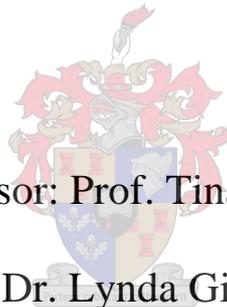


# **Negotiating (Trans)national Identities in Ugandan Literature**

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## **Dedication**

For my mother, Kabiira Pulisima; my wife, Roselyne Tiperu Ajiko; and our children, Isabelle Soki Asikibawe, Christabelle Biira Nimubuya, Annabelle Kabugho Nimulhamya, and Rosebelle Mbambu Asimawe

In memory of

My father, Daniel Bwambale Nkuku; my maternal grandmother, Masika Maliyamu Federesi; my high school literature teacher, Mrs Jane Ayebare; and my friend, Giovanna Orlando.

## Abstract

This thesis examines how selected Ugandan literary texts portray constructions and negotiations of national identities as they intersect with overlapping and cross-cutting identities like race, ethnicity, gender, religious denomination, and political affiliation. The word “negotiations” is central to the close reading of selected focal texts I offer in this thesis for it implies that there are times when a tension may arise between national identity and one or more of these other identities (for instance when races or ethnic groups are imagined outside the nation as foreigners) or between one national identity (say Ugandan) and other national identities (say British) for those characters who occupy more than one national space and whose understanding of home therefore includes a *here* (say Britain) and a *there* (say Uganda). The study therefore examines the portrayal of how various borders (internal and external, sociocultural and geopolitical) are navigated in particular literary texts in order to construct, reconstruct, and perform (trans)national identity. The concept of the border is crucial to this study because any imagining of community is done against a backdrop of similarities (what the “us” share in common) and differences (what makes the “them” distinct from “us”).

Drawing from various theorists of nationalism, postcolonialism, transnationalism and gender, I explore the representation of key events in Uganda’s history (for instance colonialism, decolonization, expulsion, and civil war) and investigate how selected writers narrate/sing these events in their constructions of Ugandan (trans)national identities. My analysis is guided by insights drawn from the work of the Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly his concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia. His proposition that the novel is a site for the dialogic interaction of multiple languages (say of authorities, generations and social groups) and of speeches (say of narrators, characters and authors) each

espousing a particular worldview or ideology enables me to create a correlation between literary texts and the nation (which contains a multiplicity of identities like races, ethnic groups, genders, religious denominations and political affiliations with each having its own interests and 'language'), and to argue that Ugandan national identity is constituted by the existence of these very identities that overlap with it. By paying attention to the way selected literary texts portray how these disparate identities dialogue with the larger national community in different situations and how the national community in turn dialogues with other nations through cultural exchanges, migration, exile and diaspora, this study aims at unravelling the dynamics involved in the negotiation of (trans)national identities both within the nation and outside it.

## Opsomming

Hierdie tesis ondersoek hoe geselekteerde Ugandese literêre tekste vorms, hervormings en onderhandelings van nasionale identiteite – na mate hulle deurvleg word deur oorvleuelende en dwarsnydende identiteite soos die van ras, etnisiteit, gender, godsdienstige denominasies en politieke affiliasies – uitbeeld. Die term “onderhandelings” staan sentraal in die dieptelesing van geselekteerde fokus-tekste wat ek in hierdie tesis aanbied, want dit impliseer dat daar tye is wanneer ‘n spanning mag ontstaan tussen nasionale identiteit en een of meer van hierdie ander identiteite (byvoorbeeld wanneer rasse of etniese groepe gekarakteriseer word as buite die nasie, m.a.w. as vreemdelinge), of tussen een nasionale identiteit (bv. Ugandees) en ander nasionale identiteite (bv. Brits) vir daardie karakters wat meer as een nasionale ruimte beset of wie se begrip van hul tuiste dus inbegrepe is van ‘n *hier* (bv. Brittanje) sowel as ‘n *daar* (soos bv. Uganda). Om hierdie rede ondersoek die studie die uitbeelding van maniere waarop verskeie soorte (interne en eksterne, sosio-kulturele en geo-politiese) grense gehanteer word in partikulêre literêre tekste ten einde (trans)nasionale identiteite te konstrueer, omvorm, of uit te beeld. Die konsep van ‘n grens is die belangrikste idee in hierdie studie, want enige konseptualisering van ‘n gemeenskap gebeur teen die agtergrond van gemeenhede (wat die “ons” in gemeen het) en verskille (wat “hulle” onderskei van “ons”).

Met behulp van verskeie teoretici van nasionalisme, post-kolonialisme, transnasionales en gender, ondersoek ek die uitbeeldings van kern-gebeurtenisse in die geskiedenis van Uganda (byvoorbeeld kolonialisme, dekolonialisering, verbanning van sekere mense en groepe en die burgeroorlog) en analiseer ek hoe sekere skrywers hierdie gebeurtenisse uitbeeld of verhaal in hulle konstruksies van Ugandese (trans)nasionalisme/s. My analyses word gelei deur insigte verleen aan die oeuvre van die Russiese literêre teoretikus Mikhael Bakhtin, veral sy konsepte van dialogisme en heteroglossia. Sy voorstel dat die

roman die ruimte is vir die interaksie van verskeie ‘tale’ (byvoorbeeld die van outoriteite, ouderdoms- en sosiale groepe) en van diskoerse (bv. die van vertellers, karakters en skrywers) wat elkeen ‘n partikulêre wêreldbeeld of ideologie aanbied of aanhang, stel my in die posisie om ‘n korrelasie te skep tussen die literêre tekste en die nasie (wat self ‘n oorfloed van identiteite soos die van rasse, etniese groepe, genders, godsdienstige denominasies of politieke affiliasies bevat) en om te kan argumenteer dat die Ugandese nasionale identiteit konstitueer word deur die bestaan van presies hierdie (ander) identiteite wat daarmee saamval of oorvleuel. Deur aandag te gee aan die manier waarop geselekteerde literêre tekste die dialoë tussen hierdie onderskeie identiteite uitbeeld, elk waarvan hul eie belange en ‘tale’ behels, en hoe die nasionale identiteit op sy/haar beurt in gesprek is met ander nasies deur middel van kulturele uitruiling, migrasies, eksiel of diaspora, mik hierdie studie daarna om die dinamika van onderhandelings van (trans)nasionale identiteite beide binne asook buite die nasionale raamwerk uit te lig.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Dedication</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Opsomming</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>Chapter One</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction:</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Suturing Uganda: Ugandan Literature and the Seams of the Nation</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter Two</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Colonial Education and the Shaping of Imperial and African Subjectivities in Colonial Uganda: Uganda’s Katikiro in England (1904) and Africa Answers Back (1936)</b> .....	<b>30</b>
Introduction .....	30
The Creation of Enchanted, Subservient Subjects .....	37
Colonial Education and the Creation of Critical, Subversive Subjects .....	52
Making Colonial Rule an African Event: Colonial Education and the Production of Strategic, Syncretic Subjects .....	65
Conclusion.....	72
<b>Chapter Three</b> .....	<b>74</b>
<b>The National Struggle and the Emergent Postcolony</b> .....	<b>74</b>
Introduction .....	74
Singing against Cultural Deracination: Questions of National Identity in <i>Song of Lawino</i> and <i>Song of Ocol</i> .....	76
The Pitfalls of Independence: Racism and Corruption in <i>In a Brown Mantle</i> .....	101
<b>Chapter Four</b> .....	<b>122</b>
<b>Expulsion, Civil War and the Disintegration of the Nation</b> .....	<b>122</b>
Introduction .....	122
Remembering and Re-remembering the Expulsion of Ugandan Asians .....	123

Writing Dictatorship and Misrule: Susan N. Kiguli's <i>The African Saga</i> .....	142
Writing Civil War and War Trauma: Mary Karooro Okurut's <i>The Invisible Weevil</i> and Beatrice Lamwaka's "Butterfly Dreams" and "Bottled Memory" .....	151
Negotiating Transnational Identities in Times of War: Goretti Kyomuhendo's <i>Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War</i> .....	161
Conclusion.....	167
<b>Chapter Five .....</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>Exile and Diasporic Circulations .....</b>	<b>169</b>
Introduction .....	169
On the Challenges, Pleasures and Poetics of Exile .....	170
Depictions of Diasporic Consciousness and the Question of Home .....	194
Conclusion.....	209
<b>Chapter Six .....</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>Conclusion: On the Dialogical Nature of (Trans)national Identities.....</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>Works Cited .....</b>	<b>220</b>

## Chapter One

### Introduction:

#### **Suturing Uganda: Ugandan Literature and the Seams of the Nation**

This thesis examines how Ugandan literature portrays the constructions and negotiations of national identities as they intersect with overlapping and cross-cutting identities like race, ethnicity, gender, religious denomination, and political affiliation. The term “Ugandan literature” is not without problems, as Peter Nazareth and Austin Bukenya note. In “Waiting for Amin: Two Decades of Ugandan Literature”, Nazareth identifies at least three difficulties that arise from this term. Some Ugandan works are not set in Uganda, making it hard to claim them for the nation. He gives Austin Bukenya’s novel, *The People’s Bachelor*, as an example. Although the country where this novel is set remains unnamed in the text, the reference to the university where its protagonists are studying as Malaas points to Tanzania as its setting, if we take Malaas to be an anagram of Dar es Salaam.<sup>1</sup> A related issue is that some non-Ugandan writers like David Rubadiri (Malawi) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (Kenya) wrote some of their works while studying or working in Uganda, for instance Rubadiri’s famous poem “Stanley Meets Mutesa” and his novel *No Bride Price*, and Ngũgĩ’s novels *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between* and his play *The Black Hermit*, which was performed at the Uganda Cultural Centre as part of the 1962 Independence celebrations.<sup>2</sup> One wonders whether these works are part of the corpus of Ugandan writing. The final difficulty Nazareth

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<sup>1</sup> An additional clue is the subject matter – a sarcastic portrayal of a regime that passes for a socialist one, perhaps Mwalimu Julius Nyerere’s.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Kimenye’s work, for instance her short story collections *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited*, fall in this category for although born in the United Kingdom, she lived in Uganda where these portraits of rural life are set.

raises is whether the work of Ugandan writers of Asian origin like himself, Bahadur Tejani and Jagjit Singh can still be considered Ugandan, since these people lost their Ugandan citizenship following General Idi Amin's 1972 expulsion of the Asians.

In his introduction to the *Uganda Creative Writers Directory*, Austin Bukenya defines "Ugandan Literature" as "literature written in Uganda by Ugandans, in any of the languages used in Uganda, and about Ugandan topics and with genuinely Ugandan concerns" ("Introduction" x). Although this definition identifies many aspects of Ugandan writing, it also poses several problems for, as Bukenya himself concedes, the emphasis on 'writtleness' excludes oral literature from the body of Ugandan literature, while the specification of the location of writing does not cater for "such major works as John Ruganda's *The Floods* and *Echoes of Silence*, which were penned in Kenya and Canada respectively" ("Introduction" x). "Even the apparently plain expectation that Ugandan literature is produced by Ugandans is not without its complications," Bukenya observes, citing the case of Taban lo Liyong "who, for a considerable period of his early career, was accepted as a Ugandan from Acholiland [in northern Uganda], only to pronounce himself a Sudanese later" (x-xi). Despite these difficulties, I consider Bukenya's definition as being encompassing enough except for the stipulation that the work must be written in Uganda. For me, as long as a text engages Ugandan concerns and themes, it qualifies as Ugandan literature even if it was written outside the country hence my inclusion of Jameela Siddiqi's novels *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* and *Bombay Gardens* both of which were written in the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

These difficulties relating to the definition of Ugandan literature reveal the complicated nature of Ugandan national identity since there are several issues to consider

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<sup>3</sup> It follows that works by Ugandan writers set outside Uganda and dealing with concerns that are not Ugandan do not fall within the ambit of Ugandan literature. An example is Bahadur Tejani's long short story "Alnoor Meets George Washington: The Healing After 9-11", which is set in the US and which the author describes as being "filled with the tender spirit of American Democracy and with the gentle strength of the Ismaili-Muslim soul" ("Alnoor" 351).

when explicating it. It is for this reason that the notion of “negotiation” is central to this study. Simply put, the term “negotiation” implies that there are times when a tension may arise between national identity and one or more of these other identities, for instance in situations where the nation is imagined from a monochromatic perspective say of a particular ethnic group or religious denomination. Also, a tension may arise between one national identity (say Ugandan) and other national identities (say Kenyan or British) for those people or characters who occupy more than one national space. The study therefore pays attention to various borders (internal and external, sociocultural and geopolitical) that are navigated in order to construct and perform national identity. The concept of the border is crucial to this study because any imagining of community is done against a backdrop of similarities (what the “us” share in common) and differences (what makes the “them” distinct from “us”). By internal borders, I mean those aspects that distinguish people according to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and political affiliation within the Ugandan nation. I explore the nature of this boundary (fluid or fixed, fully or partially closed, syncretic or authenticity-minded) and how it relates to national cohesion and projects of integration as they are portrayed in Ugandan literature. On the other hand, external borders mean, in the context of this study, those boundary-related issues that arise as the Ugandan nation interacts with other nations since, as Geoffrey Bennington observes, the border or frontier of any country “does not merely close the nation in on itself, but also, immediately, opens it to an outside, to other nations” into which entry may be permitted or denied (121).

In this study, I explore two forms of interaction of the external type. The first one involves the travel of cultures<sup>4</sup> between Uganda and the outside world even in situations where the characters portrayed in the texts do not make a physical journey. Among the texts

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<sup>4</sup> I am borrowing this phrase from James Clifford who in turn borrows it from one of Edward Said’s essays “Travelling Theory” (Said *The World* 226-247).

which depict this kind of interaction are Akiki K. Nyabongo's *Africa Answers Back* and Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* where the protagonists (Abala and Lawino, respectively) are exposed to colonial cultural forces even when they do not physically travel to Europe. The second form of external interaction is the one where characters occupy more than one national space, that is to say, they undertake an actual physical journey which inevitably impacts on how they define themselves in terms of national identity. The texts in this category are set both in Uganda and other countries – the United Kingdom (Ham Mukasa's *Uganda's Katikiro in England*, Peter Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle*, and Jameela Siddiqi's *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* and *Bombay Gardens*); the United States (Nazareth's *The General Is Up* and Doreen Baingana's "Lost in Los Angeles") and the Netherlands (Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles*).<sup>5</sup> In these works, characters perform their national identity both within and beyond the Ugandan nation, sometimes in situations where national and cultural borders crisscross and (co)mingle. It is for this reason that I bracket off the prefix "trans" in the word "(trans)national" to underline the fact that people/characters have multiple affiliations.<sup>6</sup> As Paul Jay observes, "every culture is always shaped by other cultures" thereby bringing into play questions of "intelligent and imaginative negotiation of cross-cultural contact" (3). The same can be said of (trans)national contact: it too brings into play questions of negotiation of (trans)national "subjectivities grounded in differences related to race, class,

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<sup>5</sup> The publication history of *Abyssinian Chronicles* provides an example of the kind of conflict I am attempting to explain here. Although written in English, it was first published in Dutch as *Abessijne kronieken* (1998). Moses Isegawa, who left Uganda for the Netherlands in 1990 (Jacqui Jones 85) has been "invited to [the Dutch] parliament, profiled on television, [and] heralded as the future of Dutch literature" (Vazquez 126) – a clear indication that he, like his protagonist Mugezi, straddles two national identities.

<sup>6</sup> Amartya Sen puts this point thus:

In our normal lives, we see ourselves as members of a variety of groups – we belong to all of them. The same person can be, without any contradiction, an American citizen, of Caribbean origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a school teacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian rights, a theatre lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician, and someone who is deeply committed to the view that there are intelligent beings in outer space with whom it is extremely urgent to talk (preferably in English). (xii-xiii)

gender, and sexual orientation [in] border zones and liminal spaces that transgress the clear lines between states and the more fuzzy ones between nations” (Jay 16). The study therefore investigates exchange(s) both within the nation as well as those between nations that produce what Arjun Appadurai calls “transnational realities” (cited in Karim 270). The analytic framework of (trans)nationalism is crucial to exploring how national and transnational imaginaries intersect and the implications this has on the imaginings and negotiations of identity. This is because several Ugandan writers (and particularly those writing in English) have lived or worked outside the country – an experience that informs their textual negotiations of national identities in (trans)national contexts. For example, Moses Isegawa, born and raised in Uganda, is now a Dutch citizen, while Goretti Kyomuhendo currently lives in London. Other Ugandan writers, for instance Grace Ibingira, Okot p’Bitek, Robert Serumaga, Austin Bukenya, Timothy Wangusa, Arthur Gakwandi, Laban Erapu, John Nagenda, and Magala-Nyago, among others, spent some years in exile due to the civil strife that engulfed Uganda between 1963 and 1985. Ugandan writers therefore have identities that are, to use Salman Rushdie’s phrase, “at once plural and partial” for they “straddle two [or even more] cultures” (15). This dispersion of Ugandan writers produces literary discourses on national identity that challenge geopolitical and cultural boundaries thereby bringing notions of home and exile into dialogic relation.

Apart from the texts that I have mentioned above – *Uganda’s Katikiro in England*, *Africa Answers Back*, *Song of Lawino*, *In a Brown Mantle*, *The General Is Up*, *Abyssinian Chronicles*, *The Feast of the Nine Virgins*, *Bombay Gardens* and “Lost in Los Angeles” – I also focus on *Song of Ocol*, *The African Saga*, *The Invisible Weevil*, *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War*, and the short stories “Questions of Home”, “Bottled Memory” and “Butterfly Dreams”. My choice of these texts is motivated by the fact that each of them provides a unique perspective on the issue this study grapples with, that is to say, how

national identity is constructed and negotiated amidst overlapping identities like race, ethnicity, gender, religious denomination, and political affiliation both within the Ugandan nation or/and with interactions with the other nations mentioned before. There are some texts I wanted to include in the scope of this study but I eventually did not because of one reason or another. For instance, I did not include V. S. Naipaul's novella "In a Free State" (1971) and novel *A Bend in the River* (1979) in my study because although these works are set in East Africa, it is difficult to call them Ugandan since they draw on events that take place in different countries in the region. Fawzia Mustafa aptly explains this point when she observes:

[E]ven though "In a Free State" was written after the overthrow of the Kabaka, and then Milton Obote in Uganda, but before Idi Amin's massive expulsion of Asians in 1972, Naipaul also grafts the ripe memories of Kenya's history of its Land and Freedom Army's campaigns, the so-called Mau Mau emergency of the 1950s, as well as the 1964 revolution in Zanzibar, and the first stages of "Africanization" in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania in the late 1960s. (118)

Imraan Coovadia makes a similar point when he observes that in *A Bend in the River*, "Naipaul fuses aspects of Uganda, Rwanda, and Zaire" (29). Besides, Naipaul is averse to nationalistic categorizations of his work as shown by the fact that he "has gone so far as to cancel a contract with a publisher for listing him as a 'West Indian Writer'" (Mustafa 8).

Although Tom Stacey's *The Brothers M* is partly set in Uganda, I did not include it among my focal texts because its portrayal of Uganda is problematic. Daudi Mukasa, the Ugandan protagonist of the novel, is not a credible character; most of his views are the author's ventriloquized through him. For instance, Daudi is made to say that for an African, "[t]ruth is an extra – a luxury, like morality" (49) – a statement the omniscient narrator agrees

with to the extent of asserting that Daudi's language, Luganda, "did not contain the word [truth] save *amazima*, which implied 'just interpretation'" (49-50). This quotation, like several others in the text,<sup>7</sup> places the novel in what has come to be called "expatriate writing on Africa" by European writers like Joyce Cary (for instance his *Mister Johnson*), Robert Ruark (*Something of Value*), Elspeth Huxley (*The Flame Trees of Thika*), and Karen Blixen (*Out of Africa*). Africans like Daudi are portrayed as being strangers to truth and morality, and this mistaken view is not presented by the authorial consciousness as an opinion that can be and should be challenged but as an irrevocable truth. There are several other aspects of the narrative that a Ugandan reader might find discomfiting. For instance, one Ugandan ethnic group, the Bakonzo, is portrayed as living a tribal life "uncompletely unfamiliar with modern life" (157) like wearing clothes unlike the Baganda who are westernized/modern (187). Through Daudi and other characters who share his view that the Bakonzo are pre-civilizational, the novel commits the scandal that Johannes Fabian associates with anthropologists: it writes the Bakonzo who are living in the present time of the narrative (the mid-1950s) as though they are living a century or so before the present date.<sup>8</sup> This portrayal has grave implications for the construction and negotiation of national identity. For instance, the novel depicts Baganda characters like Daudi and his brother Tony as being contemptuous of the Bakonzo whom they speak of as an anthropological curiosity. As for *The Last King of Scotland*, I left it out of this study because it is my contention that Peter Nazareth's *The*

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<sup>7</sup> For instance at one point Bob McNair, David Mukasa's friend, muses thus:

In this land [mid-1950s Uganda] no indigenous body might preserve purity and wholeness, but was swiftly invaded, and shared, and ultimately possessed, by innumerable alien microbes . . . Daudi had told him of the sickness they called in Kenya kwashiorkor: the physical dissolution of a man into apathy and emptiness of spirit, not wholly in life, nor yet dead – although silent, crouched away from doorways with dusted eyes, and unmoving as dead. Kwashiorkor was only in Africa. (201)

<sup>8</sup> Fabian calls this scandal "the denial of coevalness", that is to say, "a persistent and systematic tendency to place its referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse" (*Time and Other* 31). In this case, the producer of anthropological discourse is Stacey himself who speaks through Daudi and other like-minded characters.

*General Is Up* gives the reader a sufficient peek into the details that Foden's novel unleashes, especially the antics of the neurotic general the novel centres on.

Although Ugandan drama is as central to the definition of Ugandanness as other genres like fiction and poetry, my study does not analyse any play at length although it does refer to John Ruganda's *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness*, Austin Bukenya's *The Bride*, and Peter Nazareth's "A Brave New Cosmos". I made this decision because in my view, Ugandan drama in English has attracted considerable scholarship as compared to Ugandan fiction in English yet there is more fiction published than drama as the *Uganda Creative Writers Directory* (2000) shows. Several dissertation projects, for instance, have been done on Ugandan drama, examples being Francis Imguga's *Thematic Trends and Circumstance in John Ruganda's Drama* (1992), Michael Muhumuza's "Theatre and Politics in Post-Independent Uganda: The Plays of Fagil Mandy and Lubwa p'Chong", Rebecca Nambi's "Investigating the Absurd in Ugandan Drama: A Postmodernist Approach" (2004), Carolyn C. Sambai's "Violence and Memory in John Ruganda's *The Burdens* and *The Floods*" (2008), and Charles Mulekwa's "Performing the Legacy of War in Uganda" (2012).

One might wonder why I decided to undertake a study on national identities at a time when the nation-state (and by implication the national identities it engenders) is said to have become obsolete. Among the exponents of this view is Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. In this influential book, Appadurai argues that the world is increasingly becoming postnational – a word he explains as having three meanings:

The first is temporal and historical and suggests that we are in the process of moving to a global order in which the nation-state has become obsolete and other formations for allegiance and identity have taken its place. The second is the idea that what are

emerging are strong alternative forms for the organization of global traffic in resources, images, and ideas – forms that either contest the nation-state actively or constitute peaceful alternatives for large-scale political loyalties. The third implication is the possibility that, while nations might continue to exist, the steady erosion of the capabilities of the nation-state to monopolize loyalty will encourage the spread of national forms that are largely divorced from territorial states. (168-169)

It can be seen from the above quotation that although under pressure from “postnational formations”, the nation-state is far from being obsolete for it continues to exert its hold on people's imaginations hence Appadurai's use of clauses like “we are in the process of moving to a global order” and “while nations might continue to exist”. In fact, he himself notes that none of the meanings he supplies for the term ‘postnational’ “implies that the nation-state in its classical territorial form is as yet out of business” (169) for “[e]ven as the legitimacy of nation-states in their territorial contexts is increasingly under threat, the idea of the nation flourishes transnationally” as “diasporic communities become doubly loyal to their nations of origin and thus ambivalent about their loyalty [to host nation-states like] America” (172). Simon Gikandi makes a similar observation. For him, the claim that the world is now postnational is contradicted by the fact that even for works of art that have transnational settings – Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* being two examples – the nation-state still lies at the centre of the subject matter they grapple with so much that

no reading of these seminal texts is complete without an engagement with the nation-state, its history, its foundational mythologies, and its quotidian experiences. To the extent that they seek to deconstruct the foundational narrative of the nation, these are

world texts; yet they cannot do without the framework of the nation. What needs to be underscored here, then, is the persistence of the nation-state in the very literary works that were supposed to gesture toward a transcendental global culture. (“Globalisation” 632)

It is because of this persistence of the nation-state even after its disappearance has been prophesied that I decided to undertake a study on Ugandan national identity as it is portrayed in Ugandan literature. Besides, issues of nationalism and national identity are still relevant in African countries like Uganda for as Thandika Mkandawire observes, “[i]t is by critically revisiting issues of nation-building, pan-Africanism, development and democracy that we will be able to address the main issues that devastate the lives of so many of us – poverty, wars, repression” (46).

In order to understand the notion of national identity as portrayed in the selected texts, it is important to briefly reflect on three related but distinct concepts – nation, state, and nation-state. Anthony D. Smith defines a nation as “a named and self-defined human community sharing common myths, memories and symbols, residing in and attached to a historic territory, and united by common codes of communication, and a distinctive public culture, and common customs and laws” (“Ethnicity and Nationalism” 175).<sup>9</sup> The notion of “self-definition” and therefore mutual recognition is important for, as David Miller explains, a nation’s “existence depends on a shared belief that its members belong together, and a

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<sup>9</sup> In an earlier work entitled *National Identity*, Smith provides more or less the same definition: “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (14). Ruth Wodak defines nation in related terms as a community with “a common culture, a common history, present and future [and] a type of ‘national corpus’ or a national territory” (106), while Vanessa B. Beasley emphasizes commonality of beliefs, ideals and values (15, italics in original).

shared wish to continue their life in common” (23).<sup>10</sup> A state, on the other hand, refers to something quite different. In *Who Sings the Nation-State?* Judith Butler defines it as “the legal and institutional structures that delimit a certain territory” (3). Enrich Prat de la Riba provides a more elaborate definition of a state as “a political organization, an independent power externally, a supreme power internally, with material forces in manpower and money to maintain its independence and authority” (cited in Castells 45), while Max Weber calls it “that agency within society which possesses the monopoly of legitimate violence” (cited in Gellner 3). From these definitions, it is clear that the concept ‘nation’ refers to the ‘we-feeling’ among people who identify with a particular geopolitical entity, in our case Uganda, whether they are resident there or not, while the term ‘state’ refers to issues of governance, that is to say, how power is exercised and how resources are distributed in the nation-state which Neuberger defines as the “congruence between states and nations” (296). In most African countries, Benjamin Neuberger observes, this congruence between nation and state is lacking because of “a multiplicity of ethno-cultural groups, borders which cut through ethnic groups and competition between a nationalism which is territorial, statist, integrative and conservative and a nationalism which is ethnic, secessionist and revisionist” (296). This observation holds true for Uganda as shown by the attempts at secession by at least two ethnic groups – the Bakonzo in 1962 (Ndebesa 53) and the Baganda in 1966 (Mutibwa 39). In this study, I examine the depiction of the tension between nation and ethnicity in selected Ugandan texts, with particular focus on how this tension is produced by the mobilization and politicization of ethnicity by agents of the state.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Miller’s explanation draws from Ernest Renan’s view that a nation’s existence is “a daily plebiscite, just as an individual’s existence is a perpetual affirmation of life” (29), that is to say, will – not commonality of race, culture, language or territory – is what constitutes a nation.

<sup>11</sup> In Uganda, the ethnic group of the head of state who by law doubles as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces has always been at the heart of this mobilization and politicization. *The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda* (1995) identifies 56 “indigenous communities as at 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1926” (145). These groups fall under

I locate my study within the ambit of Postcolonial Studies which does not involve “a singular theoretical formation, but rather an interrelated set of critical and counterintuitive perspectives, a complex network of paronymous concepts and heterogeneous practices that have been developed out of traditions of resistance to a global historical trajectory of imperialism and colonialism” (Young 20).<sup>12</sup> Associated with the work of a host of theorists like Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this field of inquiry concerns itself with issues like

the study and analysis of various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-

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four broader groups and mostly inhabit particular geographical regions: the Bantu (southern and western Uganda), the Nilotics (northern Uganda), Nilo-Hamites (eastern Uganda) and the Sudanic people (north-west Uganda, popularly known as West Nile). Sometimes the politicization of ethnicity goes hand in hand with the region of origin hence the rivalry between northern and southern Uganda that Moses Isegwa explores in his novel *Snakepit*. Suffice it to mention that the first post-independence president, Sir Edward Muteesa II, came from Buganda (southern Uganda), Milton Obote came from northern Uganda while Idi Amin came from West Nile. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who has been in power since 1986, comes from western Uganda.

<sup>12</sup> This fact – that Postcolonial Studies does not involve a singular theoretical position – is one of the area’s weaknesses which many critics have identified. Stephen Slemon, for instance, observes that “the heterogeneous field of ‘post-colonial studies’ is reproducing itself at present as a spectacle of disorderly conduct” (15), with “discordant methodologies scrambl[ing] agonistically for purchase” (32). The other weakness usually mentioned revolves around the area’s name. Anne McClintock argues that the term ‘post-colonialism’ confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper, making other cultures “share only a chronological, prepositional relation to a Euro-centered epoch that is over (post-), or not yet begun (pre-)” (86). Eminent Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo contends that the concept ‘postcolonial’ “is not only a fiction, but a most pernicious fiction, a cover-up of a dangerous period in our people’s lives” for unlike “neo-colonial” it “posits a notion of *something finished*” (152, italics in original). “[C]olonialism has not been “posted”-ed anywhere,” she wryly observes. Edward Said makes the same point in an interview with Neeladri Bhattacharya, Suvir Kaul, and Ania Loomba when he says that the term post-colonialism is a misnomer because neo-colonialism continues to ravage the world through “the workings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank” (“In Conversation” 2). While all these are valid observations, my decision to use selected insights of particular postcolonial thinkers like Homi K. Bhabha, Achille Mbembe, and Simon Gikandi enables me to draw much from the field while avoiding its limitations.

independence nations and communities. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin *Key Concepts* 187)<sup>13</sup>

This notion of colonial legacies is pertinent to this study because most of the issues haunting independent Uganda, and which the writers who are discussed in this thesis speak to, have their origin in the colonial history of the country. For instance, the animosity between certain races, ethnic groups and religious dominations which has continued to affect inter-ethnic, inter-racial and inter-religious relations in Uganda can be located in certain colonial policies and practices like: using Baganda soldiers to conquer and incorporate other ethnic groups into the protectorate; politicising religion by instituting Anglicanism as a quasi-state religion thereby making almost all important jobs in the colonial service go to people from one religious denomination; and favouring Asians over Africans in crucial areas like cotton-ginning, shop-owning and labour laws.<sup>14</sup> In examining the tension between national identity and racial, ethnic and religious identities as portrayed in Ugandan literary texts, I therefore look back to Uganda's colonial history in order to historicize and contextualize the issues at stake. This is one of the strengths of the postcolonial studies paradigm, for as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe:

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<sup>13</sup> Additional concerns of postcolonial studies include a re-reading of Western canonical texts like Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*; a critique of the way Western discourses represented non-Western peoples; and an analysis of literary texts which questioned and challenged colonialist discourses (McLeod 17-29). These include earlier texts like Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin *Empire Writes Back* 6; Lazarus 16) and Nyabongo's *Africa Answers Back* (Sigirtharajah 12-14).

<sup>14</sup> Most historical studies on Uganda explore these issues in detail. On Buganda-Uganda relations, see Karugire, Kabwegyere, Mutibwa, and Low. On the Asian question in Ugandan politics, see Mahmood Mamdani's *From Citizen to Refugee: Ugandan Asians Come to Britain, Politics and Class Formation in Uganda, Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda*, and "The Uganda Asian Expulsion: Twenty Years After". For the role of religion in Ugandan politics, see Welbourn, Rowe, Kokole, Ward, Waliggo, Mudoola, and Hansen. While tensions between races have somewhat abated, those between ethnic groups and religious denominations continue to thwart attempts at building a cohesive, integrated Ugandan identity.

Post-colonial analysis increasingly makes clear the nature and impact of inherited power relations, and their continuing effects on modern global culture and politics. Political questions usually approached from the standpoints of nation-state relations, race, class, economics and gender are made clearer when we consider them in the context of their relations with the colonialist past. This is because the structures of power established by the colonizing process remain pervasive, though often hidden in cultural relations throughout the world. (*Key Concepts 1*)

This fact – that colonial structures of power remain pervasive even in the postcolony – is crucial to my study since the turbulence Uganda found itself in between 1966 and 1986 and which had profound implications for the production and negotiation of different identities has something to do with neo-colonialism.<sup>15</sup> In this study, I examine how writers narrate/sing/recite this turbulence in relation to the construction, production, and negotiation of national identities as portrayed in their works.

Besides drawing from it to historicize and contextualize my study, Postcolonial Studies also provides me with critical tools with which to understand some of the issues I explore in this thesis. For example, I use Bhabha's notions of ambivalence, mimicry and hybridity to explain the tension between imperial subjectivity and national identity in the literary texts set during the colonial time. I argue that although the characters portrayed in these texts are interpellated as British imperial subjects, they find ways of asserting their Africanness/Ugandanness by appropriating aspects of imperial culture that they find useful

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<sup>15</sup> It is generally accepted that Idi Amin whom Britain and Israel brought to power plunged Uganda into "a state of blood" (Henry Kyemba) and an abyss (Moses Isegawa). Mamdani calls Idi Amin's take-over of government "an imperialist coup" because it was engineered by Britain and Israel. He writes: "It was because Edward Heath, the then British prime minister understood imperialism's pivotal role in the Ugandan state machinery so well that he predicted during the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in Singapore in 1971, that some of the fiery leaders sitting around the table would not be able to return home!" (*Imperialism and Fascism* 31). The fiery leader in question was Milton Apollo Obote who was deposed while still in Singapore. Kenyan politician Oginga Odinga captured this neo-colonial state of affairs in independent Kenya with the eponymous phrase "Not yet Uhuru" – a bitter irony, since he is writing five years after uhuru (Kiswahili for "independence").

for their communities – for example schools, hospitals, and modern housing – even as they show allegiance or are required to show allegiance to the King or Queen of England. It is for this reason that Simon Gikandi’s rejection of “the popular image of the colonial borderland as a victimized margin, one without a voice in the shaping of the larger imperial event, one without its own strengths and interests, one without agency in the shaping or representation of modern identities” (*Maps* 38) is so telling, because as both *Uganda’s Katikiro* and *Africa Answers Back* show, the colonized people try to get as much as possible from the colonial experience, that is to say, they try to transform the colonial event “into an African occasion” (Gikandi “African Subjects” 32).<sup>16</sup>

One of the instances of ambivalence that I explore in this study is the continued use of the English language in African countries like Uganda and the effect this has on the construction, production and negotiation of national identity. Perhaps the clearest manifestation of the ambivalent nature of this issue is the fact that different writers have responded to it differently. Two of the most outspoken commentators have been Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe. To Ngũgĩ, the continued use of English, French and Portuguese in African letters is a clear case of mental colonization which robs African languages of vitality since African writers enrich European languages instead of their own (*Decolonising* 9; *Penpoints* 126-127).<sup>17</sup> Achebe takes a different stand albeit one also

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<sup>16</sup> Gikandi is interrogating the “write-back” tradition espoused by the influential *The Empire Writes Back* which presupposes a centre and a periphery/margin. Evan Maina Mwangi makes a similar point when he proposes that African novels, especially those published after the mid-1980s, should “be read as writing back to themselves and to one another” rather than to the West (*Africa Writes Back* ix).

<sup>17</sup> Ngũgĩ’s stand on the use of English and other European languages is informed by Nigerian critic Obiajunwa Wali’s polemical article “The Dead End of African Literature?” A response to the proceedings of the June 1962 conference for African writers of English Expression held at Makerere University, Uganda, Wali argues that “African literature as now understood and practised” leads to a dead end because it “is merely a minor appendage in the main stream of European literature” lacking “any blood and stamina” (13). Oriented towards English-speaking European and American countries and the few college-educated Africans, Wali contends that such literature excludes the overwhelming majority of African people who have not had the fortune to acquire European education. Besides, it hinders the development of “a truly African sensibility” since Africa’s most talented writers are busy enriching European literature. “The student of Yoruba for instance, has no play

grounded in nationalist discourse.<sup>18</sup> To him, the use of a colonial language plays an important role in bringing together different ethnic groups in a multi-lingual country like Nigeria thereby enabling communication across the entire nation (“Politics and Politicians” 100).<sup>19</sup> In this study, I evoke this debate as I explore the place language occupies in the imagining of the nation especially in those texts where this issue is central to the author’s subject and message, for instance Ham Mukasa’s *Uganda’s Katikiro* (written in Luganda but published in an English translation), Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino* (where the village persona supposedly ‘sings’ in Acoli to her husband who despises this language and everything associated with it), and Mary Karoro Okurut’s *The Invisible Weevil* (where the choice between Kiswahili and English mimes the choice between life and death in Amin’s Uganda). The fact that English is still the language in which much of Ugandan literature is written half a century after the end of colonial rule serves as a constant reminder that imaginings of Ugandanness are inevitably linked to the country’s colonial past and the institutions that came with British rule, both cultural (for instance schools and churches) and political (for instance western judicial and parliamentary systems).<sup>20</sup> Besides, it helps me to examine the place that Ugandan writers

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available to him in that language, for Wole Soyinka, the most gifted Nigerian playwright at the moment, does not consider Yoruba suitable for *The Lion and the Jewel* or *The Dance of the Forest*,” he observes (14-15).

<sup>18</sup> This fact – of two writers locating their differing views on the use of English in nationalist discourse – brings to mind Tom Nairn’s metaphorical reference to the nation as “the modern Janus” in an eponymous chapter in his *The Break-up of Britain*. Comparable to the “Roman god, Janus, who stood above gateways with one face looking forward and one backwards”, Nairn writes, nationalism looks “desperately back into the past, to gather strength wherever it can be found for the ordeal of ‘development’” (348-349). Homi K. Bhabha evokes this image when he talks of “the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation” (“Narrating the Nation” 3).

<sup>19</sup> Will Kymlicka makes a similar point in his discussion of the official-and-national language status of English in the United States where different immigrant groups speak different languages. Besides fostering a sense of common identity, he argues, the use of English in the United States “makes it easier for citizens to engage in political debate with each other, and so has been seen as a precondition for creating a genuinely ‘deliberative democracy’” (17).

<sup>20</sup> There are writers who use local languages especially in the area of theatre. However, their works remain largely unknown in the country as a whole, showing how writing in local languages is limited as far as imagining national identity is concerned. Perhaps no text testifies to this better than Okot p’Bitek’s first novel, *Lak Tar*. Published in Acoli in 1953, it remained unknown to non-Acoli reading publics for almost four decades.

accord language in their portrayal of the nation's quest for a cohesion that transcends race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and political affiliation. Bhabha's other notion – hybridity – helps me think through other texts that I discuss, for instance those dealing with the experience of exile and diaspora, as I examine how a character's occupation of two national spaces (Uganda and another nation like the US, the UK or the Netherlands) problematizes the question of national identity and the way it is negotiated. I also use Achille Mbembe's notion of *commandement* and of excess/vulgarity of power to examine how Ugandan writers represent the abuse of power by postcolonial Ugandan regimes and how this abuse impacts on the construction and negotiation of national identity as such regimes use other identities (race, ethnicity, gender, religious denomination, and political affiliation) to divide rather than unite the population as a means of entrenching themselves in power.

Since my subject is national identities, it is pertinent that I explore what this term means. According to Anthony D. Smith, national identity refers to "the reproduction and reinterpretation of the symbols, myths, memories, values and traditions that form the heritage of the nation, and the identification of its members with that heritage" (175). This definition shows how central the notion of negotiation is to the production and performance of national identity. This is because the task of reproducing and reinterpreting is a creative one that calls for a people's engagement with their national identity vis-à-vis other overlapping identities that I have identified above. What complicates this negotiation is that as a country with multiple races, ethnic groups, languages, religious denominations, and political affiliations, there are different symbols, myths, memories, values and traditions that each group produces or valorises thereby necessitating the need to forge these into one set of symbols, myths and memories that can speak to the entire nation, while at the same time retaining each identity's

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It was only in 1989 when the English translation of it was posthumously published that readers became aware of Okot as a novelist.

uniqueness. It is for this reason that I am using the image of suturing in the title I have chosen for this chapter. I investigate how disparate symbols, myths and memories from the country's disparate races, ethnic groups and religious denominations can be stitched together to form identities that transcend particular ethnic groups and that constitute a national mythos and ethos. This is because, this study argues, national identity is not something already there to reproduce and reconstruct and reinterpret; for a country like Uganda which is still struggling to constitute itself into a nation, national identity is something that has to be produced and constructed continuously.

I borrow the metaphor of suturing from Leon de Kock who in turn borrows it from Noël Mostert's book *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* which opens with the statement: "If there is a hemispheric *seam* to the world, between Occident and Orient, then it must lie along the eastern seaboard of Africa" (xv, my emphasis). Building on this metaphor of the seam, de Kock observes:

To see the crisis of inscription in South African writing following colonization in terms of a "seam" is to regard the sharp point of the nib as a stitching instrument that seeks to suture the incommensurate. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) defines seam as a "junction made by sewing together the edges of two pieces . . . of cloth, leather, etc.; the ridge or the furrow in the surface which indicates the course of such a junction." The seam is therefore the site of a joining together that also bears the mark of the suture. (276)

De Kock argues that "the seam is the site of both convergence and difference" and therefore the place "where difference and sameness are hitched together – where they are brought to self-awareness, denied, or displaced into third terms" (277). Commenting on the same

metaphor, Meg Samuelson identifies another paradox that the metaphor of the seam throws up. A sewing so neatly done might hide the marks of the suture, she says, something with grave implications in situations where the fashioning of history – in her case during the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa – might end up rendering some groups, for instance women, invisible (239). This insight is relevant for this study in which I argue that the construction and performance of national identity need not negate other identities since national identity can co-exist with them depending on how the tension/conflict between it and them is negotiated. How the writers portray this possibility in their works, that is to say, how they sew different pieces of ‘cloth’ to make one ‘garment’ called Uganda is the subject I investigate in this study.<sup>21</sup>

Through this metaphor of suturing, this study establishes a link between creative writing and nation-building. Acts of suturing, quilting and tapestry “act as metaphors of becoming, rather than of being,” Samuelson observes, for “they favour process and creative rewriting over completion and complacency” (240). This insight draws attention to the role that creative writers play in imagining the nation – a role that has been commented on by many scholars who have established a link between nation and narration. For Geoffrey Bennington, narration is at the centre of every nation because “[a]t the origin of the nation, we find a story of the nation’s origins” in the form of “myths of founding fathers [and] genealogies of heroes” (121). This makes the idea of the nation “inseparable from its narration” – a narration which “attempts, interminably, to constitute identity against difference” (132). Perhaps it is Benedict Anderson, more than anybody else, who elaborately theorised and consequently popularized the link between nation and narration by arguing that it was print-capitalism and its institutions like the novel and the newspaper which imagined

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<sup>21</sup> I am aware of the dangers of borrowing a notion from a country like South Africa which has a different colonial history to Uganda’s. However, there are some similarities between the two countries. For instance, both are multi-ethnic and multilingual nations meaning that when it comes to constructing and performing national identity, negotiations are central to this process of identity formation.

the nation into existence through language: “The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time [in a novel] is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (26).

African writers have also commented on the link between nation and narration. Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, for example, have theorised the role the arts play in nation-building. In an essay entitled “The Truth of Fiction”, Achebe observes that art is “man’s [sic] constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him; an aspiration to provide himself with a second handle on existence *through his imagination*” (139, emphasis in original). To him, fiction “calls into full life our total range of imaginative faculties and gives us a heightened sense of our personal, social and human reality” (151) by “transforming us into active participants in a powerful drama of the imagination” in which realities like the problem of excessive consumption of alcohol as portrayed in Amos Tutuola’s novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* “takes on flesh and blood” (144). He develops this point further in another essay entitled “What Has Literature Got to Do with It?” where he observes that

Literature, whether handed down by word of mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality; enabling us to encounter in the safe manageable dimensions of make-believe the very same threats of integrity that may assail the psyche in real life; and at the same time providing through the self-discovery which it imparts, a veritable weapon for coping with these threats whether they are found within our problematic and incoherent selves or in the world around us.<sup>22</sup> (170)

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<sup>22</sup> In an essay of the same title published two years after Achebe’s, Cedric Watts makes a similar point when he observes that “[g]ood literary texts offer paradigms – conspicuous models – of social inscription, and they offer warnings about such inscription. They extend the definition of the human self” (81).

It is because writers speak to these “threats of integrity” like colonial denigration of African people and neo-colonial exploitation that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o gives three of his books highly evocative titles – *Writers in Politics*, *Barrel of a Pen* and *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*. For his part, Uganda's most famous writer, Okot p'Bitek, accords artists a central place in politics – a place more important than that of the political chieftain. Taking his cue from the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's suggestion that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world, Okot argues that through poems, stories, dances, sculpture and other arts, the artist "creates the central ideas around which other leaders, law makers, chiefs, judges, heads of clans, family heads, construct and sustain social institutions", punishing "the culprits with laughter" and rewarding "the good mannered with praises" (39).<sup>23</sup> In this study, I indeed demonstrate that Ugandan writers engage important issues like: contesting official narratives in order to show the lies or half-truths hidden in them; enlightening people about the failures of the nation-state, for instance, its investment in tribal and racial politics; castigating atrocities committed by governments, for instance, the killings and detentions which occurred during the regimes of Idi Amin and Milton Apollo Obote; and exposing injustices committed against certain groups in the nation, for instance women and children, particularly during times of civil war. I therefore investigate how selected authors, as writers in politics, construct and produce the notion of Ugandan identity amidst overlapping identities of race,

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<sup>23</sup> It is in recognition of the political nature of the work produced by ‘third world’ writers that Fredric Jameson proposed that “[a]ll third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories” (69). While this formulation has attracted several attacks and objections partly because of its sweeping generalisations (Jean Franco) and its ethnocentrism/eurocentrism in the sense that it posits ‘third world’ cultural productions as being radically different from those of the ‘first world’ (Aijaz Ahmad), it contains some truth, as the views propounded above by Achebe, Ngũgĩ, and Okot on the role of art in Africa, testify. Imre Szeman and Neil Lazarus have argued that Jameson’s critics, especially Aijaz Ahmad, misread him.

ethnicity, gender, religious denomination, and political affiliation between 1904 and 2011 – the years in which the first and the last texts I examine appeared.<sup>24</sup>

One of the things which show that most Ugandan authors are writers in politics is the preponderance of politics in their writing. The titles of some of the studies on Ugandan letters testify to the pervasiveness of the political theme in Ugandan writing: Peter Nazareth’s “Waiting for Amin: Two Decades of Ugandan Literature”; Abasi Kiyimba’s “The Ghost of Idi Amin in Ugandan Literature” and “Male Identity and Female Space in the Fiction of Ugandan Women Writers”, and Austin Bukenya’s “An Idiom of Blood: Pragmatic Interpretations of Terror and Violence in the Ugandan Novel.”<sup>25</sup> From these studies, we learn a lot about how Ugandan writers approach the themes of dictatorship and gender inequalities. But because these essays are general surveys, the texts discussed therein receive sparse attention, sometimes only a couple of paragraphs. Also, some studies, for instance G. D. Killam<sup>26</sup>, R. S. Sugirtharajah<sup>27</sup>, and Mariam Pirbhai<sup>28</sup>, are brief and do not discuss the texts on which they focus in detail. My study builds on the insights gleaned from these studies while providing a more detailed discussion of the selected texts.

Where critics provide detailed analyses of particular texts, they do not place them in conversation with other Ugandan texts. Examples are Tobias Döring, Simon Gikandi (“African Subjects”), J. R. Maguire, Brenda Cooper, Jacqui Jones, and Emilia Ilieva and

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<sup>24</sup> The earliest text in this study is Ham Mukasa’s *Uganda’s Katikiro in England* (1904) and the most recent texts are Beatrice Lamwaka’s short stories “Butterfly Dreams” and “Bottled Memory” (2011).

<sup>25</sup> Bukenya’s article is extracted from his MA thesis entitled “Literary Pragmatics and the Theme of Terror in the Ugandan Novel, 1969-92”.

<sup>26</sup> His commentary on *The Story of an African Chief* (also known as *Africa Answers Back*).

<sup>27</sup> His remarks on *Africa Answers Back*.

<sup>28</sup> Her commentary on *In a Brown Mantle*.

Lennox Odiemo-Munara.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, there are essays that focus on a particular author but do not place this author in conversation with other Ugandan authors, for instance Charles Ponnuthurai Sarvan, Olatubosun Ogunsanwo, and Andrew H. Armstrong (“Narrative” and “Reporting”). My study places different texts and authors in conversation hence my decision to discuss at least two writers in each of the four core chapters of this thesis.

Besides, different texts are read from various theoretical positions leading to different emphases and nuances. For instance, while I approach Isegawa’s *Abyssinian Chronicles* from the perspective of exile, Armstrong, Cooper and Edgar Nabutanyi (“Archives” and “Representation”) approach it from different vantage points – postcolonial failure, materiality of objects, and troubled childhood, respectively. In the same vein, while I approach Peter Nazareth’s *In a Brown Mantle* from the pre-exile moment of the narrator’s political activities, Dan Ojwang approaches his discussion from the vantage points of exile and of the politics of Asians’ representation of Africa (*Reading Migration*). Similarly, Marie Kruger approaches Okurut’s *The Invisible Weevil* and Goretti Kyomuhendo’s *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War* from the perspective of modernity, while I approach it from the angle of postcolonial dystopia. As for Tirop Peter Simatei, his study of Nazareth and Okurut focuses on the role of the writer in nation-building while mine moves beyond this theme to explore issues of the production of (trans)national identities.

Some texts are relatively new and have not yet attracted much attention, for instance Siddiqi’s novels and Baingana’s and Lamwaka’s short stories. Ojwang and James Ocita provide insightful discussions of Siddiqi’s *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* but neither of them includes *Bombay Gardens* in the scope of their analysis. Chielozona Eze provides a rich but

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<sup>29</sup> My MA thesis falls in this category of texts. In it, I examine the work of three East African Asian novelists – Peter Nazareth (Uganda), Yusuf K. Dawood (Kenya), and M. G. Vassanji (Tanzania). Of Nazareth’s novels, I only discuss *In a Brown Mantle*, without placing it in conversation with *The General Is Up* or with other Ugandan texts.

brief commentary on Doreen Baingana's short stories "Lost in Los Angeles" and "Tropical Fish". As for Lamwaka, I am not aware of any critic who has studied her work. Related to this issue is the paucity of studies on Ugandan lyric poetry which partly explains why Susan Kiguli's *The African Saga* has, to my knowledge, only received one detailed analysis since its publication in 1998 (Mwangi "Hybridity"). My thesis aims to fill some of these gaps.

As Charles Okumu shows in "Towards an Appraisal of Criticism on Okot p'Bitek's Poetry", studies of Okot p'Bitek's work focus on his appropriation of the Acoli oral literary tradition. G. A. Heron (*Okot p'Bitek*) and Cliff Lubwa p'Chong ("Okot p'Bitek") are good examples of this kind of criticism. While several essays have been published on *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*, none of them, to my knowledge, specifically discusses the issue of (trans)national identity. Usually, what is emphasised is the clash between African values and Western lifestyles as portrayed in the poems (Bernth Lindfors "Two Songs", Ali A. Mazrui, David Rubadiri "The Development", and Taban lo Liyong *Last Word*<sup>30</sup>) or the question of hybridity, that is to say, how Okot creates, sometimes inadvertently, a fusion of African and Western values (Jahan Ramazan *Hybrid Muse*). My discussion of Okot in this study supplements these readings by showing how the clash between (and fusion of) African and Western values speaks to the question of (trans)national identities. While all the above work is commendable, I believe that my thesis has something new to contribute to scholarship on Ugandan literature since, as Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, no reading can be considered final since there is always room for new readings/perspectives.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> His analysis of *Song of Lawino* is different from other scholars'; he considers the poem a failure because of its use of "the simple, *unedu*, uneducated Lawino" as a spokesperson (*Last Word* 141, italics in original).

<sup>31</sup> This view challenges Taban lo Liyong's title, *The Last Word*. He himself noticed the anomaly of his title, for he later published another book entitled *Another Last Word*. While he retained the phrase "last word", the word "another" disturbs the finality and closure this phrase suggests.

I rely on the work of Russian theorist Bakhtin in my analyses, particularly his concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia. I argue that Bakhtin's insights on the nature of the language used in the novel (and in poetry<sup>32</sup>) are relevant to the concerns of this study. To Bakhtin, the novel is a site for dialogic interaction of multiple languages (of authorities, generations and social groups, among others) and of speeches (say of narrators, characters and authors), each espousing a particular worldview or ideology. Because of differences in ideology/worldview, discourse in the novel is characterised by the struggle between two forces: "a centralizing (unifying) tendency" and a "decentralizing tendency (that is, one that stratifies languages)" (67). The existence of this struggle destroys two myths simultaneously: "the myth of a language that presumes to be the only language, and the myth of a language that presumes to be completely unified" (68). This view – that the novel contains multiple languages, speeches and styles in constant dialogical interaction with each other – helps me to create a correlation between the novel and the nation which too contains a multiplicity of identities, each with particular interests and worldviews. By paying attention to how these disparate identities dialogue with the larger national community as portrayed in Ugandan literature, I am able to unravel the dynamics involved in the negotiation of national identity. Bakhtin's other significant proposition – that the multiplicity of different voices in the novel (that is to say its heteroglossia) is what defines it as a form – helps me to argue that Ugandan national identity is constituted by the existence of these very identities that overlap with it. In other words, race, ethnicity, gender, religious denomination, and political affiliation are part and parcel of what Meg Samuelson calls the "warp and woof" of the nation (231), in this case

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<sup>32</sup> In "Bakhtin on Poetry", Michael Eskin explores Bakhtin's ambivalent attitude towards poetry: "On the one hand, Bakhtin depicts poetry as repressive and heterophobic," he writes, "on the other hand, he suggests that it is an exemplary mode of the discursive enactment of existence precisely because it facilitates the completion of one of the most important ethical tasks, namely, the creation of mutual understanding and, concomitantly, the subversion of sociopolitical, potentially repressive, authority – a function explicitly ascribed to the novel" (389). My discussion of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and Susan Kiguli's *The African Saga* in chapters three and four of this thesis shows that poetry can be as dialogic as the novel.

the Ugandan nation. Clara A. B. Joseph captures this reality succinctly with the phrase “Nation Because of Differences” – a title of a paper she wrote on national identity as it is portrayed in African literature. This title, needless to say, privileges negotiation over closure and urges us to rethink Eurocentric notions of national identity that emphasize similarities in descent, language and culture. This privileging of negotiation over closure is important, for dialogism entails engagement not resolution. In the words of a dialogic critic Don Bialostosky, Bakhtin’s dialogic principle requires discourse communities to “respect the diversities within their own voices and the divergences among the several voices in the community” without relapsing into “a live-and-let-live relativism” or “a settle-it-once-and-for-all authoritarianism” (224). What is required in discourse, he observes, is an “open-ended dialogism” that keeps people “talking to themselves and to one another, *discovering their affinities without resting in them and clarifying their differences without resolving them*” (224, my emphasis). How true this statement is for discourses on national identity in Ugandan literature is the task I undertake in this thesis.

This study offers a close reading of selected focal texts in order to examine how they enter into the negotiation of (trans)national identities. At the same time, it also performs a more distant reading that aims to survey the field of Ugandan literature in English except in two instances where I cover a translated text and a transliterated one,<sup>33</sup> in search of broad thematic and narrative trends, while homing in on the selected focal texts in order to explicate

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<sup>33</sup> *Uganda’s Katikiro in England* and *Song of Lawino*, respectively. The term transliteration is meant to capture the fact that *Song of Lawino* is not just a translation of its Acholi original, *Wer Pa Lawino* which was later published in 1969, but a translation that includes a re-writing of some lines. It is for this reason that Okot’s friend, Taban lo Liyong, felt the need to do his own translation of the book which he entitled *The Defence of Lawino*. “*Song of Lawino* is a watered down, lighter, elaborated, extended version of *Wer pa Lawino*,” he argues in his preface to this text (ix), in justification of his task. “When faced with the dilemma of elucidating a point prosaically or recasting the point poetically, I have opted for rendering meaning rather than soaring poetically” (xvi), he says, insisting that Okot’s translation did the contrary. While Lo Liyong has a point, especially with regard to including an entire chapter that Okot left out of *Song of Lawino*, his translation has generally been received as a watered down version of the poem, worse than the version (*Song of Lawino*) he set out to “improve”. See the review by Mark L. Lilleleht.

and elaborate these. Using Bakhtin's theory of dialogic discourse which I have just explained above, I set the texts under discussion in conversation with each other in order to explore how each of them examines the issues at hand. To locate my discussion in other discourses in the field of nation and (trans)nationalism, I use insights gleaned from various disciplines – literary studies, anthropology, history, and political studies among others.

I present my discussion in four core chapters as follows:

In Chapter Two, I examine negotiations of national identity in a colonial setting as portrayed in two early Ugandan texts – a travelogue by Ham Mukasa entitled *Ugandan Katikiro in England* (1904) and a novel by Akiki K. Nyabongo entitled *Africa Answers Back* (1936), first published in 1935 as *The Story of an African Chief*. In these texts, I explore the portrayal of imperial subjectivities as produced during the colonial era and investigate how imperial subjects negotiate their way around colonialism in a bid to perform a coeval Ugandan/African subjectivity. Following Bakhtin's insight that monoglossia (one-languagedness) is not completely possible since forces of dialogism are always at play contesting and disrupting it, I argue that the characters portrayed in these Ugandan texts manage to perform a Ugandan/African identity in conditions of difficulty where imperial pedagogical and disciplinary practices are bent on fashioning them into black Englishmen and women.<sup>34</sup>

In Chapter Three, I explore the portrayal of the decolonization struggle (1950s to 1962) and of the first post-independence Ugandan republic (1962 to 1971). Focusing on three texts – Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966) and *Song of Ocol* (1969), and Peter Nazareth's first novel *In a Brown Mantle* (1972) – I examine a number of key issues pertinent to these

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<sup>34</sup> This view of Bakhtin's – that complete or total monoglossia is not possible since it is always challenged by forces of dialogism – brings to mind Michel Foucault's view that "[w]here there is power, there is resistance" (*History of Sexuality* 95). This chapter therefore shows the resistances – both implicit and explicit – that different characters in *Uganda's Katikiro* and *Africa Answers Back* engage in as they carve out a Ugandan identity in a colonial situation.

two decades, like the dangers of servile imitation of Western cultures and lifestyles by Ugandan/African educated people who take on the reins of power at independence (*Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*) and the exclusion of sections of the population from full membership and participation in the nation-state on racial grounds (*In a Brown Mantle*). The works discussed in this chapter show a dis-ease about the state of the emergent postcolony and emphasize glaring problems in political governance that need to be addressed lest the nation degenerate into chaos.

In Chapter Four, I argue that the warnings made by the texts discussed in chapter three are not heeded by political leaders, so the nation does in fact disintegrate as shown by the expulsion of the Asian members of the population from the country and the reign of terror that ensues shortly after, which persists for decades. I examine how both Peter Nazareth and Jameela Siddiqi narrate the expulsion with special focus on how they challenge official narratives that construct Asians as racists, exploiters and opportunists who do not have the interests of the nation at heart. I then explore the portrayal of the disintegration of the nation in Susan N. Kiguli's *The African Saga* (1998), Mary Karooro Okurut's *The Invisible Weevil* (1998), and Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War* (2007), paying particular attention to the relationship these writers see between patriarchal domination, familial dictatorship, and political tyranny. I also explore the portrayal of civil war in Okurut's novel and Beatrice Lamwaka's short stories "Butterfly Dreams" and "Bottled Memory", with a special focus on the gendered nature of the violence that ensues during war times. I argue that these four writers' membership to a women's organisation (Uganda Women Writers' Association) inevitably influences the way they narrate the nation since their self-conscious mission is to, among other things, challenge patriarchal representations of women (Ebila 166-168).

In Chapter Five, I examine the portrayal of the experiences of exile and diaspora in Nazareth's *The General Is Up*, Siddiqi's *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* and *Bombay Gardens*, Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles* (2000), and Doreen Baingana's short stories "Lost in Los Angeles" and "Questions of Home" (2005). I explore how these texts depict the reconstitution of home in new domiciles and what this reveals about issues of national identity. I demonstrate that a writer's occupation of a transnational locale – the US for Nazareth and Baingana, the UK for Siddiqi and the Netherlands for Isegawa – influences the way they write exile, diaspora and the nation. I conclude the study with a summary of findings.

## Chapter Two

### Colonial Education and the Shaping of Imperial and African Subjectivities in Colonial Uganda: *Uganda's Katikiro in England* (1904) and *Africa Answers Back* (1936)

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the portrayal of colonial education and the kind of subjectivities it created in colonial Uganda as portrayed in two literary texts – *Uganda's Katikiro in England* (1904), a travelogue by Ham Mukasa and *The Story of an African Chief* (1935), re-published a year later as *Africa Answers Back*, a novel by Akiki Nyabongo. Both Mukasa and Nyabongo were important persons in colonial Uganda. Born in 1871, Mukasa was 23 when Uganda was declared a British Protectorate in 1894. In 1885 he was converted to Christianity by the Church Missionary Society, an Anglican evangelical group that had arrived in Uganda in 1877. By 1902 when Katikiro<sup>1</sup> Sir Apolo Kagwa travelled to England to attend Edward VII's coronation, Mukasa was his secretary. As for Nyabongo, he was born in 1904 to Omukama Kasagama, King of Toro Kingdom, which had come under Britain's influence in 1891 when Captain Fredrick Lugard of the Imperial British East Africa Company signed a treaty with the Omukama in which he promised to 'protect' him against Omukama Kabarega, the powerful king of the Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom from whose forces he had fled (Kabwegyere 23-27). Nyabongo studied at Harvard University for an MA and Oxford University for a PhD in Philosophy and worked at Tuskegee University and North Carolina A&T University in the 1940s and 1950s. He returned to Uganda after the country became independent in 1962 (Gikandi and Mwangi 126-127). It can be seen from these biographical sketches, that these pioneering Ugandan writers lived during a

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<sup>1</sup> 'Katikiro' is the title for the Prime Minister of the Buganda Kingdom. The Baganda refer to him as "kamaala byoona" ("the one who handles everything to completion"), in order to underline his importance. I have used the pronouns 'him' and 'his' because in the history of the kingdom, there has not been a female Katikiro so far.

dramatic period when pre-colonial Ugandan kingdoms lost their sovereignty and became ‘protected’ dominions of imperial Britain which ruled Uganda from 1894 to 8<sup>th</sup> October 1962<sup>2</sup>. This rule, which was marketed in colonial parlance as a civilising mission, used education as one of its major weapons to produce particular subjects who would serve the interests of Empire (Fabian 70-74; Comaroff and Comaroff 13).

By ‘colonial education’ I refer to the entirety of the pedagogical machinery that was employed by the British colonial government to ‘civilize’ and/or subjugate Ugandans, for instance the accounts by explorers like Henry Morton Stanley which portrayed the country as being in dire need of Christianization and civilization;<sup>3</sup> the activities of missionaries like the Reverend Alexander Mackay which aimed at fighting what they called heathenism and paganism; and campaigns by colonial Governors and their teams which ensured that the British flag flies in the country in peace and order. In all these interventions, certain ideas of Uganda were created and presented to the colonised people as self-evident facts in the colonial church, school, library, office, and command post, to mention but a few, with each of these spaces serving as an imperium in miniature where the official word was to be obeyed without question. The colonial school and church were the most important spaces for as Louis Althusser has noted in a seminal essay entitled “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)” (1971), schools and churches not only teach students “techniques and knowledges” necessary for the doing of certain jobs and the performing of certain duties but also “the rules of good behaviour” established by the dominant class (132) in forms that “ensure subjection to the ruling ideology” (133), in our case colonialism.<sup>4</sup> This education provided by schools and churches, among others, was aimed at achieving a number of things, one of them

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<sup>2</sup> Uganda became independent on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1962.

<sup>3</sup> In *Through the Dark Continent*, for instance, Stanley described Buganda as a “benighted region” (193).

<sup>4</sup> He calls schools and churches “ideological state apparatuses” because the state – in our case the colonial state – uses them to subjugate people to its ideology and interests. Other ideological state apparatuses he identifies are: the family, the legal system, the political system including the different political parties, trade unions, communications institutions (for instance the press, radio and television), and cultural institutions (for instance literature, the arts and sports) (143).

being to make Ugandans look at Britain's presence in the country as an act of philanthropy, or to use Empire poet Rudyard Kipling's oft-quoted phrase, as a "white man's burden" (128); and another, to make Ugandans subservient to colonial personnel whatever their station in the Protectorate entailed – missionaries, teachers, military and police officers and tax collectors, among others. The success of this education varied: in some cases, Ugandans were enchanted by the idea of Britain and the British as propounded by the colonial machine; in other cases, Ugandans remained indifferent to Britain and its achievements, choosing instead to valorise their own cultural and socio-political identities. In most cases, however, a middle position prevailed as Ugandans negotiated the above stances (enchantment and indifference) by fusing the two worldviews (African/Ugandan and Western/British). Hence at least three subjectivities are distinct in the works examined in this chapter: the enchanted, subservient subject; the critical, subversive subject; and the strategic, syncretic subject of the middle ground I have mentioned above. From the outset, I would like to emphasize that this last subjectivity is the most complex of the three I have identified above and therefore the most interesting for the analysis I attempt in this chapter and in the rest of the thesis, since my concern in this study is to examine how the negotiation of (trans)national identities is represented in Ugandan literary texts. For a better understanding of these subjectivities, I closely refer to the context in which the texts I am examining were produced in order to demonstrate how each of them communicates within a particular time and space. In doing this, I am guided by Mikhail Bakhtin's view that each text is a response to a past utterance and/or an anticipation of a future utterance (*Dialogic Imagination* 280).<sup>5</sup> For although it is not certain if Nyabongo read Mukasa, one can still see a dialogic tension between their works and the contexts in which these works were written, affirming Bakhtin's contention that "[t]wo utterances, separated from one another both in time and space, knowing

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<sup>5</sup> Bakhtin writes: "[E]very word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates. The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction" (*Dialogic Imagination* 280). In this chapter, I suggest that *Africa Answers Back* be considered, in some ways, a response to *Uganda's Katikiro*. In the same vein, I suggest that it anticipates the issues Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* raise as the next chapter shows.

nothing of one another, when they are compared semantically, reveal dialogic relations if there is any kind of semantic convergence between them" (*Bakhtin Reader* 17).

*Uganda's Katikiro in England: Being the Official Account of His Visit to the Coronation of His Majesty King Edward VII* (hereafter referred to as *Uganda's Katikiro*)<sup>6</sup> is a record of the journey Sir Katikiro Apolo Kagwa and his amanuensis, Ham Mukasa, made to England to attend the coronation of Edward VII. The book starts with the party's departure from Buganda on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1902 and ends with their return on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1902 and their meeting with some dignitaries, the last one being Colonel Sadler, the Commissioner of the Uganda Protectorate government, on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1902. Written in Luganda and translated into English by the Reverend Ernest Millar who served as the party's chaperone and official translator, this travelogue is a foundational text in Ugandan letters for it is one of the first books written by a Ugandan. The book is available in three versions: Ernest Millar's translation published in 1904 by a then leading London publishing house, Hutchinson & Co.; Taban lo Liyong's abridged edition published in 1975 by Heinemann Educational Books in its famous African Writers Series as *Sir Apolo Kagwa Discovers Britain*,<sup>7</sup> and Simon Gikandi's edition published in 1998 by Manchester University Press. I use Gikandi's edition because unlike Taban lo Liyong's which is abridged, it contains Ernest Millar's full translation and footnotes.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it has an insightful introduction that, together with the editor's footnotes, places the book, like this study, in the

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<sup>6</sup> Although the title refers to Uganda, it is clear that Mukasa and Kagwa had Buganda and the Baganda in mind hence their constant reference to places and phenomena in Buganda Kingdom, besides writing their book in Luganda. Strictly speaking, the idea of a Uganda Katikiro is a misnomer since "katikiro", as I explained in the first footnote, is a title specific to Buganda kingdom. However, in documents written around this time, the common name used to refer to Buganda was Uganda. For instance, the letters Mutesa allegedly wrote to Colonel Gordon were signed "Mtesa king of Uganda" (Low 5-7). Even the 1900 agreement that incorporated Buganda into the British Empire was called "The Uganda Agreement" (Low 37-41; Kizza 113-131). Immaculate N. Kiiza explains the misnomer thus:

The term 'Uganda' is from the Swahili and means 'Land of the Ganda'. Originally . . . this term applied only to the Buganda kingdom. As British colonial control expanded outwards from this central territory, the term was retained for the whole Protectorate. The central territory was distinguished from the wider colony by using its indigenous name of Buganda. (132)

<sup>7</sup> Taban lo Liyong does not explain why he chose this title. In my view, he wanted to goad Western readers whose compatriots like Richard Burton and John Speke claimed to have discovered African rivers and mountains.

<sup>8</sup> Gikandi also uses the original title of the book unlike Taban lo Liyong who gave the book his own title.

ambit of Postcolonial Studies. Occasionally, I refer to Taban lo Liyong's edition, in particular to the introduction and the footnotes, both of which are very insightful in explaining the context in which the book was written and in highlighting the vision Sir Apolo Kagwa and Ham Mukasa had for Uganda. It should be emphasized that none of the three versions above is the original text, for as I have mentioned already, the book was originally written in Luganda, the most widely spoken language in Uganda today, a quasi-national language. Unfortunately, "there is no evidence that this original text was ever published," Gikandi notes, meaning that "while Mukasa had written his text with a Luganda-speaking public in mind, his book was condemned to be read by foreigners (mostly missionaries and anthropologists) and by the tiny group of Ugandans who could read English" at this point in time (Gikandi "African Subjects" 30-31).

As for *Africa Answers Back*, it was published in 1936. It first appeared in 1935 as *The Story of an African Chief* and contains four parts. Part I is an account of Europe's incursion into Buganda, starting with the arrival of Henry Morton Stanley at Kabaka Mutesa's court in 1875 and of the missionaries – the Reverend Alexander Mackay of the Church Missionary Society in 1877 and Father Lourdel Mourpel of the White Fathers in 1879. In this section of the novel, we see how Buganda Kingdom is soon plunged into chaos as different religious groups strive to control the Kabaka's court leading to the 1892 religious wars between Christians and Muslims and later between Anglicans and Catholics in which a powerful chief, Ati, fights on the side of the Anglicans. Part II depicts Ati's return from the war and the birth of his son, Abala, whom he also names Stanley (after Henry Morton Stanley) and Mujungu (after the missionaries who, to him, 'roam' throughout the land).<sup>9</sup> We also see Ati's wives prevail upon him to take another wife – the 375<sup>th</sup> – which he does most reluctantly. Part III centres on missionary education in Buganda. Mujungu, 10, joins Reverend Hubert's school where he confronts the missionary a number of times because of what he believes to be incorrect subject matter (for instance the missionary's view that Africans are savages) and authoritarian pedagogy (for example the

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<sup>9</sup> The protagonist's full name is therefore Abala Stanley Mujungu. In this thesis, I use the surname, Mujungu.

missionary's unwillingness to listen to his students' views).<sup>10</sup> Eventually, Hubert dismisses him from his school. Ati takes him to a private school where he completes his secondary education. The last part depicts a chiefdom in crisis: there is a smallpox epidemic which Ati does not survive. With help from European medical personnel, Mujungu manages to contain the epidemic. After he is installed as his father's successor, he tries to introduce far-ranging reforms in the kingdom which his wife and other subjects resent.

Although set in a specific region (Buganda), the novel imagines a Ugandan identity. Chief Ati and his family speak Lutoro, a language spoken in the western Ugandan kingdom of Toro. By setting his novel in Buganda kingdom where Lutoro-speaking people rule as chiefs, Nyabongo imagines the nation in a novel way in that a person's ethnic group does not prevent him from becoming a chief in another kingdom peopled by a different ethnic group. When bidding the Reverend Hubert farewell in one of the chapters, Ati says, "*Nyamuhanga akulinde*" (71, italics in original). These words, which mean "God bless you", are from Lhukonzo, a language spoken by a different ethnic group, the Bakonzo, who were incorporated into Toro kingdom by force of arms.<sup>11</sup> That Ati speaks three languages (Lutoro, Luganda and Lhukonzo) without any sense of tension or conflict makes him perhaps the most 'Ugandan' character in the novel. In total, five languages are spoken in the novel: Luganda, Lutoro, Lhukonzo, English and German (used by one of the doctors who come to Ati's chiefdom to fight the smallpox epidemic). In Bakhtin's word, the novel is therefore polyglossic. This polyglossia points to a history of harmonious or potentially harmonious inter-ethnic interactions between different ethnic groups during pre-colonial times which colonial historiography usually elides when it emphasizes internecine conflicts in the region, for instance between the kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro.

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<sup>10</sup> Nyabongo portrays Mujungu as a preconscious child, which is why he is able to engage Hubert in arguments although he is young.

<sup>11</sup> Eventually the Bakonzo revolted in a bid to break away from the kingdom. See Kirsten Alnaes. Anthony D. Smith opens his *Theories of Nationalism* with a quote from this article (1).

This novel remains “somewhat neglected” and “overlooked in postcolonial discussion” as Tobias Döring (139) and R. S. Sugirtharajah (12) point out, respectively. In discussions of East African literature, it is not accorded its rightful status as the region’s first novel – a status usually given to Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo’s *Weep Not, Child* (1964) which Stephanie Jones mistakenly calls “the first novel in English to be published by an East African” (171). The reason for this is fourfold. First, the book’s first title – *The Story of an African Chief* – gave the impression that it was an autobiography, not a novel, making literary critics neglect it in their discussion of fiction. Secondly, the book was published at a time when works by African writers were not taught in Ugandan colonial schools where the syllabus was dominated by texts from the Leavisian “Great Tradition”, as Carol Sicherman (15-17) shows. Besides, the first part of the book reads like a historical account, moreover from a mostly Eurocentric perspective which makes the narrative somewhat inauthentic as an African response to colonial incursion.<sup>12</sup> Finally, post-independence Africa neglected literary works written in the first decades of colonial rule as they were not in the mainstream resistance tradition that was celebrated at this time.<sup>13</sup> Yet it is an important text that can help us understand the encounter between Europe and Africa, and in particular Uganda,

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<sup>12</sup> Eckhard Breitinger argues that the novel is “written from an assumed but fake African perspective in order to transport certain ideas that would probably be unacceptable if presented from a western point of view” (161), the most central one being the practice of eugenics that the traditional authority in the novel, Chief Ati, advocates and practises. When one of his wives gets pregnant, Ati calls for an abortion because she is not one of the women considered fit to bear children. Breitinger argues that Nyabongo reproduces “an ideology of racial purity as it was promulgated by racial fanatics in Europe and practiced by the Nazis in Germany a few years later” and contends that “although it claims to present an African perspective, [the novel] does not concern itself really with Africa or Uganda. It uses Africa as a disguise to promote fundamentalist racist ideas” (162). While Breitinger’s observation about the novel’s stand on abortion is correct, I think his contention that the novel does not concern itself with Africa is a little over-stated.

<sup>13</sup> Susan S. Andrade makes this point clearly when she observes thus:

It was not only women’s novels that were marginalized in nationalism’s schemes for regulating the field of African writing and distributing cultural capital within it. Novels published by men as late as the 1930s, but before anticolonial sentiment reached its height in western and southern Africa, were also excluded from the consolidating canon of African novels. Critical attention by and large has focused on a narrow conception of resistance, and literary criticism has not yet fully acknowledged that African independence struggles did not gain momentum until after the Second World War. (6)

Although Andrade does not mention eastern Africa here, her observation applies to this region as well.

especially given the fact that it is the only Ugandan novel, to my knowledge, whose plot and theme centre on missionary education in colonial Uganda.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Creation of Enchanted, Subservient Subjects**

Both *Uganda's Katikiro* and *Africa Answers Back* portray Ugandans' response to colonial rule as being one of enchantment in the sense that their contact with white people came with feelings of awe, mystification, puzzlement, and delight because of their superior military strength (the maxim gun as compared to the spear, for instance), superior technology (the steamer as compared to the canoe) and superior architecture (storied buildings as compared to huts), among other things. But there is a difference in the way each of these books approaches the subject. While this enchantment is more or less uncritical in *Mukasa*, in *Nyabongo* it is tempered by a critical gaze at European agents particularly missionaries. In both books, Ugandan characters are fascinated with the Bible which Homi K. Bhabha describes as "an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline" (*Location* 146). As an insignia of colonial authority, the Bible is used to constitute colonial subjects along standards steeped in what Mary Louise Pratt calls "the Christian moral universe" which categorize people into Christians or heathens ("Transculturation" 25). There are many examples of this in *Africa Answers Back*. For instance in the first part of the novel, Stanley gives Kabaka Mutesa a gun. To test its efficiency, the King orders that a slave be shot. In response to this apparent brutality and lack of respect for human life, Stanley addresses his host thus:

Your Majesty, I should like to read you something from my country which will be interesting to you and your chiefs. I have been here a long time and I have observed your

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<sup>14</sup> Timothy Wangusa's *Upon this Mountain* (1989) is also set during the colonial period. Although the deputy headteacher of Elgon secondary school, James Graves, is a church minister, his role is quite different to Reverend Hubert's of *Nyabongo's* novel in the sense that evangelization is not portrayed as Elgosec's mainstream activity the way it is in *Africa Answers Back*. It is for this reason that I consider *Nyabongo's* book the only Ugandan novel whose plot and theme centre on missionary education in colonial Uganda.

actions. Many people are sentenced to death every day. My book, however, and my religion, tell me we are all brothers and should not kill each other. Your Majesty, couldn't you have mercy on these poor people who are sentenced to death?" (8-9)

In this speech, Stanley politely calls Mutesa a merciless man and a murderer whose apparent brutality can be cured, so to speak, by becoming a Christian<sup>15</sup>. From the Gospel of John, Stanley reads:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. (9)

On hearing these words the King asks, "What is that, your mythology?" to which Stanley replies, "This is the guiding book of our religion" (9). "A very nice religion it would seem," the Prime Minister says. "Tell us more," he requests (10). Indeed the reading of the Bible becomes a daily event:

Every day the King sent for Stanley to read the Bible and to tell biblical stories. The King and his chiefs asked many questions. One day he told them the story of the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea.

One of the chiefs said to the King, 'Hm, that's just like our story, because when the Gods came from the north they reached the River Kira and the waters stopped flowing, so

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<sup>15</sup> The Buganda King's power over life and death has been documented by several historians. Two suffice here: Sir Apolo Kagwa in his *Basekabaka Be Buganda* (later translated and edited by Semakula Kiwanuka as *The Kings of Buganda*) and Semakula Kiwanuka in his *A History of Buganda: From the Foundation of the Kingdom to 1900*. In both books, Mutesa I is portrayed as a brutal leader who time and again condemned his subjects to death.

that they could get across. Isn't it strange that his story and ours should be the same.<sup>16</sup>

(10)

The chiefs and Stanley become friends and visit each other in the evenings. I suggest that one of the reasons why the chiefs find Christianity alluring is the way Stanley presents it in favourable terms as a religion of justice and liberation – a message highly welcome in a Kingdom ruled by an absolute monarch who has power over life and death. In the passage above, for instance, God is portrayed as being on the side of the persecuted – the Israelites who are fleeing slavery and heading to the Promised Land. Somehow, the King is also impressed by Stanley's Bible reading. "Muzungu,"<sup>17</sup> he addresses him, "on return to your country I want you to send us some men who can read the Bible to us as you have done" (11). One of these men is the Reverend Jeremiah Randolph Hubert, one of the main characters in the novel.

In the novel, many characters are enchanted by Christianity and western cultural institutions associated with it (for instance the Church, the School and the hospital) from which they would like to benefit without necessarily converting to the new religion. In other words, enchantment with the white person comes with ambivalence in the sense that colonized people desire to be part of colonial modernity while at the same time remaining loyal to their cultures and traditions. This ambivalence is well captured in Nyabongo's portrayal of Chief Ati. Ati defies the traditions of his people and names his son and heir-apparent after Europeans. He explains to his dumbfounded family why he chooses foreign names:

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<sup>16</sup> Sugirtharajah reads this response by the king as making the Bible lose its authority since it "has a parallel story, to vie with the "heathen" version, for attention" (13). In other words, to him, the Bible's monological hold on the truth is challenged from the very beginning even before Mujungu subjects it to "a heavy hermeneutical bombardment" (13). Suffice it to note that this incident – the Gods travelling from the north to the south – is an example of local migration during this country's pre-colonial times.

<sup>17</sup> This word refers to "white person". Etymologically, it comes from the Luganda word "okuzunga" which means to "wander or roam aimlessly" – a pointer to how the Baganda perceived the explorers.

A white man came into Uganda about fifteen years ago. He was seeking a friend who had been lost in this country. He was well received by Mutesa, King of Buganda, and the impression he left with him was very favourable.<sup>18</sup> Mutesa asked this white man to send him men who could read from a book he always carried with him, and who could make guns. This man's name was Stanley. He was a very good man, and that is why I want to name my child after him. Of course, the men who came in answer to Stanley's invitation were not all like him. These men called themselves missionaries. They go from one place to another, and never settle down. That is why we call them roamers. And since Stanley was their greatest man, the boy shall be named after him. His family name will be Mujungu, after these people that roam. When my son grows up, he will learn all about these people, and will know even more than they do. (54-55)

In this passage, Chief Ati is both enchanted and disenchanted with Europeans. As a Chief and therefore a military leader<sup>19</sup> of his people, he singles out Stanley's ability to make guns as something important. While he disparages the missionaries as 'roamers', there is something precious he wants from them which is perhaps why he etches their presence on his son in the form of a name. This precious thing is education. He intends to take his son to their schools so that he may learn as much as possible with the hope that this knowledge and skills will be helpful to the chieftom.<sup>20</sup> He also wants his child to be baptised in both the African and Christian ways so that he may benefit doubly. This is how he puts it:

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<sup>18</sup> This view is supported by Semakula Kiwanuka who attributes the good impression Stanley made on Mutesa to the fact that Stanley fought on Mutesa's side in a war against the Bavuma (169).

<sup>19</sup> Kiwanuka writes, in his introduction to *The Kings of Buganda*, "a Muganda chief was an administrator and a tax-gatherer in peace time and a military leader in time of war" (xxviii).

<sup>20</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo's second novel, *The River Between* (1965), has a memorable scene similar to this. An old man, Chege, urges his son, Waiyaki, to go to the Mission School to "[l]earn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites" (24).

When a child is born to these strange people, they say they wash off the sins by pouring a little water on top of the child's head and making two lines on the child's forehead – from right to left and up and down [sic]. They call it a cross. We use a different method, as you know, and our method is better than theirs . . . I want my child to be washed of his sins twice. I want him washed by our method. Then, when he grows up, I wish him to be washed by the strange people's method. That will make the child clean both ways. (55)

This passage portrays Ati's enchantment with Western lifestyles in that he shows some rudimentary knowledge of the sacrament of baptism as shown by his description of the way it is administered. Were he indifferent to the activities of the Europeans in his midst, he would not have known anything about this cultural practice. He also wants his son to benefit from both African and European ways as shown by his decision that Mujungu be baptised twice, meaning that there is something to gain from Christian baptism after all. Furthermore, while he himself is not a Christian (since he refuses to abandon polygamy), he is willing to take the risk<sup>21</sup> of his son becoming a Christian. In my view, this risk would have been impossible had Ati not been attracted to Christianity and western education. So much is the Chief's attraction to European traditions that even when his relatives shout out in protest, "Our customs, our customs, our customs!" (58), he remains steadfast in his decision to name the child after Europeans, to have him baptised in the Church, and to send him to a mission school.

Towards the end of part III of the novel, there is a good illustration of how Chief Ati and his men are enchanted by western education. Ati visits the school to discuss the question of polygamy after his son has read to him the story of King Solomon who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. After unsuccessfully discussing this matter, Hubert gives him and his men a guided tour of the school and plays the organ for them. "You are a remarkable man,

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<sup>21</sup> It is a risk because conversion comes with the possibility of abandoning African religious and cultural practices which are at the heart of the chieftom whose leadership Mujungu will one day take over, since he is the heir-apparent.

Reverend Mr. Hubert,” one of the men says. “We wish we were young. We would surely come to your school” (214). When Hubert tells them of a basement where the boys keep their bicycles, another man says, “You are a wise man. The boys learn a lot from you” (215). Another man tells the missionary: “If I ever have a boy, I’ll certainly send him to you. I want him to read and write and learn all the good manners that you are teaching these boys” (215). The chief concludes the visit with a blessing on Hubert. “*Orame,*” he tells him, “may you thrive. And I wish you good luck with the boys; teach them more of the European ways” (216, italics in original). Here, African characters are portrayed as being enthralled by western technology (the organ) and western architecture (the basement, which points to the fact that the school had storied buildings – a novelty in the country at this particular time, the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century).

Perhaps the character most enchanted with Western modernity in the novel is Mujungu. He starts off as a critic of Christianity which he finds implausible and of the pedagogical methods of the Reverend Hubert which he finds inflexible.<sup>22</sup> When he becomes a Chief upon the death of his father, however, he embarks on wide-ranging reforms which show how dear he holds some aspects of western culture. We read in the final chapter of the novel:

Mujungu returned to his village, proud of his position as a chief. He immediately began a long list of innovations. First he sent all but one of his wives, whom he had inherited from his father, back to the homes of their parents.

When the wives heard of this, there was much anguish, and all the older people in the clan shook their heads dubiously.

After this, Mujungu went on a long tour of inspection over his villages and made plans for the beginning of a school system. On his travels he went dressed in European fashion, in a tweed suit and long boots. Whenever he came to a village, the elders came out and

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<sup>22</sup> I will return to this point in the next section when discussing how the novel portrays the critical, subversive subject.

bowed before him, but he told them to dispense with such old-fashioned ceremonies. He wanted to shake hands in a European way. (275)

That Mujungu embraces monogamy, takes to European clothes and shakes hands in a European way, among other things, is an indication that he is enthralled by the European values to which he had been introduced. He undertakes other reforms which can be inferred from his wife's complaint below:

Nobody likes all these new ideas you have brought in, or these schools you have started – where you teach the children the ways of the white man. My aunt says we don't want to know the ways of the white man; we want to follow our customs, and keep away from these radical, new-fangled ideas. And my uncle says you're a radical, and you're ruining the country . . . And here you are wearing all these strange clothes that the white man wears; and you don't sit the way we do, but you cross your legs; and you smoke that terrible long stick [the cigar], instead of the beautiful pipes your father had; and you do not help out the poor people. And then I met the old doctor the other day and he says that these new doctors are making all the people sick – and that their medicines are not as good as his – and people won't believe in him anymore . . . And [my aunt] says that you ought to be like your father, and marry more wives, and let them take care of the poor. (276-277)

This conflict between Mujungu and his subjects shows how Nyabongo portrays his characters as responding to colonial modernity differently depending on whether or not they have attended western schools. The conflict can be explained in terms of ambivalence which Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define as “the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized” (*Key Concepts* 12). While Mujungu's people have

benefited from western medicine (which has seen the smallpox epidemic contained, thanks to his appeal to doctors in neighbouring countries to come to his aid), they do not want to lose their medical lore completely hence the old doctor's charge that European medicines are not as good as traditional ones. At the same time, however, people cannot revert to a pre-colonial lifestyle, for colonial institutions like the church and the school have irrevocably altered something in the way things are done. The matter at stake is therefore what identity means to different people in this period of cultural contact between Africa and the West. Those who, like Mujungu's wife and aunt, insist on a purist conception of identity sooner or later discover that a purely traditional African identity is no longer possible, since Christianity and western education and medicine have made inroads into the village thereby bringing new perceptions and practices. In the same vein, those who, like Mujungu, take on western lifestyles sooner or later realize that setting people along the same path requires that they ask if this is desirable and how it can best be done without disrupting the cultural ethos of the community. The novel ends with a self-reflexive passage to this effect:

Mujungu began to worry whether all his innovations had been for the best. He had got rid of all the wives but one, in the hope that this example would be followed by the rest of his subjects. But now he saw that the one wife he had chosen was a shrew of endless capacity. Mujungu decided that companionship with her alone would lead him to distraction. So he returned to his house. He still believed in the value of his reforms, but perhaps it was best to slow them up. The first thing he planned to do was to get a few more wives – three or four at least. Then he might have some peace to carry out his reforms. (278)

Here, Mujungu realizes that the performance of a western identity has to come with a difference if it is to become acceptable to his people. While he desires monogamy, he cannot set a good

example for his community if he is not seen as being one with them, culturally speaking. So he decides to marry three or four more wives, but not as many as 375 as his father did. This middle space he occupies between the western and the African cultures is both transitional and translational – transitional because he hopes the benefits of monogamy will soon become clear to his people so that they take to this new cultural practice; translational because he aims to use it to change his community from one mode of marriage (polygamy) to another (monogamy). It can also be called a hybrid space if we agree with Homi K. Bhabha's view that the notion of hybridity is "about the fact that in any particular political struggle [or cultural struggle, in our case], new sites are always being opened up, and if you keep referring those new sites to old principles, then you are not actually able to participate in them fully and productively and creatively" ("The Third Space" 216).

In *Uganda's Katikiro* we meet two other colonial subjects who mediate between two cultures. These are Sir Apolo Kagwa and Ham Mukasa who, unlike Mujungu, do not start as critics of Christianity but embark on their journey to England as devout Christians who have demonstrated their Christian faith by fighting in the religious wars of the late 1880s and early 1890s.<sup>23</sup> The colonial subject portrayed in this travelogue is therefore an enchanted and subservient one who is awestruck by the "cleverness of the English," a phrase that runs like a refrain throughout the book.<sup>24</sup> Mukasa<sup>25</sup> constructs Britain as superior to Buganda in almost every area ranging from infrastructure to technology. In the entire book, he seems to conform to

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<sup>23</sup> In the wars, Ham Mukasa was seriously injured hence his lame leg for which he tries to get a surgical boot while in England. After the Muslims routed the Christians in the battle of Mawuki, Apolo Kagwa fled to Ankole (about 280 kilometres from Buganda) where he spent two years in exile (Kiwanku *History of Buganda* 213). After this, he fought in the war between Christians and Muslims which the former won and in the war between Protestants/Anglicans and Catholics in which he commanded the former to victory earning himself a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (K. M. C. G) medal upon the recommendation of Captain Macdonald (*History of Buganda* 240).

<sup>24</sup> The book is written after the journey has already taken place. Mukasa kept a daily record of his and Kagwa's impressions of the journey and England from the day they leave Buganda (6<sup>th</sup> May 1902) to the day they return (7<sup>th</sup> September 1902).

<sup>25</sup> While the book is an account of the two travellers (Mukasa and Kagwa), I sometimes refer to Mukasa as though he were the sole author because he is the one who is deeply amazed at the wonders he sees unlike Kagwa who does not seem to remember seeing anything spectacular whenever he travels alone. The book is therefore written from Mukasa's perspective hence the pervasive use of the personal pronoun 'I' in it.

what Leon de Kock calls a “Manichean discursive regime” (*Civilising Barbarians* 96) within which western colonial officers operated to define Europe vis-à-vis Africa: civilisation versus barbarism, enlightenment versus ignorance, democracy versus tyranny, peace versus chaos, Christianity versus paganism, industry versus sloth, and light versus darkness, to mention just a few of the common binaries. In this dyadic discursive frame, colonisation was seen as a blessing to Africa – a continent that Winston Spencer Churchill described, in 1908, as having “a native race still plunged in its primary squalor, without religion, without clothes, without morals” – a continent European colonialism has saved from “intertribal fighting” so much that in countries like Kenya “white officers ride freely about among their villagers without even carrying a pistol” (Churchill 34). It is because of Western sentiments like this that Zimbabwean Church Minister, politician and intellectual Ndabaningi Sithole observes that “in general terms, the doctrine of white supremacy represents the sum total of European attitudes towards the African people” (28).

In principle, Mukasa accepts the premise upon which these binaries are based, that is to say, that white people are superior to blacks. There are many indications of this fatalistic acceptance in the book. “I was much amazed at the cleverness of the English,” he enthuses when one of the ship stewards waiting on the party turns a tap to let in cold water and a different tap to let in hot water:

One wonders more each day and each hour that one sees the cleverness of the English, which is never ending. They are not white men for nothing; in all countries white things are considered very beautiful, and so also the English deserve to be held in honour, not only on account of their white colour, but because to their whiteness they add very wonderful wisdom<sup>26</sup>, and just as a blacksmith or a carpenter is given praise on account of

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<sup>26</sup> Simon Gikandi observes that the word ‘wisdom’ is used in the book as “a synonym for enlightenment” (footnote 86, page 204).

the good work he does, so they should be praised on account of what they do. (71)

This quotation reveals that Mukasa likens whiteness to cleverness hence the clause, “they are not white men for nothing”. By implication, he links the technological backwardness of Buganda to the fact that the Baganda are not white thereby associating blackness with backwardness. This is why later in the book, he is surprised to find that Egypt is technologically developed yet it is located in Africa. “Port Said is a large town not far from Alexandria where the Nile flows into the sea,” he writes, “we did not expect to see towns like this in Africa – we thought we should only find them in Europe” (70). Mukasa goes ahead to link the way people behave or talk to their colour. During their return journey, the party travels on a German vessel where they find a Swede who talks to them of “most disgusting and unspeakable things” making Mukasa comment, “I never saw any European who could talk in such a way, and even a black man would have been ashamed of himself” (169). This clause – “and even a black man would have been ashamed of himself” – implies that Mukasa has accepted the colonial moral hierarchy which placed the white person on a level higher than the black person. But there is a certain confusion or ambivalence in what Mukasa is saying. He says two contradicting things: first, that white men are technologically advanced because they are white hence the clause “they are not white men for nothing”; second, that white men should be honoured “because to their whiteness they add very wonderful wisdom,” implying that whiteness and wisdom are two distinct things. This confusion is central to our understanding of the book in that the moment Mukasa separates wisdom from whiteness and colour from skill it becomes possible for him to imagine the possibility of Buganda becoming as technologically developed as Britain in the future.

I have already observed that the phrase ‘the cleverness of the English’ runs through the book like a refrain. This phrase serves many roles. In the first place, it shows how awestruck Mukasa and Kagwa are by what they see. In the introduction to his edition of the book, Taban lo Liyong explains this thus:

Realising that for Africa then, travel meant walking on foot, day after day, or rowing in boats. How welcome was a steamer which could do in three hours what used to take a week? Or those very swift trains moving at a mile per minute? And again, seeing that for a multiplicity of reasons Africa was sparsely populated . . . wasn't it with envy that the two Ugandans saw human locusts swarming the streets of London? As Uganda had just gone through religious civil wars wasn't it wonderful to find a land where no wars were being fought? Of course in Uganda at that time the only employed people were men. How marvellous it was then, to come to a land where women were so actively engaged in manufacture . . . Coming from a Uganda, where for most of the time the King's word was law, how charming it was for King Edward to accept the advice of his aide who said that time was up, that the King had a busy day tomorrow, and that he should let his guests go now! ("Introduction" xiv-xv)

The second role the phrase 'the cleverness of the English' plays in the book is that it serves as a heuristic guide to what is missing in Buganda since Mukasa and Kagwa would not wonder so much at something they already have at home. Finally, it is a pointer to what they desire, that is to say, what they wish to realise in Buganda. A few examples of the wonders will suffice to show why Mukasa and Kagwa are deeply moved by what they see. In Entebbe they see a "wonderful printing-press, a very ingenious one", "a very clever table" and a steamer which takes fifty-seven minutes between Entebbe and Mbiru, a journey that takes Bugandan canoes about two hours and twenty minutes (48).<sup>27</sup> Other inventions that astound Mukasa and Kagwa are the train, the ship, and later the motor car, apart from ingenious technological manoeuvres like making a train climb over a hill or tunnel through mountains, building bridges as high as

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<sup>27</sup> Ham Mukasa's comparison here, as elsewhere in the book, emphasizes his amazement at English/European technology. But it also shows, as Taban lo Liyong notes in his edition of the book, how precise he is: his estimation of distances vis-à-vis durations is astounding.

cathedrals, constructing houses as high as mountains, training animals to perform tricks in circuses or storing up lightning (electricity) or looking through a person to see their bones (the x-ray). “When you see a new piece of work done by the Europeans,” Mukasa concludes, “you become like a little child in thinking about their work, it is so wonderful” (53). He observes that foolish people who do not know of the existence of God “would call [white men] God” (60). This possibility of mistaking the white man for God brings to mind the observation Sithole makes on the African’s first encounter with Europeans:

The first time he ever came into contact with the white man, the African was simply overwhelmed, overawed, puzzled, perplexed, mystified, and dazzled. The white man’s ‘houses that move on the water’ [ships], his ‘bird that is not like other birds’ [aeroplane], ‘his monster that spits fire and smoke and swallows people and spits them alive’ [the train], his ability to ‘kill’ a man and again raise him from the dead [anaesthesia], his big massive and impressive house that had many other houses in it [rooms], and many new things introduced by the white man just amazed the African. Motor-cars, motor cycles, bicycles, gramophones, telegraphy, the telephone, glittering Western clothes, new ways of ploughing and planting, added to the African’s sense of curiosity and novelty. Never before had the African seen such things. They were beyond his comprehension; they were outside the realm of his experience. He saw. He wondered. He mused. He trembled at the sight of the white man whose prestige soared sky-high and left the African bowing before this new white god who had come from the waters of the ocean. (146-147)

While Mukasa and Kagwa are aware that white men are not gods, they bow to them in awe all the same. Mukasa writes: “My friends, you had better let the Europeans teach in all lands, so that the people may escape from their ignorance” (64). That this conclusion comes after he has seen England points to the political economy of the journeys that England organised for colonized

peoples. Simply put, these journeys were a kind of practical lesson to the colonised people to see how progressive and mighty the mother country was. If they became loyal to the Empire, they would benefit from this progress. But if they became disloyal, they would face the consequences. In other words, the journeys had a double function: England was to seduce the colonised people with its charms or cow them into submission with its technological might. So Mukasa tells his readers to let Europeans teach in all lands, but also to beware their might. For people who can tunnel through mountains and ‘store up lightning’ and tame wild animals like elephants, there is nobody who can defeat them in a war hence his conclusion: “If any man could stand in the track of a railway train and stop it from passing him, or if he could run his head against a mountain and pass through it, such a man might check the power and glory of the English; but such a thing is absolutely impossible” (198). In any case, fighting the English people is not necessary because they are kind and peaceful. Instead, they should be praised because their kindness

is like the sun that ripens fruit; they make a fool into a wise man, and do not like any one to do ill to his neighbour, but want peace everywhere. They are like the father of the nations of the earth in teaching habits of kindness, and were the first to abolish slavery in all lands, and the other European nations learned this from them. (195)

To Mukasa, if all nations were like the English “all the world would be at peace” (185). For countries which decide not to cooperate with England/Europe, they will remain ignorant and backward. He considers Zanzibar a perfect example of such countries:

The houses of the Zanzibar peasants are like the houses of the Uganda goats; and that is the reason I pity them so much, for they long ago saw the cleverness of the Europeans, but could not learn it for themselves, because they trusted in their own wisdom, though it was of no profit to them, since they never applied themselves to cultivation of the land

and the building of houses, but were like strangers to the country; and that is the reason I pity them, as their houses and their streets all smell very badly. Well, if Europeans have been so many years in their country, and they have not yet learned any better, when will they learn to build and cultivate their land properly? They will be a very long time indeed in learning, because in their foolishness they think that their own wisdom is profitable to them, and despise that of the Europeans, which would be of real use. The streets in the town itself are very narrow and smell very badly, and are just like ours were nine years ago, though now our streets are clean and wide. (182)

Colonialism is therefore for the benefit of the colonised: England is in Africa to spread enlightenment and civilisation. English people “rule righteously in all lands whether of wise nations or of ignorant nations,” he declares, “and they honour men who do not themselves expect to be honoured. This nation is a truly peaceable nation in all its laws, which are in many ways like the laws in the Bible” (68). His final prayer is that “God's blessing may rest on the English, so that their land may protect other lands” (198). When we remember Frantz Fanon's observation that the colonial “only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values,” (43) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's contention that “[i]t is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues” (*Decolonising* 20), we can conclude that Ham Mukasa is a perfect example of the power of colonial education in producing an enchanted, subservient subject. The journey to England is part and parcel of the colonial education he receives; it is his field trip. Clearly, if travel books written during the period of imperial expansion “gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized” as Mary Louise Pratt (*Imperial Eyes* 3) argues, then those books written by Africans who travelled to Europe during the same period, like Mukasa and Kagwa, confirmed to their countrymen and women how great Europe was. By

praising the accomplishments of Europe in different areas like technology, architecture, government and culture, books like *Uganda's Katikiro* benefited Britain by creating a favourable impression in the minds of the colonised people for whom they were written.<sup>28</sup> Yet, a close reading of these books reveals slippages that enable alternative readings. It is to these slippages in Mukasa and Nyabongo that I now turn.

### **Colonial Education and the Creation of Critical, Subversive Subjects**

Although Simon Gikandi aptly observes that *Uganda's Katikiro* is “a book which strenuously refuses to provide a critique of Englishness” (“African Subjects” 28), there are some moments when Ham Mukasa and Sir Apolo Kagwa are critical of Britain. In the travelogue, there are times when English hospitality fails or when it is implied that some English people are not well-intentioned in their dealings with Buganda or with Mukasa and Kagwa. On more than one occasion, the Reverend Millar prohibits Mukasa and Kagwa from speaking to people in London because some “would have abused people like us” (74) – a subtle reference to racism. After meeting King Edward VII, his secretary asks Mukasa and Kagwa to sign their names in the Visitors' Book but Captain Hobart, the officer who arranged the meeting, sends them out before they can do so. Mukasa writes: “We did not like this at all, but we kept silence knowingly, and let the man who was in charge of us do as he wished, and he himself wrote down our names” (158). As for the possibility of duplicity on the part of some English people, two examples suffice. When they arrive in Zanzibar, Mukasa and Kagwa receive letters informing them that “the Government were going to turn about a hundred chiefs and peasants out of their estates” despite a promise which “had been made that some of these people should not be turned out” (190). While Commissioner Colonel Sadler refuses to allow this arrangement on seeing that “a

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<sup>28</sup> Ugandan historian Tarsis B. Kabwegyere argues that Britain's sponsoring of Chiefs' journeys to Europe was a way of honouring them for their collaboration in the imposition of colonial rule. He further argues that these journeys benefited Britain by creating a favourable impression in the minds of the colonised people since “each chief, as opinion leader of his area, was to carry out a campaign telling people, on his return, what good things he saw abroad. Participants were encouraged to write books” (83).

great many people were angry”, it remains clear that the relationship between the Chiefs and the Central Government is not as harmonious as *Uganda’s Katikiro* seems to portray it. The second example is when Mukasa and Kagwa meet a man who wants to buy or rent land on which to grow bark-trees in Uganda. Mukasa observes that “letting a rich man rent one’s land is the same thing as selling it all, unless one is very clever” (149), implying that when it comes to cunning an Englishman can be as shrewd as any other person. Finally, there are some rare cases where Mukasa and Kagwa are openly critical of Britain. Despite its marvels, London is too noisy and polluted for their liking hence the relief they register when they reach France on their return journey (166). While they like English music, they find the waltz disconcerting because of men and women dancing so close to each other.

Besides this conscious critique, *Uganda’s Katikiro* is sometimes critical of Britain in ways of which its authors are not aware. In these moments, the book uncannily produces a critical, subversive reading subject who is able to see what Mukasa and Kagwa fail to see. For instance, the book suggests that the wonders the two visitors are marvelling at have been made possible by Britain’s conquest and plunder of other lands, including their country, Uganda. This is made clear by the fact that the raw materials used in British factories (the ivory used in the making of knives, for example) come from colonies like Uganda which also serve as markets for the finished products. The irony here is that the factory Mukasa and Kagwa are praising is the reason their country does not produce knives anymore for as Mahmood Mamdani has shown, Uganda’s production of iron implements like hoes and knives ceased with Britain’s colonisation of the country which led to mass importation of British products like hoes and knives (*Politics and Class* 34-35). Besides, the grandeur of British museums is made possible by artefacts and species from Britain’s colonies. In the British Museum, for instance, Mukasa and Kagwa see

different articles from our country; some had been brought by Sir H. H. Johnston, who had given a great many things, and others by other Englishmen: the Rev. J. Roscoe had

given a great many, the Rev. R. P. Ashe had given a great many, and others too had given things from our country. (83)

The Zoological Gardens also contain species from British colonies, for instance “two boas from India [which] were as large as the middle of a crocodile” (88), and apes and servaline cats that Mukasa and the Reverend Millar carry from Uganda (52). The fact that visitors to these gardens are charged a fee is another example of how species from Britain’s colonies enrich her coffers. What all these examples point to is that colonies like Uganda contributed to the greatness of Britain and therefore participated in the constitution of imperial Britishness.<sup>29</sup>

Mukasa and Kagwa also fail to see the connection between empire and the luxury in which British government officials like Lord Rosebery<sup>30</sup> live. Mukasa writes:

After this he [Rosebery] took us all over his house, which was very beautiful and very large, and when we saw this house we understood that the great men of England and the rich men do not want kingdoms such as the kingdoms in our countries, because many kings have none of the comfort which these men have. (152)

A critical reader is able to see that the conclusion Mukasa and Kagwa reach is not accurate because the wealth of British officials like Lord Rosebery has partly been produced by kingdoms like Buganda whose subjects pay taxes to the British crown, produce raw materials like coffee and cotton for British factories, and provide markets for British goods. That Mukasa and Kagwa fail to see this link between the wonders of Britain and British imperialism brings to mind Rita Felski’s observation, made in a different context, that enchantment is “the antithesis and enemy

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<sup>29</sup> This view is informed by my reading of Simon Gikandi’s *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* in which he argues in part that colonial cultures/spaces were “central in the transformation of English identities” (xv).

<sup>30</sup> Mukasa tells his readers that Lord Rosebery was the person who, “when he was Foreign Minister, settled to make the Uganda Protectorate” (151).

of criticism. To be enchanted is to be rendered impervious to critical thought, to lose one's head and one's wits, to be seduced by what one sees, rather than subjecting it to sober and level-headed scrutiny" (56).

Finally, some of the praises Mukasa and Kagwa lavish on Britain contain traces of criticism of the very country they are praising. A good example is provided by Mukasa's fable of the fowl which he uses to show his readers that Britain (ruling Uganda, Kenya and Zanzibar) is a better coloniser than Germany (ruling Tanganyika). In this tale, two fowls are owned by two men who look after them as each thinks fit. One man says, "I do not want to eat all the eggs that my fowl lays; I will eat just a few of them, and leave the others so as not to annoy it; and I shall not eat all the chickens which it will rear, but will eat a few, so that the number of my fowls will soon be very great" (197). The second man does the opposite: "he ate up all its eggs, and only occasionally left a few, and then when the fowl reared chickens he ate them all up" until it "jumped over to the house of the man who looked properly after his fowl" who kept it, owing to a law stipulating that "a fowl that left one man and went to another was not to be brought back by its original owner". He interprets the fable thus:

The fowls are the inhabitants of the lands ruled over by European nations, and the owners of the fowls are the various European nations; well, a great many people will leave the countries ruled over by other European nations, on account of their bad government, and go to the English and to the countries ruled over by them, in order that they may have peace. (197)

While this fable is meant to praise Britain as a benevolent colonizer, it is clear that the difference between the two farmer-gentlemen is one of degree, not of kind. As a matter of fact, both eat their fowls' eggs and chickens except that one eats them all while the other spares a few, perhaps to be devoured on another day. So both imperial powers are exploiters, with the slight difference

of one being less cruel than the other. In any case, the law in place does not protect the fowls fully from exploitation and cruelty since an aggrieved fowl cannot escape to total freedom. So while it is true that Mukasa and Kagwa are enchanted by and subservient to imperial Britain, the few moments when they are critical of England are insightful in revealing how the experience of enchantment paradoxically comes with a sense of disenchantment owing to the fact that however marvellous a city or system may be, it is certainly not perfect. Suffice it to mention that *Uganda's Katikiro* is a translation. The translator, the Reverend Millar, admits that he “omitted a few remarks that might have caused pain to some, or that were of too personal a nature” when working on the book (39). This might explain the pervasiveness of the praise showered on and the sparseness of criticism directed towards England. Taban lo Liyong provides another explanation for the sparseness of the criticism: “Sir Apolo was a mature statesman; Mukasa was a responsible assistant. Whenever they met with adverse treatment, they censured diplomatically, or let it go if it was small in magnitude. Decorum guided their actions” (“Introduction” v).

In *Africa Answers Back* colonial education is portrayed as producing a more critical, subversive subject than those of *Uganda Katikiro*'s. In the first place, the novel starts with an account of the religious wars fought in Buganda at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the third-person narrator has recounted the wars between the Anglicans and Catholics he observes:

The many wounded men from both sides were cared for by the British officials under Lugard. The bodies of the dead, whenever they could be found, were buried. They numbered about one thousand, with not one Englishman or Frenchman among them. (30)

Chief Ati, one of the main characters in the novel, regrets fighting in this war whose cause he does not understand. Through him, Nyabongo attacks Christianity as a divisive force that brings about death and mourning instead of the light and life it had promised.

In the novel, African characters are portrayed as being critical of the missionary's naming of them as sinners – a practice through which, as many postcolonial critics like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe have shown, western imperialism asserted its hold over the people it subdued.<sup>31</sup> When Ati wishes to have his son baptised in the Church, the Reverend Hubert declares, "I cannot baptise a child whose father is living in sin. You are a sinner" (62). The sin at issue here is polygamy for Ati has 374 wives.<sup>32</sup> He refuses to accept the label 'sinner', arguing that according to his religion, polygamy is allowed because it is through his wives that he takes care of the poor and the needy. On hearing that men in Europe marry only one woman, Ati asks Hubert:

Who looks after the poor people? Do you yourself go out and find poor people, or does your wife? If she does that, then her time is so taken up that she can do nothing for you; and on the other hand, if you do it, you are performing an office your wife should be filling – and are hence unfair to her. (65)

In other words, polygamy as portrayed in the novel is not just the marrying of more than one wife as the Europeans saw it; it is an institution designed to ensure "relief for families whose heads were either too old to work or were dead" as G. D. Killam clarifies (65). Ignorant of the meaning and place of polygamy in this society, Hubert calls it a sin from which he seeks to 'save' Ati and his people. "You think you are *not* a sinner," Ati responds, "but I can call you one too if you marry one wife, and don't marry . . . those whom you capture in war, and keep your wealth selfishly to yourself. If your work is not benefitting society, then *you* are a sinner" (69,

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<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, chapter two of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Globalectics* entitled "The Education of the Colonial Bondsman" and chapters one and six of Chinua Achebe's *Education of a British-Protected Child* entitled "The Education of a British-Protected Child" and "Spelling Our Proper Name", respectively.

<sup>32</sup> This is before he takes the 375<sup>th</sup> wife.

italics in original). This act – of the native attacking the label ‘sinner’– is a criticism of and resistance to Christian doctrines.

As for Mujungu, he becomes a critical student when he joins Hubert’s school. The missionary rules the school with an iron fist, helped by teachers and prefects. Mujungu finds himself in trouble several times and is punished. During a kicking game, for instance, he hurts a playmate. The missionary bans African games on the pretext that they are dangerous. When a boy argues that European games are as dangerous since his brother broke his arm while playing football, Hubert forecloses debate in his characteristic way: “I don’t want to discuss the matter with you children,” he rules, “I am giving my order and if you don’t obey, you’ll be put out of school” (136). Then he tells the children what his school is meant to do: “You, all of you are being trained away from your African habits, and towards Western ideals” (136). This is an important statement in the novel for it makes the mission of the school clear: training Africans to turn away from their ‘habits’ by which Hubert means their traditions and cultures so that they may wholly embrace western values and lifestyles. It is no wonder that Hubert’s lessons on Christianity are tied to denigrating specific aspects of African culture. For instance, he elaborates the healing miracles in the New Testament to “prove that Jesus was superior to the medicine-men” (225). The idea is to discredit African medicine so that students and their relatives may take to western medicine. This educational aim brings to mind Thomas Macaulay’s infamous “Minute on Indian Education” which colonial educators of Hubert’s kind were most likely to have read since India, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has observed, “was the major English imperial centre from where many social experiments were exported to other British possessions” (*Globalectics* 37).<sup>33</sup> In this Minute, Macaulay, who was a member of the Supreme Court of India from 1834 to 1838, calls upon colonial educators to use the English language as the medium of instruction in Indian schools since, to him, no Indian language is civilised enough to play this

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas R. Metcalf elaborates this point thus: “The practice of empire was, as well, shaped by structures of governance devised in British India. From Macaulay’s law codes to the paired creation of the Collector in the district and the Resident at the princely court, from the classifying of ethnic groups to the working of ‘divide and rule’, the India of the Raj was the touchstone around which colonial administrative systems were put together” (2).

role. Macaulay's ethnocentrism prefigures Hubert's disdain for African games on the grounds that they are "savage". When the boys protest and try to teach him an African game to show him how good it is, he declares, "I don't care if the game's as good as European games. You are not going to be permitted to play those savage games" (141). Hubert's unwillingness to learn an African game and his confession that he does not care if it is as good as a European game betrays what V. Y. Mudimbe has called the West's "epistemological ethnocentrism" – "the belief that scientifically there is nothing to be learned from "them" unless it is already "ours" or comes from "us" (15). By conceiving his role as being to train Africans away from their traditions towards western lifestyles, Hubert is following the pedagogy Macaulay championed, captured in the ominous words:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (375)

For Macaulay, the colonial school had a clear ideological role to play. Louis Althusser clarified this role several decades later in an essay which I have already mentioned entitled "ideological state apparatuses". To Althusser, ideology – which he defines as "the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (158) – interpellates individuals as subjects, that is to say, it calls them into a certain subjectivity they already inhabit as people born in a particular family with a particular religious faith or political party or cultural practice. He gives an example of a policeman calling a man walking in the street, "Hey, you there!" On hearing this exclamation, an individual turns around, and "by this mere one-hundred-

and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject* . . . because he has recognized that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was *really him* who was hailed’ (and not someone else)” (174), italics in the original). Althusser’s interpretation of this hypothetical scenario leads him to conclude that “ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: individuals are always-already subjects” (175-176).

The hypothetical example Althusser uses makes a number of things clear. The individual who is hailed is already an individual, a *you*, who recognizes himself through ideology, the law in this case, or the family, the school, the church, the political party, the trade union, and the media, among others. The act of recognizing that it is indeed he/she who is being hailed means that he/she has recognized his/her subjecthood and his/her subjection, in this case to the law.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the scenario opens up space for resistance in case the person being hailed refuses to respond to the hail. Using Althusser’s insights, we can say that Macaulay’s project is to have western schools interpellate colonised peoples into an uncritical, docile subjectivity so that when they are deployed to destroy their own cultures and lifestyles, they do it without raising any question or objection. For Macaulay, western traditions are the norm that colonised countries must conform to if they are to be cured of what he considers nonsensical practices like teaching history which abounds “with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long, and Geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter” (374). This privileging of Western epistemes at the expense of colonized people’s knowledge systems brings to mind Mikhail Bakhtin’s observation on how monological systems which claim to possess the ‘truth’ operate when they come into contact with other cultures. To Bakhtin, the aim of these systems is “the

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<sup>34</sup> On this issue of subjecthood and subjection, Michel Foucault writes: “There are two meanings of the word ‘subject’: subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his [sic] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (“Subject and Power” 781). In this study, I posit that these two meanings of the word subject are always in dialogical tension, and that this tension is central to the kind of subjectivities produced by particular regimes of power, whether colonial or postcolonial.

supplanting of languages [world views or ideologies], their enslavement . . . the incorporation of barbarians and lower social strata into a unitary language of culture and truth, the canonization of ideological systems . . . directed away from language plurality to a single proto-language” (*Dialogic Imagination* 271).

Through Mujungu’s critical attitude, Nyabongo shows that colonial education can produce subjects who are able to see through what they are being taught and therefore refuse to make the Althusserian metaphorical one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical turn. Having “a logical mind and a nose for paradoxes” (Nyabongo 223), Mujungu deploys what he has learnt in class and from the books he has read to question what Hubert teaches. He disputes the credibility of the story of Jonah because it is unlikely that a whale would swallow a person whole since its throat “is only large enough to allow a man’s fist to enter” (224). He refuses to believe the Book of Genesis because it is unlikely that a woman came from a man’s rib. To him, to believe that Adam and Eve are the origin of humankind does not make sense since it would imply that Abel and Cain slept with their mother to procreate. As for the story of the Virgin Birth, Mujungu calls it a fairy tale since two evangelists (Mark and John) do not record it in their Gospels probably because they did not believe it (225). Perhaps his most radical critique is that since Jesus Christ was born to a woman who had two spouses (God and Joseph), he is a product of a polygamous relationship. “You won’t baptise the children of men with two wives,” he tells Hubert, “[y]et John baptized Jesus” (226). When Hubert fails to convince Mujungu, he declares in defeat: “There is no hope for you. You are dangerous to the faith of the rest of the class. I shall pray for you; but until you mend your ways, I shall have to ask you to withdraw from this class” (228). Suffice it to mention that being withdrawn from class is one of several punishments Mujungu suffers including caning, hard labour, ‘detainment’ (on two occasions he is not allowed to go home during school holidays), and eventually dismissal from the school which comes about when he thwarts the missionary’s mission one holiday when, while acting as an interpreter, he warns the villagers against Hubert’s designs: “He’s going to teach your children the truth, so that

they can learn new ways, and give up the savage ways of their fathers”, he tells them, and they reply: “We don’t want a school where the children learn to disrespect their elders. We won’t have anything to do with it” (233). Hubert blames Mujungu for misrepresenting him to the people and calls off his evangelical visit. In my view, Mujungu’s interpretation of Hubert’s message is quite accurate since, as I have already indicated above, this was indeed his mission – turning Africans from their ways so that they adopt European values.

The examples I have given above show that rather than become submissive to the British/Europeans, Mujungu and his classmates adopt a critical attitude to them that borders on blasphemy (for instance arguing that Jesus Christ was born in a polygamous marriage) and irreverence (for instance when one boy responds to William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet* with the cynical observation: “Why, I didn’t know those people had love!” (209). In the same vein, his students challenge Hubert’s practice of calling them savages using the very criterion he has used to define savagery. There is a remarkable dialogue in the novel that captures this:

“Why do you call us savage?”

“Because,” said the missionary, “you are not living in a European manner. Therefore you are a savage.”

“Oh, then if I learn to read and write, then I’ll not be a savage.”

“Yes, that’s it.”

At this, Mujungu spoke up, “Then I’m not a savage any more. I can read and write.”

The Reverend Mr. Hubert said, “Silence! I don’t want to hear one word from you.”

(141-142)

Here, a student ingeniously equates Hubert’s definition of living in a European manner to the ability to read and write. When Hubert accepts this deduction, Mujungu introduces a Socratic

twist that places his teacher on the spot. The boys also make fun of their teacher's racist attitude. When he decides to punish them for playing an African game, he rules out caning them because he does not want to break his arm as their "bodies are too hard" (142). The children respond to this by "laughing in loud guffaws", which makes Hubert so angry that he "increased their two days of work to four days" (142). But the children are not deterred by this; instead they continue with their subversion of what they consider a draconian punishment:

[T]hey went to work on the playing-field. They laughed and talked as loud as they could, to disturb the classes. They imitated the missionary and his manner of speech. Mujungu acted as the Reverend Mr. Hubert, and another boy took Mujungu's part. They carried on the conversation as it had just occurred. The missionary heard the imitations. He got very angry, and coming to the window of his classroom, he shouted, "Silence!" The echo of his voice was heard all over the school. The boys laughed aloud at the echo, not even knowing who was talking. (142-143)

This passage and the previous one bring to mind Homi K. Bhabha's work on colonial discourse. The boys point out the loopholes inherent in Hubert's attitude towards them by demonstrating how self-contradicting his definition of savagery is. By getting angry when Mujungu says he is not a savage since he can read and write, Hubert betrays the fact that even when the boys meet the criterion, they will remain savages, that is to say, even when they get civilised they will not be quite civilised: they will be, in Bhabha's formulation, "almost the same but not quite" (*Location* 122), thereby highlighting the bad faith of the missionary which the students bring to light.

It should be emphasized that what the students are resisting is not western education per se but the missionary's ethnocentrism and his "hermeneutic monopoly" as Tobias Döring calls it (145). By resisting indoctrination, the students are asking for a better pedagogy – one that

respects their traditions and initiatives. Mujungu makes this clear later in the book when he addresses Hubert thus:

Sir, we appreciate what you have done for us. But your attitude has been fixed. If you will change your mind – not suddenly but gradually – with a view of soothing us . . . then all of us will see that you are different from what we have thought. If you view us in this new light, surely you will change your notion of us and we will think of you in new light.  
(263)

The above quotation highlights Nyabongo's project in the novel – advocating dialogue between European and African worldviews with the aim of getting the best from both. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls this "building bridges" between cultures so that each can "illuminate the other" ("Borders" 389) for "[i]t is only when we see real connections that we can meaningfully talk about differences, similarities, and identities" (391). While Mujungu values European institutions like schools and hospitals, the missionary sees nothing worth valuing among the Baganda. Rather than take Mujungu's constructive challenge espoused in the quotation above, he forecloses debate by declaring: "You have forgotten all my teachings, Mujungu; and though you are baptised, you are no Christian" (264). To him there is no question of getting the best of both worlds: you are either Europe-oriented/Christian or Africa-oriented/savage. Following Bakhtin, we can call this attitude epistemological and ideological monoglossia. The title the author chooses for his novel – *Africa Answers Back* – points to his intention – questioning this monoglossia and asserting his continent's right to speak back to the colonizer in order to, among other things, correct some misconceptions about it and put some customs (for instance the practice of polygamy) in their proper perspective.<sup>35</sup> He does this in order to assert a Ugandan identity and to ensure that this identity is not eroded by colonial pedagogies.

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<sup>35</sup> Tobias Döring argues that the novel does not succeed in this task. He observes:

## Making Colonial Rule an African Event: Colonial Education and the Production of Strategic, Syncretic Subjects

Colonialism is one of the social spaces which Mary Louise Pratt has called “contact zones” where “disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (*Imperial Eyes* 7). This encounter of cultures was mediated by members of the local population trained by colonial educational institutions like the Church (where they were called Readers) or the Mission school. In Uganda, these were usually Christian converts, for example Ham Mukasa and Apolo Kagwa in *Uganda's Katikiro* and Abala Stanley Mujungu in *Africa Answers Back*. Whether they were submissive to colonial rulers or critical of them, these mediators tried in one way or another to get the best out of European incursion by “transform[ing the colonial event] into an African occasion,” as Gikandi avers (“African Subjects” 32). In this section of the chapter, I examine how they did this as portrayed in the two texts under discussion.

Both writers portray the importance of western education in training people who will translate western knowledge and technology to Buganda and the Baganda. Mukasa records several occasions when Kagwa asks people in England to come to his country as teachers, medical workers, and artisans<sup>36</sup>. Kagwa does this because he is aware that it is through educational institutions like Cambridge University which Mukasa describes as “the tutor of the

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[T]o some extent, Nyabongo's text initially echoes European voices. It recounts East African history by simply reproducing what must be seen as stereotypes of colonial historiography – for instance, when Captain Lugard is cast in the role of impartial peace-maker between religious factions, or when the presence of British troops in the region is declared necessary to prevent French and German expansion, which unmistakably replicates the classic reasoning of British governments. Thus, *Africa Answers Back* begins by repeating rather than resisting the argumentational patterns by which England domesticated Africa into the Grand Narrative of exploration and pacification. (144-145)

<sup>36</sup> Under Kagwa's tenure as Katikiro (1889-1925) several schools, hospitals and churches were built in Buganda. Some of these include: King's College Budo, Gayaza High School, Mengo School and Makerere University, established in 1922 as a technical college; Mengo and Mulago hospitals (founded in 1897 and 1917 respectively), and St. Paul's Cathedral, Namirembe (founded in 1890).

world” (115) that England possesses technological and architectural wonders. Mukasa is certain that sooner or later the wonders he sees in England will reach home:

[W]e are fortunate in one thing, and that is that some of these things will not fail to be brought to Uganda, and so will be seen by those who never saw them in England. Already we have seen the wonderful telegraph, which is the greatest thing that has yet come to us; the second is, perhaps, the steamers: these are the two wonderful things the Baganda have seen. (62)

But this will happen if the Baganda work hard because this is what leads to progress. “The English sleep very little, and therefore they get very rich,” he writes. He invokes a proverb to make his point: “A sluggard will not fail to beg of him who is not a sluggard”, which he interprets as meaning that “a lazy man begs from a man who works hard, and therefore all our nations require many things from the English” (62). He concludes his book with an eschatological vision:

Well, my friends, you should read this book very carefully and attentively, that you may understand what other and wiser lands are like; and though we call these lands wise, you should remember that wisdom does not come to a lazy and weak man, but to one who works hard and thinks daily about his work. Thought and perseverance thus increase a man's wisdom every year and every month. “He who goes slowly goes far”; “a crackling sound is not a fire,” and a great city is not built in one year. Let us then go ahead slowly and surely; perhaps our grandchildren will be much wiser than we are, but we should encourage our children daily to learn all they can, that they may teach their children after we have gone, and so they may go on increasing in wisdom both in the mind and in handicrafts. (204)

The exhortation that the Baganda read the book carefully points to the reason why Mukasa wrote it. He is not praising England's wonders for the sake of it; rather, he is emphasizing their glamour to show that with hard work, Buganda can be as developed as England. In Mukasa's vision, education is a foundational aspect in bridging the technological, architectural and scientific gap between England and Buganda hence his emphasis on learning and wisdom. And this education is for both sexes; in England he pays special attention to the way women are treated. Not only are they given honour (a lady is chosen to give prizes during a ceremony for instance) but they also work in factories (112-113).<sup>37</sup> If the Baganda work hard with patience and steadfastness, they too can become as great as England which does not hold a monopoly over cleverness and inventiveness. "[I]ndustry is not theirs alone," he writes, "for in all countries every industrious man will not fail to find what he searches for but a lazy man is always wanting things and never obtaining what he wants" (199).

By urging the Baganda to work hard so that Buganda can become developed, Mukasa and Kagwa are underlining the fact that England is not their home, so its technological, architectural and infrastructural wonders are not their own. While imperialism interpellated them as British-protected persons or black Britons, Mukasa and Kagwa still worked hard to carve out a Ugandan identity for themselves. Simon Gikandi comments thus on this issue:

Beneath his adulation of Englishness . . . Mukasa was eager to mark his difference from it; he was never in doubt that what he called the 'fashions' of the British were different from his own, that their ancestors were not his, that while they had been conjoined by a recent history, the colonised and the coloniser did not share a common genealogy or even destiny. Buganda's duty was to learn from Britain and then move on alone. Mukasa was ostensibly writing his book to establish the common identity he shared with his

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<sup>37</sup> He writes: "[T]here were a great many women in the workshop, and we were amazed at the strength of English women that enables them to work like men, as in every kind of work one finds men and women" (112-113).

colonisers, and he often went out of his way to valorise this common Christian identity, but he was also writing with a clear sense of his identity in the alterity of Englishness. (“African Subjects” 26)

This observation is important for it underlines what I pointed out above – that Mukasa and Kagwa were carving out a Ugandan space for themselves even as they praised the ‘cleverness of the English’. The language of their narrative is therefore “shaped by a double imperative – the desire to be close to Englishness in order to understand its authority and the need to be always vigilant about [their] difference from its central institutions and categories” (Gikandi *Maps* 39). Even the way they style themselves while in England is an example of this, for although they had learnt English and were capable of communicating in it, they kept to their home language, Luganda. And although they could have dressed in tweed jackets, they chose their traditional Ganda robes as the picture in the book, taken in a Bond Street studio, shows. Even the writing projects they undertake help in this task, as the existence of Kagwa’s *Basekabaka (The Kings of Buganda)* in Cambridge University library shows. To explain how the library collects the books it contains, Mukasa writes:

Of every book that is printed they take one copy, and put it in this building as a remembrance. We saw there a great many books some fourteen to seventeen hundred years of age, and they told us there were about half a million books in the library. Is this not amazing? If you count the number of books in the Bible from Genesis to Malachi, how many would you find? then, again, how many are there from Matthew to Revelation? Well, this is the way they count their books; one book of every kind is stored up, just as Apolo Katikiro wrote *Basekabaka Bebuganda* ("Kings of Uganda"), and they took one copy and kept it; in this way the number of five hundred thousand books is made up. (116)

Gikandi observes that “[i]n calling Cambridge “the tutor of the world,” Mukasa was also claiming it for himself. In this respect, instead of locating himself in a marginal position in relation to this tradition, Mukasa was reading it in relation to the central institutions of his own Buganda culture and the primary referents it provided” (*Maps* xv). That Cambridge University library has *Basekabaka* brings Mukasa immense pride, for more than being written by a Ugandan (thereby demonstrating the colonized people's mastery of the modern culture of writing and celebrating their entry into the culture of Englishness, as Gikandi observes), the book helps to record a long line of Buganda's kings. If we remember what Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel said about Africa proper (by which he meant black Africa) in the lectures on world history which he delivered between 1822 and 1828 – that it was “for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World – shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself – the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night” (109) – then we begin to see the importance of Kagwa's book as a counter-discourse, to use Richard Terdiman's term which I will explain later in the thesis, for it shows that Buganda was not “shut up” from the world since it had dealings with Zanzibar and other African kingdoms like Karagwe, and that it was not a land of childhood since it had elaborate administrative structures for example the Lukiiko, the equivalent of a European parliament.<sup>38</sup> It is true that pre-colonial Buganda had some flaws (for instance the unconstitutional, absolutist nature of the monarchy), but Mukasa's book shows that this flaw was not limited to Buganda: even England at one time had absolute monarchs hence this entry which he made on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1902:

We saw also the ancient kings, and the way in which they were dressed; and they showed us all the good kings and all the bad kings, each king and the way he ruled. We saw also

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<sup>38</sup> Britain used these administrative structures to entrench its rule in Uganda. Writing about the eastern Uganda sub-region called Bugisu where a Muganda general, Semei Kakungulu, had declared himself a *kabaka* (king) upon conquering it for the British between 1898 and 1902, Suzette Heald writes: “The units of the administration were known by the Ganda terms, *saza* for county, *gombolola* for the sub-county, *muluka* for parish, *butongole* for the village divisions of the parish and *mutala* for further sub-divisions” (28, italics in original).

the place where the king called Charles I was beheaded, because he would not listen to his nobles; we saw also slaughter-places, where the common people were killed; we saw also the ancient church, where all the nobles who were beheaded for treason were buried . . . We saw also the bell that used to be tolled in old days when they were going to kill a man. *But in all lands the ancient people were very evil indeed in their customs, to torture people thus cruelly.* (104, my emphasis)

In *Africa Answers Back*, Nyabongo's project is similar to Mukasa's. While he does not set out to shower praises and blessings on England the way Mukasa does, he too is interested in portraying how Ugandans take advantage of European incursion while at the same time keeping a distance from its potentially corrosive values. I have already shown that although Chief Ati does not want to convert to Christianity which requires him to send away his so many wives thereby cutting off the help he gives to the needy members of his chiefdom, he sends his son, Mujungu, to school to learn as much as he can for the benefit of his community. This enables Mujungu to translate parts of the Bible to the family thereby enlightening his people on some of the contradictions in the missionary's teaching. "Ha, ha, your son will find him out," one of Ati's wives exclaims after Mujungu has read something about King Solomon who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. "He can read his books, too! The Reverend Mr. Hubert can't tell us lies anymore" (207). In this role as a translator, Mujungu undermines the missionary's authority so much that his father tells Hubert soon afterwards, "I hope you stop telling people what you told me. As it is, we find out that it's untrue from what the children read to us" (213). Mujungu's education also empowers him to intervene decisively when smallpox strikes the village: he procures western medicine to fight the disease since the traditional medicine-man's efforts are not enough. When a German doctor asks Mujungu to encourage his people to get vaccinated, he replies with what Döring has called "a grand statement of reform policy" (141):

[I]t is my intention to do what I can from the point of view of modern science, and I'm sure my people will agree with me. By gradually changing their old culture, but not by throwing it away entirely, I hope to amalgamate what is good in the old and the new.”  
(246)

Although his father and several other people die of smallpox, Mujungu is praised and thanked by the survivors for “his quick action in calling the European doctors and stopping the epidemic” (266). He is nominated as heir to his father “in preference to other and older sons of the chief” (266) and is presented by the Prime Minister to the King with these words:

This man has rendered service to our country already. His wisdom has been proved by his deeds. He killed a wild beast when he was young. He saved the people when the epidemic came to our country. He has received education of the European kind. (272-273)

He leaves the King's palace confident to “develop the possibilities in his people and country” (274). In the last chapter of the novel we are told that on taking office he “immediately began a long list of innovations” (275). These include taking one wife, building schools, and encouraging the use of modern medicine. Although not everybody welcomes these innovations, the point to emphasize here is that Mujungu's mission is to use the knowledge he has got from western education to improve the welfare of his chiefdom.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the kinds of subjectivities colonial education produced as portrayed in *Uganda's Katikiro* and *Africa Answers Back*. My decision to work with three kinds of subjectivities was heuristic, as shown by the fact that the major characters I discuss have aspects of all the three subjectivities I delineated. Although enchanted with and submissive to Britain, Mukasa and Kagwa are at the same time strategic in that they use their positions as Christians and imperial subjects to open up institutions of modernity like schools, hospitals and Churches in Buganda which later served all Ugandans irrespective of race, ethnicity, religious denomination or political affiliation.<sup>39</sup> If we agree that these institutions played and continue to play a big role in defining Ugandanness, then people like Mukasa, Kagwa and Nyabongo contributed a lot to fostering a Ugandan national identity.

Another way through which they cultivated a Ugandan spirit was, as we have seen above, through writing books on Ugandan history, for example Kagwa's *Basekabaka Bebuganda (The Kings of Buganda)*, and on Ugandan customs, for example his *Ekitabo kye Empisa Za Baganda (The Book of the Traditions and Customs of the Baganda)* and *Engero Zabaganda (Tales of the Baganda)*, which demonstrates that he remained proudly Bugandan even as he served in a colonial government. The same can be said of Mujungu who, although critical of his Mission schoolteacher, appropriates western medical knowledge to save his people from a smallpox epidemic and founds schools in different parts of his chiefdom. Even as he does this, there are some traditions he does not break away from, for instance inheriting one of his father's wives – a practice that would be considered anathema in the western world. In other words, Mukasa, Kagwa and Mujungu make several negotiations as they inhabit a world where the forces of

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<sup>39</sup> Uganda's most famous writer, Okot p'Bitek, attended King's College, Budo, for instance, which Mukasa and Kagwa helped to found in 1906. This school and others like it also trained people who were later to call for the decolonization of the country, for example radicals like Semakula Mulumba, J. Kivu, F. Musoke, Rev. Spartas and James Miti whom Carol Summers discusses in her illuminating article "Radical Rudeness: Ugandan Social Critiques in the 1940s". For helping him get Budo hill as the site for the school, the first headteacher of King's College Budo, Weatherhead, pays tribute to Sir Apolo Kagwa as someone "who was genuinely keen on Christian education and on starting a more advanced school for the sons of chiefs and others" (McGregor 8).

tradition and those of modernity struggle to supplant each other. Yet, these people have been called sell-outs of Uganda because of the role they played in incorporating the country into the British Empire. A famous Ugandan sociologist, Christine Obbo, argues, for instance, that “Uganda became a British colony (Protectorate) because there were men willing to grab the opportunity to collaborate” (217). While the evidence she gives of the opportunism of Apolo Kagwa, Sitanislas Mugwanya and Zakaria Kisingiri is incriminating,<sup>40</sup> we should not let the weaknesses of these people overshadow their contribution to the making of modern Uganda. Drawing from Ross Chambers’s *Room for Maneuver: Reading Oppositional Narrative*, Gikandi observes that:

[I]t would be a conceptual mistake to see Sir Apolo and Mukasa simply as collaborators with the colonial system; rather, their works were oppositional to the extent that they strove to shift modes of British colonial desire towards what they would consider to be Bugandan ends. This shift in desire was evident in the books they read and the ones they wrote; it was in such modes of reading and writing that the colonised would become instrumental in changing the nature of what has come to be known as the colonial library. (“African Subjects” 20-21)

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<sup>40</sup> She quotes from the letters these men wrote to colonial officials asking for special monetary and material favours for their role in the signing of the 1900 Uganda Agreement which made Uganda Britain’s possession. Excerpts of these letters are available in Low 32-36.

## Chapter Three

### The National Struggle and the Emergent Postcolony

#### Introduction

In the last chapter, I examined the kind of subjectivities colonial education created in colonial Uganda as portrayed in two early Ugandan literary texts – Ham Mukasa’s travelogue and Akiki Nyabongo’s novel. I argued that colonial education produced subjects who were both enchanted with and critical of colonial rule and who strove to open up their societies to western modernity through colonial institutions like churches, schools, and hospitals. In this chapter, I examine the imagining of a Ugandan national identity in the works by two of the beneficiaries of the schools these pioneers helped to build – Okot p'Bitek (who attended King’s College, Budo) and Peter Nazareth (who attended Makerere University College). Focusing on Okot’s *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*, and Nazareth’s *In a Brown Mantle*<sup>1</sup>, I explore how these writers represent the national struggle against colonial rule (from the 1950s up to 9<sup>th</sup> October 1962, the day Uganda gained independence) and the first nine years of self-rule (from 1962 to 1971, the year Idi Amin deposed the first prime minister and the second president, Milton Apollo Obote<sup>2</sup>). These texts are all overtly political, for they are preoccupied with the kind of society Uganda becomes after independence. What Okot said about his work echoes true for Nazareth too:

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen these texts because they occupy a special place in the corpus of Ugandan letters. Okot’s poems were so innovative in form and style that other writers imitated them thereby ushering in what critics have called “the song school” of East African poetry (Roscoe 32). These writers are Joseph Buruga who published a long poem entitled *The Abandoned Hut* and Okello Oculi who published *Orphan* – a long poem with several characters addressing an orphaned boy, Okello, and a novel, *Prostitute*, which, like *Song of Lawino*, contains one speaker, Rosa, who narrates her experiences in a Lawino-kind of monologue albeit in prose. *In a Brown Mantle* was the first Ugandan novel to detail Uganda’s struggle against colonial rule and to narrativize what transpired in the newly independent nation from an Asian perspective. In so doing, it foregrounded the dynamic of race in the emergent postcolony.

<sup>2</sup> The first constitutional president of independent Uganda was Sir Edward Muteesa II, King of the Buganda kingdom. His prime minister, Milton Apollo Obote, deposed him from power in 1966 and bombarded his palace a few months later, forcing him to flee the country – an experience he narrates in his memoir entitled *Desecration of My Kingdom* (1967). For more on the bombardment, see Mutibwa (39); Kabwegyere (56-58).

I want to suggest that all my writings, whether they are anthropological monographs, studies of religion, essays, songs, poems, or even traditional stories and proverbs such as I am collecting now, all of them are ammunition for one big battle to decide where we here in Africa are going and what kind of society we are building. (Cited in Lindfors “Okot p’Bitek” 300)

In other words, for Okot, there is a link between fiction and life as lived in a particular community.<sup>3</sup> This inference brings to mind Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze’s observations about the relationship between African literature and history. To him, a literary writer is a historian in the sense that writing a fictional work is “an act of mending not only an individual’s memory, but also the historical self-understanding of a people, a culture or a tradition” through the narration of what he calls normal time and broken time (88). The writer’s mission is therefore to “repair the brokenness of time, to articulate an existence that must be lived in temporal crises, and thereby redeem humanity from, as the Christians say, an Original Fall” (89).<sup>4</sup> This notion of the fall from a state of purity and innocence to that of sinfulness and disgrace is pertinent because the texts I discuss in this chapter all depict how Uganda’s independence gets derailed within a short period of time as leaders fail in their mission of building a national community due to their self-willed cultural and spiritual alienation (Okot) and their racialism and factionalism (Nazareth). I discuss these issues in detail one at a time using insights on national identity

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<sup>3</sup> He held the view that writers and politicians can work together for the betterment of their societies. The writer, he said, “sees what the politician is doing and tries to say something about it. The poet or the playwright, if he [sic] is writing meaningful things, is trying to say to his brother politician: ‘Look, brother, this is not right. We should go this other way’” (*Cultural Revolution* 47).

<sup>4</sup> J. R. Maguire and Charles Ponnuthurai Sarvan hold related views about the relationship between literature and history. For Maguire, the writer is a “historical translator” who works with historical sources but translates them into new material according to “his [sic] sensibility, his motivations, his perspective, the medium he uses, the editor and the way we read the text” (22). For Sarvan, the writer is a “historical witness” in the sense that he/she draws from history thereby communicating “something of the experience of that history” (71), albeit in a fictional manner. These observations are important for they remind us that literature deals with life as lived in particular societies – societies with different cultures, traditions, and histories. For this reason, my analysis delves into the political issues while at the same time examining how each of the writers envisions “Ugandanness”.

gleaned from Anthony D. Smith and David Miller. In order to contextualize the issues the writers deal with, I start each section with a brief biography of each author.

### **Singing against Cultural Deracination: Questions of National Identity in *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol***

To appreciate the issues Okot is preoccupied with in *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*,<sup>5</sup> we need to understand who the poet was and some of the views he held on colonialism and post-colonialism. Okot was born on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1931 in northern Uganda. Significantly, his mother, Lacwaa, was “a famous dancer and composer of songs” (p’Chong “A Biographical Sketch” 2), and his father, Opii Bitek, was “a great storyteller and witty in his use of proverbs” (Lindfors “Okot p’Bitek” 299). At high school, Okot participated in a number of creative activities like composing songs, acting, and singing. At 22, he published a novel in his mother tongue, Acoli, entitled *Lak Tar Miyo Kinyero Wilobo*,<sup>6</sup> a commentary on the way the practice of bride wealth in northern Uganda was being abused by parents who charged so much money that young men found it almost impossible to marry. For his higher education, he read education, law and social anthropology at universities in Britain – at Aberystwyth in Wales, Bristol and Oxford respectively (Wangusa “Developments” 145). He taught at Makerere, Nairobi and Ife Universities where he was involved in organising music and dance festivals. He also worked as the director of the Uganda national cultural centre from 1966 to 1968 – a job from which he was

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<sup>5</sup> The setting of *Song of Lawino* is ambiguous. Sometimes it appears as if it is independent Uganda hence Lawino’s contention that political leaders are enriching themselves as the people who voted them into office live in poverty (110-111). The reference to the ‘present’ time of the poem as being “One thousand / Nine hundred / And sixty six” (73) – which is also the year it was first published – reinforces this reading. Other times, however, the setting is clearly pre-independence as when we are told that Ugandans are “fighting for Uhuru” (103) – a Kiswahili word for ‘independence’. This ambiguity can be explained by the timespan between the writing of the poem (Okot finished the Acoli version in 1956 but it was rejected by the publishers [Heron *Okot p’Bitek* 3]) and its publication (1966). While the poem was written before independence, it is possible that Okot revised some sections to accommodate post-independence realities. As for *Song of Ocol*, its setting is clearly independent Uganda.

<sup>6</sup> The English translation of this book is *White Teeth Make Us Laugh on Earth*, often shortened to *White Teeth*. It was published posthumously in 1989.

fired because of his outspoken views on politics.<sup>7</sup> His publications include *Song of Lawino* (1966), *Song of Ocol* (1967), *Wer pa Lawino* (1969)<sup>8</sup>, *Two Songs* (“Song of Prisoner” and “Song of Malaya” [1969]), *Religion of the Central Luo* (1971), *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (1971), *Horn of My Love* (1974),<sup>9</sup> *Hare and Hornbill* (1978),<sup>10</sup> *Africa’s Cultural Revolution* (1973), *Acholi Proverbs* (1985), and *Artist, the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values* (1986).<sup>11</sup>

As a scholar, Okot held the view that colonial education was dangerous because it brainwashed students into hating their past and pushed them to blindly imitating Western lifestyles. To him, the role of the educated class in Africa was to fight this brainwashing so that students are helped to discover that their past is rich and valuable.<sup>12</sup> In the preface to *Africa’s Cultural Revolution*, he asserts that

Africa<sup>13</sup> must re-examine herself critically. She must discover her true self, and rid herself of all ‘apemanship’. For only then can she begin to develop a culture of her own. Africa must redefine all her cultural terms according to her own interests. As she has broken the political bondage of colonialism, she must continue the economic and cultural revolution until she refuses to be led by the nose by foreigners. We must also reject the

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, in an article entitled “Indigenous Ills”, Okot argues that most of postcolonial Africa’s ills are indigenous, so solutions to them “cannot be imported: they must be the result of deliberate reorganization of the resources available for tackling specific issues” (40).

<sup>8</sup> This is the original Acoli version of *Song of Lawino*.

<sup>9</sup> A translation of Acoli songs, 34 of which were composed by his mother (Lindfors “Okot p’Bitek” 289).

<sup>10</sup> A translation of Acoli folktales.

<sup>11</sup> He also published poems in anthologies like *Poems from East Africa* (1971) and poems and essays in magazines like *Transition*, *The East African Journal*, and *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts*. For bibliographical references of some of his short poems, see Ofuani.

<sup>12</sup> Achebe makes a similar point when he argues that a novelist is a teacher. He writes, “I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did more than teach my readers that their past – with all their imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them” (“The Novelist as Teacher” 45).

<sup>13</sup> Okot addresses himself to the continent but in the book, he uses examples from Uganda.

erroneous attempts of foreign students to interpret and present her. We must interpret and present Africa in our own way, in our own interests. (vii)

Although polemical, this quotation gives a clear summary of Okot's mission as a writer – a mission elaborated further in the 1976 interview he gave Bernth Lindfors from which I picked the quote I cited in the introduction to this chapter. *Song of Lawino* is part of this re-examination.

In this poem, Okot creates a character called Lawino who complains about her Western-educated husband, Ocol, who despises Acoli<sup>14</sup>/Ugandan cultures in favour of Western/European cultures. A village woman, Lawino is steeped in the traditions of her people which she celebrates with passion and which she defends against the onslaught from Ocol who believes that everything Acoli/Ugandan<sup>15</sup> is primitive and savage. “Husband, now you despise me / Now you treat me with spite / And say I have inherited the stupidity of my aunt,” the poem begins, with Lawino presenting her case before her clansmen and women to whom she appeals to arbitrate the conflict between her and Ocol. The poem contains thirteen sections each about a particular issue: Ocol's insults to his unschooled wife and to all African people (section 1), a description and dismissal of Lawino's co-wife Clementine (section 2), a comparison of Acoli and Western dances (section 3), a self-portrait of Lawino as a cultured young girl steeped in indigenous beauty and leisure (section 4), a comparison of Acoli and Western perceptions of beauty and hygiene (section 5), a comparison of Acoli and Western foods and kitchens (section 6), a comparison of Acoli and Western perceptions of time (section 7), a comparison of Acoli and Christian religious concepts and practices (section 8), a questioning of some aspects of Christian

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<sup>14</sup> The poem is set in a particular place in Uganda – the Acoli sub-region of northern Uganda. Lawino therefore speaks from a specific cultural perspective in multi-ethnic Uganda. But the issues she raises about customs, norms and values could be raised by a character belonging to any other Ugandan ethnic group, hence my use of the slash between Acoli and Ugandan. Besides, the political issues she raises later on – for instance the animosity between two Ugandan political parties – make it clear that her critique of Ocol is national in scope.

<sup>15</sup> While I acknowledge the fact that conflating Acoli with Uganda is problematic, I have decided to take the risk and do precisely this because it is my contention that Okot's major concern in the poem is the valorisation and preservation of national values, with Acoli culture serving as a case in point. In other words, the issues Lawino articulates could as well have been raised by any other character with a different cultural locus, be it Lugbara, Madi, Ganda or Konzo, to mention just a few.

teaching (section 9), an elaboration of the Acoli worldview on health and diseases (section 10), a description of party politics and its pitfalls (section 11), a description of Ocol's home library and the effect of book learning on his manhood (section 12), and Lawino's proposal of ritual cleansing for Ocol so as to re-instate him to his former selfhood (section 13).<sup>16</sup> This summary makes it clear that the poem depicts a dialogic tension between two belief systems/worldviews, one Acoli/Ugandan, the other Western/European. Through this tension, Okot raises several questions about national identity using Lawino and Ocol (who responds to her in *Song of Ocol*) as spokespersons, for as Bakhtin observes, every speaking person in a literary text "is always, to one degree or another, an ideologue, and his [sic] words are always ideologemes" (*Dialogic Imagination* 333).<sup>17</sup>

To understand how the issues raised in both *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* (and in Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle*) relate to the notion of Ugandanness, we need to reflect on what national identity means. This is not a simple task, for some of the famous texts on nationalism like Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1990) take the notion of national identity for granted, so much so that the phrase "national identity" does not even appear in these books, although inferences can be made about what this concept means from their discussions of the term 'nation'. Moreover, nations and other collective entities (for instance ethnic groups) have quite a lot in common, making it difficult to make a distinction between them.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, it is difficult to come up with an all-encompassing definition of national identity as one nation is quite distinct from another, depending on whether it conceives nationality in ethnic terms (thereby emphasizing

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<sup>16</sup> This neat summary of the poem is provided by Wangusa ("Developments" 146-147).

<sup>17</sup> Later in the book, he puts this point differently when he states that each character's language is "a point of view, a socio-ideological conceptual system of real social groups and their embodied representatives" (411).

<sup>18</sup> Hobsbawm puts this point laconically thus: "[T]he problem is that there is no way of telling the observer how to distinguish a nation from other entities *a priori*, as we can tell him or her how to recognize a bird or to distinguish a mouse from a lizard. Nation-watching would be simple if it could be like bird-watching" (5).

common ancestry, descent and language as is the case in Germany) or in civic terms (hence underlining a common territory and legal and political citizenship as it is done in the US).

Lawino's plea to Ocol revolves around issues of territory, culture and history – three of the five major features both Anthony D. Smith and David Miller identify as constituting national identity. To discuss *Song of Lawino* more productively, I ask the following questions to which I attempt to provide answers: in this poem, what is Okot's nationalist project? Is he in total agreement with Lawino in her critique of Western culture and of Ocol, or are there moments when he turns his satiric flashlight on Lawino herself? What circumstances pertained to the publication of *Song of Lawino* (and its sequel *Song of Ocol*), and how do they illuminate the nationalist issues that Okot grapples with in the poem?

I would like to begin my discussion by noting that Lawino's point, as I understand it, is that as an Acoli/Ugandan, there is a certain way Ocol should conduct himself. For instance, he should respect his parents and his wife, and he should live within the purview of accepted norms, practices and customs. Unfortunately, this is not what is happening: he is abusive to Lawino, contemptuous of her mother and relatives, and hateful of his brother who belongs to a different religious denomination and a rival political party. To her, the Western education Ocol has acquired has blinded him to the beauty of his culture. He calls Acoli/Ugandan languages, dances, foods, medicines and ways of reckoning time primitive. He also declares Acoli/Uganda traditional religions heathen and inferior to Western counterparts. Ocol's views would not be so scandalous to Lawino if they were presented as a matter of personal opinion and preference that she can ignore. Unfortunately, they are more than this, for Ocol's mission is to destroy African ways and customs. The refrain – “The pumpkin in the old homestead / Must not be uprooted!” (41) – points to this. This statement is central to the meaning of the poem in at least two ways. As a proverb, it locates the poem within the cultural milieu of the Acoli people of northern Uganda, the way Chinua Achebe's proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* locate this novel within the cultural milieu of the Igbo people of Nigeria. As a refrain, the proverb also serves as the framing

argument of the poem. In his introduction to *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*, G. A. Heron explains this point thus:

Pumpkins are a luxury food. They grow wild throughout Acoliland. To uproot pumpkins, even when you are moving to a new homestead, is simple wanton destruction. In this proverb, then, Lawino is not asking Ocol to cling to everything in his past, but rather not to destroy things for the sake of destroying them. (Heron "Introduction" 7)

David Rubadiri interprets the refrain as a symbol. He observes that through the refrain, Lawino is

stating a profound, philosophical truth not only of our survival, but also of that which identifies us. If you uproot where you come from, then you have got nothing else – no pumpkin – you live like the people who live in the towns, from one flat to another because there is nothing to uproot except your valuable pictures. So that the pumpkin here becomes highly symbolic. ("The Development of Writing" 155)

Rubadiri's use of the pronoun "us" is productively ambiguous; it can refer to members of the Acoli ethnic group or of the Ugandan nation or of the African continent, or even of the human community, for the issues raised in the poem – for instance the dangers of slavish imitation of other cultures – can speak to different people across time and space.<sup>19</sup>

Okot locates Ocol's deracination in colonial education. He has been to Makerere University where he learnt that

Black People are primitive

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Nazareth observes that renowned American novelist, Alice Walker, "quotes an extract from *Song of Lawino* as an epigram to *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*" ("Waiting for Amin" 31).

And their ways are utterly harmful,  
Their dances are mortal sins  
They are ignorant, poor and diseased! (36)<sup>20</sup>

Because of this lesson, he does not want to stay with his wife, Lawino, who is not Western-educated and whose head, according to him, “[i]s as big as that of an elephant / But it is only bones, / There is no brain in it” (36). Instead, he chooses an educated woman, Clementine, who “aspires / To look like a white woman” by using a lot of make-up, bleaching her skin (particularly the face) and straightening her hair (37).<sup>21</sup> Already, the reader can tell that the education Ocol has received misrepresents things: it takes Africa as the antithesis of Europe as I explained in the previous chapter; and it assumes that whoever has not attended a Western school does not have a brain. But it does something worse than this – it inflicts a wound in Ocol’s soul<sup>22</sup> for he comes to believe that his culture is primitive and inferior to that of the white people and that Africa is nothing but an idle giant

Diseased with a chronic illness,  
Choking with black ignorance,  
Chained to the rock  
Of poverty,

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<sup>20</sup> This kind of lesson was in fact possible in a colonial school as Murray Carlin, whom Carol Sicherman calls a “much-admired member of the English Department [at Makerere University] (23), testifies. Moved by sympathy for students, Carlin wrote in the late 1950s:

What we are practicing at Makerere, day in and out . . . is the subversion . . . of the African mind; the breaking down of mental tissues; their reconstruction in the Western mode; the reordering of thoughts, feelings, habits, responses, of every aspect of the mind and personality. This is what we are doing, and cannot avoid doing – this is the core of our activity. (Cited in Sicherman 11).

Okot portrays Ocol as a product of this colonial mental engineering.

<sup>21</sup> In *A Man of Two Faces*, Henry Owino depicts a similar situation. Like Ocol, Okure abandons his village wife when he returns from Europe where he has been studying for a doctoral degree. To underline the fact that education has made Okure different from other Ugandans, especially those who have not been to Western schools, the narrator of the novel, Jamor, calls him “[a] black European” (52).

<sup>22</sup> I borrow this phrase – a wound in the soul – from Chinua Achebe (“The Novelist as Teacher” 44).

And yet laughing,  
Always laughing and dancing,  
The chains on his legs  
Jangling;  
  
Displaying his white teeth  
In bright pink gum,  
Loose white teeth  
That cannot bite,  
Joking, giggling, dancing ... (125)

He wishes he were a white man, hence his anguished cry:

Mother, mother,  
Why,  
Why was I born  
Black? (126).<sup>23</sup>

By regretting having been born black, Ocol confirms what Lawino has said all along – he is a brainwashed man who is ashamed of his race and of his culture, and who would rather he were

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<sup>23</sup> Fanon gives many examples of people who behave like Ocol in one way or another, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, first published in French in 1952, with the English translation coming out in 1967, a year after the publication of *Song of Lawino*. There is a case of “[t]he black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about “our ancestors, the Gauls [thereby] identifying himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages – an all-white truth” (114). Another case – one of many involving black women – is recorded by a one Etiemble whom Fanon quotes thus:

I was stupefied, as an adolescent, when a girl who knew me quite well jumped up in anger because I had said to her, in a situation where the word was not only appropriate but the one word that suited the occasion: ‘You, as a Negress—.’ ‘Me? a Negress? Can’t you see I’m practically white? I despise Negroes. Niggers stink. They’re dirty and lazy. Don’t ever mention niggers to me.’ (35)

white. In the memorable words of Frantz Fanon, he has a black skin but a white mask. If Fanon's observation that "the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values" (*Wretched* 43) is accurate, then Ocol and his concubine Clementine, whom Ali A. Mazrui aptly describes as "a powdered and lipsticked piece of female modernity" (84), testify to the efficacy of colonial education in destroying self-pride in the colonized. But Okot's point is not that colonial education is inherently destructive. In my view, he uses the portrait of Ocol to underline the dangers pertaining to slavish imitation of what is learnt at school. To him, students must take it upon themselves to be critical learners so that they are able to distinguish between truth and racist propaganda.<sup>24</sup> In the words of Fanon, I read Okot to be asking the Ocols of Uganda to pray, "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (*Black Skin* 181). He also aims to portray the self-terminating proclivities of some of the leaders who take on positions of responsibility in independent Uganda; leaders who are not in a position to foster national consciousness and national pride because they are not proud of their race and of their culture. Instead of using his education for nationalist ends like forging unity through dialogue which Lawino calls for, Ocol shuts her up and orders her to pack her things and leave 'his' house. If politics, as Harry Boyte postulates, is the way people with different values and from different backgrounds can "work together to solve problems and create common things of value" and the "process by which citizens with varied interests and opinions negotiate differences and clarify places where values conflict" (cited in Westheimer 616), then Ocol's refusal to listen to Lawino is unfortunate because it robs the nation of her valuable contribution since the issues she raises, as I have already noted, are topical and worth listening to.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> In the last chapter, I explained how Nyabongo's Mujungu turns out to be this kind of learner in Reverend Hubert's school.

<sup>25</sup> In *Africa's Cultural Revolution*, Okot makes it clear that he is not against Western education. His concern is that Western-educated people should use their knowledge to serve their communities. "This educated member of the elite cannot and will not entertain his own people, the taxpayers who pay for his education," he observes. "He cannot, he does not want to play his piano or act his Shakespeare before a village audience. He will not even try to teach his brothers and sisters to dance the Scottish dance during his vacation" (13).

To make matters worse, leaders like Ocol, Okot suggests, lead their countries on the grim road of neo-colonialism.<sup>26</sup> This is well illustrated by Ocol's glorification of King Leopold II of Belgium (151) whose colonial reign in the Congo is universally considered to have been a terrible humanitarian disaster from which that country (now called the Democratic Republic of Congo) is still struggling to recover. Seen from this perspective, Lawino is a patriot/nationalist who is trying to save Ugandan values from being destroyed by mentally and spiritually colonized Ocol, hence her incessant plea, as I have already mentioned, that he should not uproot the pumpkin from the old homestead. Some of these values are hospitality towards visitors, respect for elders, and veneration of the dead – all of which Ocol violates. If nationality means sharing in common values and norms, then Ocol disavows his Ugandanness by being inhospitable to visitors, disrespectful to elders, and irreverent to the dead. His face darkens, Lawino tells the reader, when visitors arrive and to quickly get rid of them, he asks, "What can I do for you?" (68). He calls Lawino's mother a witch (35), and he attempts to cut down the Okango – the sacred tree on his father's shrine. When his mother thwarts this act, he goes to church and kneels "before / The stone picture of Joseph" (95) – a subtle indication of his narrow-mindedness for with all his Western education, he cannot see that the two religious symbols (the shrine and the statue) play similar roles in the spiritual life of the people who have created them.

Ocol's stance against Ugandan values, norms and customs is made even clearer in his response to Lawino, depicted in *Song of Ocol*, in which he threatens to use his political power to completely destroy Ugandan culture by either imprisoning or executing different professionals responsible for fostering it – poets, dancers, folk-story tellers, myth-makers, court historians, professors of anthropology and teachers of African history, besides making "a bonfire" of their works, "destroy[ing] all anthologies / Of African literature" and "clos[ing] / All the schools / Of

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<sup>26</sup> With Europhilic characters like Ocol in power, independent countries like Uganda become fertile ground where corrupt and corrupting Western characters like Alexander Loote in Grace Ibingira's *Bitter Harvest: A Political Novel* thrive. The name 'Loote' is meant to point to his looting proclivities by use of personification allegory.

African Studies” (129).<sup>27</sup> If national identity is about imagining a community through products of the imagination as Benedict Anderson suggests, then Ocol’s threat to incarcerate and execute imaginative writers works against the grain of building national consciousness, thereby revealing him as anti-nation and reactionary. His intention is not to work towards a politics that conceives the nation as “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7), for he does not care about unity and comradeship. In fact, both poems underline the problem of disunity. Ocol portrays Christianity and multiparty politics as dividing people, including close relatives. Ocol and his brother are a case in point as Lawino explains:

Ocol dislikes his brother fiercely,  
His mother's son's hatred  
Resembles boiling oil! (104)

The poem suggests that the hatred results from the religious base of the parties: the Democratic Party to which Ocol belongs is predominantly Catholic while the Congress Party to which his brother belongs is Anglican.<sup>28</sup> Although political parties in Uganda are a late 1950s phenomenon, the animosity between Catholics and Anglicans in Ugandan politics goes way back to the religious wars of the late 1890s when the Anglicans triumphed over the Catholics, thereby gaining a dominant role in the colonial state between 1900 and 1961 and in independent Uganda.<sup>29</sup> The fact that belonging to different religious denominations and political parties

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<sup>27</sup> Okot’s concern here – the threat that postcolonial Uganda’s leadership might pose to the freedom and life of artists – became a reality in the 1970s when Idi Amin murdered playwright Byron Kawadwa (Mbowa “Luganda Theatre” 221 and “Theatre and Political Repression” 90). Elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, a similar trend took place. In Guinea, for instance, poet and dancer Keita Fodeba was executed by Sekou Toure (Gikandi “Theory, Literature” 9).

<sup>28</sup> At the time of the poem’s publication in 1966, the Uganda People’s Congress was the ruling party.

<sup>29</sup> Kevin Ward comments on this issue thus: “As a quasi-establishment during the colonial rule, [the Anglican church/Church of Uganda] has tended at times to cling on to that position in the very different situations of independent Uganda” (72). As for A. G. G. Ginyera-Pinyewa, “the fact is that religion and the modern political Uganda were like Siamese twins that saw the light of day at the same time. And, to continue with the metaphor, the two had not been really separated even when independence came some eighty years after” (cited in Kokole 52).

divides the brothers so irrevocably shows how antagonistic to each other the two faiths and the two parties are. This antagonism has been registered by other Ugandan works, notably Nyabongo's *Africa Answers Back* and Mary Karooro Okurut's *The Invisible Weevil*. As I noted in the previous chapter, *Africa Answers Back* opens with religious wars in which Anglicans triumph over Catholics. As for *The Invisible Weevil*, which I discuss in the next chapter, it depicts how a father and a son almost fall out in post-Amin Uganda when the latter joins a political party that is not religion-based.<sup>30</sup> The fact that Uganda is a country divided against itself is further highlighted by the rhetorical questions Lawino asks Ocol:

Where is the Peace of Uhuru?

Where the unity of Independence?

Must it not begin at home?

And the Acoli and Lango

And the Madi and Lugbara,

How can they unite?

And all the tribes of Uganda

How can they become one? (107)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> When he learns that Genesis has joined a new political party, his father, Runamba, threatens to cut him to pieces for bringing a "terrible thing" upon his household. "We've had our two main parties for a long time," he states. "We know that the Democratic Party has been for Catholics. We the Protestants, ours has been the Congress Party and many of the Moslems have been together with us there. Now, you come with yours which has no religion!" (Okurut 169). His wife, Kaaka, asks him to let Genesis carry on with the new party since it stands a better chance of uniting the people. "The way I've been seeing these things, our parties are not good," she says. "Just think, we never talk to our neighbours who are in different parties, different religions. They never talk to us either. What sort of life's that?" (169).

<sup>31</sup> In his other long poem "Song of Prisoner", Okot further explores this issue of disunity. The persona, the prisoner, says he assassinated his victim, an important post-independence politician, because he was, among other things, "[a] tribalist / clannist / [and] brotherist" (67). However, the prisoner is portrayed as also being a tribalist, clannist and brotherist, since he rudely chides his father for condemning his children to poverty by marrying a woman from a wrong clan, that is to say, a clan that is not in power. In other words, the prisoner condones clannism and nepotism.

In *Song of Ocol*, Ocol does not respond to these questions, important though they are to someone like him who is in power. This shows his disinterest in uniting disparate sections of the population in the spirit of fostering a feeling of national consciousness.

While I have argued that Lawino's stand is portrayed in the poem as nationalist since she advocates the preservation of values which are under threat from brainwashed Western-educated people like Ocol, there are cases where what she says sometimes goes against the grain of building national unity among different sections of the population. In her praise of Acholi traditions and lifestyles, she sometimes tends to despise other peoples, for instance when she rhetorically asks:

Do you know  
Why the knees  
Of millet-eaters  
Are tough?  
Tougher than the knees  
Of the people who drink bananas!  
Where do you think  
The stone powder  
From the grinding stone goes? (59-60)

Here, Lawino is buying into the stereotype that northern Ugandans (whose staple food is millet) are stronger and tougher than southern Ugandans (whose staple food is bananas). This kind of view is problematic for it has the potential to engender conflict between ethnic groups which consequently thwarts the growth of national consciousness.<sup>32</sup> In such moments, Lawino's

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<sup>32</sup> Monica Arac de Nyeko's short story entitled "The Banana Eaters" explores this issue in detail. In this story, the friendship between two teenagers – Naalu and Amito – suffers because their parents are enemies. The enmity is caused by ethnic stereotyping as several instances in the story show. Some southern Ugandan characters call

Acoliness does not stand as a metonymy for Uganda but as a valorisation of a particular ethnic identity – what Bernth Lindfors aptly calls “dogmatic Acolitude” (“Two Songs” 149).

Besides, Lawino is sometimes ethnocentric in her attacks of other nationalities. While her assertion of Acoli values and lifestyles is commendable because it shows how proud of her heritage she is, the way she portrays Western culture is unfair for it is one-sided. She dismisses it *in toto* as though there is nothing positive she can gain from it. Yet her concession – “The wonders of the white man / Are many / They Leave me speechless!” (57) – shows that there is something good that Ugandans can get from Western culture, for instance electricity and modern medicine. Unfortunately, she is not able to distinguish between Western culture and the abuse of this culture by indoctrinated Ugandans like Ocol. It is this aspect of the poem that has attracted bitter criticism from scholars like Andrew Gurr, Maina Gathungu and Taban lo Liyong. For Gurr, Okot’s uncritical defence of traditional values in a modern world is a form of “propagandising” (cited in Wanjala *For Home and Freedom* 47). For Gathungu, “[t]o infer that a woman – even the mother to Lawino – would be averse to the idea of piped water in her house is a gross misrepresentation of our sense of values” (58). As for lo Liyong, he dismisses Okot’s Lawino as an “anachronistic wife” (143) for she is defending values of a bygone era. Citing Lawino’s verse – “Like beggars / You take up white men's adornments, / Like slaves or war captives / You take up white men's ways. / Didn't the Acoli have adornments? / Didn't Black People have their ways?” (49), lo Liyong writes:

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Amito’s mother “a husbandless slut, a fanatic Christian, a sex-starved bitch who should migrate back to the north of the country where people were uncivilized and lacked manners”. They go as far as suggesting that her “womb carried the ugliest of children, children who came out with heads the size of water basins and nostrils that could fit a man’s fist”. On her part, she holds strong views about her attackers:

Ma said it often that Baganda [the most populous ethnic group in southern Uganda] treasured money over loyalty. They would steal your hand if you turned away. The Baganda were banana eaters. They consumed matooke [steamed bananas] for a staple. Ma said matooke was a useless food, one per cent air and ninety-nine per cent water. She thought the Baganda were a weak people, fearful of confrontation and conflict, who chose the easy way instead of the upstream path of honesty, clarity, and directness. (n.p)

That's a point of contention. Did the Acholi borrow ways from among themselves, or not? Did the Acholi borrow from other Black People, or not? Have the Acholi, or Black People, made cultural contributions to other people, or not? If the Acholi and Black People have been 'borrowers' and 'lenders', what is the rationale for imposing limits to borrowings and lendings now? Unconscious cultural absorptions take place every day without the reasoner's knowledge or sanction. (*Last Word* 149)

This quotation brings to mind Kwame Anthony Appiah's notion of "cosmopolitan contamination" and his oft-quoted observation that "[c]ultural purity is an oxymoron" since people's lives are "enriched by literature, art, and film that come from many places, and that contains influences from many more" (113).<sup>33</sup> Lo Liyong reiterates his point by arguing that

African culture is to be a synthesis and a metamorphosis – the order of the things to come. It assimilates and it dissimilates. It picks, it grabs, it carries on. It modifies, it combines – it does everything designated by the words active, changing and progress. (*Last Word* 206)

The character lo Liyong considers to be embodying this synthesis is Ocol. "Yes, Ocol," he writes,

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<sup>33</sup> Salman Rushdie makes a similar point when he observes that his novel, *The Satanic Verses*

celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves. (394)

Black people are primitive, their ways are harmful, they are ignorant, poor and diseased. If they were not ignorant, they would not go to school; if they were not poor and diseased, they would not be asking for foreign aid; if their ways were not harmful (to progress) they would have been less primitive. For why did others advance, if their ways were not conducive towards the progress we are chasing? (*Last Words* 143)

This uncritical acceptance of Ocol's viewpoint shows that lo Liyong misreads both poems for Ocol does not have any plan to make his compatriots less ignorant, primitive and diseased. Rather than respond to the problems afflicting the people – what Lawino calls “the pythons of sickness / Swallow[ing] the children . . . the buffaloes of poverty / Knock[ing] the people down / And ignorance” (111) – Ocol is busy planning to incarcerate and execute sections of the population and to erect monuments to the architects of colonialism and imperialism, as I have already noted. Clearly, Ocol is not interested in issues of cultural synthesis. If he were, he would have tried to fuse the positive aspects of both cultures in order to come up with a new way of life and a new value system. As it is, he sets out to uproot the pumpkin in the old homestead without replacing it with anything worthwhile. Rather than respond to Lawino in a respectable way, he abuses her; rather than engage her in debate, he banishes her from his house.

The discussion above makes it clear that as an artistic product, *Song of Lawino*, like *Song of Ocol*, invests heavily in the discourse of national identity. Apart from the issues the poem raises on nation and nationalism, there are other aspects of it that highlight Okot's stand on the subject under discussion. These include his choice of a non-Western educated person as a persona and spokesperson, the poem's publication history, the language in which it was originally composed, its sources of inspiration, and its style.

Okot's choice of an uneducated village woman as the protagonist of the poem highlights his belief that each and every person has a role to play in cultivating a sense of Ugandanness

irrespective of their social status.<sup>34</sup> Since Lawino has not been to a Western school, a reader might find her an unsuitable commentator on Western culture. In fact, Taban lo Liyong argues that the choice of Lawino as a critic of the West makes Okot conduct his discussion in “a low key” since “it is the simple that he deals with . . . things to be seen with the eyes, things to be heard with the ears, or felt with the skin – but little to be felt with the intellect” (*Last Word* 141). By making this argument, lo Liyong seems to suggest that it is only Western-educated people who are intelligent. Okot deconstructs this view by endowing Lawino with tremendous intelligence that enables her to speak with philosophical depth. As Heron correctly observes, she “raises most of the issues about Westernisation that an intellectual might have raised” (“Introduction” 14). Okot’s choice of Lawino is therefore not coincidental; it is a call to postcolonial leaders to revisit their views about the social status of their countrymen and women who have not attained Western education, and a reminder to them that these people too have something to contribute to national development if given a chance.<sup>35</sup> In *Africa’s Cultural Revolution*, Okot decries the exclusion of the Lawinos of Uganda by the educated men in power:

You cannot become a member of *their* parliament unless you can speak English or French. You may be the greatest oral historian, but they will never allow you anywhere near *their* university. The greatest traditional musicians and poets cannot teach in the

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<sup>34</sup> Florence Stratton has a problem with Okot’s use of Lawino as a symbol of authentic African culture. To her, this symbol analogizes women like Lawino “to a bygone culture which is usually conceptualized [by male writers like Okot] as immutable, rendering the female figure static, conservative, and ahistorical” (50). Building on this critique, Lynda Gichanda Spencer rightly observes that the ambiguity of Lawino’s legacy as a speaking woman character is that “p’Bitek, the nationalist writer, is ventriloquizing through her voice to articulate his concerns about the tensions between tradition and modernity, effectively reiterating the classical nationalist patriarchal trope of women as carriers and custodians of culture” (93). While I agree with the general argument Stratton makes in her influential book, I have a problem with the above statement. I do not think that the culture Lawino is advocating is a bygone one. She asks for virtues like respect of elders, reverence for the dead, and tolerance of worldviews we consider old-fashioned – virtues which are far from being of the past. She is conservative, yes, but she is not asking Ocol to respect every custom or norm Acolis/Ugandans practice. Rather, she asks him to let people choose the food they would like to eat, the dances they would like to enjoy, and the gods they would like to worship. To my mind, this is far from being static. As for the charge that Lawino is portrayed as ahistorical, I think this is an overstatement since Lawino is conversant with what is taking place in her community, for instance the effect Western education is having on Acoli culture.

<sup>35</sup> He himself benefited a lot from the tutelage of his father and mother who were accomplished artists in their own right as story teller and singer, respectively (p’Chong “A Biographical Sketch” 2; Lindfors “Okot p’Bitek” 299).

Department of Music or Literature; they cannot teach in *their* schools. The African medicine expert is called a ‘witchdoctor’ (a misleading term, implying that he is a ‘witch’ and, therefore, a bad person), and his skill dubbed fetish. His counterparts in the medical schools treat him with spite, and refuse to learn anything from him, or allow him to enter *their* hospitals. The most pious village priest is regarded as a witch and is punished for witchcraft. Renowned story-tellers, and the greatest dancers, cannot teach drama or dancing in *their* schools and university. But these men and women are the best in the world in their own fields, and no experts, even those professors at the universities or anywhere on earth, are qualified to examine them. (7, italics in original)

He suggests that schools, hospitals and other institutions should open their doors to knowledgeable and experienced albeit non-formally educated experts.<sup>36</sup> This is Lawino’s plea to Ocol: that he treat her with respect although she has not been to a Western school, and that he respect Acoli and other Ugandan cultures and traditions. In essence, Okot is calling for dialogue between the educated and the uneducated, villagers and town dwellers, men and women, so that they work together to make Uganda a better place. To him, the school should not be a boundary that divides the educated from the uneducated; rather it should be a bridge that brings the two groups together. Okot’s decision to compose the poem in Acoli and later translate it into English is part of the integration he seeks. To communicate with the non-formally educated members of his community, he decided to write in a language they spoke, thereby involving them in the debate between Lawino and Ocol since the issues raised here concern them. It is no wonder that when the poem was first published it became “an object of great debate in northern Uganda, in Gulu at least. It was debated in the pubs and in dancing places” (*Cultural Revolution* 44). He

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<sup>36</sup> Although this looked impracticable at the time he first suggested it (1967), his proposition has been implemented in Uganda. At Makerere University, for instance, the department of performing arts hires experienced village drummers, dancers and singers for specific periods even when they do not have formal Western education. Mr Alfdaniels Mabingo Mivule Bassibye, an assistant lecturer in dance at Makerere, confirmed this in an email he wrote to me on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2013. The Ministry of Health has also recognised the invaluable services traditional medicine-men and women – birth attendants and bone-setters for instance – render, and it has put in place policies to regulate their medical practice.

attributes this to the fact that “[i]t was written in the vernacular, and everybody who was around who heard it, enjoyed it” (44). In other words, the medium of communication was tied to the way the poem circulated: people identified with it because it was something written in their language, not something written in English and therefore considered as being meant for only the Western-educated. But even when he translated it into English, the poem retained its African roots, which explains why non-Acholi speaking Ugandans enjoyed it a lot and still do.<sup>37</sup>

Suffice it to emphasize that Okot’s use of Acoli to write a poem so rhythmic and so touching is a counter to Ocol’s claims that it “is a primitive language / And is not rich enough / to express ... deep wisdom” (87). Like Lawino, Okot is telling educated people:

Let me show you  
 The wealth in your house,  
 Ocol my husband,  
 Son of the Bull,  
 Let no one uproot the Pumpkin. (120)

This quotation highlights the indigenous source of the poem. Unlike most of the poems written in the 1950s and 1960s, *Song of Lawino* was mostly inspired by African oral literature, not European literature.<sup>38</sup> Born to a singer-mother, Okot used the structure of the Acoli satiric song to compose it as Heron has shown (*Okot p’Bitek* 84-100). There are several qualities of the traditional song evident in the poem, which was originally performed as an Acoli opera in its earliest stages of conception. First of all, there is a singer who addresses a particular person or

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<sup>37</sup> To Nazareth, for instance, the poem gives “the listener . . . the illusion that he [sic] was listening to the protagonist, Lawino, directly in her own language” (*Waiting for Amin* 10).

<sup>38</sup> K. E. Senanu and T. Vincent observe that Okot’s poetry in general is “fortified by a rich blend of native traditional literary forms and acquired European forms [and] represents one of the best examples of African poetry to successfully express African ideas in European forms, retaining the lyric freshness and simplicity of the songs of his own tribe, the Acholi, and using personal imagery” (103).

persons. In the poem, Lawino addresses herself to her husband, her clansmen and her brother. There is also a refrain that is recited many times in the form of the proverb “The pumpkin in the old homestead / Must not be uprooted.” Additionally, there are some moments when Okot inserts short songs within the poem. Because of its novelty, the poem has been praised by many critics. For instance, Emmanuel Ngara asserts that “Okot p’Bitek’s achievement in *Song of Lawino* is unparalleled in African poetry to date” (75). Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike call it “possibly the best rounded single work of African poetry in English today [which uses] authentic African imagery, proverbs, laments, invocations and curses, thereby successfully rooting the modern in the traditional” (195). Bernth Lindfors calls it “a thoroughly indigenous poem in form, content, style, message and aesthetic philosophy” and “the first poem in English to achieve a totally African identity” (“Songs” 146, 144). Nazareth calls it

the first ‘poem’ in English to break free from the stranglehold of British writing . . . It owed little to any English or western model: in one bold movement, it swept away the ghosts of T. S. Eliot, Wordsworth and others . . . Prior to that, the best poets had walked in the shadows of the English ‘Greats’.<sup>39</sup> (“Waiting for Amin” 10)

This aspect of the poem – its break from the stranglehold of European influences and styles – is another feature of the national struggle that Okot highlights through Lawino’s ridicule of Ocol who, to her, has become a slave to the white man whose books he reads:

A certain man  
Has no millet field,  
He lives on borrowed foods.

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<sup>39</sup> Nazareth cites David Rubadiri’s oft-anthologised poem “Stanley Meets Mutesa” as an example of works modelled on European literature, in this case T. S. Eliot’s “Journey of the Magi.” Another good example one may give is Timothy Wangusa’s “A Taxi Driver Foresees His Death” which, as the titles suggests, is modelled on W. B. Yeats’s “An Irishman Foresees His Death”.

He borrows the clothes he wears  
And the ideas in his head  
And his actions and behaviour  
Are to please somebody else.  
Like a woman trying to please her husband!  
My husband has become a woman! (116)

Some critics have accused Okot of exaggerating the arrogance and absurdity of Ocol. “Even if you allow for the fact that Lawino in her anguish sees too much contempt in the acts of her husband,” Mazrui argues, “the feeling nevertheless persists that the poet himself has erred on the side of excess in his portrayal of Ocol” (84). To Mazrui,

Okot has merely succeeded in creating a caricature that could in no way be regarded as representative of the type of person he wants to typify. Ocol by this account is a hyperbolic deserter from his own culture. The person lacks full credibility. (85)

While Mazrui's point on the credibility of Ocol's character is valid, I think he stops short of examining how exaggeration works as a technique that brings the satiric subject – in this case Ocol – into sharper focus. Okot's mission is to show how destructive colonial brainwashing can be and he shows this by constructing a brainwashed subject par excellence who represents not all educated people but those who disavow their African identity and become white masks. For this reason, I consider Ocol a credible character.<sup>40</sup> However, it is true that there are moments when Lawino generalises her accusation to all educated people, for instance when she says:

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<sup>40</sup> Other Ugandan writers have created Ocol-like characters or given testimonies of Ocol-kind of characters they know, meaning that the kind of behaviour Okot ridicules was quite common at the time. In a short play ironically entitled “Brave New Cosmos”, Peter Nazareth, for instance, creates Kaggwa, an arts student in the University of East Africa, who does not go home for holidays because his parents will not understand him since “[t]hey've got hardly any education” and therefore “know nothing of the great writers” he is studying, like William Shakespeare and John Keats (175). Kiwanuka, a former schoolmate of Kaggwa's who did not make it to University and is now

all our young men  
Were finished in the forest [of books],  
Their manhood was finished  
In the class-rooms,  
Their testicles  
Were smashed  
With large books! (117)

The use of the word “all” in the above quotation shows Lawino’s bias against Western education. It is not true that all Western-educated people turn out as Ocols, just like it is not true that all people who do not attain Western education are as intelligent and as knowledgeable as Lawino or are as steeped into their traditions as she is. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that Western-educated Ugandans like Sir Apolo Kagwa, Ham Mukasa and Nyabongo (through his character, Mujungu) are portrayed as working hard to give their societies the benefits of Western modernity (schools and hospitals, for instance) while at the same time preserving aspects of traditional life that they find valuable, and reforming those that they think are a little outdated, for instance the practice of polygamy. So Ocol’s position as a person who hates being black is quite peculiar to him and other people like him; it is not general to all Western-educated people as Lawino puts it.

Before I conclude this section, I would like to note that the issues Okot raises in *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* were central to the debates raging in East Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance the role a writer should play in the society and the kind of education East

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working as a village schoolteacher, is scandalized by this sentiment and reminds Kagwa that “Shakespeare should help you to understand people better and to sympathise with them, even if they are your intellectual inferiors” (175). David Rubadiri’s revelation that students at some schools became so ashamed of their traditions and cultures that they “used to refuse to go home for the holidays because they wouldn’t like to live in so-called primitive conditions and have to mix with primitive parents” (“The Development of Writing” 151) shows that Ocol might not be a caricature since he has real-life ‘peers’.

African universities should provide. A colleague of Ngũgĩ's at the University of Nairobi in the late 1960s and 1970s (although in different departments – Ngũgĩ in English which was later renamed Literature and he in extramural studies), Okot raised some pertinent issues long before Ngũgĩ did. Chris Wanjala mentions two of these issues – writing in East African languages and calling for the reorganisation of English departments in the region (“Growth” 11-12). Indeed, Ocol prefigures many characters in Ngũgĩ's later Marxist literary texts like Chui in *Petals of Blood*, the Kenyan thieves and robbers in *Devil on the Cross* and Ahab Kioi in *I Will Marry When I Want* – characters who do not use their education to help their communities but get into partnership with imperialists as local watchdogs for foreign capital. Even Ngũgĩ's influential book *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* echoes Okot's portrayal of Ocol; to Ngũgĩ, many educated Africans suffer from Ocolism in the sense that they are Eurocentric.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps the most important event that had some resonances with Okot's work was the call for the abolition of the English department at the University of Nairobi by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (or rather James Ngũgĩ as he was called then), Henry Owuor-Anyumba and Taban lo Liyong in a memo they authored on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1968, two years after the publication of *Song of Lawino* and just a year after that of *Song of Ocol*. Underlining the colonialist nature of the department as shown by the kind of syllabus it was running, these scholars demanded that it be replaced by a Department of African Literature and Languages in order to

to establish the centrality of Africa in the department. This, we have argued, is justifiable on various grounds, the most important one being that education is a means of knowledge about ourselves. Therefore, after we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from

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<sup>41</sup> In fact, Ocol's cry – “Mother, mother, / Why, / Why was I born / Black? (*Song of Lawino* 126) – is quoted in the book.

the African perspective. The dominant object in that perspective is African literature, the major branch of African culture. Its roots go back to past African literatures, European literatures, and Asian literatures. These can only be studied meaningfully in a Department of African Literature and Languages in an African University. (150)

Notice the ‘Lawinesque’ echoes in this quotation: the demand that the “homestead” be respected and given primacy of space in the curriculum; the urgent need to look at the reality from an Afrocentric perspective after about seven decades of direct colonialism; and the primacy of oral literature (and by implication of local languages like Acoli) in literary education. While Okot’s name is not usually mentioned when this memo is evoked, it is clear from the document’s subject matter and tone that his work was influential in shaping the thinking of the revolutionary trio.

In conclusion, Okot’s first two poems give the reader a glimpse of his national liberation ethic. Through his portrayal of Lawino and Ocol, the reader is able to see the kind of Ugandan society he is advocating – a society where people appreciate their rich cultural heritage as they borrow from other cultures to enrich what they already have and who they already are.<sup>42</sup> As Lindfors aptly puts it, Okot “advocated neither an atavistic return to Acoli customs and traditions nor a total abandonment of Western ways” but a creative synthesis of the two (“The Songs” 153).<sup>43</sup> This explains why even when it came to issues of aesthetics, he borrowed from both

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<sup>42</sup> What Ziauddin Sardar says of Fanon’s book holds true for *Song of Lawino*:

*Black Skin, White Masks* offers a very particular definition of dignity. Dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization: it is not about assuming the attitudes of the master *who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table*. It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one’s own ways of being, doing and knowing. It is about being true to one’s Self. (vii, italics in original)

This is the hallmark of Lawino’s pleas to Ocol.

<sup>43</sup> This is a point Andrew Gurr misses in his reading of *Song of Lawino*. He accuses Okot of “fussing over the outworn garments of the past, not the teeming present” (99). He makes this accusation after quoting a long passage from “On National Culture” where Fanon describes those intellectuals who, in their attempt to contribute to the national culture by way of cultural products, end up leaning toward “a stock of particularisms” (*Wretched* 223) because they do not fully grasp the meaning behind the people’s culture. This failure to understand inevitably makes them catch hold of only the “outer garments” which are “merely the reflection of a hidden life, teeming perpetually in motion” (224). Okot is not advocating for a return to a pristine past which is what one would call “catching hold of the outer garment”. Instead, he wants educated people like Ocol to use what they have learnt in schools to enrich

African orature and Western literature (the imagery and idiom of the Acoli and the Western notion of a written poem), and when it came to language use, he used both Acoli and English. It is this aesthetic that guided him in his redefinition of literature as “all the creative works of man [sic] expressed in words” (*Cultural Revolution* 20). This redefinition informed his response to Taban lo Liyong when the latter decried what he called East Africa’s “literary barrenness” (*Last Word* 23):

When, recently, my friend Taban lo Liyong wept bitter tears over what he called the literary desert in East Africa, he was suffering from acute literary deafness, a disease which afflicts those who have been brainwashed to believe that literature exists only in books. Taban and his fast dwindling clan are victims of the class-ridden, dictionary meaning of the term literature, which restricts literary activity and enjoyment to the so-called literate peoples, and turns a deaf ear to the songs and stories of the vast majority of our people in the countryside. In this book I have presented the poetry of Taban's own people, the Acoli of northern Uganda. (*Horn of My Love* ix)

As for Okot’s founding of the ‘song school’ of poetry writing, it is a nationalist innovation in itself if we agree with Anthony D. Smith’s observation that national cultures are built and forged by elites or intelligentsias who creatively draw from past traditions (“Towards a Global Culture?” 177). One can only compare Okot with a literary innovator like Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503?-42), “the very first British writer to use the sonnet” (Spiller 81). Like Wyatt who rewrote an originally Italian verse form into a uniquely English version, Okot fused Acoli and English poetic traditions to come up with poems that are so novel in style and so perceptive in subject matter. In my view, this is cultural synthesisism in its most practical form.

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their communities. Sometimes Lawino’s conservatism (for instance her refusal to use modern electric appliances) points to an obvious fuss over the past, but this is the character’s fuss, not the poet’s.

In the next section, I examine the portrayal of Western-educated people as they work for the decolonization of Uganda and how they go about governing the new nation once independence has been achieved.

### **The Pitfalls of Independence: Racism and Corruption in *In a Brown Mantle***

Born to a Goan father and a Malaysian mother, Peter Nazareth is a Ugandan writer who has taught at the English Department of the University of Iowa since 1973, and has been an advisor to the International Writing Program (IWP) since 1977. To date, he has authored several critical essays, two novels, two radio plays, and seven books of literary criticism from *Literature and Society in Modern Africa* (1972) to *Edwin Thumboo: Creating a Nation through Poetry* (2008). He left Uganda in 1973 to take up the Seymour Lustman Fellowship at Yale University which he had won for his novel, *In a Brown Mantle*, which I examine in this section. *In a Brown Mantle* (hereafter referred to as *Mantle*) depicts the challenges of nation-building in East Africa at the cusp of and shortly after independence. The novel is narrated by a politician called Deogratius Pantaleo Joseph D'Souza in the form of a confession, as Nazareth explains:

Deo D'Souza is a Goan, and almost all Goans in East Africa are Roman Catholic. Any Catholic knows that while one confesses, one is both trying to tell the truth and to evade the truth. The duty of the father confessor is to direct you to facing the truth. Deo's story, in fact, is a dialogue with his conscience. Everything he remembers is important at the time of remembering it, particularly if it is in direct speech; and memory comes up not only to confirm his conclusions but sometimes to contradict them. Sometimes, he recalls a scene clearly, but his conclusions are questionable. We have to disagree with him. ("Practical Problems" 57)

In the novel, one of Nazareth's aims is to inscribe Goan characters into the narrative of East African nations.<sup>44</sup> He does this successfully through the portrayal of two prominent politicians: D'Souza in Damibia, a fictitious country which resembles Uganda, and Pius Cota in Azingwe, a country that resembles Kenya.<sup>45</sup> Nazareth's decision to set the novel in two countries is an instance of textual transnationalism which brings to mind actual instances of the same experience. Like D'Souza and Pius Cota who freely interact with each other although they hail from different countries, Nazareth and Ngũgĩ were close friends at Makerere University and the University of Leeds where they studied. In fact, Nazareth reveals that it is Ngũgĩ who encouraged him to write *In a Brown Mantle* (Lindfors "Nazareth" 204). While working on the novel, Nazareth was influenced by David Rubadiri, the Malawian Ugandan writer, whose *No Bride Price* was the first East African novel to depict the troubled relationship between Asians and Africans ("Waiting for Amin" 14). Perhaps the best example of this literary transnationalism, if we can call it this, is provided by the multi-national casts of East African drama productions. A case in point is the inaugural production of Ngũgĩ's first play *The Black Hermit* at the Uganda National Theatre in November 1962, which featured actors and actresses from six countries: John Agard, Rhoda Kayanja, Frieda Kase and Lydia Lubwama (Uganda), Peter Kinyanjui, Bethuel Kurutu and George Ong'ute (Kenya), Herman Lupogo and John

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<sup>44</sup> While Nazareth focuses on Catholic Goan characters, Bahadur Tejani, in the first novel by an East African Asian, *Day After Tomorrow* (1972), inscribes the experiences of an Ismaili Muslim character, Samsheer, into the national narrative. Jameela Siddiqi, whose work I discuss in the next two chapters, creates characters who belong to disparate religious identities – Hindus (for instance Mohanji in *The Feast of the Nine Virgins*) and Muslims and Catholics (Shahbanu Hussein and Mrs D'Sa, respectively, in *Bombay Gardens*).

<sup>45</sup> In an interview with Lindfors, Nazareth makes these resemblances apparent when he reveals that several incidents in the novel happened in real life either in Uganda or in Kenya. For instance, the strike at fictitious St. Jude's was inspired by a real strike he witnessed at St. Mary's College, Kisubi, where he taught briefly. The details of the fictitious strike – the Chaplain resigning dramatically during Mass, a students' newspaper running an interview with him, and the sacking of a teacher who is sympathetic to them – all come from real life (Lindfors "Nazareth" 201). He also reveals that the attempt on Kyeyune's life was inspired by the assassination attempt on Milton Apollo Obote, Prime Minister of Uganda (205), while Pius Cota is modelled on a Kenyan Goan journalist and politician, Pio Gama Pinto, who was assassinated on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1965 (Sarvan 67).

Monyo (Tanzania), Goody Godo (Malawi), Celia Powell (Britain), and Suzie Oomen (India) (Ngũgĩ *Black Hermit* iv).<sup>46</sup>

Set mostly in Damibia and partly in Azingwe, the novel deals with at least three aspects of the national struggle. First, it depicts Damibia's agitation for independence from Britain. In Ugandan literature, this decolonization struggle has not been widely portrayed. To my knowledge, it is only this novel that gives a somewhat detailed account of how Damibia (Uganda) fought for independence.<sup>47</sup> The reason for this, to infer from Nazareth's comment on why Idi Amin is the most dominant factor in Ugandan literature, is that "[u]nlike Kenya, Uganda did not have land-alienation [and] did not go through a prolonged, traumatic guerrilla fight to get back the land, as Kenya did", so "there is no single anti-colonial war and corresponding myth to which Ugandan writers can refer" in the re-telling of the country's decolonization struggles ("Waiting for Amin" 9). The novel represents the struggle for independence through the political activities of a character called Robert Kyeyune, a Damibian politician who later becomes the first Prime Minister of independent Damibia. Kyeyune organizes strikes which help workers and local farmers to get a better deal from the colonial government (22). Later, he organizes a very effective trade boycott in the largest county of Damibia whose purpose was

to force the government of Damibia to accept Damibians in the Legislative Council of the country. Again, he was locked up. But after the people did not buy anything from foreign businesses for two months, Kyeyune was freed and some Damibians were taken into the Legislative Council – not Kyeyune, of course. (22-23)

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<sup>46</sup> In politics, a similar transnational trend can be seen. John Okello, born in northern Uganda, migrated to Kenya and later to Zanzibar in search of better employment opportunities. In Zanzibar, he mobilized the local African population to overthrow the Sultan's Arab government in January 1964 in what has come to be called the Zanzibar Revolution. See his memoir *Revolution in Zanzibar* in which he explains how he found his way from Uganda to Zanzibar via Kenya, and how he masterminded the revolution.

<sup>47</sup> Henry Barlow's poem "My Newest Bride" also covers the national struggle and the first few years after independence.

When the British Government later discovers that direct control of the country is impossible and sets about looking for “good boys” to whom to hand power, Kyeyune publicly denounces its motives – “grant[ing] fake independence so that Damibia could be controlled just as before by the Mother Country” (23). To silence him, the government censors the letters he sends to the local English newspapers. Unstoppable, Kyeyune founds his own paper which runs for some time until it folds for lack of funds. He then resorts to word of mouth: he travels all over the country, making speeches on Britain’s neo-colonial plans, that is to say, how she “wanted to leave by the front door and, while the *wananchi* were still waving goodbye, re-enter through the back door and tie everybody with fine but strong strings” with the help of local stooges (24).

The second aspect of the national struggle that the novel deals with is showing how independence turns into a nightmare as abuse of office among leaders becomes a common phenomenon. D’Souza’s confession is in fact about this – how he falls from the pedestal of patriotic idealism and becomes a bribe-taking politician who amasses a huge fortune that he hides in a Swiss bank. Finally, the novel explores the issue of racial prejudice in independent Damibia and how it affects the prospects of building a multiracial and multi-cultural country. To understand this final point, which is central to the meaning of the novel, it is pertinent that I make a note or two about Asian presence in East Africa and the nature of Asian-African relations as captured in some of the available literature. Michael Twaddle's *Expulsion of a Minority: Essays on Ugandan Asians* (1976) is one rich source of this information, as well as sociological and historical studies like H. S. Morris's *The Indians in Uganda* and J. S. Mangat's *A History of the Asians in East Africa*, respectively. Most commentators on the subject observe that British colonial administrators created a racially stratified society with the Europeans at the top, ruling and undertaking large-scale economic activity, the Indians in the middle, providing clerks, skilled workers and wholesale and retail traders, and the Africans at the bottom working as

peasant farmers and unskilled labourers (Morris 161-162 and Barot 71).<sup>48</sup> In this racialized structure, argues Dent Ocaya-Lakidi, Asians acted as “the middlemen between Africans and Europeans” hence earning the ire of the former since by being middlemen they became “the concrete individuals who put into effect colonial policies resented by the Africans” (90). The Africans’ negative attitude towards Asians was exacerbated by some white people’s demonization of Asians as dirty, exploitative and a hindrance to Africans’ progress. This demonization has a long history. Keith Kyle cites an extract from the 1919 Kenya Economic Commission Report in which the Indian is said to “keep the African out of every position and depriving him of all incentives to ambition and opportunities of advancement” (16).<sup>49</sup> The tone used in such statements is clearly captured in an extract from a letter published in *The Sunday Post* under the caption “Feudalism in Kenya”:

In the future Kenya will have to suffer to an extent never contemplated in the past from the most evil influence of oriental feudalism. Thousands of years of autocracy have made the Indian people what they are today: a race of usurers and gamblers. Usury and gambling are in the pigmentation of their blood. They can no more resist the temptation to exploit their fellow men than the drunkard can resist the taste of liquor. (Cited in Seidenberg 33)<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> This stratification was evident in the physical architecture of both the protectorate and the first republic. While Africans lived in slums, the whites and Indians had better places as Isegawa recounts in *Abyssinian Chronicles*:

The whites, in their marble fortresses, were locked in their privilege and elitist corporate power. They enjoyed the protection of nuclear arms in silos back home and warships in the Indian Ocean over here . . . The Indians in “Mini Bombay” were sealed off in their mansions, their schools, their hospitals, ever a mystery to the Africans. (126)

<sup>49</sup> While this report might seem out-dated, the sentiments it contains were still prevalent by the time of the Asian expulsion in 1972 as several accounts, for instance Mamdani’s *From Citizen to Refugee: Uganda Asians Come to Britain* and Grace Ibingira’s *The Forging of an African Nation: The Political and Constitutional Evolution from Colonial Rule to Independence, 1894-1962*, show.

<sup>50</sup> Writing in 1972, the Austrian anthropologist who took the name Agehananda Bharati, gave more of these stereotypes which he summarised thus:

Asians are sneaky, mistrustful, they stick to each other and do not mix with others, they are arrogant, they cheat in business, they are cowards, their houses are dirty, they are obnoxiously thrifty, they lower the

The adjectives used in this passage, and in other passages like it, were used by Africans later to describe Indians: usurers, gamblers, exploiters, crafty, cunning, someone with his soul bound to his body by the one laudable and religious concern to turn his coin to better advantage; the local Jew; a user of false weights and measures, a receiver of stolen goods, and a “Banyan contemplating his account book” (Mangat 22). Against this background, the reader is able to understand some of the racial tensions narrated in the novel, for instance the outbursts of a character like Gombe-Kukwaya (nicknamed The Cow because ‘Gombe’ is Kiswahili for ‘cow’), against the narrator, D’Souza.

I now turn to the novel to examine how Nazareth represents the above issues. I start by focusing on the way he ironizes his narrator and thereafter I explain the significance of the confessional style D’Souza uses to relay his past and that of his country to the reader. D’Souza fashions his character in a certain way, but a closer examination of what he says and what he does reveals a gap between what he is and what he says he is. A few examples suffice. At the beginning of the novel, he portrays himself as an innocent man when he asks, in response to a voice in his mind urging him to confess, “Confess – when I had committed no crime?” (2) Somewhere into the novel, we discover that he has in fact committed a crime – he has taken bribes and stacked away a huge sum of money into a Swiss bank. Afraid to be found out, he has fled the country, which is why he is living in a cold apartment in London from where he is narrating his story. He also fashions himself as a liberal as far as racial relations are concerned yet there are clues in the narrative that show that he is not as liberal as he would like the reader to believe. For instance, he racializes the assassination of Pius Cota by attributing it to the fact that he was a Goan (2), yet what sets off his own narrative is an attempt on Kyeyune’s life by his fellow indigenous Africans like Gombe-Kukwaya, meaning that race is not the only factor to

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living standards of their neighbours because they do not spend money even though they could afford luxuries and encourage other people’s wealth; they are clannish, they monopolize trade within their fold, they are not trustworthy in business nor in social matters. (Cited in Ojwang, “Bad Baniani” 5).

consider when accounting for political assassination in Damibia and Azingwe.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the best example of ironization takes place when the writer exposes D'Souza's attitudes towards black people as prejudiced. At one point, D'Souza exclaims, "God, what a capacity for drink Kyeyune had, like most Africans" (26), yet later in the novel he becomes a heavy drinker himself so much that he starts drinking "more alcohol than water" (35) and moves around with "a small flask of brandy" (120). Through this ironization, Nazareth shows D'Souza as an unreliable narrator whose perspective should be interrogated for a better understanding of the novel.

As for Nazareth's use of a confessional style, it is, to the best of my knowledge, unprecedented in East African writing.<sup>52</sup> Through it, Nazareth achieves a number of things in the novel. In the first place, he creates a subtle link between nation(alism) and narration which Benedict Anderson and Homi K. Bhabha (and his contributors) later theorised in two landmark books, *Imagined Communities* (1983) and *Nation and Narration* (1990), respectively. By narrating the role he played in the fight for Damibian independence, D'Souza brings to life an imaginary country whose motto, "One people out of many" (*Mantle* 94), indicates the desire of its nationalists to create a collectivity from motley ethnic groups and races. The novel is an account of this project: its achievements (for instance winning independence from Britain), its challenges (for example the incompetence and corruption of civil servants and politicians), its threats (the attempted assassination of and coup against the legitimately elected head of state, Robert Kyeyune), and its future prospects, which the confession points to in the sense that through it, D'Souza is "seeking expiation" (2). The *English Oxford Dictionary* defines expiation as "the action of making atonement for a crime" or "the action of ceremonially purifying from guilt or pollution." The choice of this word is vivid, for D'Souza has polluted himself by taking bribes and he has betrayed the people close to him. These are Kyeyune ("the only man in the

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<sup>51</sup> Tirop Peter Simatei has argued that Cota would have "seen his death as a sacrifice for the ideals he stood for" rather than as a targeting of a Goan politician (*The Novel* 110). Racializing it therefore reveals D'Souza's own racist sentiments.

<sup>52</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o later used this style in his fourth novel, *Petals of Blood* (1977).

whole set-up who had not chosen to make money” [154]); his father (a man who valued “integrity” [92]), and Pius Cota (a friend who advised him to return “the thirty pieces of silver” rather than “sell [his] soul to the devil for a mess of pottage” [144]). Haunted by these betrayals, he decides to write a confession as a way of coming to grips with what has become of him. This brings to mind Stuart Hall’s famous observation that “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (“Cultural Identity” 222). Although Hall is talking about cinematic representations of Caribbeans, his notion of a narrative constitution of identity holds true for D’Souza whose identity as a guilty bribe-taking Goan Damibian politician becomes clear as he confesses his guilt to the reader even as he tries to evade the truth by attempting to exonerate himself from blame.

Furthermore, the confession locates the novel in the biblical discourse of the Fall of Man which allegorically hints at the fact that the birth of the new nation called Damibia is haunted by the shadow of sin. Indeed, the action of the novel, as I have already shown above, revolves around the reality of transgression, of falling. In both Damibia and Azingwe, it portrays independence as quickly morphing into a nightmare for the ordinary citizen as civil servants and politicians use their positions to enrich themselves. Only two characters in the novel (Kyeyune of Damibia and Cota of Azingwe) are portrayed as having clean hands, showing how rampant the problem of corruption is. Because of the abuse of office that has become the defining characteristic of the emergent postcolony, as Achille Mbembe’s influential *On the Postcolony*, especially the chapter entitled “The Aesthetics of Vulgarity”<sup>53</sup> shows, many characters predict hard times for the newly independent countries. The selfless patriot, Pius Cota, observes that

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<sup>53</sup> Using Cameroon as his case study, Mbembe discusses the excesses of Independent African governments, for instance brutality, extortion, and licentiousness. In the postcolony, he argues, “the purest expression of *cammandement* [which I understand to mean absolutist authority] is conveyed by a total lack of restraint, a great delight too in getting really dirty. Debauchery and buffoonery readily go hand in hand” (*Postcolony* 108).

Azingwe is heading for a crisis although outwardly it is making tremendous progress. New buildings, new businesses, external aid. But there are worms in the apple. The poor people have no land, no food, no jobs. They lived in rat-infested slums before Independence. Now they do not have these slums. The slums were destroyed and replaced by modern flats, too expensive for the poor. (145)

The image of a worm-infested apple – which resonates with the biblical account of the Fall of Man and which Mary Karooro Okurut deploys to considerable success in her novel *The Invisible Weevil* as I explain in the next chapter – vividly captures the disillusionment that has enveloped not just Azingwe, but also Damibia. When a foreign country gives Azingwe prefabricated houses to mitigate the housing problem, the Minister who receives them on behalf of the government sells them via one of his relatives. When Cota unearths this robbery, he is assassinated before he can present the matter to Parliament. The frightening thing is that the assassination is carried out with the express knowledge of the president of Azingwe. In Damibia, the situation proves more or less the same. Top officials have their hands greased by people doing business with the government. Commenting on this, the narrator wryly asks, “if five individuals had to be given thirty million shillings to make the country purchase a new aircraft, what the matter? The cost was included in the cost of purchasing the aircraft anyway” (106). Because of this kind of practice, government officials become millionaires in the space of a few years. D’Souza says of one of them:

When I left Damibia, The Cow [Gombe-Kukwaya] had acquired a paunch and a fleshy face, as though his system could not cope with the good living suddenly thrust upon it. He was a millionaire many times over, owning practically anything you can name. At the last count, he was a director of about thirty companies and businesses, owned by Indians,

British companies, or American companies. And he was typical, not exceptional. He and others like him would not part with what they had newly acquired. (153)

As for the people lower down the ranks, they

took their cue from the people above and made grabbing whatever they could their sole objective in life. Public office became merely a means to get rich. From time to time, cases came to light of Public Officers, Tax Officers, Accountants' clerks, who had received bribes or embezzled money. Always it was the small fry who were caught and made an example of. The big bosses then railed against Public Dishonesty. (112)

With this kind of impunity, the emergent postcolony soon finds itself in what the narrator calls "a quagmire of corruption" (113). To explain this state of affairs, Nazareth invokes Frantz Fanon to fault post-independence Damibian leaders for what I would like to call ideological poverty and ideological opportunism. By ideological poverty, I mean that the leaders do not develop or espouse a particular ideology reflecting specific aspirations and interests; by ideological opportunism, I mean that they fraternize with both capitalist and communist blocs. Consequently, Damibia becomes a cog in the cold war machine as the narrator explains:

[W]hat happened was, let us say, one of the Eastern bloc countries offered us aid to put a textile mill in an area where there was no development. We, the political bosses, would welcome such aid, because we had announced that our policy was one of Positive Non-Alignment. Then we would leave it to the civil servants for implementation while we concerned ourselves with other matters. But the civil servants, being liberal humanists, feared deep Communist plots to take over the country. Besides, the few British civil servants left would still want to maintain close economic links with Britain. They would

dilly-dally, and years later, we would discover that the loan had not yet been utilised. The Western press claimed that the Communist countries made paper offers of aid, but when it came to the point no aid was forthcoming. (104-105)

Here, ordinary people are portrayed as losing potential help from Eastern bloc countries because political leaders and civil servants belong to different ideological camps, making the poor people the proverbial grass that suffers when two elephants fight. But the problem is much bigger than mere ideological incompatibility resulting from ideological opportunism: Kyeyune's government is portrayed as being so incompetent that it takes years to discover that the loans it has received from foreign countries have not been utilized. This incompetence is partly explained by the presence of neo-colonialist agents in the civil service – Britons who still want Damibia to be yoked to Britain even after independence. But it is also because rather than concentrate on the work they have to do, most civil servants and politicians spend a lot of time and energy traveling overseas so much that

every week, somebody or other had to go abroad – “in the interests of the country,” the papers said. The papers showed photographs of ourselves and our civil servants posing with Big Figures of other countries. Pretty soon, these trips became necessary – most of our men developed an insatiable appetite for the white women who had been denied them before Independence, and they got so used to easy living they could not bear to sit down at a desk to work. Furthermore, they needed the money they received in the form of subsistence allowances. (105)

These cases of corruption and incompetence help us to infer a thing or two about Damibianness/Ugandanness as imagined in the novel. For a country like Damibia which is portrayed as having diverse races and ethnic groups, incompetence of state employees (which

hinders remote parts of Damibia from receiving government projects) is inimical to the development of a national consciousness since those people who are affected by it might be inclined not to consider themselves as Damibians on account of being excluded from national services. The same holds true for the state's failure to curb the theft of public money meant to carry out its projects, for without a culture that valorizes values like justice and the rule of law, certain groups are likely to consider themselves as being imagined outside the Damibian nation. There is another way through which corruption and incompetence relate to the question of national identity. In the novel, Damibia is portrayed as being incapable of improving the living conditions of its people, for instance through provision of basic services like water and housing, and construction of infrastructure like roads, dams, schools, and hospitals. Through this portrayal, I understand Nazareth to be saying that it is hard for Damibians to be proud of their nation since independence comes to mean nothing to them in both spiritual and material terms. To make matters worse, independent Damibia quickly surrenders its soul, so to speak, to the West as it allows the country to crawl with so-called experts, some of whom the narrator describes as "the biggest bunch of crooks, thugs, thieves, and rogues one could find anywhere" (107).

Apart from corruption and incompetence, the novel depicts other worms in the apple of independence which impact on the question of national identity. I have already hinted at them in my discussion: racial prejudice (against Asians), political assassination (of Cota), and coups d'état (for instance the one attempted against Robert Kyeyune).<sup>54</sup> Nazareth portrays the prejudice against Asians as one of the urgent problems that the emergent postcolony must address. One of the powerful politicians, Gombe-Kukwaya, makes it clear, from the beginning, that his idea of Damibianness does not include Asians, even those who were born in Damibia. D'Souza recalls a dialogue he had with him in a bar before Damibia's Independence:

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<sup>54</sup> In actual life, the coup did take place on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1971, a few months after Nazareth had completed writing the novel in 1970 ("Waiting for Amin" 14).

“Where are you from, Mr., Mr –“

“D’Souza.”

“What country are you from?”

“This country, Damibia.”

“I mean your real country – your country of origin.”

“I was born here. I was even conceived here.”

“D’Souza, eh? You must be from Goa. When do you propose going back?”

“I don’t know what you mean. I am a citizen of this country.”

“We are fighting for our Independence here. Don’t you think you should go back to fight for your country and win independence for it?” (75)

“We will not tolerate immigrants here,” Gombe-Kukwaya declares shortly after this. “Those who come to this country must go back where they came from. We can do without your kind here. We have had enough of exploiters” (75).<sup>55</sup> By calling Asians ‘exploiters’, Gombe-Kukwaya is buying into the age-old stereotype that has been propagated about this group – a stereotype that is in this particular case ironical because it is Gombe-Kukwaya, not D’Souza, who is an exploiter, already owning “two taxis and two houses” through corrupt means, it is implied (75). It also shows that the stereotype of Asians as exploiters is so deep-rooted among some African characters that even when Asians participate in the decolonization struggle, their contribution does little, if anything, to cast them in new light as partners in nation building. More seriously, however, it portrays Gombe-Kukwaya as a racist who advocates what Paul Gilroy calls a politics of “ethnic absolutism”, that is to say, “a reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and

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<sup>55</sup> We find this kind of rhetoric in another Ugandan text – Jagjit Singh’s “Sweet Scum of Freedom”. In this radio play, the Minister of Commerce and Trade, Broadcasting, Foreign and Cultural Affairs, Dr Ebongo, says this as part of his speech in parliament:

[Although now independent] the African is still very, very oppressed, I tell you – economically oppressed. We still have a lot of foreigners in our country. I am referring of course to the Asian community now . . . But I must warn the Asians. We will never allow them to have one foot in Britain, the other foot in India and only their hands in Africa playing like prostitutes with our commerce and trade. (45)

national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture [and race] so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and inconsumerable" (115). This ethnic and racial absolutism becomes so plain shortly after independence that Gombe-Kukwaya, who is now Kyeyune's Minister for Interior and Defence Matters, asks D'Souza without any feeling of embarrassment: "Hey, Mugo! When are you going back to your country?" (114). When D'Souza reiterates that Damibia is his country, Gombe-Kukwaya ominously declares: "If I were in power, I would chase all these brown people into the sea [because] they kept aloof from us until we won our Independence and now that we are the bosses, they are trying to be friendly" (114). This statement reminds the reader of the dream that D'Souza had had some time back in which he had seen Asians "being hunted in the streets by blacks [and being] chased out of their shops and houses" (76).<sup>56</sup> This proved prophetic, for although Nazareth finished writing the novel in 1970, the expulsion of the Asians he had anticipated was announced by General Idi Amin on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1972, "a few days after the novel was launched in Kampala" ("Waiting for Amin" 14).<sup>57</sup> I explore the literary representation of this expulsion in the first section of the next chapter of this thesis. For now, the point to underline here is that characters like Gombe-Kukwaya imagine the nation in exclusive terms by labelling immigrants as aliens who do not have a right to dwell in Damibia. To them, the notion of a Damibian Goan is a misnomer because by being brown, the Asian is already and always an intruder, an impostor. Nazareth problematizes this view by suggesting that even the so-called indigenous people may not be indigenes of the countries they occupy. D'Souza courageously tells Gombe-Kukwaya, "I know that your tribe came to Damibia from across the border to escape persecution from the Belgians. I'll go to Goa the day you go back to Congo. And the day

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<sup>56</sup> In an email communication to me, Nazareth reveals that this dream is an autobiographical detail, for he did in fact dream that Asians were being chased out of their shops and out of Uganda.

<sup>57</sup> Another Ugandan text that predicted the expulsion is Jagjit Singh's "Portrait of an Asian as an East African". Although it was published the same year the expulsion was announced, the poem had certainly been written a year or so earlier.

all immigrant tribes in Africa move back to where they came from” (75).<sup>58</sup> Challenged, Gombe-Kukwaya “threw back his seat and jumped to grab me,” D’Souza recounts (75). D’Souza uses the authority of history to challenge Gombe-Kukwaya’s autochthonous claims which are inimical to the reality of pre-colonial African migrations.<sup>59</sup> Dan Ojwang reads this evocation of migrations as Nazareth’s way of saying that “identification of oneself as a citizen must not become a rejection of others on the basis of their foreign-ness, for, if we look hard enough, everyone is a foreigner” (*Reading Migration* 36). Gombe-Kukwaya’s view that D’Souza – whom he calls ‘mugoa’ – is a foreigner is self-contradicting if we accept John Scheckter’s argument that the use of Kiswahili labels like *mugoa* or *mwindi* helps to “regularize [Asians’] solid, visible presence in East Africa. That is, their Goan and Indian identities have already been reformulated by the time of the novels’ openings, compounding new African identities that include origins elsewhere” (83).

Suffice it to mention that D’Souza cites racial prejudice as the reason why he starts taking bribes. He misses a ministerial post on racial grounds: Kyeyune claims that “[t]he people are not yet ready for an Asian Minister” (81). When Gombe-Kukwaya buys a gold bed in London thereby embarrassing the Government of Damibia, D’Souza advises Kyeyune to dismiss him but his advice is not taken because Gombe-Kukwaya is a powerful politician who Kyeyune cannot dare to dismiss. Kyeyune tells D’Souza bluntly: “We have been through much together. But, you know, you are still rather politically naïve. You are not indispensable. If you resigned there

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<sup>58</sup> At least two other Ugandan literary texts explore this notion of autochthony in detail – Bonnie Lubega’s novella, *The Outcasts* (1971) and Austin Bukenya’s play, *The Bride* (1984). In *Outcasts*, Lubega explores the prejudice that settled farmers in Kayonga village (a place in central Uganda) have against migrant cattle-keeping people (Balaalo) from western Uganda, whom they consider primitive, savage, and dirty. The two groups are African, yes, but because they belong to different tribes and different lifestyles (settled farming versus nomadic farming), one group sees the other as the alien, the other. *The Bride* explores more or less the same issue: Merio’s family is maltreated in a particular village because he is an immigrant. Although he marries a daughter of the soil, Merio’s offspring are still considered strangers and are subjected to various ills, for instance being excluded from initiation rites. Perhaps the worst maltreatment in the play is when Merio’s daughter, Namvua, is betrothed to the Chief Priest’s dead son, Letie, because in this community it is believed that a Chief Priest’s son does not die: he can therefore ‘marry’ a living girl when he ‘comes of age’. The point the playwright stresses is that it is a stranger’s daughter, not a village girl as the case would have been in ordinary circumstances, who is betrothed to the skull.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Geschiere observes that according to French scholar Nicole Loraux, “the insistence on having remained on the same spot is a basic denial of history, which always implies movement”. “[H]istory and movement are a hidden subtext undermining autochthony’s rigid memory”, she avers (330).

would be no trouble. There would be some surprise and some regret, but that is all, not so if I kicked GK out” (121). D’Souza realizes how politically powerless and vulnerable he is and decides to enrich himself as soon as he can before he is abandoned by Kyeyune. What D’Souza is saying here is that had the two leaders (Kyeyune and Gombe-Kukwaya) not been racist in their dealings with him, he would not have taken to receiving bribes. Nazareth, however, challenges this view by giving us a profile of Pius Cota, a selfless and patriotic leader who, even when abandoned by fellow politicians, decides to remain steadfast in his pursuit of a just society where poor people are treated humanely and given what is due to them. Besides, the novel suggests that D’Souza’s descent into the depths of corruption has something to do with a challenge by the young lady, Maria Nunes, when she says she will marry him only when he becomes a millionaire (138-139). In other words, Nazareth portrays D’Souza as not being courageous enough to fight racism from within the nation. Referring to himself as Africa’s “bastard son” (150), he flees the country instead of facing racial prejudice bravely like Cota.<sup>60</sup> And by stacking away a huge sum of money into a Swiss Bank, he inadvertently proves Gombe-Kukwaya right: he fits the stereotype of the Asian exploiter.<sup>61</sup>

Race and ethnicity haunt the nation, even as independence is celebrated. While the novel asserts that “[e]verybody was infected with the fever of impending freedom: black, brown, white, and the various blends” (93), a critical analysis of the events surrounding the celebrations reveals that the narrator has exaggerated the “fever”. To use his metaphor, the fever was there,

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<sup>60</sup> “In D’Souza’s final action to leave Damibia,” Tirop Peter Simatei argues, “one reads a tendency by the East African Asians to take the easier options available to them which is to quit the country when things become unbearable” (*The Novel* 110).

<sup>61</sup> It is important to note that it is not only African characters who imagine the nation in racial terms. There are cases where Asians do the same. One of them is Joaquim, a young Goan who calls D’Souza by an indigenous Damibian name – Mukasa – because “[a] man who moves about only with Africans and not with Goans must be an African” (83). Joaquim’s observation results from the fact that the fight for independence has kept D’Souza too busy to socialize with Goans at the Goan Institute. However, the way Joaquim frames his argument betrays a Manichean way of looking at identity; to him, one is either Asian or African. He privileges race over nationality and sees D’Souza’s work with Africans as a kind of betrayal of the Goan community. Yet what D’Souza is doing as a politician is important, for it is a contribution to the country’s decolonization struggle and an opportunity to imagine the nation in a new way as the space where both Africans and Asians work together for the well-being of all people irrespective of race, ethnicity, religious denomination, gender and political affiliation.

true, but it was not as infectious as he makes it appear. This is because different characters who attend the celebrations are portrayed as harbouring anxieties about what independence will mean to them as members of racial, ethnic or class groups. For instance, a conscious decision is made to have a symbolic national flag whose colours represent different races – black for Africans, brown for Asians, and white for Europeans. Care is taken to make these colours “concentric circles” (93). *Chambers Concise Dictionary* defines the term “concentric” as relating to “having a common centre”. The concentric circles in the Damibian flag are therefore meant to represent the nation as the common centre around which other identities are grouped. The motto which is chosen for the new nation – “One people out of many” (94) – emphasizes this desire to form a national collectivity out of disparate identities. But at the very time the symbolism of the colours and of the circles inscribes unity, it also marks difference. Since concentric circles do not meet or intersect despite the fact that they have one centre, the symbolism might be interpreted to mean that in independent Damibia, the three races will remain as distinct as they were during the colonial period with little mixing between them because of what Jameela Siddiqi calls “unofficial apartheid” (*Feast* 17). This interpretation, which casts doubt on the efficacy of the motto “one people out of many”, is reinforced by the meaning-laden costume that the prime minister-elect, Robert Kyeyune, chooses to wear during the independence celebrations. D’Souza describes the costume and the reactions it produces from different groups of people in some detail:

Kyeyune had devised a costume which was a composite of the costume of the various tribes. He had a long flowing gown, rather like the ones the Nigerians wear, which came from his own tribe. On top of this, he had something resembling a waistcoat without buttons and button-holes, made from bark-cloth; this came from a tribe up in the North. Then he wore a circular cap, which came from a third tribe. His walking stick belonged

to another tribe again and on it were patterned, in glass beads, motifs of all the tribes of Damibia.

Kyeyune's turning up in such an outfit sent ripples of shock and/or joy through the people. The British – including the Speaker – were not happy although they managed to keep the usual upper lip. To them, it must have been a gesture of defiance, carrying overtones of radicalism and atavism and a certain contempt for the solemnity of the occasion. The few Asians who were present felt a little uneasy, not sure whether the pro-African feeling projected by the dress also implied as a corollary an anti-Asian feeling. The Africans dressed in full suits were shocked at what they considered to be an affront to their education and position.

But the “common people” gathered outside Parliament were overjoyed when they saw Kyeyune. This gesture on his part was not lost – he was still one of them! He was wearing their dress, he had not forgotten them. And spontaneous, rhythmic dancing started, to express their joy at this discovery. (95)

This long passage nicely captures the tension that Homi K. Bhabha sees between the pedagogical and the performative elements of the narrative address of the nation (*Location* 209). I understand this tension to mean that while the nation insists on seeing its people as one – what Bhabha calls “the many as one” and “out of many one” (204) – in reality difference is always inscribed by certain practices or symbols, thereby subverting the unity implied by these phrases. Before Kyeyune appears for the independence celebrations, Damibia has decided on a racially inclusive flag and a progressive motto. In one stroke, however, the symbolic attire Kyeyune wears divides the people into different races, ethnic groups and classes as each interprets its meaning in a manner over-determined by these identities. In other words, the anxiety these groups evince about Kyeyune's sartorial-cum-political performance and the joy the common people display upon seeing him arrayed like one of their own, shows that nobody really believes that the ideal

carried by the motto is achievable, however desirable it may be. Somehow, Nazareth seems to say, the reality of difference overrides the ideal of unity.

The cases of racial prejudice and anxiety and corruption that I have discussed above clearly show that independence is indeed a worm-infested apple. But even before independence was won, the novel suggests, there were signs that the tree might bear rotten fruits. When Robert Kyeyune recruits D'Souza, he asks him, "[h]ow much will you earn in the [civil] service? After eight years, three thousand pounds per annum – if you're lucky," pointing to the fact that he emphasizes monetary gains, not patriotism, as the motivation behind joining politics (28). With this kind of attitude, the greed of some government officials does not therefore come as a surprise. Besides, the writer portrays Robert Kyeyune's victory in the elections that make him Damibia's first Prime Minister as being marred by electoral malpractices like bribing voters or intimidating them. D'Souza explains:

In certain areas, our men would get in without help. But in other areas, we were not so sure. So we arranged to "assist" them. We arranged for youth-wingers to intimidate supporters of the other party. We gave polling officers gifts so that the ballot boxes with votes for the other party would be switched with ours if we received fewer votes. Sometimes the polling booths were closed early, at a point when it was known that our party was ahead. Who would complain about irregularities? The people would not know how to fight for their rights. And if they wanted to voice complaints, who would listen to them? (79)

Notice the cynicism of the narrator here – a cynicism that is by implication shared by Robert Kyeyune and other party members since they celebrate a victory they have secured through deceitful means. What matters to them is not justice but power, and they do everything possible to get this power. It is no wonder that Kyeyune does not pick candidates who stand for "party

ideology and who could then be voted for on the basis of what they stood for” (79), but those, like Gombe-Kukwaya, who are popular in their regions but who do not subscribe to Damibia’s ideal of “one people out of many” (94), as his attack on D’Souza’s ancestry shows. In other words, Kyeyune chooses to toe a Machiavellian line.

In conclusion, Nazareth vividly captures the derailment of independence by postcolonial leaders using vivid imagery and allusions which make their betrayal of the people and of the ideals they stood for poignant. His choice of D’Souza as a narrator is effective because through such an ambivalent character, the reader is able to appreciate the complexities of nation-building in a multi-racial and multi-ethnic country where some powerful politicians and civil servants think it is their right to use state resources for their own enrichment. As I mentioned in the previous section, Benedict Anderson argues that as an imagined community, the nation “is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Nazareth’s representation of the imagining of the Damibian nation by post-independence leaders might seem to contradict this now canonical formulation since some characters like Gombe-Kukwaya are portrayed as not caring about this kind of comradeship. Yet, this is the point Nazareth is making – that the politicians have failed in their task. Fanon had presciently foreseen this failure when he observed:

The behaviour of the national bourgeoisie of certain underdeveloped countries is reminiscent of the members of a gang, who after every holdup hide their share in the loot from the other members who are their accomplices and prudently start thinking about their retirement. Such behaviour shows that more or less consciously the national bourgeoisie is playing to lose if the game goes on too long. They guess that the present situation will not last indefinitely but they intend to make the most of it. Such exploitation and such contempt for the state, however, inevitably gives rise to discontent among the mass of the people. It is in these conditions that the regime becomes harsher.

In the absence of a parliament it is the army that becomes the arbiter: but sooner or later it will realize its power and will hold over the government's head the threat of a manifesto. (*Wretched* 173-174)

*In a Brown Mantle*, which mentions Frantz Fanon by name, testifies to this observation. We have seen that post-independence leaders like Gombe-Kukwaya plunge the nation into a quagmire of corruption. We have also seen that there is racism which is threatening the welfare of the Asian members of the population. In his understanding of who the citizens are, Gombe-Kukwaya excludes Asians, thereby bringing to mind Arjun Appadurai's sardonic observation that "one man's imagined community is another man's political prison" (32).<sup>62</sup> Women are also excluded from the "deep, horizontal comradeship" as shown by the glaring androcentric character of the novel. Where women appear, they are mostly prostitutes. The "deep comradeship" is among men, and as we have seen, not among all men but black men. But even this soon breaks down to comradeship among those black men who subscribe to a particular ideology when Gombe-Kukwaya makes an attempt on Kyeyune's life and tries to capture state power by use of arms – an action anticipated by Fanon in the quotation above. While the coup in the novel does not succeed, in real life, Idi Amin's coup against Milton Apollo Obote's government succeeded. Within less than two years of his rule, Amin announced the expulsion of Asians and embarked on other policies and practices that plunged the nation into an abyss. In the next chapter, I explore how selected writers represent these events.

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<sup>62</sup> The Asians' experience of exclusion seems to follow them everywhere they go. In London where the narrator is self-exiled, a meter-collector mutters the phrase "bloody foreigners" when he discovers that D'Souza has used his Damibian coins to light his room (1). That is to say, even in United Kingdom, the Asian is considered a foreigner. In Goa, East African Asians are seen as show-offs, judging from what Antonio da Cruz says of them in his review of *In a Brown Mantle* entitled "African Goans with Pants Down". Nazareth reports da Cruz as saying that "when they [East African Goans] came home to Goa, they misbehaved, showing off their cars, cutting themselves off from the people by speaking Kiswahili among themselves" ("Alienation" 375). In other words, Goans are rejected everywhere they go, hence Simatei's apt observation that for East African Asians, "to belong to three continents is in effect to belong to none" (*The Novel* 77).

## Chapter Four

### Expulsion, Civil War and the Disintegration of the Nation

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I examine literary depictions of political terror between January 1971<sup>1</sup> and 2011<sup>2</sup> – a period that saw Uganda ruled by seven presidents.<sup>3</sup> Two of these – Amin and Obote II – exercised a kind of power that Achille Mbembe has called “necropolitics” which he defines as “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” (39) in which “weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*” thereby subjecting vast populations “to conditions of life which confer upon them the status of *living dead*” (40, italics in original). Although his concern is the global deployment of various technologies of occupation, domination, and exploitation from slavery to colonialism and apartheid, Mbembe’s argument that “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (11) is relevant to my discussion in this chapter, for Amin’s and Obote’s regimes unleashed a reign of terror on the population characterised by techniques of power like expulsions, beatings, detentions, rape, assassinations and massacre, among others. It is because of this terror that Tirop Peter Simatei observes that “Uganda more than any other country in East Africa has gone through a horrendous phase in her postcolonial history” (*The Novel* 133). Ugandan writers have responded to these events through literary representations of what in their view went wrong. In the pages

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<sup>1</sup> Idi Amin came to power on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1971.

<sup>2</sup> I have chosen 2011 because this is the year Beatrice Lamwaka’s short stories “Butterfly Dreams” and “Bottled Memories” were published, making them the most recent of all my primary texts.

<sup>3</sup> Idi Amin (1971-1979), Yusuf Lule (April – June 1979), Godfrey Binaisa (1979 – 1980), Paulo Mwanga (May – December 1980), Milton Obote II (1980 - 1985), Tito Okello (1985 – 1986), and Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (1986 to date).

which follow, I examine how six writers (Peter Nazareth, Jameela Siddiqi, Susan Kiguli, Mary Karooro Okurut, Goretti Kyomuhendo and Beatrice Lamwaka<sup>4</sup>) represent the disintegration of the Ugandan nation in their work, with special attention to how they narrate (or recite, in the case of the poet Kiguli) one or more of the following central issues: the expulsion of Asians from Uganda; political terrorism by both state and anti-state<sup>5</sup> actors and the resistance it engenders; the link between patriarchal oppression and political oppression; and the trauma of misrule and war.

### **Remembering and Re-membering the Expulsion of Ugandan Asians<sup>6</sup>**

In an essay entitled "Fiction as a Mediator in National Remembrance", Ann Rigney underlines the role art plays in memorializing historical events. She observes that "[t]he past can only be invested with meaning for groups of people through observable acts of remembrance in the form of stories, rituals, monuments, images, poems, epitaphs, and so on" (80) which serve "as [a] heuristic tool in opening up other worlds to contemporary readers and enabling them to imagine themselves in unfamiliar social frames (87). For her, these acts of remembrance bring "into circulation the memory of certain experiences, hitherto left out of official histories" (88). Literature does this better than other disciplines, she avers, because "in providing a space for experimenting with ways of representing the world, [it] also gravitates towards engaging us in

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<sup>4</sup> As Nazareth ("Waiting for Amin") and Kiyimba ("The Ghost of Idi Amin") show, Ugandan literature is dominated by the theme of political terror hence the difficulty one encounters in deciding which texts to include and which ones to leave out when discussing literary representations of misrule. The problem is compounded by the fact that different writers inflect their representations with different nuances thereby tempting the critic to refer to as many books as possible. This explains why Nazareth's and Kiyimba's essays are exploratory in nature, each referring to as many as a dozen or so texts.

<sup>5</sup> By this I mean rebel groups that attempt to capture power by force of arms, for instance the Lord's Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony.

<sup>6</sup> The expulsion of about 70,000 Asians was not the first one to take place in Uganda. According to Mamdani, Milton Apollo Obote I expelled roughly 50,000 Kenyan Luos in 1970. In the 1980s, Obote II expelled Rwandese immigrants "numbering in several hundreds of thousand" ("Asian Expulsion" 95). China Keitetsi's memoir, *Child Soldier: Fighting for My Life* (2002), hints at this expulsion of Rwandese nationals.

critical reflection on the nature of remembrance itself" (87).<sup>7</sup> In remembering the expulsion of Asians from Uganda, different artists have used different genres.<sup>8</sup> In this section, I examine the portrayal of the expulsion of Asians in Nazareth's *The General is Up* (hereafter referred to as *General*) and Siddiqi's *The Feast of the Nine Virgins (Feast)* and *Bombay Gardens (Bombay)*. Occasional references are made to Mamdani's and Alibhai-Brown's memoirs in order to emphasize particular issues raised in the novels.

There are three major aspects of the expulsion that the novels examined here capture: the terrifying atmosphere that prevailed in the period between the expulsion decree and the actual departure of the Asians; the motivation for the expulsions; and the responses of disparate sections of the population to the expulsion. In *General*, Nazareth vividly captures how the expulsion affected particular characters and families. Using narrative styles of focalization and stream of consciousness, he presents a nightmarish world where Asians are asked to remove themselves from Damibia<sup>9</sup> "by the next moon" – a phrase that is understood to mean 'within one month'. Mainly told from the perspective of David D'Costa, a Ugandan Goan civil servant, and his black Ugandan friend, George Kapa, the novel portrays the suffering that the Asians went through in the period between the expulsion order and the actual departure. In this novel, the suffering is reflected in the way Asians are unjustly treated by both the Ugandan and British government. When the General decrees that the Asians verify their citizenship papers with the Ministry of Citizenship and Internal Affairs, long queues ensue where people spend several

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<sup>7</sup> Homi K. Bhabha captures this double move with his play on the words "remembering" and "re-membering" when he says that remembering Frantz Fanon is "a process of intense discovery and disorientation. Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (123). I owe the title of this section to this formulation by Bhabha.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Nazareth and Jameela Siddiqi use the novel; Mahmood Mamdani and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown use the memoir (*From Citizen to Refugee: Uganda Asians Come to Britain* for the former and *No Place like Home* and *The Settler's Cookbook: A Memoir of Love, Migration, and Food* for the latter); Mira Nair uses film (*Mississippi Masala*); while Bahadur Tejani uses poetry ("Leaving the Country") and the essay form ("Farewell Uganda").

<sup>9</sup> *In a Brown Mantle*, discussed in the previous chapter, is set in the same fictitious country which resembles Uganda.

hours before they are served. The verification exercise is done with a crudeness which betrays its ill intentions:

David began to hear what sounded like keening in front of him. God, what was going on? Had somebody collapsed and died from the strain? A tall, blue-suited Damibian was moving through the human river, checking papers, tearing some of them up and telling the people immediately that they were not citizens of Damibia. The family of each person thus dispossessed would burst out in anguish. (64)

This quotation shows the precariousness of the status of Asians as a so-called “non-indigenous” group. Within seconds, some of them lose their citizenship and become stateless. D’Costa also becomes a victim; his citizenship is taken away because his certificate of renunciation of British Citizenship is not found in his file.<sup>10</sup> His incessant cry at the end of the verification ordeal – “They took away my citizenship” (71) – summarises the anguish the dispossessed people feel. It also shows that in their national imaginary, these characters are very much Ugandan even when they do not openly avow this Ugandanness. D’Costa’s tragedy – and that of thousands of other Asians – is compounded by the fact that Britain, which is behind the mess they are in in D’Costa’s view, does not come to their rescue as fast as he would have expected or wished. In his agony, he reminisces:

It was Calvary. David was carrying the White Man’s burden. Who had brought the Indians in Eastern Africa but the White Man, David thought. Who and [sic] exploited India but the White Man, making it necessary for Indians to leave? Who had exploited Goa but the White Man, forcing Goans to wander all over the world without a home?

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<sup>10</sup> This experience was based on the author’s: “There was no Certificate of Renunciation on my file, although there was another certificate in which I renounced any previous citizenship I might have had, so I was declared Stateless,” he reveals (“International Players” 10).

Who had exploited Africa but the White Man? Who had been so subtle as to turn the two exploited non-white groups against each other instead of against the real enemy? Who had left the country with such a complicated set of rules of citizenship but the White Man? Who had decided to disown its responsibility to its non-white citizens but the White Man? The devious British, snarled David mentally. (44)

This quotation is significant for it points to several issues relevant to my discussion. To begin with, it historically contextualizes the expulsion by tracing its roots to European colonialism of India and Africa. Furthermore, by alluding to Calvary, Nazareth presents the Asians in sacrificial terms, hence D'Costa's reference to them, later in the novel, as "the pallbearers for the dying British Empire" (63). It also emphasizes the complexity of independent Damibia's citizenship rules well captured by D'Costa's reminiscence on his renunciation of British citizenship to the Queen of England shortly before the country's independence, only to swear "his allegiance to the Head of State of the new nation, who was the Queen of England" (29). Suffice to mention that it is behind these entanglements that both Damibia and Britain hide while dealing with Asians, with the former saying that Asians are the latter's responsibility and the latter saying that they are mere British passport holders, not British citizens.<sup>11</sup> This insistence on contextualization is distinct in Nazareth's writing of the expulsion. He sees the event as part of a wider imperial history that entangles both India and Damibia. Even in his earlier novel, *In a Brown Mantle*, he makes this point through one of his characters, Kyeyune. When his Asian assistant, D'Souza,

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<sup>11</sup> Derek Humphrey and Michael Ward give a detailed account of this in *Passports and Politics* (1974). Britain's reluctance to welcome its coloured passport holders is a kind of expulsion which, like Amin's, is based on racial grounds. White families from other commonwealth countries enter Britain without any difficulty while Asians from East Africa are barred from the country because of the 1968 Immigration Act which made their D-class British passports worthless. Salman Rushdie comments on this issue thus:

One of the more curious aspects of British immigration law is that many Rhodesians, South Africans and other white non-Britons have automatic right of entry and residence here, by virtue of having one British-born grandparent; whereas many British citizens are denied these rights, because they happen to be black. (133)

asks him why he accuses Asians of being exploiters when campaigning to become Damibia's first post-independence Prime Minister, Kyeyune responds thus:

The British are clever. They placed a middleman of another race between themselves and Africans so that they could rake in the profits undisturbed. Do you know the story of Cleopatra and Antony? When the messenger brought news to Cleopatra that Antony had been defeated, Cleopatra executed the messenger! It is the one who deals directly with the African who is hated most. The British remain aloof and are neither loved nor hated.  
(45-46)

Dent Ocaya-Lakidi reiterates this view when he observes that by “becoming the individuals who put colonial exploitative policies into effect, [Ugandan Asians] inevitably came to take the blame for an exploitative colonial system while the real authors of the system, [the British], operating invisibly behind the buffer, remained relatively free from black hatred” (82). By asking his readers to read the expulsion in the context of British imperialism, Nazareth ensures that his novels throw light on the forces that brought Idi Amin to power and made the expulsion possible.<sup>12</sup>

In her novels, Siddiqi builds her plots around the expulsion. Her first novel, *Feast*, contains three plotlines: the life and later expulsion of Asians from an African country called Pearl; the friendship between two artists (Sonia and Ash); and the making of a film about a 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian courtesan called Tamezaan Bhai. The film script is based on biographical information Sonia has recorded about Pearlite Indians, particularly the Brat and ‘her’<sup>13</sup> mother,

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<sup>12</sup> Mahmood Mamdani's study on Amin, *Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda* (1983), aims at uncovering these forces. Using various sources like trade agreements between Amin's Uganda and the US and the USSR and newspaper reports, he shows that while some countries denounced Amin in public, they kept him in power for “eight long years” by selling him high-tech military and surveillance equipment.

<sup>13</sup> I am putting this pronoun in inverted commas because it turns out that the Brat is not a girl but a boy whose mother dressed as a girl in order to avoid losing custody of the child after divorcing the father (*Feast* 326).

Mrs Henara, and a dukavalla (shopkeeper) called Mohanji whose home she frequented as an eight-year old girl because his younger sons were her friends. A complicated text because of the multiple plots, temporalities and narrators it contains, *Feast* requires readers to work through it slowly and carefully as they ask questions like: where and when is this event that the narrator is describing taking place? Is it taking place in Pearl (Uganda) in or before 1972 or in England in the 1990s or in India in the nineteenth century? Who is the narrator at this particular moment in the narrative? This last question raises further problems because the main characters bear different names depending on the place and temporality that they inhabit. The different genres that the novel contains complicate it further as readers work out which of the material they are reading is the novel proper, so to speak, and which of it is the film script. At the end of the novel, the mystery surrounding the characters is unravelled as we learn that the Brat is one and the same person as the World's Number One Composer (it also turns out that he is Tameezan Bai's grandchild); Sonia (on whom the Producer-character in the film script is based) is his ex-wife; the film financier is Mohanji himself; the star actress is his wayward daughter-in-law; and the script writer, Ash, is her son by an African servant, George. We also learn that the Actress<sup>14</sup> married Mohanji's eldest and favourite son while she was pregnant. When she gave birth to a biracial child, he and the other members of the Morality Committee insisted that she give the child away to a Christian orphanage but she refused to comply, rightly arguing that the child was not an orphan. A dictatorial government exploited the situation to accuse Mohanji of racism. After murdering eight of his sons, the Dictator expelled him from Pearl. His sponsoring of a film that he does not plan to release is a revenge plan against his daughter-in-law who is now a Bollywood actress; the film script is Ash's tool of avenging the way his mother treated him, by casting her in the role of a lifetime and then leaving her "grossly overweight, high and dry – like an unfinished orgasm . . . shelved, postponed, permanently on the back-burner. Wasted. Just like

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<sup>14</sup> I am calling her Actress because she occupies a central place in the film script. In the novel, she is not given any proper name.

him, wasting in the fearful jungle – under the bushes, surrounding [sic] by the rattling sounds of snakes” (329).

In this novel, the pathos of the expulsion is portrayed in a poignant chapter entitled “Exodus: Bidaai.” This chapter starts off with an elaborate description of the rituals and ceremonies that pertain to an Indian wedding, making the reader anticipate a colourful ceremony. Unfortunately, no such ceremony takes place; the girls are dressed like brides so that they carry as much of the family jewellery as possible since the General allowed Asians to take only “what they could wear”:

They would have to move fast [to reach the airport in time for the flight]. But how does one move with forty gold bangles, twenty on each wrist, to say nothing of several gold chains and necklaces worn all at once, choking at their throats? Upper arms laden with solid gold bands. Hands weighed down by dozens of rings on each finger, and both thumbs. Faces pulled down by dangling nose-rings. Footsteps slowed down by heavy toe-rings and chiming anklets. Completely and utterly dispossessed but laden with gold. Oh, how they suffered! (281)

To be dressed as a bride and not have a wedding to go to is a painful experience; it is as if one is getting married to exile, a life of solitude and multiple dislocation: from India to Africa (two or three generations ago) and from Africa to Europe or North America (in the present moment). To understand the pathos of this journey, one needs to juxtapose it with Siddiqi’s description of the way safaris (journeys) were celebrated in the happy pre-expulsion days when “a journey was an event, a major episode in one’s life. Weeks of preparation, followed by days of stomach-butterflies and sleepless nights on the final countdown” (194). In those days every member of the community participated in preparing for the journey as they offered advice (for instance on what to pack) and invited the travellers-to-be and their entire family for lunches and dinners that lasted

at least a week before and after the actual journey, as a gesture of good neighbourliness. Travelling to England was the ultimate journey for it came with the anticipation of the honourable title, “England-returned” (196). But now, everything has changed: there are no lunches and dinners to go to as all Asians have been asked to leave the country; and there are no honours upon return, for the expulsion is a one-way journey. And that sought-after England where all Asians dreamt to go one day is not the ever beautiful, magical place they had conjured up in their minds: it is instead the place where, in Mamdani’s experience, they will be horded up in camps and where they will be treated not like citizens but like refugees – “helpless, well-behaved children, totally devoid of initiative, indiscriminately grateful for anything that may come their way” (126). To make matters worse, there are those Asians who do not safely make it out of the country. For instance, Mohanji’s eight sons are murdered. The brutality with which this murder is carried out is alarming; its gruesomeness captures the hatred the soldier-murderers have against Mohanji, a shopkeeper targeted by the regime:

They smashed their way in just before midnight. They shot all the Mohanji sons. Corpses lay strewn everywhere – bloodied heads in sacks of flour, faces covered with red chilly powder and yellow turmeric. The boys, whose destinies had dealt them the all important task of weighing out these colourful powders, lay lifeless in the midst of rainbow clouds of dust – faces and clothes splashed with colour as though it were Holi. Spicy aromas – haldi and dhaniya – mingling with the pungent, rotting cabbage smell of death. The Mohanji boys. Born in the shop, died in the shop. Aged from eighteen to eleven. (270)

That he may suffer all his life, Mohanji’s life is spared, together with that of his widowed daughter because the man behind the execution of the expulsion is Robert Kasoga, the toilet cleaner (bhangi) she liked, who had promised to save her from her father’s enslavement. The novel portrays the massacre of Indians as being widespread, for many more heaps of bodies are

found behind other dukavallas' shops (271). Suffice it to mention, however, that not all the killings are carried out by the General's henchmen. Zarine, the Bechari Widow, who later reinvents herself as a teacher of dreams when she settles in London, contends that:

Many of the killings were organized by opportunist Muhindis themselves. Keen to cash in on the chaos and keen to settle their own scores. And what of all those men who went missing, presumed dead somewhere in some ditch? Well, actually, many of them had used the chaos and confusion to abandon their wives and go off to greener pastures with other women . . . And that brutal murder of Mrs Henara and her so-called brother, together, in bed? I'm convinced that was organised by the Haqs. Mrs. Haq had never forgiven Mrs Henara for helping the Haq daughter to elope with her Hindu boyfriend. (334)

This quotation points to the existence of internal divisions between Asians either within the same family (husbands running away from their wives) or between families (Mrs Haq murdering Mrs Henara). The opportunism Zarine invokes here also brings to mind characters who see the expulsion decree as a big opportunity for them to be admitted into Europe, for instance those who had wanted to migrate to Britain but had failed to do so because of the country's restrictive immigration policies of the 1968 Nationality Act.<sup>15</sup>

The works examined here suggest that the expulsion of Asians from Uganda reveals the desire of both the Ugandan and British government to imagine the nation in racial terms. Mamdani and Alibhai-Brown show how Britain treats its brown citizens cruelly, keeping them in camps instead of resettling them. This, James Ocita suggests in his discussion of the work of

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<sup>15</sup> In *General*, Gerson Mendonca is one such character who takes advantage of the expulsion to find his way to North America. David D'Costa explains how: "The General did Gerson a favour. Gerson had applied twice in the past to Canada and had been rejected on medical grounds and because he had no special skills or education. Thanks to the General, the Canada entrance requirements were lowered, and Gerson was accepted today! He is getting ready to leave tomorrow" (92).

Alibhai-Brown and Siddiqi, highlights “the racially-charged exclusivity of Empire” (138). In Uganda, Asians are portrayed as being treated as aliens irrespective of whether they were born in the country or are its citizens. In *General*, the General rationalizes this cruel treatment by accusing Asians of being exploiters who “milked the cow of the economy” (101) and of being socially exclusive and refusing to “integrate with Africans” (90).<sup>16</sup> Both Nazareth and Siddiqi interrogate these charges by presenting to the reader a world peopled with characters who are a far cry from the exploiters and social recluses that the General evokes. In *General*, none of the characters can be called simply exploitative, for they are mostly civil servants who live on a modest salary. David D’Costa and Ronald D’Mello are good examples. D’Costa works with the Ministry of Forestry and Conservation while D’Mello works with the Ministry of Public Information. To underline the fact that most Goans worked with the civil service, Nazareth introduces a character, Mr Leo Baretto, thus:

Mr Baretto had worked as a law clerk and used his knowledge to qualify as a lawyer, going to England in the last stages to sit for his exams and be called to the Bar. After qualifying, he had gone back to his old office, now called the Ministry of Justice; the civil servant instinct went deep in Goans of Damibia. (30)

The financial state of some of the characters who are not civil servants is portrayed as being dire. One of them is a certain Jacob Britto who earns his living as a transporter of people and goods using an old Bedford van that he cannot replace because he is unable to afford another vehicle (84). When Britto is sent a notice from the Ministry of Citizenship and Internal Affairs ordering him to remove himself “from Damibia by the 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1971” (85), he asks D’Costa to help him:

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<sup>16</sup> In real life, Amin made these accusations in the conference he had with leaders of the Asian community, as Humphrey and Ward report (22-23).

I was saving for a two-way ticket so that I could go to Goa on a visit, but I never made it. I have also saved three thousand shillings. This money is to be used to pay for my funeral expenses. But now I have to leave for Goa. I will need this money to pay for the funeral there. I don't have any relatives. I have never sent money out of the country. Can you help me send this money out to Goa for me? . . . I'm not asking you to send the money out through the back door . . . I have heard that the government might let civil servants who were not citizens retire and take some of their benefits with them. If you know of anybody from your Department or any other Department who does not have as much money as he is entitled to take out, please tell him to take this money for me. I will come for it in Goa. (86)

The experience of this minor character shows that the official accusation of Asians as exploiters is in most cases a convenient lie. All Britto has got from his decades of hard work is an air ticket and some money to help settle his funeral expenses. Even when he is expelled from the country, he remains loyal to the laws of the land: he does not want to “send the money out through the back door”. Bitter at the General’s mistreatment of people like Britto, D’Costa reflects:

For choosing to become a Damibian citizen instead of something else, an option not open to indigenous Damibians, not only was Jacob being asked to leave with no country to go to but also he was being given less than one week's notice, considering the postal delay. (85)

In *Bombay*, the same is true: the characters Siddiqi creates are certainly not ‘milkers of the economy’ for they are struggling to make ends meet. The novel is about a Pearlite Asian landlord called Naranbhai and his relationship with his family, his tenants and a few other Asians, for instance his political rival, Raushan. Naranbhai’s fortunes in business meet with disaster: both

his cinema and transport enterprises are failures. His tenants at Bombay Gardens are people with humble means: Virjibhai earns his keep from being a compounder in Dr Dawawallah's clinic; Pundit Suddenly is a Pundit (Hindu man of God) who lives off the charity of his clients; Mrs D'Sa, whose husband Tony D'Sa is a jobless drunk, runs her big family with money she gets from giving private piano lessons and baking cakes; Mrs Huseni and her daughter Saira work as prostitutes. Other Asian characters in the novel have more or less humble situations as far as finances are concerned. Perhaps the most marginal of them is Hazari Baba, the religious mystic who has neither a job nor a place to stay. He tells Mrs Narabhai:

My work takes me everywhere. I do not choose where I have to go. Today I'm here, tomorrow, who knows? Today you offer me stale bread. Who knows what – or even whether – I will eat tomorrow? My home is wherever the night overtakes me. The sky is my ceiling, the earth my floor. I rest wherever my feet get tired. (253)

There is an exception in *Feast*: Mohanji is portrayed as a rich man. While he is depicted as a wily shop-owner who fits the stereotype of the exploitative Indian, the novel shows that his wealth is also made possible by the free labour he receives from his many children (a daughter and nine sons). But Africans are also portrayed as being capable of cheating. In *Mantle*, there is Gombe-Kukwaya whose corrupt practices I have already discussed in the previous chapter; in *General*, the General himself is “rumoured to be sending cash in American dollars to a Swiss bank” (114). This sentiment – that indigenous Damibians were also committing economic crimes – is echoed by two other characters in the novel – D’Costa’s cook and the student leader Mugambi-Mukono. “*General* has done bad,” the Cook states:

He has told all the *Muindi* and the *Mugoa* to go away. He has told all the bad ones like Bwana Sequeira and the good ones like Bwana D'Costa to go. Why did he not tell only the bad ones go and the good ones stay? And what about the bad ones of our kind? (124)

Through this character's musings, Nazareth raises an important question – that of sincerity. By racializing exploitation, the impression given by the General and his cronies is that Africans are the antithesis of Asians – honest and sincere. The novel shows that this is not the case, for as the students put it through their leader, Mugambi-Mukono, oppression and exploitation do not “wear only one colour” (102). In fact, the reader is told of a government minister who fumes with racial hatred at an immigration officer during the verification of Asians' citizenships: “Take it away! We cannot let these bloody *Muindis* keep on sucking our blood!” (42). Yet, he is said to be

one of the most corrupt people around. He had been a high official in the previous government, and he was known for cashing huge cheques with his own Ministry, which always bounced. He had become a Minister in the new regime and had immediately electrified his country residence. (42)

Through these expositions, Nazareth is suggesting that exploitation need not be racialized and that notions of moral behaviour should not be the condition upon which a person's citizenship status depends.

As for the charge that Asians were not integrating, the two novelists again contradict this. Nazareth shows the Goan community trying to reach out to the indigenous population during the post-independence period. For instance, Goan leaders work towards making Goan institutes (social centres) multiracial and they drop the adjective ‘Goan’ to reflect this reality. After achieving this, they welcome Africans to vie for leadership positions in these institutes. In *General*, D'Costa is the President of the Goan Institute while Kapa – an indigenous Damibian –

is his Vice. It is true that older Goans are not happy with this development, but this is depicted as being a generational problem that will soon disappear. Kapa also feels that despite the changes at the institutes, the speeches and audiences are still “very Goan” (96), but this is also shown as something that is bound to change with time as more indigenous Damibians become members. Unfortunately, this time does not come to pass for the General’s expulsion brings a halt to the communion/comradeship that Goans and Africans are building.<sup>17</sup>

In Siddiqi's novels, the General’s charge of social and racial insularity is portrayed as somewhat true, for there are characters who are blatantly racist in their dealings with Africans. Three examples are Mrs Naranbhai in *Bombay*, and Mohanji and Mrs Henara in *Feast*. Mrs Naranbhai comes from India with extreme prejudices against black people. “[W]hat a pity about the natives. Why did they have to be so dark?” she muses on getting off the ship at Mombasa:

How could one know whether they were clean or not? With such dark skin how do you tell dirt apart from skin colour? Did they wash? How did they know when all the dirt had washed off? Did the water turn black? So why were the rivers and lakes so clear and sparkly blue? Is it true they eat humans? (101-102)

While the novel makes it clear that this crass prejudice is a result of the fact that this is Mrs Naranbhai’s first visit to Africa, her attitude towards Africans does not change much in the course of the novel. Even when Jannasani works so hard for the family despite the meagre wage he is given, she accuses him of being lazy.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Other examples of this communion are given in the novel. Shortly before D’Costa leaves the country, Kapa and his wife Miriam give him and his family beaded sticks as gifts. “The three colours are to remind you of your three parents,” Kapa says. “Miriam made them specially for you. The three parents are your father Goa, your stepfather India, and your mother Damibia” (98). Kapa even drives to the airport to see D’Costa off despite the fact that this can easily get him into trouble with the military government.

<sup>18</sup> In her memoir *No Place like Home*, Alibhai-Yasmin depicts similar racist sentiments. Her uncle, Ramzan, says: “These black shenzis [barbarians/savages] don’t know how to make money, you know. It grows on trees here” (7). And his son, Shamsu, shares this sentiment: “It is in their nature, you know. Bloody empty-headed, can’t work, just

In *Feast*, Mohanji is so racially bigoted that he considers black Ugandans the antithesis of civilised Indians. In fact, he uses the same derogative language that British colonialists used when referring to Africans. “What did the natives know about running a shop? No work ethic, these blacks,” he observes (*Feast* 12). And shortly after this, he is portrayed as thinking thus:

Useless African fellows, stealing from the shop, and who knows, entertaining lustful thoughts about their daughters as well. These black guys had to be watched – they couldn’t be trusted. Lazy as hell. They just sat around in the sun laughing and talking and eating bananas. What did they know about work? (14)

When he sees black people dancing he exclaims: “Look, look how they move to our music – such rhythm these native tolos!” (14). By referring to black people as tolos (Kiswahili for children), Mohanji underlines his contempt for them. To him, “any hint at racial equality” constitutes part of what he calls Kalyug – “the age of darkness, and treachery – the penultimate chapter in the history of the world and a sure sign that the world was about to end” (52). The narrative perspective of these novels condemns this racial bigotry through the focalizers’ comments whenever racist behaviour occurs. A good example is given in *Feast* when Mrs Henara invites a Brahmin temple singer, Kanhayya Lal, for dinner. She banishes her cooks from the kitchen on this day because “[b]lack hands cannot cook this kind of pure meal for a Brahman temple singer” (204). When Lal eventually comes, the Brat narrates:

All my mother’s purity and purification rituals – her pure Muslim-Brahman kitchen, her separate vegetarian pots and pans – everything turns to dust as Kanhayya Lal insists on sharing a plate of maize-meal porridge with our servants, whose cooking pots are bubbling away cheerfully outside the servants’ quarters in the back-garden. He sits down

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want to drink their money, only understand the stick and the shoe [a reference to the practice of some Asians beating Africans]. No culture, you know, not like us” (9).

on the floor with them and eats an ample portion, praising it for simplicity of taste and richness of nutrients. Zero fat. No sugar. No salt. Prepared and served with love – their one and only meal of the day. (206)

The point here is that there are Asians who rise above racial prejudice and embrace Africans as fellow human beings worthy of respect and love. Mohanji's widowed daughter shows this respect to Robert Kasoga, the toilet cleaner (bhangi) whom she tries to befriend even when she is aware that her father and the other four members on the "Panchayat", that is to say, the Indian Morality Committee called the "Custodians of Shame, Honour, Dignity and Female Chastity" (45), would chide her if they ever found out. "I had always liked Robert," she confesses in the last chapter of the novel:

His father had, after all, died in our shop and as a result, Robert had to leave school and sweep shit. He used to make his way quietly to the backyard, not even daring to look up at me while going past the shop verandah. For me he was special even then, and I tried on several occasions to talk to him when nobody was looking. (333)

The above portrayal of the expulsion in Nazareth and Siddiqi brings to mind Salman Rushdie's view about the role of fiction – a view similar to Ann Rigney's which I noted in the introduction to this section. To Rushdie, "[w]riters and politicians are natural rivals" for "[b]oth groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of the truth" and "giv[ing] the lie to official facts" (14). As I have shown, both novelists show that not all Asians were exploiters. As a matter of

fact, they portray most of their Asian characters as being far from the wealthy exploiters that the General (or Idi Amin in real life) complained about.<sup>19</sup>

Another way through which these writers represent the expulsion is by performing a counter-expulsion: they expel the General from the world of civility by portraying him as a buffoon. In *Bombay*, Siddiqi portrays him as a common clown who demands that Indians, whom he believes to have magical powers, show him how to control the size and luminescence of the moon, besides teaching him how to get erections that can last 84 years. By having such ridiculous obsessions, Siddiqi's General comes across as an insane man who is unworthy of a big office like that of head of state. Besides, he is portrayed as a glutton who gobbles up samosas with so much relish that he cries out with childish delight while clutching his stomach: "Aahhh . . . aaahhh. . . I'm dying, Mamma, O Mamma, I'm dying" (368). In *General*, Nazareth depicts the General as a lunatic who slaps one of his ministers during a Cabinet meeting and breaks a TV knob in anger. Indeed, he is depicted as a fool who has no clue about statecraft as revealed by a televised midnight speech to the nation in which he ridicules bureaucrats who produce five-year plans which he considers useless. His plan, he says, is "a Ten-Year Development Plan which I discussed and agreed with God. I can tell you this plan. Big hotels – twenty storeys – all over the country. With swimming pools, air conditioning, large conference halls, banquet halls with my pictures all over (127). He concludes the speech thus:

The rest of the plan will then be easy – changing names of streets, naming lakes after me, introducing official language which I can understand, putting my beautiful image on money, national flag, etc., changing the name of my country to reflect my image, changing the national anthem so that it is sung to praise me and my good work. Once

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<sup>19</sup> Even in real life, very few Asians were really wealthy according to Mamdani. In an article entitled "The Uganda Asian Expulsion: Twenty Years After", he estimates the number of wealthy families of large-scale property (industrial, commercial and residential) at about 50 (96). It is these wealthy Asians that M. A. Tribe writes about in his article "Economic Aspects of the Expulsion" as siphoning money out of Uganda using methods like "over-invoicing of imports and under-invoicing of exports, false declaration of factor incomes such as profits and rents, and improper use of personal transfers" (144).

these are done, I will then decree that all male children are named after me and all female children are named after my wives. *At this historic moment, I will have carried out my plan, I will have achieved my objectives as ordained by God.* (131, italics in original)

Abasi Kiyimba has faulted this portrayal of the General as mirroring Western stereotypes of Idi Amin which were created to “sustain and propagate certain age-old racist stereotypes about the African people” (“The Ghost of Idi Amin” 133).<sup>20</sup> Nazareth’s General, Kiyimba argues,

is not a human character; he is a robot tuned to vice. He kills, expels fellow citizens, robs, and condones other forms of evil; and he has no single human emotion to his credit. It is even suggested by an Asian doctor character that the man has a mental problem. In other words, the Amin Nazareth gives us in the lunatic General has nothing to offer that we shall not get from exaggerated Western newspaper reports and historical records about Amin and his rule which is far less than a creative writer should do. (131)

Kiyimba’s point is a valid one: Nazareth’s ridicule of the General is exaggerated, and it makes the expulsion appear as something illogical that has been authored by a deranged mind. Yet, as Mamdani has argued, Idi Amin knew exactly what he was doing when he expelled the Asians: his action was a well-calculated move to win legitimacy among some sections of the population (the unemployed urban classes, for instance) by preaching populist economic nationalism (*From Citizen* 60). There is another weakness in *General*: Asian characters are portrayed in more favourable light than African ones. Kapa, for instance, is presented as D’Costa’s moral inferior: unlike D’Costa who is a faithful husband, Kapa is unfaithful. And unlike D’Costa who is frugal, Kapa is a spendthrift, drinking rather too much and not caring to save for the future.

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<sup>20</sup> Mamdani makes the same point (“The Uganda Asian Expulsion” 93).

Despite these limitations, Nazareth and Siddiqi do a commendable job in memorialising the expulsion through literary representation. As I have explained above, they interrogate the claims upon which the General bases the expulsion decree. Their texts show that expulsion is somewhat an incomplete project since something always remains of the place where people once lived, something no dictator can touch. This is the memory of the pre-exclusion days – the memory that makes the narration of *Feast* and *Bombay* possible. It seems to me that the very act of writing is an imaginative way of defying the expulsion, since to write of a place one has been expelled from is to re-occupy it by peopling it with characters from memory and from one's own imagination. Through the novel of memory like *Feast* or *Bombay*, therefore, the writers reconstitute the home they have been forced to flee and declare that they will always live – in the materiality of the text – in the land from which they have been exiled. The disintegration of the nation therefore engenders a narrative re-integration, so to speak, since the experience of loss necessitates a remembering and re-remembering or re-population of a life one once lived in a particular place, at a particular time. In the sections below, I examine the way Kiguli, Okurut, Kyomuhendo and Lamwaka write dictatorship and civil war, and what this writing reveals about their idea of Ugandanness.

### **Writing Dictatorship and Misrule: Susan N. Kiguli's *The African Saga***

Susan N. Kiguli's *The African Saga* (1998), hereafter referred to as *Saga*, is a collection of 81 poems arranged in four sections – “Poems of Protest”, “Relational Poems”, “Poems of Nature”, and “Existential Poems”. It “has received considerable attention in public readings and the popular media, and made literary history in Uganda by selling out in less than a year” (Mwangi “Hybridity” 42). While some poems specifically name Uganda (“Uganda”, for instance) or castigate specific Ugandan figures like Idi Amin (“I Laugh at Amin”), Kiguli's concern is continental hence the title she chooses for the collection, which is also the title of a poem portraying the farce of electoral processes on the continent where losers of elections use force to usurp power from those who have been legitimately elected into office. Despite this continental frame, however, the poems mirror recognisably Ugandan situations as the discussion below shows.

In the first section, Kiguli portrays a world in which violence against the weak abounds. Using satire and vivid imagery, she attacks particular failures in African post-colonial states – violence and injustices against women, rigging of elections, political murders, and detention of innocent people, among others. In her writing of dictatorship, she explores issues of governance in the private space of the family and in the public sphere of schools, churches, and government. This focus on both private and public spaces in the depiction of misrule is one of the most dominant characteristics of the works I examine in this section and the next one. *Saga* opens with two poems on oppression and injustices against women: “The Resilient Tree” (1-3) and “I am Tired of Talking in Metaphors” (4-5). In these texts, men's exploitation and abuse of women is portrayed as something so commonplace that the society seems to take it as normal. Through this portrayal, Kiguli shows how marginal women are in the narrative of the Ugandan nation. In “The Resilient Tree”, for instance, women are depicted as suffering untold oppression and exploitation. The persona, a young woman, enumerates some of injustices women endure:

My mother my teacher showed me  
That woman in this world is a river  
A river that halts all manner of silt  
And is expected to still flow with dignity and grace;  
Expected to have pure water.

A woman, a black woman, is a tree  
That will stand rain in all its shades  
Will receive showers, storms and hurricanes  
And still hold out by the roots.

...

Grandmother, my mother's teacher taught her  
That a woman, a black woman, is a fruit-bearing tree  
That will nurture fruits to full bloom  
And will watch man harvest the choicest of them  
Will watch man bite and chew,  
His teeth tearing roughly what she has tenderly sheltered. (1)

The oppressed and exploited woman is expected to accept the injustices committed against her with grace and courage: she is called to be a rock that endures “[t]he numerous blows from the rough winds” and a resilient tree that bends under the weight of leaves “[r]ather than run away and die” (1). Critical of this state of things, the persona makes a journey into her soul and finds it “sad and solemn” because

She yearns to play and yet not be a plaything

She longs to fly and weave freedom in the clouds

She wearies of being pinned down

Of being named, caged and watched.

My soul wants to fly with her powerful wings

Out-stretched driven by the currents of the sky. (3)

The lessons her mother is teaching her do not make this flight possible; to the contrary, they clip her wings. With this discovery, she declares:

I am tired of old sun,

I am tired of standing in one place

I am breaking free. (3)

This poem highlights the way some oppressed people participate in their own oppression by accepting the status quo (tradition or culture in this case) without questioning the injustices inherent in it. To the persona's mother and grandmother, men's oppression and exploitation of women is something considered normal, something that is part and parcel of the status quo. These women uphold it by teaching their offspring to emulate their example of uncritical loyalty to patriarchal norms and practices, even those that threaten the lives of women like instances of domestic violence.<sup>21</sup> One of the points Kiguli is making here is that the abuse of human rights common in the public sphere (which I turn to in a moment) starts at the family level. By implication, the fight for democracy and human dignity should start at the domestic level from

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<sup>21</sup> In "I am Tired of Talking in Metaphors", for example, the persona's mother is "blinded in one eye [and] crippled in the right leg / Because she did not vote / Her husband's candidate"; another woman, referred to as "our daughter", is brutally murdered and sent back to her parents as "pieces of flesh in a sack" (4). Kyomuhendo's *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War* also draws attention to this gruesome act (murdering a woman and putting her remains in a sack). Mary Karooro Okurut's *The Invisible Weevil* depicts a similar scenario of older women entrenching patriarchal domination. When preparing protagonist Nkwazi for marriage, Ssenga (her paternal aunt) advises her "never to turn your back to your man. Whenever he turns to you, consent. No matter what time of the night it is" (199). She gives Nkwazi a symbolic gift – a sheep – and enjoins her to "[g]o and keep quiet in your home like a sheep" (200).

where it should spread out to the public front. This position has been elaborated by eminent Somali writer Nuruddin Farah. “If there is no democracy in the house,” he observes, “there can certainly be no democracy in the capital” (cited in Alden and Tremaine 31). This conviction, I suggest, is one of the reasons as to why she begins *Saga* with poems on patriarchal injustices against women after which she turns to poems on misrule (tyranny) in the public sphere. Her critique thus suggests that unless women are given room in the narrative of the nation, any performance of Ugandaness falls short of its enabling potential both in the private and public sphere.

In her writing of dictatorship, Kiguli mostly uses animal imagery to depict the savagery of tyrannical leaders. She presents dictatorial leaders as belonging not to the world of humans but to that of carnivorous animals and venom-spitting reptiles. In “The Old Guards’ Circus”, the persona talks of “wrinkled lions” who “[s]hake their tattered manes / [a]nd fling their caked shit at us” and of leopards which “treacherously tear / [o]ur wives to pieces” and of stallions which “[m]ount our daughters” (23). Kiguli uses these images to represent aspects of the leaders she decries, for instance fierceness, treachery, and lechery. The reference to the leaders as lions and leopards emphasizes their brutality: they, like these cats, mercilessly tear their prey to pieces. It also emphasizes their cunning: like wild cats which overpower bigger game through calculated moves, the leaders strike their targets with stealth, making their terror even more frightening since one does not know when it will be unleashed. The reference to the leaders as vipers reiterates their deadliness (they can kill with one strike) and their treachery (the serpent is, in Christian literature, the archetypal symbol of deceit). And by comparing the leaders with stallions, Kiguli calls attention to their lecherous nature. In a word, Kiguli’s use of animal imagery shows that the leaders have turned their countries into jungles where the mighty trample upon the weak; jungles where, as the persona of the poem entitled “Uganda” says,

The gun is the spokesman

Prison is the courtroom

Detention is the password

Genocide is no crime. (19)

In this kind of world, people live in “continual fear, and danger of violent death”, as the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes put it, “and the life of man [sic], solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (84).

A related image Kiguli uses to write dictatorship and misrule is that of the bird of prey, the vulture. In the poem entitled “Why Vultures Laugh at Us”, the persona states thus:

We have dipped

Half-fired pots

In the well of independence

Like vultures sinking

Long beaks in the soft parts

Of a rotting carcass. (7)

A half-fired pot is a half-done artefact that can break any time thereby spilling the water it contains. The person carrying such a pot therefore risks reaching home without a drop of water – something quite dire given the centrality of this liquid to human survival. To Kiguli, this is what has happened in independent Uganda: Ugandans have not adequately prepared themselves to harvest the fruits that come with independence, metaphorically portrayed here as a well open to all users. But the simile she uses – likening the dipping of pots in the well of independence to vultures sinking long beaks in a rotting carcass – suggests that something is the matter with the well itself for it is being compared to something repulsive, a rotting carcass. Something drastic has happened in this 6-line stanza: the poet has moved away from looking at independence in

positive terms (as a well and therefore something life-sustaining) to looking at it in negative terms. This shows her ambivalence towards the subject: it is as if independence is both life-sustaining and sickening. This ambivalence is also evident in the portrayal of the speaking voice of the poem. On the one hand, the “we” of the poem are portrayed as dutiful people who are trying to get the best out of independence, albeit with inadequate tools (the half-fired pots); on the other hand, they are compared to repulsive vultures that feed on carrion. I suggest that this ambivalence is produced by the persona’s disillusionment with independence. Frustrated with the state of affairs in independent Uganda, the persona sardonically observes thus in the rest of the poem:

At least the vultures harvest  
Chunks of stinking slippery flesh  
Which sail gently  
Down welcoming throats.

But we have stayed by the well  
Soaked in frustration  
Our arms heavy stumps  
Our hearts shrivelled nuts  
As the water defies our pots  
Little wonder then  
The vultures laugh at us. (7)

The use of the pronouns ‘we’, ‘our’, and ‘us’ implies that the community is implicated in the process/situation being described, that is to say, there is a part each member has played or is playing in making independence such a dismal failure. Thus, while Kiguli levels her lyrical

criticism against leaders who betray their mandate, she does not spare ordinary citizens, who should play their part in building the Ugandan nation. This point – that every member of the community is implicated in the misrule taking place – is emphasized in the poem entitled “Political Sorcerers” where Kiguli uses yet another related animal image of human beings degenerating into cannibals.<sup>22</sup> In this poem, the persona states:

Because the witch hunters slumber

The fire eyed sorcerers

Strut across the land

With large butcher knives

And heavy sacks of salt

Making corpses then boasting

"When you find ready game

Don't you eat it up?" (25)<sup>23</sup>

In this poem, Kiguli implies that the menacing actions of the sorcerers are a result of the irresponsibility of the witch-hunters (a metaphorical reference, I suggest, to institutions of government like the legislature, the police, and the judiciary): rather than keep watchful attention about what is happening in the country, they slumber away, giving cannibals room to rob graves and feed on fellow human beings. The sordidness and horror of the situation is poignantly captured in a short play by Nuwa Sentongo entitled “The Invisible Bond” which he produced in

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<sup>22</sup> While cannibalism is a term imperial Europe used to portray natives as the savage other of Europeans in order to justify colonial expansion as Bill Aschroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (*Key concepts* 29-31) and Peter Hulme (13-43) have shown, it should be noted that the representation of grave-robbing and corpse-eating sorcerers in African communities predates colonialism as shown by its pervasiveness in African folktales.

<sup>23</sup> In her book *Men Love Chocolate But they Don't Say*, Mildred Kiconco Barya uses the related image of a vampire. In a poem entitled “The Blood Birth,” the persona morbidly declares: “[In this land] we quench our thirst by cutting men’s throats and /Drinking their blood, licking our lips as it oozes out” (62).

May 1972 when Idi Amin was one year and four months into what became an eight-year regime.

In this play, there are morbid speeches like these:

First Night-Dancer: I'll eat the arm.

Second Night-Dancer: The ear is mine.

Third Night-Dancer: I like his full-blown lips and the thick chin.

Fourth Night-Dancer: I'll eat the eyeballs.

Fifth Night-Dancer: I like these fat buttocks.

Sixth Night-Dancer: I want the toes.

Seventh Night-Dancer: Who will eat the thighs?

Leader of Night-Dancers: . . . As your leader and one who has the largest family, I shall  
take the thighs. (16)

When a fight shortly breaks out over this matter, the night-dancers use human bones for weapons (17). The point of Sentongo's play, like that of Kiguli's poem, is that this society has degenerated so horribly that cannibalism has become a way of life to the extent of human body parts being used to pay for bride wealth. Human values and sensibilities like sobriety, propriety, and decency are no more; what remains of the leaders is a morbid valorisation of the perverse and the grotesque, which brings to the reader's mind the excesses associated with Idi Amin's tyrannical regime.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, in her writing of dictatorship and misrule, Kiguli alludes to a spectacle which is reported to have been common in Idi Amin's regime – the dumping of human beings into lakes.

In the poem entitled "Fishers of Men" we read:

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<sup>24</sup> A. B. K. Kasozi reports that victims of Amin's regime had their bodies "[d]ismembered and parts used for ritual purposes. For example, the head of Brigadier Suleiman Husein, who was killed at Makindye, was cut off and taken to Amin, who is reported to have addressed it and kept it in a fridge. The penis of Colonel Mesesura Arach, Commander of the First Infantry, was severed and plugged into his mouth" (114). In Moses Isegawa's novel *Snakepit*, this sordid deed is referred to as making someone "smoke his own penis" (15).

The nets are out in the depth  
Doing the job  
The silver grey moon floats  
On the surface of the waters.  
Fishermen pull their nets  
With big hearts; waiting for the fish!  
Out come the meshes  
Full of the moon-lit harvest!  
The fishermen flee  
As the silver wonder  
Turns into bullet riddled chests  
And water-logged eyes! (8)

This disturbing poem portrays the atrocious nature of the tyrannical regime which is not content with committing murders and/or assassinations but goes ahead to deny the dead a decent burial by throwing them into lakes to be devoured by crocodiles and fish. The disintegration of the nation registers itself here in the reversal of the natural order of things: instead of fishermen catching fish, they now catch human beings in their nets.<sup>25</sup> The phrase “water-logged eyes” chills

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<sup>25</sup> John Ruganda’s famous play, *The Floods*, was the first Ugandan text, to my mind, to portray this horrendous reality. Kyeyune, one of the main characters in the play, recounts:

It was a normal day, by all signs. It was early evening when I set sail. I paddled my canoe forward, as the breeze beat against the brow. The waters let me sail on and on towards where the *empuuta* [a large fish called Nile perch] abound . . . I cast my nets as usual and paddled along. The sun was slowly setting and luck was not on my side that day. So I paddled on and on to the centre of the lake. Then all of a sudden the net on my right became heavy, it weighed down the right side of the boat. I knew it was a big catch. Do you know what it was, son? A man. A military man. Dead. Three long nails in his head, his genitals sticking out in his mouth. A big stone around his neck. His belly ripped open and the intestines oozing out. (13-14)

Another time, he finds a finger in the bowels of a fish he is eating. In an essay on Ruganda, eminent Kenyan dramatist Francis Imbuga reads these two incidents as evidence that the regime’s killings are so many that “even the crocodiles are beginning to get tired of the constant supply, hence the discovery of rotting bodies in the lake by fishermen [and] the fish are getting constipated too and it shows in the undigested human parts which are found in the stomachs of some of the fish” (“John Ruganda” 255-256).

the heart, especially when we remember that this poem, like Ruganda's play *The Floods*, is a realist portrayal straight from the annals of Ugandan history. An eminent Ugandan historian, A. B. K. Kasozi, has revealed that in Idi Amin's Uganda, "few victims [of the regime] were given a proper burial. Their bodies were thrown into rivers (such as the Nile at Karuma, Jinja, and other places), in Uganda's many lakes (Victoria, George, Albert, Salisbury, Kioga, Wamala, etc.), in mass graves, or burnt in their houses or cars" (114).

Kiguli's writing of dictatorship and misrule is novel. The vividness of her imagery makes the readers see, in their mind's eye, the action she describes. This arouses in them particular feelings towards the tyrannical regimes she writes against (both patriarchal and political) and towards the victims of these regimes. If we consider her political poems to be elegies in the sense that they commemorate the lives of the brutally murdered, we can argue that her work creates, in the words of Jahan Ramazani (drawn from Benedict Anderson's seminal *Imagined Communities*), a "horizontal comradeship of mourners" or an "imagined-community-in-mourning" (*Transnational Poetics* 77). Kiguli's poetic eye surveys the land to see how her compatriots are being treated in both domestic and public spaces and when she sees somebody being beaten or being savaged by wild beasts, sea creatures and cannibals, she raises an alarm so that the nation may know what is happening and rise up to save their own. Her writing thus functions as a way of reconstituting that which has disintegrated: honouring abused bodies and restoring civility.

### **Writing Civil War and War Trauma: Mary Karooro Okurut's *The Invisible Weevil* and Beatrice Lamwaka's "Butterfly Dreams" and "Bottled Memory"**

*The Invisible Weevil* (hereafter referred to as *Weevil*) belongs to those literary texts which attempt a narration of Uganda's history over a long period of time, that is to say, from 1962 to the 1990s. Other texts which cover more or less the same period are Alex Mukulu's play *Thirty*

*Years of Bananas* (1993), Arthur Gakwandi's novel *Kosiya Kifefe* (1999), and Moses Isegawa's novel *Abyssinian Chronicles* (2000). *Weevil* occupies a special place in Ugandan letters because it is the first literary text to narrate, in one sweep, the triple weevils of political mismanagement (dictatorship), patriarchy, and the HIV/Aids pandemic.<sup>26</sup> “[It] is an extremely talented translation of history into literary art . . . full of unforgettable episodes”, Ugandan poet, novelist and academic, Timothy Wangusa, describes it in its blurb. It tells the story of Uganda’s political upheavals from independence (1962) to the first few years of President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni’s regime – upheavals that led to the loss of approximately 800,000 lives between 1971 and 1985 (Tripp 4). The presidents in the novel are thinly disguised – President Opolo is Milton Apollo Obote as can be seen from some key incidents of his regime, especially his May 1966 attack on the Kabaka (King) of Buganda’s palace and the abolishing of monarchies, which ordinary citizens interpret as the beginning of Uganda’s political woes for “things which start in blood end in blood”, as one character puts it (45). President Duduma whose English is ungrammatical and who expels Asians and under whose regime the country descends into an abyss is unmistakably Idi Amin, while President Kazi who helps Uganda out of the abyss and starts political reforms which promise a bright future is Museveni, who has been a President since 26<sup>th</sup> January 1986, and in whose cabinet the novelist has served as the President’s Press Secretary, Member of Parliament and Minister for Information and National Guidance, among other roles.<sup>27</sup>

*Weevil* is told mostly from the perspective of Nkwanzi, a female lawyer who participates in the liberation struggles and later becomes a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in President Kazi’s government. Her childhood boyfriend and husband, Genesis, with whom she participated in the liberation struggles and who is currently the head of Kazi’s Government’s Secret Service,

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<sup>26</sup> Moses Isegawa does the same in *Abessijne kronieken*, published the same year (1998). I am calling *Weevil* the first Ugandan text to do this because it took two more years for Isegawa’s novel to be accessible to Ugandan readers when it was published in English in 2000 as *Abyssinian Chronicles*.

<sup>27</sup> Kazi is Kiswahili for “work” or “hard work”. To Okurut, President Kazi is a conscientious leader whose hard work restores the rule of law in the nation.

gets into an extra-marital relationship with another woman who infects him with HIV. His sick state and eventual death are narrated in the prologue and epilogue, respectively, with the bulk of the novel being a recounting of these two characters' pasts, especially at school (primary school, high school and university) and in the liberation struggles. Three other major characters in the narrative are Mzee, Genesis's childhood friend and faithful companion; Rex, an opportunistic, evil classmate and colleague; and Mama – a city primary school teacher who diligently organises the underground Movement which contributes to Kazi becoming President.

From this cast of characters, it can be seen that in Okurut's writing of the liberation wars that saved Uganda from Duduma's and Opolo II's dictatorial regimes, she foregrounds the role played by intellectuals and by women. To her, Uganda's endemic political problems partly result from the ascension to power of people like President Duduma who do not have adequate formal education. Such leaders do everything in their power to destroy intellectuals because intellectuals make the exercise of authoritarian power difficult, since they subject government policies/decrees and actions to critical analyses that reveal their inadequacies. In the novel, Okurut devotes considerable time to Duduma's violent attacks on Makerere University which she represents, in Tirop Peter Simatei's words, as "the site where [the General] stages his onslaught on the psyche of the nation" (*The Novel* 154). In one of these attacks, the soldiers "vandalized books, they defecated in the rooms and corridors and smeared faeces on walls" (140). To show that this is not an isolated incident, the novel depicts a similar instance: soldiers loot the residence of a former minister in Opolo's regime and "shit in every room", smear "the faeces on the walls", and use the family's wedding photographs and certificates "as toilet paper" (101). By turning rooms and corridors into toilets, the soldiers show themselves as far removed from civilized living. They act the way they do well aware that their victims cannot protect their spaces from being desecrated since they are unarmed. In other words, their defecation is a performance of power: by defecating in houses where they know they should not, the soldiers are showing how they can get away with anything, including murder. Achille Mbembe calls this

kind of display of power “the aesthetics of vulgarity” which he describes as being characterised by “the grotesque and the obscene” (*On the Postcolony* 103) and the tendency to pursue “wrongdoing to the point of shamelessness” (115). But the defecation is also “a symbol of excessive consumption” – to borrow a phrase from Joshua D. Esty’s discussion of the discursive use of faeces in the work of postcolonial African writers like Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwi Armah (34). If we remember that Duduma’s regime creates *mafuta mingis* (Kiswahili for the excessively rich),<sup>28</sup> then we can see the link Okurut is creating between their fat, sweaty bodies and their uncivil toilet manners. Finally, the use of faeces here is Okurut’s subtle call on patriotic Ugandans to clean the mess caused by the soldiers in order to create a clean, healthy Uganda.

The language used by the defecating soldiers is another way through which Okurut portrays the disintegration of the Ugandan nation. The English spoken by their Commander-in-Chief, Duduma, is ungrammatical, pointing to the fact that he is not well-educated.<sup>29</sup> For example, in his speech after he has been sworn in as President, he says he is very happy “completely and also to stood here and undress you on this suspicious ocazion” (99).<sup>30</sup> This kind of language helps the reader to identify the historical personage who is being fictionalized in Duduma.<sup>31</sup> But on a more serious note, the ungrammatical language is an indication that something is quite wrong in this country where a semi-illiterate soldier has captured the most powerful office in the land. Okurut highlights this subtle point when she makes her character say the very opposite of what he intends to, for instance using the word ‘suspicious’ instead of ‘auspicious’ in the above speech, thereby “inadvertently affirming the actual fears of the people

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<sup>28</sup> In the novel, these are the men who got free shops formerly owned by Asians.

<sup>29</sup> In Uganda, English is the official language and the medium of instruction in schools.

<sup>30</sup> The language mistakes Duduma makes remind one of Francis Imbuga’s *Betrayal in the City* – a play about post-independence corruption and brutality in a fictitious country called Kafira. In this classic, there is a character called Mulili who is the president’s right-hand man and private executioner. He calls a character he hates “a green grass in the snake” (62) and after he has killed him in a fake car accident, he reports that people at the scene said Kabito’s “breath smelled full of spirits” (66) – an obvious anomaly since a dead man cannot breathe.

<sup>31</sup> Idi Amin did not speak grammatical English because he only had a primary four education (Mamdani *From Citizen* 60).

who are apprehensive of the coup,” as Simatei observes (*The Novel* 155). The rhetorical technique she uses here is catachresis where one inappropriate word is used to refer to an appropriate one. When Duduma’s cruelty becomes well-known, his and his henchmen’s ungrammatical language provides some comic relief in the tragic situation his rule occasions, as when he says he is the “former current Chairman of the OAU” (136).

In her narrative of liberation, Okurut portrays the fighters as belonging to both sexes. Her choice of Nkwanzi as focalizer, combatant and Assistant Minister, and that of Mama as a competent and successful leader of two underground movements (one against Duduma and the other against Opolo II), serves to inscribe women into the narrative of the nation as subjects who played and are continuing to play a crucial role in the liberation of the nation and the restoration of the rule of law.<sup>32</sup> This is a far cry from previous portrayals by male writers, for instance Robert Serumaga’s *Return to the Shadows*, Magala-Nyago’s *The Rape of the Pearl*, and Allan Tacca’s *The Silent Rebel*, which picture women as victims of misrule on whose bodies the horrendous marks of dictatorship/war are written usually in the form of rape.<sup>33</sup> Like the personae in some of Kiguli’s poems, Nkwanzi and Mama fight at both the domestic and the public front. When she is raped by Rex shortly before her wedding, Nkwanzi decides – against her aunt’s wish that the shameful incident be hushed up – to report this crime to the police so that the culprit faces the might of the law. By doing this, she helps draw attention to the fact that

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<sup>32</sup> Since Mary Karoro Okurut’s founding of the Uganda Women Writers Association (Femrite) in 1995, female writers have played a key role in revitalizing creative writing in Uganda and in reimagining the nation from a woman-centred perspective. Okurut, Kiguli, Goretti Kyomuhendo and Beatrice Lamwaka are all prominent members of this association which has published more than twenty five books in three genres: poetry (for instance Kiguli’s *The African Saga* and Christine Oryema-Lalobo’s *No Hearts at Home*); fiction (for example Kyomuhendo’s *Secrets No More*, Violet Barungi’s *Cassandra*, and Okurut’s *The Invisible Weevil*); and life writing (for instance *Tears of Hope*, *I Dare to Say*, and *Beyond the Dance*). Femrite members have also won key awards, for instance the Macmillan Writers for Africa Senior Prize (Glaydah Namukasa, 2005), the Commonwealth Writers Prize for First Best Book, Africa Region (Doreen Baingana, 2006), and the Caine Prize for African Writing (Monica Arac de Nyeko, 2007). For more information on Femrite publications and on the awards won by Femrite members, visit <http://www.femriteug.org/?view=5> and <http://www.femriteug.org/?view=7>, respectively.

<sup>33</sup> In *Return to the Shadows*, soldiers rape Joe’s mother; *The Silent Rebel* opens with the gang rape and murder of Solomon Lamo’s mother by the Secret Guards of the Revolution; in *The Rape of the Pearl*, Maria and other “young women, schoolgirls, housewives and nuns” are raped (123). In *Abyssinian Chronicles*, Isegawa portrays the vulnerability of both men and women to rape. Both Mugezi and his aunt (Kasawo) are raped by female post-Amin Ugandan soldiers and Tanzanian troops, respectively.

although political governance is slowly returning to normal, there is still a lot to be done to ensure that women are safe from what Pumla Dineo Gqola calls “violent masculinities” (111). And when she discovers that her husband is cheating on her, she refuses to have unprotected sex with him even when he insists on it as “the head of this house” (226). This saves her from being infected with HIV.

Okurut uses Genesis’s sick body to point to the state of the nation. When his mother sees him, she asks Nkwazi: “[W]hat is it that has eaten our son? What manner of disease has made his eyes hide in their sockets and his ribs stand out like *askaris* on a parade ready to be counted? What plague is this that has even power to make the head shrink?” (5). When she is told that Genesis has HIV/AIDS, she replies, “I know what it is. I know what this plague is. It’s like a weevil. The weevil eats up a bean. When you look at the bean, you think it’s healthy. Then when you open it, you find that the weevil ate it up a long time ago and inside, the bean crumbles to dust. It’s nothing but dust inside” (6).

As the pervasive symbol in the novel, the weevil refers to several ills in the nation – political thuggery, hence the reference to “the weevil of bad leaders” (6) and to Duduma as “a weevil [that] has entered the country” (103) when he orders the murder of soldiers belonging to deposed President Opolo’s ethnic group; and moral breakdown, hence the comparison of sin to a weevil that “will eat you from inside until your whole person crumbles like a bean eaten up by a weevil” (49) and the reference to “the weevil of bribery and greed, of rape and inhumanity” (134). The symbol enables Okurut to make a number of points about the state of the Ugandan nation. In the first place, the degeneration of Genesis’s HIV-infected body symbolises the disintegration of Uganda’s body politic which is depicted as being infected by numerous weevils. By using a man’s body to convey a political message, Okurut makes a radical break since the tendency in African literature is to use woman as symbol of the nation as mother Africa, seductive temptress or prostitute as Florence Stratton and Elleke Boehmer have shown in their study of canonical male writers like Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and Meg

Samuelson in her work on South African writing of the transition period from apartheid to the end of the 1990s.<sup>34</sup> The use of the male body is quite appropriate here since the nation-state is, as Lidwien Kapteijns observes, “often gendered male and the nation gendered female. Women, that is, are commonly constructed as the symbolic form of the nation whereas men are invariably represented as its chief agents” (69). Genesis’s betrayal of his marital vows therefore symbolises male political leaders’ betrayal of the promises they make to the nation.

Okurut also writes the liberation struggle as something incomplete, something that still requires more concerted efforts to accomplish. This is cleverly captured by the symbolic use of a terminal disease whose cure, like that of the restoration of democratic governance, is still eluding the nation.<sup>35</sup> Although Kazi is portrayed as a more humane president than his predecessors, his government is portrayed as being infected with some weevils as well. For instance, just three years after taking over power, some of his commanders roast more than a hundred people in a train wagon upon accusing them of collaborating with rebels (219).<sup>36</sup> The novel therefore highlights the fact that the struggle for a more humane society is still on and calls upon Ugandans to beware the myriad weevils threatening their lives and their freedom. One of these

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<sup>34</sup> This is the case, for instance, in Okello Oculi’s *Prostitute*, where a government minister destroys the life of a young village girl, consequently pushing her into prostitution. The Malaya (Kiswahili for ‘prostitute’) in Okot p’Bitek’s “Song of Malaya” serves more or less the same thematic role: Okot uses her body to highlight the hypocrisy of his society. Different people, for instance politicians, policemen and priests, condemn her as degenerate, but they stealthily go to her and other prostitutes for ‘service’.

<sup>35</sup> In his writing of misrule, Wangusa refers to dictatorship in a similar way when his persona talks of “our home-grown cancer” (*Anthem* 12). His attitude to liberation struggles is quite pessimistic, as shown by what his persona says:

But there is nothing new happens under the sky,  
There is no new wisdom or new foolishness;  
Every bloody deed enacts its ancient original,  
*And every saviour becomes the monster he killed.* (46, my emphasis)

<sup>36</sup> This is a fictionalization of the National Resistance Army’s massacre of innocent civilians in Mukura, Kumi District, Eastern Uganda, on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1989. Amii Omara-Otunnu reveals that even before the Museveni government celebrated its first anniversary, its soldiers had killed several people in northern Uganda, besides burning villages and detaining critics. In an essay entitled “The Changing Face of Authoritarianism in Africa: The Case of Uganda”, Aili Mari Tripp has identified several ways through which Museveni has kept a heavy hand on Uganda. Tripp published this essay in 2004. Several observers, for instance newspaper columnists Muniini K. Mulera and Allan Tacca (“We Don’t Need More Guns, But Less Despotism”), argue that the situation has deteriorated further, with Uganda descending deeper into grand corruption and state-sponsored violence, especially police harassment of innocent civilians during civic demonstrations against the government’s excesses.

weevils is presented in the form of incessant civil wars, for instance that between Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the government of Uganda.<sup>37</sup> I would like to conclude this section by looking at how Beatrice Lamwaka narrates this war.

Beatrice Lamwaka's work calls attention to the fact that Uganda is still a country embroiled in war. Her stories "Butterfly Dreams" and "Bottled Memory" (2011) draw attention to the fate of girl children abducted in northern Uganda to serve as child-soldiers and soldiers' wives in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In "Butterfly Dreams", Lamunu, who was abducted by rebels when she was 11, is rescued by government forces at 16. The story relates the family's experience with her since the day she was rescued, with particular attention to her silence. The "we" narrator addresses her throughout the story as she tells her about a number of things – how they buried her *tipu* (spirit) when they heard she had died; how they live in grass-thatched camps instead of the homes they were used to before; and how Pa was cut to pieces by the rebels. The story ends with Lamunu in school uniform, still traumatised and tormented by nightmares but ready to resume the dream that the rebels' abduction of her had interrupted.<sup>38</sup> In "Bottled Memory", another former abductee, Ayat, escapes from captivity during a battle between LRA rebels and government forces, leaving behind her young son, Bidong. It is four years now and she is in a Kampala school where she is preparing to sit her final ordinary level exams. But she cannot concentrate on her studies because she is tormented by nightmares about her son, whom she feels guilty of abandoning. One early morning, she walks out of the dormitory purportedly to

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<sup>37</sup> Sverker Finnstrom states that within the first two years of Museveni's regime (1986 to 1988), "27 different rebel groups were resisting the new government. Only a few have remained over the years, most notably the Lord's Resistance Movement/Army rebels" (200).

<sup>38</sup> This story is informed by a true happening in Lamwaka's family – the abduction of her 13-year-old brother, Richard, by the Lord's Resistance rebels. Elizabeth Day writes of this incident in *The Observer*:

Against all odds, Richard survived, returning home some months later. Yet he never once spoke about what he had endured. Nor did his family ever ask him what had happened. They didn't know how to tell him that in his absence, they had assumed he was dead and had buried his "tipu" – his soul [sic]. Then, at the age of 15, Richard died of pneumonia. His mother couldn't find the words to grieve; she retreated into silence. Beatrice, too, knew not to say anything. Her childhood had been marked by violence. She grew so used to the sound of gunshot fire being exchanged between LRA rebels and government troops that she could distinguish when a bullet had hit a person and when it hadn't from the noise it made. The people in her village did not talk about such things. No one did. Silence was the only form of survival. (n. pag.)

find Bidong, but it is a journey to nowhere since it is unlikely that she will return to the Lord's Resistance Army's camp, where the baby is.

More than any other writer I have discussed so far, Lamwaka focuses on the traumatic effects of war. Her young victims of war find it hard to cope. Lamunu's voice has been muted by the horrors she saw while in captivity – horrors written on her body in the form of “bullet scars on your left arm and right leg” (“Butterfly Dreams” 3). Her silence points to the effect her suffering has had on her being for as Elaine Scarry observes, “intense pain is . . . language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject” (35). Mute and reticent, she lives like a sleepwalker. Lamunu stands in the rain and lets herself get drenched, unperturbed by the loud thunderstorm. Even when she has her monthly period, she does not do anything about the condition: instead, she lets the blood “streak down [her] legs” (7), making her mother shed tears of sadness on observing how the war has destroyed something in her daughter. Ayat's trauma manifests itself in intrusive recollections about her son: she is guilty that she left him in the bush. This guilt is translated into nightmares which make her schoolmates call her “mad girl” (“Bottled Memory” 146). They even nickname her “Joseph Kony” which shows how insensitive they are to her pain and suffering since they are aware that she is a former abductee and therefore someone who has experienced untold horrors. This nickname, I suggest, is Lamwaka's subtle comment on the insensitivity of the rest of the country to the pain and suffering of the people of northern Uganda.<sup>39</sup> In other words, her work shows a nation divided into two: the suffering part (northern Uganda, particularly the war-ravaged Acoli sub-region) and the peaceful part (southern Uganda). But southern Uganda has not

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<sup>39</sup> In her short story “Strange Fruits”, Arac Monica de Nyeko makes a similar hint. Government soldiers commanded by a certain lieutenant Kanyeihamba gang-rape Lakidi after her husband, an LRA rebel, has been captured. The choice of the commander's name is not innocent: it is a subtle pointer to the region from where he comes (western Uganda), that is to say, the region from which the incumbent head of state and commander-in-chief hails. Moses Isegawa makes similar hints in *Abyssinian Chronicles* and *Snakepit*. In the latter novel, for instance, he portrays General Bazooka, who comes from north-west Uganda (West Nile), as someone bent on humiliating and destroying southern Ugandans, even those close to him like his girlfriend Victoria Kayiwa and his star staff, Bat Katanga. The motive behind his decision to make Kayiwa spy on Katanga is tribal. “Two southerners destroying other,” he muses, “would be entertaining to watch” (16).

always been peaceful; it too has experienced war as shown by Kyomuhendo's novel, *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War*, to which I now turn.

**Negotiating Transnational Identities in Times of War: Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War***

*Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War* (hereafter referred to as *Waiting*) is a fictional reconstruction of the last days of Idi Amin as Uganda's President. It captures the anxiety and destruction that his soldiers cause in a village in Hoima – a district in Western Uganda – as they flee Kampala which has been captured by a combined force of Ugandan exiles and Tanzanian troops, fondly called liberators. This particular village finds itself under Amin's soldiers' fire because it lies along the route that leads to West Nile where Amin and most of his soldiers came from and where they seek refuge when the regime falls. The novel is narrated by a thirteen-year old girl, Alinda, who takes on the role of surrogate mother, so to speak, because her mother (simply called Mother in the text) is pregnant, anaemic, and unable to work. Mother's husband, Father, impotently suffers with his wife for there is nothing he can do to help her since all the hospitals in this part of the country have been closed because of the insurgency: "nurses and doctors had run away, fearing for their lives" (17). The dreaded soldiers attack on the day she is giving birth, and they kill an old woman, Kaaka, as she serves as a birth attendant/midwife. Mother dies but the child survives, although at the beginning he hovers between life and death because of an infection of *ebino* (false killer teeth) from which the Lendu Woman, a refugee from Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), successfully cures him. The liberators eventually come and the novel ends with the return of normalcy and the reconstitution of family life through marital unions (Father takes on Nyinabarongo as wife and the Lendu Woman moves into Uncle Kembo's house) and adoption (of the young Tanzanian soldier, Bahati).

This novel is remarkable in Ugandan letters for its economy of style, particularly in the area of setting, in that the events recounted therein take place in one village over a period of about five months. This preciseness of plot contributes to the tautness of the action as every event narrated in the text thickens the tension that the characters (and consequently the readers)

feel as they wait for danger and/or liberation. The novel is also remarkable in its “focus on humble village lives that are far removed from the centres of power” and in its use of a young narrator “who is just reaching adolescence to depict the suffering of a group of people” as M. J. Daymond observes in an afterword (116).<sup>40</sup> The choice of Alinda as a narrator is apt because as a teenager who does not deeply understand the world she lives in – a world characterised by war, racial prejudice, xenophobia, and patriarchy – she gives the reader the events as they happen and the dialogues as they are spoken without offering her own comment or judgment. Through this factual, documentary-like narration, Kyomuhendo touches serious issues without much ado and invites the reader to read between the lines as a way of mediating between the writer and the narrator.

Structurally, Kyomuhendo builds her plot in such a way that life is portrayed as a balance between opposing forces: birth and death, loss and gain, anxiety and hope. For instance, Kaaka and Mother die as a baby is born into the family; Tendo leaves home and follows the liberators as they pursue Amin’s soldiers while Bahati remains behind and becomes a new member of Father’s family; the Lendu woman and Bahati lose their countries, so to speak (Zaire and Tanzania respectively), but they get a new home (Uganda); Alinda and her siblings are orphaned but they soon get a new mother (Nyinabarongo); there is chaos and anxiety caused by Amin’s undisciplined soldiers whose interest is “women, food, and money” (37) but this is soon followed by some order when the liberators,<sup>41</sup> who are quite disciplined, arrive. With this counterbalancing of each loss with a particular gain, Kyomuhendo saves the novel from the overwhelming mood of gloom that usually characterises war narratives. Instead, she gives some positive aspects like how people caught up in war make sense of their day-to-day lives, how they

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<sup>40</sup> Isegawa’s *Abyssinian Chronicles* is also told from the perspective of a young person, Mugezi, but there is a difference in the narrative strategies used in it and in *Waiting*. In Isegawa, most of the experiences recounted are being remembered many years after they occurred while in the latter case, the narrative time is the present or the recent past.

<sup>41</sup> In the novel, the liberators are the combined force of Ugandan exiles and Tanzanian army who invaded Uganda in 1979. Tanzania was responding to Idi Amin’s 1978 invasion of the Kagera region which he claimed was Uganda’s territory (Ssewakiryanga and Isabirye 56).

help each other even in times of scarcity, and how they preserve their tenderness and therefore their humanity even in times of adversity. It also shows the characters' desire to triumph over the degeneration and disintegration that war engenders. By welcoming new vistas of hope amidst loss of life and livelihoods, the characters refuse to be defined by the tragedies they have suffered and seize every opportunity that they get to reconstitute their lives, their community, and their nation.

One of the issues Kyomuhendo explores in this novel is the phenomenon of transnational crossings brought about by war. This is portrayed through two characters – the Lendu woman and Bahati. The Lendu woman flees her country, Zaire. In Uganda, she is at first not fully accepted by the indigenous people. We are told that when the old man gave her a piece of land where to build, Mother was not happy because “she did not want to have foreigners, whose ways she did not know, as neighbours” (25). The old man defends his decision in a way quite derisive to the Lendu woman: he argues that “Lendu people were useful because they had rid the village of monkeys by eating them” (25). When the baby that Mother gives birth to gets sick with *ebino*, Father accuses the Lendu woman of bewitching him. “How come before she came to our village, babies never used to suffer from *ebino*?” he asks and exclaims, “We should expel her!” (50). Later he says: “She should go back to wherever she came from. We don’t need foreigners here” (51). But when she brings the much needed and rare sugar for the child, Father softens towards her and thanks her for the gift. When she gets an opportunity to talk to Alinda, she says she is not happy about the way her father “goes about my being a witch” (55) and explains that she asked Father to pay her for the child’s medication not in order to profit from the family’s misfortune but because “[i]f you don’t attach a monetary value to the treatment, it ceases to be effective” (55-56). She also exonerates her husband from accusations of exploitation when she says: “The people here also say that my husband is a bad man because the fish he sells them is expensive. Yet he goes to a lot of trouble to get the fish from the River Congo, which is very deep and difficult to navigate” (56). In other words, she and her husband are not enemies of the village;

there are reasons why they have done particular things. Perhaps the action that earns her wholesome acceptance in this community is her swift and bold intervention when the old man's leg is hit by a landmine. She announces that the leg should be cut off, and she goes ahead to do the surgical operation using a saw. Later in the novel, we see the patient steadily recovering. The narrative that she tells about her past clears the mystery surrounding her and makes it possible for Alinda and the reader to sympathise with her. This highlights the role of narrative in creating an enabling environment in which characters can engage each other and 'discover' who the other really is – something central to the negotiation of national identity.

Through the Lendu woman, Kyomuhendo challenges discourses of autochthony. She suggests that what matters is not where one is born but whether or not the person can establish a relationship with other people and contribute to the welfare and betterment of the community. People born in one's village or nation can act in terrible, inhuman ways, the way the old man acted when he butchered his wife over a simple matter (she gave away his meat to her parents when he took two days to return from a drinking spree) and the way Amin's soldiers have acted (killing Kaaka and terrorising the village), while those coming from a different country, like the Lendu woman, can be more compassionate (she gives the sick baby sugar) and more useful to the community (her medical intervention bears fruit for both the baby and the old man). Perhaps it is because of this realization that the news that the Lendu woman is pregnant and that she has moved in with Uncle Kembo does not come as a shock to the village. Instead, she is accepted as a new member of the community. The point here is that one does not have to be born in Uganda to become Ugandan.

Perhaps the best illustration of this inclusive notion of Ugandanness is offered in the portrayal of the relationship between the young Tanzanian soldier Bahati and the young Ugandan girl, Jungu, the narrator's classmate and friend. The two have been teaching each other their languages: Bahati learns English and Lunyoro from Jungu; she learns Kiswahili from him. This transnational and transcultural communication highlights these young people's desire and

determination to look beyond discourses of autochthony in order to establish new connections and new identities which are not based on national and cultural borders, but on friendship and affection. She also rehabilitates Kiswahili from the damage Amin's soldiers have done to it. By using Kiswahili to terrorise the village as they do in the novel (for instance in the scene where they assault and kill Kaaka), these soldiers have made the local people look at it as a language of violence, destruction and death.<sup>42</sup> The author rehabilitates it by showing it as a language that can communicate tenderness and civility so much that the love between Bahati and Jungu is communicated through gifts of beautiful cotton cloths called *kanga* which have poetic inscriptions like "Macho Yameonana Mioyo Ikasemezana", which Bahati translates as "Our eyes met and our hearts began to speak" – a moving summary of what has happened between him and Jungu (90). It is clear, from the foregoing, that for Kyomuhendo the language of love and community is what matters, not the language of autochthony. As Emilia Ilieva and Lennox Odiemo-Munara observe in their reading of the novel, "*Waiting* shows a people determined to forge new identities in order to survive socio-political upheavals" (195). Perhaps the best example of this is Father's adoption of Bahati. This happens when Bahati tries to follow the liberators so that he can reconnect with Jungu from whom he has been separated by Tendo's failure to deliver his secret message to her. "He's one of us now," Father says of Bahati (107), and as he leaves for the city to resume his job, he jokingly tells his family, as he points to Bahati, "Now, I'm confident that you won't be washed away by the rains. You have a man who can take care of you" (110). He is willing to pay his fees which is why he tells him, "And you too will be starting school with the others" (111).

Through the young characters, Kyomuhendo imagines a possible prosperous future where national borders will be less rigid than they often are today. The child Uncle Kembo and the Lendu woman are going to have will be a challenge to people who see national boundaries as

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<sup>42</sup> In *The Invisible Weevil*, a Duduma (Idi Amin) soldier tells a student, "Don't spoke English. Sema Kiswahili" – a statement the narrator comments on thus: "How the students and ordinary people had loved Kiswahili in the past. But now it had become the language of violence" (139).

being cast in stone, for it will be both Zairian and Ugandan. Bahati's love for Jungu poses the same challenge, for these two are determined to make their love work irrespective of country of origin. As Dominic Dipio observes, the young people in the novel are represented as being "freer and more versatile in communication, and their differences are not represented as obstacles, but opportunities to learn and appreciate the other better" (55). In other words, the writer does not see any tension in identifying with more than one nation; rather, she endorses this transnational imagining of identity through the favourable portrayals she makes of the Lendu woman and Bahati, who at the end of the novel become part of the community. Her vision of identity is similar to that espoused by the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Gyekye in an illuminating essay entitled "Ethnicity, Identity, and Nationhood" where he argues that "[o]ur humanity, not our particular 'ethnic' background, should constitute our fundamental identity" (103) because "it is the individual, worthy of dignity and respect, not the ethnic group, who ought to be considered the fundamental or primary unit in the composition of the multinational state"<sup>43</sup> (96). Instead of focusing on ethnic origins of people, Gyekye calls us to "consider every citizen of the nation-state, irrespective of the family, clan, or communocultural group into which she happens to have been born, as an individual of intrinsic moral worth and dignity, with a claim on others to respect her" (103). He calls this reconceptualization of nationhood "metanationality" which can "eliminate conflicts, prejudices, and stereotypes, while creating structures of mutual understanding necessary to the integrity, solidarity, and cohesiveness of the nation-state" (104). Kyomuhendo's vision in *Waiting* mirrors this view, for she calls for relationships based on human connections, not on national boundaries.

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<sup>43</sup> By 'multinational state' Gyekye means a state with different nationalities/ethnic groups.

## Conclusion

The discussion above underlines the fact that between 1972 and 2011, life in Uganda became precarious as evidenced by numerous instances of violence perpetrated by both the state and anti-state elements that are portrayed in *General*, *Feast*, *Bombay*, *Saga*, *Weevil*, *Waiting*, “Butterfly Dreams” and “Bottled Dreams”. I have shown how the writers of these works portray human life as becoming cheap in this period – so cheap that murder, assassination and rape are recurrent in the texts. I have also shown how the dead are portrayed as being desecrated and how people are forced to sleep in bushes like animals for fear of Amin’s soldiers (*Waiting*). By depicting all these horrors, the writers are challenging their readers to create a world that does not beget rulers like Idi Amin and Milton Obote. Never again, they seem to tell the reader, should their land become the abode of ogres and cannibals. This is why the works are not completely gloomy even as they narrate or recite macabre realities: once in a while a little ray of hope radiates here and there as a pointer to the future regeneration of the nation. *Weevil* suggests that the weevils eating up the Ugandan society will one day be defeated: since they are no longer invisible, they are not invincible. *Waiting* shows a people who look beyond their suffering and manage to forge ties that transcend ethnicity and nationality, while *Saga* celebrates the silent courage of the people who see their sons killed and daughters raped by sadistic agents of a monstrous regime. In a poem entitled “Lake Victoria”, Kiguli shows her optimism through a persona who, after “teas[ing] meaning out of beseeching eyes / Washed ashore by wrathful waves / That brutally speak a thousand tongues”, courageously concludes:

Yet

I rise and believe

In the dream Uganda

Land of lakes and rivers

Ready to dissolve

The times of pain

The compassion of people

To conquer

To prevail. (“Lake Victoria” 213)

This resolve to conquer and to prevail also permeates those texts that capture experiences of exile and diaspora, for instance Siddiqi’s novels, Moses Isegawa’s *Abyssinian Chronicles*, and Doreen Baingana’s short stories “Lost in Los Angeles” and “Questions of Home”. These experiences come with daunting challenges which the characters in these texts are portrayed as courageously facing in order to make their new domiciles a homely space. In the next chapter, I examine how Siddiqi, Isegawa and Baingana narrate these experiences with particular attention to how Ugandan national identity is constituted and/or performed in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the United States, respectively.

## Chapter Five

### Exile and Diasporic Circulations

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the expulsion of Ugandan Asians from the country in 1972. The years following this expulsion were turbulent ones: Idi Amin became a “lion rampant” (Mutibwa 110), killing whoever he deemed a threat to his rule. Among his victims were the writers Byron Kawadwa, who was also the Artistic Director of the National Theatre (Mbowa “Theatre and Political Repression” 90) and Pio Zirimu, also a linguist and lecturer at Makerere University. During this time, thousands of people fled the country including several writers, for instance John Ruganda, Henry Barlow, Okot p’Bitek, Robert Serumaga, Austin Bukenya, John Nagenda, Laban Erapu, and Magala-Nyago among others. When Obote rigged his way to the Presidency of the country in 1980 (hence the term Obote II), the state of insecurity became worse than before as I observed in my examination of Okurut, with thousands of people being murdered. Even when Yoweri Kaguta Museveni took over as President in 1986, some Ugandans found the harsh psychosocial and socio-economic conditions in the country unbearable and left Uganda for other lands. Among these were the writers Moses Isegawa who emigrated to the Netherlands in 1990 (Jones 85) and Doreen Baingana who left for the US from where she has since returned. In this chapter, I examine how this dispersion of Ugandans produces literary discourses on national identity that challenge geopolitical and cultural boundaries and bring notions of home and exile into dialogical relation. I also examine what the writers that I analyse here see as the relationship between national identity and the experience of exile and diaspora, that is to say, how they constitute the notion of Ugandanness with exile and diaspora serving as vantage points, albeit ones that evince a certain ambivalence to the sociocultural and geopolitical

reality called Uganda. This ambivalence, I explain, arises in part from particular characters' occupation of two locales (here and there) and two temporalities (now and then) which are in a dialogical engagement with each other. Finally, I investigate how the writers' experiences of dislocation influence the narrative strategies they deploy, particularly their characters' navigation of disparate settings and temporalities in a contrapuntal way. I have borrowed the term 'contrapuntal' from Edward Said's classic essay "Reflections on Exile" which informs much of what I say in this chapter. Said in turn borrows the term from music which, according to *Chambers Concise Dictionary*, relates to a counterpoint – "the combining of two or more melodies sung or played simultaneously into a harmonious whole." For an exile, says Said, "habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these same things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally" ("Reflections" 366). In the texts explored here, characters straddle two places – where they are (London for Siddiqi's characters, Amsterdam for Isegawa's Mugezi, and Los Angeles for Baingaina's Christine) and the place which they left (Pearl/Uganda).

### **On the Challenges, Pleasures and Poetics of Exile**

Edward Said distinguishes between exiles, expatriates, émigrés and refugees. To him, the term 'exile' carries with it "solitude and spirituality" because "once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider" ("Reflections" 362). While 'refugee' is a political category that requires urgent international attention, 'expatriates' designates immigrants who voluntarily live in alien countries. As for the émigrés, "choice in the matter is certainly a possibility" (363), making them akin to expatriates. Commenting on this classification, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza observes that

in reality, the distinctions may be more abstract than real for the causes and consequences of displacement embodied in each nomenclature cannot be separated into neat boxes of exclusive biography; all are forms of exile or rather exile is a metonymy for various forms of dislocation from a physical and psychic homeland. (10-11)

It is for this reason that in this section, I use the term ‘exile’ to capture the experiences of all dislocated persons/characters be they refugees or immigrants.<sup>1</sup> From the outset, I would like to argue that the texts I am discussing here challenge the tendency to look at exile from only one perspective – that of a person being banished from his or her homeland. The writers suggest that even within the same country, exilic conditions may pertain, hence the need to explore two different trajectories of banishment – within the home (as family, community or nation) and outside the home. The first trajectory serves to remind us that home is not always a hospitable place. To the contrary, things can and do fall apart in the home as Rosemary Marangoly George and Jeremy Bent have shown, making home a desire one aspires to fulfil. Some examples suffice here. In *Abyssinian Chronicles* (hereafter referred to as *Chronicles*), the protagonist, Muwaabi Mugezi, grows up in a dictatorial home and goes to a dictatorial school (a Catholic seminary) which both mirror the tyranny of General Idi Amin and his successors whose regimes produce a world in which “violence, beating, blood-letting and torture, both physical and psychological, rule the everyday” (Cooper 89). It is partly to escape from this violence and torture that Mugezi is advised by his friend, Lwendo, to travel to Europe or North America for a long holiday so as to sort himself out. “You have to go,” Lwendo insists when Mugezi refuses to budge. “You look more dead than alive. You are so absentminded that I am afraid a car will knock you down one of these days” (442). In this case, emigration is proffered as the possibility of a peaceful life – something quite paradoxical since, in order for Mugezi to feel at home, he has to flee his home.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Seidel’s definition of an exile as “someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another” (ix) is in line with the emphasis I place on memory and dislocation.

This seeming contradiction clearly captures the kind of nation Uganda becomes after independence as the previous two chapters have shown. In this country, liberation wars are portrayed as coming with heavy costs, for instance internal displacement of people as the population takes to looting and mob justice against people suspected to have supported fallen regimes. In *Chronicles*, post-liberation revenge takes on regional and religious character as people from northern Uganda (where both Milton Apollo Obote and Idi Amin came from) are targeted for crimes that the army committed. When Idi Amin's regime falls in 1979, houses belonging to people from northern Uganda and to Muslims (the religion Amin belonged to) are torched by angry mobs.<sup>2</sup> To escape this kind of treatment, a Muslim character called Hajj Gimbi moves his family to an obscure village "where few people knew him and were unlikely to cause him trouble" (332). In other words, he wilfully opts to become an exile in his own country, scared of being killed by people who consider him a pro-Amin person. In this novel, homes are reconstituted every time there is a regime change, with certain parts of the country (either north or south), particular ethnic groups (Luo or Bantu) and particular religious denominations (Christians or Muslims) being forced to flee Kampala city. This within-the-country exilic condition points to the precarious nature of Ugandan citizenship, since every citizen is potentially an exile/refugee depending on the kind of discourse produced by new regimes. It also shows a country divided against itself on ethnic, regional, and religious grounds; a country each successive regime is challenged to unite.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Far away in the villages," Mugezi narrates, "houses belonging to northerners and to some Muslims had gone up in flames. A crowd had swooped onto the home of Aunt Nakatu and her husband, Hajj Ali, accused them of being Amin supporters and asked them to come out lest their houses be burned down and their coffee trees cut" (*Chronicles* 326).

<sup>3</sup> There is another form of exile that Monica Arac de Nyeko's prize-winning short story "Jambula Tree" covers – exile resulting from homophobia. While sexual identity is not within the scope of my thesis, it is pertinent to say a word or two about this matter, since it relates to the issues I am exploring in this chapter. Mama Atim discovers two teenage girls, Anyango and Sanyu, under a jambula tree touching each other's breasts as they roll on the brown earth. News of her discovery soon spreads, bringing shame to the girls and their parents. Sanyu's father, who is well-to-do, immediately sends her to London for studies, leaving Anyango lonely. The story is her letter to Sanyu who has been away for five years. It is clear that the act of withdrawing Sanyu from the prestigious school that she is attending and suddenly sending her to London is an act of banishment: she is being separated from Anyango so that their relationship is curtailed.

Isegawa also portrays Mugezi as an exile in his parents' home in Kampala where he is taken against his will when his Grandmother dies in a fire. In this home, he is constantly tortured by his parents whom he calls "the dictators" (90) or "the despots" (469). His mother, Padlock,<sup>4</sup> is an ultraconservative Catholic who believes that if children are not beaten for every mistake they make or are suspected to have made, they will get spoilt. She therefore considers it her Christian duty to hammer virtue into her sons, using guava swishes. Mugezi, her eldest son, is her main target since she believes that his Grandmother spoilt him rotten. He recounts his suffering thus:

My stay in this city had, so far, been a calculated attempt to reduce my stature, to prune my idea of myself and to crush my personality in the mortar of conventionality. I was being ordered to do things without being told the reasons or the purpose. I was being beaten and lathered in contempt. I was only good for washing nappies, cooking, fetching water – for doing all the things that Padlock did not want to do. In other words, the torture rack was grinding and spinning, slowly doing its job of breaking my body and will. (114)<sup>5</sup>

To spite Padlock, Mugezi deliberately transgresses, including feigning having sexual intercourse with a neighbour's wife, Lusanani. Padlock and Mugezi's father, Serenity, banish him from the

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<sup>4</sup> This name captures the character of Mugezi's mother. She is so cruel to her children that she can be said to have a "Padlocked' heart" (Cooper 88).

<sup>5</sup> In her youth, Padlock had more or less suffered like Mugezi, for she too had been mistreated in her parents' home. Like him, she did back-breaking work for her family which nobody appreciated. The narrator relates thus:

As a woman she had to learn to wake up first and retire to bed last. In a short time she had all those boys [her brothers], all those mini-men, to wash, to feed, to see off to school, to pluck jiggers from, to protect from fleas, bedbugs and mad dogs. She gradually became the swamp that filled with the murky waters of hatred, the steadfast clays of perseverance and the dark green papyrus of obedience and stoicism . . . Her hair and her clothes reeked of kitchen smoke and dish soap. Her eyes reddened with too much worry and too little relief. (60-61)

The novel suggests that this suffering informs in part her mistreatment of her sons. That is to say, her own internal exile in her parents' home breeds a similar exile for her children, especially Mugezi.

house and send him to Aunt Lwandeka's home where he remains throughout his school years and where he finds happiness.

Siddiqi's *Bombay Gardens* (hereafter referred to as *Bombay*) provides two other instances of exile within the nation. The first one involves a young girl, Kirti, whose musical talent is mistaken for madness. She welcomes new moons with special love songs which her step-mother calls "toon-taan songs" (251). A constant embarrassment to her family, especially when they have visitors, Kirti is "confined to an upper storey in Naran Villa" (89) while her mother, Sushilaben, is put "under instructions to never speak of her own accord in the presence of her husband and the second wife, particularly when there were guests" (285). The second case involves Geeta. The omniscient narrator recounts that on her wedding day in India, Geeta gets involved in a motor accident with other couples and spends a night with a man she mistakes for her husband. When the mix-up is discovered the following morning, her real husband and his family reject her on the ground that she spent a whole night with another man. Geeta is disgraced since her insistence that she is still a virgin does not count. To save her honour and that of her family, she decides to become a celibate ascetic somewhere in the hills where she meets Naranbhai, who has been visiting a certain shrine in search for a spiritual solution to his daughter's 'madness'. She flees to Africa with him to start a new life as a married woman.<sup>6</sup>

While Siddiqi's narrator presents these cases of internal exile in a light-hearted manner, the novel makes it clear that these experiences have dire consequences for the victims involved. For instance, Kirti's parents' quest for a cure for her 'madness' comes with several prescriptions, most of which are disgusting and humiliating:

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<sup>6</sup> In *Feast*, Actress (Mohanji's daughter-in-law) suffers a similar fate. When her parents discover that she has been impregnated by an African servant, they quickly banish her from their home to save the family from the shame that comes with premarital sex, moreover with an African houseboy. "I had to get married, as soon as possible, and go away to another town, another country," she narrates (242). A related exile in the same novel is Mrs Seema Henara. "She had spent her entire childhood being passed around like a parcel from house to house, country to country," the reader is told (102), since her mother was a courtesan. That is to say, her mother did this so that Seema does not get to know the profession she is practising.

From pigeon blood and feathers to cow-dung and urine: the Mad Girl had been fed every imaginable concoction dictated by almost every single belief system known to Man. And, when the cocktails of blood and urine and cow dung had failed, there had been scores of other rituals requiring various substances to be burnt and the ashes placed under her pillow. There had been forced feeding of unmentionable ingredients and forced starvation for days on end in an attempt to starve the "bhoot" (evil spirit) that was said to be in possession of her body. (171)

When all these so-called remedies fail to work, someone suggests that marriage will be the most effective solution. A marriage is quickly arranged for her without her knowledge, but this does not take away the moon songs which are, as the reader knows, not a sickness but a talent. Instead, it only worsens Kirti's misery for her 'husband' disappears a night after the wedding, taking with him all her "wedding jewellery [and] the few hundred shillings she had received as gifts" (291). And as if this is not bad enough, he leaves her pregnant. The family shares her misery:

They felt immensely sorry for her because, whereas previously she had only been a Mad Girl, now she was a mad *woman* whose husband had abandoned her after one night. And she didn't even know it! As they listened and felt sorry for her, (not because she was mad, but because her husband had walked out on her) a few Bombay Gardens' residents gradually wandered over, hypnotised by the catchy, new melody. (292, italics in original)

These two cases show that there is a link between internal exile and patriarchal control of/over women's bodies and lives. Both Geeta and Kirti suffer the way they do because they are women who, for that reason, are expected to behave according to particular conventions or standards. By spending a night with a man who is not her husband even when she does not know this owing to

the circumstances under which the anomaly occurs, Geeta becomes an outcast. Her protestations of innocence come to no avail because the conventions of tradition define her as a transgressive woman who must be banished from the society lest she corrupt other women. As for Kirti, her experience shows how helpless women are in a society where life-changing decisions are made by parents without the knowledge or involvement of the girls who are directly affected.

It is clear, then, that these characters face banishment of one kind or another which comes with a “crippling sorrow of estrangement” which Said identifies as one of the key pains of exile (357). Like Mugezi, these characters only get a sense of relief when they flee their homes. For Geeta, that home is puritanical India which considers her soiled, “[s]econd-hand goods – a complete disgrace not only to her family, but the community at large” and “a source of shame and disgrace for the entire province, the whole country and a blot on the good name of Indian womanhood” (97-98); for Kirti, the home of banishment is her father’s house. In Pearl, Geeta buries her past and settles down as a wife and a mother; in India, Kirti’s ‘toon-taan’ songs catapult her to “name, fame and wealth” when a Bollywood film director, Babu, by accident discovers her musical talent on his visit to Pearl. It seems to me, therefore, that Said’s observation that exile tears “millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography” (358) needs some qualification, not because it is inaccurate, but because there are cases where tradition and family do not nourish but imprison. In a similar vein, there are cases where exile becomes the place where freedom and happiness are experienced. I will return to this point in a moment. Having highlighted these trajectories of banishment, I will now explore how selected characters in the works examined in this chapter respond to the sorrow that comes with exile and what these responses reveal about the writers’ idea of the Ugandan nation. In Siddiqi’s work, there are at least two responses to estrangement. The first one is that when they are expelled by Idi Amin in 1972, some characters are hit hard by their loss of a homeland and they remain nostalgic about Pearl. But there are also characters, particularly the young ones, who re-

invent themselves and move on in their new domiciles without anguishing much about Pearl. I will start with the first category.

While in exile in London, the central character in *Bombay*, Naranbhai, is reduced to an idle state characterised by a routine that his wife derisively describes as “TV, TV, TV, food, TV, TV, toilet, TV, TV, food, TV, bed” (63). The meaninglessness and absurdity of his life is captured by the fact that he watches the same film over and over again, moreover with the volume muted. In fact, the impression the reader gets is that the pictures moving on the screen are the ones ‘watching’ Naranbhai, not the other way around. He finds London so strange that a mere parcel addressed to him disturbs his peace of mind and causes him untold anxiety. In Pearl, he would have known what to do with his life and how to handle his parcels, but in the UK, he is scared. “In this country,” he explains his fears to his wife, “they just send things and it says Free – No Obligation. You put it to one side and forget all about it. A month later they send a bill. Two months later they send threatening letters. Six months later they send the bailiffs” (62). He hopes to return to Pearl whose rhythm of life he understands, but he does not realise his dream for he subsequently collapses while watching a video and dies. Through this depiction of Naranbhai’s fate, Siddiqi captures the pathos of exile. A quite influential and respectable patriarch is reduced to an idle, helpless man who is taunted by a young wife who in the past would not have dared to contradict him. He looks on helplessly as his children marry non-Hindus and eat meat and chicken – dishes they would never have touched back home. Gone are the days, back home, when he had a hold over his family; gone are the days when order and harmony reigned in his life. In exile, things become “a clear case of ‘Ulti-Ganga’ (the Ganges . . . flowing backwards)” (41), to use the words he was fond of while in Pearl, or of Kalyug, “the age of darkness, and treachery – the penultimate chapter in the history of the world and a sure signal that the world was about to end” (*Feast* 52).

The same is true for Siddiqi’s other character, Mohanji, who finds exile painful. He has made a lot of money in Europe and is much richer than he was in Pearl, but he has no peace of

mind since his nine sons were murdered by the Dictator's soldiers shortly before he was expelled from the country. His surviving children 'disappear' from him on reaching a refugee camp in London: his eldest daughter, the Bechari Widow, goes her own way to obtain a psychology degree, while his son is snatched from him by his wayward daughter-in-law who had brought calamity to the household back in Pearl. His anguish is captured in his words:

All alone in the world, what could I do? There was only one thing I knew how to do – make money.

Now I have more money than I could ever have imagined possible. Much more than before! But I don't understand it. I don't even work that hard any more. It just keeps coming in. (291)

The tragic changes in the fortunes of these two exiles (Naranbhai and Mohajji) are portrayed with the help of the contrasts between two different temporalities (pre-1972 Pearl) and 1990s-2000 UK. The back-and-forth movement of the plot in both *Feast* and *Bombay* therefore serves to foreground the patriarchs' misery in exile by juxtaposing their present-day anguish with their yesteryear positions as revered leaders of their families and communities. The fact that both of them die of heart attacks seems to suggest that they are inconsolable over the loss of their homeland and the demise of family cohesion. As for the younger exilic characters, Siddiqi seems to suggest that these adjust faster and better to their new domiciles. It is implied, for instance, that Naranbhai's sons feel more at home in the UK where he feels so ill at ease. None of them marries a Hindu wife as their father would have desired; they also go ahead and take on a different dietary culture that is taboo to the Hindu father – eating meat and chicken. His wife, about 30 years younger than him, and who calls his insistence on Hindu customs a stupid thing, attributes his sons' actions to the new socialization they have received in the UK:

All the Asian children in this country now go to the same type of schools and speak the same kind of slang English. Just by choosing another *Asian* for a partner they feel they are being old-fashioned and traditional. Religion is not that important for them, so why make it an issue? As long as they marry good people, what does it matter? (*Bombay* 153, italics in original)

Bimla adds that life in London is comfortable, with a high standard of living and facilities like “vacuum cleaners, washing machines, microwaves, to say nothing of pre-packaged foods and ready crushed garlic and ginger” being readily available (60-61). For me, this explanation is not convincing since there are characters in *Feast* who live in London and yet remain nostalgic about Pearl. One of them is the main narrator of the novel, the Brat, also known as the World’s Number One Composer – a renowned musician who misses Pearl so much that the entire novel is based on recollections of his childhood there. In my view, there are many reasons that explain why young characters in the novels examined in this study adjust quite well to their new domiciles. First of all, these younger exiles are not familiar with the land they left behind. At the time of the expulsion in 1972, the Naranbhai boys were too young to develop a specifically Ugandan Asian cultural consciousness, so they do not have a concrete past with which to compare their present.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, these younger characters are portrayed as being resilient enough to put their initial suffering in exile behind them, especially when they get help from older people. The Brat, for instance, suffers a lot when his mother takes him to a Bombay school where he discovers, to his dismay, that although he was brought up as a girl, he is a boy (*Feast*

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<sup>7</sup> I need to qualify this statement. The eldest Naranbhai boy is nine years old, while the Brat, the main narrator in *Feast*, is eight years old, yet the latter remembers so much of his life in Pearl that the entire novel is based on his recollections as written down by his ex-wife, Sonia. But there is a difference in the way Siddiqi depicts these two characters: the Brat is so precocious that he behaves and acts in a way far beyond his age while the Naranbhai boy is not.

326).<sup>8</sup> Shortly after this discovery, he runs away from the boarding school and suffers a great deal:

I ran and ran and ran. I hung on to trains, I hid inside cars, and once I even hid inside a fridge on the back of a lorry. I polished shoes, I sold newspapers, I sold song-books outside cinemas. I even went with White tourist men for money. . . What was I to do! . . . Just turned nine and completely alone in the world. Thrown mercilessly into the inhospitable heat and dust of Bombay. (330)

Luckily for him, he meets the Brahman temple singer, Kanhayya Lal, whom he had encountered in Pearl when Mrs Henara invited him to her home for a meal. Lal takes him on as a student and helps him overcome the destitution that has come with exile:

He placed his hand on my head and I knelt before him. Tears of bitter fury poured easily. He taught me the value of forgiveness. He dressed my wounds. He taught me to live with the scars. But best of all, he taught me music. Under his expert guidance I learnt everything about music . . . lots and lots of theory, and it was simply a matter of time before I was able to apply the theory to the sounds of my Pearl childhood. (331)

Younger characters also adjust relatively easily as compared to the adults because of their desire to break with or efface a traumatic past by voluntarily re-inventing themselves in a new geographical and cultural location that makes certain decisions possible, especially for girls and women. This is what Bimla and Zarine do. Bimla's past abounds with heartrending tragedies, like losing her father and being stood up by her groom on the wedding day. I interpret her total embrace of the present moment in London as her desire to efface this traumatic past. The same is

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<sup>8</sup> His mother dressed him as a girl, I have noted earlier, so that his father does not claim custodial rights over him upon being divorced by Mrs Henara.

true for Zarine whose life in Pearl was one tragedy after another. There, she had married an irresponsible alcoholic who got killed by a train, leaving her six months pregnant. Then she had been returned to her father's house where she slaved in his shop, making dresses and home, cooking. She was so miserable that

[a]lthough still under twenty-one, she looked well over fifty. Her skin was wrinkled, dark hollows encircled her eyes and her hair had already turned dry and silvery . . . Sometimes they called her "Bechari" – not only helpless but also unfortunate and cursed. At certain ceremonials and weddings she was not allowed to step anywhere near the areas declared sacred that day. She may not let her shadow fall on a new bride. She may not visit a woman who had newly given birth. (*Feast* 66)

Paradoxically, the expulsion of the Asians became a blessing to her. Reflecting on this event 30 years later, she posits that Robert Kasoga (the Dictator) "simply booted out the Dukavallas and set their daughters free" (334).<sup>9</sup> The novel suggests at least three forms of freedom that women experience as result of the expulsion: freedom in career choices, freedom in sexual matters, and freedom of expression. In London, the Bechari Widow takes on a new identity as Zarine 'Teacher of Dreams' after completing a psychology degree. It is important to note that this is the first time she is called by a proper name – Zarine; before that, she was simply referred to as the Widow, making the narrator (the Brat) observe laconically, "I sometimes got the impression that

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<sup>9</sup> Alibhai-Brown observes that some wealthy Ugandan Asians in Britain kept pictures of Idi Amin in their mansions in thankfulness to him "because he forced them to leave so they could come to this land of milk and honey" (*No Place* 98). In her novels, Siddiqi also hints at the fact that some characters took advantage of the expulsion to act in unethical ways. In *Feast*, the Bachari Widow observes, as I mentioned earlier, that many of the killings following the expulsion order "were organized by opportunist Muhindis themselves" (334). In *Bombay*, the announcement of the expulsion and the contradictory reports surrounding the future of Asians in Pearl are good news to Naranbhai who is hiding from the public, afraid of being lynched by the people he has cheated of money when a cinema show aborts. "The entire Indian community was now sure to be focussed on its own precarious future," he muses:

Who in God's name was going to bother about whether or not Nirmala Natkhatti [a famous Bollywood actress] had appeared, or not appeared, and who cared that four people died when a ceiling fan, in full motion, came crashing down? No, people were sure to have other, more important things on their minds, and he, Naranbhai, was again clearly off the hook! (413)

she had carried this title before her marriage. Perhaps she was born a Widow” (66). The point to emphasize here is that in Pearl, Zarine would not have become a Teacher of Dreams because this profession, though it exists/existed there in the form of palm-reading, was performed by religious leaders like gurus and pandits, not ordinary people like her. And since it requires a formal academic qualification, the profession would have eluded her since her father considered education a waste of money. Besides, since she was considered something of a curse in Pearl as I have explained above, nobody would have taken her seriously had she taken to palm-reading. Finally, in Pearl, nobody would have paid her the huge sums of money she gets paid in London, which make her financially independent. Considering that the liberty she wins partly comes from being economically independent, it follows that in Pearl, she would have remained a worker in her father’s shop, where she was not paid any wage.<sup>10</sup>

As for freedom in sexual matters, Siddiqi provides some examples in *Bombay*. In London, Camilla/Kamla can now marry out of love – something that was not possible back home in Pearl where love, sarcastically referred to as “love-shove” (204), had no place to play in determining who to marry, since marriage was arranged by parents and older relatives according to tradition. Moreover, she marries a white man (Simon Perkins) and not an Indian as she would have been required to do in Pearl. Most importantly, Camilla divorces him when she can no longer stand his unfaithfulness – something that would never have happened in Pearl or India where the sages had decreed that a Hindu wife must stay put with her husband be he

deformed, aged, infirm, offensive in his manners; let him also be choleric, debauched, immoral, a drunkard, a gambler; let him frequent places of ill-repute, live in open sin with other women, have no affection whatever for his home; let him rave like a lunatic; let him live without honour; let him be blind, deaf, dumb, or crippled; in a word, let his

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<sup>10</sup> This point – economic independence coming with freedom – can be seen in the portrayal of Mrs Henara. As a teacher in a government school, she does not depend on her husband for sustenance. When he becomes unfaithful to her, she does something that is portrayed as being unprecedented among the Asians – she kicks him out.

defects be what they may, let his wickedness be what it may, a wife should always look upon him as her god, should lavish on him all her attention and care, paying no heed whatsoever to his character and giving him no cause whatsoever for displeasure. . . (345)

Bimla, who in Pearl was a model wife according to the above teaching, becomes a rebel, so to speak, in London. I have already noted that she answers back to her husband, declaring some of his beliefs stupid. Sometimes she acts impudently as the example below shows. Naranbhai complains that she wastes money on irrelevant purchases. “You’ve bought a vase, so now you’ll go out and buy flowers. And they’ll die in a week, and then you’ll buy some more. What a waste of money!” he exclaims (63). Rather than respond to him respectfully as she would have done in Pearl to explain how a vase is not a waste of money, she bluntly tells him that the flowers “won’t die in a week. I’ve seen really nice silk and plastic ones. They’ll last longer than you!” This is in fact what happens, for Naranbhai dies that very day. Clearly, London provides freedom to young characters that they would never have dreamt of in Pearl. Exile deals patriarchy and tradition a blow as family leaders lose authority over their children and wives take on new subjectivities. Gone are the days when children and wives were submissive to their parents and husbands; in London, they seek and practise personal autonomy which makes possible what was once unthinkable. Exile provides the space where women can reclaim their bodies which were formerly made docile and passive by the disciplinary practices of patriarchal domination and the Hindu religion. They refuse to let men decide their destinies as it was the case in Pearl; rather, they act in ways that are in consonance with their hearts’ desires, even if these are what patriarchs like Naranbhai would consider anathema, like marrying out of love and asking for and securing a divorce.

Exile may be “a condition legislated to deny dignity – to deny an identity to people” by cutting them off “from their roots, their land, their past” as Said (358; 360) observes, but the texts suggest that contrary to this, there are moments when exile offers new possibilities of

undoing past tragedies and starting anew. In fact, *Feast* ends with Zarine's desire to hold a "Feast of Nine virgins" for "[i]t's been more than twenty years since I promised Him [God] such a feast in return for freedom. And now I am free" (335). This feast, from which the novel gets its title, derives from a practice, common among members of the Ismaili Muslim faith in East Africa, "in which a woman, having received divine blessings, thanks God by organizing a feast for nine or seven young girls whom she feeds lavishly" (Ojwang "Eat Pig" 80). The fact that a Ugandan Asian exile in London wants to celebrate her achievements in a manner reminiscent of Pearlite days is further evidence that a complete break with the homeland is not possible since the exile is always in touch with his or her cultural past. Indeed, to appreciate the new possibilities that exile has opened up for Zarine or the tragedies that it has dealt Naranbhai, we need to juxtapose their present moment with their past thereby bringing the Pearl of pre-expulsion days into a dialogical relation with the UK of the present-moment.

This dialogical engagement with two settings and two temporalities is the pillar upon which Siddiqi's plots are built. For in her world, many characters are doubles of the same self in different settings and temporalities. In *Feast*, the renowned World's Number One Composer in the 1990s UK is the 8-year old Brat through whose eyes the life of Asians in Pearl of the 1960s-1970s is seen. The millionaire-sponsor of Ash's film is the Pearl Dukavalla, Mohanji; the star actress in the film is Mohanji's wayward daughter-in-law, and the script writer is the son whom she had with an African servant, George. In *Bombay*, Siddiqi does a similar thing: the characters we meet in the UK of the 1990s-2000 are doubles of those of 1955-1972 Pearl. Camilla Perkins is Kamla, Virjibhai the Compounder's brainy daughter; the Grumpy Old Man is Naranbhai and his current wife is Bimla, Kamla's docile sister. The Bombay film sensation, Kitty Complex, is Naranbhai's daughter, formerly known as 'Mad Girl' Kirti. This doubling is the vehicle that sustains Siddiqi's plots as readers unravel the mysteries of her narratives – riddles to be answered and puzzles to be solved. It is for this reason that Peter Nazareth observes that Siddiqi's *Feast* abounds with "clues that *glow* when reread" ("Feast of the Nine Virgins" 86, my

emphasis). This doubling points to the complexity of identity, since each person is portrayed as being or having more than one self. As James Ocita observes, *Feast*'s "intricate form emerges as a signifier of the complex identities of Siddiqi's characters and their multiple attachments. The unravelling of the plot thus becomes the process of disclosing the characters' often hidden identities" (154).

To use a Bakhtinian term, we can say that exile puts the individual in a dialogical relation with the self as he or she lives what we may call, borrowing from Said, a "contrapuntal life" – a life that conjoins two settings and temporalities. In this kind of life, photographs play an immense role in linking different genealogies and temporalities, thereby helping the reader to look at the character's former self in the light of the present moment. Through her use of photographs, Siddiqi highlights the fact that identity is not something fixed in stone; rather, it is something constructed or re-constructed. In both *Feast* and *Bombay*, key characters come to understand who they are with the help of photographs. In *Feast*, the 8-year old narrator, the Brat, comes across a photograph of "[a] very nice looking woman all dressed up with ornaments in her hair in a formal pose for a brown-and-white photo. Hand under chin. Zillions of shiny bangles on her wrist" (173). This woman who "looks a little bit" like his mother is Saloni, courtesan Tameezan Bai's daughter and therefore his grandmother. In one moment, the photograph connects different temporalities – 19<sup>th</sup> century India (where Tameezan Bai lived), 1960s-1970s Uganda (where Mrs Henara, Bai's granddaughter lived), and 1990s London (where Mrs Henara's son, the Brat, now called the World's Number One Composer, lives). It is this photograph that links the three different plots in the novel – the main plot of the Asians' life in Pearl given to the reader through the eyes of the Brat, the shooting of a film on Tameezan Bai, and the discovery that the personalities behind the film (the sponsor, the actress, the script writer, and the Production Assistant) are London doubles of former Pearl personalities – Mohanji the Dukavalla, Actress his wayward daughter-in-law, Ash her son with an African boy, and Ronnie the Bechari Widow's son, respectively.

Likewise in *Bombay*, photographs link the 1990s-2000 London with 1955-1972 Uganda as Baby describes the pictures she saw in the house where she grew up, which turns out to be Naran Villa, a building a couple of metres away from Bombay Gardens where Kamla, her interlocutor in a London restaurant, lived. The photographs in question are the studio portrait of Naranbhai's ill-fated nieces Mohini and Sohini, the picture of Bimla's tree 'husband' and that of the big swinging hammock on the veranda with an empty seat (which should have been occupied by Hazari Baba but who mysteriously did not appear in the snapshot). The photographs invoke key events in the narrative: the Mohini-Sohini fiasco that haunts the entire novel, Pandit Hazari Baba's visits to Bombay Gardens and the mysteries surrounding him, and the tragedies of the Virjibhai girls, especially Bimla, and the circumstances under which she gets 'married' to a tree. By doing this, the photographs serve as a frame for the narrative Siddiqi is constructing, provoking the reader to compare Baby's descriptions with the 'tales' the omniscient narrator is telling in the main plot of the novel. When Camilla/Kamla sees a bulbous figurine on a chain Baby is wearing, her suspicion that Baby might be 'Mad Girl' Kirti's daughter is heightened. She immediately drives her to Naranbhai's home where she learns that the old man has died. A letter from Kitty Complex – once called 'Mad Girl' Kirti – confirms her suspicion: Baby is Kitty Complex's daughter. Siddiqi should be commended for this ingenious use of objects (photographs and figurines) in reconstructing the past lives of exiles. At the centre of her novelistic project is a decoding of the secret messages of the past and its relics, well captured in the Brat's learning of the Urdu alphabet in order to make sense of the two lines that he finds in his mother's cupboard.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Siddiqi's novelistic use of photographs and other objects echoes the opening paragraph of Tanzanian-Canadian novelist Moyez G. Vassanji's debut novel, *The Gunny Sack*:

Memory, Ji Bai would say, is this old sack here, this poor dear that nobody has any use for anymore. Stroking the sagging brown shape with affection she would drag it closer, to sit at her feet like a favourite child. In would plunge her hand through the gaping hole of a mouth, and she would rummage inside. Now you feel this thing here, you fondle that one, you bring out this naughty little nut and everything else in it rearranges itself. Out would come from the dusty depths some knickknack of yesteryear: a bead necklace shorn of its polish; a rolled-up torn photograph; a cowrie shell; a brass incense holder; a Swahili cap so softened by age that it folded neatly into a small square; a broken rosary tied up crudely to save the remaining beads; a blood stained muslin shirt; a notebook. (3)

Through her use of photographs and other objects, Siddiqi seems to be suggesting that in order to understand who we are, we need to take a closer look at our past and try as much as we can to understand its grammar, its meaning. It's the Brat's precocious searches that reveal who he is – 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian courtesan Tameezan Bhai's great-grand child. And it is Baby's scrapbook of photographs and the figurine she is wearing that help her to discover who her real mother is. To Siddiqi, identity, like narrative, is something we construct, a version of who we are, or who we think we are. These constructions are not final since other discoveries and reconstructions are possible. The difficulties readers have on first encountering her work, like making sense of the multiple plots she employs and of the many narrative perspectives she provides, show how complex questions of identity can be. Like identities, her novels resist a simple, linear, straightforward unfolding of events. Instead, she tasks the reader to find order in the 'disorder' she is narrating and to read for clues that point to some characters being doubles of themselves. The result is a cryptic style that, to use Terry Eagleton's words on the nature of modernist texts, "seeks to distil something of the fragmentation and ambiguity of modern existence, qualities which invade its form and language and risk rendering it opaque" (185). This fragmentation and/or ambiguity makes projects like Idi Amin's attempt to create a mono-racial Ugandan nation futile, since dialogical interactions between races and cultures and nations make it impossible to talk of a fixed, singular, homogeneous identity.

It is interesting to compare how Siddiqi and Moses Isegawa (in *Abyssinian Chronicles*) use objects and how this use relates to their novelistic projects. While Isegawa's protagonist Mugezi deconstructs the objects he encounters (for instance his parents' headboard and Fr Lageau's boat) to show the sham they are as, Brenda Cooper shows, Siddiqi's characters decode the photographs and the figurines in order to discover clues to the mysteries of the past. Similarly, while Isegawa's objects "become fetishized and invested with illegitimate, symbolic

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Like Siddiqi's objects, Vassanji's gunny sack is closely bound up with the plot of the novel, for the objects it contains activate the narrator's memory as he recounts the lives and fortunes/misfortunes of his family over four generations.

power, representing the entwined dictatorships of State, Family and Religion” (Cooper 90), Siddiqi’s photographs and figurines are on the contrary invested with the possibility of illuminating the present through the clues they offer about the past. Finally, while Isegawa’s objects lose their symbolic power and become ordinary in the eyes of Mugezi and the reader, Siddiqi’s objects are elevated from their ordinariness to a symbolic status as they signify several things about the partial nature of identity. These differences relate to the mission each writer pursues in his or her work. From her novels, we can surmise that Siddiqi’s purpose is to capture her memories of Uganda, the country from which she was severed by the 1972 expulsion. On this journey of memory, photographs and figurines play a significant role as relics of a bygone era hence the reverent manner in which her narrators handle them. For Isegawa, some of the objects that his protagonist remembers in the narrative are repositories of bitter memories like beatings and blood-letting – memories Mugezi wants to elide.

I would like to end this section by reflecting on the challenges that the experience of dislocation exerts on exiles in their new countries of domicile. One of these is that of communication. Even when it is English they are using, it becomes apparent that the version used in the home country is different from that spoken in the host country, as we see in Baingana’s story “Lost in Los Angeles” and Nazareth’s *General*. “I have to repeat myself two or three times; it’s easier not to talk,” Christine, the narrator of “Lost in Los Angeles,” observes (Baingana 122, italics in original). She is told she has an accent: she pronounces words differently. For instance, she says “Africa” instead of “Aay-frica,” and her *t*’s and *d*’s remain just that instead of becoming *r*’s.

And I thought I spoke English. But I do. I speak English, everyone speaks English, but it’s not the English I know. “Are you done?” my supervisor asks. “Done? How?” He rolls his eyes then raises his voice and slows down his drawl. “Are you *finished* with that

file?" "Oh, yes, yes." I fumble as I grab the file and hand it to him, feeling such a fool.  
(Baingana 123)

In the epilogue to *General*, which is set in United States of America, a character called Ronald D'Cruz asks for a lift, leaving the car owner, Charlie, wondering what he means. It's only when D'Cruz demonstrates what he means ("he made the motions of opening the door, sitting in and then said 'zz-oom!") that Charlie understands and obliges. While the issue concerning accents might seem unimportant, there are moments when the constant reminder that Christine and D'Cruz "have an accent" inscribe their difference and alienation. This is perhaps not a problem since it is true that Christine and D'Cruz are immigrants, but there is a more serious point: their accent is portrayed as sometimes impeding communication upon which their wellbeing in the US depends. The example I have just given above – D'Cruz's near failure to get a hike from Charlie because he calls it by its Damibian name (a lift) – confirms this. This near failure is followed by more difficulties in communication as D'Cruz unintentionally offends Charlie every time he makes an unflattering comment about the US. While Charlie agrees that there is little enough to praise the country for, "what with all its violence, garbage, pollution and corruption," he does not want to hear D'Cruz criticize America because of his status as a refugee: "when a refugee – mind you, a refugee who had been thrown out of his country and had been generously accepted by this country – when this country was good enough to accept him, how dare he criticize it?" he asks (*General* 140). In other words, the refugee should not be a speaking, critical subject, but an eternally grateful subaltern whose voice should remain muted.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Ruganda's play, *Shreds of Tenderness*, captures this point. Wak flees his country when State Research Bureau operatives come looking for him at the University where he works. The second part of the play details the tribulations that refugees go through as Wak enacts, through mime, the humiliation he was subjected to in a neighbouring country – evidently Kenya because of its subtle allusions to the Mau Mau struggle. "There's nothing as abominable as being a refugee," he tells his siblings (Odie and Stella):

Your dignity lowered. Hell, man. It is a blight . . . self-exile is another matter, of course. One has made up one's mind to take chances. And besides, he or she can always go back home without being asked questions. But a refugee, God! It's hell, man. From the sweeper to the highest official they subtly remind you that you don't belong. You are an alien. That word stinks. Alien. *Makwerekwere*, a third-rate non-citizen, always associated with hunger and deprivation and cheap labour. Worse than cheap labour.

In some instances, this silencing takes the form of the inability to publish certain kinds of books if one is an exile/immigrant. Siddiqi hints at this through one of her characters, Camilla/Kamla, whose manuscript on the life of East African Asians has not been published in the UK because publishers there proscribe British Asians from telling certain narratives that are not set in India. Camilla complains vehemently:

Publishers! What do they know? My story is about Indians in East Africa. If it had been a story about Indians in India, it would have been issued and reprinted several times by now. They just can't cope with Indians living anywhere but India – or Britain. Africa doesn't count, unless of course you write about wildlife, safaris, tribal dancers and, these days, AIDS. But, Indians living in small town East Africa and behaving exactly as though they were in some Indian village . . . well, that doesn't sell books. (*Bombay* 248)

Camilla's interlocutor, Baby, makes an observation about this that should be read, I suggest, as a direct authorial comment:

Years of systematic undermining of our cultures has led to us now being put in a showcase – on full view, brought to you by courtesy of this, that or the other do-gooding institute of culture and refinement. And there's a very clear idea about what is, and isn't

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Because sometimes no one wants you to work. Your very presence is an irritant. Whether or not you do as much work as the nationals do, they always say behind your back that you're not fully committed. You are saving your energies for your mother country. If you do more, they will jokingly tell you, 'You're buying your stay.' It's hell, man. (80-81)

In the play, Ruganda suggests that women find exile even more horrifying as it makes them vulnerable to sexual oppression. In the second mime, he shows two policemen sexually assaulting a female refugee, Dr Rugendarutakaliletirugaruka, just stopping short of raping her because she frightens them off by declaring that she is HIV-positive. Ugandan Asians also faced it rough in London refugee camps as Mamdani, Alibhai-Brown and Humphrey and Ward show. The insults Wak suffers are quite similar to those that the Asians suffer in London where some politicians, led by John Enoch Powell, spoke of them as if they were "vermin" (*No Place* 185). An example of the insensitivity with which the Asians were treated is that the meals served in camps included pork and beef even when it was known that most of the expelled people were either Muslim or Hindu (Humphrey and Ward 63).

“Indian,” as there is of what is, and isn’t, African. If it’s a little Indian and a little African, then there is no convenient cubby-hole. It’s almost as inconvenient as it used to be for a baby who was a bit of both. Yes, there is little or no recognition for Indian writers who write about the experience of being Indian in Africa. White European or American authors who had put in a brief spell as VSO [Voluntary Service Overseas] or Peace Corps, were considered better qualified to comment on the plight of the African-Indians. (248)

In his seminal book *Orientalism*, Said called this prejudiced Western way of looking at India “orientalism” and described it, in part, as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient” (3). The implication here is that exile/migration is a site for the West’s perpetuation of certain stereotypical ways of looking at formerly colonised countries and histories. India and Africa are considered as antithetical to Western societies and as the seat of what is exotic (especially India) and vile (especially Africa). These stereotypes are propagated by the media as Nazareth implies in *General*, when Charlie asks D’Cruz, who is mesmerised by New York’s high-rise buildings, “Don’t you have any buildings where you come from? Oh, I forgot, it was Africa” (139). When D’Cruz says, “Blast it, do you think that people in Africa live in a jungle?” Charlie responds, “Sorry! I only know what I’ve seen in films” (139). These stereotypes contribute to the gloom of exile/migration, as Isegawa shows in *Chronicles* through Mugezi’s discomfort with his first Amsterdam lover, Eva Jazz, who considers Africa “a Pandora’s box of horrors and shames best left untouched and condemned to the depredations of dust, termites, cobwebby neglect and calculated silence” (462). In such situations, the exile/immigrant ends up as a kind of spokesperson for Africa who has to defend it against the accusations of the West. In his love relationship with a Dutch woman called Magdelein De Meer, Mugezi starts to resent

having to defend the whole African continent, or the whole of Uganda, or the entire black race. I refused to become a self-styled ambassador, the eternal explainer of Amin's or Obote's or some other tyrant's atrocities, as though I were partly to blame. I was supposed to explain droughts and famines and the atrocities of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and other pirates with a smile on my face. After all, hadn't I been taken in by these white people at this or that party? (490)

The smile Mugezi is expected to wear on his face is a call to him to be servile: as an immigrant, he dare not be critical. Western racist discourse that sees Africa in negative terms as a monolithic failure abounding with ills and horrors is meant to remind him of his supposed racial inferiority and demand that he be eternally grateful to the Netherlands for taking him away from what Joseph Conrad calls "the heart of darkness" in his novel of the same title, and ushering him into *the* civilized world, the land of light. In other words, what Nazareth shows the US as doing to D'Cruz through Charlie is what Isegawa shows the Netherlands as doing to Mugezi through De Meer's bigoted countrymen and women. In *Chronicles*, racism is institutionalized, for immigrants are confined to a congested ghetto where crime abounds and policing is lax. Mugezi observes that in the ghetto

[i]f burglars struck at night, you had to hold on, hoping that the wardens would come in time to lend a hand. If you got held up by rough youths or some deranged junkie, you had to rely on your own resources. If you were stalked or terrorized by shadowy characters, you had to work out your own defence system. Consequently, quite a few people here carried knives. (453)

And in the ghetto there are fights, particularly between drugged youths or youth groups. This state of affairs is partly a result of police indifference:

The police never lifted a finger. Police policy was to arrive after the flames had died down, or rather when one of the combatants had been knocked out cold or killed. They never concerned themselves with threats: if somebody threatened to harm you, the police never did a thing till he honoured his threat. And many criminals were released as fast as they were arrested. (457)

I suggest that this indifference of the police be seen as a racist denigration of immigrants' lives. The police do not consider immigrants as people who require police protection; so they leave the ghetto to its own resources – something they do not do in other neighbourhoods where the white Dutch live. It is for the same reason that noise levels in the ghetto go unregulated, so much that if “a neighbour was disturbed by noise, all he could do was return the favour by organising a party and making as much noise as possible” since “police never looked into such matters” (453). Mamdani reports something similar to this in his memoir *From Citizen to Refugee* which recounts his experience of racism in a British refugee camp in Kensington. Here, Asians are called ‘wogs’ and treated like helpless refugees, even those who carry British passports. Things get from bad to worse in this camp; eventually, camp dwellers are asked to carry cards and wear badges clearly marking them as refugees. When four white people come to the camp and try to beat three Asians, the camp personnel just stand and watch. A huge fight erupts as the Asians try to defend themselves, leaving one of them wounded (127). Like in Isegawa’s Amsterdam ghetto, the bodies of the Asians in this camp do not matter; they can be destroyed without much ado. This racist treatment of exiles, among other factors, for instance the desire to see the landscape or participate in sociocultural rituals of one’s childhood or youth, makes them look at the homeland with new eyes of affection so that although it “wasn’t heaven” it begins to seem “like it was,” as Christine observes in *Tropical Fish* (132). In other words, characters’ occupations of foreign locales inevitably lead them to consciously or unconsciously revisit their relationship

with the place they have left or lost. This re-visiting opens up a space where diasporic consciousness becomes possible. In the next section, I explore the nature of this consciousness and how it is lived/performed in the narratives under examination.

### **Depictions of Diasporic Consciousness and the Question of Home**

The fiction I examine in this section depicts a diasporic consciousness among Ugandan Asians and Ugandan refugees wherever they reside after being expelled from or on fleeing the country. I am talking of ‘diasporic consciousness’ following Rogers Brubaker’s suggestion that “rather than speak of ‘a diaspora’ or ‘the diaspora’ as an entity, an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact, it may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on” and to treat diaspora “as a category of practice, project, claim and stance, rather than a bounded group” (Brubaker 13).<sup>13</sup> This suggestion is pertinent to this discussion because Ugandans who live across borders do not necessarily create a diaspora community in the classical sense of the word that Brubaker identifies with three key characteristics. These are: dispersion across state borders; an “orientation to a real or imagined ‘homeland’ as an authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty”; and “boundary-maintenance, involving the preservation of a distinctive identity vis-à-vis a host society (or societies)” (5-6).<sup>14</sup> Approaching Ugandan literature from the vantage point of diaspora is important for as Brian Keith Axel observes, “the study of diasporas opens up new points of investigation into nationalism, at the same time demanding that we rethink belonging within a global context” (411). If it is true that “language, religion, kinship, the aura of family rituals, and common experiences in school or work-place function invariably as the organic bonds of

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<sup>13</sup> Anand Singh’s observation that people of Indian origin are “as different as their religious and customary practices [make] them” (10) makes the notion of an Indian diaspora a little misleading and validates Brubaker’s suggestion that rather than talk of a diaspora as something definite, we need to talk of a diasporic claim or practice or stance.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of how different scholars like Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Robin Cohen, and James Clifford understand the concept ‘diaspora’, see Floya Anthias.

community” as Epifanio San Juan, Jr (69) avers, then it is interesting to explore how the notion of diaspora relates to these aspects of identity in the Ugandan context. In this section, therefore, I explore how experiences of displacement as portrayed in Ugandan literature affirm or disturb Esan Juan Jr’s formulation.

In Ugandan literature, the question of diaspora can be discussed from two perspectives: Uganda as a new domicile for dispersed people (in which case the Asians in the country constitute an Asian diapora) or Uganda as the source of people migrating to other lands like the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the United States, where they form or attempt to form a Ugandan diaspora. In the discussion that follows, I touch briefly on the first point; for the most part, however, my concern lies with the second. The works I examine in this section deal with key concerns of diaspora discourses some of which Peter Simatei identifies as “the politics of home and belonging in displacement, the ambivalence of the postcolonial situation, the polyvalent nature of cultural identities and histories within it, and the co-existence of a multiplicity of cultural cartographies associated with it” (“Diasporic Memories” 59).

In Siddiqi’s novels, some characters are portrayed as living in the hope of one day returning to India, which they consider their true home. The protagonist-narrator of *Feast*, the Brat, observes that for Mohanji, Pearl

was never home, but it was the homeland. Real home was always India, Bharat. He had always asserted that as soon as he had enough money, he would return to Bharat. He’d said this for forty years. But in the Mohanji way of thinking, one could never have enough money. And he would never have left small town Pearl had it not been for his forced expulsion. (51)

In *Bombay*, it is Naranbhai who hopes to return to India one day:

Naranbhai's grandfather had come to East Africa as a middle-aged man. It had been a short-term strategy, and the family myth still prevailed. They were here to make money, gather up the gains and go back to India to live like kings. Naranbhai had been brought up to think of East Africa as a foreign land, where he was supposed to make his fortune and quit. And, two generations on, Naranbhai still bought into the myth of someday returning home. (48)

This hope of a homeland to which the Indians dispersed to East Africa hope/yearn to return makes them a diasporic people.<sup>15</sup> In *Bombay*, one of Siddiqi's characters speaks of Asians "living in small town East Africa and behaving exactly as though they were in some Indian village" (248). In an essay entitled "The Diaspora in Indian Culture", eminent novelist Amitav Ghosh attributes this to the East African Indians' practice of going back to India to get brides (75).<sup>16</sup> In Siddiqi, the Asians are portrayed as reproducing Indian culture and value systems in Uganda in various aspects like marriage customs, culinary choices, religious belief systems, and fashion trends, to mention but a few. In both *Feast* and *Bombay* this reproduction of India is so effectively done that "Sunday evenings on the High Street [in Kampala] made the place look like it was somewhere in India" because of hundreds of sari-clad women (*Bombay* 50). Alibhai-Brown also invokes this memory when she writes:

Even on an ordinary Sunday, on the streets you felt like you were in Bombay (one of the excuses used by the odious President Amin when he announced our expulsion), with

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<sup>15</sup> It follows that the experience of displacement does not necessarily lead to a diasporic consciousness unless it is accompanied by a longing for home or the homeland. Martin Sökefeld makes this point thus: "[T]he dispersal of migrants from a certain country does not necessarily engender an imagination of community. Migrants do not necessarily form a diaspora but they *become* a diaspora by developing a new imagination of community, even many years after the migration took place" (267, italics in original).

<sup>16</sup> In an article on Ugandan Goans, Jessica Kuper attributes this practice to the colonial administration's policy of giving government clerks and their families six months' paid leave home every four years which enabled them to travel to and reconnect with the motherland (245). The narrator of Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle* alludes to this when he is describing the circumstances under which his father got married during one such leave (6).

Hindi music blaring out, people dressed in their best clothes parading up and down the two main streets, making eyes at each other and allowing themselves to look for illicit pleasures if only in their heads. (64)

In Siddiqi's novels, Indians live in small communities centred on religious denominations – Hinduism for the Hindus, different varieties of Islam, and Catholicism. There is religious bickering that reminds the Indians in Pearl of the 1947 Partition of India. Marriage ceremonies are held according to Indian customs; for Hindus, there are Pandits in charge of such solemnities. Buildings are usually named after Indian cities; in *Bombay* we have “Delhi Gardens, Poona Gardens, Bangalore Gardens, Mysore Gardens, Madras Gardens, Benares Gardens, [and] Calcutta Gardens” (68), not forgetting the gardens that give the novel its title: “BOMBAY GARDENS – *residences for decent peoples only – Rats not allowed*” (47, capitalization and italics in original). Indian food and drinks also play a big role in reproducing the mother continent in Uganda/Pearl as Dan Ojwang shows. Drawing on Arjun Appadurai's articles “Gastro-politics in Hindu South Asia” and “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India”, Ojwang reads the portrayal of food in East African Asian writing as serving a particular semiotic function. To him, food in the writing can be considered as “a statement of diasporic nationalism, an index of loss and nostalgia, an occasion for the enactment of cultural difference, a leveller of social distinctions, and a means for conviviality” (“East Pig” 80). In *Feast*, Indian food is portrayed as the “uniter of all classes” (47), for all Indians irrespective of class, profession and education level take South Asian dishes. In *Bombay*, food is portrayed as a sign of good neighbourliness and Indian civility while at the same time “serving as a preliminary investigation of new tenants” (88). Mrs Naranbhai welcomes a new tenant, Shahbanu Hussein, with a metal thali loaded “with numerous little bowls bearing ample portions of the regular Naranbhai lunch. Dal, vegetable curries of three different kinds, rice, chapatties, chutneys, pickles, [and] papards” (87). Mrs Naranbhai expects something small in return (a cup

of tea, for instance) from Hussein according to Indian civility, but she gets nothing. “Can’t expect you to offer me tea or anything,” she says as she excuses herself to leave on realizing that nothing is forthcoming:

You have, after all, just moved in. My mother would never even take a glass of water in a Muslim house, but we are different. As long as it’s not meat or fish or other dead flesh, we eat anything, anywhere. Must leave you to enjoy your lunch. Please send the girl to the house if you need more of anything, like prickles . . . (90)

Hussein is enthusiastic about the offer, making Mrs Naranbhai wonder:

It was customary to offer second helpings to guests, even if they weren’t eating at your house. But no person of good breeding was expected to take up the offer and appear greedy for more. So Mrs Naranbhai was truly amazed that Shahbanu, on such a short acquaintance could jump so eagerly at seconds. Bad form!” (90)

What Siddiqi is doing in this passage, as elsewhere in the book as I will demonstrate shortly, is to show how etiquette surrounding food produces an idea of a well-bred Indian woman and how this woman should carry herself wherever she is, even if it is thousands of miles away from India. Mrs Naranbhai expects Hussein to return her plates as soon as possible, but she does not: two weeks elapse before they are returned, and when eventually they are, they are “all empty, badly rinsed and untidely piled on the tray” making her conclude, “[p]oor show, very poor show,” by which she means that Hussein is ill-bred (94). Besides, Hussein does not cook as she only feeds on tea and biscuits – another indication of her ill-breeding as far as Mrs Naranbhai is concerned. The point Siddiqi is making through Mrs Naranbhai’s chastisement of Hussein is that food is not an ‘innocent’ product: it is closely tied to a certain idea that diasporic Asians have of

India and Indianness. In Siddiqi's novels, the waning of diasporic consciousness is registered through the waning of the attention Asians place on Indian food, particularly after the 1972 expulsion that forces them to flee to the UK and other countries. Some of the expelled people take to new culinary practices in these new domiciles. In *Bombay*, this change in culinary habits is nicely captured in a dialogue between Naranbhai and Bimla as they expect the visit of his three sons, their wives and children. When Bimla tells him that she will not cook because his daughters-in-law will bring the food for the day, Naranbhai protests because he does not like their food. To him, his second daughter-in-law, a Muslim girl from Kenya called Salma, makes "lousy dishes" that he cannot eat. Alison, his oldest daughter-in-law, cooks what he calls "[w]hite food" – sandwiches and nothing else, for she is Irish. And his youngest daughter-in-law, a Goan Catholic called Ingrid, makes vegetarian dishes that he does not trust because "[v]egetarian it may be, but she will have used the same pots to cook meat and fish and God knows what else. My old mother would have had a fit." To which Bimla replies: "Times have changed. And you know that your own sons now eat beef and chicken – not in front of you, but they still do. You must let go of these stupid ideas" (155). If we accept Ojwang's view that food is "a statement of diasporic nationalism", then we need to read Naranbhai sons' assimilation into a hitherto taboo culture as an indication of a waning of diasporic consciousness and indeed a loss of what we may call a 'Hindu Pearl' identity. This reading is supported by the fact that some characters crave for Ugandan food once they are in exile. For instance, Alibhai-Brown observes: "When we came to Britain, what we wanted more than anything else was *matoke* [savory green bananas which is part of the staple diet in Uganda], *mogo* [cassava] and mangoes, whatever the cost" (*No Place* 123). As Ojwang further observes, this points to the fact that food is "a way through which the expelled communities maintain a nostalgic connection with a place for which they have an ambivalent attachment" ("Eat Pig" 80).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This nostalgia is best captured in Alibhai-Brown's book, *The Settler's Cookbook: A Memoir of Love, Migration, and Food* which narrates the history of East African Asians from the vantage point of the kitchen/dining table by providing dozens of recipes each associated with or resulting from a particular experience or situation.

Besides, it is implied in Siddiqi's novels that the expulsion of Indians from Uganda destroys the myth that India is the true homeland as none of the expelled people returns to it. Siddiqi makes this point at the end of *Feast* through Zarine's comment:

The Indians always said they dreamed of going back to India – well here was their chance! But it's a funny thing that not a single one of them actually returned to India – they ended up in all sorts of unlikely places, but no India. Instead, they made their Indias and Pakistans in Vancouver and in Bradford; from Chicago to Barcelona they live in a fictitious sub- continental haven of their own making. The Guru now has his temples in temperate zones. He wears an anorak over his dhoti as he clears away snow from the temple steps, while the Maulana now faces the reality of the 24-hour fast when Ramadan falls during summer in northern Norway. And their disciples go on dreaming about returning to “The Homeland” – this year, next year – in five years' time. When the children are settled. When we've saved more money. When . . . when . . . when . . . (335)

In fact, for some of the characters like Naranbhai, the mythic place of return ceases to be India but becomes Uganda – an indication that the experience of exile has changed Pearl from the host country to home. This is as it should be, for Pearl is where Naranbhai was born and where he grew up. Paradoxically, therefore, exile has the uncanny effect of transforming Uganda from the perception of it as a temporary abode into the homeland to which the Asians desire to return.<sup>18</sup> But returning is not an easy thing: the country hosting the exiles/immigrants with time gets its hold on them and becomes alluring, making it hard to leave. In Baingana's short story “Lost in Los Angeles”, there are characters who keep postponing their return to Uganda:

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<sup>18</sup> Jessica Kuper makes a similar observation when she writes: “To many Goans in Kampala, the frame of reference was frequently Goa. In England or in Canada the frame of reference has become Kampala or Uganda, or East Africa” (69).

We are here in America, and we all need our reasons to stay, despite our vows not to die here, oh no! Alone in an apartment where your body may rot for days and no one will miss you? Here, where no one knows you even exist? Imagine ending life in a retirement home, where you have to *pay* someone to look after you, as if you have no children, no family? What a disgrace! We are going back home in two years; home is home. Five years maybe. No, for us, our kids have to get into college first, you know the schools at home. When I finish my house; when I've set up my business; when I get the UN job I've been promised. That's the only way to survive, you know, to get paid in dollars. If, when, if, when ... (Baingana 129, italics in original)

In the above passage, there is a difference in the desire to return home captured by these two Ugandan groups in different locales. For the Ugandan Asians, dislocation from Uganda to the UK complicates the notion of home: is home Uganda or India? For the young Asians, the possibility of ever returning to Uganda or India recedes further and further as they consolidate their place in the UK through new cultural practices that are different from those in Pearl. For Ugandans in the US, the home to return to is clearly Uganda, but the return journey is postponed again and again as they set new goals to achieve before they can make it back there. Those like Christine, who eventually return to Uganda, discover that the home they remember – a memoryscape that Salman Rushdie calls “not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands” (10) – is not the land they find. Through Christine, Baingana captures the challenges of settling-in that come with having lived in a different locale, moreover one with certain advantages like modern technologies and security:

At the taxi park [in Kampala], the jostling hawkers, crying babies, and jangling music mirrored the turmoil in her mind. She wasn't able to read during the *matatu* ride back from Entebbe. There was a lot to untangle, to make sense of, including

why on earth she was troubled. She was home, right? She felt as if she had to make some sort of decision, but about what? She couldn't turn around and leave, just like that. Go back to the States with her tail between her legs. Then what? This was ridiculous; she didn't have to leave. She pressed her eyes closed to keep the tears back. (168)

This disappointment at arrival in the country that exiles/immigrants had romanticized is understandable because the country they had carried in their minds/memories does not match reality. In Baingana, it is implied that the returning immigrant or exile needs to undergo a process of readjustment in order to be able to feel at home again. I would like to call this process 'reverse translation', because returnees have to relearn what they had unlearned and unlearn what they had learned while they were away. This relearning of what was unlearned and unlearning of what was learned indicates how entangling the exile-home relationship is for each locale makes particular demands on the person. Baingana provides a good example here – the English accent. I have already noted that when Christine goes to the US, she has to unlearn how to pronounce and articulate words and to take on an American elocution for her to be understood. When she returns to Uganda, she has to unlearn the American accent and slip back into speech accents she had had before leaving Uganda. The passage below gives a case in point:

*“Awo, ku Queenzi.”* She forced herself to pronounce “Queens” in what she and her sisters called a *maalo*, village-ish, back when they were kids. But it wasn't just a different pronunciation; it had become a *kiganda* word, like how money was *esente*, from the word “cent.” If she pronounced ‘Queens’ properly, the driver wouldn't understand, or would refuse to understand what to him was an affected way of speaking. She, luckily or not, had been to a good school, where she had been taught to speak English properly, that is, like an Englishman, which, of course, was impossible for her to do. Not that the English

themselves spoke their language in one “proper” way. Nor was it theirs alone anymore. English was no one’s and everyone’s now. Or so the unloved step-children to the English tribe insisted. Oh, what tangled webs we weave. Christine smiled. Wrong quote, wrongly quoted! The words and accents in all their wrongness and rightness were the sounds of home. They made sense here, and she understood how, in a way no foreigner could. (170-171, italics in original)

The use of localized English words (Queenzi for Queens, Leeke for Lake, and cente for cent) signals, as Chielozona Eze observes, “a birth of a new world arising from the contamination and mixing of different worlds” (124). It also highlights the notion of negotiation that comes with speaking from particular locations and with particular experiences and grammars. While exile/immigration usually widens a person’s vision by providing a plurality of vision as Said (366) has taught us, it can paradoxically become a burden when exiles/immigrants eventually return home, unless they have to undergo a new translation of their already translated selves. Baingana further captures this through the portrayal of the tension between Christine and her mother. In the US, Christine feels like a young girl as she learns everything anew, including how to cross the streets. When she returns home, she is considered an old maid because she is 29 and unmarried. Besides, she has to live under the disciplinary gaze of her mother. On the evening when she arrives at Entebbe International Airport, Christine is moved by what she sees:

“How dark the sky is!” Christine leaned back to take it all in. The sky was spread open like an endless scroll, the stars mysterious yet meaningful writing. “Just look at all those stars! You can actually see the stars!”

Mama and Patti looked at each other and laughed. “*Ahaa, nga* you’re romantic these days,” Patti said.

But Christine couldn't help herself. "And that . . . oh, I remember that perfumy smell . . . what is that?"

"Maybe those flowers over there, the pale blue ones, lilacs?" Patti pointed to a large bush whose delicate flowers glowed faintly in the dark. Their sweet smell wafted by again with a change of wind.

"I hadn't even noticed," Mama said. "Yes, they do smell nice."

"Nice? Not nice." Some other new word, Christine thought to herself. (149-150)

This passage underlines a number of aspects about the dialogic interaction between the returnee and the people who never left. First, returnees are able to notice things that people who never left take for granted. Because Christine is coming from smog-filled Los Angeles, seeing a starry night is an experience she cannot help but notice. To her mother and sister, she has become "romantic", that is to say, she is responding to the world around her in a deep, sentimental manner quite uncommon in Uganda. But something new has happened to them as well: her mother has admitted that she had never paid attention to the smell of the lilacs and can now appreciate that they indeed smell nice. In other words, the returnee has introduced a new aesthetic. It is in this dialogic interaction, Baingana suggests, that the returnee and the people who never left will find a new grammar as they compare their experiences and 'cross-pollinate' each other. This relates to the observation George Robertson and his companions make:

The home we return to is never the home we left, and the baggage we bring back with us will – eventually – alter it forever. The assemblage of memories, images, tastes and objects that clings to our return will mark the place of that return. Travel is corrosive. (4-5)

I suggest that the word ‘corrosive’ should itself be translated to mean something that renews/regenerates even as it eats away lifestyles/perspectives/attitudes with which it comes into contact.

It should be pointed out that dialogic interactions between exile and home are not limited to characters like Christine who undertake physical returns. To the contrary, the most frequent of returns are the psychic ones as exiles/immigrants keep remembering home by seeing their new places using the grammar of their homelands. *Chronicles* provides several examples of this. I have already shown how Mugezi responds to events around him through ‘Ugandan eyes,’ that is to say, for anything to mean something to him, he evokes Uganda. He is aware of this, for when he escapes from his Action II hosts to make a call in an Amsterdam booth, he observes:

As the phone rang I could hear flies buzzing, jumping off the pictures awaiting my fund-raising saliva in the morning and colliding with each other. The vision of blue-green flies and the small black ones colonising carrion, shit and putrescence filled the booth with a cadaverous stench and made me nauseated. *Alas, I had left nothing behind. I had buried nothing in the clouds. I had brought it all with me, coded secretly, gnawing away in the dark like the virus that had killed Aunt Lwandeka.* I felt beleaguered, encumbered, enervated. (450, my emphasis)

Yet, this ever-present Uganda is the country in which he suffers terribly at the hands of his brutal parents, tyrannical priests, and the Infernal Trinity (the three female soldiers who rape him) and where he has lost the people he loves – his Grandma (to arson), his Grandpa (to civil war), his uncle, Kawayida, and his Aunt, Lwandeka (both to HIV/AIDS). To understand this paradox, we need to keep in mind that Mugezi uses the strategies he deployed to defeat dictators in Uganda – cunning and wiliness – to beat racist Europe. This in itself means that at all times he sees his present situation against the background of his past. For instance, he obtains a forged passport so

that he can become a citizen of the West so as to access the privileges that come with this citizenship. He pays over a thousand dollars and becomes a John Kato – a double of “an ant going by the same name” somewhere in Britain “unaware of the existence of a twin brother negotiating the wetness of the Dutch polders” (483). This unscrupulous subjectivity that Mugezi takes on is evidence of Uganda’s hold on him not only in his choice of a Ugandan name (Kato), but most importantly in his discipleship of General Amin, whom he refers to as “the godfather” who taught him a lesson or two on how to fight his adversaries.

Through Mugezi’s attachment to Uganda, Isegawa seems to suggest that however insecure or dictatorial one’s home may be, it remains ever-present in one’s consciousness. The intensity of this attachment is revealed by his joy when he hears someone say “Aallo?” when dialling a Ugandan contact shortly after escaping from the hotel where he had been accommodated by Action II – the necrophilic organisation which wants him to fundraise for its projects. “Yes, it was the flat, Lugandanized English of our people,” he enthuses:

I felt like jumping up and knocking myself out on the booth ceiling. Little Uganda, that cocoon of Ugandans in exile, was calling right in the heart of white Holland! This was what returning Indians must have felt when talking to people in Gujarati or Urdu in the middle of Kampala.

*‘Osibye otya nnyabo?’* (How are you, madam?)

*“Bulungi seebo”* (All right, sir) the voice replied. How sweet it sounded in the cold night air! The rest of the conversation, and the introduction, and the inquiries about where I could rent a room for some time, occurred in a dream. I could already see the flushed faces of my hosts on discovering that I had disappeared, especially since they hadn’t a clue that I hated what they did, and how they did it. I left the booth laughing, the taste of revenge burning like liquor in my breast, the prospect of staying with people from my country lending wings to my limbs. (450, italics in original)

This passage shows the sheer delight Mugezi experiences at reconnecting with Uganda via Little Uganda, a name that mirrors the desire of exiles/immigrants to remain members of the Ugandan nation, albeit from outside its borders. Notice that it is Little Uganda that offers him a passage to freedom from the grip of Action II who footed the bill to transport him to and accommodate him in Amsterdam. This is a good example of transnational citizenship – a conjoining of two disparate identities into one, the way different melodies are synchronized in music to enrich a piece of music. It is true that these characters are in Amsterdam, but it is not only the Dutch space they occupy: they also inhabit some Ugandan space through their language (Luganda) and Lugandanized English. They also make a kind of Ugandan community albeit one dogged by suspicions because of the different backgrounds of the members constituting it. For instance, there are people who had fled Amin's terror, those who were Amin and Obote soldiers/torturers, those who had registered as Sudanese citizens in order to get easy access to Holland because of the civil war in southern Sudan, and Ghanaians and Nigerians who "masqueraded as Ugandans, or at least had done so when they first came here to ask for political asylum in the seventies" (455). I suggest that this constitution of Little Uganda in Amsterdam be seen as the exiles' message of defiance to political leaders in Uganda that no regime, military or civilian, can take away their Ugandan identity. In the same vein, the performance of a Ugandan identity on Dutch soil is a demonstration of how futile it is for nation-states to attempt a construction of a singular, homogeneous, horizontal national identity. It is for this reason that Samir Dayal has observed that diasporic consciousness dismantles "the imagined singularity of national identity" (47), for by always remembering and re-remembering home, one lives a contrapuntal double consciousness. Ugandans in Amsterdam take on a hyphenated identity as they occupy the liminal space between the two nations, reinventing themselves as they negotiate the Dutch polders under new names (Mugezi as John Kato, for instance) or new circumstances (Obote and Amin soldiers/torturers becoming family men) or new nationalities (some Ugandans registering

themselves as Sudanese). In this liminal space, binary oppositions like home/exile, Uganda/Holland become pointless as it increasingly becomes clear that people are not *either* Ugandan *or* Dutch, but *both* Ugandan and Dutch.

The works examined in this chapter suggest that it is sometimes in a foreign country where people discover their deep albeit ambivalent attachment to their nations. In the diasporic moment made possible by exile/immigration, a space opens up in which new revelations become possible, revelations that would have remained hidden had one not left one's country. Mugezi has had a hard time in Uganda as I have shown on several occasions, but this does not blind him to the fact that abysmal though it is, Uganda has something valuable to offer him, the gift of language for example. He also appreciates what it is to be uprooted from one's cultural moorings, hence his invocation of an Indian in Uganda speaking Gujarati to somebody in India. In other words, it is in an Amsterdam booth where the experience of displacement (and the joy of reconnection, however momentary this may be) becomes crystal clear to him. True, there are also characters who choose to make new homes without carrying the baggage of the old ones, Bimla being a good example. But even in this case, Uganda still asserts its hold on these characters in one way or another. I have already mentioned that at the end of *Bombay*, Kamla takes Baby to Bimla's home after she is convinced beyond any doubt that Baby is 'Mad' Girl Kirti's daughter. The fact that Baby is introduced to Bimla at this particular moment when Naranbhai has just died, points to the fact that Pearl still has its hold on these British Ugandan Asians, including those who would rather efface this history from their lives. Put differently, the 'discovery' of Baby as Kirti's daughter as the novel closes shows the open-ended nature of identities in the sense that new connections between the present and the past can be established any time. At the moment when Bimla's Ugandan connection as embodied by her husband seems to have been severed by his death, a new connection reappears in Baby who turns out to be her step-grand-daughter.

## Conclusion

The writers I have examined above have woven narratives that show how much they have learned from their experiences of exile, immigration and dislocation. Siddiqi has enriched the portrayal of exile and diasporic consciousness by setting her narratives in a tri-continental world of three temporalities thereby locating the genealogies of her characters in three countries (India, Uganda and the UK) on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe). Isegawa has given readers a *bildungsroman* that covers sixty years of Ugandan history and ends with insights into Little Uganda in the Netherlands where his protagonist, Mugezi, prepares to settle. And Baingana has captured, in detail and with nuance, the challenges returning migrants face as they readjust to the rhythm of home or what they once called home. In doing all this, each of the writers has thrown light on the question of how literary texts imagine or reimagine the nation. In all the works, the nation is portrayed as being larger than its borders hence the notion of the trans/national that I have invoked throughout this study.

## Chapter Six

### **Conclusion: On the Dialogical Nature of (Trans)national Identities**

Born in Bombay, raised in Mombasa, married in Kampala, educated in London, worked in Tehran, lived in New York, then Stuttgart, then Hong Kong, and died in Vancouver. Where was this person actually from? Where does anyone live these days?

*(The Feast of the Nine Virgins, 1)*

This thesis set out to examine how selected Ugandan literary texts portray constructions, reconstructions, and negotiations of national identities as they intersect with other identities like race, ethnicity, gender, religious denomination, and political affiliation. It covers one hundred and seven years of Ugandan writing, starting with Ham Mukasa and Sir Apolo Kagwa's travelogue *Uganda's Katikiro in England* (1904) and ending with Beatrice Lamwaka's short stories "Butterfly Dreams" and "Bottled Memory" (2011). The writers come from different regions of the country and belong to different races, ethnic groups, genders and religious denominations, and hold different political views. This heterogeneous composition inevitably informs the way national identity is negotiated in the texts I cover in this study. The fact that Uganda is one of many nations further complicates the negotiation of national identity as Ugandans come into contact with other nations through travel and cultural exchanges.

The study follows a chronological approach in the discussion of how national identity is negotiated in different epochs, starting with the early colonial period (1900 to 1930s) through decolonization struggles (1940s to 1950s) and independence (1962) to the post-independence period which is heuristically discussed under two general labels: the emergent postcolony (the 1960s) and the tumultuous period from Idi Amin's rise to power in 1971 to the publication of

Beatrice Lamwaka's stories which depict an on-going situation – the Lord's Resistance Army's guerrilla war against the government of Uganda. In other words, I cover three generations of Ugandan writing with Ham Mukasa, Sir Apolo Kagwa and Akiki Nyabongo constituting the first generation, Okot p'Bitek and Peter Nazareth the second generation, and Mary Karooro Okurut, Goretti Kyomuhendo and Susan Kiguli the third generation. Beatrice Lamwaka can be included in this generation or she can be said to belong to a fourth generation since she is about ten years younger than any of these others.

The study underscores the place history occupies in the negotiation of national identities. In fact in the selected texts, one of the most pervasive issues tackled are the colonial roots of the tension between races (especially blacks versus Asians) and ethnic groups (especially the Baganda versus the rest of Uganda and southern Ugandans versus northern Ugandans). The writers locate the violent regimes of Milton Apollo Obote and Idi Amin in the colonial history of Uganda as they show particular characters carrying out pogroms against particular races and ethnic groups, for instance the General's expulsion of Asians (Nazareth and Siddiqi) and his murder of soldiers belonging to deposed president Opolo's ethnic group (Okurut). Even in texts published as late as 2011 (Beatrice Lamwaka's short stories), ethnic tensions are portrayed as still being prevalent as southern Ugandans act somewhat insensitively to the suffering of northern Ugandans as shown by the schoolgirls' irresponsible act of nicknaming Ayat "Kony" because she is a survivor of notorious rebel leader Joseph Kony's captivity, and "mad girl" because she acts strangely towards the other schoolgirls. Safe in their southern homes, these girls are not interested in establishing the link between Ayat's strange way of acting and the trauma that the shock of abduction has caused her.

My study reveals that national identity is always in dialogic tension with other identities. In the texts set during the colonial time (*Uganda's Katikiro in England* and *Africa Answers Back*), I demonstrate how issues of national identity are at stake as colonized Ugandans go about carving out a Ugandan national space within the imperial order of things. My study contends that

protagonists in these texts are nationalists in their own right in the sense that they desire to see Uganda transformed into a modern nation while at the same time retaining its mores. I suggest that any reading of these early texts must pay attention to the imperial situation under which writers like Ham Mukasa/Apolo Kagwa and Akiki Nyabongo operated against which they negotiate their pride in their Ugandan roots which the colonial machinery (the school, the church, and the library among others) set out to spite as savage and heathen. While it is true that these writers and the characters they create are in one way or another complicit in colonialism, I argue that it is also true that they work within the colonial system to challenge and disrupt colonial discourses through writing Uganda-centric books like Kagwa's *The Kings of Buganda*. My study therefore questions the tendency to demonize these early writers and the characters they create as collaborators who should have no place in the nationalist historiography of the Ugandan nation. I suggest that there is need to revisit this misleading practice of dividing people who lived at the cusp of colonial conquest and/or in the early colonial period into collaborators and resisters because it blots out the contributions they made in laying the foundation of modern Uganda, besides flattening out the complex conflicts and tensions they had to negotiate in their sociocultural and political lives.

The study shows that the writers generally display a high level of ethical responsibility in rendering Uganda's traumatic history into fiction. Where they see racialism, tribalism, sexism and religious factionalism, they portray it with calmness without apportioning blame to races or ethnic groups or sexes but to individual perpetrators. Perhaps the best illustration of this is shown in the discussion of the way Nazareth and Siddiqi portray the expulsion. They desist from blaming black Ugandans and insist on placing the responsibility for the tragic event at the door of Idi Amin himself, at whom they vent their anger by portraying him as a buffoon. They also locate the expulsion in the colonial history of the nation (Nazareth) and in the insensitive practices of some sections of the Asian community, for instance racial prejudice against black people (Siddiqi).

The writers I studied show that characters who espouse exclusive identity politics are often dangerous, so the cultural purists, the patriarchs and those who are willing to perpetuate ethnic violence are portrayed in these narratives to show the destruction they wreak. Some Asians' insistence on cultural purity and *izzat* (family honour) in *The Feast of the Nine Virgins*, for instance, is portrayed as laying the ground for Idi Amin's expulsion of them from Uganda.

Similarly, some patriarchs are portrayed as causing immense pain to their kin, for instance Mohanji to his daughter, the Bechari Widow (Siddiqi) and Gora's father to her and her mother (Okurut). Some even go as far as battering their wives or even murdering them (Kiguli and Kyomuhendo). As for the characters that perpetuate ethnic violence, Okurut shows how costly this can be in human lives through the portrayal of Duduma and Opolo both of whom massacre soldiers who belong to ethnic groups that they consider enemies. Through these portrayals, writers call for a different politics based on respect for people irrespective of their race, ethnic group, gender, or political convictions.

In other words, the study depicts Ugandan writers as being interested in futures that enable characters to build something new from the debris that is left by tensions between races, ethnic groups and religious factions and by sexist practices and the consequences of war. I show that in the texts, the writers present characters who seek connectivity not racial or ethnic insularity. To these characters, a person's racial or ethnic group or religious denomination is not a barrier to be maintained but a bridge to allow dialogue. There are several examples to illustrate this point but three suffice. In *The General Is Up*, Kapa stands by D'Costa and even accompanies him to the airport when he is expelled well aware that this act of commiseration could cause him grave harm. In *Bombay Gardens*, Mama Safia, an African, brings up an Asian child, Baby, in post-expulsion Uganda as though she were her own child, showing that while Amin is racist, there are many Ugandans who are not. And in *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War*, Father adopts Bahati as his son despite the fact that he is a Tanzanian, not a Ugandan. Rather than emphasize differences between groups of people, the writers suggest, there is need to

underline the similarities between them while at the same time respecting diversity. This way, people can “arise and walk”, as Achille Mbembe puts it (“What’s Postcolonial Thinking?” n. pag.). By this phrase, I understand Mbembe to mean that rather than perpetuate injustice and regimes of death through retaliatory missions against former oppressors, former victims of repression should work towards the building of a new and better society where every member is respected and valued, that is to say, a society where “person-to-person dialogue becomes possible and replaces commands” (n. pag.). Indeed, we see many characters arise and walk even in hard situations like colonialism (Mukasa, Kagwa and Nyabongo’s Mujungu), war (Okurut’s Mama and Nkwanzi, Lamwaka’s Ayat and Lamunu, and Kyomuhendo’s Lendu woman and Father), and exile (Baingana’s Christine and Isegawa’s Mugezi). The inclusion of Mugezi in this list needs some qualification because the narrative strategy Isegawa uses – constructing Mugezi as an anti-hero – is susceptible to being misread. The fact that nothing good comes out of Mugezi’s revenge missions but pain is Isegawa’s way of calling for a different politics not based on revenge and vindication but on reconciliation and reconnection. Mugezi more or less reaches this realization while in Amsterdam. Rather than start revenge attacks on the women with whom he has unfulfilling love relationships, for instance, he decides to let matters lie and start a new life. Even his callous description of the demise of his parents (whom he still calls “the despots”) can be read positively as his twisted way of paying his respects to them since he cares to explain to the reader how they died. So in his own unique style, Mugezi too is portrayed as arising and walking.

The study establishes that women writers are in dialogical engagement with male writers over the way women are written into the narrative of the nation. They insist on their agency and emplot themselves into nationalist discourse as active subjects, not helpless victims, and insist on being treated as equals. In other words, they carry out what Richard Terdiman calls a counter-discourse which he defines as the “discursive systems by which writers and artists [seek] to project an alternative, liberating *newness* against the absorptive capacity of . . . established

discourses” (13, italics in original). In their narratives, crimes against women still take place, for example the rape of Nkwanzi in *The Invisible Weevil*, but these crimes are crimes in their own right: they are not symbolic portrayals of the state of the nation or the nature of its leaders the way they are represented in the work of male writers like Robert Serumaga’s *Return to the Shadows*, Allan Tacca’s *The Silent Rebel* and Magala-Nyago’s *The Rape of the Pearl*. The texts reveal that there are still obstacles that pose a threat to the achievements of women, for instance older women’s perpetuation of the patriarchal order and men’s rampant masculinities evident in the act of rape, but these challenges are portrayed as surmountable. In some of the texts like *The Invisible Weevil*, women take charge of their sexuality and insist on protected sex when they discover that their spouses are unfaithful to them. The abducted girl children in Lamwaka’s short stories are not in a position to negotiate their sexuality, of course; however, they try as much as they can to rise above the tragedy that has befallen them by insisting on going back to school (“Butterfly Dreams”) and resolving to face the ghost of trauma head-on (“Bottled Memory”). At the same time, however, the books by women writers serve to remind the readers that a lot of work still needs to be done for women to find the nation-state a safe place.

The study reveals that Ugandanness is defined by its contradictions, not by neat and definite characteristics. While some scholars of nationalism like Ernest Gellner emphasize commonality in descent, culture and language as major defining characteristics of national identity, the texts show that commonality in suffering tragedies like expulsions, detentions and massacres, and pandemics like HIV/AIDS, is sometimes more productive in establishing the consciousness of belonging to one nation. The writers also suggest that other commonalities transcending descent, language and culture can always be found if the will to find them is there. People belonging to different cultural groups and speaking different languages can still connect with each other because cultures are adoptable and languages are learnable. Kyomuhendo’s *Waiting* provides good examples of this in the friendship between Bahati and Jungu (who teach

each other their languages) and in the village's acceptance of the Lendu woman's marriage to Uncle Kembo.

The study further reveals that Ugandan national identity is an identity still in the making as shown by what happens when characters go into exile. They reconstitute a certain Ugandanness, but one different from what they had experienced in Uganda for it now includes a here and there, a now and then. It is a "contrapuntal" Ugandanness, to borrow a term from Edward Said, which I explained in the previous chapter. This shows that Ugandan national identity is not something already made or fixed. Rather, it is one that is always in construction/constitution, one always in the process of becoming, of evolving, bringing to mind Stuart Hall's suggestion that "instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" ("Cultural Identity" 222). As Ugandan writers are borne across cultures and nations through expulsion and exile, for instance, they become "translated people" who write "translated texts", to use Tina Steiner's phrases, which suggest that as people move across space and time, they acquire or may acquire new experiences and identities as they meet new people and establish new connections. Translating between Uganda and the United Kingdom, and between Uganda and the Netherlands,<sup>1</sup> these texts feature translated Ugandans – those whose national identity is not singular (Ugandan) but plural, that is to say, Ugandan and English (for Siddiqi's characters), and Ugandan and Dutch (for Isegawa's Mugezi). For these characters, to speak of Uganda (their roots) happens contrapuntally with talking about England or the Netherlands (where they have arrived by way of routes), hence Hall's observation that identities are not merely the "return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our 'routes'" ("Who Needs Identity?" 4). This point relates to the epigram with which I started this chapter where one of Siddiqi's narrators in *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* reflects on the multiple layers of

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<sup>1</sup> I owe the phrasing of the first part of this sentence to the title of Tina Steiner's article "Translating between India and Tanzania: Sophia Mustafa's Partial Cosmopolitanism".

contemporary identity formation characterised by various travels/routes which complicate questions of roots.

Hall's phrase – coming-to-terms-with our 'routes' – resonates with the notion upon which I premised my investigation: negotiation. This negotiation, the study shows, comes with different dynamics, some ambivalent. For instance, some of the texts show that Ugandan identity becomes evident in the moment of its loss, that is to say, it is after characters have fled the country and settled in other locales that they discover what Uganda truly means to them. I explain, for instance, how Mugezi's speaking of Luganda in an Amsterdam telephone booth suffuses him with joy as he prepares to join the Ugandan community in the Amsterdam ghetto. In other words, Mugezi reconnects with Uganda at the very moment he has fled it. For Asian Ugandans, I demonstrate how Uganda, which has always been perceived as a transit-zone on the way to India becomes the true home that many characters yearn to return to, for instance Naranbhai, who finds London inhospitable.

One of the themes which cut across most texts is that public and private spaces are intimately linked, and that the disorder we see at the level of the nation-state is mirrored in what goes on in families, in schools, and in religious institutions. Disintegration starts at the family level and spreads to the public sphere: a wife is despised by her husband and compared to a foolish sheep (*Song of Lawino*); women are murdered and taken back to their parents in sacks (*The African Saga* and *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War*), and families are run like tyrannical regimes with children being beaten terribly because of the mistakes they make (*Abyssinian Chronicles*). Schools are also places where asymmetrical power relationships thrive, as I show in my discussion of *Africa Answers Back*, *The Invisible Weevil* and *Abyssinian Chronicles*. The link that some of the writers establish between familial dictatorship, patriarchal domination, and political dictatorship is one of the most significant contributions to the narration of national identities.

In Bakhtinian dialogical spirit, I would like to conclude my study by saying that it is just one voice among many voices on Ugandan literature – past, present and future. There is much still to be done in the area I have explored. For instance, there is a need to study books by Ugandan writers which are set in the countries where they live(d), for example John Ruganda's play *Echoes of Silence* (set in Kenya), and Laban Erapu's *Khayaletu: The Promised Land* (set in South Africa). It would be interesting to explore why these writers set their works in those countries and not in Uganda, and why and how they explore the subjects they do – tribal tension between the Kikuyu and the Luo ethnic groups in Kenya and the wars between the Africans and the Boers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, respectively – to find out if there are 'Ugandan resonances' in these texts. Another area where more voices are needed is the narration of civil wars in Uganda since many fictional works are being published on this subject, for instance Julius Ocwinyo's *Fate of the Banished* (1997), Raoul J. Granqvist's anthology *Michael's Eyes: the War against the Ugandan Child* (2005), poetry collections like Jane Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Farewell* (1994) and Christine Oryema-Lalobo's *No Hearts at Home* (1999), and dozens of short stories by Jackee Budesta Batanda<sup>2</sup> and Juliane Okot Bitek<sup>3</sup> among others. Also, several memoirs have been published by people who participated in some of the civil wars Uganda has suffered, for instance *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Uganda* (Yoweri Kaguta Museveni), *Child Soldier: Fighting for my Life* (China Keitetsi), *Impassioned for Freedom* (Eriya Kategaya), and *Uganda's Revolution 1979-1986: How I saw It* (Pecos Kutesa), among others, all by combatants of the National Resistance Army as it fought Milton Apollo Obote II's government. Charles Mulekwa, a Ugandan dramatist, has shown the way in this area with his doctoral thesis entitled "Performing the Legacy of War in Uganda" which "explores the interaction of performance and warfare in the framework of colonial and post-colonial times" and "examines the works of a range of home-bred, as well as Diaspora Ugandan dramatists such

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<sup>2</sup> For instance "Dance with Me" which won the Commonwealth Short Story Competition 2003-2004 (Batanda 87).

<sup>3</sup> For example "Going Home" which won the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association Short Story Competition 2004 and the BBC Radio Short Story 2005 (Bitek 67).

as Sam Okello, Kenneth Kimuli, Okot p'Bitek, Byron Kawadwa, John Ruganda, George Seremba, Rose Mbowa, Alex Mukulu, and Ntare Mwine” in order to argue that “since Independence from British rule, Uganda has been hostage to a legacy of war – a post-colonial nation spiralling in a state of ruthless power contestations, with violence of various degrees” (vi). More voices like these are needed, for as the motto of King’s College, Budo (one of the schools Sir Apolo Kagwa and Ham Mukasa helped to build) puts it: “Gakyali Mabaga” – a Luganda phrase rendered into English on the school’s website as “So little done, So much more to do” (n. pag.). This statement, it should be remembered, rendered “Cecil Rhodes dying words” (Ranger 222). A Ugandan school embraces the words of a dying imperialist as its guiding philosophy, which a student of Ugandan literature uses to conclude his study on Ugandan (trans)national identities more than a hundred years after the founding of the school. Clearly, Mikhail Bakhtin was right: words have a way of resisting monological forces. As they travel from place to place and situation to situation across time, they are inevitably dialogized. And so are national and transnational identities.

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