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Rural-Urban Interaction in Ugandan Poetry: Is the Urban an Open Space?

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Abstract

This article interrogates the interaction of the rural and the urban in Uganda's poetry anthologies by analysing what poets construct as discursive interface between the two spaces. I argue that the rural and the urban, even when they are discrete spaces, represent each other in an asymmetrical relationship. Thus, the rural and the urban are in constant, transient and dynamic contact which contact at times seems paradoxical. The article uses textual analysis to enable a scrutiny and discussion of associations and disconnections by focusing on five selected poems. I anchor the reading of the poems on the theory of planetary urbanism and deploy Amin and Thrift's (2002) concept of transitivity to examine the rural and the urban as spaces of intermingling because of their porous boundaries. Using this theoretical lens, I interrogate the interaction between the two spaces with a focus on Amin and Thrift's claim of the openness of urbanity. The article concludes that although the urban and the rural, as represented in the selected poems, can be read as distinct spaces, they converge in everyday life and experience from historical, cultural, social, and kinship perspectives. Both the rural and the urban are depicted as sources of knowledge, which sources are replicated in either space in ever-shifting and ever-changing ways.

Keywords: rural, urban, interaction, and openness

Introduction

This article discusses the interaction between the rural and the urban as constructed in the selected poems. The key terms 'rural' and 'urban' are often described based on criteria such as settlement size and population density (Wineman et al., 2020, p. 2020). Some scholars view the two terms as colloquially used since people tend to have mental conception of each ideal landscape creating a binary that has long ceased to have meaning (Simon et al., 2004, p. 2004). The two terms depend on the social discourse that defines them. They are distinct and are associated with different things (Thornton 2008). In this article, I look at the two spaces as sites of artistic expressions where poets engage with multiple issues. I read these spaces from selected poetry anthologies. Poetry anthologies draw together diverse voices and collections of perceptions which create convergences or divergences and an overview of poetic thoughts and imaginations on a given subject (which, in this case, is the idea of rural-urban interaction). The different

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voices in the anthologies give liveliness and intensity to a given issue (Khayana, 2018, p. ix; Okot & Bangirana, 2000). Since urban is looked at as collection of processes that are created through interconnections (Pryke, 2005), anthology, which brings voices together, is best suited to discuss the multi-dimensional and asymmetrical relationships between the rural and the urban. Furthermore, the creation of urban spaces through interconnections is suggestive of the openness of urbanity to what is beyond its boundaries. Thus, my interest is in interrogating the breadths and limits of the openness envisioned by the poets through the reading of rural-urban interactions.

Rural-urban relations have been significant throughout history (Lynch, 2005, p. 7). A number of scholars acknowledge that there has been a considerable convergence between rural and urban right from the time cities began to evolve (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1991; Freund, 2007). This evolution came because of trade long before colonialism. The urban offered market to the rural for agricultural products. On the other hand, the rural provided market for the merchandise from the city (Dirksmeier, 2016, p. 888). This commercial relationship positions the cities as links between the rural and the rest of the world (Lynch, 2005, p. 15). There are also spatial linkages where people, goods, ideas, and information circulate between the rural and the urban fluidly (Gebre & Gebremedhin, 2019, p. 3). These interactions boost urban and possibly rural development. The two authors vehemently assert that "development hardly exists in the absence of linkages" (p. 3). Thus, the two spaces are inseparable (Trefon, 2009). One can find neither a purely rustic rural nor a purely polished urban.

Similarly, Uganda's initial stages of urban growth suggest a close interaction between the rural and the urban. First, urban centres existed before colonialism. In the 1890s Captain Fredrick Lugard established the British headquarters in present-day Old Kampala. The establishment was based on the modern urban principle alongside the rural administrative mode of the then Buganda capital, the *Kibuga* (Nawangwe, 2010; Sahle, 2010). This dual development eventually gave birth to modern and rural characteristics of the city of Kampala. Although this development of the urban bears colonial undertones, the area previously occupied by the last king of Buganda in the colonial period known as Kibuga is present. What could be considered rural characters of the Kibuga such as the tombs and other traditional artifacts exist to date in Kampala. The Kibuga does not only depict rural resilience in the urban but also demonstrates how closely connected the urban space is to its history that is anchored on the rural. Thus, in my view, when Nuttall and Mbembe (2008, p. 8) say the city "comprises actual bodies, images, forms, footprints and memories", they mean the urban space has both the present and the past intermingled. This past connects us to the pre-urban which relates to the rural. The rural-urban connection suggests that the urban is porous and, therefore, open (Amin & Thrift, 2002). This argument suggests the rural and the urban are open to "new possibilities and new interactions between people" (Allen & Pryke, 1999, p. iiiv), as well as the spaces they occupy.

This article interrogates the extent to which selected poems by Ugandan poets construct the urban as an open space, by focusing on poetic devices and actions of the personas which may suggest notions of rural-urban interactivity. Therefore, I pose the questions: Is the urban open? How are we to understand rural-urban relations in the selected poems? What does openness of the urban mean? I specifically focus on the

poems that engage with the historical, social, and cultural practices which Ugandan poets envisage as drawing the two spaces together to discuss the idea of openness or closedness of the urban.

Studies focusing on rural urban interaction in Uganda have largely been through migration narratives (Andersson & Johansson, 2013; Nyongesa, 2019; Stites, 2020). These scholars highlight factors for migration such as poverty, insecurity, diseases and some traditional practices such as circumcisions as well as the general attraction urban spaces usually present to individuals and communities. Besides, there are food security issues that constantly forge interaction as depicted in the study of Ugandan secondary cities (Mackay, 2019). My chief motivation in this article comes from the background that critical studies so far undertaken on this theme have engaged with Ugandan urbanity, especially the capital, Kampala, as though it were isolated from its hinterlands. For example, David G. Pier's *The spectre of rootless urban youth (bayaaye) in Kulyennyingi, a novel of Amin-era Uganda (*2021*)*, and S. Frankland's *No Money, No Life: Surviving on the Street of Kampala (*2007) focus on the dynamics of the everyday life of the marginal category of urban folks. Yet, the category of the marginal folks that they study may have close influence and networks outside the city.

My reading of the selected poems, is anchored on planetary urbanism that sees the urban as a fabric that stretches and envelops everywhere and the non-urban as largely internalised within an uneven yet planetary process (Brenner & Schmid, 2014; Merrifield, 2014). Amin and Thrift (2002), expand on this theorisation of planetary urbanism by using the term transitivity to grasp the notion of relationships of these spaces as porous and fluid. Within African scholarship, this theorisation resonates with the work of Quayson (2014) who posits that the everyday urban projects the interaction of local and global economy. This is so because the urban is constantly penetrated given the porous nature of its boundaries. These scholars further suggest that the urban is an open space that can be penetrated. Ogude (2012) demonstrates the porousness of the urban when he discusses how music from the rural earned new audience in the urban space. This implies the urban folks access and interact with the rural music because the social boundary is open and permeable. While I agree that the urban allows intermingling, I argue that the urban is only spatially open with subtle and tightly restricted interaction, especially when it comes to social relationships.

I examine the argument of the openness of urbanity using textual analysis of five poems from one online collection of poems titled *Poems from Africa*, Vander (2005) and three published book anthologies: *Boda Boda Anthem & other poems: A Kampala Poetry Anthology* (Barya, 2015)*,* this anthology focuses exclusively on Kampala's urban life and draws contribution from within and outside the country scaling up selections and views on urbanity. *Wondering and Wandering of Hearts: Poems from Uganda* (Susan Kiguli, 2017) and *Uganda Poetry Anthology 2000* (Okot & Bangirana, 2000) are the other anthologies. These two anthologies are not exclusively on urban, but their inclusion here add up voices about rural-urban interactions. Whereas these anthologies present diverse views and are constructed under different circumstances, they have been selected because their publications fall within the time of increasing urbanity in Uganda, that is, from the year 2000 to date (Tumwesigye et al., 2023). The binding thread in the five poems is their subject matter that depicts links and disconnections between the rural

and urban. I categorise the selected poems based on emerging themes and: first, I analyse the notions of rural resilience within the urban space. Secondly, I discuss how family and kinship relations foster convergence and finally explore how cultural practices such as burial, marriage and other economic activities, akin to either rural or urban, create agency for interactions. I discuss these themes basing on how the poets construct their various personas and how the personas perceive their immediate spaces. The key question at this point is: How do the selected Ugandan poets envisage and recreate interaction between the rural and the urban?

Rural Resilience in Urban Space

I read the notion of rural resilience basing on how things could be objectified or reinvented and recreated as rural within the urban space. Freund (2007) argues that in old cities, there is continuity of the rural through resilience in time and space to contemporary cities. This argument resonates with the accretion of rural features such as cultural sites that visibly emerge in the poetry about the city of Kampala. The theme of resilience dramatises the openness of the city from a historical and conceptual perspectives. Historically, Vander (2005) visualises some definitive features about the old Buganda city that has withstood the test of time from 1890s to date. She also discusses the notion of time. The poem "Morning in Kampala" published in an online collection *Poems from Africa,* for example, reconstructs rural characters through images. The poet observes the city of Kampala at dawn and envisions the then Buganda kingdom before the colonial establishment of modern city plan. Also, the poet shows how visibly, some of the features like the tombs – where the relics of the past kings sit – interact with the modern Kampala. The poet juxtaposes Kasubi Hill and another hill which could be Namirembe or Lubaga because it is described as having a church on it. This spectacle of the two hills creates some links between contemporary urban Kampala and the then colonial urbanity in Uganda.

Morning in Kampala

The morning comes up sluggishly.
Kasubi Hill, where dead *kabaka*s[1] sleep is still immobile,
The neighboring hill with a well-known church at its summit begins
    to blink with cars.
The sky wears a trace of smile as some distant rooster announces his
    daybreak.
The cars are first to arise.
Then the familiar stretching and yawning of silverware, tables
    awakened by the dishes,
Windows open their eyes
How sharp and unfrayed the morning shadows,
Alert and responsive.
Children try the first cry of the day to rouse the laundry still pinned on
    (i) the line
Some trees walk in the sun while others stand locked in sleep like
    (ii) horses.

1 Kabakas were the kings of the Baganda ethnic group before Uganda became a British colony and later a multi-tribal country. [the poet's own interpretation].

One bird now prods the sky
A human whistle tickles the air
A rude hammering shocks the timber of the cells of a new building
As a truck farts up an incline.
Everyone's up now,
The morning is unshattered.

Most striking about "Morning in Kampala" is the use of personification. Inanimate objects and abstract entities are given human qualities. In the first six lines, the morning, for example, comes sluggishly. The church summit begins to blink as though it possesses eyes, and the sky wears a trace of smile. These personifications engage our sights and create images of how morning starts in this city. In the process, the poet looks at images of history. For example, the persona observes Kasubi Hill and talks of the dead Kabakas in a discourse which appeals to tradition and recreates a pre-urban Kampala. There are images which depict transition of pre-urban Kampala to the modern city of Kampala. The images of city come through a colonial construction of urbanity. Thus, the church accompanied by strong images of cars and light and the rooster signify development of urbanity. Whereas cars are shedding lights to show morning, the distant rooster is announcing the daybreak. So, there is the machine life of urbanity and the rustic in the same space. These images - the car and the rooster - define the city of Kampala.

In the rest of the poem, nature echoes the rustic coexistence with the machine culture, the urban and modernity. For example, the persona further depicts nature and the destruction of it arising from the pressure of urbanisation. For instance, we read that: "Some trees walk in the sun while others stand locked in sleep like a horse, ...bird prods the sky, human whistle tickles the air, rude hammering shocks the timber, a truck farts up an incline, /Everyone's up now/ The morning is unshattered" (lines 16-20). In rural urban interaction framework, the images: "unfrayed morning shadows, birds prod the sky, and morning is unshattered", create the impressions of an obtrusive presence of rural innocence within the city landscape. However, the rural is threatened by urban development as in the expression "hammering shocks the timber" (line 19). The image of morning could, therefore, create a sharp binary between the rural and the urban. However, the divide is collapsed by the different activities shown in the images of cars, birds, and humans cutting down trees, all in the same space.

Furthermore, the persona observes the city at its most natural moment or rural state – one would say – when we reflect on Williams' presumption in *The Country and the City*. Williams' "country is contingent, as it could represent the nation" (Williams, 1975, p. 1). The natural state in "Morning in Kampala" captures both the city and the rural. For example, both the car and the rooster are time markers in this poem. The roosters depict the traditional concept of time and how the pre-modern African people told time, before the modern notion of clocks. This idea of telling time also resonates with Simon Gikandi's argument that beneath African fictions set in the pre-modern and even seemingly unmodern lies modernity (Gikandi, 2007, pp. 4,5). In the poem, the rooster conjures up image of rural setting and suggests how folks tell time in traditional context. In this rudimentary way of telling time, lies modernity and civility. This is because time is a modern resource that organises the activities of the urban folk. The

rooster here, is part of the organising principle in time management in the urban space, thus demonstrating the resilience of rural within the urban. The image of the rooster and the sound it makes mediate the traditional notion of time with what the modern-day clock does. I, therefore, argue that the idea of rural resilience in this poem demonstrates the openness of urbanity to its rural past.

"Morning in Kampala", therefore, blurs the line between the urban and the rural, given the two images of the car mingling with the traditional time marker – the rooster. Importantly, the rooster is emerging from a distance but its announcement is audible. Whereas the car evokes the visual and the auditory images, the rooster evokes only the auditory. I read these two images, the car for example, as gaining more space and taking on the hitherto role of the rooster in traditional contexts and the audible sound coming from the rooster as a residue. Thus, the rural is surviving, thriving, and enduring the pressure from urbanisation from the margin. The image of the rooster is testament that the rural cannot be detached from the urban. But from the dominance of the image of the car over the rooster, one can deduce that the rural cannot earn space within the urban equitably. While the urban is open to the rural, there is also a suggestion that the rural is being suffocated by the pressure from urbanisation shown by the dominant image of car over the rooster.

Family and Kinship Connection

The notion of resilience is helpful if one is to examine physical entities within the urban and how the notion is linked to the historical past. In this section, I look at how human relationships within family and kinship structure foster and question the extent of the interaction between the rural and the urban. The openness here is, for the larger part, spatial. The family is my primary interest since family is the basic unit of a society which provides the social context into which members derive their primary identity. Kinship, on the other hand, is also important. It is one of the main organising principles of human society and, largely, has its roots in the extended families (Jack Jackson, 2015). There are some established networks among the people in the poem which forge linkages and interactions between the rural and the urban as I will demonstrate in the following poem. Johnson Grace Maganja's poem "My First Visit to Kampala" published in *Boda Boda Anthem* (Barya, 2015) provides a unique experience of rural and urban interaction, from a folk narrative and referential kinship perspective. Here, I examine how the persona – a young girl – experiences and begins to form an opinion about city through folk narrative. She processes the idea of city through a stream of consciousness and later makes an impromptu visit to her uncle in the city of Kampala. The poet, therefore, uses personal folk narrative of people who once lived in the city to relay to the readers what some people make of the city of Kampala as in the following lines:

It's a city built on hills, bragged those who had lived there
Then I laughed; but *Kabale* has more than seven hills
Others urged that it was the city with most cars in Uganda
No, it's the city with most important buildings in Uganda
It's the city of the educated and rich

No wonder those who travel there didn't want to return to the village, I thought
Except when the ancestral gods called on them

In lines 1-5, what sounds like everyday conversation significantly reproduces and places the urban characters within the rural context through reminiscence. Take the example, "It's a city built on hills, bragged these who lived there/...city with most cars.../ city with most important buildings...". These lines asymmetrically represent the urban in the rural. Besides, the conversation constantly forges a kind of interplay between the urban and the rural as peculiar urban images are conceptualised within the rural. This interplay influences the ways in which rural folks perceive the urban. An example, is the persona's tone of awe, partly captured in "No wonder those who travel there don't want to return to the village, I/ thought" (lines 6-7). Secondly, the persona wondered why Kampala, built on seven hills, is an issue when *Kabale* actually has more hills![1] But we need to know that the seven hills are the initial identity markers of Kampala until about the 1970's when Kampala began to rapidly expand and now sits on more than 21 hills (Nawangwe, 2010). Thirdly, how is the city looked at by a rural dweller? Rural folks perceive the city as a space for the educated, the rich, a place for cars and buildings. These characteristics depict aspects of modernity highlighted in the previous poem. The city – the epitome of the urban – also has ethos of colonial undertones that differentiate the city as belonging to some people like the rich and the educated. The last three lines, however, resolve the distinction between the urban and the rural. A point of convergence emerges in the euphemism "Except when ancestral gods called on them" (line 8) to mean that when they die, they are transported back to the village. This construction affirms Trefon's (2009) assertion that people always go back to the hinterland for several reasons, and burial is one of them. The stanza which I have quoted from the poem "My First Visit to Kampala" depicts the fluidity of interaction between the two spaces arising from what, at this point, I can term as ordinary folk narratives. The same stanza also suggests the temporality of the urban space to some people, as reflected in the idea of transporting relics to the rural and vice versa.

Maganja further explores how the persona moves from the rural to the city and experiences ideas she got from the ordinary folk narratives.

One morning I decided to pay a visit to my uncle in Kampala.
As the bus contoured around the hill of my mother and *Kabale*.
I could see trees, people and houses move in fast motion from the opposite direction.
Soon I was overtaken by sleep,
waking up occasionally during stopovers.
I looked out through the window and from a distance saw vast plain

1 Old Kampala (where Captain Frederick Lugard built his fort) 2. Mengo Hill (Kibuga Capital of Buganda Kingdom), 3. Kibuli Hill (Home to the Kibuli Mosque), 4. Namirembe Hill (Home to the Anglican Cathedral), 5. Lubaga Hill (White Fathers, Lubaga Cathedral), 6. Nsambya Hill (British Catholic) and 7. Nakasero Hill (Fort Nakasero- British Military Installations) (Explanations added).

land 15
I wondered why it wasn't hilly like *Kabale*.

In lines 9-10, the poet depicts the connection between the rural and the urban as brought about by mobility. This mobility is not in the sense of migration but simple kinship relations arising out of curiosity of the young girl, interested in experiencing life in the city. The persona, "...decided to pay a visit to [her] my uncle in Kampala". The key factor that facilitates and mediates this convergence of the two spaces, is the transport urgency. Amin and Thrift's concept of transitivity, which I have already alluded to, manifests clearly in the influx of transport means, the movement and infusion of the spatial boundaries in the stanza. However, a question still lingers: to what extent can the persona from the rural fit in the hands of the kin, let alone the stranger, who finds oneself in an urban setting? This question is intriguing, if we closely look at the persona's experience in the following lines.

Soon we came to a place with so much noise and hooting of vehicles.
Never have I ever seen so many vehicles in my life!
I saw a raised rectangular board near the roundabout: WELCOME TO 20
KAMPALA CITY.
Then I remembered a place called *Busega* my friend had told me about.
I excitedly said to myself; 'Yes', this is Kampala city.
...
Then I approached a tall, bald man at the gas station.
I gave him my uncle's phone number and humbly asked him to call.
He arrived in a white saloon and I sat quietly at the passenger seat admiring 25
the tall buildings.
"Next time make a phone call first before coming to Kampala" he barked.
That was my first lesson about Kampala.

As the persona comes to the city, she already has expectation and experience of the city through personal or ordinary folk narratives. Many cars, noise, and big buildings are some of the tropes of urban modernity in the persona's conception. The persona is bewildered at the sight of the many vehicles and tall buildings, being her first time in a city. Transport means connect the city to its hinterland. The buses and other means of transport, therefore, draw the rural and the urban closer to each other and force the urban to keep open, thus, facilitating the porousness of the city boundaries.

However, the stanza suggests a distinction between the rural and the urban. Whereas in the rural, individuals need not make prior arrangements for them to visit their kin, in the urban it is mandatory to arrange a visit and the intended host has to be agreeable to the arrangement. It is interesting to note that, for instance, the first meaningful conversation between the persona of "My First Visit to Kampala" and the uncle is a reprimand: "Next time make a phone call first before coming to Kampala"

(line 27), upon which the persona confesses: "That was my [her] first lesson about Kampala" (line 28). Whereas the uncle's response to the impromptu call can be interpreted as reverence to the links that exist between him and his rural root, socially, he has acquired a new code of behaviour that prompts him to assert his 'new self', the urban self, authoritatively, "...make a phone call first before coming to Kampala". Nevertheless, there is a bond that exists between urban dwellers and their rural root which suggest the closeness of the two. But the question remains: is the urban open?

...
I was soon in a large mansion guarded by a security man.
I wondered whether Kampala was a city full of insecurity.
I was told never to leave the house and I did all the chores at home.
One night my uncle came to my room and tried to rape me.
After two weeks I said goodbye to Kampala, back to my village in *Kabale*.

The presence of the security man in line 29 signifies restrictions to both the place and the space the persona is to occupy. Ironically, the guard also depicts insecurity. The idea of insecurity is supported by the stern warning in line 31 that she should not go out, thereby depicting a new world opening to her. Apparently, the persona is caged. And the most poignant insecurity goes against her social and cultural code, the rural, where the persona is sexually threatened by the uncle, making her to flee back to the village, to the place she calls '...the hills of *her* mother and Kabale' (line 10). This experience of the persona bears significant irony, for the uncle is unable to distinguish kin, child, and sexual partner. And the uncle's attempt to rape the girl depicts that the urban has corrupted the morality of the uncle, thereby painting the urban as a space of moral decadence and an insecure space for the young girl. The attempted rape gesture depicts the uncle as disconnected from his rural root, and the social urban world is closed to the young girl.

Similarly, another poem that illustrates the subtle character of social boundaries within the urban space is Paula Biraaro's "Larok from Napak", published in *Boda Boda Anthem* (Barya, 2015, p. 56). Unlike "My First Visit to Kampala", where the persona moves from the village and back, in "Larok from Napak" the persona identifies himself as a ten-year-old needy boy from Napak, a district in the north-eastern part of Uganda. He is in the city and he commutes from one of the city's ghettos, Kisenyi. He comes to the city to get rid of poverty, as he articulates:

At the crack of dawn, my life begins;
Departing from Kisenyi ghetto,
I embark on the trodden route,
To the concrete jungle of Kampala

These streets are my domain,
Jam-filled traffic routes I thereby remain,
Knocking on windows pleading for change

Earning my keep; for shillings I must gain

Windows shut. Doors lock. Radios off
as I approach
Stares glares leers and sneers
shadow my every move.

You do not know me you never did ask for my name
You say it is none of your concern so please do not judge
Should it not shock and puzzle you
that a ten year old boy is begging for bread?
...
...
To the city I was drawn, hope serenaded
Visions and dreams filled my arid mind;
the night bus I boarded, to the capital I came
To Kampala; the Canaan of matooke and pork;

I Larok, son of the soil from Napak,
vow to look eye to eye into poverty's face,
fighting to win
If Karamoja does not develop, Larok and his family will.

Whereas the persona's aim in coming to the city is to improve his economic status, his social position and rural identity make him unwelcome. He starts his day at dawn, heading "To the concrete jungle of Kampala". The line carries two inanimate and contrasting images of concrete and jungle to refer to Kampala. Concrete and jungle conjure up images of buildings and animal-like setting when we think of jungle as a forest, for instance. The concrete may symbolise the people in the city as indifferent or animal-like. This image of concrete appears to exaggerate the nature of the city. However, the poet qualifies the concrete and jungle in (lines 9-12) by dictions and phrases that support ideas of indifference. As the persona approaches the vehicle to seek alms, "Windows closed. Doors locked. Radios off/ as I approach/ Stares, glares, leers and sneers/shadow my every move". The persona's attempt to relate and interact with the people of the urban is met with spitefulness. The windows and doors are literally closed on his approaching. The gesture towards the persona, is supported by the choice of words whose endings bear sound patterns like "sneers, stares, glares and leers" to show contempt and to question the boy's street life. This questioning attitude towards the persona is a means of interrogating the openness of the city. And, ironically, pursuing coins on the street can never elevate one's status, but discourages growth instead.

The portrayal of the persona reveals the perception of the city as the big promise in the mind and face of the rural children. This construction bears thoughts of the Bright Light Theory which postulates that rural dwellers are naively curious and attracted to the adventure of city life and are largely unaware of the social problems in the city (Bakewell & Jónsson, 2011). In this particular poem, the persona's fascination is seen in the lines "To the city I was drawn, hope serenaded/Visions and dreams filled my arid mind." The attraction is like a song beckoning him, manifested in the diction "serenated" suggesting a beautiful musical note, the attractive note of the city in this case. The persona, therefore, belongs to the category of the innovative migrants (Ullah, 2004), the target migrants. The boy has relocated himself to the city to improve the standard of living for his family as he asserts "...vow to look eye to eye into poverty's face/Fighting to win/If Karamoja does not develop, Larok and his family will" (lines 23-24). This desire for improvement is larger than the persona. It is familial and regional. I therefore argue that it is perhaps the poet's imaginative fantasy for equitable distribution of resources too, although the poet is cognizant of the persona's place in the city and the irony that surrounds this young boy's pursuit of freeing himself from poverty.

Nevertheless, the persona's rural origin limits his interaction within the ghetto, the slummy residence that houses people of their kind. Hence, the urban is simultaneously and paradoxically open and closed. It is open in that one can access the urban spatially. But what is the nature of openness if one relates and operates only where his or her kind is? This boundary affects how individuals experience and perceive the urban space. Thus, the poet constructs this idea of boundary from the perspective of street children who are an extension of the urban folks largely drawn from the rural and with some wild expectation and hope as exemplified in the persona. Although the children insist on living on the street, they are distinguished and the poet creates gestures and attitudes of urban folks who do not support their life on the street, as presented in the poem.

Therefore, the two poems "My First Visit to Kampala" and "Larok from Napak" challenge the argument that the city is a place of intermingling due to the porosity of the boundaries and mobility[1], (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Ogude, 2012; Quayson, 2014). There is an elusive social boundary that does not allow every individual to freely interact because they are unable to negotiate life in the new context. The persona's inability to freely interact beyond the slummy ghetto space is indicative of social disconnect which is engendered by his rural background and economic status. When the persona of "My First Visit to Kampala" utters "One night my uncle came to my room and tried to rape me/After two weeks I said goodbye to Kampala, back to my village Kabale" the mental scene created is poignant. It is a scenario that is a threat and a sign that the persona is unwelcome as long as she maintains the moral code and ability to discern and distinguish kin from potential sexual partner. Similarly, the displayed contempt in the poem "Larok from Napak", as the persona approaches the vehicle, expresses the existence of deep social boundaries. These personas from the two poems have experienced the city differently. However, their common rural background affects their interactions within the urban space. Besides, the personas' fantasy of the city, the idea of becoming rich, could be

1 MOBILE URBANITY: Somali Presence in Urban East Africa Edited by Neil Carrier and Tabea Scharrer. http://berghahnbooks.com/title/CarrierMobile

seen as the poets' call and dream for an equitable distribution of resources amidst the high rate of urbanisation in Uganda. Although it has been argued that high rates of urbanisation in old cities such as Kampala are exaggerated and that the smaller towns are rapidly growing (Potts, 2009), Kampala as the largest urban centre in Uganda has continuously grown and changed in all spheres.

Cultural and Economic Interactions

Let us now interrogate relationships and activities that people engage in to foster rural-urban interaction. Lynch (2005) argues that the role of small towns in rural-urban interaction is much neglected yet they are important. Aloysius Kawooya's "Fare Thee Well Kampala", published in *Wondering and Wandering of Hearts* (Susan Kiguli, 2017, p. 85) draws our attention to the city of Kampala and an emerging and potential city of Kasese, should the government of Uganda continue creating new cities[1]. The rural-urban convergence in "Fare Thee Well Kampala" arises from a customary perspective, that is, pursuit for marriage. The poem's persona is a young man who is addressing his love, Kampala, where the city of Kampala is personified as a woman. In his pursuit of a partner, the persona moves away from the woman Kampala, to another countryside woman, Kasese. Kasese is one of the upcoming cities in the western region of Uganda. This city is also personified as a young beautiful and an untapped woman. The diction 'Untapped' reiterates the notion of the rural purity. Conversely, the persona suggests that Kampala, unlike Kasese, is exhausted. He points out the things that propel him to go to Kasese that Kampala as a woman cannot give anymore. He addresses the latter thus:

...
You have become a polyandrous wife.
You were once fertile, but see what has happened to you my dear?
Did you have to spread your legs to every man that sought?
Why did you let them suck the life out of your once succulent breasts?
The birth control pills, numerous abortions, natural calamities have all rendered you barren.
But my darling, am still a young man, with desires
And fantasies.

Kampala as a woman has literally become barren. The persona uses highly sensual and erotic expressions such as "polyandrous wife, ...spread your legs to every man... suck the life out of your once succulent breast" and so on. These expressions arouse repulsiveness through the sexual images used and create the impression that Kampala is sullied and adulterous, in the traditional context of marriage. Thus, the justification of the persona's claim that Kampala is not productive anymore. Kampala has already wasted life through birth control pills and abortions. This constructed image of a prostitute-like-figure is a metaphor referring to Kampala and "...natural/ calamities,

1 Parliament of Uganda in 2019 approved 15 urban centres and declared cities in a phased manner beginning 1st July 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

have all rendered [her] you barren" [emphasis added] (lines 8-9). The barrenness is a result of birth pills and natural calamities. The images created of a barren woman figure, metaphorically suggest that Kampala suffocates life through her actions. Similarly, Kampala city shuns and destroys life and, therefore, the persona redirects his search towards Kasese.

The social and cultural practices such as searching for marriage partners draw the city close to the rural and the rural close to the urban. The interaction here dramatises the openness of both spaces. The new mistress, Kasese, is a small town in the countryside and has not been defined as a city but distant from the capital, close to the rural (Agergaard et al., 2021). This man (the persona), leaves the city for he has not come across a suitable marriage partner and he decides to go to the rural woman. The union between the city-based gentleman and the rural woman becomes a symbolic union between the urban and the rural. This union is the artistic angle through which the poet perceives the openness which allows the fluidity of interaction between the two spaces, rural and urban. The poet further highlights the admirable qualities of the new mistress Kasese through the persona's articulation:

> She knows no abominable ways and dresses like
> a princess.
> She was fed on palm oils from the Congo and
> bathes the freshness of the Rwenzori springs.
>
> with her I hope to bear children and raise a family.

The stanza, overall, gives some qualities that are necessary for starting a family, from a rural perspective, I suppose. The images of "royalty, palm oil, fresh Rwenzori springs" support life and are aesthetically appealing, contrary to the images of birth pills and abortion associated with Kampala. The stanza also suggests that small cities that are emerging today present differently from the big ones with their attendant congestions, pollutions, and crises of the existing old cities (Watson, 2014, p. 225). This is so especially in regard to the cities that emerged from other establishments like trade and colonialism (Freund 2007, Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1991). The poet thus uses imagery of fresh spring water that flows ceaselessly, to present his vision of a dream city of bliss. The question still lingers: will the dream city be purely urban, or will it bear some rural characteristics? The way in which the poet presents a fascinating and an admirable quality of the rural woman suggests rural remains part and parcel of urbanity, thus their dependency on each other (Trefon, 2009).

Furthermore, the question of home for urban folks is problematic in the context of fostering fluid interaction. The idea of home, as argued by (Ahmed, 1999), is about the affect, that is, where the heart is. In the following poems, the idea arises from the challenges that some urban folk experience, hence nostalgic about the rural. In the poem, "Take me back home", by Abago Mary Nyar' Obote published in *Uganda Poetry Anthology 2000* (Okot & Bangirana, 2000, p. 1), the persona decisively expresses the need for going home. He deliberately obscures his stance and he concentrates only on understanding home. The images emanating from 'home' reveal some natural and rural setting. He suggests that he is in a place that isolates him. Like in Timothy Wangusa's

poem, "He Longs to Return to Butiru[1]," the persona in the poem "Take me back home", among the reasons for his going back home is to "...find [his] my love/... find his people" (lines 4-5). Given the portrayal of the urban in the poem like "Larok from Napak" where the urban is portrayed as unfriendly, the persona in the poem "Take me back home" could be disenchanted by the urban environment.

Throughout the poem, except in the last stanza, the poet makes the persona use repetition and parallelism. The line "I want to go back home" is repeated twice in each stanza as if it is a refrain of some song and it is followed by the reason for the decision which comes through parallel structures as follow:

I want to go back home
For here my heart is forlorn
I want to go back home
Where I can find my love
Where I can find my people
Where I can lie together with the cows
With chicken clucking by my bedside
And goat urine sweet to my lungs.

I want to go back home
For here meaning is lost
I want to go back home
Where my muscles stretch on the millstone
Singing praise to the bravest of men
Turning grain to powder
Sweet sweat dropping
Where I can balance the pot on my head
My little one leaning from my back.

I want to go back home
Here all roots are rotting
I want to go back home
Where deep in the woods
I will go hunting
Running after the birds
Home where I will wade in the waters
Bathe in the sands
Dance at the moon
And pray to the sky.

There where my heart is
There where my home is
There where my grave shall be.

The poet, through the persona, creates parallel structures to emphasise and

1 The poem "He Longs to Return to Butiru", is published in the author's own collection of A Pattern of Dust: Selected Poems 1965-1990. Fountain Publishers, 1994. 41. The poem reminiscences childhood life in Butiru and celebrates the culture of the people, particularly the circumcision rites and the pride that comes with it. It projects a vibrant rural life.

rationalise the decision and the agency for the speaker's returning home. The persona gives three reasons: "For here my heart is forlorn" (line 2), "For here meaning is lost" (line 10) and "Here all roots are rotting" (line 19). The images evoke feelings of loneliness, loss, and repulsive smell from rot. These lines emphasise the emptiness of urbanity's social and cultural life. This is why the persona enumerates in every stanza the rationale for going back home. First, he needs to go home, potentially, to find love, people, and to lie together with cows, chicken clucking and goats. Secondly, since "... meaning is lost", the persona needs to go home to ...stretch over the millstone, ... sing praise to the bravest of men, and ...balance pot on the head (stanza 2). The persona's heart is in 'home' (Ahmed, 1999). Lastly, "the roots are rotting", depicts literally, the image of rot. Metaphorically, the image of rot suggests that urbanities shun life as depicted in the poem "Fare Thee Well Kampala", earlier discussed. Thus, the persona can go to the natural woods: hunting, running after birds, swimming, sun-bathing, dancing and praying to the moon. This new disposition becomes a point of difference and depicts the rural as possessing peculiar and more attractive attributes.

The concluding stanza ends by the use of parallelism to affirm the persona's indebtedness to the rural by repeating the pattern of grammatical structure, "There where my heart is/There where my home is" and "There where my grave shall be" (lines 28-30). These lines, cumulatively, depict the urban as contingent upon the rural as Trefon (2009) would say. Whereas some people could be buried in the urban space, the practice of taking deceased kindred to the village for burial[1] is a common practice among the urban dwellers and thus aligns with Freund's insight that people come to cities to fulfil some obligations and later retire in the rural home that bears some property of permanence (Freund, 2007). This gesture, reiterate my earlier argument about the temporal nature of urbanity for some folks.

Finally, the poem "I want to go Back home" defines the rural by the activities and values associated thereto. The practice of grinding millet and hunting is a lively routine, for instance. In terms of recreation, the persona sees the village as a space where she can sing praises to the bravest of men, balance a pot on her head, run after birds, wade in waters and sand-bathe. The idea of recreation emerges as another angle of convergence between the rural and the urban, in which the concept of modern beauty in present-day times resonates with experiences in the rural. For example, young rural women compete in balancing water-pots on their heads as they move from wells to their homes. Likewise, during beauty contests that usually take place in urban centres, young women models mimic carrying water pots as they pause for pictures. Also, games like boxing and wrestling are replications of what take place in open arena in rural settings such as hunting ground where young men wrestle[2], for example. Today, holiday makers go to the beach to sand-bathe, swim, go after birds, animals and so on. Therefore, in terms of ideas traversing the spaces, Amin and Thrift's (2002) argument about transitivity is well placed and the poem suggests no boundaries as ideas move between the rural the urban which Gebre and Gebremedhin (2019) also discuss. As these ideas of recreation travel from the rural to the urban, for example, they get significantly modified to suit the new

1 See, "My First Visit to Kampala" by Johnson Grace Maganja published in Boda Boda Anthem, 2015 (stanza 1)
2 See Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" (1958:1), where his protagonist Okonkwo becomes the hero of the village of Umuofia after throwing Amalinze the Cat in a wrestling match.

context. I read these movements of ideas of recreation as furnished by, ironically, what can be viewed as the basic rural craft that travels into urban space. The way these ideas interact and adapt to the new context is indicative of openness of both spaces. Thus, the openness allows both spaces to create and refashion ideas to suit their distinctive contexts.

Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed the idea of rural-urban interactions in selected poems drawn from selected poetry anthologies: *Boda Boda Anthem*, *Uganda Poetry Anthology 2000* and *Wondering and Wandering of Hearts* to interrogate the nature of interactions between the rural and the urban. I have based the reading of the poems on the arguments of Amin and Thrift (2002), Quayson (2014), and Ogude (2012) who contend that the urban is a place of intermingling. While I agree that there is fluid interaction between the two spaces, the Ugandan poets whose works I have explored approach this subject of rural-urban interactivity in ways that challenge and partially approve the notion of openness of the urban. First, the depiction of the theme of resilience demonstrates that the urban is open and linked to its past and elsewhere (Nuttall & Mbembe, 2008). The poets, through their respective personae, demonstrate that the rural has been a part of the process of urbanity right from the inception of the latter. For example, the visible rural images of the royal artifacts memorialise the city and frame it as a gateway to its past – its rural kin. Nevertheless, poets depict images like the car which resonates with urbanity as dominant over rural-like image of the rooster even though they mingle in the same space. I argue that the openness of urban to its rural past presents vagueness for the future of the rural in the urban considering the pressure from urbanisation.

Besides, poets perceive the interaction between the two spaces as largely spatial. Whereas individuals can easily access the city – the centre of the urban – there are subtle social disconnections involved in the process. This subtle disconnection can be observed in the ways poets variously construct a tightly restrictive urban atmosphere which challenges the openness postulated by Amin and Thrift. For example, the experiences and perceptions of personas in the poems "My First Visit to Kampala" and "Larok from Napak" demonstrate a link and disconnection. A linkage is seen in traces of recognition of the rural connection that still exists within the urbanite folks. An example is how the persona in "My First Visit to Kampala" interacted with his kin. The disconnection emerges through the attitude of the urban folks towards the persona who hails from the rural, as represented in the poem "Larok from Napak". The sneers and the jeers with which the persona is received on the street in Kampala depict misplacement and alienation from the space he now occupies. This ironic position is indicative of the subtle and restrictive nature of the city as an urban setting. The openness becomes paradoxical as it allows entry with limited interaction.

Nevertheless, the poets construct the two spaces as asymmetrical, distinct but interdependent, largely in terms of economic and cultural points of view (Trefon, 2009). Transport networks are thus crucial in enhancing the rural-urban interaction through back-and-forth movements of people and ideas (Bakewell & Jónsson, 2011). Conceptually, ideas traverse the two spaces and depict each of them as porous by how

recreation has shifted to an entirely new thing. Given this construction, the article concludes that both the rural and the urban are repositories for knowledge, given the peculiar images from both these spaces. The openness allows ideas to travel across spaces and get continuously modified to suit the new context. On the other hand, since ideas and people mingle in a great velocity, the urban becomes a place of knowing through its great density (Amin & Thrift, 2002 p. 59).

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