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# Ethnicised Politics and the Changing Lwo Identity in Eastern Africa: A Case of the Acholi of Uganda

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## Abstract

There is an astonishing difference between the image of the Acholi as portrayed by the early European visitors to eastern Africa and that offered by Uganda's post-colonial politicians. Modern scholarship on the Acholi has generated prejudices, stereotypes and occasionally, damaging ethnic categorisations and labelling. Similar scenarios have been reported about other Lwo peoples in South Sudan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya. This research analyses the ways in which divisive-regional and ethnicised politics have affected the image of the Acholi of Uganda over the years. I have reviewed relevant literature, conducted archival research, and key informant interviews to investigate the ways in which divisive politics have been damaging to Acholi identity.

**Key words**: Acholi, Lwo, ethnicised politics, stereotypes, prejudice, identity.

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## Introduction

This article addresses the changing identities of the Lwo peoples of eastern Africa with a particular focus on the Acholi of Uganda. The article argues that the ethnicisation of politics in Uganda has contributed to the rise of prejudice and stereotypes against the Acholi making their post-colonial image astonishingly different from that provided by European explorers and Christian missionaries in the precolonial period.

Ethnicity and ethnic contestations have been phenomenally problematic in Africa since the days of European colonialism (Ake 1993). All East African countries are ethnically plural and, save for Tanzania, have experienced ethnic conflicts with cases of tribal chauvinism reported in Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and South Sudan. The Lwo peoples have been at the centre of all the ethnic conflicts in East Africa except for Rwanda. Focusing on the Acholi as a case of the Lwo peoples of eastern Africa, the article illustrates how politics of ethnicity have altered their image over the years.

The Lwo are a Nilotic group of people who are reported to have lived in the Bahr el-Ghazal region of what is now South Sudan and then split up some six hundred years ago and spread out into the region. According to Ogot (1974), the Lwo migrated from Bahr el-Ghazal and settled under different names in present day South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Tanzania.

A small group of them remained in the Bahr el-Ghazal area for some time then moved westwards to the regions of present day Wau City on the banks of Jur River in the Wau State of South Sudan. This Lwo group that remained in the Bahr el-Ghazal area is known as the Jurchol. Their language is quite similar to that of the Alur of Uganda, the Anywak of Ethiopia and the Joluo of Kenya.

The Lwo group of people found in Ethiopia are known as Anywak. They occupy the Gambella region near the border with South Sudan (McGill, Iggers & Cline 2007). In South Sudan, the Lwo ethnic groups include the Shilluk of Malakal (Upper Nile State) and the Acholi of Magwii County. The Acholi, Alur, and Jopadhola are the Lwo people in Uganda. The Democratic Republic of Congo also has a group called Alur.

In Kenya and Tanzania, the Lwo are called Luo or Joluo. In all these countries, the Lwo have been involved in ethnic conflicts with neighbouring communities. For the case of Uganda, the Acholi face stereotyping and name-calling to the extent that there is an astonishing difference between their image as portrayed by early Europeans that visited the region and that offered by post-colonial politicians and some scholars of Uganda's history.

Similar cases of ethnic conflicts have been reported about the Lwo peoples in different parts of east and

north eastern Africa such as the Shilluk of South Sudan, the Anywak of Ethiopia, the Alur of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Luo of Kenya. This article analyses how divisive-regional and ethicised politics have affected the image of the Acholi people of Uganda over the years. It shows how divisive politics can be damaging to a people's identity.

## Ethnic Conflicts involving the Lwo in East Africa

The Hema, Lendu, Biri, and Okebu in the Ituri Province, one of the 25 provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, have been at odds with the Alur at different times. There were reports that these conflicts have been out of attempted ethnic cleansing in the region (Pottier 2004). Between 1999 and 2004 many Alur were forced to flee across Lake Albert to Uganda where hundreds are in refugee camps especially Kyangwali. Others moved to live with relatives in Uganda in expectation of returning to Congo when ethnic tensions in Ituri Province eased.

Ethiopia is a large country with eighty ethnic groups. The Lwo in Ethiopia are called Anywak. They number about three hundred thousand people; they are considered a minority in Ethiopia. They live in the Gambela region. Gambela is a Lwo word for "bring my millet", which is the staple food of the Lwo people. Despite their minority status, the Anywak of Ethiopia have come under intense ethnic persecution by Ethiopian highlanders. McGill, Iggers & Cline (2007) have reported that more than a thousand Anywak live in Minnesota, USA, having fled ethnic persecution in Ethiopia. They give an eyewitness account of the ethnic conflict in Ethiopia as follows:

> Two troop trucks containing uniformed Ethiopian soldiers had arrived in town and disgorged soldiers who then went from home to home in the village, calling out the Anuak men and boys and shooting them dead in the street. Occasionally, the soldiers were joined by non-Anuak citizens, or lighter-skinned Ethiopian "highlanders," who shouted "Today is the day of killing Anuak!" and killed their victims usually with long spears, knives, or machetes.

The ethnic conflict in western Ethiopia involves the Anywak who are Lwo and the other groups reported here as highlanders. The highlanders say that the Lwo belong to South Sudan and should go back to their country. This is because of the affinity the Anywak have with southern Sudanese communities, such as the Shilluk and Dinka.

In Kenya, although at the time of independence in 1963, the British preferred Oginga Odinga, a Luo to become president, power went to Jomo Kenyatta and the Luo have never led the country (Klopp and Kamungi 2008). Following the 2007 botched elections, the Luo came under attack especially in the Central Province. The Kikuyu, who are the majority people as an ethnic community in

Kenya have vowed never to elect a non-circumcised person as president of Kenya.

The Luo do not circumcise their boys as a cultural practice. Hence, the talk of non-circumcised people is generally understood in Kenya politics to refer to Luo politicians like Raila Odinga, the late Robert Ouko, late Tom Mboya and Peter Anyang Nyong'o among others. The Kikuyu ethnic group, who are politically and ethnically the majority in Kenya, on the other hand, circumcise their sons (Ogot 1974).

Meanwhile power in South Sudan is in the hands of the Dinka, the largest ethnic group in the country. Lwo people such as the Acholi in Magwi County and the Shilluk are largely in the opposition. The Dinka have many times attacked the Acholi of Pajook and Magwi and told them to "go to your country" (Personal communication with a South Sudanese refugee in Palabek Kal on 3 March 2019). The Dinka, according to this interviewee, argue that all Acholi are Ugandans.

Some post-colonial politicians in Uganda also, incidentally, view the Acholi as South Sudanese – this is the reason they were at some point in the 1980s called Anyanya after the Anyanya rebel movement of southern Sudan that fought for secession from Sudan. In this way, the Acholi in Uganda have been viewed as South Sudanese while those in South Sudan are viewed as Ugandans. According to Lomo and Hovil (2004), the nationality of the Acholi, in the opinion of some politicians in Uganda is revealed by one government official observation:

> Someone came into my office once while I was away. When I came back, I asked my colleagues whether the person was a Ugandan or a foreigner. They said, 'Oh, he was not a Ugandan. He was an Acholi.' This is characteristic of wider things in the country (Lomo and Hovil 2004).

These government employees knew the visitor to have been Acholi, they also knew the Acholi to be Ugandans but their report betrays the attitude and speech pattern that was prevalent in southern Uganda most especially during the National Resistance Army (NRA) bush war of 1981 to 1986 and its immediate aftermath.

The Lwo are easily identified wherever they are found because they pursue similar patterns of development and carry similar physical features such as their height and skin complexion. The typical Lwo economy is mixed farming involving cropping as well as animal husbandry. The Lwo languages are also close to each other and are particularly distinguishable from the languages of other Nilotics, the Central Sudanic and Bantu communities among whom they live. The dark skin colour has been the identity of the Lwo and Sudanic peoples of East Africa.

One of the Lwo communities in Sudan is called Jurchol, meaning dark-skinned people. They live around the town of Wau in the Republic of

South Sudan. Crazzolara (1951) has also suggested that the name Acholi may have come from "col" the Lwo word for "black". Lwo peoples are generally known, by their Bantu and Plain Nilotic neighbours, as people with a dark skin colour. Many of the people who migrated from Sudan include the Central Sudanic Madi are dark-skinned. Sudan in Arabic means "land of dark people".

The Lwo also have similar customs of marriage, burial, leisure and political organisation. The Lwo do not have any autocratic centralised system of government. A Lwo, according to Crazzolara (1951),

> Is frank, candid and pleasant in dealing with bonafide individuals who approach him; he likes to talk, joke and laugh. He is hospitable and generous to guests and visitors without distinction. He treats all as equals for there is no class distinction among them.

By "no class distinction" Clazzolara is referring to the segmentary nature of the Lwo political systems and their egalitarian social structures. Although there are organised chiefdoms among them, the Lwo groups remain segmentary in that the chiefdoms were and still are autonomous with the chiefs wielding equal powers and none exercising colonial or imperial control over another. The Lwo were generally peaceful among themselves and with their none-Lwo neighbours during the pre-colonial period.

The distinctive personal names of Lwo also help to identify them quite easily. Popular names, such as Okello, Okema, Okullo, Auko, Atoo, Apiyo, Lam, and Lakot are common to all and are found in all their territories from Gambella in Ethiopia through South Sudan to Uganda, Kenya and down to Musoma Municipality in the Mara Region of Tanzania. Lwo clan names have also been maintained in all the land they occupy. Names, such as Gem, Koc, Lamogi, Payira, Lamwo, Puranga used in the present Acholiland in northern Uganda, are also found among the Jurchol of Wau, the Anywak of Gambela, and the Luo of Kenya and Tanzania.

Lwo dialects are easily distinguishable from Bantu languages and other Nilotic or central Sudanic dialects. Recently, when President Magufuli of Tanzania greeted President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya in Lwo dialect during the 17th Ordinary Session of the East African Community Heads of State Summit in Arusha held on 2nd March 2016, the majority Bantu in Kenya and Tanzania were uneasy with it and the matter went viral.

Magufuli, is reported to have said to Kenyatta in greeting: "*Wachi ane matie machieni*" (Tell me the news prevailing that side – Kenya (Kimuyu 2016). Lwo speakers from Uganda understood what he meant. Although he is not a Lwo, President Magufuli, chose to greet his Kenyan counterpart, who also is not Lwo, in Dholuo; why did he chose to use Luo? He told the guests present, "President Kenyatta's language (Kikuyu) is of course very difficult but I can speak Kijaluo,

which is also spoken in Kenya" (*Kenya Today* 2016).

Magufuli's use of Lwo to greet President Kenyatta did not go well with many of his countrymen and women as well as many Kenyans. One commentator called Magufuli "The East African joker!" Another said he was the East African Jacob Zuma, to imply that he was ridden with scandal. This was around the time when the former president of South Africa was facing trials for corruption. Another commentator called Dholuo a "heathen language" and asked why the president chose to use it (*Kenya Today* 2016).

All these negative comments point to aversion towards the Lwo people and their language. The case of ethnicised politics becomes stronger when one considers that during the said 17th Ordinary Session of the East African Community Heads of State Summit, Magufuli also spoke in another two languages from the region. He spoke some Kinyarwanda (language of the Rwandans) and Luganda the language of the largest ethnic group in Uganda (Kimuyu 2016); yet Magufuli's use of these other languages did not receive any negative comments similar to those Lwo attracted.

## Ethnicity in Pre-colonial Uganda

Pre-colonial Uganda had four major identifiable linguistic groups namely the Bantu, the Plain Nilotics, the River-Lake Nilotics and the Central Sudanic. The Bantu were the largest and occupied the western, southern, central, and some parts of eastern Uganda. The descendants of the Bantu groups include Baganda, Banyoro, Batoro, Banyankore, Bakiga, Basoga, and Bagisu. The Plain Nilotics are represented by the Iteso, Karamojong, Kuman, Kakwa, and Langi. While the Lwo include Acholi, Alur, Chope, and Jopadhola. While some of the Central Sudanic groups are the Lugbara, Aringa, and Madi. The four major linguistic groups have sub-groups with different but inter-related languages.

In terms of political organisation, however, pre-colonial Uganda had three major groups. Firstly, there were the highly centralised and despotic societies with kingdoms: Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro and Ankole (Mutiibwa 1992). The second was the poly-cephalous societies that were characterised by the existence of several centralised chiefdoms none of which was big and strong enough to dominate another. For this reason, the chiefdoms remained small in population, territory and economy. These included the Acholi and the Alur people. The third political category was the purely segmentary societies, such as the Langi, Karamojong, Bakiga, and Iteso. They had neither chiefs nor royal families. Their leaders were 'army generals' and elders.

In all the three political categories of the pre-colonial societies, there were clans with known clan members and each of the clans had lineages

created by outstanding family heads (Karugire 1980). This is why Deng (1997) has argued:

> Traditionally, African societies and even states functioned through an elaborate system based on the family, the lineage, the clan, the tribe, and ultimately a confederation of groups with ethnic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics in common. These were the units of social, economic, and political organisations and inter-communal relations.

Marriage was forbidden among members of the same clan and lineages; clansmen could not wage war among themselves. Members of the same lineage, clan, chiefdom, and kingdom lived as family by loving and supporting one another. Although Busoga is a kingdom today like Buganda and Bunyoro, it was a poly-cephalous society in the pre-colonial days (Karugire 1980).

Busoga had eleven principalities that were the same as the chiefdoms of the Acholi and the Alur. In fact, some of the principalities were founded by Lwo chiefs during their migration from Bunyoro to eastern Uganda. Names, such as Namugalo and Bulamogi in Busoga point to Lwo connections. The Lwo who settled in Busoga however lost their culture including language and adopted those of the Bantu among whom they lived.

The different kingdoms of pre-colonial Uganda rivalled each other over scarce resources. There were wars, raids and counter raids as well as foreign trade. These raids and wars such as between Buganda and Bunyoro were in the true sense inter-state conflicts rather than ethnic struggles. When the kingdom of Buganda waged war against Bunyoro, it was most likely a territorial-expansionist war between two independent and powerful political entities (Karugire 1980).

The segmentary societies related positively among themselves with limited cases of territorial conflicts. A typical example was the Teso-Karamojong contacts following the migration of the Iteso from Karamoja to their present land. The Karamojong and Iteso are both plain Nilotics and moved to what is now Uganda as one block from Ethiopia. Although the Karamojong settled in their present land, the Iteso proceeded farther south and settled in their current territory close to Lake Kyoga. The Iteso and Karamojong, however, regarded themselves as one ethnic group (Lamphear 1976).

The centralised kingdoms fought with each other but this should not be understood as ethnic conflicts. The conflict between Bunyoro and Tooro kingdoms, for instance, were territorial and imperial in nature. For some time, Tooro was a vassal of Bunyoro Kingdom. Hence, the hostile relationship between the two states was because Bunyoro fought for imperial domination over Tooro while the Batooro preferred and struggled for social, political, and economic autonomy.

Hardly was there any degree of hatred between the southern centralised societies and their northern segmentary polities. Trade existed, especially about salt from Katwe (Karugire 1980). The name-calling that became rampant together with feelings of exclusion started during and after the British rule. It is a known fact that the rulers of Bunyoro, Tooro, Buganda and Busoga were descendants of the Lwo whose brothers were in control of northern Uganda polities (Karugire 1980).

The cordiality of the relationship between centralised kingdoms of southern Uganda and the segmentary societies of northern Uganda was exhibited during the time of British colonisation of Uganda. The earliest Christian missionaries in Acholiland came from Bunyoro. Rwot Awich of Payira chiefdom wrote a letter to the king of Bunyoro to send for him Christian teachers so that his people could benefit like the Banyoro were already reaping from the activities of the missionaries. Such a letter could only have been written to a leader with whom one was at good terms. When the British overpowered the monarchs of Buganda and Bunyoro kingdoms towards the beginning of the twentieth century, they took refuge in northern Uganda, first among the Acholi and later among the Langi where both Omukama Kabalega and Kabaka Mwanga were eventually captured in 1899. The two leaders could have fled to northern Tanzania or eastern Congo but they chose to hide in northern Uganda. Rwot Awich gave them protection until they were troubled by the activities of the Nubian forces in Acholiland. This fear forced Mwanga and Kabalega to relocate to Kangai in Lango where they were captured.

Such cordial and caring attitude that existed in pre-colonial Uganda between the Bantu communities and the Nilotics as explained above evaporated and disappeared completely during the colonial and post-colonial periods in Uganda. Generally:

> Colonialism invented traditions accentuated hitherto latent tribal consciousness among African peoples, making fluid ethnic boundaries and identities more rigid and making ethnic rivalries more pronounced (Ibhawoh 2010).

British colonial officials practised indirect rule in Uganda as they did in Nigeria. Indirect rule solved the problem of a shortage of European colonial administrators, so African soldiers/politicians, such as Semei Kakungulu could easily fill the void. However, the African colonial administrators were overzealous to impress their European bosses hence they were hostile, oppressive and insensitive to the feelings of their subjects.

The ruthlessness of Bantu colonial administrators in northern Uganda marked the start of the negative comments, stereotypes and hatred between communities of northern and southern Uganda. Put differently,

the Bantu-Nilotic animosity began during the British colonial period. It was Semei Kakungulu who coined the phrase "Lango mito alek" (personal interview with a Lango elder in Oyam District on 6 March 2019). He instructed his lieutenants to "torture the Langi using the pestle". The effect is that Bantu communities began to look at people from northern Uganda as subjects while northerners saw the Bantu people, basing on the activities of colonial African administrators, as hostile and oppressive.

## Ethnicity under British Colonial Rule

The colonial system of administration, which combined indirect rule with the principle of divide and rule, is the genesis of ethnicised politics in Uganda. This should not be understood to mean that the ethnic identities in present day Uganda never existed prior to 1894 when the Britain took over the administration of Uganda. Ethnicity and ethnicised politics were sharpened by the historical conditions found in the affected societies (Okuku 2002); for the case of Uganda, the different ethnic groups already occupied their present lands by the time the British arrived in the country.

When the British brought these independent polities under one administration, they started to compete for the available limited resources. Cleavages soon developed as one group struggled to take advantage and outwit other groups in such a competition. The societies and individuals that collaborated with the British remained on good terms throughout the colonial period and the reverse was true (Kasfir 1976). Such societies and individuals were favoured as colonial agents and administrators hence eliciting the anger and envy of those disfavoured members of the protectorate. This planted the seeds of ethnic conflicts witnessed in post-colonial Uganda.

The British favoured the collaborating societies not only in the sense that they selected and appointed colonial administrators from among them but they also provided social services and constructed vital infrastructure as well. The first schools in Uganda, namely, Mengo High School was built in 1895, Namilyango High in 1902, Gayaza High in 1905, King's College, Buddo, in 1906; all built in Buganda.

Likewise, the first hospitals Mengo (1897), Lubaga (1899), and Nsambya (1903) were also located in Buganda. The same applied to other infrastructure including roads, ports, and railway networks. To many outside Buganda, this favour was to reward the Baganda for cooperating with the British arising from the Buganda Agreement of 1900. This agreement became the template for other agreements the British signed with different societies of Uganda.

Buganda became more developed than the rest of Uganda and became a superior kingdom. The Baganda also became the most educated people in

the protectorate and they began to despise low jobs of security guards, the army, and police that were taken up by other groups. These jobs went to lowly educated people especially from northern Uganda and this opened another chapter in the politics of ethnicity especially when the security forces began to oppress the Baganda just like their colonial agents had done before (Gersony 1997). The British were reluctant not only to colonise but also to develop some parts of Uganda seen as less productive (Odoi-Tanga 2009) especially the north and north-eastern territories. Such places remained for a long time without schools, roads, telephone services, police posts, among others.

With time, this lopsided development set the peoples of the less developed regions against those of areas that were slightly better developed. Hence:

> On the instantiation of political ethnicity, ethnicity is politicised, politics is ethnicised and ethnic groups tangentially become political formations whose struggles with each other and competing interests may be even more conflictual for the exclusivity of ethnic group membership (Ake 1993).

Baganda agents were not only to become colonial officials but they also enlisted in the British colonising army and worked hard to subdue other societies especially the Banyoro who resisted the British under Kabalega and the Acholi who waged two rebellions namely the Lamogi Rebellion of 1912 and the Paimol Resistance of 1917. Some of the resisting chiefs of the Uganda protectorate were imprisoned in Buganda. Rwot Awich of Payira for instance was incarcerated in a prison in Kololo at the current Summit View military facility. Buganda, to the British, was a safe place where dissidents could be kept away from their people and "rehabilitated". The Baganda appeared to be traitors to other ethnic groups in Uganda.

Although the districts created by the British colonialists aimed to ease administration, they had ethnic undertones. Acholi District, Lango District, Bugisu District, and so on, meant that other ethnic groups could not be comfortable in those districts. The fact is that those districts were multi-ethnic despite the names that suggested mono-ethnic status. Teso District had Kuman and the Acholi District had Madi, Chope, and Alur. The current border conflicts between the Madi and Acholi over Apar Game Reserve originated from these ethnicised districts. To the natives, Madi District was strictly for the Madi people and Middle Nile District would have been accommodative to both societies.

The establishment of commercial enterprises, factories, tea estates, railway depots and other major investments in Buganda and the rest of the southern region was another way by which the British were seen to favour southern Bantu communities. The north remained without

significant investments throughout the sixty-eight years of British rule. This means that people from the north had to migrate to the south in search of jobs. Labour immigrants from northern Uganda were often rebuked and loathed by their Bantu employers. The fact that people from the north were employed by those from the south created a kind of master-servant relation that led to political animosity.

Many Bantu people loathed people from northern Uganda to the extent that they did not want anybody from the non-kingdom regions to lead independent Uganda. kingdom:"?" independent

Obote's victory in the 25 April 1962 election was therefore a surprise to many and it was of little wonder that he received limited allegiance from Buganda. The Uganda People's Congress (UPC) alliance with Kabaka Yekka (KY) was expected to fail as it did in 1964. Throughout Obote's reign from 1962 to 1971, he never appealed to the Baganda as national leader because they preferred a person of royal background to lead the country. The special status that the colonial government accorded the kingdom regions of Uganda over and above the non-kingdom societies was responsible for the little legitimacy that the first UPC government had.

The kingdoms of Buganda, Bunyoro, Tooro, Ankole and later Busoga had their leaders, territories, emblems and police force officially recognised. They were said to be cultured and civilised, and were made to believe that they were superior to other people and therefore natural leaders of Uganda while the people originating from non-kingdom areas, such as Milton Obote were inferior and in away meant to be their servants. This was the basis of the resistance against Milton Obote that culminated into the 1966 crisis and the eventual abolition of monarchies in Uganda (Amone 2011).

Meanwhile Uganda's colonial army became heavily dominated by people from northern Uganda since those from the Bantu, in southern part of the country, despised it as a job for illiterate people. Acholiland became the recruitment yard of the King's African Rifles (Postlethwaite 1947). The Acholi dominance of the army was briefly challenged by Nubians from 1971 to 1979 when Idi Amin was in power; that dominance was restored upon Obote's return of exile in Tanzania in 1979 in form of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA). The brutality of the UNLA, especially in reaction to the rebellion against the second Obote buttressed the image of the Acholi as a cruel people.

## Today's Image of the Acholi

The overwhelming presence of Acholi men in the colonial and post-colonial armies of Uganda has been the benchmark for the evaluation of the character of the Acholi as a people by many Ugandans from the southern part of the country. Before 1986, if

one visited the towns of Uganda that hosted a military barracks, there would be a part of the town known as the "Acholi Quarter". There were such 'quarters' in Kampala, Jinja, Moroto, Mbarara to name but a few examples.

The Acholi Quarter was a section of the town where Acholi military officers housed their relatives and spouses that could not be accommodated within the barracks and as such were where these officers spent their leisure time (Amone 2011). Unfortunately, the colonial army was trained to oppress the indigenous people. Even when independence was attained, the oppressive nature of the army did not change.

This character remained within the nature of Uganda's army. When challenged by rebels, especially the National Resistance Army, a guerrilla force that waged war in Luwero Triangle and other guerrillas in West Nile from 1981 to 1986, the national army became completely detached from the citizens whose lives and property it was meant to protect. Instead, the army looted, raped and killed people suspected to be rebels or sympathetic to the rebels. The national army of Uganda in the Luwero Triangle and in the West Nile region was referred to as "the Acholi" army (Gersony 1997).

Rebel forces created this categorisation to sow seeds of discord by portraying the government forces as aliens to win support of the population. The trick worked and the national army became an alien force worth opposing militarily. As opposition, against the government and the national army – the UNLA – intensified, the ethnic antagonism labelling and hatred against the Acholi grew. The Acholi became characterised as murderers, rapists and looters on account of the behaviour of the national army that committed such atrocities.

The rise of transgressive rebel movements in Acholiland that challenged the government of Yoweri Museveni from 1986 to 2006 did not help rehabilitate the ethnic image of the Acholi. Rebel leaders: Alice Lakwena, Severino Lukoya and Joseph Kony led groups at different times, whose human rights record were worse than that of the defunct UNLA. All the three rebel leaders mentioned were Acholi and their militants were predominantly Acholi. They all opposed the National Resistance Army, which was very popular in the Bantu regions of Uganda having successfully routed the much-hated UNLA. It appeared to the people of southern Uganda that since the UNLA was brutal and in a similar vein, the Lakwena, Lukoya, and Kony rebel groups committed a lot of atrocious, the Acholi people are generally murderous and uncouth.

Hence, especially since 1986, the Acholi have been cast in negative light and this is purely due to their dominance in Uganda's military from about 1912 to 1986 as discussed above. However, it is the ethnicised

politics of Uganda that made the Acholi appear to some as ignoble. Acholiland occupies only about 28,000 of Uganda's total area of 236,040 square kilometres. The Acholi makes up only 4 per cent of Uganda's total population. To blame this small population for all the problems this country has witnessed is to take politics of ethnicity to the extreme.

The Acholi were called Anyanya, at some point in time, first to categorise them as foreigners (Sudanese) since the Anyanya were a rebel movement based in then southern Sudan, fighting the government of Sudan. The Anyanya morphed into the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) that eventually won independence for South Sudan. But the name-calling was also intended to show political and social rejection for the Acholi people, whether in national or institutional leadership. Peter, not real name, said that when he was posted to head a non-governmental organisation in Hoima, in the 1990s, people called him Anyanya during his maiden speech as the organisations regional manager.

Rita, another Acholi born recounted how in the 1990s when her husband was posted to Mubende District as District Population Officer, she happily moved there to live with her husband with their two children. However, she was forced to return to Kampala because Mubende residents often reminded her and their children that they were "Kony". If she was lucky, they would call her "Mudokolo". Literally, "Mudokolo" means someone from Dokolo locality now a district, but incidentally were from Gulu District, miles away from Dokolo. The term was designed to connote backward and primitive people! In many other places in southern Uganda today, if a person from Acholi picks a quarrel or a fight with a person from any Bantu community, the Acholi is blamed out right and called a "Kony" in reference to the brutality of Joseph Kony.

Likewise, Nobert Mao, the President General of the Democratic Party (from 2010 to date), once narrated that while a student at Makerere University, suggestions were made to change the name of the Acholi Makerere University Students' Association (AMSA) to remove the word "Acholi". Makerere University, like all public universities in the country, has associations of students from different ethnic groups. The students of the one of the Acholi is AMSA. who mooted the idea, feared to be identified as Acholi due to some kind of Acholi phobia. Such students feared speaking Lwo, the language of the Acholi. They preferred English or broken Luganda to Lwo, which they were fluent in, even when speaking to fellow Acholi.

As late as 2006, at the installation of Sabino Odoki as Auxiliary Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Gulu, one national leader who hails from the southern part of the country declared. "We shall transform the people in

the north from material and spiritual backwardness to modernity" (Todd 2010). The northern part of Uganda indeed lags behind in development relative to central and western Uganda. This was, as discussed earlier, largely because of the uneven concentration of investments and infrastructure in this part of the country. It has nothing to do with spiritual backwardness of the people of northern Uganda.

Modern scholarship focusing on the history of Uganda has equally been damaging to the Acholi identity (Mutiibwa 1992, Odoi-Tanga 2009). Some publications by outstanding scholars in Uganda especially those in politics, have generated prejudices, interpretations, and occasionally damaging ethnic categorisations, labelling and stereotyping. For instance during the LRA war, it was written: "Those Acholi are killing each other up there, and they always will. Why should we be concerned? [...] they are like that!" (Lomo and Hovil 2004). Tanga Odoi, a researcher on the political history of Uganda, wrote that the pre-colonial Acholi were not as civilised as the people of southern Uganda and that the British colonial government had little to consider Acholiland for. In part, he wrote:

> Acholiland was marginal in many ways to early British colonial rule. It was viewed as occupied by a tribe of a quite different and inferior order and its people (the Acholi) were perceived as "naturally lazy" and as having little to contribute to the "development" of the colonial economy (Odoi-Tanga 2009).

Such views are completely different from what British administrators and early European visitors themselves penned about the Acholi as already pointed out and as will be discussed in the next section. If the Acholi were perceived as inferior and lazy, why did the British prefer them to other ethnic groups of Uganda for the colonial army? Reminiscing about the war in the Luwero Triangle between 1981 and 1986 and the atrocities that accompanied it Mutiibwa (1994) wrote: "The Acholi goons who killed my father removed the clothes he was wearing". He, however, goes ahead to reveal that by the time of the murder, he was in exile. How did he know that those who killed his father were Acholi?

In addition, would it not have been more responsible of him to write: "The UNLA goons who killed my father removed the clothes he was wearing"? When I interviewed Col. Walter Ochora, a former UNLA soldier, he revealed that the brigade, which operated around Professor Mutibwa's father home (Semuto in present-day Nakaseke District) was commanded by Lt. Col. Kiyenga. He further revealed that the overall commander of the operation in Luwero, at that time, was Col. John Ogole (personal interview with Col. Walter Ochora, ,in Gulu); none of these two former UNLA commanders was an Acholi.

Similar to the sentiments expressed by the professor mentioned above, Maj. Gen. James Kazini, a long-time member of the Ugandan army's High Command and indeed commander of the UPDF at some point, blamed all military violence on the Acholi. He argued: "If anything, it is local Acholi soldiers causing the problems. It is the cultural background of the people here: they are very violent. It is genetic" (Lomo and Hovil 2004).

James Kazini was one-time commander of the UPDF 4th Division based in Gulu, he later commanded the national army after the Acholi had lost dominance in the institution. Since 1986 after the National Resistance Army (NRA) defeated the UNLA, the Acholi lost dominance of the national army. It is, therefore, difficult to comprehend how the Acholi can be blamed even for the crimes committed by NRA. General Kazini was blaming Acholi soldiers for the crimes committed by the NRA. One such crime took place in Palabek Kal Sub-county in the present Lamwo District. The commander here was called Abiriga who is not an Acholi (JRP 2012). The mention of Acholi as perpetrators of the crimes was because of the pre-existing prejudice and stereotyping against them.

Accusations that the Acholi are primitive have also been ripe. Even during the Nairobi Peace Talks of 1985, mention was made that the Acholi are primitive (Gersony 1997). A memo, reportedly from one government official to another in 1987 had this in part: "I have now realised that the Monkeys called Acholis are sitting upon Gold Mine. It is surprising that even the British Colonialists did not make them utilise the rich land properly" (Todd 2010).

This talk about the primitivity of the Acholi could have been a political gimmick orchestrated by politicians who wanted to wrestle power from General Tito Okello, an Acholi, between 1985 and 1986. It is important to contrast these stereotypes about the Acholi with the opinion of non-political actors who lived among the Acholi. Below I re-collect and analyse the views of European Christian missionaries, adventurers and explorers who worked among the Acholi. I consider their opinion neutral because they were neither Acholi nor Ugandans of any ethnic background.

## Earlier Image of the Acholi

It is now known that war in general and ethnic conflicts distort the truth (Todd 2010). Many facts concerning the Acholi have been distorted. In 1903, Reverend Lloyd met Rwot (chief) Ogwok of Padibe, one of the then chiefdoms of the Acholi. This is what he reported about Ogwok:

> He extended to us the heartiest welcome, ushering us into his hut with the natural polish of a born gentleman. I was greatly struck by this man …. He sits and sleeps on a kareb and entertains his guests with coffee (Lloyd, 1911).

By 1903 Acholi chiefs were civilised as to draw the admiration of European visitors. They entertained their visitors by serving them coffee although the Acholi did not produce it. Ogwok was drinking imported coffee probably from Ethiopia. Reverend Lloyd did not report the form of primitivity that non-Acholi Ugandan politicians have alleged as discussed in the previous section.

When another European, J. R. P. Postlethwaite, known to the Acholi as Langalanga, met Rwot Ogwok, his impression is not different that of Rev. Lloyd, he wrote:

> He speaks Arabic very well, always wears European clothes and came to meet me riding on a donkey, getting off and kissing my hands with all the manners of a polished Arab (Milner 1952).

These are descriptions of the Rwot (chief) of a people now considered primitive. If Acholi leaders were drinking coffee, riding on a donkey and wearing European clothes, the people he governed could not have been primitive. Another Christian missionary, Reverend Father Lucien, also lived among the Acholi and wrote about them. He was much more impressed than Reverend Lloyd.. Here is what he stated:

> What did I see in those few days? Something deep rooted in the Acholi nature.... Something not yet ruined by the so-called progress of civilisation ... In them from childhood upwards are born the virtues of endurance, courage and resourcefulness ... the qualities of cooperation and the sense of community effort and mutual help (Lucian 1946).

This was at a time when the British "civilisation of Africa" had not been successful in northern Uganda, so the Acholi culture was still undiluted.

It has been alleged that the British were reluctant to colonise northern Uganda because the inhabitants were lazy and primitive (Mutiibwa 1992, Odoi 2009). But a letter dated 1909 to the Commissioner of the Nile Province by his Assistant Commissioner stationed in Koba near present day Gulu District Headquarters states otherwise:

> Every endeavour has to be made to administer this healthy and fertile country inhabited by a fine intelligent race, keen on acquiring knowledge, and anxious to share the benefits that accrue to those under our protection (Gulu District Archive, A 46/351/ Opening of Gulu Station.

This letter was written by a European officer to another European. As can be seen, the junior officer is appealing to his boss to ensure that the Acholi are colonised because they are a fine, intelligent and healthy race. So, the alleged primitivity and backwardness of the Acholi relative to other ethnic groups in Uganda was not observed by this European administrator. One can only conjure that the negative stereotypes against the Acholi emerged in later years due to the nature of divisive politics that emerged after independence.

Lloyd (1911) wrote about the perceived militant nature of the

Acholi, "overall one would call them a fine race physically, but not warlike." His views are corroborated by those of Baker (1874):

> I arrived here today (January 13th, 1876) five days after Fatiko (Patiko) [….] A vast undulating Prairie of Jungle grass and scrub trees… The Shuuli (Acholi) are a very polite people, always ready with greetings and inquiries after one's health.

In addition, that:

> The men of Shooli (as the Acholi were called) are the best proportioned that I have ever seen; without the extreme height of the Shilluks or Dinkas, they are muscular and well knit, and generally their faces are handsome (Baker 1874).

The proportionality of the Acholi was, however, contradicted by Odoi-Tanga (2009) when he wrote that the Acholi were inferior people. All political history books on Uganda state that Acholiland was the major recruitment region for both the colonial and post-colonial regimes of Uganda. According to Major Graham, "On recruiting safaris we went for the chaps who were tough and strong and ran quicker than anyone else" (Hugh 1983). This remark by a British army officer does not point to inferiority of the Acholi people.

Many Acholi men and women are unhappy about the negative image of their identity but they lack the platform to air their views. Others simply fear to speak lest they are treated as political opponents or rebels. Kony reportedly established the LRA to reclaim the honour of the Acholi people (Faber 2017). Other scholars have stated that Acholi nationalism remained a cornerstone of the LRA war (Gersony 1997; Lomo and Hovil 2004). Thus:

> The north/south conflict in Uganda is the LRA's raison d'être. This conflict is the result of foreign power interference and the historical marginalisation of the Acholi people before, during, and after the colonial period (Faber 2017).

The atrocity that Joseph Kony's rebellion meted out on the Acholi negates in a way the assertion that he waged war to reclaim the honour of the Acholi but it is a fact that there are deep seated grievances in Acholiland towards the current government. The reasons for these grievances hinge on loss of lives of loved ones, loss of cattle, marginalisation, stereotyping and name-calling as discussed in this article.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to illustrate that today's stereotyping and name-calling against the Acholi is a product of ethnic politics in Uganda. I have also demonstrated that ethnicised politics in Uganda is a product of discrimination and elite rivalry. When the various ethnic communities of Uganda were brought under one realm of administration by British colonial forces, competition for national resources began. Politicians, at times relied on the national army to outwit

their opponents. Unfortunately, the Acholi dominated the national army until 1986. This was why the Acholi bore the brunt of ethnic stereotyping and name-calling because of the army's brutality.

Negative stereotypes against the Acholi and other communities from northern Uganda as presented in this article show that there are individuals in the country who do not accept Uganda as one country. The Acholi, just like other Lwo people of eastern Africa, have been cast in negative light for reasons beyond their control. Had the Acholi been antediluvian, murderous and inferior as some politicians and scholars have stated, European visitors to Uganda whom we can assume to be neutral would have been the first to report this fact. The contrast between the image of the Acholi as presented by early European visitors and that offered by some scholars and politicians in post-colonial Uganda, therefore, help to shed light on how damaging the politics of ethnicity have been in Uganda especially to the Acholi ethnic group.

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# Shifting Identity: A Historical Evolution of the Nubi Indigenous Ethnic Community in Uganda[1]

*Abudul Mahajubu**

## Abstract

The article examines how the Nubi who arrived in Uganda in the 1890s as a British colonial regiment of hired Sudanese soldiers, evolved into an indigenous community of Uganda by 1995. The article attempts to answer a key question: What caused the ever-changing Nubi identity during different historical situations in Uganda? Using oral narratives and information from different archival documents, the article argues that by the time the Nubi were recognized as one of Uganda's indigenous communities, various factors under different historical contexts, accounted for their ever-changing identity.

**Keywords**: Identity, Nubi, community, shifting, ethnicity, British colonialism

## Introduction

The Nubi have had a trail of names at different times in their history, reflecting their changing identity in Uganda since their arrival in the 1890s. For instance, at one time, they were referred to as "slave soldiers", "Sudanese mercenaries, "British colonial soldiers" "Anyanya mercenaries", and finally as the Nubi." The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995, categorizes the Nubi as one of Uganda's indigenous ethnic

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communities and are mentioned among the fifty-six officially recognized ethnic groups in Uganda.

The 2014 Uganda census puts the Nubi population at a total of 28,772 out of the 34,142,417 Ugandans. (Uganda Bureau of Statistics Census Report 2014). Many Nubi are live in Uganda's central region, they have communities in Bombo, Entebbe, and Kampala; in the western region they are in Toro and Mbarara; and they are also in Arua in the West Nile region among many other areas. Unlike most of other ethnic groups that are attached to specific territories which are considered ancestral homelands.

The Nubi have thus had no territorial claim to any specific part in Uganda, ever since their arrival in the early 1890s. The identity of the Nubi in Uganda has been changing across the board on a historical time continuum and situations until they were formally recognised among Uganda's indigenous ethnic communities in 1995.

The term indigenous in the context of this particular article is used to refer to members of ethnic societies that were settled in Uganda by the first day of February 1926 according to the Uganda constitution. The term "ethnic" as used in this article, relates to the Nubi as a community of people whose identity is based on a combination of shared historical experience, values, cultural traits, beliefs and a way of life (Byarugaba 1997).

The study is based on constructivism theory of ethnicity, which argues that ethnicity is not embedded within individuals, but always constructed on the basis of the intended objective of the agent behind its invention. Mamdani (2018) argues that through the hegemonic agency of those competing for positions of advantage in the modern state, societies end up being constructed based on their ethnic inclinations. In this case, ethnicity is used as a tool for a particular group or individuals in pursuit for either political positions or economic interests, such as jobs.

Within the African context, Leroy (1989) argues that ethnicity is a result of uneven development within Africa's colonial territories where some Africans were able to benefit from colonial education and employment opportunities that colonial capitalism presented. According to Hobsbawm and Terence (2012), the "petty bourgeoisie" together with European missionaries and colonial officials or "cultural brokers" were the key actors behind the invention of traditions and mobilizing Africans along ethnic lines in order to continue maximizing their opportunities. The evolution of Uganda's Nubi indigenous community, is well explained as a 'construction' of a social ethnic category majorly due to the Turko-Egyptian imperialism in Sudan during the nineteenth century.

## The Nubi as Slave Soldiers

The "Egyptian Nubians" trace their origin to Upper Egypt in the Nuba Mountains (Hilliard 1998). This category of Egyptian-Nubians is associated with the great Egyptian civilisation, which later championed the world's social, political and economic trends, not only of nations and states, but ethnicities as well. This area was a Christian kingdom, but was later influenced by the advent of Islam. Whereas Egyptian-Nubians are ethnically different from the Ugandan Nubi, both groups have a common historical connection in the Turko-Egyptian imperialism, which was instituted through trade and Islam. Through the Anglo - Egyptian expeditions in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Egyptians annexed Sudan extending further south into Uganda. Egypt's imperial expansionism further south into Sudan led to what Mahmood Mamdani (2012) terms as Arabization (the spread of Arabic culture and identity).

With the need to expand further south for majorly economic reasons, Egypt sought to expand its army to protect its trade interests especially in gold, slaves, and ivory in the south. This resulted into raids on some ethnic communities, from which many people especially from southern Sudan were captured by the Turko-Egyptian army and eventually were trained as slave soldiers. According to Owens (1985), the Khedive of Egypt Muhammad Ali, in the 1830s had interests in extending Egyptian influence southwards to Gondokoro, in order to access tradable items he desired. Owen's argument is in line with a Nubi elder interviewed in 2018, who narrated:

> Khedive Muhammad sent his Nubian commanders from Egypt and caused havoc, they torched people's huts and settlements taking Africans as slaves, the male youths were mainly recruited as slave soldiers purposely to capture more slaves in order to carry ivory and search for gold. They were forced to become Nubians because they could not trace their ethnic origin.[2]

The above assertion is augmented by Amone (2013) who argues that the Sudanese Nubi were more known as slave military soldiers who gave birth to the rise of the Ugandan Nubi since the Egyptian influence reached northern Uganda in 1840s. The recruitment exercise saw Africans from different ethnic communities in Sudan put in settlements known as Zariba. People who settled in Zaribas lost connections with their former ethnic communities and instead adopted the Islamic culture due to their association with Arab traders.

Trade and military activities by the Turko-Egyptian Arabs and the Egyptian-Nubians in 1830s in southern Sudan contributed significantly to the rise of the slave soldiers who evolved into southern Sudan-Nubians. Emin Pasha, the governor of the Egyptian province

[2] Personal interview conducted on 29 August 2018.

of Equatorial, later used the southern Sudan-Nubians in 1870s as Sudanese-Egyptian mercenaries with the aim of expanding Egyptian imperial influence further south into present-day Uganda and stopping slave trade.

## From Sudanese Mercenaries to British Colonial Soldiers

The Nubi of Uganda are a conglomeration of many ethnic communities who are descendants of the armed forces of Emin Pasha that lost all connections with their former ethnic groups from which they originally sprang (Formal Announcement on the Nubi Matter 1939).[3] According to Labidi (2017), after the Egyptian government abandoned its imperial advance into Sudan in 1884, Emin Pasha was obliged to give up several of his military stations to face off the Mahdist advance and with his troops they had to retire to Rajaf in southern Sudan and later Wadalei. Labidi (2017), further asserts that in 1885 Emin Pasha and his men were surrounded by hostile African forces; Mahdist to the north and Bunyoro Kingdom to the south. Emin Pasha together with some of his Sudanese soldiers stayed at Wadelai located in the West Nile sub-region of Uganda until the Welsh-American adventurer, Henry Morton Stanley rescued him.

Emin Pasha left behind two groups of Nubian troops, one under the command of Fadl al Mulah stationed at Dufile, northern Uganda, and another group commanded by Selim Bay in Kavali, near the southwestern corner of Lake Albert (Labidi, 2017). In a report presented to both houses of the British parliament (1893), Lugard notes that after negotiating and reaching an agreement with the Nubians through their leader Salim Bay, on 5 October 1893, he left Kavali with about half of the Sudanese, their families (slaves, women and children). They moved by canoes on the waters of Lake Albert until reached Bunyoro. These included 932 men with arms, 1,153 men without arms, 3,065 women, 1,484 girls, 1,358 boys, 14 people from different ethnic groups, total 8006.[4]

One of the major tasks of the British colonial authority in Uganda in the early 1890s was to restore peace due to insecurity partly caused by warring religious factions notably the Catholics, Protestants, and the Muslims in 1880s. Mutibwa (2018) asserts that the circumstances Lugard found in Uganda as the agent of the Imperial British East African Company obliged him to intervene in the affairs of the distracted religious factions, which were bringing utter ruin by their civil wars. Lugard's main task was to enforce and restore

[3] A formal announcement on the Nubi matter on 2 February 1939 in a letter to the Honourable, the Chief Secretary from the District Officer, Entebbe c.1923. V, Uganda National Records Centre and Archives.

[4] Report from Captain Lugard presented to both houses of parliament by command of her Majesty, in Africa No.2 (1893). Further Papers relating to Uganda (c-6848). Africana, Makerere University Main Library.

peace by maintaining law and order, especially in Buganda.

In that context, Lugard decided to seek for the assistance of Nubian soldiers or 'Sudanese mercenaries' in order to fulfil the company's colonial objective of maintaining peace in Uganda. In his report to the Earl of Resebery (1893), Gerald Portal notes that even after Lugard left Uganda for England in 1892, further recruitment of the Nubi continued at the hands of Sir Henry Edward Colville the acting British commissioner in 1893 for the Bunyoro expedition.[5]

The recruitment of more "Sudanese mercenaries" as they were identified was mainly to back up the numbers of British soldiers who were by then fewer than was required for imperial expansion. The military might of the British with their Sudanese mercenaries saw Bunyoro become part of the protectorate government. This was a major military achievement on the side of the British since King Kabalega of Bunyoro had rejected and opposed the British colonial authority, accusing the British of plotting to take away Bunyoro's independence (Mutibwa, 2018).

The military assault on Bunyoro by the British culminated in Kabalega fleeing the wrath of the British and seeking refuge in Acholi under the protection of Chief Awich Abok of Payira (Amone 2014). The involvement of Nubi soldiers in the colonial project led by Lugard confirms that the Nubi soldiers came as a result of a military vacuum that existed within the British colonial government.

According to Amone (2014), Lugard considered the Sudanese soldiers to be the best material of soldiery. The reason behind the consideration of the Nubi as "British mercenaries" was because the British had no plans of recognising the Nubi as an ethnic community after extending colonial authority over Uganda and other parts of East Africa. The British believed that after accomplishing their military role, the Nubi would return to their cradleland in Sudan. In the eyes of the British, the Nubi were men of good skills and conduct, but neither the British nor native ethnic communities regarded them as one of Uganda's indigenous communities.

Some Nubi, descendants of the former British soldiers, however, dismisses the view that their predecessors were British mercenaries. A Nubi elder asserts: "Nubians came voluntarily; they did not come as mercenaries but as soldiers of the British army."[6] The elder narrative in denying that the Nubi were not British colonial mercenaries is to deny the fact that it was the British, through Lugard, who needed them for the colonial project. What the elder seems not to appreciate was the fact that the Nubi

[5] An extract from Sir G. Portal's report presented to the Most Honorable the Earl of Rosebery. (Received 27 June 1893)

[6] Personal interview conducted on 1 October 2018.

were not British soldiers but rather men hired and trained purposely to help them achieve a British project, which had nothing to do with the Nubi.

According to the notes on the Nubi (1947), the view that Nubi were not mercenaries, but rather colonial soldiers is contrary to what the British thought of them. To the British, the Nubi were perceived as their old mercenaries whom they used in the fight against other ethnic groups that opposed their rule.[7] According to the online Oxford Dictionary, a mercenary is defined as a professional soldier hired to serve a foreign army. The Nubi were first of all former fighters in the Egyptian army known for their profession as soldiers of the Khedive. Given that they were paid by the Egyptian government to fight on its behalf, then, it is right to regard them as "mercenaries."

Secondly, the Nubi agreed to join the British on specific terms, including payment of their wages among other conditions. Lastly, Nubi were to serve as part of a British foreign army just as the case was when they served in the Egyptian army which again justifies the label: mercenary. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1897 sections of Nubi mutinied against the British because some terms agreed upon with the British army had not been met. The argument presented above shows how the British colonial authorities were influential in identifying the Nubi as both their old British colonial mercenaries as well as their British colonial soldiers serving as part of the King African Rifles (KAR).

## Changing Nubi Identity in Post-Independence Settings

In post-independence Uganda, ethnic identity became central to constructing Uganda's future local, regional, and national level political dispensation (Stonehouse 2013). The army, for instance, was one of the new government's institutions where loyalty was determined by a shared ethnic allegiance with the leader in the highest political office. Following Uganda's independence, some Nubi continued serving as soldiers in the Uganda Army. However, using ethnicity, and drawing on the British tradition of divide-and-rule, the post-independence government, especially the army and the civil service were filled with members inclined to the ethnicity of the sitting head of government.

Olum (2011) observes that the Langi ethnic group of northern Uganda was inclined to fellow Langi Milton Obote, who was then the Executive Prime Minister-designate of Uganda. Although the army was composed of majority northerners (especially the Langi and the Acholi), the Nubi were considered to be more experienced in comparison due to past colonial military history.

[7] Notes on the Nubis: Letter from the District Officer to the Chief Secretary; Entebbe 1947, c.22/25, Uganda National Records Centre and Archives.

In this respect, several Nubi recount the difficulties they endured from the Acholi in military barracks after independence; they openly discriminated against the Nubi and called them "foreigners" who had come to take up their positions in the army.

The threat of violence against the Nubi went beyond soldiers to include even their wives and children. On their way to pick weekly rations and fetching water from the designated water points in the military barracks, Nubi women and their children were always insulted and warned of repatriation back to their country of origin, they were not considered as citizens (Lumumba 2015). The Nubi's only recourse was silence. Obote's post-independence government remained silent as the members of other ethnic groups especially the Lani and the Acholi continued to subject those from other ethnic groups specifically the Nubi to different forms of injustices even when they exercised the highest form of patience amidst open and injustice confrontations. In this respect, Lumumba (2015:1) adds that "Obote's mistake was to go after an ethnic group that was in the army, well-armed and militarily trained." This forced some of the Nubi in the army to start attacking the colleagues from other ethnic group, hence causing chaos and insecurity in the army.

The situation in the military was not so much different from the rest of the Nubi who were not in military uniforms. By 1962, the Nubi were not recognized as indigenous Ugandans and hence their citizenship was a subject of contestation since they were perceived to be foreigners from Sudan. Some Nubi could not guarantee their own survival since they were a targeted of those who regarded them as "foreigners." Therefore, they opted to join the army even when they knew of the mistreatment and abuse that their relatives in the army faced. Those that could not join the military ended up working as security guards, drivers, shop attendants, while the elderly spent most of their time in mosques either reciting the Quran or teaching youngsters Islam.

## Mistaken Identity and the Anyanya Mercenaries

To become a Nubi, required one to become a Muslim and adopting Nubi traditional customs and language. Amin's regime (1971-1979) saw the "Nubianization" process at its peak. Many Lugbara, Madi, Kakwa and the Alur from West Nile became Nubi especially through embracing Islam and speaking the Nubi language. Nelson Kasifir (1976:220) observes: "An unusually large proportion of them were born into other ethnic units. They became Nubians by adopting Islam, learning to speak Nubi (an Africanized form of Arabic), and adopting certain Nubi customs." Amin himself mobilized and encouraged members of other ethnic communities to become Nubi.

Amin's effort to consolidate the Nubi ethnic group, made him recruit from a Sudanese militant group, the Anyanya, from southern Sudan, into Uganda's army in the early 1970s. A former Office Assistant at Uganda's High Commissions in Sudan and Ethiopia during the Amin's regime, noted:

> Anyanya was a southern Sudanese separatist movement formed in 1960s from a conglomeration of southern Sudan ethnic communities for example the Dinka, Zande, Bari and many others. The main objective the movement was to put up a strong military resistance against the Sudanese government which they accused of extending Islamic influence to the south. Amin later relied on the Anyanya mercenaries and other Nubi within Uganda to form a core of the Uganda Army with the intention to eliminate those that were against his regime. By the time Idi Amin was ousted from power in 1979, by the Uganda Nation Liberation Front, many people categorized the Nubi as Anyanya.[8]

Classifying the Uganda Nubi as Anyanya was an error because by the time Amin recruited the Anyanya into the Uganda Army in 1971, the Nubi had long before settled into Uganda. This was an injustice committed against the Nubi who then literally traced their ancestral birth rights and subsequent origin in Uganda, the Nubi claimed the right to be recognised as an indigenous ethnic community in the submission they made to the Uganda Constitutional Commission in 1989.

With ever changing identity, the Nubi, One of the greatest achievements of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) after capturing power in 1986, was the attempt to solve the identity question for different communities in Uganda through the making and promulgation of a new Uganda constitution in 1995. The Nubi are among the people who were, for the first time, recognized as Uganda's indigenous community.

The constitution-making process started when the interim government of the National Resistance Movement established a Constitutional Commission that was mandated to carry out wide consultations, both within and outside Uganda (Kanyihamba 2010). In March 1989, the Constitutional Commission was duly constituted and mandated with the task of collecting proposals from members of the general public for the enactment of a new national constitution (Kanyeihamba 2010). The Constitutional Commission would then draft a report and make recommendation on the basis of findings from the consultations and then present a draft constitution to the Constituent Assembly for debate, which would in turn develop a new constitution for promulgation.

The commission had twenty-one members chaired by Justice Benjamin Odoki and John Mary Waliggo was its secretary. The members were: Dan Mudoola, Wenkere Kisembo, Medi

[8] Personal interview conducted on 4 October 2018.

Kaggwa, Azizi Kasujja, Jonathan Kateera, Miria Matembe, Serwanga Lwanga, Jotham Tumwesigye, Kale Kaihura, Justin Okot, Andrew Atim, Kiddu Makubuya, Mary Maitum, Constantine Rwaheru, Sam Kirya Gole, George Ufoyuru, Edward Ssempebwa, and Joseph Obwangor. Kanyeihamba (2010) asserts that the commission carried out its mandate by travelling the length and breadth of the country canvassing people's views on a wide range of constitutional subjects administered under the "new constitution." Membership of the commission represented different political interests, spiritual affiliation and special interest groups, such as women, the armed forces, academicians, and other categories.

In April 1989, at a meeting attended by members of the public at Bombo, the Nubi both old and young, were among the people who attended the consultative meeting to express their views on identity and citizenship. Both the Nubi elders and the youth demanded to be recognized as one of Uganda's indigenous ethnic communities. One of the participants, who attended that meeting, now an elder, interviewed in Bombo in 2018, recalls that all people from his community were united under one identity "Nubi", in the Nubi language he said:

> Ina Je Nubi kan ina ma-aju kede azoli yoyote wonusu fogo wanasa Je ina fi Sudanisi, ina kulu ja rudu kena kun ma fikira wayi Je ina Nubi te Uganda.[9]

Translation

> We as Nubi never wished anyone among us to claim that we were Sudanese. We all maintained that we are Nubi of Uganda.

The assertion above suggests that some Nubi had identified themselves as Sudanese from Sudan and if they were to continue identifying themselves as such then, it would prove rather difficult to be recognised as one of Uganda's indigenous communities. They hence, agreed among themselves that they are Ugandan Nubi and not Nubi from Sudan. As political entrepreneurs in Africa worked towards manipulating, harmonizing and inventing people's history, some political actors in Uganda similarly were instrumental in pushing for the recognition of the Nubi as an indigenous ethnic community as a means to further their personal political ambitions. Some Nubi social actors, both young and old, who knew only Uganda as their ancestral home pushed for their recognition as indigenes in order to access government services, which were easily accessible to citizens.

The Nubi strategy may be compared to that of the Masai pastoralists of Tanzania who agitated for indigeneity in order to claim recognition and resources from the state (Peterson 2012), the Nubi too seemed to have understood the need to be recognized as Ugandan indigenes in order to

[9] Personal interview conducted on 29 August 2018.

equitably compete for state resources like other indigenous communities. They demonstrated unity amongst themselves by exhibiting solidarity between those that considered themselves "elders" or the "Jidi" for elderly Nubi men and the "Abuba" for elderly Nubi women with the young Nubi generations.

In the attempt to foster unity among all Nubi, the Nubian Consultative Forum (NCF) was formed in 2001 with the aim of meeting and discussing the challenges affecting their people throughout Uganda and how they could try to mitigate them. On 18 January 2002 the association was registered as a limited company under the name Uganda Nubian Consultative Forum Limited (UNCFL) with branches in different parts of the country. People's views, about indigenous ethnic communities in Uganda to be recognised as such from all over Uganda, were collected by the members of the Constitutional Commission.

Although some members of the general public, were in support of the recognition of the Nubi as one of Uganda's indigenous ethnic communities, some were against the idea, arguing that Nubi were Sudanese African Muslims who did not constitute a Ugandan ethnic community. The reason they advanced was that the Nubi came as British colonial mercenaries who were supposed to return to their home country, Sudan, after fulfilling their colonial mission or if not, they had to accept to be integrated and take up other ethnic identities. A key respondent recalls an incident when one lady (not a Nubi), while meeting members of the Constitutional Commission at Bombo Secondary School, observed:

> Abo abeyitta mbu Banubi si gwanga nga bwolaba amawanga nga Abaganda, Abatoro oba Abasoga. Kimanyikidwa nti bba Sudani abakoleranga Abangereza aba matwale. Naye olwokubula awokulagga nga Abangereza bagenze basalawo besenze na mawanga gakasangwawo[10]

Translation

> Those who call themselves the Nubi are not an ethnic group just like you see Baganda, Batoro or Basoga. It is known that they are Sudanese who worked for the British colonialists and settled among other indigenous communities after the British finally left because they had nowhere to go.

The tough facial look and the tone of the high-pitched voice of the Nubi elder while commenting on the woman's view of the Nubi, demonstrated how the Nubi were not willing to lose their ethnic identity to other indigenous communities. During that meeting the Nubi realised that some section of the public contested the Nubi claim to indigeneity, which greatly impacted on their citizenship rights. However, the Nubi advent in 1890s as British colonial soldiers from Sudan, made their ethnic identity and citizenship

[10] Personal interview conducted on 29 August 2018.

contestable. The sentiments against the consideration of Nubi as an indigenous ethnic community, as expressed in the meeting, however, did not stop the members of the Constitutional Commission from recommending that the Nubi be included in the new constitution as one of Uganda's indigenous ethnic minority.

The presentation of a draft constitution for debate by the Constituent Assembly (CA) led to the promulgation of Uganda's new constitution on 22 September 1995. In its third schedule, Article 10 (a) the Nubi finally were considered as one of the indigenous communities to have settled in Uganda as by the first day of February 1926. With the inclusion of Nubi in the constitution, they became Ugandan citizens by descent upon providing evidence that their parents were born in Uganda and that their grandparents had settled in Uganda by the first day of February 1926.

Chapter Three on citizenship, specifically Article 10 (a) states that

> … every person born in Uganda, one of whose grandparents is or was a member of any of the indigenous communities existing and residing within the borders of Uganda as at the first day of February, 1926, as set out in the Third Schedule to this Constitution shall be a citizen of Uganda by birth.

The inclusion of Nubi in the Uganda constitution of 1995 as one of the indigenous communities with citizenship rights was good news to many Nubi whose identity has been shifting for so many years without an official recognition.

According to a Nubi elder and a key participant, the recognition of the Nubi as one of Uganda's indigenous ethnic communities brought happiness and joy to many Nubi and attributed the achievement specifically to the NRM government. He asserts:

> We as Nubi are proud of who we are and we are never ashamed of who we are any more. Thanks to the visionary government of 'Mzee' (Museveni), we can now hold Uganda Passports and National Identification Cards.[11]

Whereas the process of recognition of the Nubi could not be attributed to a single person or a political system as the respondent alleges, some people believed that the recognition of the Nubi as an indigenous ethnic community of Uganda, was a political move of appeasement intended to garner support of the NRM government as one respondent summarized:

> All Museveni wanted in the 1990s was popularity and support for his government from all corners of Uganda including those that for so long had been considered minorities like the Nubians.[12]

The 1995 constitution also empowered the Nubi to promote and preserve their cultural values and practices that enhance the dignity and

[11] Personal interview conducted on 4 October 2018.

[12] Personal interview conducted on 21 September 2019.

the well-being of the people under Section XXIV.

Since the Nubi were classified as one of the indigenous ethnic communities and their citizenship was no longer in question, the Nubi enjoy their traditional customs ranging from cultural music and dance 'Dholuka' to craftworks and Nubi foods. All these traditions gave a sense of cultural belonging to the Nubi as an ethnic minority that the people could not freely enjoy under all earlier governments under which the people had no citizenship.

## Conclusion

In a nutshell, the ever changing Nubi identity, since their advent into Uganda in the 1890s, manifests in how different political actors have defined the identity of the Nubi during different historical contexts. It is also related to how the interests of a few groups with political authority have attempted to use the Nubi to further their political ambitions. During the colonial period for instance, the Nubi were more identified as Sudanese mercenaries by the colonial masters – the British because they were hired to restore order in the East African British colonial empire. During the post-independence period, the identity of the Nubians kept shifting from time to time. From 1962 to 1971, the Nubi were commonly identified as Sudanese foreigners or "Anyanya" even when their settlement in Uganda from 1890s was not in dispute. Some political actors that perceived the Nubi as Sudanese foreigners felt threatened by their presence due to their military lifestyle which could make it easy for the Nubi to challenge any political authority. With a continuing shift in identity, the Nubi felt victimized by the groups that considered them foreigners. The Nubi henceforth agitated for recognition as one of Uganda's indigenous communities.

In 1995, the National Resistance Movement government (NRM) officially recognized the Nubi as a Ugandan indigenous community by placing them in the Uganda constitution. Whereas the recognition of the Nubi was premised on the fact that they had settled in Uganda prior to the colonially demarcated boundaries of what came to be called Uganda in 1926, the NRM government wanted to consolidate support from among ethnic minorities in Uganda with the aim of garnering overwhelming support in the then impending 1996 general elections.

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# Kiswahili in Contact and Conflict: The Case of Namanga Border Town in East Africa[1]

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## Abstract

Language conflict is commonly studied and understood as an outcome of contact between speakers of different languages. In this article, we explore language conflict in the conversations of speakers of a sole language – Kiswahili. We argue that language conflict can as well occur among speakers of the same language. Using sociolinguistic data collected ethnographically among ordinary speakers of Kiswahili at the Namanga border town in East Africa, we show that these conflicts arise as a result of issues such as (i) citizen mobility, (ii) existence of several varieties and labels, (iii) varying attitudes of people towards different varieties, and (iv) demonstrating linguistic power. Consequently, we demonstrate that contrary to the assumptions of many scholars of Kiswahili and others, the Namanga border town bares a perfect example of a space in East Africa where meaningful and informative studies relating to different sociolinguistic aspects of Kiswahili, such as contact and conflict can be undertaken.

**Key words**: Kiswahili, language contact, language conflict, Namanga, East Africa.

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## Introduction

One of the fundamental issues involved in language contact studies is language conflict. Consequently, language conflict has been recognized as a common occurrence in language contact situations involving speakers of not only different languages but also different varieties of the same language. The case of different varieties of the same language manifest simply as misunderstandings, tensions, and frustrations in face-to-face conversations.

The aim of this article is to explore the contact and conflict situations involving speakers of Kiswahili at the Namanga border town (hereinafter, Namanga) – an East African town located on the Kenya-Tanzania border. Namanga is a border town that houses one of the busiest customs offices in East Africa. It, therefore, experiences high mobility of different kinds of citizens[2] who use it as an entry and exit route into and out of Kenya and Tanzania. The town also experiences high convergence of people, both natives and non-natives who move into the town in search of livelihoods and leisure.

The high mobility and convergence of citizens of diverse backgrounds at Namanga brings about a socially multilingual setting in which several languages and language varieties come into contact, requiring the use of a common language for communication.

[2] The theoretical model which we invoke in this article uses the term 'citizen' in a specialized way to refer to ordinary people who stay in a particular place and participate in social activities in such a place.

The talk of a common language for communication in East Africa has been popular for quite some time now because East Africa has been recognized as a highly multi-ethnic and multilingual region in which many languages are spoken (Habwe 2009; Mwaniki 2010). Among these languages, Kiswahili has been reported to be the most widely spoken and one that functions as a lingua franca among the many ethnolinguistic communities that exist in the region (Mazrui & Mazrui 1993, 1995; Merritt & Abdulaziz 1985; Moshi 2006; Mukuthuria 2006, 2009; Mulokozi 2002).

Kiswahili is widely used in East Africa and has a long history in Tanzania and Kenya as the language of national identity (Merritt & Abdulaziz 1985; Lodhi 1993; Nyongani 1995; Petzell 2012; Vilhanova 1996). It is almost a foregone conclusion by many scholars of Kiswahili that the ordinary citizens at Namanga would effortlessly, and without any form of 'conflict' use Kiswahili as a common language of communication when they come into contact with each other.

However, as Peter Nelde (1987) has argued, no two languages or language varieties come into contact without any form of conflict. Nelde summarizes this argument in the popular phrase that "there can be no language contact without language conflict" and that "language contact means language conflict." There exists a number of works that demonstrate contact between Kiswahili and other

languages, notably English, and some Bantu languages (see Akidah 2013; Bosha 1993; Dzahene-Quarshie 2010; Gowers 1952). However, there is lack of significant literature regarding conflict within Kiswahili.

## Methodology

The data presented in this article is part of a sociolinguistic study conducted at Namanga about the use of Kiswahili as a tool for social integration in the East African Community. The data was collected ethnographically within a period of six consecutive months beginning February 2019. Individual interviews and observations were the main methods employed in the course of the study.

We received ethical approval from the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The first phase of data collection involved carrying out observations in market places, religious gatherings, bus parks and customs areas, and football screening halls. We selected these areas after examining the multilingual social nature of the participants. Thus, research in the markets targeted the buyers and sellers while the research in religious gatherings targeted religious adherents.

The research in the bus parks and around the customs area targeted the road travellers, and in football screening halls the research targeted the football fans. As part of the observations, the researchers also engaged in incidental casual talk with different people targeting specific aspects of the use of Kiswahili that constituted contact and conflict. The data in casual conversations and observations was written down in a notebook.

The second phase of the research involved face-to-face interviews with 16 individuals. The 16 consisted of two ordinary citizens drawn from each of the four study sites. We selected the interviewees purposively based on our judgement of their knowledge of the day-to-day social life in their respective areas. Their experience in interacting with citizens from all walks of life and on a daily basis was considered.

The interviews were largely unstructured and proceeded in the form of open conversation. The conversations were based on guiding question developed following (Bowern 2008). Sample guiding questions for the topic of this article included: (i) if and when the participants spoke Kiswahili; (ii) if and when they used a particular variety; (iii) general impressions of participants about Kiswahili; (iv) impression about who spoke 'the same' and 'differently'; (v) how participants judged particular varieties, that is, which varieties are prestigious and which ones were considered inferior; and (vi) language perceptions and attitudes of the citizens. The interviews also yielded information about the demographics and the kinds of mobility and linguistic repertoires at Namanga.

We conducted all of the interviews in Kiswahili as the participants' code of choice. The interviews were audio-recorded with informed

consent from the participants. The interviews were then transcribed and eventually translated into English. The transcription and translation were done by the principal researcher of the study who has experience as an English-Kiswahili/Kiswahili-English translator.

The analysis was done qualitatively based on the themes of the study. Four main codes (issues) that constitute the theme 'language contact and conflict' were derived from the data collected, these are: (i) citizen mobility; (ii) varieties and labels; (iii) citizens' attitudes to language; and (iv) demonstration of linguistic power. We have presented these in section four of this article. Each issue is illustrated with relevant extract(s) from data transcripts. We have used a roman number enclosed in double brackets to mark each extract.

English words and phrases in the original Kiswahili extracts have been italicized, and so are the Kiswahili words and phrases in the English translation of the extracts. Speech marks are used to mark direct quotations from responses of the participants. Ellipsis is used to show that some parts of speech have been left out of the extracts. Bold typeface is used to mark that part of the extract that is emphasised in the context in which it has been used.

## Theoretical and Literature Review

The discussion in this article is informed by the Citizen Sociolinguistics (CS) model proposed by Betsy Rymes and Andrea Leone-Pizzighella (2014). The CS model is conceptualized both as a theoretical and methodological framework that draws from other theories such as citizen science, participatory culture, orders of indexicality and communicative repertoires. According to Rymes and Leone, the CS model seeks to provide an understanding of language and social life by tracing the ways ordinary citizens comprehend and make use of the world of languages around them. As such, the CS model is summarized as the study of language-use based on citizen (public) participation (Rymes and Leone 2014). The model pays attention to the participation of ordinary citizens in social interactions, also called 'citizenship' (Hausendorf and Bora 2006). It traces the way discourse genres, texts and people circulate back and forth in social interactions (Moore 2015).

The CS model considers language as a social act, and speaking as a social action, and hence looks at situated uses of language and other modalities of communication in the day-to-day interactions. It emphasises the need to obtain research data empirically from the social contexts where the language is used. It calls for the investigation of a myriad of issues such as (i) varieties of language in use; (ii) language choice decisions that speakers make as reflected in the local patterns of language use; (iii) ideologies that citizens have about language; and (iv) attitudes of citizens towards language as reflected in what

they do with it. We found these issues directly related to language in social interactions and language contact situations, hence, the suitability of the methodology for the study.

Peter Siemund (2008) observes that systematic studies of language contact situations seriously started with the publication of Uriel Weinreich's seminal monograph *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* (1953). Siemund adds that it is for this reason that Weinreich is considered the founder of contact linguistics. Following Weinreich's publication, language contact received considerable attention from linguists, such as Clyne (1998, 2003); Sankoff (2009); Siemund (2008); Thomason (2001); Thomason and Kaufman (1998) among others.

Another group of scholars from the late 1960s through 1990s, such as Haarmann (1986, 1990); Mackey (1967); Nelde (1987, 1994, 1997); and Ninyoles (1969) recognized language conflict as an integral outcome of language contact situations in multilingual communities (Darquennes 2010). Language conflict was then defined as a form of open (and sometimes violent) disagreements, tensions, resentments and differences of opinion between and among ethnic groups, and which came about as a result of language or simply expressed through language (Nelde 1994). These kinds of language contacts and conflicts became the most studied the world over. Nelde opines that the initial studies in inter-ethnic language conflicts suggested that most conflicts originated in historical, political and economic factors between members of the ethnic groups in a multilingual community.

However, she argues that this is not always the case as some conflicts can also be self-generated in a multilingual community. She adds that these kinds of conflicts are mostly characterized by competition between language groups, each trying to find space in the linguistic hierarchies in a multilingual society, and dominant languages trying to outdo the less dominant languages. According to Darquennes (2010), in some cases, the disadvantaged or weaker groups choose to cooperate with the dominant groups and lead to some other outcomes, but in other cases, they may choose to put up some form of political resistance.

Previous studies in East Africa have been limited to understanding linguistic outcomes of contact between Kiswahili and other languages (Akidah 2013; Bosha 1993; Dzahene-Quarshie 2010; Gowers 1952). These studies have concerned themselves with how Kiswahili and other languages such as Arabic, English and indigenous African languages influence each other through borrowing. Essentially, these studies have taken the approach of looking at contact as a product of inter-ethnic influences in multilingual societies. However, as Mattheier (1984) has shown, conflicts over language use can also occur in 'monolingual

communities' – communities in which one dominant language is used. It would appear that what Mattheier alludes to is what Gumperz (1982) referred to as 'social conflicts'. These kinds of conflicts can best be studies in face-to-face conversations.

Face-to-face conversations are considered vital in interactional sociolinguistics on the basis that a conversation is more than just the exchange of information, but also some form of social event in which different individuals come to play (Gumperz 1982; Madsen 2006). Gumperz and Madsen argue that in a conversation, every linguistic act can be seen as a social act in which speakers negotiate social relations through various strategies. Many issues suffice in the process of negotiating identities and relations. Thus, to understand the communicative phenomena that arise in human interaction, Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz (1982) advise that we need 'to go' gain insights into the communicative processes by which the phenomena arise. This article looks into these issues in communicative processes in which Kiswahili functions at Namanga.

## Issues Emerging out of the use of Kiswahili at Namanga

Our analysis of the data collected in language contact and conflict situations among the ordinary citizens at Namanga revealed four major issues that we present and discuss below. These are:

- varieties and labels;
- attitudes of the citizens to language;
- demonstration of linguistic power; and
- citizen mobility

## Varieties and Labels

Variety is used as a neutral term for language and dialects (Meyerhoff 2006), and also, any of the human speech patterns associated with a group within a dialect or an individual within a group (Wardhaugh 1986). Our data revealed socially constructed varieties of Kiswahili at Namanga which are in turn assigned unique labels by the ordinary users. Notable varieties include: (i) *Kiswahili cha Tanzania* (Tanzanian Kiswahili); (ii) *Kiswahili cha Kenya* (Kenyan Kiswahili); (iii) *Kiswahili cha Uganda* (Ugandan Kiswahili); (iv) *Kiswahili cha Coast* (Coastal Kiswahili); and (v) *Kimaaja* (Street Kiswahili).

### *'Kiswahili cha Tanzania' (Tanzanian Kiswahili) ("clean Kiswahili[3]")*

The *Kiswahili cha Tanzania* variety was ascribed to Kiswahili speakers of Tanzanian nationality at Namanga. It was referred to as *Kiswahili safi* (clean Kiswahili) or *Kiswahili kizuri* (good Kiswahili). The following extract relates to this variety.

[3] "Clean Kiswahili" is our direct translation of "Kiswahili safi", a term used by participants to describe the *Kiswahili cha Tanzania*. We chose a direct translation in order to capture the metaphorical sense in which participants understand and speak of the variety, but later in the analysis we show that they actually mean 'pure Kiswahili'.

In extract (1) the participant who is a Kenyan mentions that there exists a variety called *Kiswahili cha Tanzania* and goes ahead to label it *Kiswahili safi* (clean Kiswahili) and constitutes 'incorrect' Kiswahili. But still, some people are unable to learn and speak that 'correct' Kiswahili even when they are aware that the variety they speak is not 'correct' Kiswahili.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (1) | …Kiswahili ya Tanzania enyewe inakuanga poa sana. Yaani ni ile Kiswahili…sijui nikwambie aje…yaani ni ile Kiswahili *safi* kabisa. Yaani akiongea unasikia Kiswahili *kimenyooka* kabisa… | …The Tanzanian Kiswahili is very good. I mean it is that kind of Kiswahili… I don't know how I can explain it to you…I mean it is a kind of Kiswahili that is very pure. I mean when one speaks you understand that the Kiswahili is very streamlined... |
| (2) | Watanzania wanazungumza Kiswahili kizuri sana. Kiswahili chao si kama chetu. Chao ni *pure* kabisa. Basi kama kuna Kiswahili *original* ni kile cha Tanzania.… | Tanzanians speak very good Kiswahili. Their Kiswahili is not like ours. Theirs is very *pure*. So, if there is an *original* Kiswahili, it is that spoken by Tanzanians. … |

*Kiswahili kimenyooka* (streamlined Kiswahili). When asked to elaborate, the participant in extract (2) assigns morelabels as "Kiswahili pure" and "Kiswahili original".

Other participants referred to this variety as *Kiswahili sanifu* (standard Kiswahili), "Kiswahili fluent", and "*Kiswahili cha ndani*" (deep Kiswahili). The speakers of this variety were said to occupy a particular space on the Tanzanian side of Namanga. This geographical positioning implied that not every citizen at Namanga can speak it. The fact that most of these descriptions and labels were assigned by speakers who do not speak this variety implies that the participants have certain socially constructed ideas of what constitutes 'original' and 'correct' Kiswahili and what

The "clean Kiswahili" was described as being grammatically correct and 'clean' in the sense that it does not employ any form of code-mixing. Our observation confirmed that while the grammatical correctness of the Kiswahili spoken in the identified space on the Tanzanian side of the border, it was not exactly similar to standard Kiswahili as used in formal domains of language use, the participants strove to maintain some level of fluency of spoken Kiswahili by maintaining word agreement. They were found to have a bigger Kiswahili vocabulary.

Words, such as *bibi* (grandmother), *parachichi* (avocado), *nauli* (fare), *njoo* (come), *mhudumu* (waiter), *agizia* (place an order), among others were heard in this space and not in other spaces where English language equivalents

were used. Conversations among the people portrayed more of the traditional Swahili cultural honorifics in forms of relational titles such as *mamangu* (my mother), *mjomba* (uncle), *kaka* (elder brother), *ndugu* (brother), *dada* (sister), and *mzee wangu* (my elder). Such features formed the basis on which the Kiswahili *cha* Tanzania was labelled clean and original.

### *'Kiswahili cha Kenya' ("broken-broken Kiswahili")*

*Kiswahili cha Kenya* described as "broken-broken Kiswahili" is a variety that was ascribed to the Kenyan speakers at Namanga. This type has characteristics represented in extracts (3) and (4) below.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (3) | …wengi wanasema Kiswahili cha Kenya kweli kimepinda. Yaani hakijakaa sawa. Kiko *broken* kidogo … | …. many say that the Kenyan Kiswahili is not streamlined. Meaning it is not in good shape. It is a bit *broken* … |
| (4) | Wakenya wanazungumza Kiswahili isipokuwa ile Kiswahili yao ni *broken-broken* …. Wanazungumza tu yao *broken*. | Kenyans speak Kiswahili although their Kiswahili is a *broken-broken* one. …They just speak their *broken* one. |

In extract (3) the participant, who is a Tanzanian, labels the Kenyan variety of Kiswahili spoken at Namanga as "broken" and in extract (4) the Kenyan[4] participant labels it as "broken-broken". When probed further, participants mentioned that *kimepinda* (it is 'bent'), which is the opposite of *kimenyooka* as applied to the Tanzanian Kiswahili in extract (1). Other participants said that this variety is *kombo* or *kombo-kombo* which is a synonym of *pinda* (bent).

The participants further said that this variety is not "original Kiswahili" because it is mixed with English unlike the Tanzanian Kiswahili which was said to be 'pure' Kiswahili. Thus, code-mixing stands out as the major salient feature that characterized the variety of the "Kenya Kiswahili" at Namanga. The following extract illustrates code-mixing:

| | |
|---|---|
| (5) | "…*fungueni Bibilia zenu kitabu cha* Mark chapter eight verse ten." Open your Bibles at the book of Mark chapter eight verse ten. |

The participant in extract (5) is a pastor in a religious gathering who starts speaking in Kiswahili and then draws in an English phrase before switching back to Kiswahili. This appeared to be a result of lack of fluency in the Kiswahili language, not only for the interlocutor but also for the addressees whom the pastor believed would not understand

[4] Although this participant is Kenyan, he reports of the form of Kiswahili used by Kenyans as though he is not part of them. Several other participants spoke this way, perhaps as a way of trying to prove their objectivity.

the part of the phrase if stated in Kiswahili.

The observation was also made at the lexical level in the domains of transport, entertainment, and trade. Many English and other non-Kiswahili words were used in speech by the ordinary participants on the Kenyan side of the border. The transport sector used words such as driver, fare, stage, and *doh* (slang for money). Words, mainly extracted from the English language, such as goalkeeper, goal, linesman, penalty, league, among others were observed in the area of entertainment. This was different from the Tanzanian variety which attempted a Kiswahili rendering of the words so that, for example, goalkeeper was rendered as "golikipa" or simply "kipa".

Another feature of the "broken-broken" variety is probably what one participant in a casual conversation described as *hakina mpangilio* (it has no order). This implied that there was disorderliness indexes and ungrammatical practices. In this regard, Kenyan Kiswahili in conversations included statements, such as *ile gari imejaa* (that vehicle is full). This construction defies the Kiswahili noun class system[5] where the noun *gari* (vehicle) which is normally placed in the (li/ya) noun class is in this example positioned in the (i/zi) noun class. The result of this is lack of intra-sentential agreement among nouns, verbs and adjectives, and the other components of the sentence.

### *'Kiswahili cha Uganda' ("little-little Kiswahili")*

*Kiswahili cha Uganda* variety translated here as "little-little Kiswahili" is a variety of Kiswahili mapped onto speakers of Kiswahili from Uganda at Namanga. Participants labelled it as *kidogo-kidogo* (a little-little), *kidogo tu* (just a little) or *kidogo sana* (very little).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (6) | Kiswahili cha Uganda nacho ni *kidogo sana*. Wale kuongea kwao ni ngumu…. Ukimpata mmoja anaongea Kiswahili *then* ni *kidogo tu*. | The Ugandan Kiswahili is *very minimal*. Those ones find it hard to speak…. If you find one speaking Kiswahili, then it is *just a little*. |
| (7) | …Mganda hakifahamu kabisa. Na kama anafahamu, *kidogo kidogo*… | …A Ugandan does know it completely. And if they do, it is *very minimal*… |

According to the participant in extract (6), it is rare to come across a citizen of Uganda at Namanga speaking Kiswahili. If one is found, he will be speaking very minimal or just a little Kiswahili. This view was shared

[5] There are 9 noun classes in Kiswahili grouped according to how the noun modifies verbs, adjectives and other grammatical entities in a sentence. Being an agglutinate language, Kiswahili allows each noun class to be represented by a particular prefix that is attached to the stems of grammatical categories when it is used in a sentence to allow for intra-sentential agreement among components of a sentence.

by other participants, including in casual conversations, who described the variety as *kidogo-kidogo* just as the participant in extract (7) observes. Their description of *kidogo-kidogo* was that the Ugandan citizens at Namanga rarely speak Kiswahili.

Participants claimed that Ugandans will mostly remain quiet in a group conversation and not contribute to a debate held in Kiswahili. But whenever they participate in a conversation involving Kiswahili, their responses will be short. One participant in casual conversations observed, "*Wanajua maneno tu na hawawezi hata tunga sentensi*" (They only know lone words and cannot even construct a sentence.) Though we did not observe any Ugandan speaker at Namanga, our conversation with some Ugandan citizens at another study site at the Busia border town on the Kenya-Uganda border supports this observation. Several Ugandan speakers we came across reported that they speak "a little-little Kiswahili." Our conversations with them displayed either lack of confidence, reluctance or wariness towards Kiswahili. Most of their speeches were accompanied and sometimes substituted with frequent gestures such as nodding and pointing. This assertion was evidenced by one participant in an interview who reported that whenever they go to the market where circumstances force them to speak Kiswahili, they normally do not engage in stories, but rather go direct to the point:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (8) | Sisi tunauliza tu, "Habari? Unauza ngapi?" au "Pesa ngapi?"… | We simply ask, "How are you? How much are you selling?" Or "How much money?"… |

However, some Ugandan participants at Busia displayed some reasonable confidence in the use of Kiswahili. Their competence resembled that of most Kenyan participants, with similar codemixing between English and Kiswahili. This is illustrated by extract below:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (9) | Kujifunza Kiswahili ni *important mostly* kwa wale wanasafiri kama Nairobi, kama hata kufanya biashara, kama kutafuta kazi. Kiswahili inakusaidia kwa interaction … | Learning Kiswahili is *important mostly* for those who travel [to places] like Nairobi, like even to engage in business, like to look for employment, Kiswahili helps you in *interaction* … |

Unlike most of the Ugandan participants who were unwilling to pick on Kiswahili as the preferred language of the interviews and interaction during the study, the participant in the extract above did not shy off speaking some Kiswahili. However, his Kiswahili was incoherent, and lacked subject-

verb agreement in addition to being a mixture of Kiswahili and English.

### *Kiswahili 'cha Coasti' / Kiswahili cha Pwani ("sweet Kiswahili")*

*Kiswahili cha Coasti/Kiswahili cha Pwani* (Sweet Kiswahili) variety of Kiswahili was reported and observed in the transport domain at Namanga. It was associated with truck drivers who were said to originate from Mombasa or *Pwani*, Kiswahili word for 'coast'. The variety was labelled as "*Kiswahili tamu*" (sweet Kiswahili). The following examples illustrates the type:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (10) | Kiswahili cha *Coasti* ni *Kiswahili tamu*. Ukiwasikiliza kwa mfano hawa madereva wanaopita hapa kutoka huko… nakwambia utapenda Kiswahili chao… hicho ndio unasikianga *Kiswahili cha Pwani* sasa… | The Coastal Kiswahili is *sweet Kiswahili*. If you listen, for example, to these drivers who pass here from there…I tell you, you will like their Kiswahili … now that is what you normally hear [people call] *Kiswahili cha Pwani*. |
| (11) | Hawa…hawa tuseme kama madereva hawa wa matrela za kutoka Mombasa hisi…wao ndio unaweza sema Kiswahili chao kisuri. … Kiswahili kile kisuri, yani kinafurahisha kusikiliza… unajua huyu anajua Kiswahili. *Kitamu* nakwambia… | These… let us say for example these drivers of trucks from Mombasa… those are those whose Kiswahili is good… that good Kiswahili, I mean, it is pleasing to listen to…you will know that this one knows Kiswahili. It is *sweet* I tell you… |

The description of the Coastal Kiswahili in extracts (10) and (11) show that this variety is based not on the grammatical 'correctness' as was the *Kiswahili cha Tanzania* in extracts (1) and (2) or 'incorrectness' for *Kiswahili cha Kenya* in (3), (4) and (5), but on the acoustic features. This comprised the way the speakers pronounce certain lexical items of Kiswahili. For example:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (12) | Wewe Kijana unaithwa nani? | (Young man, what is your name?) |

Example (12) provided by a speaker shows a change in word forms where, instead of the normal /*unaitwa*/

(you are called), the pronunciation given is /*unaithwa*/. In this example, the dental stop /t/ is replaced with another dental stop /th/. Another example picked from a conversation is the use of palatal stop /dh/ instead of alveolar stop /d/ as in /*ndhugu*/ in place of /*ndugu*/.

This type of speech is similar to that of the traditional dialects of Kiswahili,[6] especially *Kimvita* and *Kiamu* as spoken on the mainland, Mombasa and Lamu island respectively. This shows that the participants and citizens at Namanga are attracted to this variety of Kiswahili mainly due to its 'pleasant' or melodious accent. While this variety was attributed to truck drivers from the coastal parts of Kenya, the variety could actually be a mixture of varieties from other traditional dialects other than those from Mombasa. Edgar Polome (1967) argues that there are features which cut across the dialects as a result of cross-dialect influences.

### *'Kimaaja' ("street Kiswahili")*

*Kimaaja* or "*Kiswahili cha mtaa*" (street Kiswahili), is a variety of Kiswahili associated mostly with the youthful motor vehicle touts at Namanga. It was described as "*Kiswahili cha wahuni*" (Kiswahili for the hooligans), or more neutrally, "*lugha ya vijana*" (language of the youth). This is illustrated in extracts (13), (14) and (15).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (13) | …. Hiyo inaitwa *Kimaaja*. Ni *lugha ya vijana* ya mtaa. …tuseme ni Kiswahili tu lakini *kimepinduliwa* kwa nyuma. | …. That is called *Kimaaja*. It is a *street language* for the *youth language* (…). We can say it is just Kiswahili but it has been *reversed*. |
| (14) | …Hiyo *Kimaaja* ni kama *kurudisha tu Kiswahili na nyuma*. Kama "soda" unaita "daso". Yaani unarudisha Kiswahili nyuma. Kama ni "chai" unaita "icha"… | …. That Kimaaja is just like *speaking Kiswahili_ backwards*. Like "*soda*" you call it "*daso*". I mean you speak Kiswahili backwards. If it is "*chai*" you call it "*icha*"… |
| (15) | Kimaaja ni cha *vijana wachache* tu. Ma-*group ndogondogo sana*. Kama sasa hawa vijana makanga na hizo *group* zao. … *So* ni Kiswahili cha wahuni tu. Unawapata kwa stage za magari sana sana hawa wanaingiza watu kwa magari. Pia wale wanabeba mizigo… | Kimaaja is spoken by just a *few youths*. Very *small groups*. For example, these tout youths and their groups. So it is just **Kiswahili for the** *hoodlums*. You will find them at the car parks, these who lead people to vehicles. Also those who carry luggage… |

[6] See Polome, E. C. (1967). *Swahili Language Handbook*.

The participant in extract (13) describes *Kimaaja* as a language for the youth spoken on the streets of Namanga. The participant in extract (15) affirms that the variety is not spoken by all the youths but a small section of touts, whom she refers to as "*wahuni*" (hooligans). Asked about how it is actually spoken, participant in extract (10), she said, "*kimepinduliwa*" (it is reversed), and the participant in extract (14) gives examples of *soda* as *daso*, and *chai* (tea) as (*icha*).

Our observation confirmed that the *Kimaaja* variety is based on a reverse order of syllables where, in most cases, the last syllable in a word comes first and the first comes last. Another example that illustrates such inflections is "*gari lile*" (that vehicle) as (*riga leli*). But in some cases, especially where a personal pronoun is involved, the pronoun comes first. A popular phrase we captured during our observations was "*tundae vihi*" instead of "*twende hivi*" (let us go this way). Thus, the reverse aspect of speech in *Kimaaja* is limited to the lexical level.

*Kimaaja* behaved as a "neutral" variety for the group consisting of members drawn from the other varieties of Kiswahili in contact at Namanga. This is considering the fact that the word *Kimaaja* itself is a reverse of the Kiswahili word '*Kijamaa*' (socialism/collectivism). Thus, while *Kimaaja* is said to be used for purposes of maintaining secrets and furthering anti-social behaviour, among its speakers, it could also be a product of linguistic tensions between the 'formal' varieties of Kiswahili spoken at Namanga. The variety's name has its roots in a predominantly Tanzanian vocabulary and a national development philosophy. The variety could also be looked at in terms of a deliberate defiance and protest against the grammatically demanding "clean Kiswahili" of Namanga.

The participants reporting about the varieties of Kiswahili, that we have presented, reveal their perceptions of each variety. These perceptions contribute to the conflict that arise when speakers of these varieties come into contact. This is mainly because the perceptions lead to varied attitudes towards not only the varieties themselves but also the speakers of the varieties. We now turn to discussing some of these attitudes.

## Attitudes of the Citizens to Language

Language attitudes is defined as the feelings which people have about their own language or the language(s) of others (Crystal 1997). These attitudes form part of the communicative competence of the members of a speech community (Davis 1995), and have been shown to be powerful in influencing linguistic behaviour and ultimately, linguistic forms (Fasold 1979). The attitudes are normally reflected in a variety of perceptions, judgements and sentiments, both positive and negative, favourable and unfavourable, ambivalent and tolerant.

In the context of our study, language attitudes of the people were discovered as useful in explaining conflicts in language contact situations at Namanga. These were discoverable in the social varieties and labels that we discussed above. The analysis agreed with Mirriam Meyerhoff's (2006) view that labels and varieties provide a basis for identifying the close association between attitudes to language use and language users. Our examination of the data collected brings out three sets of feelings and perceptions, which we discuss below.

### *Positive/Favourable Attitudes*

In response to direct questions requiring participants to rate the extent of the use of Kiswahili at Namanga and how they think the language should be used, some of the participants expressed positive attitudes towards Kiswahili. The following are examples from our findings:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (16) | …Lugha ni Kiswahili tu. Hiyo ndio tunatumia *100 per* cent... | …The language is just Kiswahili. That is the one which we use 100 per cent…. |
| (17) | …Hiyo hiyo tu Kiswahili. *Kaka nimekueleza Tanzania nzima ni Kiswahili. Mijini, majumbani, Kiswahili.... Kaka...hivi nakwambia hamna lugha nyingine hapa. Mji huu wote unavyouona ni Kiswahili tu.* Kenya, Tanzania, Kiswahili, Kiswahili pekee… Watu hapa ni Kiswahili wanazungumza. Asiyejua ni mgeni. Labda kaja jana au leo. Iwapo ni juzi, huyo ashajifunza tayari. Hata kama ni kile cha maneno mawili tatu. | …Just that very Kiswahili. *Brother, I have told you that the whole of Tanzania it is just Kiswahili. In towns, in homes, just Kiswahili... Brother...I am telling you that there is no other language here. The whole of this town that you see is just Kiswahili.* Kenya, Tanzania, only Kiswahili… It is Kiswahili that people speak here. He who does not know Kiswahili is a stranger. Maybe he came yesterday or today. If it is yesterday but one, that one has already learnt it. Even if it is only a few words. |

The participants were enthusiastic in revealing that Kiswahili is the "only" language spoken at Namanga. The participant in extract (16) went ahead to quote '100 per cent' as the extent to which citizens at Namanga use Kiswahili. Similarly, the participant in extract (17) claims that Kiswahili is the most used language in the whole of Namanga and Tanzania, both in homes (private spaces) and in towns (public spaces). The emphasis laid on these assertions by the participant serves to portray Kiswahili as the favoured language at Namanga.

However, casual conversations during observations and indirect questioning of the participants during the interviews revealed that only the variety labelled as "clean Kiswahili" is seen to be highly regarded and favoured by the citizens than the other varieties. As extract 4 shows, the positive and favourable attitude towards the "clean variety" can also be decoded from its several positive labels while the other varieties were described by the use of only one or two labels. In one of the public religious gatherings, the preacher asked the gathering for the equivalent of the word "lecturer" in Kiswahili. It took some guesses from the audience before the preacher almost settled for "*Mwalimu wa chuo kikuu*", as voiced by the gathering before changing his mind insisting that he wanted to hear from a Tanzanian.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (18) | .... *Watanzania mko wapi jameni? Nipeni neno mzuri... (kicheko)... Haya tafuteni* .... | …. Tanzanians where are you folks? Give me a good word…. (laughter)…okay, look for it… |

Extract (18) above shows that the preacher does not trust the vocabulary supplied by speakers of other varieties, and believes that a Tanzanian citizen could have supplied a better word. The preacher believed that the phrase *'mwalimu wa chuo kikuu'* was not provided by a Tanzanian speaker of Kiswahili. The preacher's trust and preference for the "clean Kiswahili" variety demonstrates an ideologically rooted attitude towards varieties of Kiswahili spoken at Namanga.

### *Negative/unfavourable and Stigmatized Attitudes*

Most of the citizens who reported that they did not to speak the 'broken-broken' variety of Kiswahili revealed concealed negative or unfavourable attitudes towards it. This was evident in their difficulty in explaining what 'broken' or 'broken-broken' actually means. Many of the participants replied "*sijui vile naweza kueleza*" (I don't know how I can explain). Compared with the "clean variety", this variety did not attract many labels. It was only explained as 'broken' or 'broken-broken'. Broken-broken served as a way of emphasizing the 'broken' nature of the variety.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (19) | …**Siwezi kubadilisha. Kama nikipata mama anauza matunda siezi kumwambia "mama nipe matunda", nitamwambia "mama shikamoo, naomba uniuzie matunda"**. Yeye anajua maana ya "Shikamoo" … Lakini sasa nikienda Maili Tisa huko ama Kajiado nimwambie mtu "Shikamoo", hajui. **Na ni mtu mzima!** Sasa kama huko wanapenda tu kusema "mambo?" Wewe niambie mtu mzima wewe utamwambia "mambo?" **Kweli ? Ni rika yako huyo? Hapana! Mpaka umwamkue vizuri…** | … **I cannot change. If I come across an old woman selling fruits, I cannot tell her** *"Mama nipe matunda", I will tell her "Mama naomba uniuzie matunda".* She understands the meaning of *'Shikamoo'*. …. But now if I go past *Maili Tisa or Kajiado* and I tell someone "*Shikamoo*", they do not know. **And he is a grown up!** There they just like saying "*mambo*?" You tell me, can you tell a grown up "*mambo*?" **No! It is a must that you greet him well…** |

Extract (19) demonstrates a negative attitude towards those varieties of Kiswahili spoken at Namanga that the speaker does not subscribe to. The participant vows that he will stick to his variety should he encounter a speaker of another variety even if the other speaker was elderly. The participant says that every citizen at Namanga should know at least some words, such as "*shikamoo*" and "*mambo*" that are associated with other varieties should not be used to address or greet a grown up! The participant says that for a grown up, "*mpaka umwamkue vizuri*" (you must greet him/her well). In this context, 'greeting well' is associated with the variety labelled as the "clean Kiswahili".

As to what language *Kimaaja* is, the response of the participant was:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (20) | Kimaaja si lugha kaka. **Hiyo ni style tu**. Ni kama kugeuza kama mtu unageuza gari. Ama unaendesha ukirundi nyuma… (kicheko)…Sasa wao wanazungumza wakirudi nyuma wakipindua maneno. Wanaita ni lugha yao lakini ni ya watu tu wa kupora watu. Hao ni matapeli kaka! | Kimaaja is not a language my brother. **That is just a style.** It is like reversing the way a person reverses a vehicle. Or you are driving going backwards… (laughter)… So they speak backwards reversing words. They call it their language but it is simply for people who rob others. Those ones are conmen my brother! |

The way the sentiments of the speaker, in extract (20), are articulated conveys meaning that *Kimaaja* is a stigmatized variety at Namanga. In addition to being associated with 'unlawful' and anti-social activities such as fraud, the participant sounds unamused with the 'reversed' manner in which the variety is spoken. The negative attitude towards *Kimaaja* is not just as a result of the nature and conduct of its speakers, but also the 'reversed' nature of the code itself.

During observation, another participant denied being able to speak *Kimaaja* even though he was a tout. His reply was "*No no no! Hiyo si ya mtu kama mimi bro! Hiyo ni ya wengine*" (No no no! That is not for someone like me brother! That is for other people). Insisting that *Kimaaja* is not for people of his calibre, the participant was not ready to be associated with the variety, signalling its stigmatized nature. As Florence Bayiga (2016) has shown, speakers will definitely deny knowing a language that they do not respect, even if they know it.

## Attitudes of ambivalence and tolerance

While some of the participants expressed indecisive attitudes towards the different varieties of Kiswahili, spoken at Namanga, others were accommodative. One such variety that attract faltering attitudes is the one labelled as "Kiswahili *tamu*".

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (21) | Lakini kile cha Coast…. Yaani wanaivuta sana. Kwa mfano wanasema "Ewe Ali waithwa hapa wewe". (Kicheko) | But that one spoken at the Coast…. I mean they really stress it. For example, they say "You Ali, you are being called here". (Laughter) |

In extract (21), the participant describes the "Coastal Kiswahili" and in the process performs the way it is spoken. The 'twisting of the voice', accent, facial expression, smile and laughter of the participant while making this performance shows that he feels thrilled and entertained at the speaker's variety. It could also be that the participant sees the dialect as comical.

The participant does not show outright positive or negative attitude towards this variety. Asked whether they could speak the variety, most participants declined because as they said, they cannot "twist" the tongue. This takes us back to Bayiga's remark about a speaker denying knowledge of a variety they do not revere. A further ambivalent attitude towards a variety of Kiswahili is given below in extract (22):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (22) | Wengine kama wafanyabiashara wanazungumza Kiswahili ingawa si kama hiki chetu hapa sisi. Wajua? Matamshi yao yanakwaruzana na lugha zao za mama. Yaani kaka unakuta mtu azungumza lakini ukisikiliza unapata anajua maneno ila kutamka kwakwe balaa… Kaka wewe wazungumza Kiswahili tena kile safi sana. Hukwaruzi wewe… (**kicheko**). Kuna watu wewe wakizungumza… (**kicheko**) yaani unahisi kuwacheka lakini unawaelewa tu. | Others like the business people speak Kiswahili although it is not similar to this one which we speak here. You know? Their pronunciation conflicts with their mother tongues. I mean my brother you find a person speaking, when you listen, you realize that he knows the words but his pronunciation is a problem… Brother you speak Kiswahili in fact a very **clean** one. You do not shrub… (**laughter**). There are people who when they speak… (**laughter**) I mean you feel like laughing at them but you just choose to understand them. |

The participant in extract (22) laughs at the fact that there are some people who do not speak "clean Kiswahili". Although the participant is amused by the way some people speak Kiswahili, he chooses to "understand" rather than laugh. By choosing to tolerate such ways of speaking, the participant demonstrates an attitude of tolerance as a factor in resolving conflicts in talk.

From the way participants identify varieties of Kiswahili spoken at Namanga, to the way they assign labels of perception to the varieties, and finally the kind of attitudes they hold towards each variety, one can deduce that the participants believe that some of the varieties are linguistically more powerful than the others. This brings us to the third theme of this article, namely, demonstration of linguistic power.

## Demonstration of Linguistic Power

Lian Malai Madsen (2003) illustrates the notion of power as a form of symbolic dominance and argues that language is the primary means of wielding linguistic power in the society. Madsen argues that this is so because the choice of language in a conversation is a practical linguistic means of negotiating power. Regarding this notion, Susan Gal (2001) contends that some linguistic variants are more valued and carry more authority than others. Gal's argument demonstrates that some variants are seen as more correct, superior and powerful; while others are seen as less correct, inferior and less powerful.

Gal proposes that the differing power status that these variants carry into an interaction is likely to create tension as the less valued ones try to resist and challenge domination by the powerful ones. Variants spoken at Namanga exhibit different degrees of linguistic power. The ordinary citizens are equally well aware of this. The following extracts from responses by participants in interviews illustrate this point.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (23) | … Na sasa abiria akiona wewe una-*shrub* sana alafu huyu ananyoosha kidogo anajua wewe utaweza kumwelekeza vizuri kidogo kuliko huyu ana-*shrub*. Si ndio sababu inabidi wanajaribu kuigaiga. | … And now if a passenger sees that you falter a lot but this other one is trying to make it correct he will know that he will be able to direct him better than the one who falters. That is the reason why they will try to imitate. |
| (24) | Wale Watanzania hawawezi. Hawawezi kabisa. Na kama anaongea ile ya Kikenya, huwa anakuwanga ana-*kuenjoy*. (kicheko). Anakuambia "gari gani, gari gani imejaa?" Sasa yeye anakuwa ana-*kuenjoy* tu vile nyinyi huwa mnazungumzanga. | Those Tanzanians cannot. They simply cannot. And if he is speaking the Kenyan Kiswahili, he will be making fun of you… (laughter). He tells you "which vehicle, which vehicle is full?" Now he will just be mocking the way you speak. |

The participant (a taxi driver) in extract (23) argues that some passengers at Namanga choose to be served by a tout who is a "fluent" speaker of Kiswahili as opposed to the one who mispronounces words. Hence, the touts, try as much as possible, to check on their pronunciation, often adjusting towards the "clean" variety. This shows that the "clean" variety is associated with more power than other varieties, such as the "broken-broken" variety and the "street language". The attempts to switch from variety to variety in conversations, demonstrates power struggles between different varieties of Kiswahili at Namanga. The less powerful variety is abandoned for the more powerful. In the end, the variety that is shunned by the citizens is dominated by the 'other'.

The participant in extract (24) stresses that Tanzanian citizens at Namanga, who are perceived to speak the "clean variety" cannot speak the other varieties spoken on the Kenya side of the town or any other type for that matter. To emphasise his point, the participant mockingly mimics how the Tanzanian nationals would pronounce it, if they were to speak it at all. This indexes not just the little power that is associated with the variety in question, but also how inferior it is considered to be, to the variety of the participant.

Further observations revealed that linguistic power at Namanga is demonstrated in relation to space as discussed under citizen mobility in the section that follows below. This is to say that each language variety carries more power in its respective space. For instance, the 'broken-broken' variety is more powerful on the Kenyan side of Namanga while the "clean variety" has more power in the Tanzanian side of the same town. Similarly, the *Kimaaja* variety is more powerful in the enclaves where it is spoken. A speaker of the "clean

variety" is humbled when in territories where, for example, *Kimaaja* is spoken.

The citizen mobility we discuss next accounts for the varieties and labels, citizens' attitudes, and demonstrates linguistic power that characterize the use of Kiswahili at Namanga. It illustrates the incidences of linguistic conflict in conversations of ordinary speakers of Kiswahili in the town.

## Citizen Mobility

Citizen mobility is a term that is invoked in the CS model to refer to the movement of people in time and space in the current globalized world. Rymes and Leone (2014) argue that the mobility of citizens results in the convergence (and contact) of different kinds of linguistic repertoires in a particular space. This observation relates to an earlier one by Jan Blommaert and Ben Rampton (2011) that migration is not only about people but also their language varieties. Blommaert (2005:6) notes that

> …linguistically speaking, the spaces that people move into are never empty spaces…, the spaces are someone's space, and they are filled with norms, expectations, and conceptions of what counts as proper and normal language use and what does not count as such.

Blommaert adds that the "space is filled with complexities that organize distinctions between the 'good', 'normal', 'appropriate', 'acceptable' language use, and the 'deviant', 'abnormal' language use" (p.6). Correspondingly, Leonard Bloomfield (2007) asserts that as people move, the 'sedentary' patterns of language use come into contact with the 'translocal' forms of language use, and that the combination of both brings about unexpected sociolinguistic effects.

From the data gathered, mobility of the ordinary citizens at Namanga has a strong effect on Kiswahili spoken. When asked about which people are found at the Namanga border town, participants responded as illustrated in extracts (25), (26), (27), and (28) below.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (25) | Hapa mpakani kuna watu wa kila aina. Sampuli na sampuli. **Watanzania** wapo. **Wakenya** wapo. Hata **Wazungu** wapo. Kuna **Wamaasai wa Kenya** na wa **Tanzania**. Kuna **Wameru** huku pia upande ule mwingine… | There are people of different kinds here at the border. Different and different kinds. There are **Tanzanians. Kenyans** are here. Even **Whites** are here. There are **Kenyan Maasai** and also **Tanzanian Maasai.** We have the **Meru** here and also on the other side… |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (26) | **Makabila ni mix**…Lakini nikianza na huu upande wa Kenya utapata kuna watu kama **Wakikuyu**, **Wameru**, **Wasomali**, **Waembu**, **Wamaasai** wenyewe, na hata watu kama **Waluhya**, **Wakisii** na wengine… | The **tribes are mixed up**…But if I start with the Kenyan side you will find that there are people like the **Kikuyu, Meru, Somali, Embu**, the **Maasai** themselves, and even people like **Luhya**, **Kisii** and others… |
| (27) | Halafu utapata hata **Wanyamwezi**, **Wanyaturu**, **Wachagga**, na wengine tu… | … Then you will also find even the **Nyamwezi**, **Nyaturu**, **Chagga** and others… |
| (28) | Gari inatoka Dar kwenda Nairobi na tena Nairobi hadi Dar. Inapepa **Wakenya**, **Watanzania**, na hata wafanyibiashara… unajua inapepanga watu wengi. So unaweza pata hata watu wa **Congo** huko, hata **Rwanda** na kila mahali wako kwa kari. | The vehicle comes from Dar and heads to Nairobi and also Nairobi to Dar. I carry **Kenyans, Tanzanians,** and even business people… you know it carries many people. So, you can even find that people from there in **Congo**, and even **Rwanda** and everywhere are in the vehicle… |

In extracts (25), (26), and (27), participants are in concurrence that Namanga is inhabited by mostly the citizens of Kenyan and Tanzanian nationalities, who apart from speaking different varieties of Kiswahili, speak their vernaculars, including Kikikuyu (Kikuyu), Kimeru (Meru), Kimaasai (Maasai), Kisomali (Somali) on the Kenya side, and Kimaasai, Kinyamwezi (Nyamwezi), Kichaga (Chagga), Kinyaturu (Nyaturu), among others on the Tanzania side. The participant in extract (28) notes that their 'cross-border-bus' through Namanga carries not only Tanzanian and Kenyan ordinary citizens but also some Rwandese and Congolese. Some "Wazungu" (the Whites) are also found at Namanga (extract 25).

These reports by interview participants correlate with our observations where in casual conversations many of the participants revealed having moved to Namanga from different parts of Kenya such as Nairobi, Machakos, Kitui, Meru, Embu, Marsabit, Mandela, Nyeri, Kiambu, Kakamega, Bungoma, and Kisii, and others from different parts of Tanzania such as Moshi, Dar es Salaam, Mbeya, Tanga, Morogoro, Mtwara, and Tabora. Other people we interacted with, in the transport domain, reported to have travelled from other countries such as Malawi, South Africa, Congo and the USA and were routing to Kenya and Tanzania.

As to what the different groups of people do at Namanga, the following extracts will illustrate.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (29) | Nililetwa hapa na *uncle* wangu mwingine alikuwa ni **contractor**… Alikuwa anafanya hii kazi ya **kujenga manyumba**. So si akaniambia kuna *job* zinapatikana za **kupaka rangi** huku... | I was brought here by one of my other uncles who was a **contractor** … He was doing the work of **building houses**. So, he then told me that there are normally **painting jobs** here... |
| (30) | Eee…ndio wengi ni **wafanyibiashara** na wengine **wanasafiri tu**… | Eee…yes, many are **business people** and others are just **travelling**… |

Citizens who reside at Namanga and those who visit are guided by different missions such as looking for jobs and travelling for leisure (extract 29), business activities (extract 30), and tourists and job-related journeys (from casual conversation). As we observed above, these citizens speak different languages and language varieties, and carry these codes into others' space(s), resulting into contact of opposing norms, values, conceptions and expectations. This paragraph shows that there are different ways of speaking, and that speakers take their ways to be the best. Tensions and collisions are bound to happen when they encounter others in talk. Speakers in conversations are always negotiating such struggles as reported in extract (31).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (31) | … kuna Wakenya wengine wakifika huko [Namanga Tanzania] pia **wanazungumza kama Watanzania**. Unajua ile kuzungumza yao ni kama *fashion*…Na pia kwa sababu wao ndio wengi huko. So utapata sasa **ukizungumza nao ni lazima umejaribu kuingia kwa ile Kiswahili yao ndio** *u-fit*. | … there are some Kenyans when they get there [Namanga Tanzania] **they speak like Tanzanians**. You know the way they speak is like fashion… And also because they are the majority there. So, when **speaking with them you must try to speak their Kiswahili so that you can fit.** |

The divergence of Kenyan speakers of Kiswahili from their variety and the converge towards the Tanzanian way of speaking as in extract (31) above illustrates the notion of space as a guarded territory where varieties compete for recognition (Blommaert 2005). The varieties are always in implicit 'wars' where, in most cases, the variety that occupies the particular space wins.

However, our observation at Namanga revealed that this is not always the case. Sometimes, the variety

that is considered most powerful (as we discussed above) is superior in whichever space. For instance, touts operating from the main taxi park on the Kenyan side of the town spotted prospective passengers in the no man's land approaching from the Tanzanian side and immediately decided to switch to the variety of "clean Kiswahili". While it is understandable that their action was meant to attract the passengers by trying to identify with them as friendly people, it is worth noting that this happens in the space of the Kenyan variety of Kiswahili. Our take on this is that the Kenyan touts could also have converged towards the 'clean variety' in order to avert a possible conflict between their variety and that of the travellers. This observation is based on the fact that the touts are aware that the travellers from the Tanzanian side of the town harbour unfavourable attitudes towards their 'broken' or 'unclean' variety. The touts had to immediately switch back to their own 'local' varieties once the passengers got onto the vehicle as a way to reclaim their space. There were no free conversations between the different varieties of Kiswahili due to linguistic tensions between the speakers.

Another observation we made about how mobility contributes to conflict among the Kiswahili speakers at Namanga is in greetings. For example, the Kiswahili variety spoken on the Tanzanian side of Namanga uses the word "*shikamoo*" when addressing seniors. The variety also has a local way of saying greetings in respect to different times of the day. Phrases, such as "*za asubuhi*?" (morning news?), "*za mchana*?" (mid-day news), "*za jioni*?" (evening news) and "*za saa hizi*?" (current news?) are applied in respect to time.

In the *Kiswahili cha Kenya* variety, greetings such as "*habari*?" or "*habari yako*?" (how are you?) and "*mambo*" (slang for "news") are used as the standard irrespective of the time of the day. *Shikamoo* is not common on the Kenya side of the town. However, as the speakers on this side of town cross over to the opposite side, they are confronted with "*shikamoo*" which sometimes gets them unprepared. As already mentioned, our observations revealed that the speakers of the "clean variety" stick to their linguistic norms as they get into the other people's spaces, and so conflicts ensue. This serves to demonstrate linguistic power of the different varieties as well as citizens' attitudes towards them.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have presented and discussed data on contact and conflict situations in relation to the use of Kiswahili at Namanga. Our central concern has been on the nature of contact and the concept of conversational conflict, particularly in conversations involving speakers of the same language – Kiswahili. The discussion has revealed that linguistic conflicts exist among the speakers

of Kiswahili when they come into contact at Namanga.

Four major sociolinguistic issues emerged as the bases for these conflicts: varieties and labels, citizens' language attitudes, demonstrations of linguistic power and citizen mobility. The four issues are closely linked to each other. Linguistic mobility leads to diversified linguistic repertoires at Namanga in form of varieties which then find labels in the context of use. These varieties carry inherent attitudes, with linguistic power being part of these attitudes.

The varieties and labels, the linguistic power, and the inherent language attitudes, and how these vary across spaces are key findings in this paper. These issues can be understood in two ways; first, in terms of the dynamic and versatile nature of language as a local practice[7] (Pennycook 2010). Therefore, Kiswahili, just like any other language, is dynamic and versatile, and prone to variation based on factors that are social as well as contextual (local).

Secondly, the above factors can be construed in terms of the varied trajectories that the development of Kiswahili in the East African region has taken over time. For instance, the fact that the Tanzanian Kiswahili is labelled as superior to other varieties can be understood as a product of Tanzania's "Kiswahili as the official and national language policy" that has been spearheaded by the Tanzanian government since independence.

Equally, the less superior varieties of Kiswahili that emerged in the study, that is, the Ugandan and Kenyan Kiswahili can also be understood in terms of the pro-English language policies in Kenya and Uganda that have given prominence to English over Kiswahili. As a result of the varied statuses accorded to Kiswahili in national and official matters in these countries. The use and perceptions about the language among the ordinary citizens have been affected by policy patterns. As a rejoinder, we conclude this article by emphasizing the fact that Namanga displays a perfect example of a local space, in East Africa, where meaningful and informative studies relating to different sociolinguistic aspects of Kiswahili, such as contact and conflict can be undertaken.

[7] The "theory" of 'language as a local practice' as conceptualized by Alistair Pennycook (2010) views language not as a pre-given entity, but as a byproduct of social practices of its speakers, and argues that knowledge of the immediate environment where the practices take place be taken into consideration when analyzing the language use.

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# Reading Two Ugandan Sketch Comedies as Social Critiques[1]

*Danson Sylvester Kahyana**

## Abstract

YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp – among other social media platforms – circulate many sketch comedies by Ugandan artists, such as Siraje Sebbanja (stage name: Muzei Kalali), Allan Mujuni (stage name: Amooti Omubalanguzi), Dickson Zzizinga and Anne Kansiime, to mention but a few. This article investigates the manner in which two of these comedies – "*Embaga ya Mayor*" and "*Kwanjula kw'Omuyaaye Ganja*" – offer social critiques on pertinent issues in the Ugandan society. Through a close reading of the comedies, while cross-referencing them to other Ugandan oral and written literary texts, and interviews with selected people, I tease out what I consider the major critiques of some aspects of Ugandan society. In the two works I focus on, as well as the major dramatic techniques the directors of the works use to carry their message across to the intended audiences, I discuss each comedy's major theme and the techniques used to develop it. It is my hope that this article will draw attention to Ugandan sketch comedies as material worthy of scholarly investigation.

**Key words:** Honour, respect, etiquette, greed, satire

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## Introduction

Studies on Ugandan theatre usually concentrate on many theatrical practices – traditional (Mbowa 2000:204-206), conventional (Ntangaare and Breitinger 2000: 224-249, and Imbuga 2000:250-261), or developmental (Kaahwa et al. 2000:185-203, and (Benge and Kiguli 2000: 109-119) – but rarely on the popular, where stand-up and sketch comedies fall. While Sam Kasule's (2007) work is in the area of popular performance, its focus is on songs, not stand-up or sketch comedies.

The scarcity of studies on popular literature affects comedies in a special way. Ebenezer Obadare (2009:244) observes that in Africa, "humour remains relatively under-investigated and is still far from seriously regarded, even though it appears to be one of the most important means by which the majority define, 'get even with', and 'resist' the power elite and the dominant power relations." I read the phrase "far from seriously regarded" to refer to the fact that the performance of humour on the continent has not yet received adequate scholarly attention. Further still, studies on humour generally privilege other sites other than Uganda. More importantly, these studies are written from disciplinary vantage points rather than literary studies (Blakes 2007:xi).

As I discuss the two comedies that I focus on here, I am aware that it is difficult to communicate in print even a quarter of how humorous they are in actual performance. This is because a "joke explained is a joke killed", as Simon Critchley (cited in Seirlis 2011:514) observes. In any case, what I find humorous may be boring to other people. This is because jokes usually work within particular cultural, social, political and economic contexts. It is for this reason that Alison Ross observes that a "joke can work brilliantly in one context and die in another, as stand-up comedians find, travelling from one venue to another" (1998:1). This means that while I find the two sketch comedies strikingly humorous, it is possible that a different person may find them boring.

I used three data collection methods to gather data for this article. The first one is close reading. This took the form of watching the video clips of the two sketch comedies several times, in order to understand the plot, subject matter and theme, as well as the key dramatic techniques used to develop the message in each piece. I paid careful attention to the actions of the characters in the skits, and the attributes or traits these characters have. This is because writers use characters as vehicles through which they convey their message. I also closely read secondary sources on humour in order to enrich my interpretation of the primary texts.

The second data collection method I used was interviews. John W. Cresswell (2014) argues that in-depth interviews create an amiable

environment between the researcher and the interviewee, thereby enabling the elicitation of data. I interviewed two categories of people: selected scholars of literature and linguistics, and the lead actors in the two sketch comedies – Emmanuel Mubiru, whose stage name is Omuyaaye Ganja, and Siraje Sebbanja, whose stage name is Muzei Kalali. These people were purposively selected because of the rich knowledge they have on the subject I was investigating.

To ensure I captured rich information, I prepared an interview guide for each of the categories of interviewees. For the scholars of literature and linguistics, the guide comprised questions on the meaning of the word '*ekitiibwa*' (honour) which is central to my investigation. For the sketch comedians, the questions were mostly on the video clips themselves, for instance the circumstances surrounding each clip's composition and performance. It is worth noting that the interviews were conducted via email (for the scholars) and telephone (for the lead actors) because of two major reasons. First, the possibility of the ease with which to reach people in different locations (for instance Prof. Helen Nabasuta Mugambi is based in USA); and second, time limitations made it difficult for me to meet the lead actors face-to-face.

The final data collection method was cross-referencing to other Ugandan oral and written literary texts in order to explain how what happens in the sketch comedies relates to what happens in these other texts.

Data analysis involved subjecting the two comedies to close scrutiny in order to understand each piece's subject matter and how it was communicated to the audience. This involved "not only understanding the surface meaning of the sentences, but comprehending the deep underlying meanings within and connections among them" (Kusch 2016:30). I used thematic and stylistic analysis to determine the occurrence and recurrence of certain aspects in the skits in order to explain why they were prominent in the texts. Three of these aspects were characterization, nomenclature, and satire.

## A Critique of Greed and Monetization of Love in "*Embaga Ya Mayor*"

The subject of food and the semiotics surrounding it are quite pervasive in African literature. Dan Ojwang (2011:69) observes that in African literary texts, food and eating appear as "metaphors of political corruption, greedy acquisition of material goods, and social inequality engendered by the latter in both the colonial and post-independence eras", and serve to mediate "social relationships". Ojwang's reading is informed by Arjun Appadurai's observation, "… in its varied guises, contexts, and functions, [food] can signal rank and rivalry, solidarity and community, identity or exclusion, and intimacy or distance" (1981:493). It might depend on the

number of courses one is served, by whom, and the order of serving (that is, before or after which guest) at a public event, such as a wedding ceremony. Ojwang's and Appadurai's views resonate with what happens in this skit as I explain below.

The sketch comedy entitled 'Embaga ya Mayor' (Luganda, translation: 'The Mayor's Marriage Ceremony') dramatizes a common happening in Ugandan society: hundreds of relatives, neighbours and friends gathering to celebrate a marriage ceremony. The skit features four characters: Hajji Manisuru (real name: Kyolaba Wamala), his son, his daughter, the daughter's fiancé, and Manisuri's neighbour, Muzei Kalali (real name: Siraje Sebbanja). For Muzei Kalali, the main character in the comedy, the ceremony is an occasion for a free meal. This is why his attention is more or less entirely on getting food. It is his fascination with eating that the comedy ridicules in the sense that it brings him dishonour since he fails to observe the etiquette surrounding food/eating in his community.

In one instance, his desire for food is stretched to the point where he is prepared to eat even what is forbidden by custom (the lungfish which is his totemic animal) and by his doctor (fried foods which are not good for his health). By doing this, he goes against the wisdom carried by the Luganda proverb, *Olya kuntono, netalumira*, which Kizza (2010:90) translates and interprets as: "It is better to eat a palatable small amount of food than to fill up on distasteful food." This proverb reminds "people that quality is often better than quantity", since "one would rather have less and have peace of mind than have plenty and be restless because of the burden that goes with having plenty" (Kizza 2010:90). As an old man ('Muzei', 'elder', is a Ugandanised form of the Kiswahili honorific title Mzee), Kalali is expected to behave with decorum and propriety. Unfortunately, he does not. Consequently, eating what is forbidden by custom (the totemic animal) brings dishonour to him for it empties him of his dignity as an elder.

Clearly, he is depicted as giving a bad example to the young people who have been socialized to believe that eating tabooed food comes with "a penalty to the offender such as illness, death, drought and disappearance" (Risiro, Tshuma and Basikiti 2013:22). The penalty that comes to him for committing this offense is the ridicule the host's son pours on him when he nicknames, in the Luganda language, "*nnantagwa mikolo*", a disparaging term which translates as "he who never misses a ceremony". This nickname has at least two implications. First, that Kalali is a feast-scavenger of sorts, since he attends every ceremony, even those where he is not expected or desired, not to socialize, but to get access to free food.

The second implication is that although he attends every feast, he himself does not organize any ceremony to which his relatives and

neighbours could come to socialize and eat. In other words, his actions are not located in the social logic of reciprocity that Mikael Karlström (2003:65) identifies in Buganda, where "hospitality and generosity with food are the pre-eminent means by which a properly constituted household opens itself to generative exchanges and solidary relations with neighbours and kin."

The antithesis of this hospitality and generosity is "eating in secret or behind closed doors in order to avoid guests," which is considered "an archetypal violation of proper social flows and connections, [thereby] exposing the household to isolation and misfortune" (Karlström 2003:65). The misfortune, in Kalali's case, is what Appadurai (1981:506) would call "gastronomic humiliation", since the host's son, with the tacit support of and encouragement by his father, ensures that Kalali gets nothing to eat throughout the ceremony. The humiliation that Kalali suffers points to the moral of the skit: that attending parties without hosting one in return is against the social morality that governs Ganda communities. For this reason, this is a deed that should be avoided.

Perhaps Kalali's status as a deviant in his society is made evident when he asks for a meal that nobody has ever served at a marriage ceremony. This meal is *ebisiyaga*, a Luganda word for a homosexual affair. The host, Hajji Manisuri, is scandalised upon hearing Kalali's request. He observes that this meal is illegal in Uganda because President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has signed into law a Bill that criminalizes homosexuality (Strand 2011, Wahab 2016). That Kalali asks for this kind of "food" which is considered taboo in Buganda shows that his appetites do not fall within acceptable social limits.

In an indirect way, however, his request is meant to serve as a commentary on the socio-political discourses taking place in the country. By imagining a socially proscribed sexual practice as taking place in a particular place in Kampala, the comedy contradicts the view that homosexuality is alien to Ugandans. In other words, the comedy makes it possible for homosexuality to be debated. This is in line with Michael Karson and Janna L. Goodwin's (2006) view that sketch comedy as a genre is especially suitable for discussing difficult topics. Equally important is the fact that the mention of homosexuality in the skit serves as a suitable guide to the socio-political setting of the comedy, particularly for the viewer is aware that the Uganda Parliament passed the Anti-Homosexuality Act on 20 December 2013.[2]

Another folly that the sketch comedy ridicules is the monetization of love. It turns out that Hajji Manisuru's daughter brings home a fiancé who is so ugly that her father

[2] For details on this Act, see: https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/14/uganda-anti-homosexuality-acts-heavy-toll (accessed on 7 September 2020).

flees the ceremony upon seeing him. The reason for her choice is that he is very rich. In the comedy, the person who acts the role of fiancé is called John Senyonjo, whose nickname is 'Mayor w'Abaabi' (Mayor of the Ugly), which is why the comedy is entitled the 'Mayor's marriage ceremony'.

The nickname owes its origin to a real-life 'beauty' pageant for Uganda's ugliest man held in 2014.[3] This pageant should have been called "Pageant for the Ugly" since it was intended that the winner would be the ugliest contestant. The real-life pageant was won by Godfrey Baguma, who was given the nickname 'General w' Abaabi' (the General of the ugly), with John Senyonjo coming second. When the directors of the comedy (Siraje Sebbanja, Kyolaba Wamala, and Charles Kikaaze) called for auditions, Senyonjo turned up for the role of fiancé. When I asked Siraje Sebbanja what message the directors had wanted to send to the audience through their choice of Senyonjo, he replied thus:

> We were ridiculing girls who care about money to the extent that they will marry anybody who comes with sacks of money, irrespective of his looks or moral background. Money has destroyed young girls, so much that some of them will not care to know if the man they are going out with has HIV. All they care about is whether or not he is rich.

"Embaga ya Mayor" uses satire which M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham (2012:353) define as "the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn of indignation." Muzei Kalali is ridiculed for three major follies: greed, selfishness, and foolishness. Greed as he moves from one ceremony where he has just eaten to the next one where he is keen to eat more. The selfishness comes out when he is seen all the time to think about himself and his stomach; and thirdly, foolishness comes out when, instead of respecting the medical doctor's advice for his own good, he only cares about eating, regardless of the impact the food might have on his health.

The use of irony lies in the fact that he is willing to eat food forbidden by custom and his doctors. Besides, because he is an old man, we expect him to be able to govern his appetite in a respectable manner. On the contrary, he does what dishonours him. For her part, Hajji Manisuri's daughter is ridiculed for monetizing marriage, which should be premised on love, to the extent that she sees nothing wrong with marrying an extremely ugly man (not because she is in love with him but rather because he is very rich).

For greater impact, the producers of the comedy use hyperbole. This technique is highlighted by Kalali's request to be served a meal called

[3] See: https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/ 1339597/battle-ugliest-uganda (accessed on 23 April 2019).

homosexuality. Perhaps there is no better evidence of his greed than this, since he mistakes the sexual practice for a food item in the same category as liver. Besides this vividly highlighting the way his desires deviate from what is considered the norm in Buganda society, it also serves as a symbol of excess in the sense that the depths he is willing to reach in order to satiate himself seem limitless. It also signals the fact that greed blinds the greedy for when he hears of "okulya ebisiyaga", the only word that registers on his brain seems be to "okulya" (to eat). In other words, in his greed, he assumes that all things that can be eaten must be a type of food.

## A Critique of Dishonour/ Disrespect in "*Kwanjula Kw'Omuyaaye Ganja*"

"*Kwanjula kw'Omuyaaye Ganja*"[4] which I translate into English as "A Rascal's Traditional Marriage Ceremony", is a video clip from a movie entitled *Amadda ge Pama*, directed by Joseph Ssendagire, who is a sketch comedian known by the stage name of Muzei Bakiddaawo. According to Emmanuel Mubiru (the man acting the role of *Omuyaaye Ganja* in this film), the decision to cut the work into short video clips was to enable it circulate easily on the online platforms, such as WhatsApp and Facebook.

In the clip at hand, the prospective groom and his party go to the prospective bride's home to meet her parents to seek their blessing for the marriage. In Kiganda culture, this ceremony – called *Kwanjula* – is a highly formal event that follows very stylized etiquette on the side of the prospective groom. To ensure that every detail of the etiquette is performed well, the groom usually hires a consultant known as *Omwogezi* (spokesperson). This is somebody with the expertise to perform the mandatory poetic speeches expected by the girl's family. He needs to be adept at the use and interpretation of proverbs, sayings and riddles that the hosting family may bring up to bamboozle the prospective in-laws. Professor Helen Nabasuta Mugambi, one of the scholars I interviewed for this article, explains, "… a stray word or behaviour deemed inappropriate by the party begging for the hand of the bride is punishable by big fines, sometimes spelt out in monetary terms." She adds, "… all etiquette around this ceremony, which could last for a whole day, is structured in word and deed around reverence."

One of the activities in this ceremony requires public display of substantial gifts brought for the in-laws to underscore the appreciation of the great role that the bride's parents played in bringing up such a beautiful and well-behaved girl. For instance, "the bride's mother must be provided with a dress (*busuuti*), formerly a bark cloth, the father and the eldest brother must each get a tunic (*kanzu*), and a paternal aunt, a *busuuti*" (Nsereko

[4] The video clip for this comedy is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ulcFvlSlE0 (accessed on 23 April 2019).

1975:685). Acceptance of these gifts "serves as conclusive evidence that the bride's family have consented to the subsequent marriage, where such consent is necessary" (Nsereko 1975:695). Needless to mention, this expected code of conduct is not a matter of choice, but an obligation, since honour itself implies "a right to respect" as John Iliffe (2005:5) observes. In other words, the prospective groom can only win the respect of his prospective bride's family if he acts in a decent manner as dictated by tradition.

To give a clear picture of the etiquette expected of prospective in-laws, I would like to refer to a fictional depiction of an introduction ceremony in Timothy Wangusa's second novel, *Betwixt Mountain and Wilderness*. Nakintu introduces her fiancé, Mwambu Kiboole to her parents, Reverend Simon Kintu and his wife, Mukyala Mary. Mwambu's entourage consists of "four saloon cars and a pick-up truck" and smartly dressed people:

> the men in navy blue suits, white Kanzus and black shoes, and each carrying a walking-stick; the women draped in *busuuti*, each of them terminating in glossy dark-brown low-heeled shoes (Wangusa 2015:122).

Among the several gifts Mwambu brings to his prospective in-laws are "huge gourds of banana juice, crates of soft drinks and beers" (Wangusa 2015:125) and

> assorted items of foodstuffs for general consumption and various pieces of attire with labels of specific recipients – the bride-to-be, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, brothers and cousins" … "colourfully wrapped (Wangusa 2015:128).

This fictional depiction of introduction ceremonies is done in the realistic mode, in the sense that what Wangusa describes (the verbal dexterity exhibited by the spokespersons of both sides, the elaborate handing over of gifts to the parents-in-law, the delicate performance of courteousness to the prospective parents-in-law, and so forth) mirrors what actually happens in real life. This picture of a solemn ceremony helps us to appreciate the extent to which the marriage ceremony depicted in the sketch comedy under discussion deviates from the norm. It is this deviation that makes the skit comical as I explain below.

In the comedy, the prospective bride, Muteweta and his party (Ganja-man, Muzamiru and an unnamed man), are shabbily dressed. Muteweta is dressed in a short *kanzu*, and a pair of shorts, obviously inappropriate for the occasion. The dressing of his colleagues is worse. The Ganja-man has a pair of multi-coloured shorts, a sleeveless shirt, a hat and iron chains around his neck; Muzamiru is in a *kanzu*, but without a jacket, and without shoes. The unnamed member of the group is in a *kanzu* and a jacket, but he is wearing gumboots, as if he is going to a farm. Because the visitors look shabby, the brother to the prospective bride asks his father,

on seeing the groom's party approach the house: "Did you invite hunters?"

This is a sarcastic question, which the father responds in the negative, thereby making his relatives conclude – with utmost relief – that the people they are seeing must be passers-by. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the visitors' spokesperson, Muzamiru, tells the hosts: "We are the people you are expecting." When the prospective bride's brother protests by saying that this cannot be the case, since the so-called in-laws look like saucepans (a metaphorical reference to their ordinariness), Muzamiru sarcastically asks: "Shall the prospective bride be married to two men?" This rhetorical question makes the bride's party relent. They sit down to listen to their visitors, who go about the business of their visit in the crudest way possible. The prospective groom Muteweta sits clumsily, prompting the Ganja-man to tell him to ensure that he does not show his 'limes' (euphemism for private parts) to his in-laws.

Perhaps the most pronounced deviation from the normal traditional marriage ceremony is in the gifts that the prospective groom brings for his prospective parents-in-laws. The prospective groom brings half a kilogram of salt, quarter a kilogram of rice, half a kilogram of groundnuts, a bun (half of which they devour in front of the hosts to prove – they claim – that it is not poisoned), and a small piece of washing soap. Unable to bear the insolence of the visitors anymore, the prospective father-in-law drives his guests out of his home with a mattock.

To understand his fury, we need to closely look at the Ganda concept of *ekitiibwa* (honour/respect). In a Luganda-English dictionary compiled by John D. Murphy, the word *kitiibwa* is explained thus: "That which is feared, honour, glory, prestige, dignity, respect, reverence, pomp" (1972:210). Murphy adds a qualifying sentence: "None of the preceding equivalents expresses the full meaning of *kitiibwa* which is perhaps the greatest ideal and the most sought-after attribute of the Baganda" (Murphy 1972:210).

This concept guides an individual's behaviour and etiquette towards the self and others in myriad situations in Buganda. The behaviour and etiquette range from the most mundane, for instance the way one walks, speaks, or eats, to the most formal, for instance the way one holds himself or herself in front of visitors, elders or authorities; for instance, chiefs or the Buganda King called the Kabaka. Behind the concept '*ekitiibwa*' is the concern of the idea of 'good breeding', which is expected of everybody, and which is expressed through the ways in which one conducts the self at all times. The concept *ekitiibwa* is so central to Ganda culture that the Buganda Kingdom's anthem exhorts every Muganda to uphold it from one generation to another.[5]

The fact that the prospective groom and his party, in the clip under

[5] For the lyrics of the anthem, see: http://buganda.or.ug/anthem (accessed on 7 September 2020).

discussion, do not prepare duly for the ceremony by following the social rules and etiquette governing such ceremonies shows that they are not prepared to enter into marriage – an institution with its own set of rules. By dressing indecently, it is implied that they are not afraid to show their 'nakedness' to the prospective mother-in-law, which is a serious taboo in Buganda society. Professor Abasi Kiyimba, another scholar I interviewed for this article, explains:

> … the whole notion of *ekitiibwa* – the respect and consideration for the in-laws – really rotates around the mother in-law and is characterized by efforts to guard against sexually related indecency. These restrictions are observed at all occasions when the two sides come in contact, but the real drama happens during formalized marriage proceedings such as *kwanjula* (introduction) ceremonies. When one goes to visit the in-laws, all Baganda know that the most important entity that one will visit is the mother in-law, and everything must be done to show her absolute respect (read: protect her from sexual indecency/innuendos).

In the comedy, what we see is the opposite of the above scenario: the prospective groom and his party do not show any respect to the family they have come to visit. This is the reason as to why the prospective father-in-law registers his disgust at their offensive manners by driving them out of his home with a mattock. His action raises a number of questions, though. The first one is that the viewer of the comedy wonders if his aim is to punish the visitors, or to rehabilitate them so that they become more respectful of elders. Perhaps his aim is the latter, if we look at this from the perspective that visitors must think twice and plan appropriately before going for a marriage ceremony to seek anybody's daughter for a wife.

The second question is whether or not the prospective father-in-law does not dishonour himself by raising a mattock against his prospective son-in-law and his party, since this is not the acceptable way of welcoming visitors in one's home. The answer to this question is that the old man had been patient enough with them, but after some time, his patience was strained, thereby moving him to potential violence. Even with this answer, however, there is some indication that he is not accommodative of diversity, since instead of engaging in dialogue (for instance asking the visitors why they are dressed in a manner he considers dishonourable), he rushes for a weapon of destruction. The word 'diversity' might sound a misnomer here, but when we remember that to the prospective groom and his party their way of dressing and speaking is okay, then it makes sense.

We could therefore say that the prospective father-in-law is monological, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term, in the sense that he knows only one code of conduct through which honour and respect can be accorded. Bakhtin's (1981:271) view

that monological systems aim at "the 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". This shows how these systems can be dominating and suffocating of other systems that they consider wrong or inauthentic. In the context of this article, this domination and suffocation could apply to the prospective father-in-law's expectation that his visitors speak and conduct themselves in a Kiganda way, which is the only one he knows, understands or appreciates. The kiyaaye way, which is what the prospective groom and his party practice, is not acceptable to him. Bakhtin's view is relevant to this discussion for the characters in the skit speak a secret language that is not appreciated or welcomed by the elders, although it is knowable to them, since they respond to it by chasing them away.

One wonders why the prospective in-laws in the skit choose to use a secret language, well aware that it could cause them trouble. Perhaps it is to emphasise their identity as deviants, since their 'crude' language (at least from the perspective of the hosts) is in character with their culturally dishonourable dressing style. Besides, one cannot rule out the possibility that the visitors simply want to spite the hosts. This view is supported by the fact that they know some social rules governing *kwanjula* ceremonies. For instance, they are aware of the requirement that the prospective groom must carry gifts for the prospective in-laws, and that the son-in-law is expected to sit decently, without showing his private parts to the in-laws. It is possible, therefore, that they are also aware that they are expected to conduct their conversation using a particular language.

This means that their decision not to do so might be read as a deliberate decision to offend or to perform their deviation from the norms governing speech in this community. In any case, they start their interaction in grammatical Lusoga (a language lexically and semantically close to Luganda) and then deliberately decide to change to their secret language mid-way, even when they are well aware that the hosts may not understand or welcome what they are saying. It is for this reason that they use the services of an interpreter.

One cannot rule out yet another motivation: that the use of a coded language is meant to scoff at the hosts' expectation that the visitors speak grammatical Luganda (or Lusoga) by establishing a form of "expression directly or indirectly criticizing or opposing the mainstream" (Parasecoli 2014:323). Seen from this perspective, the coded language can be considered a form of resistance against the standard language ideology that overtly stigmatizes linguistic variation

(Gates and Ilbury 2019:109). Besides, it can be the beginning of a project aimed at making the outlawed language, dress style and code of conduct the norm. This brings to mind the observation made by Emmanuel Mubiru (the person who plays the role of the translator in the comedy) in the interview I held with him, that increasingly, *kiyaaye* (uncouth) culture is increasingly becoming alluring to many people so much that if nothing is done about this, it may sooner or later become the norm. In other words, the skit can be read as a warning that something needs to be done to ensure that *kiyaaye* culture does not become the norm.

At an artistic level, however, the script writer and the skit directors use this language for the sake of creating humour, by showing the chasm between the lexicon expected of the prospective in-laws and the one that they actually use. Abasi Kiyimba's observation that "oral literature is a fairly reliable indicator that when change takes place in a society, the literature changes to reflect it" (2008:169) is true for drama as well, for the realities that the comedy highlights are not far-fetched. Indeed, it is not uncommon these days to see adults dressed in a manner similar to the one we see in the comedy.

Finally, as a popular art form, the skit offers a critique of youth culture, not just in relation to language use (what in Uganda is called '*Luyaaye*' or uncouth language), but also other aspects like dress code and cultural upbringing. Since the characters in the skit have been produced by the Ugandan society, it is also possible that the skit is asking the critics of youth culture, such as the prospective father-in-law who raises a mattock against his visitors, to reflect on their contribution to what is happening. Perhaps the parents are "too wrapped up in their jobs" (Grobman 2001:10) to know what is happening to their children. The fact that the prospective father-in-law's daughter has brought home people who look like hunters and who speak a coded language as prospective in-laws lends credence to this point.

It is significant that in the skit, the prospective in-laws are imagined as foreigners/strangers in Buganda society because they come from the eastern Ugandan region of Busoga. This perhaps explains why they act the way they do, for it is possible that they do not know the Ganda etiquette surrounding visitation and introduction ceremonies. It is also possible that the skit directors are passing on a stereotypical message about the Basoga as an ethnic group that lacks common sense.

However, the requirement that in-laws show etiquette and honour is not just a Ganda thing, but one which cuts across all ethnic groups of Uganda, if not all sociocultural groups all over the world. This disparaging of the other (the Basoga in this case) weakens the skit's corrective potential, since the problem of dishonour and lack of etiquette that it explores

is not limited to one ethnic group. The argument made by the French-Hungarian philosopher Julia Kristeva (1991:1) that the foreigner we detest "lives within us [as] the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder" comes to mind here. It is evident that the Basoga people, whom the skit seems to disparage, represent all of us irrespective of our ethnic or national identity, because we are all capable of falling short of the honour, respect and etiquette expected of us in myriad settings. In other words, the subject of the skit's critique only becomes a Musoga if I, the viewer, consider myself different from him or her. The moment I notice that the honour and etiquette-related mistakes the Musoga makes are similar to those that I, the non-Musoga, make or is capable of making, then the Musoga becomes me and me the Musoga.[6]

There are several elements that make this sketch comedy humorous. The obvious one is the way the prospective bride trivialises the ceremony by dressing and acting informally and clownishly. The Ganja-man's translations, which are obviously off the mark, also contribute to the humour. For instance, when Muzamiru advises the prospective bride to be respectful to her prospective groom despite him being small in stature, the Ganja-man translates this to mean that the groom is "doggish and feverish". When Muzamiru says that the groom deserves respect from the wife-to-be despite him being a poor man, the Ganja-man translates this to mean that the groom is "rotten-rotten." This has the effect of making him seem worse off than just being a poor man.

When Muzamiru further advises that the two lovers should make God the centre of their marriage, the Ganja-man translates this to mean that they should employ God as their security guard. This is rather a preposterous proposition, since it depicts God as someone who takes instructions and acts according to the whims of the employer. Simon Lewis's observation that "[t]he point of the Italian proverb *tradurre è tradire* is that exact translation is never possible and that any translation therefore implies some 'betrayal' of the original"' (2001:435) comes to mind here. The Ganja-man's translation is an obvious case of treachery to Muteweta, the prospective groom, for it makes him unacceptable as an in-law, even before the mattock is brandished against him and his party.

Another way through which both the humour and the meaning of the skit can be analysed is to approach it from the perspective of literary onomastics, which Alvarez-Altman (cited in Mhlambi 2012:75) describes as "a more specialized literary criticism in which scholars are concerned

[6] Kristeva's observation that "the foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities" (1991:1) is relevant here.

with the levels of significance of names in drama, poetry, fiction and folklore". Ruth Finnegan (2012:456) observes that names "… can be used as a succinct and oblique way of commenting on their owners or on others." D. S. Izevbaye (1981:166) notes that "naming in literature is of unconscious value to readers, acting as the lodestar in the appreciation of narrative [for] apart from acting as pointers to meaning in certain kinds of narrative (folktales, allegories, romances), names help to characterize the work for the reader" in particular contexts. Besides, names have the capacity to "convey powerful imagery" (Martin 1991: 83).

This is why names are so important that we carry them "even into death; etched in stone they stand above us for all eternity" so much that even when we change them in courts of law "the old name is not completely erased. Reduced to a footnote, it drags along at the bottom of your history" (McGlynn 2009:289). However, an artist might imbue a name with irony to the extent that what the name means in one context is the opposite of what it means in another.

The name 'Muteweta', for instance, refers to a person who does not bend or one who walks in one direction without turning left or right, that is to say, a person who lacks flexibility. By implication, the character bearing this name is a robot of sorts, inflexible in his manner of doing things. Yet, when Muteweta's friends ask him to sit well so that he does not scandalize his in-laws, he actually complies, meaning that his name is not his fate as such. Rather, the script-writer and the script-directors use the name to create humour, as the audience is bound to laugh when such a name is mentioned since it is an unusual one.

The translator is called "Omuyaaye-Ganja" – a name that points to the fact that he is a street nonentity – one who is not a gentleman. The word *muyaaye* is a Luganda word that denotes "a delinquent, unreliable, or uncouth child" (Snyder 2000:187), a "street boy" (Beraho 2008:23), or a "vagabond" (Ntarangwi 2009:26). The additional adjective, Ganja-man, implies that he is on drugs (*njaaye*, the Luganda word derived from 'ganja', means marijuana) and therefore not in complete control of his senses.

This name, which is also the title of the skit, therefore underlines the senselessness of his speeches, dress code and deeds. The word 'muyaaye' also suggests that the characters in the skit are products of a certain urban modernity associated with street life and hip-hop as a cultural product (Olaniyan 2004:8-23). This is a modernity that espouses a certain rebellious attitude to traditional values, in this case ritual oracy, which Stuart Sillars considers a "means of defining the individual and reinforcing and extending the community" (2008:24). The failure at ritual oracy, in the skit, destroys the relationship between the two groups (the hosts and visitors).

I suggest that the sketch comedy also ridicules traditional marriage

ceremonies as practiced in Uganda today, where they have become so spectacularised that people pay large sums of money to have them broadcast on television. As a parody, the comedy "encourages the reader or listener to focus on the style itself and be aware of a conflict or dialogue between the old style and the parodic version", in the words of Alsion Ross (1998:48). This way, it has the capacity to serve as an antidote to the over-spectacularising of the marriage rite by showing us the opposite of what we see on TV: shabbiness in the place of glamorous dressing; laughable gifts in the place of truckloads of goods; jocular personae instead of the dead-serious grooms, and so forth.

In other words, the ridiculousness we see in the comedy in terms of miserliness and sartorial blundering serves to remind the audience of the preposterousness we see in spectacularised and mediatised marriage ceremonies, which are characterized by excess of pompousness and spectacle.[7] On the one hand, through parody, the artists behind the comedy (writers, directors, producers, the camera crew, etc.) seem to be telling their audiences that if what we see in the skit is laughable because of the way it robs the marriage ceremony of its respect and solemnity due to the uncouth way the groom's party goes about the traditional marriage, the same is true of the exaggerated performances on TV, which are equally laughable because they also rob the rite of its meaning by prioritizing glamour and spectacle over solemnity and meaning.

This lesson is possible with the resources of intertextuality which "occurs when one text is read in relationship to others and is affected by the spaces between the texts" (Fiske cited in Roome 2002:56). This implies that the audience watching the comedy is expected to have witnessed or watched the 'normal' marriage ceremony, which forms the basis for both the ridiculous version that the skit ridicules, and the spectacularised, usually televised ceremonies as well.

## Conclusion

The article has highlighted the fact that sketch comedies entertain and educate. The paper has explained how the educative purpose of the comedies is made possible mostly with the help of satire, whose key device, humour, "often involves critique, accomplished through bringing unexpected elements together thereby – potentially – providing new insights and spurring change" (Bell 2017:366). The new insight in our case is that failure to observe the etiquette surrounding marriage ceremonies can cost one a partner. The comedy therefore teaches us to observe every rite with care, lest we come to dishonour.

In the first skit, we saw how Muzei Kalali is disgraced for being

[7] Victoria Nampala speaks to this issue when she asks, in a June 2019 New Vision article, "Is Kwanjula a show these days?" See: https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1501467/kwanjula-days (accessed on 7 September 2020).

gluttonous; in the second one, the prospective in-laws miss the bride, as they are sent away scampering when their host raises a mattock against them. As we watch these skits, we laugh at the characters for being gluttonous (Muzei Kalali) and rowdy, disorderly and scandalous (the prospective in-laws). However, we are aware that we are not perfect either.

There are moments when we too act in greedy or disorderly ways; such as when we want every opportunity to come our way and not our neighbour's, and when we treat our relatives and friends disrespectfully. Therefore, as we laugh at the characters, we laugh at ourselves as well, since the stranger (read: the 'flaws') in them are also in us. In other words, the scripts achieve both purposes of entertaining and educating us, for not only do they amuse us, but they also challenge us to always watch how we behave at all times.

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# Mythologizing Mwalimu Nyerere and the Kagera War in Banyakyusa Narratives[1]

*Ignas Fedeo,* Abasi Kiyimba,** & Okot Benge ****

## Abstract

Mwalimu Juilius Kambarage Nyerere is widely regarded as the advocate of peace and stability in Tanzania and beyond. However, the critics of his legacy claim that the Kagera War between Tanzania and Uganda of 1978-1979 represents a contradiction with Nyerere's commitment to peace and harmony. As Commander in Chief, Nyerere led Tanzanians and (some) Ugandans to fight the war against Idi Amin Dada. A lot that has been written about Nyerere's motives for waging the war in the official narratives about the war. However, little is known about the perception of local Tanzanians on the nature of the war and Nyerere's actual role in it. This article, uses a Banyakyusa poetic narrative *"Ubwite bwa Kagera"* (The War of Kagera) to examine Banyakyusa process of mythmaking about Nyerere's perceived involvement in the Kagera War. The article argues that the Banyakyusa narratives present Nyerere as a superman, a demi-god who had mystical abilities, which enabled him to defeat Idi Amin decisively, but also as one who desired a peaceful settlement of the conflict. For the Banyakyusa, it was Idi Amin's murderous disposition that made Nyerere declare the Kagera War to protect the innocent people of both Tanzania and Uganda.

**Key words:** Banyakyusa, Nyerere, Idi Amin, Myths, Kagera War

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## Introduction

One among Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's remarkable ideals was his advocacy for peace and harmony. According to Henry Kissinger (1990), the former US Secretary of State, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere was "a seductive interlocutor ... capable for steely hostility" (Kissinger 1990:223). And to Phillips (2015), Nyerere's devotion to peace is among the reasons for the reverence accorded to him in Tanzania, as one widow explained:

> The Father of the Nation came to strengthen the life of peace and cooperation together. He brought peace for all the tribes to live together without discrimination. Anywhere you go in the Republic of Tanzania you will not have a problem (Phillips 2015:101).

As suggested by Phillips, Tanzanians feel obliged to maintain peace in the country as a way of paying homage to his worthy service to the nation. Kissinger's earlier comment further implies that Nyerere's commitment to peace and harmony extends beyond the geographical boundaries of Tanzania. According to Mpangala and Mawazo (2015), Nyerere was involved in peaceful settlement of several political conflicts in the region, such as that of Burundi, for which he was the mediator until his death in 1999. Mpangala and Mawazo clarify that as part of his commitment to peace, Nyerere formed Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation. The primary role of the foundation was to help in solving the Burundi conflict, and in maintaining peace in Africa. Of particular note, while clarifying the main objective of the foundation, Nyerere stated:

> *Kwa hiyo ninashukuru kwamba taasisi ambayo imeanzishwa ili kulinda na kudumisha Amani, Umoja na Maendeleo ya Watu Wote Barani Afrika; pia ina malengo ya kuhamasisha watu wa taasisi mbalimbali kujifunza na kutafakari juu ya Afrika hizi* (quoted in Mpangala and Mawazo 2015:197).
>
> ---
>
> (Therefore, I am grateful that the foundation is formed to keep and maintain peace, unity and development of all people in Africa. Also, it intends to encourage different institutions to learn and reason on these ideas.)

Here, Nyerere summarizes the ideals which mark his personality: peace, unity, and development for all Africans. Therefore, the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation stands as one of the indicators of Nyerere's devotion to peace and harmony.

The foregoing background about Nyerere suggests that he was an ardent believer in peace and security, and in the peaceful settlement of conflicts. Consequently, Nyerere's involvement in the 1978-1979 Kagera War against Idi Amin Dada of Uganda raises critical questions about his motives for waging war despite his commitment to peace and peaceful settlement of conflicts. What was so important about this war that made Nyerere decide to set aside his commitment to peace and peaceful settlement of conflicts? Was the war inevitable? Is the Kagera War a stain on Nyerere's commitment to peace?

This article assesses these questions from the perceptions of Nyerere as recreated in a Banyakyusa poetic myth about *"Ubwite bwa Kagera"* (The War of Kagera).

Nyerere is widely revered in Tanzania as the founding father of the nation, and as a hero who defeated Idi Amin of Uganda in the 1978-1979 Kagera War. Because of this reverence, he has become a subject of myth and political mythmaking among Tanzanians (Phillips 2015:100-123). Stories to this effect are in abundance among the Banyakyusa, the Sukuma, the Maasai, the Bahaya, the Chaga, the Fipa, the Makonde, the Zaramo and among many other communities in Tanzania. The Banyakyusa people are mainly found in Busokelo, Kyela, and Rungwe districts in Mbeya region of South West Tanzania, and in Karonga District of Malawi.[2] Given the location of the Banyakyusa, their selection for this study is significant. They are far from Butiama where Nyerere was born (about 1,100 kilometres), far from Dar es Salaam where Nyerere's State House was (about 1,000 kilometres), and far from Kagera where the Kagera War was fought (about 1,300 kilometres). This article, therefore, underscores the point that Nyerere was a highly influential leader, revered in various Tanzanian societies, irrespective of their locations. The researchers also use the study to sharpen the understanding of the way local myths and political mythmaking are used to boost Nyerere's position in the life and history of the people of Tanzania, the Banyakyusa in particular.

The myths about Nyerere in different Tanzanian societies appear with similar contents and features despite some slight differences which are a result of environmental and economic differences between the people and their locations in Tanzania, who all, as Seger (2012) and Besier (2014) contend, try to associate themselves with their hero, Nyerere. However, little is known about the process of constructing his heroic image in the myths. Understanding processes of mythmaking about Nyerere, especially the language use, would create greater awareness about the process of constructing images/symbols associated with him, such as the myths that carry local voices, beliefs, and perceptions about him.

Local voices, beliefs, and perceptions of Nyerere are significant in comprehending reasons behind his continued reverence for him, as an ardent believer in peace, despite his involvement in the Kagera War. This article explores the mythmaking process about Nyerere's involvement in the Kagera War, as perceived in the Banyakyusa myths. Through the analysis of literary devices (such as diction, hyperbole, symbols, metaphors, similes, imagery, and point of view) which are employed in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, the article responds to the question on how the Banyakyusa perceived

[2] This article focuses on Tanzania's Banyakyusa from Busokelo, Kyela, and Rungwe districts.

Nyerere's involvement in the Kagera War through its reconstruction in their myths.

Douglas (1966:121) defines myth as "a representation in fictional form of truths or values that are sanctioned by general belief". Using Douglas' definition as a reference point, myths are narratives which are believed in a society as truth. The truth which myths carry, as Trubshaw (2003) argues, is unquestionable in the society where the myths originate. On her part, Wilson (1960:1) regards myth as "an account of actual historical happenings" which merge fiction and fact. With reference to Douglas (1966), Trubshaw (2003) and Wilson's arguments above, the myth analysed in this article carries Banyakyusa beliefs, and is believed in Banyakyusa society as true.

As Murray (1959:216) explains, a story becomes a myth when "it has invaded numerous other minds and proved its potency by being widely represented in spoken or written words as well as in an ample iconography." Here, Murray indicates that a narrative becomes a myth when it has gained community acceptance. Friedland (1960:84) stresses that myths "represent ways of thinking which are universally held by a group." Friedland explains that a myth is "told by someone who says he heard the story from a friend who got the story from another friend to whom the event is actually supposed to have happened" (Friedland 1960:86).

To Friedland, "the placement of the story at this distance precludes, of course, any investigation of its fundamental truth" (86). Friedland's contentions indicate that myths are owned by a society and that the truth of a particular myth is based on societal beliefs which cannot be contested with evidence. Murray and Friedland's contentions suggest that the community of the Banyakyusa collectively owns the myths about Nyerere, and that the truth of the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, which is examined in this article is based on their beliefs, voices, experiences and point of view.

This article employs the mythological approach to look at the use of imagery, language and meaning in the myth under discussion. As Frye (1957) contends, the mythological approach examines the process of mythmaking and meaning of imagery which the myth employs. According to Trubshaw (2003), the mythological approach which offers an interdisciplinary focus in cultural studies, such as myths, is an appropriate device to examine modern political myths, which are characterised by an interplay of political, historical, scientific, traditional, and religious ideologies.

In agreement with Frye and Trubshaw's arguments, this article deploys the mythological approach to look at the imagery associated with Nyerere's involvement in the Kagera War in Banyakyusa myths. Moreover, the mythological approach enables the

article to capture Banyakyusa voices, beliefs and perceptions of Nyerere, as embedded in their myths, to amplify comprehension of the reasons for Nyerere participation in the war, in spite of his popular image as a man of peace. The significance of this research lies mostly in the intention to uplift the voices and beliefs of local people, and to highlight the study of oral materials including myths, as a way of comprehending local perceptions and beliefs on various aspects of a society's history and politics.

## Nyerere and the Kagera War in the Banyakyusa Myth

Before looking into the depiction of Nyerere and the Kagera War in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, it is important to understand the position of Nyerere towards the outbreak of the war. In his account as to whether the Kagera War was a just war, Acheson-Brown (2001) argues that the Kagera War was the result of long time hostility between Nyerere and Idi Amin (Acheson-Brown 2001:3-5).

The hostility between Nyerere and Idi Amin began immediately after the overthrow of Milton Obote's government in Uganda by General Idi Amin Dada in 1971 according to Matata (2016), the hostility between Nyerere and Idi Amin resulted from Nyerere's support for Milton Obote, on the one hand, and Idi Amin's invasion and torture of civilians in Kagera, Tanzania, on the other. Both, Acheson-Brown's and Matata's contentions, in general, associate the Kagera War with Nyerere and Idi Amin, with each wanting to show that his decisions were right.

The association of the Kagera War with a personal misunderstanding between Nyerere and Idi Amin by Acheson-Brown (2001) and Matata (2016) above is an important element in understanding the emphasis placed on Nyerere's commitment to peace versus his involvement in the Kagera War. For Acheson-Brown and Matata, the root cause of the war was a personality clash between Nyerere and Idi Amin, which suggests that Nyerere and Idi Amin involved their nations in their personality conflict. However, according to Mpangala and Mawazo (2015), Tanzanians strongly supported Nyerere to wage the Kagera War.

Mpangala and Mawazo report that local Tanzanians with one heart contributed livestock, food crops, and money to support the war against Idi Amin. The support Tanzanians rendered to the war suggests that for them, Nyerere had reasonable grounds to fight Idi Amin. Acheson-Brown (2001:9) also reports that when Tanzanian troops captured Kampala on 10 April 1979, they "were greeted by a jubilant population." As in the case of local Tanzanians' support to the war, the warm welcome, which Ugandans showed to Tanzanian troops suggests that the removal of Idi Amin was important to them. The support, which Nyerere got from local people to fight the Kagera

War, denotes that his departure from peaceful settlement of conflicts to war was reasonable and that the war was not for his personal benefit.

Banyakyusa have a number of myths about Nyerere's involvement in the Kagera War. Most of the myths are short and each tells of a single event. The "Ubwite bwa Kagera" poetic myth, similar to a myth about the involvement of Nyerere's mother in the Kagera War, recounts the war from its outbreak up to the defeat of Idi Amin. However, contrary to the myth mentioned above, which associates the outbreak of the Kagera War with Nyerere's mother; the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth links the Kagera War to the call of the Tanzanian people who wanted Nyerere to uproot Idi Amin.

Of particular importance in the myth under discussion is the reoccurrence of several issues represented in a number of other Banyakyusa myths about Nyerere's involvement in the Kagera War. These include the belief that he possessed mystical powers and the ability to transform himself into different creatures such as birds. The myths also underscore Nyerere's devotion to peace despite his involvement in the Kagera War. As a result, the recreation of Nyerere in this myth reflects his representation in a number of other Banyakyusa myths about the Kagera War.

In this story, "Ubwite bwa Kagera" Idi Amin is portrayed as one who is cursed by elders. According to the narrative, Nyerere did not intend to fight Idi Amin despite all the killings and torture which Idi Amin had carried out. The citizens however convinced him to end the Idi Amin curse. This story is divided into three sections: pre-war, declaration of the war, and the war itself. The story provides a comprehensive understanding of the war from the point of view of this community. The pre-war section presents the personality of Idi Amin, what he was doing in Uganda and later in Tanzania; it then adds Nyerere's reaction to Idi Amin's actions. In the first fifteen verses, the narrator talks about Idi Amin's personality. The narrator relates the story of how Idi Amin was killing, arresting and throwing very old women and disabled people into River Kagera. From verse 6 to 11, the bard states that:

Ugwakisige kimo
Ulinkuntaga mwa Kagera
Ulinkuti fyakulya fya ngwina
Ugwalobe lumo
Ulinkuntaga mwa Kagera
Ulinkuti fyakulya fya ngwina

---

(The person with single eye
You were throwing him in Kagera
You were saying it was a crocodile dish
The person with single finger
You were throwing him in Kagera
You were saying it was a crocodile dish)

The above section of the myth present Idi Amin as killing helpless and harmless people. The act of

throwing *ugwakisige kimo* (the one with a single eye) and *ugwalobe lumo* (the one with a single finger) in River Kagera to be eaten by crocodiles projects Amin as a merciless killer and prepares ground for the justification of the war against him. From verse twelve to twenty-two, the narrator states that Idi Amin's parents, grandparents, and great grandparents held a meeting with him. The elders asked:

> …jwani uju ikupapigwa nu unna ulwakwanda
>
> Uju ikwingila munna ulwabubili ukupapigwa bo untu gubele panja?)
>
> ----
>
> (…who after being delivered by his/her mother
>
> Goes back in his/her mother's womb to be delivered again, after his/her head has increased the size?")

They then ask:

> …jwani uju egile akakikulu akanunu akakalibuno
>
> Uju ikuntendela unkasi munda ukuti ngupapa mwana bulibe?
>
> ----
>
> (…who after marrying a very beautiful young woman
>
> Who peeps at his wife's womb to know the child she is going to have?)

The answer to all these questions was *najumo* (no one). The bard uses the above rhetorical questions to signify that human beings do not have ability to prevent themselves from being born disabled. Thus, the elders found that Idi Amin mistreatment of disabled people was illogical and for those reasons (as the narrator states in the thirtieth line), they cursed him and he ran mad.

Verses twenty-three to thirty-five narrate that Idi Amin invaded Tanzania, killed people, cattle, and destroyed the bridge across river Kagera and the sugar industry in Kagera region. The narrator states that regardless of all that Idi Amin's did in Tanzania, Nyerere was reluctant to declare war against him. In verses, thirty-eight and thirty-nine, the narrator says:

> Jope Nyerere atifwile limolyene
> Alinkuti ndi nkilisiti
>
> ----
>
> (Nyerere also ruined one thing
> He said he is a Christian)

The above lines suggest that Nyerere's refusal to declare war against Idi Amin was based on his religious beliefs. Following Nyerere's refusal to declare war against Idi Amin, the narrator states that Tanzanians rhetorically asked "*Nyerere, bho twukwiitawala gwalondaga ifiki*? (…Nyerere, what were you looking for when we became independent?); to which he replied that "…*nalondoga abandu*" (I wanted people). Following Nyerere's answer, Tanzanians told him in the verses forty-two, forty-three, and forty-four that he will remain with trees and grass only.

This suggests that Idi Amin was determined to kill all Tanzanians. Remaining with trees and grass as used in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, suggests that if Idi Amin was left to continue with his actions, all Tanzanians would be killed. The narrator in line fifty-seven states that

Nyerere replied by saying "…*mbilike*" (…I have heard) which signified that he had accepted the call of his people who wanted him to declare war against Idi Amin.

In the second section of the narrative, Nyerere is claimed to have "*atulile ikitabu kyake biblia abikile mumpiki mwa mwamwembe*" (removed his book, the Bible and put it on a mango tree). Nyerere's act to remove his Bible implies that he decided to go against his faith to protect his people from Idi Amin. After putting aside his religious beliefs, Nyerere went back to Dar es Salaam from where he led his troops to River Kagera. The narrator states that Nyerere found the bridge already destroyed and Idi Amin told him that he cannot swim across the river because the river is full of crocodiles and has a strong water current. From verse fifty-two to fifty-six, the bard states:

> Ngimba pa Kagera balipo amashabiki
>
> Batile kutwaku Nyerere na abhandu bhako?
>
> Atile ndumigwe ni ikisu
>
> Ngubhuka isilya lila kwa Kagera kunsebho
>
> Ngakete abhandu bhangu
>
> ----
>
> (But there were supporters in Kagera
>
> They asked him "where are you going Nyerere with your people"
>
> He said that "I have been sent by the nation"
>
> I am going to that side of the river on Kagera road
>
> To look at my people)

Here, the myth stresses the belief that Nyerere's involvement in the Kagera War was prompted by his determination to protect his people. The verses "…*ndumigwe ni ikisu"* (I have been sent by the nation) and *"Ngakete abhandu bhangu"* (to look at my people) indicate the influence which the people (Tanzanians) had on Nyerere's decision to wage the war.

Verses sixty and sixty-one state that Nyerere transformed himself into a bird and flew above the river up to the other side. This indicates that Nyerere had mystical powers that he used to transform himself into a bird to overcome challenges. According to Wilson (1959), Banyakyusa believe that community leaders, *Abanyafyale* (chiefs) and *Amafumu* (spiritual leaders) possess mystical powers, which make them majestic and brave, and instil fear and elicit obedience from their subjects. As the myth under discussion shows, the Banyakyusa believed that Nyerere possessed mystical powers which made him brave, and enabled him to protect his people.

After crossing to the other side of river, Nyerere found corpses of Tanzanians and a lot of blood, and he cried in Kinyakyusa "*etatagwe! Abhandu bangu unne!"* (Eee Father! My people!). The fact of Nyerere cries, denotes the pain that he felt over things that Idi Amin had done to his people in the Kagera region, and secures his position as saviour. After witnessing what Idi Amin had done to his people, Nyerere went back to

State House in Dar es Salaam and declared war against Idi Amin.

The third section of the narrative is about the war itself. The myth features, from verse seventy-one to the last verse, the different war tactics used by both Amin's and Nyerere's troops in the battlefield. The narrator states that Idi Amin, after hearing that Nyerere had declared war, he vowed to beat Nyerere up to his home and defeat Tanzanians. But the narrator states in verse seventy-five that Idi Amin and his troops "*bakalimenye ukuti Nyerere nnuguna gwa Jesu ntubatiko*" (they did not know that Nyerere is a young brother of Jesus in the order).

The narrator, in verse one hundred, emphasises that "*kokuti unna alijomalija umpapa Jesu*" (it is like his mother was Mary, the mother of Jesus). Here, the narrator suggests that Nyerere's power is second to that of Jesus and that Idi Amin had no chance against him. The narrator states in verses eighty-three to eighty-six:

> Batile tukome bosa nabakumyitu tukajagege inafasi
>
> Bakomigwe bosa abakwa Nyerere na abakwa Idi Amin kolumo
>
> Po apa balinkuti bafwile abandu aba kwa Nyerere
>
> Ngimba tugogene jujuswe
>
> ----
>
> (They said that "let us shoot all even ours to get the way"
>
> They shot all, those of Nyerere and those of Idi Amin together
>
> It was then they were saying that Nyerere's people have died
>
> While we killed one another)

The above verses highlight the belief that Nyerere and his troops could not be defeated by Idi Amin by indicating that even those Tanzanian soldiers whom Idi Amin claimed he had killed had actually died in friendly fire from fellow Tanzanians in a sacrificial operation because they were surrounded. Verses ninety-one to verse ninety-five indicate that Kawawa (former prime minister and minister of defence during the Kagera War, and a long time Nyerere's close associate) believed that though the war had started, Nyerere was not willing to continue with it until Idi Amin attacked a plane that carried a child of a Whiteman and killed him. The narrator states in verses ninety-nine and one hundred that Nyerere said in Swahili:

> Kumbe vita haina macho
>
> Songa mbele watoto, mimi niko nyuma
>
> ----
>
> (The war does not have eyes
>
> Move forward my children, I am behind you)

The use of Kiswahili in the above verse signifies that those words were actually spoken by Nyerere himself. They imply that Nyerere decided to continue with the war against Idi Amin fearing that if Idi Amin remained in power, he would kill even those who did not have a direct connection with the war. The narrator states in verse one hundred five that "*Po apa Nyerere atile "komaga kangi komaga*" (It was then Nyerere said "shoot then shoot"). The repetition *komaga kangi*

*komaga* (shoot then shoot) in that verse emphasises Nyerere's decision to continue fighting against Idi Amin. The narrator concludes that Nyerere ordered the soldiers to fight against Idi Amin until he fled to Libya "*mpaka naulu*" (up to now).

The "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, revels the extent of Nyerere's commitment to peace. The myth explains that Idi Amin was killing and torturing his people (Ugandans), especially disabled people and old women, people who had no ability to harm his government. Following his inhuman acts, the Banyakyusa believe that Idi Amin was cursed by elders. In verse twenty-two the narrator states "*ngimba abhagwise bankulile imbepo Idi Amin*" (his fathers blew the wind to Idi Amin). The Banyakyusa word *imbepo* (wind) literary means madness.

The phrase *bhankulile imbepo* (blew the wind to him) signifies that elders cursed him by making him mad. Also, the Banyakyusa adverb *ngimba* at the beginning of the above verse is used to clarify motives behind all evils that Amin was doing by associating them to the curse. Thus, it is believed among Banyakyusa that Idi Amin was mad; he became mad after being cursed by elders, the Banyakyusa signify that his madness was so bad to the extent that it could not be cured. The implication of this story is that Idi Amin was incapable of arriving at any peaceful settlement, and had to be fought. Armed struggle was the only solution to end Idi Amin's killings and torture in Uganda and Tanzania.

On the other hand, the narrative states that despite all that Idi Amin was doing in Uganda and later in Tanzania, Nyerere did not want to fight against him. In the verse thirty-six "… *tufwile tata gwe nzanaki gwe mwafrika*" (we are dying our African Zanaki father) whereby African Zanaki stands for Nyerere who was a Zanaki by ethnicity. Verse thirty-seven says "*gwimikege ingwego ni ndusu*" (prepare spears and guns), an indication that Tanzanians were requesting Nyerere to declare war against Idi Amin to save them from being killed. But, as it emerges in verse thirty-nine, Nyerere replied to the people's call, to fight against Idi Amin, with "…*ndi nkilisiti"* (I am Christian). According to Matata (2016), more than four thousand (4,000) people (soldiers and civilians) lost their lives during the Kagera War. With respect to Matata's contention, the recreation of Nyerere as a Christian in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth sanitises his image as a leader who would not entertain bloodshed.

According to Msekwa (n.d.:41), religious beliefs made Nyerere "a strong advocate of equality and respect for human dignity, and nurtured his advocacy for peace and his utter dislike of violence." With reference to Msekwa's contention, Nyerere's claim above, that he is Christian, denotes that he preferred a peaceful settlement with Idi Amin. However, as the narrator states in the second section of the story, especially from verse forty-seven to

fifty, Nyerere decided to fight against Idi Amin after being warned by his people that Idi Amin was determined to kill all the people whom Nyerere struggled to free from colonialism. As explained above in the verse forty-seven, Nyerere abandoned his Bible to save his people from Idi Amin.

Elsewhere in real-life scholarship, Mohiddin argues that Nyerere loved his people and cooperated with them in building Tanzania (Mohiddin 1999:4). Mohiddin's argument suggests that Nyerere decided to declare war against Idi Amin to protect the people he loved and needed for the development of Tanzania. Therefore, we can argue that Nyerere's decision to fight against Idi Amin as depicted in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth polishes his image as a leader who devoted himself and his leadership to the life and defence of his people.

Furthermore, Msekwa's and Mohiddin's contentions above emphasise a collaborative interplay between mythical reconstruction of Nyerere in Banyakyusa myths, "Ubwite bwa Kagera" in particular, and actual scholarship. According to He (2006:70), the actual scholarship (such as researched books and articles) is among tools used by elites to popularise political myths in order to "meet practical political needs such as to enhance regime legitimacy, mobilize public support to government policies, and win factional competition" (He, 2006:70). Political myths have the ability to individualise a group of people as complex as the state (Stoica 2017), and to "justify and strengthen certain political ideologies and or regimes" (Svilicic & Maldini 2014:729).

As a result, myth about political leaders are popularised to create the impression that they are very strong as leaders and that certain things could not have been achieved without them (Brown 2014). According to Stoica (2017), Svilicic and Maldini (2014), He (2006), and Brown (2014), the collaborative interplay between the mythical reconstruction of Nyerere in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" and the actual scholarship indicates that mythmaking is influenced by the elites. Nyerere's image among the Banyakyusa, and Tanzanians in general is influenced, inter alia, by the wishes of the elites in Tanzania and beyond to popularise him as a strong leader through articles, magazines, and books.

The stylistic devices used in the narrative are equally significant. The diction, rhetoric and imagery are all calculated to project a monstrous image on the part of Idi Amin, on the one hand; and on the other hand, the stylistic features of the text present Nyerere gloriously as a saviour of the country. For example, to prove the allegation that Idi Amin was determined to kill all Tanzanians, we are told that on arrival in Kagera, Nyerere found a lot of blood and many corpses. The word *ilopa* (blood) as used in verse sixty-two and *imifimba* (corpses) in verse sixty-three are

emotive, and are specially selected to signify merciless killings.

The myth also uses characterisation to build Nyerere into a strong mythical hero that does not always answer to the laws of nature. After witnessing the results of Idi Amin's merciless torture and killings in the Kagera area, Nyerere uses supernatural powers to fly over the river. In verse sixty-one we are told that "Nyerere *kumanga gake alipelengenye ukuja kajuni*" (Nyerere mystically transformed himself into a bird) and in the verse seventy-eight "*apulwike mpaka kwisilya ku nsebo* Kagera" (He flew up to the other side of the river to Kagera Road). The phrase *kumanga gake* (on his mystical ability) carries Banyakyusa belief that Nyerere had mystical power, which he used for his success and the success of his nation.

A bird is often used in Banyakyusa narratives (myths, legends, and folktales) as a creature with supernatural power to help people to overcome challenges or to rescue them from danger. Thus, the act of investing Nyerere with supernatural ability to transform himself into a bird suggests that he was capable of overcoming challenges in order to help his people. The other implication of the image of a bird is that Nyerere was beyond the reach of Idi Amin. It illustrates that there was no way Nyerere could be defeated by Amin who had no ability to fly.

African myths do not only carry history of a society but also the culture and innermost experiences of Africans (Jaja 2013). Jaja adds that "myths represent the African spirit and the African view of reality" (Jaja 2013:13). Banyakyusa as explained earlier, believe that community leaders, such as Nyerere, possess mystical powers which give them majesty (*ubusisya*) to make people obey them and to protect their subjects (Wilson 1959). Jaja and Wilson indicate that the recreation of Nyerere with mystical powers (*amanga*) in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, as explained above, reflects Banyakyusa cultural beliefs and their view of reality. Moreover, as Mbiti (1991) points out, mystical powers come from the Almighty God. With reference to Mbiti's and Wilson's contentions, the representation of Nyerere with mystical powers in the myth under discussion, lifts Nyerere's position in Tanzanian politics to that of a specially endowed leader capable of protecting his people from any danger.

Furthermore, in political mythmaking as Mushengyezi (2004) contends, a leader who is imbued with mystical powers, such as the belief that one has the ability to transform himself/herself into something else is important in mobilising and stimulating community support. Mushengyezi reports that the belief that the then rebel leader of NRM/NRA Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (who eventually became president of Uganda) regularly transformed himself into certain creatures to avoid arrest, "gave a lot of morale to his

fighters and contributed a great deal to making them invincible fighters" (Mushengyezi 2004:48).

Mushengyezi further argues that the myths about Yoweri Museveni, as a leader greatly contributed to the NRM/NRA victory in 1986. With respect to Nyerere, Mushengyezi's contention suggests that the belief that Nyerere had mystical powers and that he was able to transform himself into a bird, as depicted in the myth under discussion, plays a significant role in enhancing his staure among colleagues and followers. This belief influenced the reverence accorded to him among Banyakyusa and the support he garnered to wage the Kagera War which, as Mpangala and Mawazo (2015) report, Nyerere obtained from Tanzanians including Banyakyusa.

The myth illustrates Nyerere's commitment to a peaceful settlement of conflicts even after the outbreak of the war against Idi Amin. In the third section of the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" story, Kawawa is given to narrate that Nyerere was reluctant to continue with the war. The narrator uses Kawawa (then minister of defence), who, for many years before and after independence was very close confidant of Nyerere, to emphasise Nyerere's desire for peace. Kawawa's words in verse ninety-four that "*ima papapo uju ikukana ubwite*" (stop there, this person is opposing the war) in which the pronoun *uju* (this person) stands for Nyerere support the view that Nyerere wanted to end the conflict peacefully. Nyerere's desire to solve the conflict peacefully is portrayed as his personal preference, as an advocate of peace, despite his outstanding power.

The use of biblical allusion in the myth is also significant. In verse seventy-five, we are told that "*bakalimenye ukuti Nyerere nnuguna gwa Jesu ntubatiko*" (they did not know that Nyerere is a young brother of Jesus). In addition, the narrator in verse seventy-six, further states that "*kokuti unna alijomalija umpapa Jesu*" (it is like his mother was Mary, mother of Jesus). The metaphorical comparison of Nyerere to Jesus is important in comprehending the Banyakyusa's perception of Nyerere's endowments and the way the myth under discussion boosts Nyerere's image among them. For Christians, Jesus is a messiah, a son of God with supernatural abilities including walking on water (John 3:16; Mark 6:48).

The perception of Nyerere as a younger brother of Jesus, flying above River Kagera as described, uplifts further Nyerere's image particularly in Banyakyusa community as indeed a very special person. He was a hero with the ability to do anything he wanted to protect his people, and that he was invincible. Therefore, getting Kawawa to contend that Nyerere was reluctant to continue with war (verses ninety-one to ninety-five) highlights Nyerere's desire to solve the Kagera War peacefully and that this was his personal wish, despite

his overwhelming ability to defeat Idi Amin on the battleground.

Similar to Nyerere's depiction in other Banyakyusa myths he is presented as benevolent. In the myths about the Lake Nyasa border conflict between Tanzania and Malawi, he is presented as motivated by a desire to protect Malawians and their property from both Tanzanian and Malawian soldiers through his mystical powers. In the Kagera war, he is shown to have decided to continue with it until he totally defeated Amin to prevent deaths of innocent people. Regardless of his desire to solve the war peacefully, the poem raises an emotional appeal that Nyerere commanded his troops to continue beating Idi Amin after attacking a plane carrying a Whiteman's child and killing him. In verses ninety-five and ninety-six, the narrator states that Idi Amin:

*Alinkutumbula akatege kala*
*Ngimba alimo umwana gwa nsungu*
---
(He shot that aircraft
While there was the whiteman's child)

The phrase *umwana gwa nsungu* (the whiteman's child) as used in the verse above, is used to further project Idi Amin as attacking innocent people such as the whiteman's child who did not have any direct connection to the war, since it was between Tanzanians and Ugandans. The myth, therefore, as it says in verse one hundred "*songa mbele watoto, mimi niko nyuma*" (Move forward children, I am behind you).

Nyerere continued with the war to prevent Idi Amin from killing people who did not have any connection to the war. Whereas the word *watoto* (children) symbolises Tanzanian soldiers, the phrase *mimi niko nyuma* (I am behind you) implies the full support of Nyerere to the soldiers to continue with the war. In addition, the word *watoto* (children) presents Nyerere as a father of all Tanzania. The myth indicates that Nyerere was responsible to protect his children (Tanzanians) by eradicating Idi Amin. To stress his ability to defeat Idi Amin, in verse one hundred one to one hundred three, Nyerere told his soldiers:

*Mimi nina mfagio*
*Mkishindwa nitaongoza mbele*
*Mfuate mfagio wa kufagilia*
---
(I have a broom
If you fail, I will lead
Follow the sweeping broom)

A Swahili word *mfagio* (a broom) as used in the verses above indicates that Nyerere had uppermost powers by which he could defeat Idi Amin on the battleground. Hence, the act of Idi Amin killing innocent people, like that *umwana gwa nsungu* (the white man's child), made Nyerere to resolve to defeat him. According to Acheson-Brown (2001), Tanzanian troops continued to fight Idi Amin even after pushing his troops out of Tanzania to prevent him I from torturing Ugandans who had welcomed Tanzanian soldiers, especially in Mbarara and Masaka.

Smith (1985:35) opines that though Nyerere was "the most peaceful of all men," he "had to fight a war to fight aggression." Smith's contention suggests that Idi Amin's presidency was aggressive, hence dangerous to Ugandans, Tanzanians and others people of the region. Like Acheson-Brown (2001) and Smith (1985) contend, the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" story, boosts Nyerere's image further by insisting that he remained devoted to peace; he fought against Idi Amin to protect innocent people (Tanzanians, Ugandans, and others) from the aggressive actions of Idi Amin.

## Conclusion

This article discussed Banyakyusa mythical perceptions of Nyerere and his prosecution of the Kagera War. The war, as depicted in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" mythical story, was a test of Nyerere's commitment to peace as a means to protecting his people; the mythical reconstruction of Nyerere by the Banyakyusa suggests that he achieved both. The "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, demonstrates that Idi Amin was determined to continue brutalising and killing innocent people in Uganda and Tanzania.

The implication of the myth is that if Idi Amin remained in power in Uganda, he would continue tormenting and murdering innocent people in the region. The myth suggests that armed struggle was, therefore, the only way to stop those tortures and killings, and that Nyerere's declaration of the Kagera War against Idi Amin was reasonable. The "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, therefore, sanitizes Nyerere's involvement in the war among Banyakyusa (and other Tanzanians) as a peaceful man who had to wage war to save and to protect his people.

In general, the recreation of Nyerere in this myth boosts his image, among the Banyakyusa in particular and Tanzanians in general. To Banyakyusa, Nyerere was a specially blessed hero. The "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, shows that Nyerere was a Godsend leader who was able to protect his people from tyrannical people, such as Idi Amin. The perception that Nyerere was specially endowed by God is stressed by the metaphorical comparison to Jesus Christ and his representation as a good Christian.

The representation depicts Nyerere as a political leader who was wonderful gift to the world. Moreover, Nyerere is, in the myth, portrayed as a reluctant warrior, one who hesitated to declare war and to continue prosecuting it against Idi Amin despite his superior powers and in spite of all the evils Idi Amin had perpetrated. Nyerere's reluctance enhances his standing as a leader who would do whatever was necessary to promote peace and harmony. Furthermore, his reluctance is seen to further underline the perception that Nyerere's use of the armed forces against Idi Amin was the only way

by which he would ensure the people were safe and protected.

Generally, the war, rather than being a stain on Nyerere's memory, it sharpens the understanding of his ideals and personality, and his devotion to peace and the well-being of his people. Because of his determination to protect the life of innocent people, Nyerere set aside his religious beliefs and commitment to peace to prosecute a war to defend the people in Tanzania and Uganda who were in constant danger of further tortured and death at the hands of Idi Amin.

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# Who is a Homosexual? Rhetoric and the Construction of Ugandan Gay in Selected Ugandan Op-Eds

*Edgar Fred Nabutanyi**

## Abstract

Leading scholars of media and public discourses such as Nancy Frazer (1992) and Michael Warner (2002) have variously argued that the media cannot be neutral when the issue under debate is an explosive subject such as sexuality, race, or gender. Deploying textual analysis, I apply Frazer's and Warner's point that the media advances particular points of view to a collection of op-eds that discuss homosexuality in one Ugandan newspaper and one news magazine – *Daily Monitor* and *The Independent* – to uncover the image of this subject that emerged from these texts between December 2013 and June 2014. My textual analysis concludes that while most of the op-eds allegorised homosexuality in order to comment on 'larger and more important' issues affecting the Ugandan polity, some texts depicted homosexuals as either pariahs or perverts.

**Keywords:** Homosexuality, op-ed, pariah, perverts, newspapers, news magazines.

## Introduction

Ugandans have utilised podiums for public discourse such as the media, political rallies, churches, village bazaars, and lecture rooms to debate homosexuality since it morphed into a topical issue around 2009. Given the polarisation that homosexuality engenders; it is plausible to imagine

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that public discourse platforms like the media should 'build bridges' between the different public perspectives on topics in the country. Unfortunately, the media, especially the tabloid newspapers, have instead exacerbated the polarisation.

This is particularly true of the *Redpepper*, a tabloid newspaper, which has elevated homosexuality to an existential threat. This point has been illustrated by *Redpepper's* publication of names and pictures of Ugandans that it accuses of not only being gay, but also of recruiting children into same-sex sexuality. *Redpepper's* sensational coverage of homosexuality gives the impression that the Ugandan society is besieged by a sexual orientation that poses an existential threat. Relatedly, while the tabloid media sensationalises same-sex sexuality, the legacy press allegorises homosexuality for other important problems facing Uganda. Nonetheless, I argue that op-eds published in Ugandan newspapers of record depict gays as either pariahs or perverts, which renders them scapegoats in the morality battles in the Ugandan public sphere.

While (Nabutanyi (2019), Sara Namusoga (2017), and Celilia Strand (2012) have variously explored the depiction of homosexuality in Ugandan Uganda's media, there is paucity of critical analysis of how op-eds – an analytical/intellectual/opinionated section of a news publication – have been utilised to debate this topic. This paucity underlines the central question of this article, namely, what kind of image of homosexuals emerges out of Uganda's legacy publication? This question reminds us of (Tamale's (2009) and Sandgrove's (2012) arguments that homosexuality has been framed as a "threat to public morality and national sovereignty" in the Ugandan media (Sadgrove 2012: 103).

The key argument that the above scholars underline is the conflation of a sexual practice with morality and sovereignty in public discourses. This conflation has created moral panics around homosexuality that complicates rational and balanced engagement with the topic in public discourses. While we expect op-eds in legacy news publications to offer rational and balanced analysis of important issues in the polity, I posit that these texts emerging out of Uganda's legacy media largely simplify and allegorise a sexual practice to underscore different points about the topic in the Ugandan society.

While there are five Ugandan news publications of record – *New Vision, Daily Monitor, Observer, Bukedde,* and *The Independent* – I use *Daily Monitor* and *The Independent* as my samples for several reasons. First, I note that the *Daily Monitor's* and *The Independent's* relentless and consistent coverage of the topic of homosexuality in the form of hard news and opinion pieces means that they have built a usefully substantial archive on the subject. Second, *Daily Monitor* and *The Independent* are some of Ugandan

Uganda's legacy newspapers that aspire to provide a platform for impassioned debates as eloquently argued in their respective editorial philosophies and exemplified illustrated by their respective tag lines "truth everyday" for *Daily Monitor* and "You get the truth, we pay the price" for *The Independent*.

The veracity of the above observation is underscored by the two publications' positioning of themselves as platforms for intellectual and independent critical inquiry and debate. This argument is perhaps best captured in Andrew Mwenda's (2013) — the managing editor of *The Independent* — claim in his resignation letter from *Daily Monitor*. He claimed that he resigned because the management of *Daily Monitor* attempted to gag free expression and debate. Mwenda moved on to found *The Independent*. The notion of free expression and debate that Mwenda foregrounds in his resignation letter echoes a similar call made by the founding fathers of *Daily Monitor* in 1992 (Javuru 2013:360). While it is ironical that a newspaper founded on the ideal of free speech is accused by one of its employees of gagging freedom of expression, it is noteworthy that the genesis of both news publications conceptualised the role of a news publication as a champion of freedom of speech and debate.

The *Daily Monitor's* and *The Independent's* aura as independent news publications providing platforms to debate important issues in Uganda informs my selection of their op-eds in my exploration of the image of homosexuals that circulate in Uganda's media. My selection and textual analysis of op-eds published in these news publications coincides with my two core contentions in this article. First, is the point that the authors of the op-eds in these publications have the freedom to debate any subject including homosexuality. Second, is the point that the diversity of opinions that free expression and independence engenders allows these news publications to advance different images of Ugandan homosexuals.

## Methodology

My core focus in this article is to establish the image of people involved in homosexuality that emerges out of Uganda's legacy news publications' op-eds. My analysis relies on textual analysis of selected op-eds in a legacy newspaper and news magazine that debated homosexuality and homosexuals in the period between December 2013 to and June 2014. My hypothesis is that while some op-eds allegorised homosexuality for others important issues in the Ugandan's socio-political imagination, others depicted people involved in homosexuality as either pariahs or perverts.

My textual and close analysis that seeks to unearth the image of a Ugandan homosexual is narrowed down to 6 op-eds published in a period of six months in *Daily Monitor* and *The*

*Independent* between December 2013 and June 2014. From *Daily Monitor*, I read Fred Sheldon Mwesigwa's "Adoption of Anti-Homosexuality Bill by MPs is Citizens' Voice" and Peter Mulira's "Homosexuality is Regarded as a Genetic Condition." From *The Independent*, I explore Yoweri Museveni's "Responding to HE Obama's Statement on Homosexuality,", "The Way Forward on Homosexuality", Andrew Mwenda's "AHA: A Reply to Christian Critics", and "How Obama Played Museveni's Hand."

I argue that the 6 op-eds variously provide us with insight into the image of a Ugandan homosexual that circulates in the Ugandan's public sphere. The six months are significant to my analysis because it was the time of heightened and concerted debates on the topic in the Ugandan's public sphere after the passing and signing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act into law. Given that homosexuality became a buzzword at this time, it is unsurprising that 50 out of 56 articles sampled in the course researching this article allegorised homosexuality. They centred the controversy associated with a 'private-sexual' practice to comment on important questions affecting the Ugandan polity such as the hypocrisy of the donor community and the dysfunctionality of the Ugandan state. This article, therefore, proposes to unveil the image of a person involved in homosexuality that is shaped and circulated in the selected op-eds. It also seeks to uncover instances when homosexuality is allegorised in the critique of 'important' Ugandan issues.

## The Ugandan Homosexuals: A Metaphors for Other Issues?

While I explored six op-eds for this article, I noted that 50 used homosexuality as a metaphor of for contemporary issues affecting the Ugandan polity. Consequently, I use seven op-eds (four in *Daily Monitor* and three in *The Independent*) to demonstrate how Uganda public intellectuals allegorise same-sex sexuality for national issues. The case in point is Daniel K. Kalinaki who foregrounds homosexuality in his Thursday, 26 February 2014 article to flag and condemn the fickleness of the Ugandan public. He argues that the Ugandan public that seemed to pay attention to alleged 'violation' of the rights of gays are complacent with the general decay and malaise of the Ugandan state.

Similarly, Allan Tacca on Sunday, 2 March 2014; Anthony K. Mbonye Wednesday, 26 February 2014; Betty Olive Kamya on 23 January 2014; foreground homosexuality to highlight and denounce either the in(actions) of the government or the double standards of the donor community. For example, Kamya foregrounds the fact that sodomy laws were introduced in Uganda by British colonialists and the principle of the separation of powers to underscore the hypocrisy

of the donor community and reclaim Ugandan sovereignty and agency.

The thread that links Kalinaki, Mbonye, Tacca, and Kamya is the fact that they allegorise same-sex-sexuality in order to critique other important Ugandan issues such as a dysfunctional state, a gullible public and a hypocritical donor community. Their op-eds tell us nothing about the people involved in homosexuality and/or what homosexuality means to Ugandans. They above-mentioned authors exploit the controversy and topicality of homosexuality to underline the shambolic state of affairs in Uganda in the case of Kalinaki and Tacca; or to assert Ugandan sovereignty and highlight donor hypocrisy in the case of Kamya and Mbonye.

The use of homosexuality as an allegory for other Ugandan issues is replicated in *The Independent* op-eds of the same time. For example, Joseph Bossa; Morris Komakech and Kalundi Serumaga use the news value of the occasion of the signing into law of the Anti-Homosexuality Act to comment on the inequities within the Ugandan polity. Serumaga notes about the Anti-Homosexuality Act that while the "native's concern might be more with public display of sexuality across the board and not simply same- sex ones," (2014:np) they have the agency to determine how to express their sexuality and should not be dictated to by donors.

It can be argued that Serumaga is foregrounding the agency and independence of Ugandans in matters of sovereignty and morality. In spite of their differing political shades of opinion, these writers use their op-eds to reassert Ugandan sovereignty and/or condemn the double standards of both the Ugandan state and the donor community. While such op-eds do not offer us useful insights into the people involved in homosexuality, they nonetheless demonstrate how combustible the topic is in the Ugandan public sphere and how op-eds can be mobilised to debate this issue.

Although homosexuality is incidental to what the writers consider to be more important themes in the Ugandan's public sphere, the different authors use its topicality to comment on important issues in the Ugandan Uganda's polity. In what follows, I apply textual analysis to six op-eds (two from *Daily Monitor* and four from *The Independent*) to attempt to answer the question: who is a Ugandan homosexual? Is s/he a pervert or a pariah?

## The Ugandan Homosexual: A Pervert?

The first question that I answer is whether a Ugandan homosexual is a pervert? To answer this question, I place Yoweri Kaguta Museveni's two op-eds in *The Independent* in conversation with Fred Sheldon Mwesigwa's "Adoption of Anti-Homosexuality Bill by MPs is Citizens' Voice" in the *Daily Monitor*. The op-eds demonstrate how the two authors

frame a sexual practice as a disease and homosexuals as perverts. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni's "Responding to H.E. Obama's Statement on Homosexuality;" and "The Way Forward on Homosexuality" as well as Mwesigwa's "Adoption of Anti-Homosexuality Bill by MPs is Citizens' Voice" ferociously attack homosexuals and people like President Obama, who are alleged to be their supporters.

The articles claim that people involved in homosexuality and their supporters are attempting to impose an unacceptable sexuality on Ugandans. Even when Museveni and Mwesigwa call for societal tolerance of a certain kind of gay sexuality, their language and, consequently, the image of gays they construct and circulate in their op-eds skilfully utilises the image of contagion to depict gays as perverts.

The texts portray homosexuals as a contagious disease that has infiltrated the Ugandan polity, and whom the Members of Parliament and the President of the Republic have courageously confronted and defeated in various ways. For example, the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act by the Members of Parliament (Mwesigwa) and the singing of the bill into Law (Museveni), the op-eds suggest that the contagion has been arrested.

The above argument is evident in Museveni's letter to President Obama about the Anti-Homosexuality Act. Museveni makes three significant arguments about homosexuality in Uganda. First, that although he is not against homosexuality, a certain display of gay sexuality is offensive to many Ugandans. Second, that there is scientific proof that homosexuality is a learned behaviour that can be unlearnt.

Third, that Uganda is sovereign country that has the right to enact whatever laws it wishes without foreign interference. Underneath this rhetoric, the op-eds describe people involved in homosexuality as perverts. It is important to note that while the tenor of the article seems to be confrontationally, condemning gay sexuality, the language and images of this subjectivity they unveiled are subtle and nuanced.

The subtlety of the reaction to homosexuality is underscored by Museveni's opening declaration: "before I react to Obama's statement, let me, again, put on record my views on the issue of homosexuals (*ebitiingwa, ebisiyaga* in some of our dialects)" (2014: np). This statement underlines Museveni's mastery of the local idiom and rhetorical craftsmanship. For example, the verb "react" significantly underlines his status as an equal to Obama.

It is unreasonable, therefore for Obama to seem to order his equal not to sign the offending Bill into law. His assertion of sovereignty projects him as the warrior and hero – a man who can stand up to homosexuals, their supporters and the powerful American leader. His stature as a reasonable,

but uncompromising leader on an existential threat to the Ugandan way of life is signposted by the noun "on record" and the preposition "again." These verbs powerfully demonstrate that Museveni, has explained on many occasions, his and Uganda's views about gay sexuality to the world. This begs the question, who is a Ugandan homosexual?

As if anticipating this question, Museveni spends the rest of his statement explaining two categories of Ugandan homosexuals. He starts by acknowledging that homosexuality exists in Uganda. This is subtly infused in the italicised statement "(*ebitiingwa, ebisiyaga in some of our dialects*)" (2014: np). The nomenclature for gay sexuality is subversive because it acknowledges the existence of homosexuality in Uganda.

However, he uses it to underscore the point that its existence did not translate into acceptance, on the one hand. On the other hand, given the people involved in homosexuality kept their sexuality a secret because all types of sexuality were a private matter, Museveni underlines the Ugandan way of dealing with sexuality. If Ugandan sexualities were private and people did not parade their orientations in public, it is reasonable to understand Museveni's and Mwesigwa's ire at what they call 'designer'/'exhibitionist' homosexuality.

Museveni, for example, argues that "promotion of homosexuality in Uganda must be criminalised or rather should continue to be criminalised because the British had already done that; those who agree to become homosexuals for mercenary reasons (prostitutes) should be harshly punished as should those who pay them to be homosexual prostitutes" (2014: np). Similarly, Mwesigwa praises the passing of the Bill on account that the criminalisation of homosexuality will protect Ugandan traditional family values under threat from "the sexual revolution in the West [that] began long ago that homosexuality in Uganda is a harbinger of. Other versions like nudism, sex change, sadomasochism, bestiality, which is legal in some European countries will soon be on the cards" (2014:np).

In the above passages, Museveni and Mwesigwa conflate a sexual practice with moral imperialism and criminality. They seem to congregate focus on the point that exhibitionism of homosexual behaviour must be punished because it is not only forbidden to publicly exhibit any sexual conduct, but it acts as a harbinger of moral decadence in this part of the world. Note Mwesigwa's use of Armageddon imagery fused in the word "harbinger" that equates homosexuals to marauding locusts that are meant to destroy the Ugandan society.

It is significant that in the above passages, Museveni and Mwesigwa deflect Uganda's credentials as a homophobic society. By deflecting criminalisation of gay sexuality to British colonial rule and arguing for the protection of the "unadulterated African cultural, Islamic and Christian

heritage," (Mwesigwa 2014: np) their op-eds propose a segregation between acceptable and unacceptable homosexuality in a manner that resonates with the Ugandan public. Here, the diction places homosexuality within the realm of prohibited sexuality. It is reasonable to argue that the caveats placed on homosexuality are applicable to heterosexuality in Uganda as well as any other part of the world.

Furthermore, these are caveats and restrictions, which are also common practices in Western countries where deviant sexuality such as paedophile and prostitution are criminalised. It should be noted that the op-eds differentiate between criminal homosexuals who procure themselves or others (especially children) to engage in homosexuality for money, exhibit gay practices in public and promote it to vulnerable Ugandan children and those "who are born like that." The simple diction and criminal imagery are a discursive strategy that effectively distils a certain brand of homosexuality as an aberrant sexuality and its practitioners as exploiters of children who are innocent (especially) of sexual knowledge.

The thrust of Mwesigwa's and Museveni's articles is that people involved in homosexuality are perverts because they engage in and/or display their sexuality in a society where sexuality is a private matter. This argument is extended in Museveni's second op-ed considered in this article. In "The Way forward on Homosexuality" Museveni reiterates his position that some homosexuals are criminals and that they are abnormal. Museveni's argument coincides with Mwesigwa's framing of homosexuality as a form of 'sickness' or 'abnormality.'

This is underlined by phrases like "born like that," which evoke divine explanation of gay sexuality. It circulates an image of homosexuals as abnormal individuals whose abnormality is the mysterious working of God. By claiming that homosexuals are abnormal, Museveni appropriates the common register in a largely Christian society that evokes God's mysterious ways of creation to condemn a sexual practice. The above point is underscored by his exploitation of the Ganda socio-relational and etiquette proverb "*enyomunyumba tebi totolwa*," (private issues are not discussed in public?) (2014: np).

This proverb cautions his "abnormal gays" to desist from displaying their sexuality. By asking them not to 'wash' their dirty linen in the 'public,' Museveni adeptly others a certain type of homosexuality. The proverb's claim that dirty linen is not exposed in public underpins the claim that sexuality, including homosexuality is a private matter that must be kept private at all times both at an individual and national level.

This thrust of their argument in the op-eds ostracizes gays by labelling them arrogant, sadistic and mercenary. The argument is fortified

by the statement "[these are gays] who are homosexual out of choice and conviction – they are not coerced; they are not after money" (2014: np). The above observation conspiratorially places Museveni and Mwesigwa discursively with their audience.

This strategy works because it portrayals Museveni, like any other ordinary Ugandan, as someone who cannot understand somebody who chooses to be gay or connives with 'foreigners' to lure and recruit children into this form of sexuality. This is suggested by the passage "if you say that foreigners are "luring" our children into homosexuality" (2014: np). The dastardly dangerous actions of gays by choice – foreign or local – are highlighted by the adjectives "foreign" and "orphans" and the verbs "recruit" and "lure."

I argue that these words are deliberately chosen to arouse anger and condemnation of mercenary homosexuals. For example, Museveni uses the verb "lure" three times in the above quotation. If one were to argue that repetition is often used for emphasis, what else does the repetition of this verb achieve? The term 'lure' underscores the point that not only is homosexuality by choice and conviction wrong, but also that this group arrogantly supports it aware that it is considered a crime and immoral by some Ugandans.

It is also important to note that the verb 'lure' carries the connotation: to entice deliberately with a promise of a reward. It follows that you lure or entice someone who is not into the kind of sexuality you practice. This implicitly suggests that criminal gays are using money to induce young Ugandans into 'a wrong kind' of sexuality.

It is also important to note how Museveni deploys another emotive term "childhood" to intensify the anger against mercenary gays. Childhood is an elastic term in the Ugandan context. Although it is legally defined as anyone below 18 years of age, in the Ugandan context its meaning is stretched to mean either a member of a particular generation or a clan/family member irrespective of the person's chronological age.

Museveni uses the importance of childhood to clan/family/country – a child is a future of these social groups – to criminalise some homosexuals. His op-ed implicitly suggests that homosexuality jeopardises the productive and procreative roles that childhood is expected to play in the country. This makes gay recruiters anti-Ugandan individuals – people working against the welfare of not only the country, but also the individual children they introduce to an allegedly criminal sexuality.

That someone could put the future of a nation and its children in jeopardy is incomprehensible to Museveni as his claim "they are just attracted to fellow men or fellow women, according to what they say, difficult though it is for me to imagine. This is a group we need to handle," indicates

(2014: np) underscores. This passage also allows for another conspiratorial moment between Museveni and the Ugandan reader of his article. By putting himself in this reader's shoes, he makes the case against gays engaged in luring Ugandan children into homosexuality.

The rhetorical significance of the above claim is that it authorises the portrayal of gays as abnormal people who do not know 'right from wrong' or 'normal from abnormal.'. Although in everyday usage these terms are innocent, used the way Museveni and Mwesigwa have used them and in these particular contexts, they assumed additional meaning. The connotation that these phrases assume resonates with the public being addressed.

A related point that validates Museveni's and Mwesigwa's perspective and ensures that one category of homosexuals is demonised is their effective deployment of childhood. The argument that homosexuals should be banned because they recruit children into a wrong form of sexuality relies on a discursive framework that conflates childhood, sex and defilement to evoke anger towards anyone who is seen as exploiting children. Using specific registers and imagery, Museveni and Mwesigwa, therefore, succeed in depicting homosexuals in selected op-eds as perverts.

## The Ugandan Homosexual: A Pariah?

The other recurrent image of homosexuals in Uganda's public sphere is that of a pariah. If one were to take the common definition of a pariah as any person who is not accepted by a social group because of who they are rather than what they do, then, Andrew Mwenda's (2014) argument makes that point. In that article "AHA: A Reply to 'Christian' Critics" and "How Obama Played Museveni's Hand" as well as Peter Mulira's (2014) "Homosexuality is Regarded as a Genetic Condition" can be read as op-eds that depict Ugandan gays as pariahs in a society characterised by polarised discourses on homosexuality.

Mwenda's and Mulira's opinions pieces about homosexuality reminds us of Teun van Dijk's (1999) concept of positive self-representation. He argues that "positive self-representation and negative other presentation" (1999:542) are discursive strategies that work through the attribution of positive qualities to a group whose interests are being advanced and the demonisation of its opponents. I argue that Mwenda and Mulira succeed in their discursive project of describing Ugandan gays using a positive and sympathetic lexicon.

The register that they have chosen presents Ugandan gays as pariahs is particularly effective in Mwenda's article "AHA: A Reply to 'Christian' Critics." His discursive

strategy in this article is anchored on negative representation of the anti-homosexuality camp in Uganda by attacking their claim for moral authority. For example, Mwenda sarcastically states "… some people claiming to be Christians have usurped God's power and sentenced me to hell" (2014: np).

The discursive effectiveness of this statement lies in how it exposes Ugandan gays as victims of a self-righteous Christian lobby. This description of the ferocious attacks on homosexuals as Mwenda elaborates, indicate societal toxicity towards gays. This point is specifically accentuated by Mwenda's subtle questioning of the group's assumed moral authority. His use of the words "claim" and "usurp" show how this lobby's actions, including the condemnation of gays, are un-Christian.

This allows Mwenda to characterise Ugandan gays as scapegoats of a homophobic majority in society. Selective use of Biblical passages to argue a case is a common and effective rhetorical technique in a largely Christian and conservative society like Uganda. This is perhaps why Mwenda extensively quotes Jesus Christ's teaching to underscore the point that gays are sinners like anyone else in need of Christ's forgiveness and love.

He goes on to accuses leading campaigners against same-sex relationships like Pastor Martin Ssempa of abdicating "their responsibility as Christian shepherds" and failing or refusing "to help homosexuals find salvation" (2014:np). He goes on to remind those condemning homosexual people that "Jesus said he came to earth to save sinners, not to dine with the holy" (2014:np). His core argument in the above passages is to show that unlike Jesus Christ who preached love and forgiveness, the Christian lobby in the Ugandan homosexuality debate are prejudiced hypocrites.

The Biblical allusions are strengthened by anecdotes, which are aimed at in humanising Ugandan gays, are characterised as pariahs in society. The first story is that of a stigmatised Ugandan gay, who is frightened by the homophobic preaching in his local church. Mwenda quotes this "young Ugandan Christian homosexual":

> I had to find an anchor on which to pin my hope. Such an anchor I thought I had found in church. I can see the look on your face: 'What, a Christian homosexual?' […] I have suffered more pain in a place where other people go to find healing. Each time a preacher walks up the pulpit my heart jumps into my mouth waiting for him to drop the bombshell: "homosexuality is the unforgivable sin", or "all homos will burn in hell." I would walk away feeling like my fate had been sealed. If it had not been for my tough faith, I would have quit church long ago but I stayed. I stayed not because I had no choice – no! I stayed because I knew then as I know now that God's grace was sufficient for me too.

The positive and dignified depiction of the young man in the anecdote attempts to achieve empathy for the young man and Ugandan homosexuals. Mwenda paints a Ugandan gay as a scared, albeit honestly God-fearing person. The seemingly paradoxical statement: "Christian homosexual" underlines this depiction. The popular image of a Ugandan homosexual that emerges from Museveni and Mwesigwa attitude is that of an outcast in society.

The passage quoted by Mwenda suggests that homosexual people are pitiable because of a sexual practice that is outside their control. This is an argument that Peter Mulira makes in defence of Ugandan homosexuals when he argues that homosexuality is a genetic phenomenon (2014: np). In the above passage, Mulira concludes that Ugandan society ostracises a sexual orientation whose members are helpless to resist or reject.

Mulira's observation that the American Psychiatric Association has removed homosexuality as a mental disorder from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual becomes a discursive counter to the prevalent homophobic rhetoric in the Ugandan public sphere. The homophobic register – "homosexuality is the unforgivable sin", or "all homos will burn in hell" – that Mwenda's article foregrounds coheres with Mulira's assertion that homosexuality is "a human characteristic that is formed in early life and is resistant to change" (2014:np) to reclaim the agency of Ugandan gays.

A direct appeal by a Ugandan Christian homosexual to other Ugandan Christians and the provision of scientific proof of their sexual orientation can effectively sow seeds for future tolerance, if not acceptance. In spite of one's views about homosexuality, this young man's passionate demand for acceptance, on the one hand and his apprehension and fear of stigmatisation on the other hand, arouses empathy for those engaged in gay sexuality. The image of a homosexual that readers take from this passage is that of a courageous person who regularly attends a church whose members stigmatise and condemn his lifestyle.

Mwenda's second article titled "How Obama Played Museveni's Hand" is a condemnation of the naïve, arrogant and hypocritical Western lobby in support of homosexuality for unwitting complicit in the suffering of Ugandan gays. Mwenda argues that their intervention does more harm than good to Ugandan gays in spite of their good intentions. Granted, there is no doubt that homosexuality as a lifestyle that can be publicly exhibited is a new phenomenon in Uganda.

If Ugandans are at the worst outraged, and at the least baffled by any exhibition of any form of sexuality, I argue that it will take some time for them to accept homosexuality, let alone its public display. This is perhaps why I agree with Mwenda's core argument in this article is that there is need for patient engagement and subtle discussion for

acceptance of homosexuality to occur rather than threatening Ugandans and their president.

Mwenda's article succeeds in portraying gays as an ostracised group in the country. He achieves this by condemning the internal and external pro-gay lobbies. He argues that the lobbies use threats (cutting off aid) and intimidation (diplomatic pressure) to force Ugandans to accept their brand of homosexuality unaware or oblivious of the subtleties of its basis in Uganda. Mwenda's anger in the passage underscores the vulnerability of gays in Uganda. He depicts them as innocent scapegoats of this naïve, but well-meaning group.

This is because Western lobbyist's misunderstanding and/or disrespect of African values harm the advocacy agenda of gays in a country like Uganda. If one can argue that Obama's letter forced Museveni's hand into signing a law that proposed to sentence gays to life imprisonment for "being who they are," (2014:np) then Obama is a worse threat to Ugandan gays than Uganda's homophobia. This is because Obama's actions inadvertently alienated a man whom he should have courted. Mwenda's article faults the naivety of the pro-homosexuality lobby for the various forms of suffering endured by Ugandan homosexuals.

## Conclusion

I have argued in this article that selected public intellectuals and experts use the op-ed medium in legacy news publications to comment on homosexuality. My textual analysis of selected opinion pieces has unearthed three patterns that emerge in debates about same-sex sexuality in Uganda's public sphere.

First, a group of public intellectuals are seen to have taken advantage of the topicality of homosexuality to use this sexual orientation as a metaphor for important issues in the Ugandan polity. Second, one group – represented by Museveni and Mwesigwa in this article – manipulate indigenous discursive idioms to label homosexuals as perverts in society. Third, progressive commentators, like Mwenda and Mulira foreground the argument that gays are pariahs in the Ugandan society.

It is plausible, therefore, to argue that public intellectuals have utilised Ugandan newspapers to distil convincing images of homosexuals in the public sphere. For example, the images of a homosexual that Mwesigwa, Museveni, Mulira and Mwenda construct and circulate in the Ugandan public sphere define a Ugandan homosexual.

The respective authors name Ugandan gays as either pariahs or perverts. In spite of these polarising frames – cultural contamination, protection of children from exploitation, upholding of human rights – Ugandan discourses on homosexuality underline the topicality of same-sex sexuality.

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