

**Anglophone women's writing and public culture in Kenya and
Uganda, 1959-1976**

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Abstract

The post-independence period was a vibrant time in Kenya and Uganda. Independence and the birth of the nation inspired a myriad of different cultural responses, including new writing and forms of literary production. The processes of decolonisation were not only shaping the political realm, but the cultural as well: events such as the African Writers Conference held at Makerere College in June 1962; the abolition of the English Department at University College, Nairobi in 1968; or the creation of the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs in 1963, all heralded a shift towards Africanisation and the abandonment of colonial cultural legacies.

The role of male cultural figures in these Africanisation processes has been well-documented; however, that of women remains under-researched. This thesis examines the ways in which Ugandan and Kenyan women writers and cultural figures viewed this period and expressed this in their writing. In interrogating student writing, prose, poetry, drama, children's literature, journalism, and non-fiction writing, the interpretations by East African women writers of decolonisation and independence in their textual production will be highlighted. They protested oppression, neo-colonialism, inequality, patriarchy, and state authoritarianism, representing marginalised communities in their texts.

The contribution of this thesis to historiography is two-fold: firstly, it will highlight voices hitherto largely considered obscure. Secondly, it will underscore the ways in which women widened the terms of the debates on decolonisation and Africanisation, making them inclusive to more participants, and entrenched at all levels in society. In a time when access to the public sphere in Kenya and Uganda was barred for many women, and authoritarianism in both countries repressed free speech and civil society activity, the texts were a public platform through which women could express themselves and make their voices heard.

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Declaration

I, Anna Adima, declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

Introduction

In the summer of 1962, the Makerere College campus in Kampala, Uganda, was pulsating with activity, as in the month of June it played host to what was to be the one of the most important African literary conferences: the African Writers Conference. Writers, artists, and journalists from across Africa and the world flocked to the Makerere hill, to participate in “the first get-together of African authors writing in English anywhere in the world.”¹ As South African writer Lewis Nkosi described it, the writers in attendance “were mostly young, impatient, sardonic” and seemingly “amazed that fate had entrusted them with the task of interpreting a continent to the world.”² Although “there were no resolutions at this conference”, it initiated debates that helped determine the direction that African literature would take the following decades.³ Held four months before Uganda’s flag independence in October 1962, the conference atmosphere and its discussions were infused with the hope and optimism that characterised East Africa in the early 1960s. The attendees, a veritable “pan-Africanist gathering”, included some of the most famous names in African literature, including Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Es’kia Mphahlele and Bloke Modisane.⁴ The East African contingent were comprised of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o – then James Ngugi – Jonathan Kariara, Okot p’Bitek, John Nagenda, and Rajat Neogy. Only two women were part of the delegation from East Africa: Grace Ogot and Rebecca Njau.

The conference was part of a larger cultural and political movement of decolonisation and Africanisation that characterised East Africa’s 1960s and 1970s. Independence and the accompanying hopes for a better future, free from the shackles of colonialism, ignited debates in the political and cultural sphere in the region on what this *uhuru* – freedom – should look like. Within the high political realm, this manifested in the creation of the East African Community in 1967, with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania, or movements towards socialism, such as *Ujamaa* in Tanzania, Kenya’s form of African Socialism, and Uganda’s strategy of *Move to the Left*. More sinisterly, political aspirations of Africanisation took the form of xenophobia and anti-Asian sentiment, marked most famously through the expulsion of

¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer’s Awakening* (New York: The New Press, 2016), p. 127.

² University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Centre: International Association for Cultural Freedom, Records, Box 436, Folder 9, Lewis Nkosi, press report for *The Guardian*, 8 August 1962.

³ *Ibid.*, Ezekiel Mphahlele, press report for *Africa Report*, July 1962.

⁴ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer’s Awakening*, p. 126-7.

Uganda's Asian community in 1972; however, Kenya and Tanzania both incorporated this form of Africanisation into policymaking.

At a cultural level – which the African Writers Conference was a part of – decolonisation movements similarly took a regional approach, through the creation of institutions such as the University of East Africa in June 1963, the East African Institute for Social and Cultural Affairs in December 1963, and its subsidiary, the East African Publishing House in February 1965. These institutions provided resources, spaces, and platforms for debates on decolonisation, Africanisation and the meaning of independence to take place. A well-known example of this is the revolution to abolish the English department at University College, Nairobi of the University of East Africa, spearheaded by Kenyan authors Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Henry Owuor-Anyumba, as well as Ugandan author Taban Lo Liyong in 1968. In a rejection of “the primacy of English literature and culture”, they argued for the need to place “African literature ... at the centre so that [they] can view other cultures in relationship to it”, calling for the abolition of the English Department, and the creation of a Department of African Literature and Languages in its place.⁵ The East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs was designed “to provide a meeting place, a forum, for East Africans with different backgrounds and political leanings to crystallise their ideas on the different facets of life.”⁶ It did this through, for instance, the publication of *East Africa Journal*, a monthly journal discussing social, cultural and political regional affairs, forming a means to create, according to Tom Mboya “an African Voice on African Problems.”⁷ The Institute's subsidiary, the East African Publishing House facilitated debates on Africanisation and decolonisation through its publication of books in Swahili, or its Modern African Library series, which consisted of novels by East African authors. Other cultural organisations across the region that celebrated this unique moment included the Chechemi African Creative Centre and Paa ya Paa Gallery, both located in Nairobi, Kenya, or the Nommo Art Gallery in Kampala, Uganda. The vibrancy of the discourse on decolonisation was also successfully captured with the magazine *Transition*, of which Asian Ugandan journalist Rajat Neogy was editor. A radical and daring publication, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes “its literary ambition, content, production, and presentation ... unlike anything seen in Kampala before, its very title suggesting liminal space between the old and the new. It was one of the signs of the New Uganda.”⁸

⁵ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 146.

⁶ Bethwell A. Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time* (Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd, 2003), p. 193.

⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁸ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer's Awakening*, p. 124.

This vibrant decolonisation movement took place to a backdrop of political turbulence in 1960s and 1970s East Africa – greater detail of which is provided below – in spite of which – indeed, often because of – high cultural life in both Kenya and Uganda thrived, as artists and writers found inspiration in the hopes of independence. Kampala especially served as the cultural hub in East Africa during the 1960s, as a cosmopolitan and multi-cultural city that attracted cultural figures from all over Africa and the world.⁹ This was partly due to the presence of Makerere College, one of the best higher education institutions in Africa at the time. Makerere’s English Department especially cultivated a generation of East African writers who were to become the most celebrated names in African literature. Kampala’s liberal reputation allowed for mixing between races among the city’s elite, in ways that could not be observed in Nairobi, an apartheid city still reeling from the aftermath of the Mau Mau Emergency. Kampala residents could enjoy concerts, plays, art galleries, and writers and artists sourced inspiration from each other at events such as the literary salons of Rajat Neogy. Of the latter, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o later recalled that they “attracted writers, artists and singers of all races, heralds of a new, confident Uganda.”¹⁰ It is little wonder, therefore, that the African Writers Conference was chosen to be held at Makerere in June 1962. Throughout the mid-1960s, Nairobi also began to develop as a cultural hub, as centres such as Paa ya Paa Gallery and Chemchemi were established, and towards the close of the decade, the centre for high cultural life began to shift from Kampala to Nairobi, due to the oppressive regimes of Obote and Amin that stifled intellectual and creative activity.

The role of prominent male cultural figures, writers, artists and academics in this dynamic cultural moment has been well-documented in history. Historiographical literature has emphasised these men’s involvement in cultural decolonisation through penning literature and creating art that praised independence and nation-building projects.¹¹ However, what remains under-researched for this period is the role of women cultural figures, who are largely neglected, indicative of gatekeeping and patriarchal structures that perpetuate their marginalisation in both the creation of sources and the creation of history. This thesis examines the ways in which decolonisation and independence were viewed by Kenyan and Ugandan women writers, and

⁹ See: Anna Adima, ‘Literature, Music and Fashion: Cosmopolitan Kampala in the 1960s’, Scottish Centre for Global History, *Global History Blog* (blog), 21 October 2020, <https://globalhistory.org.uk/2020/10/literature-music-and-fashion-cosmopolitan-kampala-in-the-1960s/> (accessed 17 February 2022).

¹⁰ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer’s Awakening*, p. 124.

¹¹ See, for example: James Currey, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008); Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time*; Carol Sicherman, ‘The Leeds-Makerere Connection and Ngugi’s Intellectual Development’, *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 23, no. 1 (1995): 3–20; Phaswane Mpe, ‘The Role of the Heinemann African Writers Series in the Development and Promotion of African Literature’, *African Studies* 58, no. 1 (1999): 105–22.

how this was reflected in the texts they produced between 1959 and 1976. In this way, it makes a novel contribution to scholarship of East African cultural history, through the prioritisation of a demographic largely sidelined in historiographies. The dearth of women at the African Writers Conference belies a completely different reality, one that saw many East African women writing and producing literature throughout the 1960s and 1970s. These women were part of an avant-garde cultural life, one that expanded the public sphere and debates on decolonisation and Africanisation to reach wider audiences; however, due to gendered structural barriers and constraints, their works remain lesser known in comparison to their male peers. Taking an expansive view on writing, the texts interrogated here will include novels, short stories, plays, poetry – written for both children and for adults – as well as essays, speeches, and articles. As will be demonstrated, access to institutionalised spaces such as that of the African Writers Conference was barred for many women, as few could afford to dedicate careers to writing; therefore, the women examined here – in addition to their being writers – were also students, journalists, teachers, politicians, diplomats, or civil society activists. This thesis will examine the ways in which women circumnavigated certain challenges, and produced texts and literature in spite of the social barriers they faced. It will also demonstrate the broad public sphere women created that contained their views for independence, as they critiqued neo-colonial and state oppression, as well as gender and class inequalities.

For all the cultural dynamism that characterised the 1960s and 1970s in East Africa, oppressive regimes and authoritarian politics immensely impacted the lives of people, especially those of the non-elite. With their texts, the women writers discussed in this thesis addressed these issues, acting as proxies for other marginalised individuals and communities, as they protested oppression, the patriarchy, and socio-economic inequalities in this period. Many expressed their disillusionment with the post-colonial state and their disappointment with independence, using their texts to critique post-colonial governance and to hold the powerful to account. At the same time, the texts were the receptacles for their continued hopes for a better future, allowing women to express their ideas for freedom and independence. This was done in a variety of ways, using different textual forms and techniques, and diverse messaging.

High political life and governance in East Africa placed their focuses externally to maintain a top-down gatekeeping control of the state, a practice giving them the nominal term ‘gatekeeping states’.¹² Following this concept, a large portion of scholarship on post-colonial East Africa

¹² See: Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

emphasises political economy and governance, focussing on the region's external relations with global structures. While these approaches are invaluable to East African historiography, what remains under-written is the idea of the 'interiority' of these states in the era of decolonisation, and the ways in which the novelty of this moment birthed debates and ideas for alternative futures. This thesis will therefore make a novel contribution to historiography through examining this dynamic interior, and interrogate it as the cultural interiority of the state, defining it as an energetic public sphere with platforms for debates on decolonisation and independence. This was the arena in which the women protested oppression with their writing, and debated the structures of the gatekeeper state. They constructed a public sphere with their texts, one that contained new debates on the meanings of independence and Africanisation, and reached broad audiences across the region. This public sphere was highly dynamic, containing a multitude of voices and ideas – sometimes contradicting each other – and remains a contrast to previous imaginings of a narrow public sphere due to exclusions of women. Although from elite backgrounds – though, of course, comparatively marginalised due to their gender – the writers used their works to address broader social issues, such as inequality, poverty, and politics. In this thesis, the ways in which Kenyan and Ugandan women curated a public sphere and introduced a discourse on decolonisation to broader audiences with their texts within this cultural interior will be examined. An interrogation of the post-independence period as it was experienced by women in Uganda and Kenya has hitherto not been conducted, and the construction of this vibrant public sphere by women has remained unacknowledged in post-colonial East African historiography. The inclusion of previously marginalised voices demonstrates not only the multivocality of dissent and protest after independence by women, and the numerous ways they exerted their agency, but also the vibrant nature of the cultural interiority of the post-colonial state.

Uganda and Kenya at Independence

In order to understand the context in which the women were writing, a brief background to Kenya and Uganda's high political history and party politics is provided here. While the writers were not necessarily addressing these issues with their works, the politics of these gatekeeper states created the structures and conditions of oppression and inequality that the women were responding to.

Uganda at independence, 1959-1972

The pre-independence years during the 1950s in Uganda saw a turbulence of events, the effects of which continued to be felt during the first years of independence. The first African political

parties in Uganda were formed throughout the 1950s, and during the struggle for independence, the Ugandan Parliament was characterised by political manoeuvring on the part of these. Debates were largely centred around the position of the Buganda kingdom, for which the country Uganda was named, and which had benefitted immensely during British colonialism through its access to social, economic, and political capital. The first political party was the Uganda National Conference (UNC), created in 1952, as a socialist-leaning, anticolonial party and nationalist movement. A few years later, the Progressive Party (PP) was founded in 1955, a party that primarily consisted of intellectuals but received little mass support. In 1955-56, the Democratic Party (DP) was formed by Catholic Baganda – people from Uganda’s Buganda region – who felt sidelined by Anglican Baganda elites. However, the DP was never a sectarian party, stretching its remit beyond Buganda and seeking to create a country-wide nationalist movement. In 1958, the Uganda People’s Union (UPU) was formed, its membership made up of African members of Uganda’s Legislative Council (LEGCO). Two years later, in 1960 the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) was created. Led by Milton Obote – of the Lango ethnic group in northern Uganda – it merged with UPU, and much of its popularity was built on its anti-Buganda stance. In 1961, Baganda politicians founded Kabaka Yekka (KY; ‘The King Alone’), an ethno-nationalist party that desired the separation of Buganda from Uganda.

The primary inhabitants of the Buganda kingdom were the Baganda ethnic group, who consisted of some of the wealthiest and highest educated Africans in Uganda. Due to the kingdom’s unique position in Uganda, Buganda had a strong belief in its particularity, one that centred around its desire for sovereignty and for the kingdom to receive state recognition, separate to the rest of Uganda and East Africa. This caused for much resentment on the part of other ethnic groups in Uganda – which did not benefit during British colonialism in the same way – a resentment parties such as the UPC exploited for political gain. In 1959, the Constitutional Committee prepared a report – known as the Wild report – that made recommendations on concrete actions to be taken towards Ugandan independence, which were to include general elections. When the report was submitted in 1960, elections were scheduled for 1961, preceding internal self-government. On 9 October 1962, Uganda gained independence from Britain, with Milton Obote as Prime Minister, and – from October 1963 – *Kabaka* Mutesa, the Buganda king, as President. A coalition government was formed between the UPC and KY, the party supported by the neotraditionalist monarchist Mengo establishment, the seat of Buganda power.

The first years following independence were already marked with state-sponsored violence, directed especially at Catholics and DP supporters. At the same time, Obote sought to integrate the new republic into the international scene. He worked for Uganda to become a member state of the United Nations, built amicable relations with neighbouring Uganda and Tanzania – resulting in the later establishment of the East African Community in 1967 – and became involved with the Organisation of African Unity. However, within Uganda, tensions remained high, and in 1964, the Ugandan army mutinied in protest against poor salaries, sparking a wave of similar mutinies across East Africa. Although Obote diffused the situation quickly, this demonstrated the potential for a military coup, foreshadowing what would take place under Idi Amin. In the same year, Kampala saw further events marked by violence with the Nakulabye Massacres of 1964. In November, Ugandan police – with the excuse of quelling a non-existent riot – opened fire on unarmed civilians in the Kampala suburb of Nakulabye, killing six of them, an incident that demonstrated the weaponisation of state violence. The Nakulabye Massacres marked “the first time that civilians in Uganda perceived that the violence was politically motivated” and “that the authorities were seen openly to be a party to violence aimed at civilians.”¹³ At the same time, enduring political and ethnic grievances manifested themselves in the violence around the Lost Counties referendum. Also in November 1964, a referendum was to be held on whether the ‘lost counties’ of Buyaga and Bugangaizi should remain part of the Buganda kingdom, or revert back to the Bunyoro kingdom – which they had originally been a part of, but had seen a transfer to Buganda as part of the 1900 Buganda Agreement between Britain and Buganda. The referendum results were in favour of returning to Bunyoro, unleashing a wave of violence from Baganda around the kingdom, including from the *Kabaka* himself.¹⁴

Obote’s regime turned to one of increasing authoritarianism with willingness to use the police and the army in a weaponization of his authority, and nowhere was this clearer than during the Mengo Crisis of 1966. In February of that year, Obote announced the abrogation of the 1962 Constitution of Uganda, and in March, abolished the position of president and vice-president, thereby stripping *Kabaka* Mutesa of his state authority. In May, Obote sent troops – led by Idi Amin – to the *Kabaka*’s palace at Mengo, where a brutal attack was launched resulting in death and destruction. The *Kabaka* fled the palace, and later Uganda, living in exile in Britain for the

¹³ Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, p. 80.

¹⁴ See: Derek R. Peterson, ‘Violence and Political Advocacy in the Lost Counties, Western Uganda, 1930-64’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48, no. 1 (2015): 51–72.

rest of his life. In 1967, a new constitution was introduced in Uganda, which abolished all kingdoms in the country, and made Obote president.

Obote's presidency introduced his strategy of *Move to the Left*, assuming a façade of socialism in Uganda, and in 1969, *The Common Man's Charter* was launched, which directed the government's ideology. While "its main attack was directed at ... Buganda hegemony and neo-traditionalism", it also advocated for the nationalisation of private firms and the redistribution of income, warning "that the growing gap between the rich and the poor might lead to the creation of two nations within Uganda."¹⁵ In reality, however, Obote's government was characterised by authoritarianism, especially in the face of political opposition and dissent. Obote began to arrest opposition politicians, intellectuals – many Makerere academics fled Uganda in this period – and journalists, including Rajat Neogy in October 1968. Corruption and nepotism also dogged government bodies around Uganda, and one opposition politician criticised the fact "that civil servants who were related to ministers were misappropriating public funds with impunity while public officers deserving of promotion were bye-passed in favour of those most undeserving."¹⁶

Public opinion of Obote was very low, including among Obote's initial supporters. In January 1971, Idi Amin launched a coup that overthrew Obote – who fled into exile in Tanzania – and made himself the new president of Uganda. Amin's new regime was initially met with much optimism on the part of both Uganda and the international community; however, any hopes of an improvement to Obote were quickly dashed, as Amin's indiscriminate violence became clear. What initially began with eliminating opposition from within the army – Amin's seat of power – extended to politicians, intellectuals, journalists, and anyone else who supported Obote or criticised Amin publicly. In August 1972, Amin initiated an economic war, with the aim of Africanising Uganda's economy, and announced the expulsion of Uganda's Asian community, who owned sizeable portions of the country's economy. The Asian diaspora was given 90 days to leave Uganda, and the businesses and property they left behind were redistributed to African Ugandans in favour with Amin. What followed was nearly a decade of violence, oppression and suffering on the part of many Ugandans. Amin's regime almost wholly suspended rule of

¹⁵ Mutibwa, *A History of Uganda: The First 100 Years 1894-1995*, p. 218-19.

¹⁶ Parliament of Uganda, *The Hansard*, December 1965-February 1966, p. 331-4, quoted in: Samwiri Rubaraza Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 2010 ed. (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1989), p. 192.

law and government institutions, and the army became a tool of brutal suppression by the military dictatorship.¹⁷

Although comparatively fewer than their male counterparts, women too were active in the high political arena in Uganda in this period. The first African women to be elected on Uganda's Legislative Council (LEGCO) were Pumla Kisosonkole in 1956 and Sarah Ntiro in 1958, and later were joined by Florence Lubega, Joyce Mpanga and Frances Akello, who in different capacities in speeches to Parliament lobbied for the rights of the girl child and for girls' education. Within the civil society space, the Uganda Council for Women (UCW) was extremely active in the Ugandan post-independence women's movement. In addition to working with communities to develop literacy and education opportunities for women, the UCW also undertook normative work in lobbying for reforming Ugandan marriage laws, and for the protection of women in marriage. Membership of UCW during the 1960s consisted of some prominent African women activists and political figures, including Joyce Mpanga, Rhoda Kalema and Rebecca Mulira (whose texts will be examined in Chapters 4 and 5). In 1972, Idi Amin banned all women's organisations in Kampala – with the exception of religious women's organisations – including the UCW. Although he permitted the creation of the Uganda National Council of Women, this legislation put a halt to the growing women's movement in Uganda.¹⁸

Kenya at independence, 1963-1971

When Kenya gained independence from Britain on 12 December 1963, the government, led by President Jomo Kenyatta, inherited a deeply divided country, still scarred from the Mau Mau revolt and the resulting Emergency throughout the 1950s. But a sense of optimism abounded, as people hoped that wealth, land, and capital – previously only in the hands of white settlers and colonialists – would be redistributed among Africans, so that they too might reap the fruits of independence. At independence, two political parties dominated the scene: the Kenya Africa

¹⁷ For further discussions on post-colonial Ugandan politics see: Mutibwa, *A History of Uganda: The First 100 Years 1894-1995*; Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*; Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*; Richard J. Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Jonathan L. Earle, *Colonial Buganda and the End of Empire: Political Thought and Historical Imagination in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Jonathan L. Earle and J.J. Carney, *Contesting Catholics: Benedicto Kiwanuka and the Birth of Postcolonial Uganda* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2021); Mahmood Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983); Mahmood Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976).

¹⁸ See: Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Aili Mari Tripp, 'Women's Mobilisation in Uganda: Nonracial Ideologies in European-African-Asian Encounters, 1945-1962', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34, no. 3 (2001): 543-64; Aili Mari Tripp and Joy C. Kwesiga, eds., *The Women's Movement in Uganda: History, Challenges, and Prospects* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2002); Rhoda Nakibuka Nsibirwa Kalema, *My Life Is But a Weaving* (Nairobi: Moran Publishers, 2021); Joyce R. Mpanga, *It's a Pity She's Not a Boy!* (Kampala: First Printing, 2019).

National Union (KANU) – led initially by Jomo Kenyatta, Tom Mboya and Oginga Odinga – and the Kenya Africa Democratic Union (KADU) – led by Daniel arap Moi, Martin Shikuku and Ronald Ngala.

Shortly before independence, in 1962, the British colonial government established the ‘Million-Acre’ Scheme, in which land was redistributed from the hands of white settlers to Africans living there. This initiative further entrenched ethnic rivalries, as the African population that benefitted from this the most was the Gikuyu ethnic group. One of the first challenges an independent Kenya faced was the 1963-68 Shifta War, in which Kenya reacted against the perceived threat from Somalia in its north-eastern province. A war ostensibly waged over land, it took an international dimension when Kenyatta turned to Britain for military assistance, a controversial decision, as few KANU supporters wished to maintain ties with their former colonial overlords after flag independence.¹⁹ In 1964, shortly after the Ugandan army mutiny, the Kenyan army also staged a strike, expressing their unhappiness with conditions and pay. Worried about a military coup, Kenyatta worked to improve the conditions, as well as increased military salaries.

Closer to the formal seats of power in Nairobi, one year after independence, discontentment was brewing among Kenyan people. Independence did not bring the ‘fruits’ that were long hoped for, and it appeared the only Africans who benefitted were those from Kenya’s elite social classes, frequently Kenyatta’s Gikuyu supporters. Power, it seemed, had only shifted from one set of elite hands to another. In January 1964, protests were held in Nairobi against the persistent inequality, with demonstrators calling for equal distributions of wealth in Kenya. In reaction, the government placed a ban on public meetings in major urban areas across the country. At the same time, anger was festering among workers across Kenya, and in 1964 and 1965, regular strikes took place, a worrying issue to the government, as the trade union movement had been a powerful force in the independence movement throughout the 1950s.²⁰ In reaction, in 1965 the government established the Confederation of Trade Unions, which not only “increased state control of union activity”, but also “prevented the labour movement from becoming a vehicle for the radical political faction.”²¹

¹⁹ See: Daniel Branch, ‘Violence, Decolonisation and the Cold War in Kenya’s North-Eastern Province, 1963–1978’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, no. 4 (2 October 2014): 642–57.

²⁰ See: Gerard McCann, ‘Possibility and Peril: Trade Unionism, African Cold War, and the Global Strands of Kenyan Decolonisation’, *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 2 (2019): 348–77.

²¹ Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 71.

Under Jomo Kenyatta's leadership, high politics – and, consequently, the entire country – became deeply divided along ethnic lines. KANU was initially a Gikuyu-Luo led party, two larger ethnic groups, and KADU, worried about this hegemony and domination, consisted of members from the Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana and Samburu ethnic groups. Religious fault lines did not play as large a role in party politics as they did in Uganda in this period, and at independence, Kenya adopted state secularism. However, even within KANU, the political outlooks of the individual leaders differed: Kenyatta, a Gikuyu, continued to let Kenya's former colonial masters exert their influence; Mboya, a Luo, was attracted to the United States of America's ideas of freedom and liberty; while Odinga, also Luo, turned to the Soviet Union, China and other communist states. One of the KANU government's first acts of state violence was against the politician, anti-colonial freedom fighter and KANU supporter Pio Gamma Pinto. Pinto had been successful in leveraging foreign – often communist – support for Odinga's branch of KANU, thereby presenting a threat to the rest of the party. On 27 February 1965, Pinto was assassinated outside his home in Nairobi.

The fractions within KANU became more obvious, as it began to polarise between the conservative Kenyatta and Mboya, and the more radical Odinga. Odinga called for redistribution and equity among Kenyans, while Kenyatta privileged private property and private foreign investment. The tide began to turn against Odinga, and when in 1964, a merger between KADU and KANU took place, Odinga resigned from KANU and his governmental position and established a new party, the Kenya People's Union (KPU), the activities of which the government tried to limit. Kenyatta's government became increasingly neo-patrimonial in style, with power based around him as a 'big man'. Gradually, a rift began to make its way between Kenyatta and Mboya, as the latter began to oppose Kenyatta's personalisation of politics, and wished to continue the nationalist project independence had sought to implement. Kenyatta felt threatened by Mboya's political talent, and on 5 July 1969, Mboya was assassinated in Nairobi. Mboya's death unleashed a wave of hostility and violence between Gikuyu and Luo people. In October 1969, Kenyatta travelled to Kisumu in western Kenya, a predominantly Luo stronghold, where Odinga received much support. In a speech to the crowds, he insulted both Odinga – who was present – and Luo people, which provoked hecklers and incited violence between supporters of KANU and KPU. After the incident, Odinga was placed in detention, KPU was banned, and in the national elections the following year, only KANU candidates could run for government positions.

This marked the entrenchment of Kenyatta's personalised authoritarianism, and from then on, Gikuyu leadership in Kenya became absolute. Land resettlement after independence remained unequal, primarily benefitting Gikuyu large-scale industrial farmers, and cemented social inequality. Similar issues could be observed in government, as Kenyatta "set out to establish a Gikuyu ascendancy that dominated the main institutions in the country."²² By 1971, the cabinet, key ministerial posts and the civil service were occupied by members of the Gikuyu ethnic group, and its 'cousins', the Embu and Meru ethnic groups. The government became characterised by nepotism and corruption, which "provided the cement that bonded the post-colonial political elites", while "Kenyatta's inner circle was tied together by marriage, private enterprise and political power."²³ In 1971, Odinga was released from detention, but was prohibited from political participation.²⁴

Kenya also saw some women become involved with politics and its growing women's movement after independence, albeit in fewer numbers than their male counterparts. The first African women to be elected to Kenya's LEGCO before independence were Jemima Gecaga in 1958 and Priscilla Abwao in 1961. Prominent women politicians in post-colonial Kenya included Grace Onyango, elected as the first woman mayor of Kisumu in 1965, and voted in as the first woman in the National Assembly in 1969, as well as Margaret Kenyatta, the first woman mayor of Nairobi, in office between 1970 and 1976. The civil society organisation *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* was involved in fighting for gender equality in both the public and private spheres, and addressed topics including female genital cutting, maternal health, and greater female political representation. Distinguished figures, all largely from Kenya's Gikuyu and Luo elite, in the Kenyan women's movement – in addition to those already mentioned – included Grace Ogot (whose texts are discussed in Chapters 2 and 5), Muthoni Likimani (whose text is discussed in Chapter 2), and Hannah Rubia.²⁵

²² Ibid., p. 99.

²³ Ibid., p. 104.

²⁴ For further discussions on post-colonial Kenyan politics, see: Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011*; Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013); Daniel Branch, Nicholas Cheeseman, and Leigh Gardner, *Our Turn to Eat: Politics in Kenya since 1950* (Berlin: LIT, 2010); Hassan Ndzovu, 'Religion in the Political Culture of Kenya', *Alternation Special Edition 2* (2005), 267-287.

²⁵ See: Audrey Wipper, 'Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 9, no. 3 (1971): 429-42; Audrey Wipper, 'The Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation: The Co-Optation of Leadership', *African Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (1975): 99-120; Mi Yung Yoon and Christol Okeke, 'Kenya: Women's Suffrage and Political Participation as Voters', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Women's Political Rights*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan, Gender and Politics (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 243-56.

The turbulent political life of both Kenya and Uganda in the first decade after independence brought about the various structures of oppression that women protested in their writing. While in the formal political sphere women lobbied for greater equality, the diversity of ways this was done in the civil society space through literature, journalism, and other forms of writing, within the cultural interiority of the state will be discussed in this thesis.

Theoretical framework, literature review and historiographical intervention

Theoretical framework: the cultural interiority of the state

This thesis aims to make interventions within the field of East African cultural history, drawing on aspects of post-colonial political and literary histories to advance the notion of the state's cultural interior by centring women as historical actors. For the purpose of this thesis, the cultural interiority of the state can broadly be defined as a crucible containing a public sphere that acted as the discursive location for debates on decolonisation and the meaning of independence, such as those of the women investigated here. The post-colonial state and the politics of decolonisation in East Africa have been the subjects of numerous historiographical works. Frederick Cooper discusses the nature of state building in Africa, and the notion of post-colonial states – as inherited from their colonial predecessors – as a “gatekeeper state”, which “stood astride the intersection of the ... territory and the outside world”, with “weak instruments for entering into the social and cultural realm over which [it] presided.”²⁶ Within this framework, “Africans tried to build networks that got around the state's control over access to the outside world”, as well as forming “economic and social networks inside the territory which were beyond the state's reach.”²⁷ The conditions that were brought about by these gatekeeper states produced an ‘interiority’ of critique within the state, which women, who were most disadvantaged by oppressive conditions, were vocal about in their cultural lives. It is this “cultural realm” that will be the topic of this thesis: while the gatekeeper state prioritised governance and the structures of political life facing externally, the cultural interiority of the state retained an inward focus, centring the local and the national, or, occasionally, the regional. Within the cultural interior, the public sphere was a space for actors to debate the structures of the gatekeeper state, often in opposition to the various forms of oppression it brought about.

Culture had been a contentious topic in colonial and post-colonial East Africa, forming the subject of discourse amongst different historical actors. In the colonial era, European colonial

²⁶ Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present*, p. 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

officials and missionaries worked to eradicate aspects of East African culture, in the form of language, cultural practices, or clothing. Proclaiming the superiority of European culture and traditions, and those of East Africa as ‘backward’ or ‘savage’, they introduced what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o describes as a “cultural bomb”, leading to the disassociation of generations of East Africans with their heritage.²⁸ In the years preceding independence, nationalist leaders were forced to employ a two-pronged discursive approach, which Megan Vaughan discusses: while they framed their readiness for independence as a “commitment to a progressive notion of modernisation”, they also claimed “they represented a people with a distinctive ‘traditional’ culture”.²⁹ The latter notion especially was employed to invoke the idea of a golden pre-colonial age, becoming heavily gendered in its metaphor, with women becoming “the repositories of an ‘authentic’ pre-colonial and pre-modern morality and ‘tradition’”³⁰ (discussed in further detail below).

Initially, the work of cultural producers and artists – especially novelists – coincided with that of nationalist politicians, as they supported the idea of independent African nations. However, this changed after independence, as power was merely transferred between hands, and the new political elite weaponised state instruments for mass oppression. Cultural and intellectual figures became quickly disillusioned with the state, as it became clear that political invocations of ‘traditional’ African culture was merely performative. This was reflected in their art, as argued by Kwame Anthony Appiah: “far from being a celebration of the nation, the novels of the second state – postcolonial stage – are novels of delegitimation: rejecting the western imperium ... but also rejecting the nationalist project of the postcolonial bourgeoisie.”³¹ Such reactionary art formed part of the cultural interior the post-colonial era, a discursive space with social networks increasingly detached from the gatekeeper state. This thesis discusses women’s involvement with this cultural interior, highlighting the multitude of ways they critiqued the oppressive structures brought about by the gatekeeper state.

The public sphere contained within the cultural interiority of the state is one that requires further discussion. In their discussion of the colonial public spheres created through print media, Emma Hunter and Leslie James proffer four factors with which to analyse how print functioned in

²⁸ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), p. 3, 9.

²⁹ Megan Vaughan, ‘Culture’, in *A Concise Companion to History*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 227-245, at p. 233.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In my Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 151.

different spaces around the world.³² Three of these factors are relevant to this thesis: materiality, addressivity and performativity. According to Hunter and James, materiality and “material circulation [was] central to the conception of publics”, encompassing the production of print media, its formatting and layout, as well as “the physical spaces in which it was received.”³³ The notion of addressivity includes both “the manifold forms of address” by print media, as well as “the various audiences that can be convened through a single named addressee.”³⁴ Finally, performativity denotes the ways in which print was performed or read out loud in different spaces, in addition to performances by print media producers, to “ordain the role and purpose of print, producer and audience.”³⁵

These three factors of materiality, addressivity and performativity lend a greater understanding to the public sphere that the women discussed in this thesis constructed with their words. The vibrancy of the public sphere depended on a multitude of factors: in addition to the act of women writing, it was also contingent on gatekeepers that enabled the production and circulation of texts. Editors and publishers, for instance, dependent on sales and market demands, decided which writers to publish, of which few were women. Once published, the reception of texts was in part determined by their circulation, which, in turn, depended on the medium they were published in, either as books, magazines, student publications, or newspapers. Given the wide variety of media, the modes of addressing their audiences, as well as their messages, differed according to each writer. Ultimately, the texts were performed and received in a manner of ways, either in a school classroom, a university lecture hall, or a theatre. All these contingent elements influenced the ways in which the public sphere was constructed, a difficult task for women writers for whom multiple factors were out of their control. Given this, the numerous voices this public sphere contained – as will be demonstrated in this thesis – as well as its dynamic nature is all the more laudable.

For this thesis specifically, texts in English produced by women will be examined. In a period when literacy in English was the reserve of the few – signifying privilege and access to exclusive education – such texts were a part of high cultural production in post-colonial East Africa. However, the women discussed in this thesis interrogated issues pertaining to society more broadly – beyond the elite demographic they hailed from – including social inequalities, rural poverty, or gender-based violence. They used high cultural forms to discuss mass – or

³² Emma Hunter and Leslie James, “Introduction: Colonial Public Spheres and the Worlds of Print”, *Itinerario* 44, no. 2 (2020), 227-242.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 230-231.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

traditional – culture, such as Kenyan writer Pamela Kola, who translated and penned rural Luo folk tales in English for children to read. Textual forms of literature and drama especially were of great political relevance, and at the time one of the most accessible means to engage with state critique. This form of high culture, therefore, was used by women to debate independence and post-colonialism, and the wide variety of texts and media interrogated in this thesis highlight the different communities that were included in these debates.

The gatekeepers of high cultural production played a significant role in defining culture in late colonial and early post-colonial Uganda and Kenya. More often than not, these figures were men – either European and or African – and in their work as editors, publishers or academics, they catered towards a specific audience with a certain vision of ‘African culture’ in mind. In the case of Western publishers, as mentioned above, their decisions on which writers to publish were largely driven by market demand and sales figures. For example, the novels published by Heinemann in their African Writers Series in the 1960s, connote a demand for stories about colonialism, European-African encounters, and struggles for independence. As will be demonstrated, the women in this thesis wrote about issues far beyond Western publishers’ initial scope, and were therefore initially less likely to be published than their male peers independence (See Chapter 2 for a further discussion on this). They navigated this, however, through searching for alternative publishing routes, such as with indigenous African publishers, journals, or magazines. As custodians over public life and culture, such gatekeepers defined East Africa high culture in this period.

As mentioned above, elite – male – politicians similarly weaponised ideas of traditional culture in their discourse on nationalism and independence, harking back to a golden pre-colonial era and using the figure of the woman as a repository for ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’.³⁶ Some women were complicit in this essentialism, as will be demonstrated in this thesis, such as Ugandan political figures Miria Obote and Rebecca Mulira, highlighting the diversity of women’s views represented in this thesis. Obote and Mulira both penned essays that defined women by their reproductive capacities, emphasising their importance and mothers and caregivers in the home and their communities. Other women, however, contested this idea of womanhood and the ‘traditional’ values women were supposed to represent, as espoused by male politicians-Writers such as Grace Ogot, Muthoni Likimani or Marjorie Macgoye used their fiction to critique gender inequality and violence towards women.

³⁶ Megan Vaughan, ‘Culture’, p. 233.

The cultural interiority of the state was a dynamic entity, and – in relation to this thesis – was defined by both cultural gatekeepers who defined high culture, and women writers who contested this. It contained a public sphere characterised by a multivocality that platformed the voices of different women writers in this period. At the same time, this public sphere was contingent – in addition to the act of women writing – on the texts’ circulation, their reception and their performance. The totality of these factors allowed for a broad discourse by women that contested the post-colonial state.

Literature review

In light of Cooper’s theory, a large section of African post-colonial historiography is dedicated to the “gatekeeper state”, and, in relation to Kenya, this is done in regard to ethnic polarisation in post-colonial politics. Daniel Branch, for instance, in his discussions on Kenyan nation-building and the role of state actors such as Kenyatta, Odinga and Mboya, examines the limitations on Kenyan unity, arguing that “Kenya’s leaders have encouraged political debate to centre on recognition rather than on redistribution.”³⁷ Similarly, Branch and Nic Cheeseman interrogate the idea of ‘our turn to eat’, and the politicisation of ethnic identifications in Kenya after flag independence.³⁸ Gabrielle Lynch also examines this ethnic mobilisation by politicians, and the resulting bifurcation of the post-colonial state.³⁹ In a similar vein, Julie MacArthur discusses this ethnic mobilisation and the ways in which this influenced boundary-making, fostering imagined communities based around community, and thereby constructions of inclusion and exclusion.⁴⁰ The construction of post-colonial Kenyan citizenship, and the nature of the post-colonial state is taken up by Kara Moskowitz, who argues that “national citizenship was ... negotiated”, and subject to contradictions in its “unevenness, multivalence, and pluralism.”⁴¹ The nature of the post-colonial state in a Ugandan context is interrogated by A.B.K. Kasozi, whose scholarship states that it is the “structures inherent in Ugandan society that have been conducive to the production of dictators, fascists, and unprincipled leaders.”⁴² These include ethnic factionalism, religious fragmentation, social inequalities, linguistic issues,

³⁷ Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011*, p. 16.

³⁸ Daniel Branch and Nic Cheeseman, ‘Introduction: Our Turn to Eat’, in *Our Turn to Eat: Politics in Kenya since 1950*, ed. Daniel Branch, Nic Cheeseman, and Leigh Gardner (Berlin: LIT, 2010), 1–21.

³⁹ Gabrielle Lynch, ‘Histories of Association and Difference: The Construction and Negotiation of Ethnicity’, in *Our Turn to Eat: Politics in Kenya since 1990*, ed. Daniel Branch, Nic Cheeseman, and Leigh Gardner (Berlin: LIT, 2010), 177–97.

⁴⁰ Julie MacArthur, *Cartography and the Political Imagination: Mapping Community in Colonial Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016).

⁴¹ Kara Moskowitz, *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945-1980* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), p. 9.

⁴² Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, p. 5.

as well as a lacking African property-owning class, all of which contributed to a weakened nation, allowing for gatekeepers to take control of the state.⁴³ Derek Peterson and Edgar Taylor further discuss Uganda's state infrastructure, analysing the ways in which the media was weaponised as a tool to entrench Amin's dictatorship.⁴⁴ These works centre the gatekeeper states and its activities, and remain highly useful in detailing the nature of authoritarianism that women writers critiqued in their texts. This body of scholarship will be drawn upon in this thesis to highlight the structures and conditions the gatekeeper state creates that the cultural interiority of the state chooses to contest. The ways in which politics influenced the cultural realm, and how women used culture to challenge the state will be examined here. In contrast to previous historiography, the focus in this thesis is on – comparatively – marginalised individuals, providing an interrogation of 'politics from below', which the women represented with their texts.

In recent years, there has been a historiographical turn away from the insular nature of the post-colonial gatekeeper state, to examine East African regionalism, placing individual countries within a globalised context. For instance, Chris Vaughan et al. proffer a regionalist perspective of the post-independence period in East Africa, arguing that "the multiple and often oppositional ways in which 'thinking East African' was ... an integral part of East African political thought."⁴⁵ Regionalism remained a vital tool "to criticise not only the artificial divisions of colonial legacy but also the paths ahead of their post-colonial nations."⁴⁶ Ismay Milford et al. take a similar perspective, one that places East Africa within a global context, and examine what this signifies "about globalising and *deglobalising* dynamics" in the region in this period.⁴⁷ For East Africans, "the very appeal of the wider world ... lay in the possibility of discovering alternative futures to those seemingly dictated by economic and political structures inherited from colonial rule."⁴⁸ Such an approach, according to Milford et al. reveals the "variation and connections across the East African region", as well as the "plurality and competing visions" of independence.⁴⁹ This thesis will draw on these ideas of regionalism, as many of the institutions that provided women with platforms to write – such as the University

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Peterson, Derek R. and Edgar Taylor, 'Rethinking the State in Idi Amin's Uganda: The Politics of Exhortation', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 58–82.

⁴⁵ Chris Vaughan et al., 'Thinking East African: Debating Federation and Regionalism, 1960-1977', in *Visions of African Unity, New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects*, ed. Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits, African Histories and Modernities (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 49–75, at p. 51.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

⁴⁷ Ismay Milford et al., 'Another World? East Africa, Decolonisation, and the Global History of the Mid-Twentieth Century', *The Journal of African History*, 2021, 1–17, at p. 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

of East Africa, the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs, or the East African Publishing House – were created with the intention of promoting East African integration, often in opposition to the gatekeeper state. There was much exchange and travel between Kenya and Uganda – for instance, through Kenyan students attending Uganda’s Makerere College, or Ugandan journalist Barbara Kimenye writing for the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation*. This regional imagining also serves to highlight the universality of women’s ideas and hopes, and that visions for independence and decolonisation were not restricted to within the borders of a nation. High political life abandoned regionalist approaches throughout the 1970s – most markedly through the collapse of the East African Community in 1977 – largely due to the insular nature of the gatekeeper state. However, the cultural interior continued to thrive through regionalism, which could be seen, for instance, in the exodus of Makerere academics to University College, Nairobi during the Amin and Obote years.

Approaches towards examining the cultural sphere over which the colonial gatekeeper state has presided is one that historiography recently has begun to take, and primarily with a focus on Tanzania. With her study of literary histories of Dar es Salaam through texts, and the ways in which urban intellectuals grappled with decolonisation, Emily Callaci argues that “texts, instead of narratives ... reveal the interplay of material, discursive, and social forms that give shape and substance to city stories.”⁵⁰ In a similar approach of cultural materialism in Tanzanian history, Laura Fair interrogates films and the cinema in post-colonial Tanganyika, discussing the ways in which “the cinema was a space of encounters ... where Tanzanians engaged with media cultures from across the globe and a diverse range of people from their own town.”⁵¹ Such an approach, according to Fair, reveals gendered constructions in Tanzania, tensions and transitions between generations, and the ways in which actors navigated the city.⁵² Andrew Ivaksa provides an examination of urban youth cultures in post-colonial Dar es Salaam, as well as discourse on marriage, women’s work and mobility in town, and interrogates “debates that animated public culture ... as a way of illuminating the urban cultural politics of Tanzania’s long sixties moment.”⁵³ Within a Zanzibari context, Thomas Burgess interrogates youth fashion and comportment, and the ways in which this became politicised in the post-colonial era, as it

⁵⁰ Emily Callaci, *Street Archives and City Life: Popular Intellectuals in Postcolonial Tanzania* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 11.

⁵¹ Laura Fair, *Reel Pleasures: Cinema Audiences and Entrepreneurs in Twentieth-Century Urban Tanzania* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018), p. 4.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Andrew M. Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar Es Salaam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 15; See also: Andrew M. Ivaska, ‘In the “Age of Minis”: Women, Work and Masculinity Downtown’, in *Dar Es Salaam: Histories from an Emerging African Metropolis*, ed. James Brennan, Andrew Burton, and Yusuf Lawi (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki Na Nyota, 2007), 213–31.

conflicted with leaders' ideas of traditional Islamic, nationalist and socialist discipline. This thesis will draw on these ideas within Tanzanian cultural historiographies, to examine the texts written by women in Kenya and Uganda after independence. As Callaci argues, texts "are organic to the social worlds in which they resonate" and "reflect the constraints and possibilities of the worlds in which authors produce them."⁵⁴ As sources, the works interrogated in this thesis reveal the tenacity and agency of women, in spite of the limitations of oppression brought about by the structures of the gatekeeper state. The texts not only reveal the dissent, but also the hopes for independence that women held for themselves and their wider communities, rendering the resistance within the state's cultural interior notable in its diversity and multivocality. Examining this cultural interiority "is a uniquely rich tool for illuminating seemingly disparate domains of postcolonial experience", and highlights a vibrant public sphere that provided the space for women to express their dissent.⁵⁵

African literary histories have also formed part of post-colonial African cultural historiographies, and will influence the analysis this thesis will provide of the cultural interiority of the state. The East African post-colonial literary scene specifically has been examined by scholars such as Chris Wanjala, who traces its growth whilst interrogating the binary between world and East African literature, acknowledging the challenges East African writers face in writing for both local and global audiences.⁵⁶ Tirop Peter Simatei examines the role of the novelist in nation-building in East Africa, exploring their initial favour with African nationalism during the struggle for independence, before their ensuing shift to the left after the entrenchment of the independent neo-liberal state. According to Simatei, the East African novelist's primary concern is the issue "of how political power through the postcolonial state ... colonises public space in order to subjugate the occupants of this space to its hegemonic interests."⁵⁷ These approaches will be employed in this thesis to highlight the important role of literary texts produced by Kenyan and Ugandan women after independence within the public sphere of the cultural interiority of the state, especially in communicating dissent with popular audiences. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, when stating his reasons for no longer writing in English and reverting instead to his native Gikuyu, argues that English is not only part of imperialism's "cultural bomb", but by independence had become the language of Anglo Africa's petty bourgeoisie, that

⁵⁴ Callaci, *Street Archives and City Life*, p. 11-12.

⁵⁵ Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar Es Salaam*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Chris Wanjala, 'The Growth of a Literary Tradition in East Africa', *Journal of Eastern African Research & Development* 11 (1981): 122-42.

⁵⁷ Tirop Peter Simatei, *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth University, 2001), p. 9.

developed among them a “contempt for the tools of communication developed by their communities and their history.”⁵⁸ While the women’s texts interrogated in this thesis are all in English – reasons for which are given below – and the women themselves were from their countries’ elite classes, they largely represent the broader communities neglected by the petty bourgeoisie that Ngũgĩ critiques. The ways in which textual production was aided by various educational and cultural institutions will also be discussed in this thesis, demonstrating how, as Doreen Strauhs states, these “have regularly been driving forces in Africa, decisively impacting the literary as well as sociopolitical and sociocultural landscapes”.⁵⁹

More recently, as a global turn has been taken in scholarship of African literature, this has produced analyses that combine the nature of the gatekeeping in literature production, with the ideas of decolonisation that were central in the first forms of African textual literature. Bhakti Shringarpure employs a global approach in her examination of African literary histories, placing post-colonial African literature production within the political context of the Cold War. She argues that the Cold War “continued the dynamic of European colonialism”, and in the literary industry, through the constructions of “politics of visibility”, the cultural Cold War engineered a “strategic reception of books”, determining which authors were to be published and sold, and which were not.⁶⁰ A similar approach is taken by Monica Popescu, who argues that literary production in Africa in this period “shaped and was shaped in turn by the cultural policies” during the Cold War. She gives the concrete example of the United States Central Intelligence Agency, which used a variety of tactics to influence high cultural production across Africa after independence.⁶¹ Peter Kalliney interrogates literary works produced in this period in Africa, and discusses the prominence of modernist concepts in African literature, arguing that this was a means African writers employed to detach themselves and their art from any superpower ideology.⁶² These approaches of literary histories during the Cold War are relevant to this thesis, and will be used to interrogate the politics of literature production and publishing. Ideas of Cold War politics and culture will be developed here to examine the ways in which this affected which women were published, in tandem with other more local structural factors

⁵⁸ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, p. 3, 28.

⁵⁹ Doreen Strauhs, *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics, and Participation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2.

⁶⁰ Bhakti Shringarpure, *Cold War Assemblages: Decolonization to Digital* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 2, 136-7, 151.

⁶¹ Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 2, 43.

⁶² Peter Kalliney, ‘Modernism, African Literature, and the Cold War’, *Modern Language Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2015): 333–68.

within East Africa that presented barriers and opportunities to women becoming professional writers.

African women's historiographies are traditionally incorporated into the metanarratives of nationalist historiographies, and examine women's involvement in nation-building and state-making. Tabitha Kanogo interrogates womanhood in colonial Kenya, analysing the ways in which women were subject to control by both indigenous societies and British colonialists, and argues that the latter were both threatened by African women's agency.⁶³ The topic of mobility and women's economic activity in an examination of prostitution in colonial Nairobi is addressed by Luise White, who argues that "conceptualising prostitution through its labour", not only is indicative of women's attitudes towards "capital accumulation", but also "tells us about women's access to housing and property ownership".⁶⁴ African women's role in Kenyan politics is also discussed by Lynn Thomas, who examines the politicisation of the female body – particularly in reference to female genital cutting – by both African and colonial patriarchy, and emphasises "the centrality of reproductive struggles to African history."⁶⁵ Politics and women's bodies in a post-colonial Tanzanian context are the focus of Andrew Ivaska's examination of women's work and comportment in an urban history of Dar es Salaam.⁶⁶ Susan Geiger, in her analysis of women in the Tanganyikan nationalist movement, employs life histories of women members of the Tanganyika African National Union party, in order "to confront the biases, silences and resulting distortions found in existing histories of the period of Tanzania's nationalist movement."⁶⁷ The role of women in politics in Uganda has been analysed in differing capacities by a variety of scholars. For example, Aili Mari Tripp examines the Ugandan post-independence women's movement, and the impact of women's associations on Ugandan politics in this period, and argues that "women's movements throughout Africa are particularly well situated to assert ... independence from the state."⁶⁸ Additionally, Tripp interrogates class solidarity across racial lines in the late colonial and early post-colonial Ugandan women's movement, also acknowledging its elite nature.⁶⁹ Alicia Decker examines

⁶³ Tabitha Kanogo, *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya, 1900-50* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005).

⁶⁴ Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 2, 20.

⁶⁵ Lynn M. Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 4.

⁶⁶ Ivaska, 'In the "Age of Minis": Women, Work and Masculinity Downtown'.

⁶⁷ Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1998), p. 6.

⁶⁸ Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*; See also: Aili Mari Tripp and Sarah Ntiro, 'Women's Activism in Colonial Uganda', in *The Women's Movement in Uganda: History, Challenges, and Prospects*, ed. Aili Mari Tripp and Joy C. Kwesiga (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2002), 23–37.

⁶⁹ Tripp, 'Women's Mobilisation in Uganda: Nonracial Ideologies in European-African-Asian Encounters, 1945-1962'.

the lives of women under Idi Amin's regime, discussing the complex nature of their relationship with the state. She argues that "the violence of [Amin's] regime resulted in opportunities as well as challenges for women, which varied according to one's relationship to the military state."⁷⁰ Women's involvement in Ugandan parliamentary politics is addressed by Sylvia Tamale, who redresses their absence in the historiography through examining their presence in colonial and post-colonial politics.⁷¹ In this thesis, approaches of high political women's activism will be combined with that 'from below', incorporating perspectives of women removed from party politics. In this way, the ways in which women expanded the public sphere of activism and dissent in the post-colonial period will be highlighted.

Historiographical intervention

This thesis builds on East African women's historiography that privileges their roles in politics, either through a focus on the politicisation of their bodies, or in nation-building, and shows women in the cultural realm within the overlooked interior of the gatekeeper state. The writers discussed here are cultural figures, students, activists, and politicians, who use their texts to challenge the various forms of oppression that the structures of the gatekeeper state reproduce, in this way highlighting not only their agency, but also the diversity and multivocality of the state's cultural interior. Some of their texts include the short story collection *Kalasanda* by Barbara Kimenye, the novel *The Promised Land* by Grace Ogot, the play *Keeping up with the Mukasas* by Elvania Zirimu, a speech on girls' education written by Joyce Mpanga, an essay on the role of women in independent Africa by Miria Obote, or newspaper articles on working women by Rebecca Katumba. Women remain marginalised figures within East African post-colonial historiography, which privileges "the masculinisation of politics" and "politics of the 'big man'".⁷² As Geiger argues, "the accumulation of androcentric bias in the written record" provides a skewed version of history, one that does an injustice to half of the region's population.⁷³ The incorporation of women's voices and experiences therefore provides nuanced understandings of this period of East African history, that allow for an appreciation of the ways in which postcolonialism was experienced by individuals marginalised in historiographies.

⁷⁰ Alicia C. Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow: Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), p. 2.

⁷¹ Sylvia Tamale, *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1999).

⁷² Frederick Cooper, 'Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective', *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 2 (2008): 167–96, at p. 192.

⁷³ Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965*, p. 9.

It deserves emphasis here that, in spite of the patriarchal structures that characterised the gatekeeper state and East African politics in this period – “the masculinisation of politics” – and the limited women’s voices available, the gendering of the state did not necessarily imply exclusion of women. Similarly, their inclusion did not preclude oppression, and certain women were also complicit in post-colonial misogynist authoritarian governance, as mentioned above. This thesis will demonstrate both ways women navigated masculine political structures, either struggling against or participating in these gendered forms of politics.

Women who protested against the patriarchal nature of politics with their words, for instance, included Ugandan politicians Florence Lubega and Joyce Mpanga, whose speeches delivered to the LEGCO – in 1959 and 1961 respectively – are discussed in Chapter 5. Both women through their occupations were firmly entrenched within Ugandan masculine colonial and post-colonial politics; however, used their positionality to work within these structures to lobby for girls’ education in Uganda. Another example is that of letters to the editor written by Kenyan and Ugandan women to various newspapers, which are discussed in Chapter 4. In Kenya, women penned letters to the *Daily Nation* in 1966, calling for greater female representation in a post-colonial parliament, in an outright rejection of the masculine nature of politics in their country. Similarly, Ugandan women in 1960 used the pages of the *Uganda Argus* to demand taxation of women, and thereby equal rights within the state. The newspaper became one of the few public platforms for women to protest the patriarchal nature of the Kenyan and Ugandan state. While the public sphere may not have been welcoming to women, using the pages of the newspaper, women forced themselves into public discourse, thereby constituting a form of political inclusion within patriarchal structures.

On the other hand, the inclusion of women also resulted in women’s complicity in the gendering of state politics and authoritarianism. Very often such women were part of East Africa’s elite, benefitting from a proximity to patriarchy that granted them elevated social status. In this thesis, the example of Miria Obote – wife of Prime Minister and later President Obote – will be given in Chapter 5, whose essay for *East Africa Journal* in 1967 discussed women’s role in a changing post-colonial East African society. In using tropes of motherhood and childbearing, and defining women by their reproductive capacities, the essay perpetuates patriarchal stereotypes used to oppress women. Similarly, also discussed in Chapter 5, Ugandan civil society activist Rebecca Mulira penned an essay published in *The East African Standard* in 1964, which also interrogated East African women’s place in society. While Mulira was a celebrated champion for women’s rights, her essay also perpetuates patriarchal stereotypes, as she emphasises

women's duty to their husbands, and their role in house and home. Through their definitions of womanhood, Obote and Mulira involuntarily aligned themselves with a patriarchal political discourse that defined women as repositories for mystic pre-colonial culture.⁷⁴ In this way, their words signified their participation in highly gendered forms of politics.

The category of 'East African women' is far from homogeneous, and is diverse by race, religion and ethnicity. The women writers were from all walks of life, with different occupations, demonstrating not only their broad talent, but also, as mentioned above, the difficulty women especially faced in making a career out of writing. A necessary caveat must be added regarding gender identifications of these women: while modern conceptions of womanhood account for greater gender diversity, this thesis will discuss solely cis-gendered women, as this was how they self-identified and were read in their social milieu. Most of the women discussed in this thesis also shared a similar class background, as part of an educated elite minority in East Africa. They came from families who could afford to send their daughters to mission schools and therefore had access to the best – and often the only – education that could be offered to girls in Uganda and Kenya. Some of the women were able to travel abroad to pursue postgraduate degrees, and later moved in East Africa's elite social and political circles. It is unsurprising, therefore, that most Ugandan women discussed in this thesis are Baganda – such as Joyce Mpanga or Rebecca Mulira – and most Kenyan women either Gikuyu or Luo – such as Grace Ogot or Micere Mugo – all ethnic groups that profited disproportionately from access to socio-economic and political capital under British colonialism. Despite these advantages, in many professional and educational spaces these women remained in the minority on the basis of their gender, with some occupying one of the first female roles in their respective professions. In a time when many girls were barred from education and literacy, their achievements are all the more remarkable.⁷⁵

In spite of their elite status, the women discussed in this thesis use their texts to discuss broader social issues and to represent marginalised individuals and communities in their works. Therefore, rather than examining these women's individual experiences of the 1960s and 70s – as this would raise, as Joan Scott argues, "questions about the constructed nature of experience" and "about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place"⁷⁶ – their positions as proxies for wider communities and other women will be discussed. One of the primary reasons

⁷⁴ See: Vaughan, 'Culture', p. 233.

⁷⁵ For further discussions on girls' education in Africa, see: Joy C. Kwesiga, *Women's Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda's Experience* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2002).

⁷⁶ Joan W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–97, at p. 777.

why these elite women's texts are used to construct an understanding of non-elite communities is simply because it is very difficult to access the latter's perspectives otherwise, for reasons ranging from archival infrastructure in East Africa to their lacking availability (a discussion on the challenges of historical research in East Africa is provided below). While English was in post-colonial East Africa the language of an educated elite, literacy in which signified a person's access to mission education, it was also spoken broadly across the region by this elite. Therefore, in penning their texts in English, a wider audience could learn about rural and working-class issues in Uganda and Kenya. In absence of other sources that are not as easily available, the texts in this thesis provide a valuable insight into certain communities' perceptions of this period in East African history.

Using prose, poetry, children's literature, student publications, essays, articles and letters to the editor, the writers used their privileged positionalities to contest gender inequality, poverty, sexual violence, and other social issues. Their words critiqued the oppression and conditions brought about by the gatekeeper state, holding those in power to account and contesting the state's agenda. They did this in differing ways using differing formats, expressing a variety of opinions, indicative of the polyphonic nature of dissent, and the heterogeneity of the state's cultural interiority. The texts hold their writers' ideas and visions for independence, their eventual disillusionment but simultaneous continued hope for a better future, representing what freedom and decolonisation signified for these women and the broader communities they represented. As Emma Hunter argues, freedom carried "meaning both at the high political level and at the very personal level", and its "contestation ... derived both from its multiple and contested meanings", which can be observed in the diversity of texts discussed and views expressed by the women.⁷⁷ The texts also acted as platforms for women to express their ideas for freedom and independence in the public sphere in a way deemed socially acceptable. Few women had access to high profile public spaces in this period, and their words, therefore, were vehicles through which women could communicate with as broad an audience as possible. In a time of increased state repression, the texts symbolised "the tensions of possibility and constraint" that defined citizens' lives in this period, but simultaneously also the women's "efforts to get around the gate", as their words could travel and inspire across East Africa.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Emma Hunter, *Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania: Freedom, Democracy and Citizenship in the Era of Decolonisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 157.

⁷⁸ Cooper, 'Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective', p. 187, 192.

Methodological intervention

Primary sources that were consulted for this thesis consisted of texts and creative writing by women, supplemented by oral history interviews with academics, writers, and publishers. This methodology remains unique within East African historiography, but is necessary to research women who – as historical figures – remain largely absent from official archives. According to Trouillot, “inequalities experienced by the actors lead to uneven historical power”, and “ensure that historical facts are not created equal.”⁷⁹ The use of texts – and in particular creative writing in the form of poetry and prose – by women is a distinct means of gleaning their voices and perspectives in ways that cannot be done from institutional archives. Incorporating women’s voices, therefore, changes understandings of the post-colonial period in Kenya and Uganda, revealing the extent of debates around decolonisation and Africanisation, a discourse that women were active participants in. As Scott argues, this not only “will yield a history that will provide new perspectives on old questions”, but will also “redefine the old questions in new terms ... [making] women visible as active participants”.⁸⁰ In so doing, this thesis contributes to retrieving these women’s voices, an issue that extends to African historiography more broadly.

This methodological approach draws upon the differing bodies of literature discussed above that inform this thesis. Previous historiographies utilise archival and other institutional documents as the basis for scholarly analysis, while literary scholars traditionally employ texts. A combination of both methodologies is used here, in order to uncover women’s voices in the period of decolonisation. There is no singular archive to draw upon for the methodology used in this thesis, as most did not leave behind capacious personal archives, and records of their lives remain fragmentary and scattered across various archives across continents. Because of the scant material available, and external pressures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this thesis draws upon published works, as well as mainstream institutional archives, which themselves, as mentioned above, contain limited information on these women’s lives (There is, admittedly, an irony in researching information on women within the very institutions that contributed to their historical marginalisation). The research for this thesis has, therefore, performed the labour of drawing upon snippets of information contained in various archives and sources across the

⁷⁹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2015), p. 48-9.

⁸⁰ Joan W. Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75, at p. 1075.

UK and East Africa, and piecing them together to form a narrative of women's experiences after independence.

The primary sources in this chapter were included in literary anthologies, magazines, school textbooks, newspapers, as well as student publications. The texts interrogated are all in English, a colonial language spoken and read primarily by East Africa's elite. This therefore places limitations on investigations of the extent of women's writing in this period, as potentially a high number of texts in native East African languages could be studied; however, given the vast number of African languages spoken across East Africa, the scope of investigating women's writing in all of these was beyond that of a single scholar. The texts selected for this thesis are therefore not an accurate representation of the totality of women's writing in Kenya and Uganda after independence, but represent a cross-section of women's textual production in this period. The choice of texts was not only based on their representations of wider communities, but also, more practically, on their availability to a single researcher. For instance, in the case of books, some proved more challenging to locate, as they were either out of print, or only available in singular libraries across the United Kingdom – such as Barbara Kimenye's *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited* – which is indicative of their marginalisation in historiography. Other texts, on the other hand, were relatively simple to source due to their canonical nature, such as works by Grace Ogot.

Archival research yielded women's writing in newspapers, magazines, student publications, as well as supplementary information on the East African publishing industry, higher education and cultural life. In the United Kingdom, the archival institutions consulted included the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, the School of Oriental and African Studies Special Collections, as well as the Oxford University Press Archives. Their Ugandan counterparts consisted of the Makerere University Library, the National Library of Uganda, and the Uganda Society Library, while in Kenya these were the MacMillan Memorial Library and the Kenya National Archives. The archival institutions in the United Kingdom contained high amounts of texts, newspapers and magazines that were investigated for this thesis, which is demonstrative of the legacies of colonialism and the ways it continues to determine the geopolitics in the location of history. Conducting archival research in East Africa on women – a topic largely still viewed as 'niche' – remained challenging, particularly in Uganda, where "archives ... have not found sustenance in an enduring official conviction that the national past holds ... lessons for

the present and future.”⁸¹ Gaps in the archives, however, were supplemented through the insights provided by oral history interviews with author, poet and academic Austin Bukonya, writer Violet Barungi – née Kokunda, whose short story *Kefa Kazana* is discussed in Chapter 1 – and the publisher Henry Chakava. Largely, however, many of the women investigated in this thesis did not leave capacious archives, and one of the ultimate aims of this thesis is, simply, to give a discursive platform to figures that have been side-lined in historiography.

The process of research was, unfortunately, also marred by the Covid-19 pandemic, which hampered archival research in East Africa, and especially in Kenya. By the time the pandemic broke out in March 2020, the bulk of this research had been conducted in Uganda and the United Kingdom, with only a very limited period spent in Kenya. The resulting lockdowns and travel restrictions prevented visits to archives and libraries, thereby preventing a greater examination of primary source material. As a result, some of the chapters in this thesis contain disproportionately more primary source material on Ugandan writers than on those from Kenya, and in certain sections draw upon online sources, or primary research sourced by other historians. However, these restrictions brought about a solidarity amongst historians of East Africa around the world, and social media and teleconferencing software allowed for the development of connections and sharing of archival material with each other, which this research also benefitted from.

Drawing upon historiographies of East African political, cultural and literary history, this thesis will discuss the role women writers played in the cultural interiority of the gatekeeper state, and will broaden understandings of the vibrancy of the region’s public sphere and civil society activism, than has hitherto been written about in post-colonial histories of East Africa. A discursive space that contained platforms for debate and dissent on the nature of independence and post-colonialism, the ways in which women curated this public sphere through their writing will be demonstrated. Using a variety of texts, in the form of fiction, non-fiction and journalism as source material, this thesis foregrounds Kenyan and Ugandan women as historical actors in the post-independence period, thereby forming a unique contribution to East African historiography.

⁸¹ Edgar C. Taylor, Ashley Brooke Rockenbach, and Natalie Bond, ‘Cataloguing and Digitisation in Uganda’s Archives’, in *African Studies in the Digital Age: DisConnects?*, ed. Terry Barringer and Marion Wallace (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 163–78, p. 163.

Structure

The texts by women that are studied in this thesis are categorised within different – overlapping – genres. Chapter 1 investigates women’s writing for student publications of the English departments of Makerere College and University College, Nairobi. In investigating short stories, plays, essays and poetry written by women students, the emphasis of this chapter lies on the notion of ‘becoming a writer’, as it charts women’s creativity in ways many were unable to after university. A study of East African student publications – in particular women’s contributions to these – remains unique in historiographies of the region, and this chapter examines the ways in which women constructed their visions for independence, decolonisation and Africanisation in their texts, for an ‘imagined community’ across East Africa and beyond.

Building on the student publications, Chapter 2 examines fiction and creative writing produced by women professionally in the 1960s, with some of these figures having been studied in Chapter 1. The texts include novels, plays, short stories and poetry, and are investigated to understand how women critiqued the post-colonial state, social inequality and women’s issues through their characters, plot, and themes. The works are seminal and demonstrate women’s agency in an environment that was hostile towards them in the public sphere. Studying these texts as historical sources reveals the ways in which women represented non-elite communities in their works, and lobbied for their awareness to a broader audience.

Chapter 3 provides a study of children’s literature, examining fiction and educational works produced for young audiences in the 1960s and early 1970s. The different genres interrogated here comprise novels, folk tales, as well as works published in school textbooks. These texts all contain themes designed to resonate with young contemporary readers, and act as a social commentary on post-colonial issues in East Africa. They demonstrate the writers’ visions for the future, their disillusionment with independence, and the simultaneous hopes for better social conditions that they place on their young readers. Significantly, this chapter demonstrates the extent to which debates around Africanisation and decolonisation permeated different sections of society beyond the ‘ivory tower’, in their being taught to children through women’s texts.

Chapter 4 is an investigation of women’s journalism and press contributions, in particular their columns, articles and letters to the editor written between the late 1950s and early 1970s in newspapers such as the Kenyan *Daily Nation*, *Voice of Uganda* and *Uganda Argus*. Written for an imagined community of fellow East African women, the texts examined demonstrate not only their writers’ hopes for the future, but also the ways in which they mobilised readers and fellow women to push for change with the post-colonial state. The chapter reveals both the

heterogeneity of the category 'East African women', as well as the multivocality of the cultural interiority of the state, through the different visions for the future that are voiced. The pages of a newspaper were a public arena and a site for women's activism and mobilisation, as women journalists and writers expressed their opinions in this sphere.

Finally, Chapter 5, under the broad umbrella of non-fiction texts, examines speeches, articles and essays written by public figures, politicians, and civil society and women's right's activists. The writers discuss social, economic and political issues that affect women in post-colonial East Africa, using their texts to express their grievances with independence, as well as their visions for decolonisation, which was to entail a greater space for women in the public and private spheres. In critiquing East African nationalist movements that largely marginalised women, the texts represent the ways in which women firmly place themselves in the state-building project and lobby for greater inclusivity towards all women. Consisting of a variety of formats, media and arguments, the texts also demonstrate the polyphonic nature of African women's dissent on the post-colonial state.

The contribution of this thesis to broader historiography will be two-fold: in the first instance, it will reveal hitherto largely obscure women's voices that have been relegated to the margins of history. In the second instance, in incorporating these voices, this will provide new ways of thinking about the interior of the gatekeeper state in post-colonial East Africa, to reveal a broad public sphere with a multitude of debates on the meaning of decolonisation and Africanisation. The texts in this thesis represent the ways in which women sustained the vibrant nature of the cultural interiority of the gatekeeper state, and how they used their words to mobilise and to critique the post-colonial state. In spite of their elite status, the women acted as proxies for broader communities, and brought issues around social inequality, sexual violence, and women's oppression to the public sphere. With their words, the women curated a public sphere that enabled them to debate on what post-colonialism and independence meant not only for women but for East African society more broadly. This public sphere formed part of civil society resistance to the gatekeeper state, as women protested the conditions that the latter created. Their texts reveal the extent to which debates around decolonisation and Africanisation permeated different aspects of society and reached various audiences. Women were a keystone within the cultural interiority of the state, and their texts played an important part in resistance and the curation of an inclusive platform for debate and dissent in the post-colonial era.

Chapter 1
Student writing

Introduction

On 28 June 1963, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the then president of Tanganyika, was made Chancellor of the University of East Africa. Speaking at a grand inauguration ceremony, he called upon the colleges of Makerere, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam colleges to “direct [their] energies particularly towards meeting the needs of East Africa”, urging them to “be torch bearers of our society and the protectors of the flame should we in our urgency endanger its brightness.”¹ This marked the beginning of a decade of vibrant exchange, that saw staff and student mobility across all three colleges, and thriving intellectual life featuring new research. Rising to this call, the student magazines of the English Departments – *Penpoint* and *Dhana* of Makerere University and *Nexus* and *Busara* of the University of Nairobi – set out to meet the cultural “needs of East Africa”. In their editorial in November 1968 (Issue 24), the *Penpoint* editors saw the magazine’s role in “[reflecting] the energies and aspirations of younger writers”, and enabling those “who feel restricted by traditional patterns of literary expression”.² The magazines were produced for almost two decades at both institutions, and provided a space for young people to reflect upon and analyse the changing world around them. Informed by regional identifications and inter-country exchange within East Africa, the contributors to *Penpoint/Dhana* and *Nexus/Busara* – many of whom would become celebrated names in East African literature later on – formed vital parts in cultural Africanisation drives throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

This chapter investigates the contributions made by women students to the student magazines of the English Departments of Makerere and Nairobi in the period between 1964 and 1975. This time frame was selected to demonstrate the development from possibility to constraint in East African academia after independence: thriving initially in the 1960s in Uganda, this changed in the latter years of the decade, and in the 1970s the intellectual hub of the region shifted to Kenya, due to increased political repression in Uganda. The contributions the women made were diverse in their topics, and will be analysed here within the rubrics of social inequalities, the new African petty bourgeoisie; and literary analysis and pedagogy. These topics were selected to showcase the diversity of women’s writing, as well as to highlight the heterogeneous

¹ Quoted in: ‘Value of Higher Education’, *Varsity Focus*, University of Nairobi, September 2009; See also: Bethwell A. Ogot and Madara M. Ogot, *Fountain of Knowledge: History of the University of Nairobi, 1952-2020* (Kisumu: Anyange Press, 2021), p. 39.

² SOAS: Editorial, *Penpoint*, 24, November 1968.

nature of the post-colonial state and its cultural interiority that inspired literary creativity. With their works, the women not only formed part of the Africanisation drive of their universities, but were also actors within the vibrant cultural interiority of the state, overlooked by its gatekeepers. Their commentary on East African society and politics and after independence expressed their own hopes for independence, and also symbolised those of their broader communities. The women acted as proxies for wider social issues, and expressed their hopes – and later disillusionment – in the pages of the student magazines.

Nine pieces – in the form of short stories, plays, essays and poetry – by women students in *Penpoint*, *Dhana*, *Nexus* and *Busara* were selected for examination in this chapter. Some are by writers who became renowned figures in East Africa later on, such as Rose Mbowa, Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, Violet Barungi (née Kokunda), Harriet Masembe, or Ellen Kitonga, for whom *Penpoint* and *Dhana* were a way to hone their skills for their professional writing careers later on. Their pieces are reflective of the authors' interpretation of the dynamic decade they were living in, and demonstrate their experiences of decolonisation and independence in the 1960s and 1970s.

The history of the University of East Africa and its individual colleges has been documented at great length by numerous scholars.³ Seminal works produced on Makerere College include those by J. E. Goldthorpe and Margaret MacPherson. The former provides an investigation of the elite nature of Makerere's student body between its creation in 1922 up until 1960, placing its ethnic origins within the context of the geopolitics of colonial educational institutions. Goldthorpe also examines Makerere's women students, and cites a study conducted in 1958 that concluded that their aspirations largely included marriage and becoming housewives and mothers.⁴ MacPherson similarly traces the development of Makerere from its establishment until 1960: in her focus on the college demographics, while she states that women graduates become teachers, community development workers or nurses, she also reports that "many Makerere women have married Makerere men".⁵ More recently, Carol Sicherman, also providing a history of Makerere's origins, analyses the institution's colonial origins. In interrogating the "myth of egalitarian education", Sicherman highlights the social inequalities

³ See: Issa Shivji, *Intellectuals at the Hill: Essays and Talks 1969-1993* (Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 1993); Ogot and Ogot, *Fountain of Knowledge: History of the University of Nairobi, 1952-2020*.

⁴ J. E. Goldthorpe, *An African Elite: Makerere College Students 1922-1960* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, The East African Institute of Social Research, 1965).

⁵ Margaret MacPherson, *They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College, 1922-1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

that Makerere perpetuated, through – initially – only being able to provide higher education for graduates of East Africa’s elite schools.⁶ The University of Nairobi is examined by Bethwell Ogot and Madara Ogot, who, in tracing the history of the institution, highlight its role in the development of Kenya and East Africa.⁷

The English departments of both Makerere and Nairobi have been the topic of scholarly examination in numerous works. MacPherson highlights the innovations made by Makerere’s English department and its contributions to Ugandan and East African culture, citing the department’s teaching, student magazines, as well as its theatre company, the Makerere Free Travelling Theatre (MFTT).⁸ A comparative analysis of the English departments of Makerere, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam is provided by Sicherman, discussing their pedagogy and curricula politics with regard to Africanisation. She underscores the connection between department decolonisation politics and geographies of the individual institutions: with its central location in Nairobi, “within easy marching distance of all government offices” demonstrations at the University of Nairobi “easily spilled over into the heart of the ... city.” By contrast, Makerere’s location, known as ‘the Hill’, “seemed emblematic of (and perhaps contributory toward) problems of articulation with the general populace.”⁹ Sicherman also interrogates the connections between the University of Leeds and Makerere, as many Makerere English graduates – such as Elvania Zirimu and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o – later attended Leeds for their postgraduate degrees – and examines how this contributed to their writing and intellectual development.¹⁰ The development of both English departments and Makerere and Nairobi is discussed by Doreen Strauhs, who also examines these in relation to post-independence politics in Uganda and Kenya, highlighting the ways in which literary production was influenced by politics.¹¹

The colonial nature of the Makerere English Department’s structure and focus on English literatures has been critiqued by a variety of scholars: Zaahida Nabagereka argues that this wilfully continued the marginalisation and suppression of indigenous African languages by the

⁶ Carol Sicherman, ‘Makerere and the Beginnings of Higher Education for East Africans’, *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 29, no. 1 (2002): 91–120; See also: Carol Sicherman, ‘Building an African Department of History at Makerere, 1950-1972’, *History in Africa* 30 (2003): 253–82.

⁷ Ogot and Ogot, *Fountain of Knowledge: History of the University of Nairobi, 1952-2020*.

⁸ Margaret MacPherson, ‘Makerere: The Place of the Early Sunrise’, in *Uganda: The Cultural Landscape*, ed. Eckhard Breiting (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2000), 23–36.

⁹ Carol Sicherman, ‘Revolutionising the Literature Curriculum at the University of East Africa: Literature and the Soul of the Nation’, *Research in African Literatures* 29, no. 3 (1998): 129–48, at p. 132.

¹⁰ Carol Sicherman, ‘The Leeds-Makerere Connection and Ngugi’s Intellectual Development’, *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 23, no. 1 (1995): 3–20.

¹¹ Doreen Strauhs, *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics, and Participation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

colonial project.¹² Focussing on English-language literature also maintained a colonial elitist intellectual hierarchy, as the ability to speak and write English in an East African context denoted access to education, a privilege reserved for an elite African minority. Many African writers who wrote in African languages, except for Okot p’Bitek, had not received a university education. Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi argue that, in relation to Makerere, “the identity of East African literature was determined in university departments and literary journals, and thus reflected the interests and anxieties of a small elite.”¹³ It was these educated individuals who would, later on, “manage the institutions of literary production after decolonisation” and “their perspectives on what was – or was not – literature were going to be seminal in the shaping of literary culture in East Africa.”¹⁴

More recently, investigations have been made into the student magazines of the English departments of both institutions. Christopher Ouma and Madhu Krishnan incorporate *Penpoint*, *Dhana*, *Neuxs* and *Busara* into their analysis of small literary magazines, arguing that they not only function “as an outlet for creative expression and vitality”, but also “allow us a different if not alternative trajectory of print cultural history and therefore ways of imagining Africa.”¹⁵ Macharia Mwangi provides a focussed analysis of *Nexus* and *Busara* at the University of Nairobi, and explores the role the magazines played in the development of Kenya’s post-independence literary scene. Providing a space for “aspiring young Kenyans” to experiment with creativity, *Nexus* and *Busara*, according to Mwangi, “enabled the growth of a vibrant literary community ... to ventilate on matters of their past and present moments through writing.”¹⁶

Building on this literature, this chapter will examine women students’ contributions specifically to the student magazines of *Penpoint*, *Dhana*, *Busara* and *Nexus*, a thorough study of which has hitherto not been conducted. In doing so, the ways in which women reflected on this period after independence in Kenya and Uganda, and their thoughts on independence and decolonisation will be highlighted. This chapter will use women’s words to analyse their visions for independence, their hopes for their countries and East Africa, and a world they envisioned

¹² Zaahida Mariam Nabagereka, ‘Resistance to Linguistic Imperialism in Uganda: A Study of Contemporary Luganda Literature Production’ (PhD thesis, London, The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2019), p. 76.

¹³ Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 9.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Christopher E. W. Ouma and Madhu Krishnan, ‘Small Magazines in Africa: Ecologies and Genealogies’, *Social Dynamics* 47, no. 2 (2021): 193–209, at p. 194.

¹⁶ Macharia Mwangi, ‘Nexus/Busara and the Rise of Modern Kenyan Literature’, *Social Dynamics* 47, no. 2 (2021): 228–42, at p. 240.

for themselves after leaving university. The pieces – in the form of poems, plays, short stories and essays – are part of the broader Africanisation movement of the English departments and universities, and comment on social inequalities, cultural issues, and current affairs. In illuminating social issues in their surroundings, the women acted as proxies for their communities and the problems they faced. The students’ voices are distinctive – in comparison to other writers and genres discussed in this thesis – primarily due to the youthfulness of the authors discussed in this chapter. Studying at the University of East Africa, and socialising alongside students from across the region, lent these young women a unique perspective, as they were privy to a discourse on radical decolonisation – such as the abolition of Nairobi’s English department, discussed below – that individuals outside of the ‘ivory tower’ would not have access to. The young women’s words, therefore, broadened these debates, as they form an “archive against which we can read a plurality of expressions of (historical) agency and creativity.”¹⁷ Their ideas formed part of a cultural public sphere that included women’s voices on debates on decolonisation.

This chapter will also demonstrate the process of ‘becoming a writer’, and the immense potential women held for East African literature, as the amateur writing of women students in university magazines demonstrates. The student publications offered a space for young women to experiment with skills in creative writing on a friendly audience. Some did become famous later on, while others did not write beyond university level (which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2) and it is particularly for such women writers that the beauty of student magazines was realised: they presented the opportunity to follow their interests, without livelihoods and incomes depending on their success. These young women were removed from the politics of literature production during the Cold War, which saw the influence of and promotion of certain writers over others by the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom.¹⁸ This freedom from Cold War politics allowed women to be creative, unrestricted by “the normative workings of the field of literary production and its attendant modes of evaluation”, determined by marketing and propaganda needs in this period, which will be demonstrated in this chapter through the diversity of topics they wrote about.¹⁹ The unique quality of the writing discussed here, as mentioned above, lies in the youthfulness of the authors, as they construct imaginations of independence in Kenya and Uganda for themselves. Their literature not only formed part of the

¹⁷ Ouma and Krishnan, ‘Small Magazines in Africa: Ecologies and Genealogies’, p. 194.

¹⁸ See: Bhakti Shringarpure, *Cold War Assemblages: Decolonization to Digital* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

¹⁹ Ouma and Krishnan, ‘Small Magazines in Africa: Ecologies and Genealogies’, p. 194.

vibrant cultural interiority of the state but was also a way into self-definition as a writer for a lot of these women.

The structure of this chapter will be as follows: firstly, it will provide a background to the University of East Africa, including a history of both Makerere and University College, Nairobi, as well as a focus on their English Departments and their publications. This is necessary, in order to allow for a full understanding of the salience of the departments' publications and their significance on the East African cultural scene. Following this, the chapter will examine individual pieces of writing by women students will, treating them across various rubrics: the topic of social inequalities; the new African petty bourgeoisie; and literary analysis and pedagogy. In spite of the deteriorating political situation in the region and the disintegration of the University of East Africa, the circulation of ideas and culture, as well as the sense of hope and possibility are tangible in the pages of the magazines.

The University of East Africa

In June 1963, around the same time that Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika gained independence, Makerere College, University College, Nairobi, and the University College, Dar es Salaam merged to become sister colleges of the University of East Africa.²⁰ The three colleges would coordinate and distribute its activities according to expertise, in order to best manage limited funds.²¹ The exchange and mobility this fostered could be seen in the movements of now-prominent East African cultural figures, who were students at the University of East Africa in the 1960s: Ugandan author Violet Barungi, for instance, attended Royal College of Nairobi, before enrolling at Makerere College for a degree in History in the early 1960s.²² Another example is Austin Bukenya, a Ugandan academic, poet, novelist and playwright, who studied Linguistics at University College, Dar es Salaam in the early 1960s, and later embarked on a postgraduate degree at Makerere College in 1968.²³

Such intellectual exchange was supplemented by vibrant student life across the different campuses. Makerere enjoyed a diversity that could not be witnessed in many other parts of Africa, as students of different races and nationalities enjoyed campus life on the 'Hill'. In his memoirs, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes the Makerere of the late 1950s and the early 1960s as

²⁰ Sicherman, 'Makerere and the Beginnings of Higher Education for East Africans', p. 92; Sicherman, 'Revolutionising the Literature Curriculum at the University of East Africa: Literature and the Soul of the Nation', p. 129.

²¹ Ogot and Ogot, *Fountain of Knowledge: History of the University of Nairobi, 1952-2020*, p. 41.

²² Violet Barungi, Oral History Interview, 29 November 2019.

²³ Austin Bukenya, Oral History Interview, 16 January 2020.

“paradise”.²⁴ Events such as reading competitions or literary soirées offered ample opportunities to socialise and build relationships and friendships.²⁵ MacPherson later described the College as one “with a strong sense of community and a pervading excitement in what was going on”, as both students and staff were constantly “creating and innovating, whether it was a new syllabus, an assault course for the cadet corps which still existed, a Nativity Play for the Chapel for Christmas, a concert, a debate or a play.”²⁶ Students also enjoyed “social evenings in the halls of residence and the dances on the floor of the Main Hall, supplemented by the nightlife in Kampala in and around Top Life, Suzana, and other clubs with live music from resident bands.”²⁷ University College, Nairobi, offered similar attractions to students, such as opportunities to perform in plays, or participate in writers’ workshops at Chemchemi Cultural Centre and Paa ya Paa Gallery, which were both located in Nairobi.²⁸ The geographical location of the University of Nairobi in the city centre also signified its proximity – in addition to government buildings, as discussed by Sicherman²⁹ – to social and cultural life in Nairobi. Where possible, the two institutions organised inter-college events, such as a Writers Workshop held at Makerere College in March 1970, which was attended by both Makerere and Nairobi students and staff. Notable discussants at the workshop included James Ngugi, Ali Mazrui, Austin Bukonya, John Ruganda, David Rubadiri, Pio Zirimu, Robert Serumaga, and Bahadur Tejani. The lively conference saw “about fifty people from the three East African countries ... [attending] the various discussions”, and “the presence of several of East Africa’s best-known writers was a great encouragement to student participants.” The workshop, according to Professor Angus Calder of University College, Nairobi, had “given a great stimulus to the development of creative writing ... in East Africa.”³⁰

These students who could travel across East Africa for education, and enjoy the various specialisations of the individual institutions, formed an “East African elite”, and had access to

²⁴ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer’s Awakening* (New York: The New Press, 2016), p. 221.

²⁵ Violet Barungi, Oral History Interview; Makerere University Library: Makerere University Archives, AR/MAK/99/11, Makerere University Faculty of Arts, Literature Dept. Notices, 1954-68.

²⁶ MacPherson, ‘Makerere: The Place of the Early Sunrise’, p. 24.

²⁷ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer’s Awakening* (New York: The New Press, 2016), p. 221.

²⁸ Sicherman, ‘Revolutionising the Literature Curriculum at the University of East Africa: Literature and the Soul of the Nation’, p. 134; NLS: Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/41, Meeting of *Busara (Nexus)* Magazine, 2 October 1968.

²⁹ See: Sicherman, ‘Revolutionising the Literature Curriculum at the University of East Africa: Literature and the Soul of the Nation’, p. 132.

³⁰ National Library of Scotland (NLS): Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/45, Kampala Writers’ Workshop.

some of the highest occupations across the region after graduating.³¹ Many had previously attended elite mission schools: for example, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, an alumnus of Makerere University, had been enrolled at Alliance High School in Kenya; Ugandan author and fellow-Makerere alum, Timothy Wangusa had attended King’s College, Budo, in Uganda, and Violet Barungi, Elvania Zirimu and Rose Mbowa had been educated at Gayaza High School for Girls, also in Uganda.³² The exclusivity of these circles was reflected in their relatively small nature at the time: Barungi recalls that, when she first arrived at Makerere, she saw many familiar faces amongst fellow “Gayaza girls” – including Elvania Zirimu – and Royal College Nairobi alumni.³³

The connections brought about by being able to study alongside, and socialise with, students from other parts of East Africa, promoted regional identifications and a sense of ‘East African-ness’ – rather than national or ethnic identifications – in the first decade of its countries’ independence. In a speech given at the Makerere University Golden Jubilee Celebrations in October 1972, the President of the Makerere University Convocation, politician Abu Mayanja, declared that “the very soul of East African unity is the fact that so many people were products of the same institution. ... Because of the personal contact that Makerere has encouraged within its tutorial system between various people from various countries, a lot of goodwill has been generated within the region, mainly because of this personal contact.”³⁴ This East African integration was not only an academic, but also a political ideal, as the independent governments of the three countries worked towards achieving an East African federation, and, as a result of this, pan-African unity.³⁵

In 1970 increasing political turmoil and authoritarianism in Obote’s Uganda and Kenyatta’s Kenya saw East African nations becoming increasingly introverted, at the expense of East African regionalism. This saw an end to the University of East Africa, which was dissolved, and the individual institutions became the national universities of their respective countries, as

³¹ British Library: “Makerere Revisited”, *Makerere Journal*, No. 11, 1965.

³² Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012); Oumah Otienoh, ‘Class of 1964: A Chat with Literary Great Prof Timothy Wangusa’, *Nation*, 21 March 2020, <https://nation.africa/kenya/life-and-style/weekend/class-of-1964-a-chat-with-literary-great-prof-timothy-wangusa-281210> (accessed 21 April 2020); Violet Barungi, Oral History Interview.

³³ Violet Barungi, Oral History Interview.

³⁴ Makerere University Library: Makerere University Archives, AR/MAK/11/1/1: Makerere University, Ceremonies, Speech (Hon. A. K. Mayanja), Golden Jubilee Celebrations, 1972.

³⁵ See: Chris Vaughan et al., ‘Thinking East African: Debating Federation and Regionalism, 1960-1977’, in *Visions of African Unity, New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects*, ed. Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits, African Histories and Modernities (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 49–75.

Makerere University, the University of Nairobi and the University of Dar es Salaam.³⁶ However, though the University of East Africa no longer existed formally, connections between the individual institutions remained: for example, the Inter-University Committee for East Africa facilitated a university staff exchange scheme, in which academics could visit departments at a different East African university for up to a month.³⁷ Two academics who took advantage of this were Pio Zirimu and Angus Calder, of the Department of Literature at Makerere University and the University of Nairobi respectively. Calder replaced Zirimu at Makerere for two weeks, and Zirimu worked at the University of Nairobi for three, both delivering lectures and seminars.³⁸ Later on, the maintenance of these ties allowed for the University of Nairobi to act as a haven for academics from Makerere fleeing the oppressive regimes of Milton Obote and later Idi Amin that stifled academic output and creativity.³⁹ The ways in which the student publications of the individual institutions contributed towards East African regional integration will be discussed in greater detail below.

Makerere College's English Department and its student publications

An appreciation of the importance of Ugandan and East African student publications requires an understanding of the nature of the English Department of Makerere College. The Department mentored some of the greatest minds in East African literature, who were editors of and regular contributors to the Department's publications, *Penpoint* and *Dhana*. While Makerere College had other student publications, it is because of the later importance of the English Department's alumni to East Africa's cultural life, and the way in which they contributed to East African regionalism, that their magazines will be scrutinised here.

Makerere College's English Department

In the decade following Ugandan independence in 1962, the Makerere English Department spearheaded the direction East African literature would take in the post-colonial period, in its production of some of the region's most celebrated authors, and its promotion of written literature in English. It is little wonder, therefore, that the African Writers Conference was held at Makerere College in June 1962, attended by writers from all over the continent, including Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Eskia Mphahlele and Grace Ogot. The week-long proceedings

³⁶ Sicherman, 'Revolutionising the Literature Curriculum at the University of East Africa: Literature and the Soul of the Nation', p. 129.

³⁷ NLS: Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/25, Kigozi to Gurr, 11 March 1971

³⁸ NLS: Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/25, Zirimu to Kigozi, 17 March 1971; Cook to Calder, 9 December 1970.

³⁹ NLS: Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/26, Gurr to Calder, 18 October 1971.

raised debates that determined the field of African literature for decades to come, as well as laying the origins for Heinemann's African Writers Series.⁴⁰

Makerere was praised for having "contributed enormously to the intellectual life of East Africa ... [having] encouraged and promoted several cultural activities, including the theatre, African creative writing and the very fine products of its School of Fine Art."⁴¹ The English Department grew and its students thrived under the tutelage of Professor David Cook, a British expatriate academic who joined Makerere in 1962, acting as Senior Lecturer from 1965, Head of Department from 1967, and, eventually, Dean of Faculty of Arts between 1967 and 1969.⁴² Other members of staff included Margaret MacPherson, Hugh Dinwiddy and, from the late 1960s, David Rubadiri, Pio Zirimu and Austin Bukonya. Students and staff in the Makerere English Department enjoyed a close relationship – due to their small numbers – and stayed in touch even after students had left Makerere.⁴³ The English Department nurtured young writers who would later become famous names in East African literature, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, Rebecca Njau, Timothy Wangusa, Rose Mbowa, Micere Mugo, and John Ruganda.⁴⁴

Professor Cook was very active in promoting writing and Uganda's literary scene, and "his greatest contribution to the cultural and intellectual life of East Africa lies in the role he played in the development of the region's literature."⁴⁵ He helped the growth of the English Department's publication *Penpoint*, which flourished under his guidance, with select pieces being published in the volume *Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology* in 1965.⁴⁶ Under Cook and fellow British expatriate academic Margaret MacPherson, Makerere also saw the establishment of the Makerere Free Travelling Theatre (MFTT) in 1964, a student theatre company that performed its plays across Uganda and East Africa.⁴⁷ In addition to developing their theatrical talents, the MFTT allowed some of its student members – who would later

⁴⁰ See: James Currey, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008); University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Centre: International Association for Cultural Freedom, Records, Box 436, Folder 9.

⁴¹ Makerere University Library: Makerere University Archives, AR/MAK/11/1/1: Makerere University, Ceremonies, Speech (Hon. A. K. Mayanja), Golden Jubilee Celebrations, 1972.

⁴² Wumi Raji, 'Tribute to David Cook', *Research in African Literatures* 35, no. 1 (2004): 3–5, p. 3.

⁴³ Makerere University Library: Makerere University Archives, Faculty of Arts, Literature Department Correspondence, 1967-1968, Nair to MacPherson, 13 September 1967; Nakonha to MacPherson, 31 January 1968.

⁴⁴ Otienoh, 'Class of 1964: A Chat with Literary Great Prof Timothy Wangusa'.

⁴⁵ Raji, 'Tribute to David Cook', p. 3.

⁴⁶ David Cook, 'Introduction', in *Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology*, ed. David Cook (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1965), viiii–xii, p. viiii.

⁴⁷ David Cook, 'The Makerere Free Travelling Theatre: An Experimental Model', ed. Eckhard Breitingger (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2000), 37–51.

become Uganda's most prominent dramaturges – to hone their literary skills, through writing plays that were performed by the students. These included Elvania Zirimu's *Keeping Up With the Mukasas*, or Austin Bukenya's *The Secret*. Other student members of the MFTT were John Ruganda, Rose Mbowa and Lydia Kayanja.⁴⁸ Cook was also co-producer with Miles Lee of the show *In Black and White* for the radio station Radio Uganda, for which they were in weekly conversation to discuss latest pieces of East African literature, such as Rose Mbowa's poem *Ruin*, originally published in *Penpoint*, *Keeping Up with the Mukasas*, or Grace Ogot's short story "The Empty Basket" in *Land Without Thunder*.⁴⁹

In 1967, following the movement to abolish the English Department at the University of Nairobi, which will be discussed in greater detail below, Makerere's English Department began to Africanise its curriculum, allowing students to study works by African authors – however, the African lecturers in the Department, Zirimu and Rubadiri, remained unhappy with what they saw as mere cosmetic changes.⁵⁰ When Zirimu joined the Department as a Makerere graduate, later to become Professor of Linguistics, he established a new field of study, Orature, which focussed on African oral literatures.⁵¹ He called for structural changes in the Literature curriculum, arguing that it should include "nationalist, socialist and revolutionary literatures of other peoples".⁵² The English Department's African staff increasingly played a greater role in the university's cultural life: for instance, Rubadiri as adjudicator in a Department English reading competition, and Pio and Elvania Zirimu hosted poetry soirées in their home.⁵³ However, from the late 1960s, creativity and literary output at Makerere – and Ugandan generally – began to dwindle, in light of the oppressive regimes of Milton Obote and Idi Amin. It was Amin's anti-intellectualism especially that resulted in the exodus of many academics, both expatriate and Ugandan, as they sought institutions with greater intellectual freedom, with some beginning work at University College, Nairobi, as will be discussed below.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ 'Report of the Makerere Travelling Theatre, 1965' (Makerere University, 1965); Austin Bukenya, Oral History Interview.

⁴⁹ David Cook, *In Black and White: Writings from East Africa with Broadcast Discussions and Commentary* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1976).

⁵⁰ Sicherman, 'Revolutionising the Literature Curriculum at the University of East Africa: Literature and the Soul of the Nation', p. 137.

⁵¹ MacPherson, 'Makerere: The Place of the Early Sunrise', p. 34; Makerere University Library: Carol Sicherman Papers, AR/SIC/1/3/8: Cook, David 1961, Literature: the great teaching of the world.

⁵² SOAS Library and Special Collections: Pio Zirimu, "'Here I Stand': An Unfinished Trend of Thinking of the Function of a Department of Literature", *Dhana*, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 47-8.

⁵³ Makerere University Library: Makerere University Archives, AR/MAK/99/11, Makerere University Faculty of Arts, Literature Dept. Notices, 1954-1968.

⁵⁴ See: Eckhard Breiting, 'Introduction', in *Uganda: The Cultural Landscape*, ed. Eckhard Breiting (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2000), 1–12, p. 4; Strauhs, *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics, and*

Penpoint

As East Africa's first literary magazine, *Penpoint* was established in 1958 under the auspices of the Makerere English Department, and would, for the following twelve years, publish the works of budding young talented student writers in the English Department.⁵⁵ Much of the magazine's writing, therefore, railed against traditional and neo-colonial publishing networks dominated by companies such as Oxford University Press and Heinemann (a further discussion on this is provided in Chapter 2). Published works in *Penpoint* included short stories, plays, poems, as well as essays, and topics covered love and marriage, post-independence African politics, colonialism, and religion. Margaret MacPherson later recalled that "students did not live in an ivory tower at Makerere and often found creative writing an outlet for stresses pressing on them from the outside."⁵⁶

Penpoint was a very popular literary magazine that received many contributions from students over the years, and editors were forced to be selective in their choice of material to publish. Indeed, for Issue 16 published in February 1964, the editorial board admitted that, for want of space, they had been forced to decline a piece by James Ngugi – although this was later to be published as *A Meeting in the Dark* in the anthology *Modern African Stories* edited by Ezekiel Mphahlele.⁵⁷ In 1965, a select number of works taken from 17 issues of *Penpoint* were published in the anthology *Origin East Africa*, edited by David Cook, of which some of the pieces will be discussed below. Writing in his introduction, Cook argues that the selected "material reflects two vital qualities of Makerere: its cosmopolitan nature, but also its essential East Africanness", with authors hailing from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Malawi, the United States of America, and Britain.⁵⁸ This pan-African authorship was not merely cosmetic: the editorial body voiced its solidarity with oppressed Africans across the continent in Issue 18 (March 1965), when it stated its intention to publish South African poet Dennis Brutus, who was imprisoned for his anti-apartheid activism.⁵⁹ The Makerere English Department's shift to Africanise its curriculum in 1968 could also be observed in *Penpoint*: in Issue 225, published in 1970, a play in Swahili – titled *Tutakula Nini Kesho*, by Jane Geteria – was included in the English-language magazine, with the editors stating that "literature in Swahili needs all the

Participation, p. 14; Austin Bukonya, 'Sixty Years of Ugandan Literature' (Makerere University, Kampala, 2007), p. 5.

⁵⁵ Cook, 'Introduction' p. viiii.

⁵⁶ MacPherson, 'Makerere: The Place of the Early Sunrise', p. 25.

⁵⁷ SOAS: Editorial, *Penpoint*, 16, February 1964, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Cook, 'Introduction', p. x.

⁵⁹ SOAS: Editorial, *Penpoint*, 18, March 1965.

encouragement it can get” and questioning “who [they] are writing for when thousands of East Africans speak and understand Swahili.”⁶⁰ This was also the final issue to be published under the name *Penpoint*, before the magazine was renamed *Dhana* in 1971.

Many names amongst the *Penpoint* contributors and the magazine editorial board are recognisable today as those of famous East African literary figures. The editorial board for Issue 16, published in February 1964, for instance, included David Cook, Paulinus Okoye and Madeleine Githae (known today as Micere Mugo). For the following issue, published in September 1964, David Cook was replaced by fellow Makerere lecturer, M. M. Carlin. Madeleine Githae also made contributions to *Penpoint* in the form of a short story, *The Innocent* (Issue 16, February 1964) and a play, *A Problem for the Young* (Issue 18, March 1965). Rose Mbowa published numerous poems in the student publication, including *Ruin* (Issue 19, October 1965), which will be discussed in greater detail below, *The Moon* (Issue 21, October 1966), *The Easter Bull* (Issue 21, October 1966) and *The Real She* (Issue 21, October 1966). Other later-famous writers included David Rubadiri, whose poem *Okigbo* featured in Issue 23 (August 1968), and Laban Erapu with his poems *The Rupture* (Issue 21, October 1966) and *Dear Cousin Patricia* (Issue 23, August 1968). Not all women featured in *Penpoint* became professional writers, or gained the fame their male peers, or other women, received. One such example is Joy French, whose published poems in different issues, including *Prayer in a New York Apartment* (Issue 17, September 1964), *Paradox* (Issue 19, October 1965), and *Disenchantment* (Issue 23, August 1968). Fellow student and writer Joy Lehai was in a similar position, with her poems *Pop World* (Issue 23, August 1968) and *Rain* (Issue 24, August 1968) – although she did gain fame as Miss Uganda in 1968.⁶¹ There were also some staff contributions to *Penpoint*, such as an essay by Professor David Cook and Trevor Whittock, titled “ ‘English’ in Africa now”, in which they responded to questions from students on the education of English Literature to African students (Issue 19, October 1965). The diversity of this list of authors is striking, especially the fact that – comparatively – more women seemed prominent in the magazine’s pages, unlike in published literature (which will be discussed in Chapter 2).

⁶⁰ SOAS: Editorial, *Penpoint*, 25, 1970.

⁶¹ Ali A. Mazrui, ‘Political Man and the Heritage of Hair: Some African Perspectives’, *British Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1972): 1–20, p. 9.

Dhana

The magazine *Penpoint* was renamed *Dhana* – “a Swahili word for thought or imagination” – in 1971, in an effort, as the editors argued, to “rechristen the journal with a symbolically relevant East African name”, part of the wider decolonising moment that could be observed in the English departments at Makerere and Nairobi.⁶² Its first few issues in the early 1970s, the magazine still saw well-known East African literary figures as its contributors: David Rubadiri, John Ruganda and Bahadur Tejani contributed to Volume 1, Number 1, published in 1971, while Peter Nazareth, Rose Mbowa, and Laban Erapu wrote pieces for Volume 2, Number 1 in 1972. *Dhana* enjoyed contributions not only from Makerere, but also from other universities across East Africa – the University of East Africa had been disbanded by this point – such as from University of Nairobi graduate Literature student, Chris Wanjala, who wrote a book review for the magazine in 1972. This demonstrates that, in spite of the dissolution of the University of East Africa and the gradual breaking down of political relations between East African countries, there was still intra-department exchange taking place, as discussed previously. From 1973 onwards, with the exception of Elvania Zirimu, who continued to regularly contribute poems and short stories throughout the 1970s, fewer laudable names populated the pages of *Dhana*. Contributors were mostly students – as opposed to a list inclusive of academics, publishers, and other literary figures – which is indicative of the academic exodus from Makerere under the rule of Idi Amin. As mentioned above, many of these academics resettled at the University of Nairobi, already from the late 1960s.

Similar to its predecessor, *Dhana*’s literary pieces consisted of poems, essays and short stories. In relation to the darkening political situation under Idi Amin in Uganda, contributions became increasingly socio-political in nature, with pieces interrogating international politics, culture and contemporary social issues. For Volume 1, Number 1 in 1971, for instance, Amar Kapoor, a fifth-year Makerere medicine student, wrote a poem titled *The Nightmare Ground*, which was about the Vietnam War. In 1972, Elvania Zirimu wrote a short story, *Nvanungi*, about a teenage pregnancy (Volume 2, Number 2), and in 1975, Literature student Angela Nashakhoma Nakitwe thematised the topic of male circumcision in her short story *Circumcision* (Volume 5, Number 1).

The Makerere College English Department and its student publications were some of the keystones of East African cultural and literary life. The contents of the magazine give a sense

⁶² SOAS: Editorial, *Dhana*, 1, no. 1, 1971.

of how young people understood and came of age in a decade of radical social and political change for East Africa. The list of contributors reflected Makerere's diverse student body, and through reading the words of fellow students from Nigeria, Tanganyika or Kenya, young people were able to develop a greater sense of 'East African-ness' as well as pan-Africanism. Fostering such connectivity and regionalism was not solely done by 'big men' and state structures, as young people too were involved in this, in slightly less formal ways, as links were created on paper, as well as in social settings at Makerere. The role University College, Nairobi played in this will now be interrogated.

University College, Nairobi's English Department and its student publications

From the late 1960s, the cultural and intellectual hub shifted from Kampala to Nairobi, largely due to the oppressive regimes of Milton Obote and later Idi Amin, which stifled intellectualism and academic output. By this time, Nairobi had become "the most important city in East Africa"⁶³, and contained both the infrastructure and the diversity to receive this influx from Uganda. Although Kenyatta's government was also characterised by authoritarianism and intolerance of criticism, it did not share the anti-intellectualism of Amin. The English Department of University College, Nairobi grew in regional importance, as more academics from Uganda and other parts of Africa flocked there, as did its publications, *Nexus* and *Busara*.

University College, Nairobi's English Department

University College, Nairobi witnessed the growth of its English Department, as African graduates – many of whom were former Makerereans – began to return to teach, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who returned in 1967 after completing a Postgraduate degree at the University of Leeds.⁶⁴ The Department also became a haven for academics fleeing Uganda, who enjoyed the initial greater intellectual freedom offered at the University of Nairobi.⁶⁵ Younger than its Makerere counterpart, the English Department at Nairobi was more radical than that of the traditional Makerere, and consisted of Marxist-leaning East African academics, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Taban Lo Liyong and Okot p'Bitek.⁶⁶ By contrast, a decade after Ugandan independence, the Makerere English department staff still consisted overwhelmingly of expatriate academics. In 1968, Ngũgĩ, Lo Liyong and p'Bitek, in addition to Henry Owuor

⁶³ Sicherman, 'Revolutionising the Literature Curriculum at the University of East Africa: Literature and the Soul of the Nation', p. 132.

⁶⁴ Sicherman, 'The Leeds-Makerere Connection and Ngũgĩ's Intellectual Development', p. 13.

⁶⁵ Strauhs, *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics, and Participation*, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Sicherman, 'Revolutionising the Literature Curriculum at the University of East Africa: Literature and the Soul of the Nation', p. 133-4.

Anyumba, launched a revolution calling for the Department's abolition. Rejecting the Eurocentrism of the Department's curriculum, and "the primacy of English language and literature", they called for the creation of a Department of African Literature and Languages instead.⁶⁷ Their professed aim was "to orientate [themselves] towards placing Kenya, East Africa, and then Africa in the centre. All other things are to be considered in their relevance to [their] situation, and their contribution towards understanding [themselves]."⁶⁸ This was to involve a radical curriculum change to include oral literature, Swahili literature, Modern African literature, drama, as well as European literature.⁶⁹ As a result, in 1970, the English Department was replaced with the Department of Literature, and the new Department of Linguistics and African Languages was established.⁷⁰ The Department of Literature worked "to discard what [was] remote and to achieve a real relevance to a characteristic and authentic African experience", in order to promote "the understanding and new development of living African culture."⁷¹ It was this revolution that also brought about the curriculum changes at Makerere, discussed above. However, similar to Makerere, University College, Nairobi was not impervious to political change: after the election of Daniel Arap Moi as President in 1978, creative output gradually came to a halt, as Moi's regime stifled any form of government critique.⁷²

Nexus and Busara

Almost a decade younger than its Makererean counterpart, the publication of University College Nairobi, *Nexus*, was established in 1967, at the same time that Makerere English graduate Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o returned to Nairobi, after gaining a postgraduate degree at the University of Leeds. Produced by the college's English department, *Nexus* contained creative writing and book reviews, and its editorial board consisted of the now well-known Kenyan writers Leonard Kibera and K. A. Kassam. After one issue, however, *Nexus* was renamed *Busara* in 1968, primarily due to marketing reasons to reach a broader audience, with its editors stating that "for people involved in [their] kind of business a name that is at once mystical, enticing and, above all, symbolic was necessary."⁷³ This change in name was accompanied by

⁶⁷ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 146.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ogot and Ogot, *Fountain of Knowledge: History of the University of Nairobi, 1952-2020*, p. 69.

⁷¹ NLS: Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/28, University of Kenya Proposed Department of Literature Development Plan, 1970-73.

⁷² Strauhs, *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics, and Participation*, p. 17.

⁷³ SOAS: Editorial, *Busara*, 1, no. 1, 1968.

a different publication focus for the magazine, to also include “more critical factual articles regarding [East Africa’s] cultural or social scene” , and the East African Publishing House became its publisher.⁷⁴

Readership of the magazine was broad, with letters of appreciation to the editor arriving from places as far away as Texas.⁷⁵ The editorial board changed to include Taban Lo Liyong, Grace Ogot, Adrian Roscoe, James Stewart, Angus Calder, Henry Kimbugwe, Awori wa Kataka, Richard Gacheche and Amin Kassam. They worked to produce and promote *Busara* beyond Kenya and East Africa, and sought contributions from “international scholars”.⁷⁶ Some editors, such as Taban Lo Liyong and English expatriate academics Stewart and Calder, also contributed to *Busara*.⁷⁷ Most contributors, however, were University College, Nairobi students, who reflected the diversity of the University of East Africa, as they included, amongst others, African and Asian Kenyans. There were several women students – who did not necessarily become professional writers after they graduated – who wrote for the magazine, such as Primila Lewis who wrote an essay titled “Some Aspects of the African Novel” (*Nexus*, Volume 1, Number 1, 1967), or Neera Kent, whose book review for Grace Ogot’s *Land Without Thunder* was published in the first issue of *Busara* (Volume 1, Number 1, 1968). In 1969, Catherine Ndegwa’s short story *The Revelation* was published, as well Mary Kimori’s essay “What Future Drama”, and Dorothea Edmondson’s poem *Black Art* (*Busara*, Volume 2, Number 3).

From the late 1960s onwards, former Makerere names that were seen in *Penpoint* and early issues of *Dhana* began to populate the pages of *Busara*. Much of this was due to, as discussed previously, Makerere academics moving to Nairobi; however, some writers, regardless of their institutional affiliations, continued to write for both magazines. Chris Wanjala is an example given above, and others included Bahadur Tejani, a Makerere Literature graduate, who contributed to both *Dhana* (Volume 1, Number 1) and *Busara* (Volume 3, Number 4) in 1971; Eisha Stephen Atieno-Odhiambo, Makerere graduate and recent hire in the Nairobi History Department – later to become a renowned Professor – who wrote for *Busara* (Volume 3, Number 1) in 1970 and for *Dhana* (Volume 1, Number 1) in 1971; or Theo Luzuka, a Makerere Literature student and editor of *Dhana*, who contributed to *Busara* in 1971 (Volume 3, Number 4).

⁷⁴ SOAS: Ibid.; Editorial, *Busara*, 1, no. 2, 1969.

⁷⁵ SOAS: Editorial *Busara*, 1, no. 2, 1969.

⁷⁶ NLS: Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/41, *Busara* Editorial Board Meeting, 14 May 1969; *Busara* Editorial Board Meeting, 7 October 1969.

⁷⁷ SOAS: *Busara*, 1, no. 1, 1968.

Similar to the publications at Makerere, an interrogation of *Nexus* and *Busara* reveals the dreams, thoughts and hopes students had for an East African future – even if diplomatic relations between Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika were on the verge of collapse and the University of East Africa was dissolved. At its prime, the University of East Africa served as a beacon of intellect in its independent countries, promoting regionalism within eastern Africa as a whole. It allowed for student exchange between all three East African countries, fostering greater regional – rather than national or ethnic – identifications among young people. Both English Departments at the sister colleges of Makerere and Nairobi played a large role in this, as the two enjoyed an intimate connection. Kenyan students wrote for Makerere’s publications, Ugandan students contributed to those of Nairobi, and many former Makerereans later worked in the Nairobi English Department. The Departments contributed immensely to East Africa’s cultural life and literary vibrancy through their student publications. The role women students played in this, and how their writing formed an important contribution to the cultural interiority of the post-colonial state, will now be interrogated.

Social inequalities

This section will examine two pieces published in *Penpoint*: The poem *Ruin* by Rose Mbowa (Issue 19, October 1965) and the short story *Kefa Kazana* by Violet Kokunda (Issue 16, February 1964), both of which were also featured in literary anthologies edited by David Cook and David Rubadiri. The pieces treat social issues through highlighting the vulnerability of women and orphan children. Mbowa and Kokunda represent these wider populations with their creativity, critiquing the post-colonial state and society for neglecting them, bringing with their words the plight of vulnerable communities to the public sphere.

“Ruin”, Rose Mbowa

Writer, actress and Ugandan dramaturge Rose Mbowa was born in 1942 in Kibuye, Kampala. She was educated at Gayaza High School, and was later a student of English Literature at Makerere College, graduating in 1967. As an undergraduate, she was very active in Makerere student life, involved with the MFTT, as well as writing for the English Department’s literary magazines. Her poems *Ruin* and *That Game* were both published in *Penpoint*, as well as in David Cook and David Rubadiri’s collection *Poems from East Africa* (East African Educational Publishers, 1971). Rose Mbowa studied for a Master’s in Theatre Arts at The University of Leeds, and after graduation worked as a producer for radio drama for Radio Uganda. Following this brief stint, she began acting, receiving the Best Actress Certificate of Merit of the Uganda National Theatre in 1973. One of Rose Mbowa’s most memorable roles was her personification

in 1998 of *Mother Courage* in *Nalukalala*, the Ugandan rendition of Berthold Brecht's play *Mother Courage and her Children*. She also wrote plays, including *Mother Uganda and her Children*, which was commissioned by the director of the Africa Centre in London in 1987. Rose Mbowa was the Head of Department for Makerere's Department for Music, Dance and Drama in 1987 and 1989-91, and also actively promoted 'theatre in development', in taking theatre 'to the people' in rural areas, in order to sensitise and educate them around social issues. She died in 1999.⁷⁸

The poem *Ruin*, as mentioned above, was published in *Penpoint's* Issue 19 in October 1965, and in David Cook and David Rubadiri's collection *Poems from East Africa* (East African Educational Publishers, 1971). It was re-printed in the anthology *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, edited by Amandina Lihamba et al., in 2007. Consisting of five five-line stanzas, *Ruin* describes the experience of a young woman approaching a large, "dark and gloomy" dilapidated building "up on a hill". The narrator describes the "heavy silence", and the feelings of unease the woman feels, as she walks "in an envelope of black" and through "giant trees, heavy and dark", past "guards on duty". Only the song of a cricket accompanies her, "lighting her path and her will", though "suddenly it [stops] / as if suppressed by a heavy hand." When the woman eventually arrives at the building and pushes open the door, "a squeal [pierces] the air; / Flashes [blind] her sight", and she falls down "on the grim, rude stone."⁷⁹

A feminist perspective on Mbowa's poem and a reading of her protagonist approaching the ruined building, illuminates a young woman coming of age in a patriarchal society. Mbowa's "striking images of the imposing, solid structure and the tenacious 'she' who dares to confront it", symbolises "a challenge to patriarchy."⁸⁰ The surrounding darkness, in combination with the phallic imagery describing the "guards on duty, erect in the dark", are a metaphor for prevailing patriarchal structures that young women are forced to navigate. The protagonist, however, remains perseverant, and continues to her destination, which is reinforced with the final line of each stanza: "But on she walked", "still—on she moved", "through them—she pushed." The poem ends on a pessimistic tone, as the young woman, once she reaches the

⁷⁸ Makerere University Library: Carol Sicherman Papers, AR/SIC/1/4/1, "Tribute to Ugandan first lady of letters", Emilia Illieva, Sunday Nation, 13 June 1999; AR/SIC/1/4/1, Timothy Wangusa, The New Vision, Thursday 18 February 1999; Austin Bukenya, 'Rose Mbowa: Three Poems, Uganda 1967, 1971, English', ed. Amandina Lihamba et al. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), 251–54; Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare and Eckhard Breitingner, 'Ugandan Drama in English', in *Uganda: The Cultural Landscape*, ed. Eckhard Breitingner (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2000), 224–49, at p. 255.

⁷⁹ Rose Mbowa, 'Ruin', in *Poems from East Africa*, ed. David Cook and David Rubadiri (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1971), 100.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

building, is knocked down, and “she [descends] at a blow” to the ground, a literal image for the blows patriarchy deals to young women.

When *Ruin* was originally published, its ambiguity led to much discussion in East African literary circles: while “for ... [Rose Mbowa’s] fellow students the poem had no specific meaning”⁸¹, on his radio show *In Black and White*, David Cook misinterpreted it as “the painful, terrifying, yet compelling experience of the girl being drawn into her first sexual knowledge, being tempted and, though she gets no pleasure, submitting.”⁸² Decades later, Mbowa could still recall her mortification at Cook’s misunderstanding of the poem, which she claimed had never crossed her mind when writing.⁸³ The poem, in actual fact, was inspired by a big abandoned building in the area of Kibuye, Kampala – her childhood home – “about which she and her friend speculated as they walked by, wondering what lurked behind those imposing closed doors.”⁸⁴ As a source, it is useful to understand what it meant for a young woman writer – Mbowa was twenty-two when the poem was first published – to have such an immense impact as a student on the East African literary scene. At a time when very few African women were recognised for literary contributions, this was a great achievement, and was only the beginning of a stellar career for Mbowa. *Ruin*, therefore, symbolises the significant contribution of women to the East African literary scene in the 1960s, which remained largely overlooked by historians and literary critics.

With *Ruin*, one becomes aware of “the emergence of an individual and original voice, aware of the challenges facing a young person coming to maturity in the early years of Uganda’s independence”.⁸⁵ Gender-based inequalities were highly pronounced in Uganda in this period, fabricated into the very structures of society, manifesting themselves in almost every aspect of women’s personal and professional lives: For instance, Joyce Mpanga, one of Uganda’s first female politicians, recalls the sexism with which she was met in parliament when she was elected to Uganda’s Legislative Council (LEGCO) in 1960.⁸⁶ In a similar vein, as the LEGCO began to collect information on women’s issues, in 1960, northern Ugandan women spoke to council members of abuse from their husbands that was culturally normalised and condoned.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Makerere University Library: Carol Sicherman Papers, AR/SIC/1/4/1, “The Rose that never withered”, Timothy Wangusa, *The New Vision*, Thursday 18 February 1999.

⁸² Cook, *In Black and White: Writings from East Africa with Broadcast Discussions and Commentary*, p. 19-20.

⁸³ Makerere University Library: Carol Sicherman Papers, AR/SIC/1/4/1, “Tribute to Ugandan first lady of letters”, Emilia Illieva, *Sunday Nation*, 13 June 1999.

⁸⁴ Bukenya, ‘Rose Mbowa: Three Poems, Uganda 1967, 1971, English’, p. 252.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ See: Joyce R. Mpanga, *It’s a Pity She’s Not a Boy!* (Kampala: First Printing, 2019), p. 140.

⁸⁷ See: Rhoda Nakibuka Nsibirwa Kalema, *My Life Is But a Weaving* (Nairobi: Moran Publishers, 2021), p. 78.

In the poem, the raw emotions that are revealed with each line, and the ultimate frustration with the limitations that patriarchy sets for women, which are expressed in the poem, are a critique of contemporary Ugandan and East African society, expressing the hope that this might change with independence. Mbowa's words form part of a discourse on Africanisation, expressing the idea of a decolonisation that would include gender equality, and cementing her place as a figure of dissent.

"Kefa Kazana", Violet Kokunda

Kefa Kazana is a short story penned by second-year Makerere History student Violet Kokunda, known today as Violet Barungi. Barungi was born in Mbarara, Uganda in 1943, and was educated at Gayaza High School and Royal College Nairobi, and later studied History at Makerere. After graduating, Barungi worked for the East African Income Tax Department in Kampala, before she was hired in 1972 to work in the Ugandan branch of the East African Literature Bureau – later the Ugandan Literature Bureau after the dissolution of the East African Community – where she remained until 1994. In 1997, Barungi joined FEMRITE, the Uganda Women Writers' Association, where she remained until her retirement in 2007.⁸⁸ Her works include the novels *The Shadow and the Substance* (Lake Publishers and Enterprises, 1998) and *Cassandra* (Femrite Publications, 1999).

Written originally for a class assignment, *Kefa Kazana* was later published in Issue 16 of *Penpoint* in February 1964, as well as in *Origin East Africa*.⁸⁹ Telling the story of a homeless child, who has lost his parents, *Kefa Kazana* is laden with pathos, as the protagonist is subject to the mercy of the first-person narrator and their mother and siblings. The short story begins with the narrator who is about to prepare tea in the afternoon for her mother and sisters, when she discovers "a small boy in rags", Kefa Kazana, loitering behind her family's house. The narrator questions Kefa Kazana, and learns that he has "no home, no daddy, no mummy", a phrase she repeats several times in the short story. Kefa Kazana has a "bare, meagre body" and it is clear that he is starving. The narrator invites Kefa Kazana inside her family's kitchen and leaves the room to tell her mother about the boy. When she returns, it is obvious that Kefa Kazana has been "scraping the remains of [their] last meal out of the dish". Kefa Kazana is nervous to meet the narrator's family as "they might beat [him] like the others", although the narrator assures him that this will not happen. When the narrator's mother and sisters enter the kitchen to have their tea, another family member, Emmanuel arrives. Emmanuel demands to

⁸⁸ Violet Barungi, Oral History Interview.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

know where “this ragamuffin” has come from, telling Kefa Kazana to get “out of [Emmanuel’s] sight before [he] is tempted to throw a stone at [Kefa Kazana].” At these words, Kefa Kazana flees from the kitchen, and though the narrator and her sisters run outside and call after him, he does not return.⁹⁰

The character of Kefa Kazana, as a homeless orphan, represents the most vulnerable of individuals in any society, abandoned and mistreated by all, and Kokunda’s short story serves as a commentary on how society treats its most marginalised. The frequent repetition of the rhetorical triplet “no home, no daddy, no mummy” emphasises the importance of family and community to the individual – especially children – to grow and survive. Kokunda’s use of the first-person narrator shares an intimate perspective with the reader, underscoring the importance of empathy in society among individuals. The themes of poverty and inequality that are treated in *Kefa Kazana* were universal issues in the East Africa of Kokunda and her peers, and the short story would have resonated with its regional readership around East Africa.

Social issues and poverty, resulting in child abuse and neglect, or causing orphaned children, were not uncommon in Uganda in the late colonial and early post-colonial period, when Kokunda was writing. Politician Rhoda Kalema, who was working as a Community Development Officer for Uganda’s Social and Community Development Ministry from 1958, recalls many situations involving vulnerable children: parental neglect or child abandonment required work with the Juvenile Court, or with non-governmental organisation in Kampala such as the Catholic Adoption Society, Save the Children Fund, or orphanages including Sanyu Babies’ Home in Kampala.⁹¹ Kalema also encountered cases “of lost children aged between six and thirteen, who left their homes to visit relatives in towns but failed to find them.”⁹² Though individual examples, they are nevertheless indicative of broader social problems in 1960s Uganda that rendered children highly vulnerable. Through examining the experiences of a vulnerable child, Kokunda at the same time imagines an ideal post-independence East Africa, one that would have far fewer individuals like the character of Kefa Kazana. Kokunda’s voice becomes a proxy for broader social problems that made children orphans, as she represents these marginalised individuals in her short story. *Kefa Kazana* is a critique of the post-colonial state that fails to help such individuals, and forms part of a discourse that imagines a more equal form of decolonisation and independence.

⁹⁰ Violet Kokunda, ‘Kefa Kazana’, in *Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology*, ed. David Cook (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1965), 1–3.

⁹¹ Kalema, *My Life Is But a Weaving*, p. 67–69.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

As a source, similar to *Ruin*, the fact that a short story by a novice writer would receive recognition to the point of publication in a literary anthology, demonstrates the strong involvement of women in the East African literary scene. Violet Kokunda's next short story was published in *Ghala* (the literary supplement to the publication *East Africa Journal*) in 1972, and she only began writing again in the 1990s, when her youngest child was in school.⁹³ This large time span over decades in which Kokunda/Barungi was not actively writing is indicative of the challenges women in Uganda faced in becoming professional writers in this period, in part due to the gatekeeping practices of publishing houses (see Chapter 2 for a further discussion on this).

These two pieces were selected to demonstrate examples of women students' discourse on social inequality in the period of decolonisation and Africanisation. While the – primarily male dominated – debates on the matter centred around high politics and university education, Mbowa and Kokunda's creative works democratised the debate, in centring the socially marginalised figures of women and children. They act as proxies for wider issues around patriarchal oppression and child abuse, and represent the affected communities in their works. In writing about these themes for a wider audience, in this way, Mbowa and Kokunda introduced issues of social inequality to the public sphere and expanded the nature of civil society activism and dissent. This highlights the wide nature of the public sphere that contained debates and dissent on the nature of independence and Africanisation. Mbowa and Kokunda not only critique a form of independence that perpetuates these social inequalities, thereby bringing marginalised voices to a public platform.

Observations on East Africa's petit bourgeoisie

The topic of class and the nature of Africa's petit bourgeoisie after independence was also treated by East African women students in their creative writing. Two pieces by Makerere women students will be discussed here that contain astute observations on East African emerging bourgeoisie: the play *Keeping up with the Mukasas*, by Elvania Zirimu, published in *Dhana*, and the poem *Rosemary Anne Rita Anymore* (*Dhana*, Volume 5, Number 2, 1975) by Christine Matenjwa. The commentary on this social class in both pieces is relayed with such a sense of intimacy, that implies both writers were either from the petit bourgeoisie, or spent much time in proximity to it. The mocking tone both writers take in their pieces with also denotes how such middle-class individuals were viewed by the writers and their peers. Within

⁹³ Violet Barungi, Oral History Interview.

a discourse of Africanisation, these two pieces provide a commentary on the nature of class in Africa after independence, as well as the role of Africa's middle class in decolonisation.

“Keeping up with the Mukasas”, Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu

The Ugandan playwright, Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu laid her roots as a dramaturge during her student days in Makerere with *Keeping Up with the Mukasas*, chosen by David Cook for publication in *Origin East Africa*. An author, dramaturge, actor, and poet, Elvania Zirimu – nicknamed “Van” by her friends – was born in 1938 on Bussi Island, Uganda. She attended King's College Budo and later enrolled at Makerere College to train as a teacher. At Makerere, she was an active member of the literary community, making regular contributions to *Penpoint* and *Dhana*, as well as writing plays for the MFTT. After graduating from Makerere, she pursued a Master's in English at the University of Leeds. Back in Uganda, Zirimu became heavily involved in developing Ugandan theatre, and founded the theatre company Ngoma Players, as well as writing plays for them to perform. Her works include *Family Spear*, *When the Hunchback Made Rain* (discussed in Chapter 2), and *Snoring Strangers*. Her poetry includes the poem *Unto Thy Hands*, which was included in the anthology *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, edited by Jonathan Kariara and Ellen Kitonga (discussed in Chapter 3). Zirimu was married to the academic and writer Pio Zirimu, and died in a car accident in 1979.⁹⁴

Keeping Up with the Mukasas is one of Zirimu's first published works, and represents the beginning of a career in theatre, which would see her write and produce numerous other successful plays, such as *When the Hunchback Made Rain* (discussed in Chapter 2). The play *Keeping up with the Mukasas* is effective in its simplicity, as it consists of two scenes and only five characters: Mwebe, a cultivator, his wife, Zebia, their daughter, Namata, their neighbour, Sali, and Sali's wife, Nora. Mwebe, “an upper-middle-class Muganda” – a member of the Baganda ethnic group – is the centre of the plot, which largely takes place in his living room. The play begins with Zebia asking her daughter Namata to help with making the mid-morning tea for the family. The conversation between them reveals to the audience that theirs was a formerly affluent family, sustained by Mwebe's former office job in town. However, his employers “gave his job to someone else who could speak better English”, and they had to leave town to live somewhere more affordable. The loss of money is evident in luxuries the family

⁹⁴ Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 177; Ian Kiyingi Muddu, ‘Uganda's Elvania Namukwaya Who Broke the Glass Ceiling of Theatre’, *African Theatre Magazine*, 15 February 2020, <https://www.theafricantheatremagazine.com/ugandas-elveania-namukwaya-who-broke-the-glass-ceiling-of-theatre/> (accessed 24 October 2020).

can no longer afford: for instance, Zebia tells Namata to use firewood to make tea, as they “cannot afford to waste paraffin when there is plenty of firewood.” Mwebe enters and it is clear he is in a bad temper, as he snaps at his wife and daughter, demanding his tea. Their conversation turns to their neighbours, the Salis, and it is revealed that Mwebe is jealous of their comparatively more affluent lifestyle than his, as he observes, “They’re getting a car. He must be earning a lot. [His wife] was using an electric iron.” Mwebe bitterly remarks that Sali “was always below [him] in class, but because [Sali] could afford a secondary education and [Mwebe] couldn’t, that puts [Sali] above [Mwebe] on the social scale.” In the second scene, Sali and his wife, Nora, enter Mwebe’s living room. Nora takes Zebia outside to show off Sali’s new car, and Sali and Mwebe are left alone in the room. Their ensuing conversation reveals Sali’s financial worries and that he is spending beyond what he can afford, in order to please his wife: “she wants this, that and the other thing: she must always have her own way. She forced me to send the children to boarding school, saying they couldn’t go to school like everyone else’s. It’s getting too expensive for me. For two years she’s been pestering me to get a car, until I got so fed up that I had to borrow money to buy one, and then she wouldn’t let me buy a second-hand one.” After Sali and Nora leave, Mwebe’s behaviour towards his family becomes conciliatory, and he expresses his interest in seeing his children’s chalk drawings.⁹⁵

Keeping up with the Mukasas – a title that plays on the idiom “keeping up with the Joneses” – is a disparaging commentary on the post-colonial Ugandan petty bourgeoisie: it is set in 1962, the year of Ugandan independence, and touches on themes of elitism, class and society. The English colonial influence that characterised the Makerere English Department’s curriculum, is evident in *Keeping up with the Mukasas*, through its language and format. It expresses African social issues in the English language, using the Western European theatrical tradition of performance on a stage, “a reflection of [Zirimu’s] attempts to reconcile [her] own subjectivity with the position of [her community].”⁹⁶ Originally written for the MFTT, and performed across Uganda, *Keeping up with the Mukasa*’s “vividly realised domestic reality was easily appreciated” by its audiences, and the performers were aware of “the different reactions of

⁹⁵ Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, ‘Keeping up with the Mukasas’, ed. David Cook (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1965), 140–51.

⁹⁶ Gikandi and Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945*, p. 10-11; For a further discussion on African theatre in the English language, see: “The Language of African Theatre” in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), p. 37-41.

different sections of [their audiences].”⁹⁷ In 1962, Zirimu’s play won the Makerere English Competition.

The play serves as a commentary on the social effects of British colonial importations of Western capitalism and accompanying social stratifications that remained in place after independence. The character of Mwebe in *Keeping up with the Mukasas* is aware of these stratifications, which explain his jealousy of his neighbour Sali, who has attained material markers of bourgeois success, such as an electric iron for his wife, a car, and a boarding school education for his children. However, it is later revealed that Sali, in fact, cannot afford these items, and is succumbing to pressure from his wife, who wishes to preserve her middle-class distinction from their surrounding community. This is the most damning message of Zirimu’s play: the effects of capitalism and class lead to the disintegration within families – evident through Sali’s resentment of his wife – and ultimately that of communities, which is depicted through Mwebe’s jealousy of Sali.

It is significant that Zirimu chooses a Baganda family as characters to communicate the message with the play’s audience: as the ethnic group that had benefitted disproportionately under British colonialism through access to the best education and jobs, they therefore had also had the greatest access to wealth, in comparison to other ethnic groups in Uganda. This situation remained after independence, with most of Uganda’s middle class consisting of Baganda.⁹⁸ Ugandan audiences watching *Keeping up with the Mukasas* were aware of these distinctions, and Zirimu’s irony would have resonated all the more with them. The social stratifications created by British colonialism manifest themselves in the characters of the play, who Zirimu uses in a tongue in cheek manner to highlight the disruption this can cause to families and communities. Within a broader discourse of Africanisation and decolonisation, with her words, Zirimu critiques the persistence of Western forms of class divisions after independence.

This type of social commentary remained a trademark of Zirimu’s throughout her writing career, which she used later in works that she wrote as a professional writer, such as the play *When the Hunchback Made Rain* (discussed in Chapter 2), and the poem *Unto Thy Hands* (discussed in Chapter 3). However, of these pieces, *Keeping up with the Mukasas* remains distinctive in its satire of Uganda’s middle class, as well as the fact that it was solely published in student magazines, and not – even later on – by a publishing company. This is indicative of

⁹⁷ ‘Report of the Makerere Travelling Theatre, 1965’, p. 16-17, 20.

⁹⁸ See: Mahmood Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), p. 162-164; Richard J. Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 272.

the nature of the publishing industry at the time, and the limitations on topics that were deemed marketable: a satire of a middle-class Baganda family remained too niche a topic, and fell outside of marketing and publishing demands, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. However, *Keeping up with the Mukasas* cemented Zirimu as a budding playwright, and lay the groundwork for her later career in the dramatic arts.

“*Rosemary Anne Rita Any More*”, Christine Matenjwa

Christine Matenjwa was a second-year Literature student, who wrote the poem *Rosemary Anne Rita Any More* for Volume 5, Number 2 of *Dhana* in 1975. The poem – written in a ballad-like format – is about the lifestyle of an elite African Kenyan family. It is narrated by the wife and mother, who describes her family’s wealth and all the markers of their new social status, such as television and a housekeeper: “I spend the whole evening / Just watching T. V.! / We have servants / You see.” Her husband “is a very educated man”, of whom she narrates, “Not only is he a B.A.! / But also an M.A.! / A Dip. Ed., Dip. Drama / I don’t know Dip. What else! / He is very learned!” Her husband says of himself that “he is just / A simple man. / ... A true African”, and claims to reject Westernisation in a performance of Africanness: “Our house / Is filled / With masks / Carvings / Paintings / Beads / Spears / Shields ... All made / By our people / Our own people / Our own African artists / We have books / By our own writers.” The narrator shares, “My husband says / We must be proud / Of our culture” and that “We must not ape / Foreign ways”. The entire family has reclaimed their Gikuyu names, and the wife states, “I am not Rosemary Anne Rita / Any more / I am Wanjiku Njoroge / No foreign names / For us.”⁹⁹

The poem acts a commentary on the new social class of African elites that developed after independence – a class that, for its very privileged, had access to the wider world through education. Under British colonial rule in Kenya, this was a relatively small class; however, after independence, when race no longer presented an immediate barrier to upward social mobility, Kenya’s petit bourgeoisie expanded to include more Africans.¹⁰⁰ The country’s middle class grew from 10.1% of its population in 1950 to 19.3% in 1970.¹⁰¹ Matenjwa’s characters are based on this growing middle class, whom she uses to mock this petit bourgeoisie. The characters reclaiming of their Africanness falls in line with contemporary society-wide Africanisation drives after independence, which could be observed across the University of East Africa and its

⁹⁹ SOAS: Christine Matenjwa, *Rosemary Anne Rita Any More*, *Dhana*, 1, no. 2, 1975, p. 11-14.

¹⁰⁰ Dieter Neubert, ‘Kenya - an Unconscious Middle Class? Between Regional-Ethnic Political Mobilisation and Middle Class Lifestyles’, in *The Rise of Africa’s Middle Class: Myths, Realities and Critical Engagements*, ed. Henning Melber (London: Zed Books, 2016), 67–76, p. 68.

¹⁰¹ Dirk Berg-Schlosser, ‘Soziale Differenzierung Und Klassenbildung in Kenya - Entwicklungen Und Perspektiven’, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 20, no. 4 (1979): 312–29, at p. 321.

colleges English departments. Histories of “bourgeois cultures” in East Africa constitute “a history of performance, in which new identities were embraced and enacted ... as individuals battled over what constituted progress.”¹⁰² The character of the husband represents a Fanonesque “native intellectual [who defends] the existence of their national culture ... in the anxiety ... to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped.”¹⁰³ Such an intellectual, according to Fanon, “sets a high value on the customs, traditions and the appearances of his people; but his inevitable, painful experience only seems to be a banal search for exoticism.”¹⁰⁴

With *Rosemary Anne Rita Anymore*, Matenjwa satirises the predisposition of performative Africanness that characterised middle classes in East Africa. Within the drive towards Africanisation and decolonisation, Matenjwa critiques its performance through aesthetic markers – which include the masks and art decorating her characters house – rather than addressing structural factors, such as the social inequalities discussed above. The superficial nature of this performance is highlighted through the husband giving his wife Rosemary Anne Rita the Gikuyu name of Wanjiku Njoroge, a patriarchal act that erases her own agency, rather than allowing her to choose her own name. Matenjwa’s poem is a criticism of Kenyan and East African middle classes after independence, and decolonisation’s failure to address underlying structural issues in society, instead focussing on more aesthetic cultural elements. “Rosemary Anne Rita Anymore” was written a decade after the publication of *Keeping up with the Mukasas*; the fact that the East African petty bourgeoisie remained a prominent theme in the amateur writing of Makerere students demonstrates its enduring relevance for young people coming of age after Kenyan and Ugandan independence.

Independence in both Uganda and Kenya also signified the development of a new African elite and middle class: where previously, race was a barrier for many Africans to attain these social classes, this changed after independence, as more began to enjoy a new lifestyle perceivably befitting their social status. Reading Zirimu’s play and Matenjwa’s poem satirise this petit bourgeoisie, demonstrating the destruction of such social stratifications to communities, as well as the superficial nature of a form of Africanisation that fails to address societal issues. Both pieces formed part of a discourse that critiqued the direction decolonisation was taking.

¹⁰² Hunter, Emma, ‘Modernity, Print Media, and the Middle Class in Colonial East Africa’, in *The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire*, ed. Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 105–22, at p. 105.

¹⁰³ Frantz Fanon, ‘On National Culture’, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 166–99, at p. 168.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Literary analysis and pedagogy

This section will discuss two pieces from *Busara* – the publication of University College, Nairobi – that contain interrogations of literature and related pedagogy: an essay by Mary Kimori titled “What Future Drama” (Vol. 2, No. 3, 1969), and a piece by Ellen Mae Kitonga, “Conrad’s Image of African and Coloniser in *Heart of Darkness*” (Vol. 3, No. 1, 1970). The effects of the Africanisation of the – former – English Department, including the influx of academics from Uganda, making Nairobi the new intellectual hub in East Africa in the 1970s, are tangible in the pages of *Busara* in this period, and especially the pieces analysed here. They demonstrate their writers’ reflections on decoloniality in culture and education, and not only contribute to, but also broaden contemporary academic and political discourse on Africanisation.

“*What Future Drama*”, Mary Kimori

“What Future Drama” is an essay written by Mary Kimori, a postgraduate student in Education at University College, Nairobi, who had recently completed an undergraduate degree in English at the same College. The essay, published in *Busara* in 1969 (Volume 2, Number 3), questions the pedagogy behind drama education at schools in East Africa. Kimori laments the fact that there are “very few published plays that are authentically East African” – aside from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *The Black Hermit* and the collection *Short East African Plays in English* edited by James Cook and Miles Lee – despite “the keen interest shown by amateur acting groups especially in schools and colleges.” The essay discusses the low priority given to drama in schools around East Africa, due to the fact that it “is associated with ‘the professional theatres or the dramatic club ... but it is never seen as having any immediate relevance to the students’”. Kimori argues that this is primarily because foreign plays are “about strange people with strange customs, factors which have little or no interest for students”. In contrast, if, for instance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo’s play *The Black Hermit* (Heinemann, 1968),¹⁰⁵ was studied in school, “the students would every easily find themselves identifying with ... any of the characters, because they are immediately aware of the situation of which the drama arises.” Kimori continues to discuss the broader social importance of drama in East Africa, calling for the need to “[break] away from past attitudes towards the theatre and [look] at drama as a ‘vital, immediate human expression’”. She raises the idea of grafting a “popular village opera”, one more appropriate to an East African context: “we need not wait until we have a magnificent stage with elaborate lighting effects and

¹⁰⁵ *The Black Hermit* is Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s first play, performed by the Makerere Free Travelling theatre at the National Theatre in Kampala in November 1962, in celebration of Uganda’s independence.

other aids, but that we are already in a position to use our bodies and voices – the most important tools for dramatic activity – for popular entertainment.” Kimori’s essay discusses the importance of drama in East Africa, calling for the “need to encourage drama in East Africa.”¹⁰⁶

Kimori’s ideas form part of the decolonisation and Africanisation discourse that was taking place at University College, Nairobi at the time, due the call to abolish the English Department initiated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Taban Lo Liyong, and Henry Owuor Anyumba a year prior to the publication of Kimori’s essay. However, while in their essay *On the Abolition of the English Department*, the three writers and academics express the importance of teaching oral literatures, modern African literature and Swahili literature alongside European literature, they give less attention to drama. They merely state that “various dramatic works should be studied as parts of the literature of the people under study”, and that the syllabus should include a “course in play-writing, play-acting, directing, lighting, costuming, etc.”¹⁰⁷ Kimori’s essay rectifies this, in further exploring the importance of drama in East African schools and colleges, and its relevance in society more broadly.

Her ideas for an East African theatre as a “popular village opera” are similarly avant-garde, as Kimori deconstructs Western constructions of the theatre, to find novel ways to make this relevant in East Africa. In 1977, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o employed such ideas when he wrote and produced the Gikuyu-language play *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I will marry when I want)*, which was performed in the working-class central Kenyan village of Kamirithu by its inhabitants. The production and performance of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was an organic and communal process: “some people in face were recruited into the acting team after they had intervened [in the performance] to show how such and such a character should be portrayed. ... Perfection was thus shown to be a process ... but it was admired no less.”¹⁰⁸ Kimori’s ideas, therefore as part of the discourse of decolonisation were novel, broadening cultural debates on Africanisation.

“*Conrad’s Image of African and Coloniser in Heart of Darkness*” by Ellen Mae Kitonga

Ellen Mae Kitonga, holder of a doctorate in English Language and Literature, was a resident of Nairobi at the time of her essay’s publication in 1970. She would later become involved in the production of didactic texts on East African Literature, including *An Introduction to East African Poetry* (1976), a secondary school textbook Kitonga co-edited with Kariara (discussed

¹⁰⁶ SOAS: Mary Kimori, “What Future Drama”, *Busara*, 2, no. 3, p. 35-37.

¹⁰⁷ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 149.

¹⁰⁸ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, p. 57.

further in Chapter 3), as well as *A Study Guide to John Ruganda's Poetry* (1977). For Volume 3, Number 1 of *Busara*, published in 1970, Ellen Mae Kitonga (referred to as “Mrs”, rather than “Dr” in the magazine, reflective of its patriarchal nature) wrote an essay titled “Conrad’s Image of African and Coloniser in *Heart of Darkness*”. In discussing the novella, Kitonga is critical of its racism, decrying the fact that “the odious terms ‘nigger’ and ‘native’ are scattered throughout the narrative” and that “the African is again presented as a natural savage.” The African continent in the novella, according to Kitonga, “remains the heart of darkness, the hell through which the individual must pass if he is to attain moral awareness and responsibility.” Ultimately, Kitonga reads hope in Conrad’s message, as the ability of “the supposedly civilised [to] come to terms with their own savagery and present the heart of darkness to others that they too might face and conquer it.”¹⁰⁹

Kitonga’s essay is a case of, to paraphrase Salman Rushdie, the empire writing back, in a staunch criticism of colonial literature and the Western gaze on Africa.¹¹⁰ This was part of the broader contemporary zeitgeist of decolonisation in colonial literature, and Kitonga’s essay demonstrates her intellectual influence of these discussions, including the recent abolition of the English Department at the University of Nairobi. Her essay remains avant-garde, as five years later, Chinua Achebe decried the racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in the second Chancellor’s Lecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, in February 1975.¹¹¹ The anti-racist views expressed by Kitonga on Conrad’s work were novel in a contemporary Western paradigm, which was confirmed by Achebe in his lecture: “Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked.”¹¹² Kitonga’s words, given the discourse of Africanisation prevalent at Nairobi and Makerere at the time, broadened the debate and thereby curated a platform for discussions on decolonisation and anti-racism. As mentioned above, Kitonga later on produced didactic texts on the study of East African literature, thereby continuing the curation of a public space for discussions on Africanisation and decolonisation (see Chapter 3 for a further discussion on this).

¹⁰⁹ SOAS: Ellen Mae Kitonga, “Conrad’s Image of African and Coloniser in *Heart of Darkness*”, *Busara*, 3, no. 1, 1970, p. 33-5.

¹¹⁰ See: Salman Rushdie, ‘The Empire Writes Back With a Vengeance’, *The Times*, 3 July 1982.

¹¹¹ See: Chinua Achebe, ‘An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*’, *The Massachusetts Review* 57, no. 1 (2016): 14–27.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

The essays interrogated here contain the writers' contributions to ongoing debates on decolonisation and Africanisation across higher education institutions in East Africa. The pieces by Kimori and Kitonga reveal their understanding of the decolonial movement and how these ideas should be applied in literature and in education. Studying these as sources demonstrates how widespread the Africanisation and decolonisation movement – sparked by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and his colleagues' revolution to abolish the English Department at Nairobi University – was among fellow academics, and that women too were active in applying its ideas to bring about social and intellectual change. Kimori and Kitonga's words expanded the discourse in novel ways, expressing ideas on decolonisation and Africanisation that would be echoed years later by celebrated African cultural figures. A focus on the dynamic public sphere that the women constructed with their texts not only highlights the important role women played in its curation, but also their pioneering part in intellectual decolonisation in East Africa.

Conclusion

This chapter examined women students' contributions to the student literary magazines of *Penpoint* and *Dhana* of Makerere and *Nexus* and *Busara* of Nairobi in the period between 1964 and 1975, largely when both institutions were part of the University of East Africa. The women's pieces – consisting of poems, essays a short story, and a play – were interrogated to reveal their contributions to the contemporary discourse on Africanisation, and the ways in which their words curated a discourse on decolonisation within the state's cultural interior.

Debates on culture and decoloniality in East African in this period were supplemented by the circulation of such ideas through print culture. On an intellectual level, this was aided by the creation of the University of East Africa, and its constituent colleges in Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika. Through academic exchange between Makerere College, University College, Nairobi and the University College, Dar es Salaam, this allowed for the development of East African regionalism. Young East African students developed connections through the University, in the realisation of their commonalities, creating a sense of East African identifications, conjointly with potential national or ethnic affiliations.

This intellectual community in East Africa was partly enabled through the student publications of the different colleges English Departments: *Penpoint* and *Dhana* at Makerere, and *Nexus* and *Busara* at Nairobi. These magazines, which consisted of writing by the university students, allowed young people to be creative and to develop literary talents. This sense of regionalism was fostered, for instance, through Kenyan students at Makerere writing for *Penpoint*, or Ugandan students at Nairobi writing for *Busara*. Women students were active contributors to

the literary magazines at both institutions, and a reading of their pieces in the publications provides a unique insight into their understanding, as young, educated women, of the special period of the 1960s and 1970s, how they thought about their surroundings and expressed this in their art.

In examining the issues of *Penpoint*, *Dhana*, *Nexus* and *Busara* broadly – highlighting contributors, themes in the writing, and the textual culture – and specifically analysing individual works by different women writers, this chapter demonstrated how young women contributed to and expanded debates on decolonisation within the public sphere of the magazine pages. The topic of social inequalities was examined with Rose Mbowwa’s poem *Ruin*, as well as Violet Kokunda’s short story *Kefa Kazana*, both of which were published in *Penpoint* and *Origin East Africa*. Written by women who would both become celebrated literary figures in different decades, their works also demonstrate the potential women students had on the East African literary scene. Under the rubric of the East African petty bourgeoisie, the play *Keeping Up with the Mukasas* by Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, and the poem *Rosemary Anne Rita Any More*, both published in *Dhana* were discussed, and the ways in which the writers lampoon this new social class, providing criticisms of post-colonial social stratifications, and impact of these on family and community. Literary analyses and discussions around the pedagogy behind teaching African literature in East African institutions were illuminated with two pieces published in *Busara*: the essay “What Future Drama” by Mary Kimori, and “Conrad’s Image of African and Coloniser in *Heart of Darkness*” by Ellen Mae Kitonga. These pieces form unique contributions to the discourse on decolonisation and Africanisation that was taking place at the University of East Africa.

The pieces form part of the women’s constructions of a public sphere that allowed for radical debates on decolonisation and Africanisation. This was, in many ways, easier for women to construct as students than later on in their life, primarily due to freedoms in the means to express themselves and the ease of becoming published in the pages of student journals. As will be highlighted in Chapter 2, it was, comparatively, a lot more difficult to become published as a professional writer, due to marketing demands and gatekeeping practices of publishing companies. The women’s words demonstrate their visions for independence and their hopes for decolonisation and Africanisation, and their curation of a discursive space within the state’s cultural interior.

Chapter 2

Prose, poetry and drama

Introduction

Reflecting on her writing career, and the low numbers of women on East Africa's literary scene, Kenyan writer Rebeka Njau once remarked, "I think the problem with us is that we are not brave enough. ... If we become courageous enough to come out and write on social or political issues, our voices will be heard. But I think women are afraid, also they are overburdened with a lot of work."¹¹³ This formed a stark contrast to the nature of women's writing as students, as discussed in Chapter 1: whereas contributing to student literary magazines was an enjoyable task for young women, a chance for them to explore creative avenues, this differed as professional writers, with higher stakes and incomes dependent on their craft. There were, therefore, fewer women becoming published professionally, than, comparatively, as students; however, contrary to Njau's statement, they were indeed "courageous enough to come out and write on social or political issues." Women were active figures in the East African literary scene, with many producing works that remain seminal in the canon today.

This chapter will investigate fiction – in the form of novels, short stories, plays and poetry – by East African women that was published between 1965 and 1975. The writers include celebrated literary figures, such as Grace Ogot, Barbara Kimenye, Marjorie Macgoye, Micere Mugo, Miriam Khamadi Were, Muthoni Likimani and Elvania Namkuwaya Zirimu. Their works were selected for the diversity in how they represented and critiqued post-colonial social and political change in East Africa, and the ways in which this was felt, not only by women, but by broader society, through their characters, plot, and choice of themes. The texts treat a range of issues pertinent in post-colonial Kenya and Uganda, including gender inequality, class disparities, corruption, and migration. With their words, the writers make criticisms of the nature of independence, and the fact that social inequalities continued to persist in the post-colonial state. They represent broader communities for whom the fruits of independence – greater wealth distribution and improved standards of living – remained inaccessible. The writers are agents within the cultural interiority of the state, a space removed from the gatekeeping nature of its leadership, and within which the texts discussed in this chapter bring critiques of post-colonialism to the public sphere. They curated a public sphere that contained discursive space

¹¹³ Adeola James, ed., *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk* (London: James Currey, 1990), p. 107.

for dissent on the state, and allowed for a diversity of voices to simultaneously protest, as well as express their hopes for independence.

Studies of East African texts traditionally analyse the works as literary pieces, investigating language, plot, themes or characterisation, highlighting their prominence in decolonial thinking, as well as the construction of such identifications, within the era of decolonisation. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, for instance, discusses the politics of language choices in African literature, as he makes the argument for writing in his native Gikuyu, rather than English, the language of Kenya’s colonisers and, after independence, that of the new African elite and petty bourgeoisie.¹¹⁴ The connections between literature and linguistic identities is further explored by Moradewun Adejunmobi, who examines the constructed nature of African identifications and the ways in which this influences literature production.¹¹⁵ Eileen Julien examines the binary between universality and locality in her discussion of African novels in the world, arguing that there is no contradiction between the two, as “African stories are not narrowly ‘local’ and certainly not provincial.”¹¹⁶ In contrast to these approaches, this chapter will employ women’s texts as historical sources, analysing them to discover how women used creative writing as a way to protest oppression and inequality and to curate a dynamic public sphere. While the issue of language will not be discussed here – reasons for which are given in the introduction to this thesis – the roots of inequality brought about by state structures that Ngũgĩ criticises are central to this chapter. A further topic within literary studies of East Africa is the politics of textual production in post-colonial East Africa. This is addressed by scholars such as Tirop Peter Simatei, who investigates the novelist’s role in nation-building, decolonising the minds of citizens, as well as critiquing oppressive power dynamics in the post-colonial era.¹¹⁷ Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi trace the development of East African literature in English in the post-World War II era, examining the role of institutions such as Makerere in shaping the literary field, and the connections between literature and nationalism after independence in East African countries.¹¹⁸ Although scholarship on East African women writers specifically remains scant, they have been the topic of discussion by a few scholars. Elizabeth Oldfield, for instance,

¹¹⁴ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).

¹¹⁵ Moradewun Adejunmobi, ‘Routes: Language and the Identity of African Literature’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 37, no. 4 (1999): 581–96.

¹¹⁶ Eileen Julien, ‘The Extroverted African Novel, Revisited: African Novels at Home, in the World’, *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 30, no. 3 (2018): 371–81, p. 375.

¹¹⁷ Tirop Peter Simatei, *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth University, 2001).

¹¹⁸ Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

investigates the ways in which Barbara Kimenye, Grace Ogot, Elspeth Huxley and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye used their texts to construct women's identities and transgress social boundaries.¹¹⁹ Most scholarship focusses on more modern literature by East African women, largely because more women only became published from the 1980s onwards. For example, this is done by Marie Kruger, who analyses works by twenty-first century East African women, including Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor and Goretta Kyomuhendo.¹²⁰ This chapter will build on these approaches, in its examination of women's writing as a form of dissent and protest, often against oppression and other conditions brought about by the post-colonial state.

In recent years, historians have begun turning to literature and its institutions, and the politics of book publishing in the post-colonial era has come under increased scrutiny from various scholars. Caroline Davis, for instance, examines the publishing industry in post-colonial Africa, investigating in particular the activities of Oxford University Press – which will be discussed below – arguing that “publishing [was] an industry that [operated] at the juncture between culture and commerce.”¹²¹ A similar approach is employed by Caroline Ritter, who discusses the neo-colonial nature of book publishing in independent African countries, demonstrating how companies such as Oxford University Press “operated as part of a broader, systematic effort to spread British values and the English language around the world.”¹²² James Currey examines the role of the publishing company Heinemann, the politics of publishing and the establishment of the African Writers Series, describing its function “in the period of independence ... to give Africans the freedom to write back.”¹²³ The role of the Cold War and its ideological competition is a further topic that is addressed within East African literary histories. In her examination of the cultural Cold War, Bhakti Shringarpure discusses how this influenced publishing and marketing engineered a “strategic reception for certain books”, which had the potential “to entirely alter the course of the book's impact on how certain places were viewed.”¹²⁴ Similarly, Monica Popescu investigates how literature production in Africa was influenced by the Cold War, and how the literary industry became a cultural proxy-battleground

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth F. Oldfield, *Transgressing Boundaries: Gender, Identity, Culture, and the 'Other' in Postcolonial Women's Narratives in East Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013).

¹²⁰ Marie Kruger, *Women's Literature in Kenya and Uganda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹²¹ Caroline Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature: African Writers and British Publishers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 7.

¹²² Caroline Ritter, *Imperial Encore: The Cultural Project of the Late British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021); See also: Dawn D'arcy Nell, 'Africa', in *The History of Oxford University Press: Volume III, 1896-1970*, ed. Simon Eliot, vol. III, IV vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 721–53.

¹²³ James Currey, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008), p.21.

¹²⁴ Bhakti Shringarpure, *Cold War Assemblages: Decolonization to Digital* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 136-137.

for ideological competition.¹²⁵ These approaches will be employed in this chapter, as it examines the gatekeeping nature of publishing companies – which were influenced by Cold War Politics – that dictated what was written, and who was given a platform within the cultural interiority of the state. This intertwined with more localised gatekeeping practices of private publishing companies in East Africa, which also excluded women from becoming published, a further discussion of which is provided below. The ways in which women writers were impacted by these power dynamics has hitherto not been investigated and form part of the intervention that this thesis will make.

Using this rich literature, this chapter will employ fictional literary works by women to analyse socio-political histories of Kenya and Uganda in the 1960s. The texts in this chapter will be investigated for how women made criticisms of oppressive structures and conditions brought about through patriarchy and the post-colonial gatekeeper state. Their words are a part of a public sphere that women curated through their creative writing, giving an insight into women's response to post-colonialism, and their increased disillusionment with independence and opportunities for women, which will be discussed in greater detail below. While scholarly interrogations of literary works usually focus on their value as art, using such texts as sources in historical analysis is a methodology that has hitherto been underutilised in historiographies of post-colonial East Africa, which generally employ government or education institutional archival sources. The contents of these archives, however, often colonial-created institutions, contain scant information about the lives of African women as historical actors, making, for this reason, creative writing valuable alternative source material. The women's texts analysed in this chapter, though fiction, can give some understanding of how non-elites lived through the turbulent period after independence. As sources, they are a relatively simple way of accessing information on African women's lives, as they are published in English and distributed around the world, which is less challenging than accessing it in other ways, such as through oral history interviews. Additionally, literature retains a unique position in the period after independence in East Africa as a politically important art form. Left-wing intelligentsia in particular used the literary form to "[recast] ... the postcolonial nation-state as an instrument of neo-colonial exploitation of the masses" when they became disillusioned with the independent state.¹²⁶ In a time when the state was beginning to clamp down on opposition and public expressions of dissent, literature remained one of the few avenues within the public sphere where grievances

¹²⁵ Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

¹²⁶ Simatei, *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa*, p. 15.

could be expressed, although of course, later on, the Kenyatta and Amin regimes would stifle this as well.¹²⁷ Literature was at the leading edge of political expression, which could also be seen through the flourishing of small magazines and literary journals, such as *Zuka* or *Ghala*.

An interrogation of East African women writers specifically has hitherto not been conducted, and part of the aim of this chapter, in addition to analysing the ways in which women utilised literature as a form of dissent, is to showcase figures who otherwise remain marginalised in historiographies. The uniqueness of their works lies in the fact that they highlight the women's agency, in spite of the limitations they faced in writing and publishing, which will be discussed below. Women in Kenya and Uganda were certainly active in political and civil society spheres, voicing criticisms of new regimes and the status quo, which could be seen through the actions of the Uganda Council for Women or the women's organisation *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* in Kenya.¹²⁸ Literature was simply another means of political protest and women's assertion of their rights as citizens in independent countries. As Austin Bukonya states, the texts demonstrate "eastern African women's fight for survival: the power to be, to do, and to grow in the face of a hostile environment created mainly by patriarchal impositions."¹²⁹ Rather than remaining silenced, as "silence as been one of the most powerful tools of subjugation of African women", they were vocal with their social commentary in the creation of their texts, which remained a highly empowering feat.¹³⁰ Through an interrogation of the women's creative writing, this chapter will discuss the vibrancy of the cultural interiority of the state, examining how women protested oppression and the nature of independence in their literature. Their texts created a more dynamic and polyphonic public sphere than traditional studies of African literature proffer.

This chapter will be structured as follows: A background to the book publishing industry in Uganda and Kenya at independence will first be given, to provide context to the works of fiction that will be analysed. The prose this chapter will examine is divided into three overlapping themes that feature in the works: firstly, disillusionment with the new order, containing texts expressing the dashed hopes and dreams of independence; secondly, globalism and regionalism,

¹²⁷ See: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*; Doreen Strauhs, *African Literary NGOs: Power, Politics, and Participation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹²⁸ See: Aili Mari Tripp, 'Women's Mobilisation in Uganda: Nonracial Ideologies in European-African-Asian Encounters, 1945-1962', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34, no. 3 (2001): 543-64; Audrey Wipper, 'The Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation: The Co-Optation of Leadership', *African Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (1975): 99-120.

¹²⁹ Austin Bukonya, 'Preface', in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, ed. Amandina Lihamba et al. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), xix-xxv, p. xx.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

a theme that will analyse works examining both globalisation and increased inter-East African connectivity and networks; finally, the theme of women and patriarchal oppression, which is treated in a varied manner by the authors. In examining these topics, the chapter argues that women were a keystone of the cultural interiority of the state, as they expressed their views for independence and critiqued conditions of oppression brought about by the gatekeeper state through their literature.

Book publishing in Uganda and Kenya at independence

Shortly after independence, Ugandan author Taban lo Liyong declared East Africa – and Uganda specifically – a literary desert, a controversial statement that gave rise to heated debates around the issue for decades to come.¹³¹ However, as has been contested by scholars and authors, this was far from the case – East Africa has witnessed a vibrant literary scene since the 15th century, with works being produced in a variety of non-European languages, as well as in forms of orature.¹³² This section discusses the book publishing industry in Kenya and Uganda, and its development over the first decade of independence in both countries. In examining profit-making motives of companies, dictations of the market, as well as global Cold War politics, the challenges facing women writers in this industry will also be highlighted.

One of the first book publishing companies active in East Africa before independence was the East African Literature Bureau (EALB), established in 1948 as part of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, which also funded the company. Following World War II, this was part of the Colonial Office's revived interest in welfare and development in the colonies, which would entail the promotion of education and culture through literature. The EALB was created as a result upon the recommendation of author and white settler in Kenya Elspeth Huxley. Literature in English in East Africa before this point was largely a product of the white settler experience, and writers such as Huxley, with *The Flame Trees of Thika*, or Karen Blixen, with *Out of Africa*, gained immense fame. The EALB was an attempt to counter this, in order “to meet ... the ever-increasing demand among Africans for books of all kinds, and to encourage African authorship.”¹³³ The company published texts – largely educational – in English, as well as in twenty-eight African languages, including Swahili, Luo, Gikuyu, Teso

¹³¹ Bernth Lindfors, *Early East African Writers and Publishers* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011), p. 211; Rebecka Njau, *Mirrors of My Life* (Nairobi: Books Horizon, 2019), p. 180.

¹³² Gikandi and Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945*, p. 9.

¹³³ SOAS Library and Special Collections: Papers of Doctor Charles Granston Richards, PP MS 12 17-39, “East African Literature Bureau Annual Report, 1958-59, PP.MS.12/25.

and Akarimojong.¹³⁴ It set up library services, bookshops and book postal services to reach readers outside of urban hubs, and worked to promote literacy in eastern Africa through workshops, campaigns, and student writing competitions.¹³⁵ As East African countries gained their independence in the early 1960s, the EALB began to Africanise its company staff, and in 1963 the British director Charles Grantham Richards was replaced by a Kenyan African. In the 1970s, the EALB was dissolved, and it split into national publishing companies for each individual African country. In Kenya, Grace Ogot served as the first director of the Kenya Literature Bureau.¹³⁶

At independence of Uganda and Kenya, private commercial companies dominated the publishing industry in East Africa, the most famous of these including Oxford University Press (OUP) and Heinemann, which were later on joined by Longmans, Nelson, Cambridge University Press, Pitman and Evans. OUP specialised in educational books for primary school children, presenting itself as a company invested in the development of African education and scholarship, in spite of its ultimate interest in profit-making. Its work was a legacy of the colonial project: before independence, it had worked with the Church Missionary Society in Africa to promote sales of its books across the continent. A permanent office was established in Nairobi in 1953, and, upon the independence of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, OUP began working with local publishers in Kampala, Nairobi and Arusha.¹³⁷ Between 1962 and 1976, OUP ran its Africa-wide Three Crowns Series, which had the professed aim of emphasising the role of literature in nation-building and the promotion of high culture across the continent. It published works by prestigious writers, including Wole Soyinka, as well as Barbara Kimenye, with her short story collections *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited* (which are discussed below).

A closer examination of Three Crowns reveals structural inequalities perpetuated by the publishing industry that made it difficult for women to become published. OUP acquired new manuscripts from African writers through brokers who were in touch with individual writers, as few had literary agents to work with. These brokers were often part of informal networks that allowed them to meet African writers, scope potential talent and negotiate with OUP on

¹³⁴ Ibid.; SOAS: Papers of Doctor Charles Granston Richards, PP MS 12 17-39, "Book Bureau to Concentrate on Adult Literacy", Grace Lamont, *East African Standard*, 4 January 1963, PP.MS.12/35.

¹³⁵ Austin Bukonya, Oral History Interview with author, 16 January 2020.

¹³⁶ See: Ritter, *Imperial Encore: The Cultural Project of the Late British Empire*, p. 55-62; Bethwell A. Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time* (Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd, 2003), p. 237; Strauhs, *African Literary NGOs*, p. 12.

¹³⁷ *The Record*, no. 7 (1962), cited in Nell, 'Africa', p. 735; Charles Lewis, interviewed by Nell, 15 October 2008, HOUP interview no. 49, cited in Nell, 'Africa', p. 735.

their behalf. These networks themselves were revealing of social power imbalances, as they consisted primarily of Europeans who had connections with African writers through professional circles or education institutions, such as the Makerere and Nairobi Literature Departments. Women would have had more difficulty accessing these networks, through limited educational and professional opportunities that would allow them to meet publishing brokers, as well as social rules that dictated which physical informal spaces African women could move in. For instance, if networking took place in bars and nightclubs, women would not have moved in these spaces with the same ease their male peers would have, entrenching the ‘boys’ club’ that the book publishing industry became. It is little wonder, therefore, that only two of the twenty-three authors published by OUP’s Three Crowns were women: Ugandan Barbara Kimenye and South African Mary Benson. It is also notable that the only two authors discussed in this chapter who were published by OUP were of British heritage: Barbara Kimenye had a white British mother and Marjorie Macgoye was a British expatriate in Kenya. The authors’ whiteness – or proximity to it – therefore allowed them to access such publishing networks and their informal spaces that other African women writers could not as easily.¹³⁸

Another foreign commercial publishing company in East Africa was Heinemann, which set up an office in Nairobi in 1965, and became best known for its veritable canonisation of African literature through its African Writers Series. Established in 1962, a few months before the African Writers Conference at Makerere in June of that year, the African Writers Series was a means for writers to establish a name for themselves internationally, beyond merely a national market. Henry Chakava joined Heinemann as an editor in 1972, and quickly rose through the ranks, eventually becoming Managing Director in 1976.¹³⁹ He later recalled that “the ambition to appear in the African Writers Series was great among local writers”, who were inspired by figures such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Chinua Achebe, who had gained fame in this way.¹⁴⁰ In spite of claims to promote African literature both at home and on the world stage, the prioritisation of profit lay at the heart of publishing activities, and market demands determined what and – more importantly – who was to be published. This market was based on overseas – mainly European – audiences, who demonstrated an interest primarily in certain types of African writing, which, as demonstrated by the earliest books published in the African Writers Series, centred around colonialism and African-European encounters. This demand fuelled the

¹³⁸ See: Ritter, *Imperial Encore: The Cultural Project of the Late British Empire*; Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature*; Nell, ‘Africa’.

¹³⁹ Henry Chakava, Oral History Interview with author, 12 March 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Henry Chakava, *Publishing in Africa: One Man’s Perspective* (Chestnut Hill: Bellagio Publishing Network Research and Information Center, 1996), p. 20.

topics and writers that publishers such as Heinemann sought out for their books. Therefore, novel African writers catered their prose, its narrative, style and language according to such demands, in order to increase their chances of success both at home and abroad. This partly explains the gender imbalance in the early decades of the African Writers Series: in the period this thesis investigates, 1959-1976, only four women were published, namely, Nigerian Flora Nwapa, southern African Bessie Head, South African Nadine Gordimer and Tanzanian Martha Mvungi. The first Kenyan woman to be published with the African Writers Series was Rebecca Njau with her novel *Ripples in the Pool* in 1978. As will be shown in this chapter, the Kenyan and Ugandan women actively writing in this period were writing on issues specifically for East African audiences around oppression and inequality, and their texts contain few – if any – European characters, making them in this way less interesting for many European audiences. There was, therefore, less interest on the part of publishers to publish such books, which, in combination with the masculine nature and inaccessibility of publishing networks, explains the lack of women authors in the African Writers Series in the 1960s and 1970s.

This gradually changed with the establishment of African publishing companies after independence, such as, most famously, the East African Publishing House (EAPH). Created in Nairobi in 1965 as an initiative of the East African Institute for Social and Cultural Affairs, it “was expected to cater more satisfactorily to ... local communities and to reflect a more positive image of the African heritage, which, it was felt, the existing foreign publishers had failed to do.”¹⁴¹ The historian Bethwell Ogot was appointed as Chair of the Board of Directors of the EAPH, and he hired the publisher John Nottingham as Publishing Director. Initially the EAPH published Swahili translations of well-known books, such as Jomo Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya (Naushangilia Mlima wa Kenya)*, and academic humanities books centring African societies, including Bethwell Ogot’s *History of the Southern Luo*. Following these successes, the EAPH ventured into fiction and launched its Modern African Library, a close contender for Heinemann’s African Writers Series. The first book to be published with Modern African Library were the narrative poems *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* by Ugandan author Okot p’Bitek, which sealed EAPH’s reputation as a successful first indigenous publishing company in East Africa. The EAPH published – comparatively – more women than OUP and Heinemann, although the number was still low, compared to the number of men who were published. By 1972, the Modern African Library also included *The Promised Land* and *Land Without Thunder*, both by Grace Ogot, *Black Night of Quiloa* by Hazel Mugot, and *Daughter of Mumbi*

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 9.

by Charity Waciuma.¹⁴² Dealing with Kenyan and Africa-specific issues, these books were written for a primarily East African audience, explaining why these women were published by EAPH and not by OUP or Heinemann. Following the success of EAPH in the 1970s, other indigenous publishing companies were established, including Transafrica Publishers, set up by John Nottingham, and Anyange Press, which was created by Bethwell Ogot.¹⁴³

Active in a time of escalating ideological conflict, the publishing industry and other cultural avenues were also impacted by global Cold War politics, which is most clearly highlighted through the direct influence of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency on high cultural production in Africa. It funded the foundation Congress for Cultural Freedom, which, in turn, provided the funding for literary, journalistic, and other cultural initiatives across the continent. These included the magazines *Black Orpheus* in Nigeria, *Transition* in East Africa and *Africa South* in South Africa, as well as the African Writers Conference held at Makerere in June 1962, and the creation of the Chemchemi Cultural Centre in Nairobi. Through these initiatives, the CIA attempted "to attract intellectuals sympathetic to the political values of democracy, intellectual freedom, and – ironically – a principle of political detachment as a hallmark of literary value."¹⁴⁴ The CIA strategised on the optimal reception for books containing these values, thereby determining the market for which books were published, "how much visibility and popularity its author could garner, and whether the book could secure a spot in the literary canon."¹⁴⁵ When the role of the CIA in CCF activities was revealed, this caused a major scandal for the writers and scholars who were at the helm of CCF-funded initiatives, such as Rajat Neogy, editor of *Transition* magazine, and who denied any knowledge of CIA involvement. The influence of the CIA and Cold War politics on the publishing industry, therefore, also partly explains the lack of women published in this time. The women's texts – as will be shown in this chapter – did not directly speak to supposed Western values of liberalism, intellectual freedom and democracy, and therefore, would not have been deemed marketable enough by publishers influenced by the CCF.¹⁴⁶

The gatekeeping nature of the Western publishing industry, sustained by global market demands and engineered by Cold War politics, therefore, barred many women writers from

¹⁴² McMillan Memorial Library: *East African Publishing House Books, 1972*, M007382.

¹⁴³ See: Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time*; Chakava, *Publishing in Africa: One Man's Perspective*.

¹⁴⁴ Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War*, p. 38.

¹⁴⁵ Shringarpure, *Cold War Assemblages: Decolonization to Digital*, p. 137.

¹⁴⁶ See: Caroline Davis, *African Literature and the CIA: Networks of Authorship and Publishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War*; Shringarpure, *Cold War Assemblages: Decolonization to Digital*.

becoming published. The 1962 Makerere Conference reflected this exclusivity in publishing, as only two East African women – Grace Ogot and Rebeka Njau – attended the debates. The women who continued to write and work to become published faced immense challenges in literature production, in which structural barriers based on sexism and racism made working with publishers difficult. In an interview, Kenyan writer Asenath Bole Odaga discussed the disadvantages her race and gender accrued to her in society, and that publishers viewed “anything produced by an African [as] inferior” and “preferred books written by Europeans.”¹⁴⁷ These structural barriers were related to broader issues around sexism in East African society at the time, especially in the belief that writing and intellectual thought was men’s work, and that women were to prioritise domestic and familial duties – if they wrote at all, they should have been ‘soft’ subjects around romance, or children’s literature.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, as Ugandan author Violet Barungi later noted, women’s writing was not taken “seriously”, which Tanzanian writer Penina Muhando also confirmed, stating that male writers disliked being challenged by women, and rarely chose to discuss the latter’s work.¹⁴⁹ Once women’s works were published, many were faced with attitudes that doubted whether they could have written something worthy of being published. For instance, when her novel *Ripples in the Pool* was published, Rebeka Njau was asked by various people whether it was, in fact, her husband, the famous artist Elimo Njau, who had written the book.¹⁵⁰ Micere Mugo faced similar prejudices when, upon the publication of her play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, co-authored with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, audiences doubted to what extent she, as a woman, could have been involved with such a notable work.¹⁵¹ Women also faced barriers to writing in the form of more immediate pressing duties in the form of work and childcare. Writing as a sole form of income was near impossible in East Africa at the time, and many had other occupations, in addition to looking after children, making it difficult to find the time to write.¹⁵²

The book publishing industry in East Africa after independence was highly exclusive, and only in the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s were indigenous publishing companies such as EAPH able to publish more women than their foreign counterparts did, including OUP and Heinemann. In spite of the challenges women faced, many became successful writers, penning works that would become vital to the East African literary canon, of which a small selection

¹⁴⁷ James, *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, p. 124.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107, 123-4.

¹⁴⁹ Violet Barungi, Oral History Interview, 29 November 2019; James, *In Their Own Voices*, p. 86.

¹⁵⁰ Njau, *Mirrors of My Life*, p. 179.

¹⁵¹ James, *In Their Own Voices*, p. 100-101.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

will be analysed below. The fact that more women, comparatively, were published as students in university literary magazines, than by commercial publishers, is indicative of the gatekeeping nature of the book publishing industry in East Africa throughout the 1960s, which placed great limitations on African women authors (see Chapter 1 for a further discussion on this).

Disillusionment with independence

A prominent theme that is present in numerous works of fiction by East African women in the 1960s and 1970s is that of frustration with new nations and leaders, and disillusionment with independence. This theme was consistent within African literature produced during this time more broadly, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (Heinemann, 1977) or Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (Heinemann, 1966). Women too were a part of this conversation, even though their works are lesser known in comparison to their male peers. The works that will be examined in this section are the poem *They Ran out of Mud* by Miriam Khamadi Were, the play *When the Hunchback Made Rain* by Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, as well as the poem *I took my son by the hand* by Micere Mugo. They will be used to understand the ways in which the writers critiqued new regimes, the oppression, as well as the persistence of colonialism.

“They Ran Out of Mud”, Miriam Khamadi Were

Like many of her female peers, Miriam Khamadi Were is a writer who combined this with other occupations over the course of her professional life, working also as a doctor, teacher, and public health specialist. Born in Kakamega district in western Kenya in 1940, Were began her career as a science teacher in 1965. In 1968, she enrolled at the University of Nairobi to study Medicine, graduating in 1973, before working for the Ministry of Health. Over the decades, Were has worked for the University of Nairobi, UNICEF, and the United Nations Population Fund, in addition to obtaining a Masters and Doctorate in Public Health from Johns Hopkins University. Were is currently the acting Community Health Strategy Goodwill Ambassador for Kenya.¹⁵³ Her fiction includes the children's book *The Boy In Between* (Oxford University Press, 1969).

The poem *They Ran out of Mud* was first published in December 1969 in the East African literary journal *Zuka*, a publication which contained works “dealing mainly with the pain of

¹⁵³ National Library of Scotland (NLS): Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/39, Proofs of Writers in East Africa, 1971; ‘Miriam Khamadi Were’, Lancet Commission on COVID-19, <https://covid19commission.org/miriam-were> (accessed 5 August 2021); ‘Prof. Miriam Were, EBS, IOM’, Global Health Workers Alliance (World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/workforcealliance/about/governance/board/were/en/>) (accessed 5 August 2021).

living in these disturbed times.”¹⁵⁴ Were was published alongside prominent literary figures, including Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, Ama Ata Aidoo, Jonathan Kariara and Bahadur Tejani. *They Ran out of Mud* was later also printed in the poetry anthology *Poems from East Africa*. Consisting of four short stanzas, the unnamed narrator in the poem laments the fact that there is not enough mud to complete basic infrastructure in the village. They describe “a little hut” for which “they’ve mudded two walls / And the rest stands unmade. ... / For they ran out of mud.” Equally, “there is a deep gully / Running along the road; / They have filled it halfway / And the rest is still gaping. ... / For they ran out of mud.” The poem concludes with the exclamation “Mud! Mud! / Who can find mud? / Maybe if it were gold / Someone would.”¹⁵⁵

By the time of publication of *They Ran out of Mud* in 1969, collectively, the rifts in independent Kenya’s government, punctuated by rivalries between Kenyatta and Mboya, as well as Kenyatta and Odinga, had become firmly entrenched (see the introduction to this thesis for a further discussion on this). Odinga was deeply opposed to Kenyatta’s neo-liberal stance that invited private foreign investment, thereby fostering neo-colonialism, and preferred a more equitable redistribution of resources among Kenyans. Kenyatta’s politics also involved the strengthening of his Gikuyu strongholds across central Kenya, whilst neglecting other areas, which entrenched the ethnic patrimonialism of the post-colonial Kenyan state. It was this that brought about divisions between Kenyatta and Mboya, to the extent that the latter was assassinated in June 1969.¹⁵⁶ Were’s poem is an expression of her disillusionment with independence, and its failure to bring about better living conditions to people in rural areas, far removed from locations of power in cities. She acts as a proxy for marginalised communities in the post-colonial Kenyan state, using the metaphor of mud to represent the basic necessities that the post-colonial state failed to provide for its citizens. The gold described in the poem is symbolic of the capitalist turn taken by Kenyan leaders after independence, intent on filling their own coffers at the expense of the livelihoods of the country’s citizens. Kenyatta’s government, by the time of the poem’s publication, was notorious for its corruption and enrichment not only of Gikuyu politicians, but also support bases within urban constituencies.¹⁵⁷ As a source, *They Ran out of Mud* represents the grievances of wider communities who felt marginalised in the post-colonial Kenyan state through policies that saw the enrichment of a primarily Gikuyu elite. Were imagined her role as a writer to “develop an empathy for humanitarianism and ... enhance or

¹⁵⁴ British Library: *Zuka*, Issue 4, 1969, Jonathan Kariara.

¹⁵⁵ British Library: *Zuka*, Issue 4, 1969, Miriam Khamadi Were, p. 35.

¹⁵⁶ See: Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

¹⁵⁷ See: Branch and Cheeseman, *Our Turn to Eat: Politics in Kenya since 1950*.

change the attitude of his audience to an empathy with his fellow men.”¹⁵⁸ It forms part of a wider discourse that criticises the Kenyan status quo in this period, which Were helped construct with her words.

“*When the Hunchback Made Rain*”, *Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu*

When the Hunchback Made Rain has been lauded as one of the most successful – and certainly best-known – plays written and produced by Ugandan dramatist and Makerere alum Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu.¹⁵⁹ Her success as a professional dramaturge certainly lay in her foundations at Makerere, where she had been an active contributor to *Penpoint/Dhana* and a member of the Makerere Free Travelling Theatre, during her student days at Makerere (see Chapter 1 for a discussion of another one of Zirimu’s plays, as well as for biographical information). Originally performed in 1970 at the National Theatre in Kampala by the theatre company founded by Zirimu, *Ngoma Players*, *When the Hunchback Made Rain* won an award in the 1971 EAPH play-writing competition, and was published by EAPH in 1975.¹⁶⁰ The play deals with the two peasants, Nsereko and Kaboggoza, who seek a meeting with God to ask for the rain their village has not seen in a while. When they arrive at “the Sanctuary of God”, the two characters encounter Kirabira, God’s drunken assistant, who has a hunchback. Nsereko and Kaboggoza are well aware of Kirabira’s power as a gatekeeper, with Kaboggoza observing that “power is ordinary human drink, and men get drunk on it.” God instructs Kirabira to give Kaboggoza rain; however, the latter instead gives it to Nsereko, in exchange for a bribe. When Kaboggoza finds out that his friend received rain and he did not, he is furious. Kaboggoza timidly returns to Kirabira to request for rain, which Kirabira refuses, shouting, “Go out peasant! This ... is no place for you. This is God’s Sanctuary. Take your dirty self out of here.”¹⁶¹ A physical altercation ensues, resulting in Kaboggoza killing Kirabira with a club to the head. Kaboggoza panics and hides Kirabira’s body amongst the mango trees. The play ends with Kaboggoza’s arrest and God ordering his execution.

Code-switching between English, Luganda and Swahili, *When the Hunchback Made Rain* uses the supernatural to illustrate people’s frustrations with the newly independent Ugandan government in the 1960s. The play is a social commentary on the rampant corruption and

¹⁵⁸ NLS: Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/39, Proofs of Writers in East Africa, 1971.

¹⁵⁹ Gikandi and Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945*, p. 177; Ian Kiyangi Muddu, ‘Uganda’s Elvania Namukwaya Who Broke the Glass Ceiling of Theatre’, *African Theatre Magazine*, 15 February 2020, <https://www.theafricantheatremagazine.com/ugandas-elvania-namukwaya-who-broke-the-glass-ceiling-of-theatre/> (accessed 24 October 2020).

¹⁶⁰ Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, *When the Hunchback Made Rain. Snoring Strangers* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), p. 31.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31-32.

nepotism among Ugandan civil servants and leaders in the post-colonial government of Milton Obote. After Obote engineered the Mengo Crisis in 1966 with Idi Amin, resulting in the exile of *Kabaka Mutesa*, the king of the Baganda ethnic group, he introduced a new constitution in Uganda that banished all traditional kingdoms and made him president. As Obote increased his authoritarian hold in Uganda, his regime became characterised by nepotism and corruption. Parliamentary debates held between December 1965 and February 1966 criticised the Ugandan Civil Service, which, after independence, became populated by civil servants related to ministers who were unfairly promoted over other colleagues, and saw the misuse of public funds.¹⁶²

The individual characters in *When the Hunchback Made Rain* represent different actors in the hierarchy of post-colonial Ugandan state and society, with God as the patron, the hunchback the corrupt middleman, and Kaboggoza and Nsereko as the peasantry. With the character of the hunchback, Zirimu “castigates the middleman’s exploitation, which the corrupt society has allowed to seep into every institution in Uganda”, and is a “call to get rid of the evil practice of ... public servants who abused their office.”¹⁶³ Kaboggoza’s killing of Kirabira is an act of helplessness and frustration, a metaphor for the anger on the part of Ugandans towards contemporary political gatekeepers. *When the Hunchback Made Rain* highlights Zirimu’s disillusionment with the post-colonial state, as she represents broader marginalised communities across Uganda, who suffer from the impunity of corruption and nepotism in Obote’s government. Using the format of a play is especially noteworthy, as drama brought her message to as broad an audience as possible, including illiterate people, who would not have been able to consume textual literature otherwise. Zirimu’s play, therefore, forms part of the post-colonial discourse of criticism and dissent in Uganda.

“I took my son by the hand”, Micere Mugo

One poem that exemplifies disillusionment with independence is *I took my son by the hand* by Kenyan author Micere Mugo. The poem was printed in *An Introduction to East African Poetry* (which will also be discussed in Chapter 3), an edited volume designed as a textbook for school children, that was published in 1976. Many familiar names appear in the volume, including those of David Rubadiri, Miriam Khamadi Were and Austin Bukenya, which is reflective of

¹⁶² Parliament of Uganda, The Hansard, December 1965-February 1966, p. 331-4, quoted in: Samwiri Rubaraza Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 2010 ed. (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1989), p. 192; See also: Phares Mukasa Mutibwa, *A History of Uganda: The First 100 Years 1894-1995* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2016).

¹⁶³ Rose Mbowa, ‘Theatre and Political Repression in Uganda’, *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 3 (1996): 87-97, p. 92.

the small nature of writing and publishing networks in eastern Africa, even over a decade after independence.¹⁶⁴ Born in 1942, Micere Mugo was educated at Alliance Girls' High School in Kenya – where Rebeka Njau was her teacher – and later studied at Makerere College, graduating in 1964, along with the famous East African literary figures of John Ruganda, Rose Mbowa, Timothy Wangusa and Okello Oculi.¹⁶⁵ Mugo received her PhD from the University of Toronto, before returning to Kenya to teach at the University of Nairobi, where she was later promoted to Senior Lecturer and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts. Marxist-socialist in her political beliefs, Mugo was a political activist, and vocal about her critiques of the Kenyan post-colonial government, ultimately leading to her exile in 1982. She moved to Zimbabwe, where she taught at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare, and later to the USA, working at the University of Syracuse, where she is now Professor Emerita. Mugo's works include the poetry collections *Daughter of My People, Sing!* (East African Literature Bureau, 1976) and *My Mother's Song and Other Poems* (East African Educational Publishers, 1994), in addition to the plays *The Long Illness of Ex-Chief Kiti* (East African Literature Bureau, 1976), and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (Heinemann, 1976), which she co-authored with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.¹⁶⁶

I took my son by the hand is a moving poem set in a rural part of post-independence Kenya, about a mother and her young son's survival in difficult conditions. The first-person narrator takes the mother's perspective, describing the "way we trekked / five long miles" to attend celebrations for Independence Day. At the festivities, the two characters "heard of / selfless sacrifice / Condemned selfishness / Damned laziness / Extolled industry / Celebrated freedom". At the end of the day, when they walk home, the son asks his mother "Do we have / *matunda ya uhuru*¹⁶⁷ / in our hut?" and if so, "May I eat one / when we get there?". His mother "[laughs] foolishly" in response and remains silent.¹⁶⁸

Printed more than a decade after Kenyan independence, Mugo's poem is a critique of post-colonial politics in the country, and an expression of her disillusionment with the state of the nation. It was published at a time when discontentment with the nature of independence was

¹⁶⁴ Jonathan Kariara and Ellen Kitonga, eds., *An Introduction to East African Poetry* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁶⁵ Rebeka Njau, *Mirrors of My Life* (Nairobi: Books Horizon, 2019), p. 96; Oumah Otienoh, 'Class of 1964: A Chat with Literary Great Prof Timothy Wangusa', *Nation*, 21 March 2020, <https://nation.africa/kenya/life-and-style/weekend/class-of-1964-a-chat-with-literary-great-prof-timothy-wangusa-281210> (accessed 21 April 2020).

¹⁶⁶ James, *In Their Own Voices*, p. 93-101; Kariara and Kitonga, eds., *An Introduction to East African Poetry*; Ed Griffin-Nolan, 'Micere Mugo's Tireless Pursuit', *Syracuse New Times*, 15 April 2015, sec. News, <https://www.syracusenewtimes.com/micere-mugos-tireless-pursuit/> (accessed 21 October 2021).

¹⁶⁷ Fruits of independence, Swahili.

¹⁶⁸ Micere Mugo, 'I took my son by the hand', in *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, ed. Jonathan Kariara and Ellen Kitonga (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), 115–17.

rife across Kenya, as many felt they had been robbed of the promised ‘fruits’ of independence. Indeed, in January 1964, a mere month after independence, protestors in Nairobi were already calling for a more equitable distribution of wealth across the country. At the same time, the political – Gikuyu – elite, known as the *wabenzi* class (as many were driving Mercedes Benz cars) saw an increase in personal wealth through this unequal wealth distribution, due to the ethnic nature of patrimonialism under Kenyatta. This issue lay at the very heart of the rift between Mboya and Odinga, with the former seeing the private accumulation of wealth as key to economic growth, while the latter saw equality and wealth distribution as vital after independence.¹⁶⁹

In an interview, Mugo stated the importance for African writers to “sing ... about our mothers out there in the rural areas ... and their poverty” in literature, which she does with *I took my son by the hand*.¹⁷⁰ The characters of the rural mother and child are a representation of some of the most vulnerable and marginalised communities in post-colonial Kenya, for whom the benefits of independence remained inaccessible. With her poem, Mugo demonstrates that independence ultimately only benefitted Kenya’s elites, stating later that some “formerly colonised people ... are neo-colonialists, promoting the very same structures under colonialism”.¹⁷¹ As a writer, Mugo saw it as her duty to hold a mirror up to society and “to side with the oppressed majority ... [in] a clear ideological position in which [she uses her] writing as a weapon in the struggle for liberation.”¹⁷² Mugo’s poem is part of a broader contemporary artistic critique of the status quo after independence in East Africa, and demonstrates her disillusionment with decolonisation and independence. *I took my son by the hand* highlights that the debates on inequality permeated all aspects of society, including rural areas, showing the tangible effects of political discourse and rivalries on marginalised communities. The fact that *I took my son by the hand* was printed in an educational textbook for children demonstrates the salience of the discourse that even school pupils were learning about it (see Chapter 3 for a further discussion on this). As a self-described “member of the petit-bourgeoisie, a very privileged and elite person, because of [her] job as a university professor”, Mugo uses the individual agency her social status conferred on her to critique the post-colonial state in her published work, and to speak on behalf of people who would otherwise not be able to express

¹⁶⁹ See: Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011*; Daniel Speich, ‘The Kenyan Style of “African Socialism”’: Developmental Knowledge Claims and the Explanatory Limits of the Cold War’, *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 3 (2009): 449–66.

¹⁷⁰ James, *In Their Own Voices*, p. 98-9.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95-6.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

their grievances in the same way.¹⁷³ Her work forms a part of a public sphere in which criticisms with independence and the post-colonial state were expressed.

The works of fiction examined in this section expressed the frustration and disillusionment with independence of Kenya and Uganda. Although such debates were ongoing within the high political sphere, in penning their poems and play, the writers brought these issues to a different audience to debate the nature of independence. As these texts reveal, women played an active role in state critique and civil society activism, which textual literature was a part of. Discussed in chronological order of publication, the texts in this section all highlight conditions of inequality and oppression brought about by the structures of the post-colonial gatekeeper states of both countries. Through choice of plot, characters and themes, Micere Mugo, Miriam Khamadi Were and Elvania Zirimu treat the disappointment and dashed hopes of independence, showing the inaccessibility of the fruits of independence. The writers represent broader communities who remain marginalised through neo-liberalism, corruption and ethnic patrimonialism. Literature, as mentioned above, held an important political function in East Africa in this period as one of the few avenues within the public sphere that contained vocal critiques of elites. Catering towards popular audiences – especially through drama, which could also reach illiterate people – the works educated and mobilised communities across East Africa. The writers use their positions within the region’s intellectual elite to critique post-colonial regimes and to hold those in power accountable through their art. Their works demonstrate their refusal to accept the capitalist status quo, and the ways in which they lobbied for greater equality for citizens of the state.

Globalisation and East African Regionalism

The theme of globalisation and East African regionalism features prominently in some of the writing by women produced in the 1960s and 1970s. This section will analyse the fictional works of *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited* by Ugandan author Barbara Kimenye, as well as *The Promised Land* by Grace Ogot. These works were selected for the ways in which the authors use their characters to highlight experiences of globalisation and East African regionalism by communities on the periphery, as well as increased awareness of East African regionalism in the latter half of the 20th century. While the works do not constitute overt criticisms of the colonial and post-colonial status quo, they nevertheless highlight issues faced

¹⁷³ Ibid.

by rural communities, of which some were largely neglected in the capitalist turn taken by post-colonial East African states.

“Kalasanda” and “Kalasanda Revisited”, Barbara Kimenye

Barbara Kimenye was a Ugandan author and journalist, best-known for her *Moses* children’s book series (which are discussed in Chapter 3). Born in 1929 to a West Indian father and an English mother in Halifax, West Yorkshire, she moved to Tanganyika in the mid-1950s with her husband, Bill Kimenye, whom she had met in London. The couple separated shortly after, and Kimenye relocated to Kampala in 1956, where she raised her two sons with the help of her mother. Kimenye worked as a secretary in the government of *Kabaka* Mutesa II, the then Buganda king, and later turned to journalism and writing. She was the Kampala correspondent for the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation*, and was Uganda’s first Black woman journalist. Kimenye relocated several times between Uganda, Kenya and Britain, before her death in 2012. Her works – in addition to those discussed here – include *Gemstone Affair* (Evans Brothers, 1978), *Beauty Queen* (East African Educational Publishers, 1988), *Pretty Boy, Beware* (East African Educational Publishers, 2004), as well as the *Moses* children’s book series (published between 1968 and 1996).¹⁷⁴

Set in the fictional Buganda village of Kalasanda, *Kalasanda* is a collection of inter-connected short stories, published by OUP in 1965. Its sequel, *Kalasanda Revisited*, was published in 1966. The stories follow the lives of the characters who “go happily about their business” in Kalasanda, “where one day is very much like the other”.¹⁷⁵ The narrative focusses on quotidian events in the village, occasionally punctuated by exciting interruptions from the world beyond Kalasanda, which the omniscient narrator recounts in humorous tones. On one occasion, for instance, “a lorry driver [delivers] the astounding news that the Russians had landed a rocket on the moon”, and the following night, “all the villagers [stared] for hours at the silver orb, disappointed at finding it without the slightest trace of mutilation.”¹⁷⁶ Another example is the character of Anna, a Kampala woman and outsider to Kalasanda, who moves to the village when she marries her husband, Lamek Waswa, a native of Kalasanda. The Kalasanda residents are in awe of this “wife from the City ... who not only made her first appearance in Kalasanda wearing tight yellow trousers and a striped sweater, but who also possessed scarlet fingernails

¹⁷⁴ Anna Adima, ‘Barbara Kimenye’, *Another World? East Africa and the Global 1960s*, 2020, <https://globaleastafrica.org/global-lives/barbara-kimenye-1929-2012> (accessed 22 October 2021).

¹⁷⁵ Barbara Kimenye, *Kalasanda* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 7.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70-71.

and a head of long, straight, shiny black hair.”¹⁷⁷ Other Kalasandans actively seek the outside world, such as the character of Daudi, “a man of burning ambition” who “has been trying for an overseas scholarship ever since the ending of the Second World War.”¹⁷⁸ He makes frequent trips to Kampala “to try badgering the Ministry of Education into sponsoring a study tour”, for which one destination included “Red China.”¹⁷⁹ In *Kalasanda Revisited*, Daudi is still unsuccessful in securing a scholarship, but, “now that so many foreign embassies have taken root in Kampala”, he enjoys what he terms “‘armchair travel’, since ... it is surprising how much you can learn about a country merely by passing the time of day in the reception room of one of its embassies.”¹⁸⁰

Kalasanda was hugely popular upon publication, and Kimenye was praised as the “Buganda Miss Mitford” in internal correspondence of OUP.¹⁸¹ One of the short stories in the sequel, “The Battle of the Sacred Tree”, was later produced as a feature film.¹⁸² Contemporary critics commented on the collections’ cultural inaccuracies in their portrayal of Buganda village life¹⁸³; however, on the other hand, OUP worked hard to market it as stories of quintessential African village life, and representative of the entire continent, in order to increase interest among Western audiences.¹⁸⁴ In 1968, the German scholar and writer Jahnheinz Jahn wrote to OUP requesting Kimenye’s biographical information, as he wished to include a short story from *Kalasanda* in an “anthology of Negro humour throughout the world”.¹⁸⁵

James Ferguson, in describing the selective nature of globalisation, views it as a discontinuous phenomenon, one that, in Africa “[hops] over (rather than [flows] through) the territories inhabited by the vast majority of the African population.”¹⁸⁶ With her short stories, Kimenye demonstrates globalisation as it is experienced by this “vast majority”, namely, people on the margins of Ugandan and East African society. As Abasi Kiyimba argues, while “the background against which she makes her social analysis is one of an ordinary village life ... the

¹⁷⁷ Barbara Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 21.

¹⁷⁸ Kimenye, *Kalasanda*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁸⁰ Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited*, p. 11.

¹⁸¹ Oxford University Press Archives (OUP): Richards to Collings, 16 March 1964, “Kalasanda – Kimenye”, OP2006/15131, 1964. Mary Russel Mitford was an English essayist, dramatist and poet active in the early 19th century, best known for *Our Village*, a series of sketches on country life in England. See: ‘Mary Russell Mitford’, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Russell-Mitford> (accessed 31 October 2020).

¹⁸² Gikandi and Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945*, p. 88.

¹⁸³ Hebe Welbourn, ‘Village Gossip: Review of *Kalasanda* by Barbara Kimenye’, *Transition*, 1966.

¹⁸⁴ Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature*, p. 133.

¹⁸⁵ OUP: Jahn to OUP, 7 September 1967, “Kalasanda – Kimenye”, OP2006/15131, 1964.

¹⁸⁶ James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 14.

social comment she makes is far-reaching and can be true of many other localities in Buganda and elsewhere.”¹⁸⁷ Kimenye uses her rural characters to portray the perspective of those who would ordinarily not have been able to travel and actively participate in globalisation processes. While the 1960s saw more East African students travelling abroad for higher education in Britain, Eastern Europe, the USSR, and the USA, this stood as a contrast to rural-based immobile communities, who did not have access to such opportunities. This is represented through the character of Daudi’s incessant search for scholarships for further study abroad.¹⁸⁸ While *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited* may not constitute an overt critique of post-colonial Ugandan and East African state and society, they do serve, to some extent, to highlight non-elite people’s experiences of globalisation. The incidents described above suggest at the quotidian nature of globalisation, its ‘everyday-ness’, and the depth of global connections within East Africa. Though, of course, a fictional source, its speculative nature provides an insight into the extent of globalisation for non-mobile communities. In spite of their immobility, their experiences of a world outside of their own enables them to “insert themselves into a global story of progress” and “a collective which transcended space” and the confines of class.¹⁸⁹ Kimenye accomplishes this through a positive lampooning of the characters’ ignorance of the outside world when they do encounter aspects of it, which – while, of course, as a work of fiction, is dramatized for effect – serves to highlight their marginalisation from centres of power that sustain globalisation. While Kimenye was neither Baganda, nor ethnically Ugandan, she nevertheless represents marginalised communities through her works, and bringing their lives and issues to high cultural discourse.¹⁹⁰ The two short story collections highlight Kimenye’s illustrations of non-elite people’s experiences of globalisation, whilst subtly critiquing the fact that they remain side-lined by the capitalist post-colonial state.

¹⁸⁷ Abasi Kiyimba, ‘Male Identity and Female Space in the Fiction of Ugandan Women Writers’, *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 9, no. 3 (2008): 193–222, p. 195.

¹⁸⁸ See: For example, see: Daniel Branch, ‘Political Traffic: Kenyan Students in Eastern and Central Europe, 1958-69’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 4 (2018): 811–31; Eric Burton, ‘Decolonisation, the Cold War, and Africans’ Routes to Higher Education Overseas, 1957-65’, *Journal of Global History* 15, no. 1 (2020): 169–91; Robert F. Stephens, *Kenyan Student Airlifts to America, 1959-1961: An Educational Odyssey* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2013).

¹⁸⁹ Hunter, Emma, ‘Modernity, Print Media, and the Middle Class in Colonial East Africa’, in *The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire*, ed. Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 105–22, at p. 120, 122.

¹⁹⁰ The concept of Ugandan belonging and citizenship is itself a highly loaded one, given that Uganda as a nation is a colonial construct, based on the consolidation of numerous kingdoms and ethnic groups within borders, and naming the space within after the kingdom of Buganda. For further discussions on this, see: Richard J. Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

“The Promised Land”, Grace Ogot

Born in 1930 in Butere in western Kenya, Grace Ogot was a Kenyan author, nurse, and politician. As a child, she attended Maseno Junior School, the mission school Ng’iya Girls School and later Butere Girls Secondary School. In 1949, she moved to Uganda to undertake nursing training at Mengo Nursing Training College in Kampala, where she qualified as the first Kenyan registered nurse and midwife, and in 1955 relocated to Britain for further training in midwifery. After marrying her husband, Bethwell Ogot, in 1959, the couple moved to London, where Grace Ogot worked as a radio announcer for the BBC. They returned to Kenya in 1961, and Grace Ogot became involved with women’s organisations: she acted as the principal of the Women’s Training Centre, and was a member of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* and the Kenya Council of Women. She also worked as a journalist for the BBC and as a midwife. Ogot became active in politics as a member of parliament and assistant minister, as well as in diplomacy, representing Kenya to the United Nations. As a cultural figure, she was a founding member of the Writers’ Association in Kenya, attended the 1962 African Writers Conference at Makerere College, and was involved with the student publications *Nexus* and *Busara* at University College, Nairobi.¹⁹¹ Her fictional works – in addition to *The Promised Land* – include the short story collections *Land Without Thunder* (EAPH, 1968) and *The Other Woman* (Transafrica Press, 1976), as well as the novel *Miaha* (Heinemann, 1983), published in Luo and translated into English as *The Strange Bride* (East African Educational Publishers, 1989). Ogot passed away in 2015, but remains today one of Kenya’s and East Africa’s leading cultural and literary figures, and leaves a legacy of prominence in the Kenyan women’s movement.¹⁹²

The Promised Land, published in 1966 by EAPH, is the first woman-authored novel to be published in Kenya.¹⁹³ Set in East Africa after the Second World War, the plot centres around two newlyweds, Ochola and Nyapol, from Seme, western Kenya, who decide to migrate to Tanganyika in search of better opportunities, as other members of their Luo community have done previously. The novel follows their journey to Tanganyika, their experiences of settling in and building a home there, as they establish a successful farm on fertile soil. However, they face antagonism from the neighbouring homestead, where an elderly man has developed a dislike towards the Luos migrating from Kenya. One day, this man places a curse on Ochola,

¹⁹¹ Tabitha Kanogo, *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya, 1900-50* (Oxford: James Currey Ltd, 2005), 198-9; Gikandi and Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945*, p. 131-3; NLS: Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/41, Minutes of the ‘Busara’ committee, 1968-70, and correspondence on the East Africa Literature Bureau, 1970-1.

¹⁹² See: Grace Ogot, *Days of My Life* (Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd, 2012).

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

who falls ill and develops a skin condition that involves warts growing all over his body. After consulting with nearly every traditional healer in the region, and visiting a mission hospital, only a witch doctor is able to heal Ochola. The novel ends with Ochola and Nyapol returning to Seme with their children, in the awareness that their ancestral home is the best place for them.¹⁹⁴

The Promised Land has formed the basis for numerous literary scholars to discuss issues surrounding gender, women and the patriarchy.¹⁹⁵ However, it is equally as useful to use the novel as a source to examine connections and networks within East Africa. Though the novel is a work of fiction, it draws on Ogot's observations of Luo society around her, as she based the novel on real events of a family in Seme migrating to Tanzania and later returning to Kenya.¹⁹⁶ Such events were not unusual for Luo communities across western Kenya, as the combination of forced labour and taxation forced many families to migrate into other areas of East Africa for work. The growth of the Luo diaspora across the region saw the creation of the Luo Union in the late 1930s, an organisation that promoted Luo connectedness and identifications across the communities around East Africa, while at the same time working to retain culture and kin obligation.¹⁹⁷

With her work, Ogot provides a social commentary on marginalised communities' participation in East African regionalism. The characters of Ochola and Nyapol are poor farm labourers with little income, yet migrate from Kenya to Tanganyika, and are initially successful in establishing a new home and new networks. Although "they [have] no radios or newspapers", when new migrants from Kenya arrive in Tanganyika, "messages which [were] received from the motherland [are] shared amongst them, so that they felt they were keeping in touch with their relatives across the lake."¹⁹⁸ Ochola is initially warned against leaving Kenya by his father, who tells him that "the strangers, amongst whom you want to live, may not be good people. They may be unfriendly and you may not find favour among them."¹⁹⁹ However, Ochola is eager to embrace life in "the 'Promised Land'", though he remains intent on maintaining his Luo

¹⁹⁴ Grace Ogot, *The Promised Land* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966).

¹⁹⁵ See, for instance: Nana Wilson-Tagoe, 'Reading towards a Theorisation of African Women's Writing: African Women Writers within Feminist Gynocriticism', in *Writing African Women: Gender, Popular Culture and Literature in West Africa*, ed. Stephanie Newell (London: Zed Books, 1997), 21–37; or Gikandi and Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945*, p. 132.

¹⁹⁶ Bernth Lindfors, 'Interview with Grace Ogot', *World Literature Written in English* 18, no. 1 (1979): 57–68, p. 61-2.

¹⁹⁷ Matthew Carotenuto and Katherine Luongo, 'Dala or Diaspora? Obama and the Luo Community of Kenya', *African Affairs* 108, no. 431 (2009): 197–219, at p. 199-205.

¹⁹⁸ Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p. 102.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

customs even when abroad. In a conversation with Nyapol, he asks her, ““What makes you think that people must abandon their traditions when they go to a foreign land? Don’t you now that our ancestors’ eyes follow us everywhere? You break the law today, or tomorrow, their eyes can see you.””²⁰⁰ These instances in the characters’ story arcs demonstrate the tensions below political proclamations of regionalism and sameness. While in the post-colonial period ““thinking East African’ was ... an integral part of East African political thought” and “East African leaders proffered regionalism as a tool to overcome divisive ‘tribalisms’”, *The Promised Land* highlights the divisions behind this regional ideal.²⁰¹ In spite of the fact that the characters migrate within East Africa, their ties to their Luo identities and homelands ultimately are what cause them to return home. *The Promised Land* demonstrates the ways in which people removed from power experience and participate in globalisation and regionalism. Though the novel does not form an overt criticism of the colonial and post-colonial status quo, nevertheless, through the characters and plot, Ogot highlights the plight of people in rural areas who remain marginalised and neglected by state makers, and migrate in search of a better life. In this way, she uses her prominent platform to represent thoughts, ideas and experiences of non-elites that remain otherwise overlooked.

Barbara Kimenye’s *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited* and Grace Ogot’s *The Promised Land* deal with topics around globalisation and regionalism, as they were experienced by non-elites and marginalised communities. The works were published in a time when post-colonial Kenya and Uganda were working towards a place for themselves on the world stage and greater regional integration, debates that were driven by political and intellectual elites. The texts discussed in this section, however, use their characters to highlight the ways in which certain communities remained marginalised in globalisation processes, yet at the same time experienced and participated in it in various ways. With their words, Kimenye and Ogot bring the issues of non-elites to high cultural life, using these to highlight their marginalisation within the gatekeeper state. Through writing for a broad audience, the writers curate a wide-reaching public sphere, as they critique the nature of independence that continued to sideline certain communities.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 211.

²⁰¹ Chris Vaughan et al., ‘Thinking East African: Debating Federation and Regionalism, 1960-1977’, in *Visions of African Unity, New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects*, ed. Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits, African Histories and Modernities (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 49–75, at p. 51.

Women and Patriarchal Oppression

This section examines the theme of women and patriarchal oppression, as this was treated in creative writing by East African – in this section, specifically Kenyan – women. The works that are discussed here are the short story *Elizabeth* by Grace Ogot, the novel *Murder in Majengo* by Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, and the poem *What Does a Man Want?* by Muthoni Likimani. These texts centre around female protagonists in different walks of life, who in various ways face oppression from patriarchal structures, through sexual assault, social precarity for young women and girls, as well as marriage, as the only institution that offers some form of protection to women. With their characters and plot, the three authors in this section highlight the perniciousness of patriarchy and the destructive forces it has on women's lives and security, and their literature forms an inextricable part of the feminist civil society space in post-colonial Kenya. The writers construct a dynamic public sphere, as they use their fictional works to critique patriarchal structures and oppression that were sustained by society at large.

“Elizabeth”, Grace Ogot

Elizabeth is a short story by Grace Ogot, initially published in the publication *East Africa Journal* in 1966, before its inclusion in Ogot's short story collection *Land Without Thunder* (EAPH, 1968). Most recently, it has been included in the anthology *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region* (The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), edited by Amandina Lihamba et al. Elizabeth, the protagonist of the short story, has recently returned from the USA, where she undertook a secretarial course, and has recently begun working as Mr Jimbo's secretary. She is happy in this position, having been subject to sexual harassment from her previous employer, and Mr Jimbo's behaviour to her seems kind. Her salary allows her to enjoy a middle-class lifestyle, and over the Easter weekend, “Elizabeth with two girl friends [takes] a long weekend to Mombasa where they [do] nothing but bathe, eat, and write the longest love letters they [have] written.”²⁰² One day, however, after inviting her to lunch, Mr Jimbo propositions and subsequently rapes Elizabeth, leaving her distraught. She leaves her job and begins care work for destitute children in a home. When Elizabeth finds out that she is pregnant, she goes to Mr Jimbo's house, who is away with his family for the day. When he returns, Mr Jimbo finds Elizabeth in his laundry room, where she has committed suicide.

²⁰² Grace Ogot, ‘Elizabeth’, in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, ed. Amandina Lihamba et al. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), 240–50, p. 243.

Ogot's short story is a commentary on the vulnerable position of women in post-colonial Kenyan society, as she makes a critique of a patriarchy that places young women at risk of sexual assault and destitution. Kenyan independence saw little improvement to the social position of women to which colonialism had relegated them; they effectively still remained second-class citizens.²⁰³ Writing to the *East African Standard* in 1964, Ruth Habwe, the president of the women's organisation *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, made the accusation that "in the home, in public, in job valuation and even in day-to-day activities, men have always regarded women as inferior to them."²⁰⁴ This status in inferiority manifested itself in social expectations of women showing deference to men, and power and authority resting within patriarchal structures.²⁰⁵ Women's organisations were active in their work to counter such social attitudes, and *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, with which Ogot was involved, worked at grassroots levels to bring about change within homes through, for instance, "educating women in home making, child care, nutrition, and hygiene", to "improve domestic standards".²⁰⁶ Other women's organisations in Kenya included the Kenya Women's Society, the Federation of University Women and the Women's Seminar, the work of which was coordinated through the umbrella organisation, the Kenya National Council of Women.²⁰⁷ With this background of an active civil society space that worked to improve women's social position, fiction was another means through which Ogot critiqued patriarchy.

Ogot uses the character of Elizabeth to underscore women's vulnerability: a middle-class, educated woman, she has financial security through her job; however, even her class background provides her with no protection from Mr Jimbo's sexual advances, which result in her losing her job and facing destitution. With Elizabeth's suicide, Ogot comments on gendered respectability politics: as a middle-class, respectable woman who becomes pregnant out of wedlock, Elizabeth faces social ruin, tantamount to the horrific ending her life takes. The short story "presents the rape, pregnancy, and subsequent suicide of a young female secretary as a crisis in gender and class relations with dreadful emotional and psychological consequences for women seeking the validation of their communities."²⁰⁸ While *Elizabeth* "is a story that advances Ogot's call for female liberation", at the same time, it highlights the vulnerability all

²⁰³ See: Tabitha Kanogo, *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya, 1900-50* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005).

²⁰⁴ *East African Standard*, 8 August 1964, quoted in: Audrey Wipper, 'Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 9, no. 3 (1971): 429–42, at p. 433.

²⁰⁵ Wipper, 'Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?', p. 434.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 432; See also: Ogot, *Days of My Life*.

²⁰⁷ Wipper, 'Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?', p. 432.

²⁰⁸ Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye and Tuzyline Jita Allan, 'Grace Akinyi Ogot', in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, ed. Amandina Lihamba et al. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), 240–50, p. 241.

women possess within patriarchal structures.²⁰⁹ With her short story, Ogot criticises gender inequality in a post-colonial state that creates a patriarchy that enables men like Jimbo to prey on women. Along with her civil society activism with *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, Ogot's short story contested patriarchal oppression.

"Murder in Majengo", Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye

Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye was a Kenyan poet, essayist and novelist, and her works form an invaluable addition to the East African literary canon. Of British heritage, Macgoye was born in 1928 in Southampton, and moved to Kenya in 1954 to work in Nairobi in the Christian Missionary Society bookshop. She married her Luo husband, the medical doctor Daniel Oludhe Macgoye, in 1960, and after Kenyan independence in 1963, she became a Kenyan citizen. Marjorie Macgoye remained in Kenya until her death in 2015. Her literary works were greatly influenced by the Luo culture into which she married. In addition to *Murder in Majengo*, other works by Macgoye include the novel *Coming to Birth* (Heinemann, 1986), the poetry collection *Song of Nyarloka and Other Poems* (Oxford University Press, 1977), and *Victoria*, the sequel to *Murder in Majengo* (Published as *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* by Macmillan in 1993).²¹⁰

Murder in Majengo, originally published in 1972 by Oxford University Press is a novel "concerned with the aggressiveness and destructive individualism associated with life in East African towns".²¹¹ Set in post-colonial Kenya, with the backstory of an ongoing unsolved murder case, the plot follows the lives of 17-year-old precocious schoolgirl Lois Akinyi, her British schoolteacher Vera, and a dubious lawyer, Mr Obonyo, whose lives intertwine over the course of the novel. Lois initially becomes involved with Obonyo, in the hope that he may pay her school fees in exchange for sex, or "if the worst came to the worst he might take her as third wife."²¹² During the school holidays, Vera, who has only been in Kenya for a year and prides herself on managing "to avoid those pockets of colonial Africa which still remained", seeks an 'authentic' Kenyan cultural experience, and accepts Lois' invitation to stay with her and Obonyo.²¹³ Vera unwittingly becomes involved in Obonyo's sordid affairs, and is also subject to sexual harassment from the latter. After a series of complications, Obonyo is mysteriously

²⁰⁹ Tonney Hillary Odhiambo, 'Contesting Traditions through Self-Narration in Grace Ogot's "Days of My Life"' (Master of Arts in Literature thesis, Nairobi, University of Nairobi, 2015), p. 82.

²¹⁰ Bodil Folke Frederiksen, 'Macgoye, Marjorie Oludhe', in *Dictionary of African Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195382075.001.0001/acref-9780195382075-e-1210>; Gikandi and Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945*, p. 102-104.

²¹¹ Gikandi and Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945*, p. 102-3.

²¹² Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p. 118.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

murdered, and Vera is questioned by the police as a potential suspect. She is dismissed from her position at her school, and takes up another teaching job on the other side of Kenya, before returning to England a year later. Lois does not return to school, and instead marries the police detective involved in Obonyo's murder case, and the two have a son, of whom "nobody ever, ever asked who his real father was."²¹⁴

With *Murder in Majengo*, Macgoye critiques patriarchal structures in post-colonial Kenya, in depicting the vulnerability young women face in urban areas of the country. The same social conditions described above that women's organisations across Kenya fought against are addressed by Macgoye with her novel. For young girls, their second-class status in society after independence could be seen for instance in their lower education levels in comparison to boys: by 1971, one year before *Murder in Majengo*'s publication, girls made up 42% of primary and 30% of secondary schools.²¹⁵ This lower school enrolment, therefore, reduced the professional opportunities available for women later in the formal sector, and it was not unusual for young girls and women to turn to prostitution as a means of income and survival.²¹⁶ The character of Lois demonstrates the precarious position of girls in this period, and how their social status rendered them susceptible to sexual advances and assault. The tragedy of this lies in its normalisation: for Lois, growing up in a brothel as the daughter of a single mother, "the sight and sound of love-making had always been so familiar to her that it held no magic", and she has no qualms about sleeping with Obonyo in exchange for him paying his school fees.²¹⁷ Lois' desire to remain in school in the beginning of the novel reflects Macgoye's consideration of "education as an opening through which awareness, empowerment and resultant freedom of women can be achieved."²¹⁸ Despite Lois' background and upbringing, "Macgoye wants the reader to see through prostitution, for which women are harshly condemned, to the forces that sustain it in the society."²¹⁹ The character has opportunities and wishes to remain in school, however, in becoming the prey of Obonyo, her resulting pregnancy forces her to leave school and marry for social protection. *Murder in Majengo* is a critique of social structures that leave young women helpless in post-colonial Kenya, and Macgoye uses the character of Lois to demonstrate the fate of those who do not have families or access to some form of social safety.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Kenya: Statistical Abstract 1972, Tables 177 and 178, cited: in Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence*, p. 837, note no. 150.

²¹⁶ See: Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

²¹⁸ Peter A. O. Wasamba, 'Gender Perspectives in the Creative Works of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye' (PhD thesis, Nairobi, University of Nairobi, 2000), p. 76.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

Although she is of British heritage, Macgoye uses her platform to represent women more marginalised than her, and to critique patriarchal structures that continue to oppress women and girls in an independent Kenya.

“*What Does a Man Want?*”, Muthoni Likimani

Born in 1925, Muthoni Likimani is a Kenyan author, teacher, radio and television broadcaster, public relations specialist and women’s rights activist. She attended Kahuhia Girls School and the Government African Girls Teachers College, Lower Kabete. Likimani initially worked as a teacher, and moved to Nairobi after her marriage to her husband, Dr Jason Clement Likimani, the first African doctor in Kenya. Muthoni Likimani became involved with women’s organisations, such as *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* and the Young Women’s Christian Association. She later moved to Britain for higher education, enrolling at the Institute of Education at the University of London and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, while at the same time working as a nurse and for the BBC. Upon her return to Kenya in 1960, Muthoni Likimani became a radio producer, and began writing her now well-known works of fiction. She founded Noni’s Publicity, her own public relations company in 1973, and was the Nairobi city councillor in the 1980s. Her literary works include the novel *They Shall be Chastised* (EALB, 1974), *Passbook Number F.47927: Women and Mau Mau in Kenya* (Macmillan, 1985) and her autobiography *Fighting Without Ceasing* (Noni’s Publicity, 2005).²²⁰

What Does a Man Want? is a narrative poem published by the Kenya Literature Bureau in 1974. It is divided into thirteen parts, with each part narrated from the point of view of a different woman expressing their unhappiness about her marriage. One woman laments “What does a man want? / I demand to be told! / Show me the do’s, / Show me the don’ts, / Of a husband! / What is the role / The Law for the wife? Yes!”²²¹ Another woman realises her husband has been sleeping with a sex worker, which makes her question “What can she offer? / Cleanliness? / Better cooking? / Intelligent talk? / Or what? / Really what ...? / What a man wants / I will be glad to know.”²²² A different woman finds out about her husband’s infidelity, and decides to leave him, and return to her own family for a while. However, it becomes difficult for her to support herself financially, and she moves to a “one room home / in the city’s quiet slums.” She

²²⁰ Elisabeth Bekers, ‘Likimani, Muthoni Gachanja’, in *Dictionary of African Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Emmanuel Akyeampong, and Steven J. Niven (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195382075.013.1173>; James, *In Their Own Voices*, p. 59; Gikandi and Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945*, p. 95.

²²¹ Muthoni Likimani, *What Does a Man Want?* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1974), p. 1.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

realises, “I missed my home. / I missed my position / My respect I missed.”²²³ Shunned by her husband and her children, she eventually becomes destitute and an alcoholic. The poem also provides perspectives of an Asian woman, an African woman married to a European man, and a European woman married to an African man. The poem ends with women of different walks of life – young, old, rich, and poor – gathering to discuss the question of what a man wants. They come to the realisation that “we are all fools, / For no one seems / To know for sure / What the men we have / Do want.”²²⁴

What Does a Man Want? serves as a critique of patriarchal structures and of the position of women in post-colonial Kenyan and East African society. The status of inferiority that women and their representative organisations were protesting in post-colonial Kenya manifested itself in the form of quotidian indignities in households: before marriage, girls lived under the authority of their father or brother, and as women in marriage, this control transferred to their husbands. As a wife, a woman was expected to prepare and serve food to her husband and his friends, but forbidden to join them, and at social gatherings, while men were seated on chairs, the expectation of women was to sit on the ground.²²⁵ Such indignities were legitimised by male policymakers: in 1966 a debate was held in Kenya’s National Assembly on permitting women to enter, to which MP Ngala Mwendwa contributed: “The first duty of a woman, any woman, is to get a husband. This is the first qualification of a woman. If she fails to get a husband, she has failed her first examination.”²²⁶ This sexism was replicated in national policy when, in June 1969, the Affiliation Act, which granted unmarried mothers and their children some protection, was abolished by the National Assembly.²²⁷ As Audrey Wipper argues, “the men who loudly espoused democratic, egalitarian principles in their indictment of the authoritarian colonial system were seen by the militants in their private lives to nurture authoritarian relationships with women.”²²⁸

Although she describes *What Does a Man Want?* as “a frivolous book” in an interview, with her words, Likimani makes a commentary on women’s vulnerable status that finds them security only in the institution of marriage, forcing them to remain with their husbands, even if they are unhappy. The fate of the woman who chooses to leave her husband underscores the

²²³ Ibid., p. 104.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 209.

²²⁵ Wipper, ‘Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?’, p. 434.

²²⁶ House of Representatives Report, 9 March 1966, col. 1886, cited in: Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence*, p. 202.

²²⁷ Wipper, ‘Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?’, p. 431.

²²⁸ Ibid.

social and physical vulnerability unmarried women face. With humorous tones she depicts, as she states in an interview, “some contradictions ... of married life”, showing how “if you are old the men want young girls, if you are young they think you don’t have much sense. If you love them too much they think you are possessive, they get fed up.”²²⁹ Her characters represent a broad cross-section of women in Kenya, highlighting that, although women may have different backgrounds, they are all vulnerable within patriarchal systems. The ending of the poem is symbolic for the strength in sisterhood that women may find, despite the confusion of “what a man wants”. Likimani’s poem was met with much popularity, and was even translated into German.²³⁰ With *What Does a Man Want?* Likimani makes a damning commentary on the institution of marriage, critiquing post-colonial patriarchal systems that place women in socially vulnerable positions, requiring security only through matrimonial union with a man.

The works of fiction discussed in this section by Ogot, Macgoye and Likimani all serve to highlight women’s vulnerability within the patriarchal structures that characterised post-colonial Kenya. The writers use a range of characters from diverse social backgrounds to demonstrate the fact that all women, regardless of class, face some form of patriarchal oppression. Speaking to the context in which they were writing, independence in Kenya saw little improvement to women’s status in society, and the patriarchal oppression of colonialism, was simply continued by African state leaders. The works highlight how women are often forced to negotiate with the patriarchy to ensure their own safety: either by marrying, as Lois in *Murder in Majengo* does, or staying married to unfaithful husbands, as the characters do in *What Does a Man Want?*. The alternative is becoming a social outcast, facing destitution, or death, the possibilities of which are illustrated with Ogot’s *Elizabeth*, and other women in *What Does a Man Want?*. The women’s movement in Kenya was active in working to improve women’s lot, making for a vibrant civil society space, of which these women writers were a part of. Their texts expand mainstream debates on decolonisation and Africanisation, underscoring that independence movements, while abolishing colonial tyranny, failed to do the same with patriarchal oppress. With their fiction, they hold a mirror to post-colonial Kenyan society, calling for a form of decolonisation and independence that would liberate women as well.

²²⁹ James, *In Their Own Voices*, p. 60.

²³⁰ Ibid.; Muthoni Likimani, ‘Was Will Ein Mann?’, in *Frauen in Afrika: Erzählungen Und Berichte*, ed. Irmgard Ackermann (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), 14–23.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the ways in which East African women writers challenged and critiqued oppression, injustices and inequality after independence in Kenya and Uganda, and expressed their grievances with decolonisation in their creative writing. Literary figures used their positions to advocate for marginalised communities and hold the state accountable, using the themes of disillusionment with independence, globalisation and East African regionalism, and women and patriarchal oppression. An impression of the post-independence book publishing industry in Kenya and Uganda was first provided, to give an overview of its exclusive nature, as well as the challenges women writers faced in their craft and in publishing.

The theme of disillusionment with independence included examinations of the poems *I took my son by the hand* by Micere Mugo and *They Ran out of Mud* by Miriam Khamadi Were, as well as Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu's play *When the Hunchback Made Rain*. Each of these pieces of creative writing highlight how independence did not meet people's expectations, through the state failing to provide basic necessities for survival, as well as enabling prevailing practices of nepotism and corruption. Globalisation and East African regionalism were topics that featured in Barbara Kimenye's short story collections *Kalasanda* and its sequel, *Kalasanda Revisited*, in addition to the novel *The Promised Land* by Grace Ogot. The works demonstrate the ways in which non-elites experienced and participated in globalisation and regionalism, and, while they did not provide overt critiques of the post-colonial state, nevertheless, through their treatment of rural characters, bring the issues such communities might face to the forefront. Finally, the theme of women and society and how this was incorporated into literature was examined, discussing the narrative poem *What Does a Man Want?* by Muthoni Likimani, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's novel *Murder in Majengo* and Grace Ogot's short story *Elizabeth*. These works highlight the various ways women face oppression in society, and critique the patriarchy that is enabled by the post-colonial state.

As discussed previously, most of the women authors examined here had privileges of education and mobility that were not a reality for many other East African women at the time. However, it is testament to their skills as writers that they were able to successfully capture the experiences of the non-elite of this period, and thereby act as proxies for broader communities. Their works criticised various forms of oppression and inequalities that not only women faced, but non-elite society at large, and the ways in which this was sustained by the conditions created by post-colonial state. The women's texts as sources are not only relevant in capturing experiences of independence by marginalised communities, but also in highlighting the importance of

literature as a tool for political dissent in this period. In a time when state authoritarianism was increasingly stifling opportunities for criticism in the public sphere, fiction remained a vital avenue through which artists expressed their discontent with independence. In spite of various challenges and difficulties they faced in society, these writers continued to remain creative, and critique society and politics in their works. Their poetry and prose demonstrate how women were vital figures in the cultural interiority of the state, using their writing to express their visions for decolonisation and continued hopes for independence.

Chapter 3

Children's Literature

Introduction

While literature for adults was booming in the 1960s in East Africa – thanks in large part to the Makerere English Department and the concerted efforts of different publishing houses – there was a dearth in literature and non-textbook fiction for children. At the time, the only written literature available for a young audience was British and Western literature in English. Such books, according to Kenyan publisher Henry Chakava, “transported [African children] to strange places, among people whose lifestyles did not bear the slightest resemblance to their own.”¹ The result was the production of “a new breed of black Europeans, who began to despise their own skin and background.”² From the mid-1960s onwards, therefore, there was a concerted effort on the part of publishing houses – in particular indigenous companies – to produce more literature suitable for children in East Africa. It was in this genre especially that women outshone their male peers, as they penned stories that were enjoyed by children across the region.

This chapter examines children's literature by East African women published in the 1960s and 1970s. The writers – some of whom also penned literature for adults, as examined in the previous chapter – include Barbara Kimenye, Asenath Bole Odaga, Miriam Khamadi Were, Pamela Kola, Anne Matindi, Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, as well as Marjorie Olduhe Macgoye. These women addressed a broad spectrum of issues across, and provided a commentary on contemporary East African society and culture, examining themes and topics that would have resonated with a young audience: they discuss the difficulties of navigating traditional customs in a post-colonial world for young people; the values of good character and integrity; as well as imbuing readers with an awareness of socio-political issues in East Africa. The contemporary *Zeitgeist* of Africanisation and decolonisation – as evidenced, for instance, through the abolition of the English Department at University College, Nairobi in 1968 – also permeated children's literature, allowing for the intersection of culture and education. This chapter will highlight the ways in which the labour of Africanisation and the democratisation of these debates outside of the ivory tower was performed by women through literature. The cultural interiority of the state was a crucible for a decolonisation discourse, which was

¹ Henry Chakava, *Publishing in Africa: One Man's Perspective* (Chestnut Hill: Bellagio Publishing Network Research and Information Center, 1996), p. 23.

² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

communicated by women in a variety of ways for differing audiences, including children. In this way, this chapter will investigate the transformative potential of these debates through women's writing for young audiences.

African children's literature – in comparison to that for adult audiences – remains relatively under-researched in academic scholarship, largely due to its relative novelty as a field, having only burgeoned from the 1980s onwards. In its early years, Osayimwense Osa traced its nascence after African countries gained their independence in the 1960s, and argued for the importance of literature specifically for children to foster their emotional and intellectual development.³ Decades later, Osa continues to recognise “African children's literature [as] part of the universal republic of childhood”, praising in particular African folk tales for inspiring the genre of children's literature.⁴ The importance of children's literature to education is discussed by Graceify Achufusi, who argues that the didactic nature of African children's books aids in addressing social problems.⁵ Scholars Donnaræ MacCann and Yulisa Amadu Maddy employ apartheid South Africa as a case study, examining the ways in which children's literature perpetuated structures of racism and inequality for young audiences. While “Apartheid was the work of intellectuals, educators, and church leaders, as well as business people and political operatives,” MacCann and Maddy argue that “South African children's literature [was] an integral part of this broad, white supremacist program.”⁶ The educational value of children's literature is particularly relevant to this chapter, which investigates how books for young audiences helped make Africanisation discourses accessible to them.

This chapter will build on this scholarship to examine the ways in which the cultural interiority of the state also incorporated children's education, and helped broaden the scope of debates on decolonisation and Africanisation. This remains a unique approach in East African cultural historiographies, as a full study of children's literature in the region has hitherto not been conducted. As this chapter will demonstrate, the discourse of Africanisation was not merely relegated to academic, political, or high cultural circles; it trickled down to all layers of society, including to young people, the labour of which was largely performed by women in the 1960s and 1970s. The texts by women that the chapter examines will be used to demonstrate their

³ Osayimwense Osa, ‘The Rise of African Children's Literature’, *The Reading Teacher* 38, no. 8 (1985): 750–54.

⁴ Osayimwense Osa, ‘The Expanding Universe of African Children's Literature: The Why, the How, and the What of Publishing in Africa about African Children's Literature’, *Journal of African Children's and Youth Literature* 19–20 (2010).

⁵ Graceify Achufusi, ‘African Literature and African Children: An Evaluation of Characters in Children's Books’, *Neohelicon* 22, no. 2 (1995): 171–82.

⁶ Donnaræ MacCann and Yulisa Amadu Maddy, *Apartheid and Racism in South African Children's Literature, 1985-1995* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. xiv.

visions for the future, through their writing for children. The works display the writers' disillusionment with independence, as they chronicle the inequality and socio-economic disparities that did not end with formal colonialism. In reading these texts, children would learn about issues around race and class in East Africa, understand the exploitative nature of the post-colonial state, in addition to gaining access to indigenous knowledge. Therefore, this chapter will highlight not just a diversification in terms of themes of debates on Africanisation, but also a new depth, as women writers bring this discourse and state critique to young audiences, providing them with both political and emotional education. This was a highly novel approach, as at the time, children and youth were often precluded from discussions on decolonisation, with the exception of formal political party structures, in which youth wings were a part of certain agendas.⁷

Through writing for children, the authors in this section combined creativity and humorous narratives with cultural critiques and appeals to tradition and African indigeneity, with the extended goal of educating children growing up in the era of independence. In writing for children using themes, settings, and language they could understand, and in creating a world that children could see themselves in, the writers were able to communicate their disillusionment and hopes for a better future to their audience. With their poems, short stories and novels, the women gave children the tools to understand their socio-political surroundings and to create the world as it should be in the future. The different formats in which the texts examined in this chapter were produced – either as prose or poetry – and the media of publication – such as in a textbook for school children – indicate the transformative potential that children's literature held in this period to educate and Africanise society. One of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's most severe criticisms of imperialism was its "psychological violence of the classroom", which led to "colonial alienation", and the "disassociation of the sensibility of [children] from [their] natural environment." As "culture ... conditions a child to see [the] world in a certain way, the colonial child was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by" imperialist powers."⁸ African women writers, therefore, were counteracting

⁷ For example, see: James R. Brennan, 'Youth, the TANU Youth League, and Managed Vigilantism in Dar Es Salaam, 1925–73', in *Generations Past: Youth in East African History*, ed. Andrew Burton and Hélène Charton-Bigot (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 196–220; Andrew Burton, 'Raw Youth, School-Leavers, and the Emergence of Structural Unemployment in Late Colonial Urban Tanganyika', in *Generations Past: Youth in East African History*, ed. Andrew Burton and Hélène Charton-Bigot (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 108–34; Thomas Burgess, 'To Differentiate Rice from Grass Youth Labor Camps in Revolutionary Zanzibar', in *Generations Past: Youth in East African History*, ed. Andrew Burton and Hélène Charton-Bigot (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 221–36.

⁸ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), p. 9, 17.

this “psychological violence” through penning stories with African characters, settings and issues, that their readers could understand and identify with. This chapter will underscore the scope and potential in these women’s works for social transformation.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: it will firstly provide an overview of the book publishing industry, specifically focussing on children’s books, in Kenya and Uganda at independence. The chapter will then interrogate the titles according to three genres: fictional novels, folk tales and school textbook literature. The fictional novels discussed here include, Barbara Kimenye’s *Moses in Trouble*, Asenath Bole Odaga’s *The Villager’s Son* and Miriam Khamadi Were’s *The Boy in Between*. The category of folk tales comprises, *East African Why Stories* by Pamela Kola and *The Sun and the Wind* by Anne Matindi, while that of school textbook literature examined encompasses three poems: *Unto Thy Hands* by Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, *For Miriam* and *Letter to a Friend*, both by Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye. These genres were selected to provide a broad representation of the different types of creative works produced by women for children in this period. East African children’s literature formed part of the foundation of the region’s public sphere after independence. It made debates on Africanisation and decolonisation accessible to young audiences, through its didactic nature that provided both emotional and academic education for children.

Children’s literature book publishing in Kenya and Uganda at independence

A background to the publishing of children’s literature in East Africa in the 1960s and 1970s will be provided here, in order to place the production of the works discussed in this chapter into context. An overview of the publishing industry in Uganda and Kenya generally, as well as the challenges facing women writers in this period, were provided in Chapter 2, and remain relevant here. As mentioned above, at independence in both Uganda and Kenya, there was a distinct lack in African children’s literature, with most young people consuming British and other western children’s books. The frustration about this was felt by both parents and educators, such as Pamela Kola – whose work will be discussed in this chapter – who stated in an interview that, as a teacher, she was “familiar with people complaining that most of [their] reading books [were] written by people who did not know about us”.⁹ For parents raising their children in a rapidly changing environment post-independence, one that was wholly different

⁹ Adeola James, ed., *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk* (London: James Currey, 1990), p. 48.

to that of their childhood, the lack of literature to help keep their children in touch with their heritage must have been difficult.¹⁰

There was, therefore, a gap in the market for African children's literature that African writers and publishers worked to fill. This was largely done by women writers who, according to Kenyan writer Grace Ogot, produced "children's story books which [were] so badly needed to break through the Enid Blyton collections so entrenched in the market."¹¹ Women writers such as those discussed in this chapter began to write short stories, novels, and poems for a young audience, using themes, settings and characters that would resonate with African children. In the case of Pamela Kola, when trying to rectify the damage caused by the sole consumption of Western literature by African children, she stated in an interview in 1990 that, retrospectively, "when [she wrote] she [was] aware of these problems and [she tried] not to repeat some of the mistakes."¹²

Foreign publishing companies such as Oxford University Press (OUP) at independence initially focussed on publishing school textbooks and supplementary readers, in catering for younger audiences. The Oxford Library for East Africa was a series of supplementary readers that consisted of books for a secondary school audience in Kenya and Uganda, and included Miriam Khamadi Were's *The Boy in Between*, as well as Barbara Kimenye's *Moses* series, which are both discussed in this chapter. For OUP, these supplementary readers were an easy and cost-effective means of producing books suitable as educational materials, and were culturally appropriate in a decade of Africanisation in Kenya and Uganda. They also offered more opportunities for women writers to become published, in contrast to the gatekeeping practices in the publication of literature for adults (as discussed in Chapter 1).¹³

The East African Publishing House (EAPH) in the 1960s also expanded its catalogue to include children's literature, thereby also giving many African women opportunities to become published. As its aim at creation in 1965 was to produce literature catered for African audiences, this was reflected in the books and supplementary readers produced for young people. By 1972, the EAPH had successfully launched a variety of children's books series, including the East African Junior Library – to which the works of Pamela Kola and Anne Matindi, both discussed

¹⁰ See: Celina Nyai Oloo and Virginia Cone, *Kenya Women Look Ahead* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1965).

¹¹ Bernth Lindfors, 'Interview with Grace Ogot', *World Literature Written in English* 18, no. 1 (1979): 57–68, at p. 67.

¹² Adeola James, ed., *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk* (London: James Currey, 1990), p. 48.

¹³ Caroline Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature: African Writers and British Publishers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 51, 62.

in this chapter, were an important contribution – the East African Readers Library, First Science Readers, Little Twiga Books, Safari Adventure Books, the East African Senior Library, and the African Secondary Readers.¹⁴ While the East African Literature Bureau (EALB) also produced educational literature, these were more didactic; the focus of this chapter will be on cultural texts.¹⁵

Generally, however, the production and publication of children’s fiction remained slow, due to poor sales figures and high production costs involving the use of inboard bindings, full-colour illustrations, and tough paper. Educational textbooks were much more lucrative for publishing companies to produce.¹⁶ The Kenyan Ministry of Education recommended 300 supplementary readers for the primary school syllabus in 1966, of which 34% were published by OUP, 33% by Longman, 28% by other British publishers, and only 4% by East African publishers, which primarily consisted of EAPH and the East African Literature Bureau.¹⁷ It was only from the 1980s onwards that this changed, and more African children’s fiction actively began to be produced by African publishers, an initiative led by Henry Chakava and Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe.¹⁸

The children’s book publishing industry in East Africa offered more opportunities for women to become published, especially with indigenous publishing houses, such as the EALB. What follows is an examination of the ways in which women used their works to educate and inspire young people in Kenya and Uganda with the help of an Africanisation and decolonisation discourse.

Children’s Fiction

Three works within the genre of children’s fiction will be examined here: Barbara Kimenye’s *Moses in Trouble*, Asenath Bole Odaga’s *The Villager’s Son*, and *The Boy in Between* by Miriam Khamadi Were. These works were selected as they are set in the period in which they were published, in a contemporary East African environment. An interrogation of these novels will demonstrate succinct social commentary, the writers’ visions for the future, and the ways in which intellectual discourse on decolonisation and independence were made accessible to children. With their themes and characters, the women in this section penned stories that were accessible to young African audiences, as part of contemporary debates on decolonisation and

¹⁴ McMillan Memorial Library: *East African Publishing House Books, 1972*, M007382.

¹⁵ Bethwell A. Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time* (Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd, 2003), p. 211.

¹⁶ Chakava, *Publishing in Africa: One Man’s Perspective*, p. 17, 23.

¹⁷ Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time*, p. 220.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23; Henry Chakava, Oral History Interview with author, 12 March 2020.

Africanisation. Their works, therefore, highlight its far-reaching nature of this discourse, the labour of which was performed primarily by women.

“Moses in Trouble”, Barbara Kimenyé

Barbara Kimenyé was a Ugandan writer, who lived in Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda, and is heralded as “one of East Africa’s most prolific children’s writers” (a more expansive biography of Kimenyé is provided in Chapter 2).¹⁹ *Moses in Trouble*, published by Oxford University Press in 1968, as part of its Oxford Library for East Africa series, it is the fifth book in Kimenyé’s famous *Moses* series.²⁰ Set in contemporary Uganda, the book series follows the adventures and misdemeanours of Moses and his friends at Mukibi’s Educational Institute for the Sons of African Gentlemen. Between 1968 and 1987, the books were published by Oxford University Press, in 1991 by East African Educational Publishers, and in 1996 by MacMillan education.

Moses in Trouble begins with Mukibi’s Education Institute in a precarious financial situation, which partially results in the resignation of the school’s kitchen staff, as they have not been receiving a salary. As a replacement, the schoolboys are used as free labour to prepare the meals, which Moses and his friends realise when their punishment for a prank (sending cockroaches in the post to the Minister of Education with the headmaster’s compliments) is to cook the school meals. Ingredients to cook with are hard to come by, and Moses and his friends on several occasions steal food from surrounding compounds and farms to serve to their schoolmates. On one occasion, after attempting to steal milk from a farm by trying to milk the cows, on the way back to school, the boys are knocked down by a speeding lorry, which loses crates of sweetened milk and soup. Moses and his friends return to their school with these goods, and prepare a meal out of them, which the entire school loves. The boys return to the site of the near accident, where they had stashed the remainder of the milk and soup, and Moses, who had been feeling unwell for a few days, faints. They are found by the police and are arrested, and one policeman believes Moses to be drunk. At the police station, upon examination by a police doctor, Moses is diagnosed with malnutrition – a result of the poor diet served at Mukibi’s Education Institute. The boys are sent back to school, and Moses spends nine days in the sanatorium. During this time, the school undergoes many changes, when a visiting health inspector comes to visit: cooks are re-hired, nutritious meals are prepared, and

¹⁹ Nancy J. Schmidt, ‘The Writer as Teacher: A Comparison of the African Adventure Stories of G. A. Henty, Rene Guillot, and Barbara Kimenyé’, *African Studies Review* 19, no. 2 (1976): 69–80, at p. 69.

²⁰ Barbara Kimenyé, *Moses in Trouble* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968).

student hygiene becomes a priority. However, when Moses leaves the sanatorium, Mukibi's Education Institute quickly reverts back to its previously dilapidated state and the cooks are dismissed, the changes having merely been a façade for the health inspector. The novel ends with Moses and his friends preparing for a party, drinking wine and smoking cigarettes.

The *Moses* series bears a distinct resemblance to other schoolchild series in the canon, notably Enid Blyton's *Malory Towers* and *St. Clare's* series, which were published two decades prior to *Moses*. The dearth in African children's literature in the 1960s was a propelling factor in Kimenye choosing to write books in the genre (having previously written the *Kalasanda* short story collection for an adult audience).²¹ The intertextual nature of the *Moses* series is what Oldfield terms "the double-voiced nature of Signifyin(g)", in that the series spans "both Western and African canonical texts", thereby "[subverting the] traditional African women's orature to address a contemporary black African child readership through the Africa-centred refiguring of texts."²² While East African children would have grown up reading Western children's literature, it is because of the creation of relatable characters and settings, that Kimenye's writing resonated with a young African audience in ways the Western canon, such as Blyton's books, could not.²³ Through the use of ordinary African schoolchild characters who have extraordinary adventures, the series remains very popular in East Africa today.²⁴

The linear plot structure and the humorous nature of the narrative style render the themes in *Moses in Trouble* (and the *Moses* series generally) of "power relations between adults and children" palatable to its intended audience.²⁵ It is through these power relations that Kimenye is able to discuss contemporary social issues in East Africa, including materialism, greed or gender inequality.²⁶ Kimenye's children's literature has received criticism for not treating contemporary African issues in her work, which contains no reference to politics or socio-economic concerns in Africa.²⁷ However, it is Kimenye's subtlety in such treatment that makes

²¹ Elizabeth F. Oldfield, *Transgressing Boundaries: Gender, Identity, Culture, and the 'Other' in Postcolonial Women's Narratives in East Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), p. xvi.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²³ *Ibid.*; Chakava, *Publishing in Africa: One Man's Perspective*, p. 23.

²⁴ Schmidt, 'The Writer as Teacher: A Comparison of the African Adventure Stories of G. A. Henty, Rene Guillot, and Barbara Kimenye', p. 75-6; Modern-day East African social media discourse continues to celebrate Barbara Kimenye and her *Moses* series. See: https://twitter.com/dan_omanga/status/1258007192898281472; <https://twitter.com/KResearcher/status/1381608684376223747>; and <https://twitter.com/amerix/status/1123975999723646978>.

²⁵ Paul Timbiti Watuwa, 'Language and Ideology in Barbara Kimenye's Fiction for Children' (Master of Arts in Literature thesis, Kampala, Makerere University, 2011), p. 42.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁷ Peter Nazareth, *An African View of Literature* (Evanston: Northwestern, 1974), p. 167; See also: Schmidt, 'The Writer as Teacher: A Comparison of the African Adventure Stories of G. A. Henty, Rene Guillot, and Barbara Kimenye', p. 75.

her works both educational and entertaining for children. Colonial mission education in Uganda was designed not only to educate, but also to teach “values such as loyalty to the existing order and disciplined self-sacrifice in the interest of that order.”²⁸ According to Mahmood Mamdani, the setting of a boarding school specifically designed “like a jail or an insane asylum”, functioned to isolate children from their environments.²⁹ This would aid in their successful inculcation of colonial values, and the creation of “a particular breed of men, ‘loyal’ Afro-Saxons – the collaborating class”, who would, later on, sustain not only colonial rule, but also its legacies after independence.³⁰ Like most institutions after independence, education institutions continued to retain similar structures to those of their colonial predecessors, with power simply being replaced by another set of elite hands.

Mukibi’s Education Institute in *Moses in Trouble* bears distinct resemblances to the restrictive boarding school environment that Mamdani criticises, with the headteacher functioning as a stock literary character “placed in [an] adversary role to the heroes”.³¹ Mukibi’s places stringent restrictions on the boys’ movement, and its leadership demanding total obedience in spite of its failure to provide basic necessities, such as nutritious meals for its pupils. Kimenye’s work criticises such colonial institutions that impact students’ freedom and lives, ultimately a critique of the nature of the colonial state and its post-colonial successor. By the time of publication of *Moses in Trouble*, Uganda had experienced a turbulence of political events since independence, characterised primarily through Prime Minister and later President Obote’s growing authoritarianism, and his intolerance of any form of opposition (see the introduction to this thesis for a further discussion on this). The novel is a lesson to children to remain critical of authority and those in power who may fail to provide what they are legally obliged to. The critiques of the Ugandan post-colonial state, and its alienation of the non-elite formed part of the discourse that was printed in student publications, literary journals and publications for adult audiences (see Chapters 1 and 2). With *Moses in Trouble*, Kimenye brings these debates to a younger audience, providing ironic yet humorous commentary on the post-independence state. In this way, her writing contributed to extending debates on decolonisation and the meaning of independence to further echelons of society.

²⁸ Mahmood Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), p. 161.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Schmidt, ‘The Writer as Teacher: A Comparison of the African Adventure Stories of G. A. Henty, Rene Guillot, and Barbara Kimenye’, p. 77.

“*The Boy in Between*”, Miriam Khamadi Were

Miriam Khamadi Were’s *The Boy in Between* is a *Bildungsroman* for a juvenile audience, set in a village in rural Kenya (a full biography of Were is given in Chapter 2). Published by Oxford University Press in 1969, as part of its Oxford Library for East Africa series, the novel follows the protagonist Namunyu, a child caught “in between” with four older and four younger siblings. The plot begins with Namunyu in primary school in his local village, and the reader learns about his love for sports – especially football – and his penchant for cheating in matches, known as the troublemaker in school. After sitting for the General Entrance Examination, Namunyu gains admission to a mission school, where the educational language is in English. Namunyu struggles initially with speaking English, and with new hitherto foreign customs, such as using an iron, or eating with a knife and fork. However, as he settles in and his English improves, he gains popularity with his classmates, who give him the nicknames “American Negro” and “Washington”, due to his American-sounding accent in English. Namunyu also develops a sense of integrity, as he stands up for younger students who are being bullied. His senior exam results are excellent, resulting in him being admitted to the best high school in the district. Once he is there, Namunyu must navigate being the new boy again, and starting a new chapter as someone with little significance, as he realises that he has to work to gain the respect from his new schoolmates, as he had to do at his previous school.³²

Designed as a supplementary reader for secondary schools in East Africa, *The Boy in Between* is a coming-of-age story, which, through following Namunyu’s educational journey, contains many messages for young readers on character and navigating a post-independence world. Namunyu’s character growth is reflected in the development of his sense of integrity, and awareness of right and wrong; he evolves from a boy who thinks it acceptable to cheat in sports, to a young man not afraid to stand up to bullies. One becomes aware of the circular nature of life, as Namunyu faces fresh starts and challenges repeatedly during his childhood. The messages for young children, though simple, highlight the author’s perceptions of important values after independence in East Africa. By 1969, when *The Boy in Between* was published, Kenya was in the mist of political instability: Tom Mboya was assassinated in July 1969, and Pio Gamma Pinto only a few years earlier in 1965. President Kenyatta’s regime became increasingly steeped in authoritarianism, corruption and patronage along ethnic lines, with primarily the Gikuyu reaping the ‘fruits of independence’ (see the introduction to this thesis for a further discussion on this). This did not translate to an environment of stability for children to

³² Miriam Khamadi Were, *The Boy In Between* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1969).

grow up in, and Were's work forms part of efforts of the state's cultural interior to counteract the ruinous actions of post-colonial Kenyan politics.

Were's messages of the importance of humility and integrity are poignant in their simplicity, and through their inclusion as supplementary readers for school children, the novel certainly had power to resonate with a wide audience of young readers. The themes addressed in *The Boy in Between* formed part of the general contemporary discourse on decolonisation and Africanisation; in making some of these debates accessible to young audiences, Were contributed to their extension across society and broadening their potential for social impact.

"The Villager's Son", Asenath Bole Odaga

Born in western Kenya in 1937, Asenath Bole Odaga was a renowned writer and publisher of books for adults and children. Odaga read for a degree in History, Education and Literature at the University of Nairobi, where she was taught by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, before working as a researcher at the University's Institute of African Studies. She later left this position, to devote herself to her passion for writing. She wrote books in both Luo and in English, with some of her works including *Jane's Ambition* (East African Publishing House, 1966), *The Diamond Ring* (East African Publishing House, 1967), *A Bridge in Time* (Lake Publishers and Enterprises, 1987), and *Between the Years* (Lake Publishers and Enterprises, 1987). She is also the author of non-fiction works, including *Yesterday's Today: The Study of Oral Literature* (Lake Publishers and Enterprises, 1984). Asenath Bole Odaga died in December 2014.³³

The Villager's Son is a novel published in 1971 by Heinemann Educational Books. It follows the life and trials of a young boy, Jako, who is sent by his father, Kala, to "the white man's school" to learn the latter's ways. Jako thrives at the school and receives excellent results, making him a viable candidate for further education at a different institution, to which, however, his father objects. Kala withdraws Jako from school, and tells him that he will instead marry Nyawi, the bride chosen for him, to which Jako unhappily agrees. It is revealed that Jako is actually in love with Poko, whom he has secretly been seeing, and when he later tells his parents that he does not want to marry Nyawi, they become very angry. When Poko learns about Jako's engagement to Nyawi, which Jako had been hiding from her, she too becomes angry with him, and rejects his proposal. In an emotional turn, Jako threatens both Poko and his parents with his

³³ James, *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, p. 22; 'Literary Lioness Asenath Bole Odaga Closes Her Chapter at 83', *Business Daily*, 4 December 2014, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/lifestyle/society/literary-lioness-asenath-bole-odaga-closes-her-chapter-at-83--2074508> (accessed 5 August 2021).

suicide, if he cannot marry Poko. Kala and the village elders eventually relent, giving Jako and Poko their blessing to be married, and the novel ends with their wedding celebration.

Similar to the other works in the genre of contemporary fiction, *The Villager's Son* provides a commentary on rural society in Kenya, through the character of Jako, who is trapped between familial expectations in the name of tradition, and his own dreams and desires, partly as a result of his education at “the white man’s school”. With her protagonist, Were depicts the challenges and pressure young people faced in navigating such difficulties in a post-independence world, which may have resonated with her intended audience. The struggles of parents in raising children in this changing environment are also demonstrated through Kala: when discussing his reasons for sending Jako to school with the village elders, Kala argues that “it’s a good idea to let Jako ... go to school during this initial stage. Then, in years to come [he] will be [a guide] and [pioneer] to ... elders and to their sons, and will act as a bridge between our ways and the white men’s new knowledge.”³⁴ Later, when he makes the decision to withdraw Jako from school, Kala tells his son that “these strange ways and this knowledge of the white man cannot replace the ways of our people which have guided us through the ages. ... [My] main worry is that the white man might give you a job away from us in another land.”³⁵ Kala’s words demonstrate East African parental worries about raising children in an environment different to one they grew up in, and their anxieties about children abandoning their customs and roots after exposure to foreign ways. Such feelings were certainly felt by many parents across Kenya and East Africa, and were also interrogated by Oloo and Cone in *Kenya Women Look Ahead*, as discussed in Chapter 5. After independence, urban areas across Kenya became the site for the struggle for self-mastery away from rural homelands for young people, and, as Ocobock argues, “the lure of town life often kept boys and young men from routinely returning home”, often at the risk of losing “a sense of where they had come from.”³⁶ Kala’s worries also fall into contemporary intellectual discourse about decolonisation and Africanisation that abounded in the ivory tower in the 1960s: academics were writing about it in university publications of *Penpoint*, *Dhana*, *Nexus* and *Busara* (see Chapter 1 for further discussions on this), and Ngũgĩ, Owuor-Anyumba and Lo Liyong called for the Africanisation of the English Department.³⁷ In depicting these issues with her characters in *The Villager's Son*, Odaga exposes her younger

³⁴ Asenath Bole Odaga, *The Villager's Son* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1971), p. 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁶ Ocobock, ‘Earning an Age: Migration and Maturity in Colonial Kenya’, p. 57.

³⁷ SOAS Library and Special Collections: Paul Juma, ‘African Federation Now?’, *Penpoint* 16, p. 35-36; Pio Zirimu, “‘Here I Stand’: An unfinished trend of thinking of the function of a Department of Literature”, *Dhana* 1, 1, p. 47-48; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*, p. 145-150.

audience to these debates, providing them with a political education in generational change as a result of education, urbanisation and migration. She showcases the inter-generational struggle in a changing post-independence society in *The Villager's Son*, providing her young readers with a mirror with which to examine themselves and their social surroundings.

Examining *Moses in Trouble*, *The Boy in Between* and *The Villager's Son* together reveals the similarity in messaging for younger readers on the part of their writers. The novels all deliver social commentary on post-colonial East African society and culture, either through providing an allegory for state-society relations, discussing the importance of morality and good character, or the clash between navigating traditional expectations and a young person's own hopes and dreams. With their various messages and morals, the authors aid East African children in interpreting the society they are growing up in, in addition to providing literary entertainment. In this way, their texts reveal the writers' visions of an East African future, one that could be an improvement on the current post-colonial reality, demonstrating how critiques of decolonisation and independence – salient in intellectual and academic circles – were also used to educate children. The debates on Africanisation, decolonisation and the nature of independence were designed to reach different audiences through various media, including children's fiction – labour that was primarily performed by women.

Folk Tales

Women authors in the 1960s also produced fiction for children based on traditional Kenyan and East African folk tales. Such broader debates around Africanisation, and romanticised notions of a pre-colonial past, were captured in various literary and artistic works in the decade, such as with Okot p'Bitek's narrative poem *Song of Lawino*. East African children's literature also encapsulated these sentiments, which will be discussed in this section. The works of two Kenyan writers will be interrogated here: *East African Why Stories* by Pamela Kola, and *The Sun and the Wind* by Anne Matindi. Collectively, it will be demonstrated how, through using entertaining stories with simple morals, women authors imagined the education and development of children after independence, in maintaining connections to their heritage, as well as embracing a new future. The discussions around decolonisation and Africanisation were reproduced for younger audiences, thereby highlighting the extensive nature of such debates.

"East African Why Stories", Pamela Kola

Pamela Kola (née Ogot) is a Kenyan educator and writer, born in western Kenya in 1943. Following her education at Machakos Teacher's Training College and the University of

Nairobi, she undertook her postgraduate studies in Education Psychology and Curriculum Development at the University of Leicester, where she wrote her thesis on African folktales. As a teacher, she worked for several years as head of a nursery school, and later became the Executive Director of the Centre for Research, Communication, and Gender in Early Childhood Education (CRECHE) in Kenya.³⁸ Kola's *East African Why Stories* is a collection of short fictional tales written in an entertaining manner for a primary school audience. Drawing on her Luo heritage and imparting stories she heard from her grandmother – who, in turn, heard them from her grandmother – *East African Why Stories* was published by East African Publishing House in 1966, as part of its East African Junior Library series.³⁹ It forms part of a children's book series that includes *East African How Stories* (1966) and *East African When Stories* (1968).

The tales in *East African Why Stories* recount the origins of the habits of different animals native to Kenya and East Africa. One story, titled “Why the hippo has no hair”, explains that the roots of a hippo's hairlessness lie in the fact that that the Hippo – who once had hair – invited his friend, Fire, to his house. On his way to the house, Fire meets Grass and Bush, and subsequently chases and consumes them. When Fire arrives at Hippo's house, destroying everything around him, Hippo runs away to a nearby body of water. He jumps in, extinguishing the fire around him, but in the process loses his hair, which is “why the hippo has no hair.” Another story in *East African Why Stories* is “Why the crocodile lives in water”, which deals with the friendship between Hare and Crocodile. One day, Hare comes to visit Crocodile for a few days, and spends the night on Crocodile's veranda, where he is cold and hungry. He decides to make a fire and cook one of Crocodile's eggs, which annoys the latter, when he wakes up to this the next day. Crocodile lays new eggs, and hides them in the water, so Hare may not find and cook them, which is how it came to be that the crocodile lives in the water. “Why baby chickens follow their mothers” follows the story of a mother hen and her four baby chickens. Mother Hen collects food for her children every day, and when she returns home, sings a song for her children, who rush out to greet her. This is noticed by an evil crow, who learns the song and one day comes to the family's home and sings the song, pretending to be mother hen. The baby chickens all rush outside, and are attacked and eaten by the crow. When Mother Hen

³⁸ James, *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, p. 46-8; Donnarae MacCann, ‘Kola, Pamela’, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Jack Zipes (Oxford University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195146561.013.1785>; ‘How Kenyan Folklore Met the Mainstream’, Blog Entry, University of Leicester, <https://www2.le.ac.uk/news/blog/2013/august/kenyan-folklore-meets-the-mainstream> (accessed 6 August 2021).

³⁹ Pamela Kola, *East African Why Stories* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966), p. 4.

realises what has happened, she is distraught and vows from then on never to leave her children alone, explaining the origin of why baby chickens follow their mothers everywhere.

The writing and publication of such a collection of traditional tales in 1966 demonstrates what values and customs were thought important to pass down to children in the post-colonial period. As a member of the Luo ethnic group, Kola drew on her own heritage in initially translating and later penning these stories. In traditional Luo society women were regarded as story-tellers who would entertain children with stories with moral guidance, frameworks of culturally appropriate conduct for young people, as well as Luo history.⁴⁰ In light of the struggle for emancipation by the youth through migration to urban areas, away from their land and family in rural areas, resulting in potential alienation from their heritage – as discussed above – the awareness of indigenous traditions and culture by young people was deemed important. This coincided with the cultural Zeitgeist of Africanisation and the decolonisation of art and creativity, which the EAPH also extended to children’s literature.

The stories in *East African Why Stories* are narrated in an entertaining, conversational style, reflective of the oral nature of their origins.⁴¹ The simplicity of their linear narratives is testimony to this, and shows that the stories’ effectiveness are equally dependent on their performance, and narrator-audience interaction. The fact that these stories were passed down to Kola by her grandmother, highlights the role they play in promoting familial and community ties. As mentioned above, as an educator, Kola understood the need for literature that was relevant to children and their environments, and was active in penning these, as well as calling for more African writers to be read in schools.⁴²

Kola initially wrote the stories down, as they were told to her, in Luo, before translating them into English. In so doing, she “was able to see what fitted where, and consider how the children would react to them”, although she did admit that “in translation a lot of the meat [was] lost.”⁴³ Her knowledge of both Luo language and culture allowed her to translate these stories effectively into English, and make them equally as entertaining in a textual form to an English-speaking audience. Even though some aspects of the stories may have been lost, in their English form they could be accessed by a broader audience across Kenya and Africa, as she states in the introduction to *East African Why Stories*.⁴⁴ This broad audience also included the Luo

⁴⁰ Grace Ogot, *Days of My Life* (Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd, 2012), p. 11.

⁴¹ MacCann, ‘Kola, Pamela’.

⁴² James, *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, p. 48-49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁴⁴ Kola, *East African Why Stories*, p. 4.

diaspora that migrated from western Kenya during the colonial era as a result of forced labour and taxation. This signified that “modes and meanings of ‘Luoness’ have been in large part constituted through the experience of diaspora”, especially “as people ethnically identifiable as ‘Luo’ have been increasingly born away from the villages of Nyanza” around Lake Victoria.⁴⁵ Kola’s Luo story collection, therefore, would have included an imagined audience of Luo children across East Africa who, though geographically dispersed, would retain their emotional connections to their heritage.

Through her stories, Kola imparts traditional oral tales in an alternative textual form, so they may be enjoyed by a new generation of Kenyan and East African children. In a post-colonial society dealing with encroaching globalisation and influences from the Global North, and young people’s desire for self-emancipation in urban areas at the risk of alienation from their roots, the publication of *East African Why Stories* speaks to the desire of parents for their children to retain their connections to their roots and heritage.⁴⁶ The discourse of decolonisation and Africanisation of literature in East Africa had the desired effect of authors and publishers producing work for children by African writers on indigenous topics. In order to maintain young readers’ connection to their heritage, such debates were broad in scope through also reaching young audiences, which Kola’s words contributed to.

“*The Sun and the Wind*”, Anne Matindi

Anne Matindi, born in Murang’a District in Kenya in 1943, is a nurse and writer of stories for children in primary school. In addition to *The Sun and the Wind*, other works include a collection of plays *The Sun-Men and Other Plays* (1971), and a short story in Swahili, *Jua na Upepo* (1968).⁴⁷ The stories in *The Sun and the Wind* are short tales with simple morals for children to understand, such as the importance of obedience to parents, and that laziness and dishonesty make for poor character. The written form of such traditional tales is a way for Kenyan and African children to learn about and remain connected to their cultures, in a rapidly changing post-colonial society that parents may have worried threatened to alienate children from their roots.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Matthew Carotenuto and Katherine Luongo, ‘Dala or Diaspora? Obama and the Luo Community of Kenya’, *African Affairs* 108, no. 431 (2009): 197–219, at p. 198-200.

⁴⁶ See: Oloo and Cone, *Kenya Women Look Ahead*.

⁴⁷ Wilma L. Jones, ‘Twenty Contemporary African Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliography’ (US Department of Education, 1995), p. 21.

⁴⁸ See: Oloo and Cone, *Kenya Women Look Ahead*.

The Sun and the Wind, published in 1967 by the EAPH, also as part of the East African Junior Library series, is a collection of children's stories based on traditional tales, intended for a primary school audience. The stories have straightforward plots, and are recounted with an enjoyable narrative containing simple morals for their readers. The story "The girl who teased her parents", for instance, teaches children the importance of honesty. It follows the protagonist Njoki, who has a habit of lying to her parents about different animals entering her room, such as ants, or a wild dog. When one day a snake enters her room and she shouts for her parents, they do not believe her. Njoki is bitten by the snake and dies the next day. Another short story, "The Lazy Wife", is about Kanti and his wife who spends her days idle. Kanti decides to buy a dog, much to the consternation of his wife, who does not want responsibility for it. When Kanti leaves for work, thieves descend upon their house, causing the dog to bark. Kanti's wife is annoyed by the noise and locks up the dog, an opportunity the thieves use to enter and rob the house, and batter Kanti's wife. When Kanti returns, his wife confesses to having been too lazy to look after the dog properly, and Kanti forgives her. Through the character of Kanti's wife, Matindi warns her readers against the dangers of laziness. The final story in *The Sun and the Wind* is "The Zebra's Stripes", which entertainingly recounts how the zebra got its stripes. All the animals throw a party, and Zebra and Donkey decide to paint stripes on each other for aesthetic effect. The following morning, when they attempt to wash off the stripes, they realise they cannot, and they remain a permanent feature on their bodies.⁴⁹

The similarity in style and narration between *East African Why Stories* and *The Sun and the Wind*, as well as the fact that they were both published around the same time (in 1966 and 1967 respectively), shows that there was a clear demand for children's literature that drew on the heritage of different ethnic groups across East Africa. Indeed, Kola, as an educator, was well aware of this demand, as well as the dearth of suitable African children's literature in Kenya.⁵⁰ Both Kola and Matindi were published by the EAPH, the first indigenous publishing company in the region, which, as mentioned above, was created with the aim of promoting the Africanisation of literature in the region. The publication of Kola and Matindi's stories not only met the market demand for traditional stories in the written form, but also demonstrated the ways in which debates around Africanisation and decolonisation in literary circles were also reproduced in literature for children. The depth of decolonisation debates was acute, and the reproduction of traditional folk tales for East African children was one facet of this. Debates

⁴⁹ Anne Matindi, *The Sun and the Wind* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967).

⁵⁰ James, *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, p. 48.

around Africanisation extended across all echelons of society, and women such as Kola and Matindi played a significant role in this.

School textbook literature

This section examines three poems published in a secondary school textbook, *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, edited by Jonathan Kariara and Ellen Kitonga, and published by OUP in 1976; although the poems were written in preceding years, before being selected for publication in the poetry collection. Two years prior to publication, in September 1974, a conference was held at Nairobi School on ‘The Place and Teaching of African Literature in Schools’. Conference attendees acknowledged that colonial education in Africa taught students “in the field of culture ... to look at Europe as [their] teacher and the centre of man’s civilisation ... and African culture was relegated to the background.”⁵¹ A decade after independence, little had changed in Kenyan schools, and “students were still being subjected to alien and meaningless cultural values.”⁵² On the national literature syllabus, out of the 57 dramatic texts taught between 1968 and 1972, only one was by an African author.⁵³

The publication of *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, therefore, is reflective of publishers’ response to this dearth of African literature on school syllabi. The poems discussed in this section include *Unto Thy Hands* by Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, *For Miriam* and *Letter to a Friend*, both by Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye. The themes and messages of the works teach an appreciation for East African society and culture, as well as to think critically about them, with the hope that their readers may help build a better post-colonial world. Collectively, the poems demonstrate the writers’ visions for the future of East African society, as learners in the post-independence era. Through their specific inclusion in a school textbook, the writers contributed to broadening the post-colonial public sphere to also reach young audiences.

“*Unto Thy Hands*”, *Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu*

Unto Thy Hands is a poem published by Ugandan writer and dramatist, Elvania Zirimu (a biography of Zirimu is included in Chapter 1), and is a socio-political commentary on the city of Kampala after independence. Zirimu’s talents as a writer were fostered as a student at Makerere, where she wrote the play *Keeping up with the Mukasas* (discussed in Chapter 1),

⁵¹ National Library of Scotland (NLS): Correspondence and Papers of Dr Angus Calder, Acc. 9851/43, ‘Miscellaneous East African creative writing’, Resolutions passed by the Conference of Literature Teachers in Schools on ‘The Place and Teaching of African Literature in Schools’ from 2nd to 4th September, 1974 at Nairobi School.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

before writing professionally producing works such as *When the Hunchback Made Rain* (discussed in Chapter 2). The publication of her poem in an educational textbook for children is testament to the far-reaching nature of her words.

Consisting of four stanzas with short lines, each of varying length, *Unto Thy Hands* deals with the first-person narrator's arrival in their "mother city". They describe Kampala as a city of contradictions, a "mixture of bush / And electric stars", consisting of "mud / And skyscrapers". Crime is also rife in the city, as the narrator discusses the presence of "Brother Kondo⁵⁴ and brother Saint", and wondering whether, as they enter Kampala, someone will "guide [them] on the way to safety, / Unless the ones / Who grab the bag / And rip the clothes / Of lone travellers / Get [them] first." The narrator celebrates Kampala's supposed change for the better, and the fact that the city has "been purged / Of nepotism and corruption." However, in the final stanza, the narrator states that they "saw the uncle / Of your brother-in-law's wife / At the gate" and wonders "what has happened / To the old guard", revealing that nepotism has not, after all, disappeared.⁵⁵

Zirimu's poem is a response to the socio-political dynamics in post-colonial Kampala, as she critiques the insecurity and economic hardship brought about by Idi Amin's Economic War (see the introduction to this thesis for a further discussion on this). The increased corruption, smuggling, over-charging and embezzlement made Kampala – and the picture of which Zirimu paints – a difficult space to survive in.⁵⁶ This indicting commentary on corruption and the post-colonial state was a running theme in Zirimu's works, and features prominently, for instance, in her play *When the Hunchback Made Rain*. The inclusion of *Unto Thy Hands* in the poetry collection by Kariara and Kitonga is indicative of the ways in which these debates on the nature of independence permeated the classroom to educate younger generations. With a bleak and highly critical portrayal of Kampala, Zirimu and the editors place their hopes and expectations on the children studying the poem, that they may create a post-colonial world that is better than the ones previous generations did. *Unto Thy Hands* is revealing of Zirimu's visions for Uganda's future: containing both disillusionment with the post-colonial current state of affairs, as well as hope that the next generation will do better, the poem is a constructive element of post-colonial state critique.

⁵⁴ Thief, Luganda.

⁵⁵ Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, 'Unto Thy Hands', in *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, ed. Jonathan Kariara and Ellen Kitonga (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), 46–47.

⁵⁶ See: Alicia Decker, 'Idi Amin's Dirty War: Subversion, Sabotage, and the Battle to Keep Uganda Clean, 1971-1979', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43, no. 3 (2010): 489–513, p. 507.

“For Miriam”, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye

Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye’s poem *For Miriam* is an extract from her 1,200-line epic *Song of Nyarloka*. At the time of publication of *An Introduction to East African Poetry* in 1976, *Song of Nyarloka* was yet to be published, to be released in 1977, and was, therefore, largely still unknown in East African literary circles.⁵⁷ Marjorie Macgoye was a British woman who married a Kenyan Luo and took Kenyan citizenship after the country’s independence in 1963 (a more expansive biography of Macgoye is given in Chapter 1).⁵⁸ The name in the poem’s title refers to Macgoye’s mother-in-law, Miriam, “who was extremely important in helping Macgoye come to terms with the new Luo culture into which she had married”.⁵⁹ *For Miriam* is a lengthy poem, consisting of nine stanzas, and is narrated in the first person by a grandmother addressing her grandchildren. Through the narrator, the fictional grandchildren learn about Kenyan history through their grandmother’s perspective, as she recounts her experiences during colonialism and the cultural shift the British brought about. The grandmother tells her grandchildren to observe “how [she covers herself] / carefully ... Yet truly / first cloth was a puzzle to [her]”, as she explains how she and her community were indoctrinated with Western values of modesty and how to dress themselves.⁶⁰ She continues to recount the suspicion with which the introduction of Western medicine was met: “We hid from the vaccinators by the river - / ... with a baby crying loudly among the reeds, / the medical people furious.”⁶¹ The narrator also recalls how her community turned to Christianity, stating that they “cried for sorrow, stood rebuked, so turned / away to Jesus, changed and were made anew.”⁶² The poem contains commentary on social class and how even within a single family this could diverge: in referring to her children, the narrator states that “this one will go to / school, that one also, one dig, one live in town.”⁶³ According to Peter Wasamba, the narrator “is an epitome of Mother Africa: strong, resilient, proud, sacrificing, loving, caring, determined and ever smiling.”⁶⁴ In spite of all the changes she has faced in her lifetime, the grandmother insists that she has remained the same, reinforced through the repetition of the words “it is still I” at the end of each stanza.

⁵⁷ J. Roger Kurtz, ‘Crossing over: Identity and Change in Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye’s “Song of Nyarloka”’, *Research in African Literatures* 33, no. 2 (2002): 100–118.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁶⁰ Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, ‘For Miriam’, in *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, ed. Jonathan Kariara and Ellen Kitonga (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), 39–42, at p. 39.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶⁴ Peter A. O. Wasamba, ‘Gender Perspectives in the Creative Works of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye’ (PhD thesis, Nairobi, University of Nairobi, 2000), p. 52.

The inter-generational story-telling format that *For Miriam* takes is an intimate one, and draws the reader (in the case of the textbook *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, the students) into a sense of familiarity with the narrator, allowing for them to sympathise with her experiences and history. In this familial manner, it helps East African students studying the poem to gain an appreciation of their own history, and to understand the trajectory of the evolution of Kenyan society during colonialism. In this way, *For Miriam* bridges a generational gap, and helps its readers to understand the nature of East Africa's current state of affairs, through painting a picture of its past. Even though Macgoye may not necessarily have written *For Miriam* with an intended audience of school students in mind, the fact that it was included in an educational publication, shows the poem's relevance to young people. It demonstrates Macgoye's – and the editors' – visions for the future: through helping students to understand their past, they can help build a better East Africa, which, by the point of the poetry anthology's publication, many were disillusioned by (see, for instance, Micere Mugo's Poem "I took my son by the hand", also published in *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, and which is discussed in Chapter 2). Macgoye's poem expanded the debates around Africanisation and decolonisation to reach and educate younger readers.

"Letter to a Friend", Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye

Letter to a Friend is also a poem by Marjorie Macgoye dedicated to her friend and fellow-literary giant Okot p'Bitek, the Ugandan novelist, poet and author of the epic poem *Song of Lawino*. Consisting of 21 four-line stanzas, the narrator is a white woman married to an African man and a mother of mixed-race children, like Macgoye herself. *Letter to a Friend* provides a commentary on prevailing Africanisation discourses, illuminating the disparities between such ideas and the reality of the lived experience 'on the ground' in East Africa. In one instance, the poem critiques the romanticised views of a pre-colonial Africa held by artists and intellectuals who hark back to a supposed golden age. She addresses p'Bitek with the words "you, who are so proud / empty your years thinking of Africa / and leave Lawino weeping?"⁶⁵ The narrator, a realist, challenges this, and argues that while intellectual elites have these debates, "one baby dies in three, songs, homesteads die - / we cannot afford fashions, competing to death."⁶⁶ The poem's narrator critiques p'Bitek's and other intellectuals' excessive romanticisation of

⁶⁵ Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, 'Letter to a Friend', in *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, ed. Jonathan Kariara and Ellen Kitonga (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), 77–80, at p. 77.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Africa's past at the expense of ignoring the continent's present problems.⁶⁷ They are also accepting of the social changes that have occurred through colonialism, such as the presence African mixed-race children. The narrator discusses her own children, stating, "half-black? They are not half anything, / not putty-coloured flaccid in your hands, / but golden and red-blooded."⁶⁸

Through its inclusion in a school textbook, with *Letter to a Friend*, Macgoye warns students of the drawbacks in the performance of Africanness, while ignoring the problems of marginalised Africans. In their introduction to the section in which *Letter to a Friend* is included in *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, Kariara and Kitonga discuss this further: they explain that the 1960s were "an exciting time for black people, as many African countries were freeing themselves from colonial domination", which saw a resurgence in African art and literature, and a "rediscovery of a black identity".⁶⁹ This cultural Africanisation, discussed previously, was reflected in many literary works and art produced in this period, some discussed in this thesis. However, Kariara and Kitonga state, "such positive values can become meaningless if they remain mere phrases; empty rhetoric that is more often used to escape from real issues than to face them."⁷⁰ An interrogation of *Letter to a Friend* reveals Macgoye's disillusionment with independence and post-colonialism, calling on students reading the poem to play their part in reshaping East African society, to be proud of their heritage, yet at the same time remain aware of the reality of the region's socio-economic problems.

The three poems, *Unto Thy Hands*, *For Miriam*, and *Letter to a Friend*, all contain critiques and commentary of post-colonial East Africa, illuminating the writers' disillusionment with independence. It is for this reason that they were selected for publication in a poetry collection for East African students: through teaching about corruption, nepotism, colonialism, and the dangers of romanticising a pre-colonial African past, the poems also contain the writers' hopes for the first post-independence generation. Their inclusion in a school textbook is also demonstrative of the cultural sphere broadening debates on Africanisation beyond elite spaces such as the ivory tower, to pervade all levels of society and education. This was done with the purpose of bringing this discourse and state critique to young East African audiences, in ways

⁶⁷ Wasamba, 'Gender Perspectives in the Creative Works of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye', p. 49-50; Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 139.

⁶⁸ Macgoye, 'Letter to a Friend', p. 77.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Kariara and Ellen Kitonga, eds., *An Introduction to East African Poetry* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 76.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

that political parties' youth wings did not. Zirimu and Macgoye's texts played a crucial role in this, as they helped construct an inclusive post-colonial public sphere.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined East African children's literature produced by women in the 1960s and 1970s in the region. Through an analysis of these texts, it was demonstrated how women expressed their disillusionment with independence in their writing, and what their visions for East Africa's future were with the lessons they imparted to their young audience. The women's words formed part of the post-colonial public sphere, and made debates on Africanisation and decolonisation accessible to younger audiences. The writers produced literary works on topics including social inequality, elite state capture, disorientations of rural-urban migration. They provide criticisms of contemporary state and society in an accessible manner for young readers, and demonstrate how intellectual debates by left-wing intelligentsia on decolonisation saturated other social strata, including children's education and literature. In writing for such audiences, the writers communicated their visions of educating the first generation to be raised after independence to create a better society than their present one.

The genre of contemporary fiction examined three short novels produced by different women that collectively contained a commentary on post-colonial East African society. *Moses in Trouble* by Barbara Kimenye reveals subtle lessons on remaining critical of authority within the post-colonial East Africa state. Miriam Khamadi Were's *The Boy in Between*, with its setting in post-colonial Kenya, contains a moral education for children through its emphasis on the importance of good character and integrity. *The Villager's Son* by Asenath Bole Odaga discusses the binary between African traditions and modern individualisms. With their themes and messages, these works were written to help East African children to understand the world in which they were growing up. Within the category of folk tales, Pamela Kola's *East African Why Stories* and Anne Matindi's *The Sun and the Wind* were analysed. Both contain stories based on traditional tales from various ethnic groups within East Africa, written in English. The simplicity of the plots and morals of these works helped to give children an appreciation of their heritage and history in contemporary post-colonial East African society. Finally, school textbook literature was analysed, a genre comprising three works published in the textbook *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, edited by Jonathan Kariara and Ellen Kitonga. *Unto Thy Hands* by Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu gives a bleak portrayal of the post-colonial city of Kampala, ridden with crime, corruption and nepotism. Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *For Miriam* contains a recounting of Kenya's past, giving its readers an insight into how colonialism was

experienced by rural communities. *Letter to a Friend*, also by Macgoye, contains a message on the dangers of the performance of Africanness, at the expense of remaining ignorant of the reality of socio-economic conditions for many East Africans in the period discussed.

In a period when the decolonisation and Africanisation pervaded all aspects of cultural discourse, women writers ensured that these debates could be accessed and understood by children as well, thereby broadening their scope. The works examined in this chapter reveal what the women wished for children to learn and become aware of, and, by extension, how they envisioned East Africa's future after independence, making debates on Africanisation and decolonisation accessible to younger readers. The texts are written in a way that make their messages and morals easy to understand, using African settings and characters, treating issues familiar to East Africans, and using an intimate narrative style, reminiscent of traditional storytelling in the region. With their lessons for young readers, the writers contributed to the shaping of post-colonial East Africa within the boundaries of the states' cultural interiority. While the reception and impact of the women's texts are difficult to gauge, their content and topics addressed speak to their potential for social transformation. The cultural public sphere was a crucible for discourse on the nature of independence and Africanisation, and the labour of its expansion was performed by women writers. This chapter has highlighted the ways this expansion not only incorporated more themes, but also reached more participants with women's discourse on Africanisation and state critique. In writing for children, women broadened these debates, through making complex ideas on decolonisation, state critique and Africanisation accessible to them.

Chapter 4

Journalism

Introduction

If becoming a published author was difficult for women, journalism was an equally inaccessible field to work in the 1960s and 1970s. A combination of patriarchal structures, expectations of socially acceptable work for women, as well as authoritarian regimes in Kenya and Uganda that placed severe restrictions on press freedom, all made it harder for women to work in the field of journalism in this period. The Ugandan children's book author Barbara Kimenye was the first Black woman to work for the newspaper *Uganda Nation*; however, she left this post soon after the 1964 Nakulabye Massacres in Kampala (see the introduction to this thesis for further information on this), when she felt the weight of authoritarianism pressing on her reporting. Responsible for covering the Commission of Enquiry into the murders, she quickly realised that her words were being sanitised by Prime Minister Obote, causing her to resign from her position.¹ This was only a temporary setback, however, as she would later become one of East Africa's most successful journalists, through her column for the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation*, and pave the way for other women to also enter the field.

This chapter examines journalism and press contributions by women in East Africa between 1960 and 1973. In investigating various columns, articles and letters to the editor, the breadth of the late colonial and early post-colonial public sphere will be highlighted, through an illumination of the multivocal nature of the discourse and dissent. The texts examined will include articles by Barbara Kimenye in the *Daily Nation* and Rebecca Katumba in *Voice of Uganda*, in addition to various letters to the editor written by women of different walks of life, also published in the *Daily Nation*, as well as in the *Uganda Argus*. Their writing will be interrogated within three categories: women, work, and the economy; women's involvement in politics; and marriage. These rubrics were selected as a broad cross-section of themes through which women debated within the cultural interiority of the state and expressed their views on decolonisation and independence. Using various techniques of inspiration, critique and debate, the sources mobilise the imagined readership of fellow East African women, and to push for the post-colonial state to change. At a time when decolonisation saw debates on the topic in politics and academia, the sources discussed in this chapter reveal the journalists' and letter

¹ Barbara Kimenye, 'State Killings, the Attack on Mengo', *Daily Monitor*, 7 November 2015, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/State-killings--the-attack-on-Mengo/688334-2945192-64aqy9/index.html> (accessed 6 December 2019).

writers' visions of decolonisation, which included gender equality and the right to occupy public space – in this case, in the form of the pages of a newspaper. Their writing reveals the nuances behind and the multivocality of the East African women's movement, the feminism and sisterhood, as well as class solidarity and dissonance. The category of 'East African women' is a highly heterogeneous one, which will be demonstrated in this chapter, through including writing by African and Asian women, as well as by Hindu and Muslim women. An examination of their writing reveals the construction of their own agency in the public arena of a newspaper.

The role of newspapers in politics and nationalism in colonial and post-colonial East Africa has been the topic of ample secondary literature. Derek Peterson and Emma Hunter examine Africa's newspaper history, and influence of print culture on politics in the colonial and post-colonial era. They discuss the trajectory of this history, from the birth of the newspaper in the colonial era, its life created by readers' interactions with the press, imagined media audiences, as well as the decrease in press freedom after independence.² Phoebe Musandu provides an analysis of newspapers as media for economic power and control in colonial Kenya, arguing that "the political and economic elite of a colonised country ... utilised the print press to facilitate their entry and struggle for dominance within the emerging system."³ Similarly, Gerard Loughran analyses the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation*, tracing how it became intertwined with post-colonial politics since its creation in 1960.⁴ The ways in which political actors used the press is investigated by Carol Summers, who highlights the combination of pre-colonial forms of communication with the Western media of newspapers and telegrams in their anti-colonial activism.⁵ The connection between newspapers and Uganda's social history is analysed by Jim Ocitti, who provides a focus on the annihilation of press freedom under both Milton Obote and Idi Amin's regimes.⁶ Spencer Mawby examines the history of the press as an institution in Uganda, highlighting policymakers' "hybrid system of regulation which mixed liberal and coercive elements."⁷ This body of literature informs this chapter, which will

² Derek R. Peterson and Emma Hunter, 'Print Culture in Colonial Africa', in *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Derek R. Peterson et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 1–46.

³ Phoebe Musandu, *Pressing Interests: The Agenda and Influence of a Colonial East African Newspaper Sector* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), p. 4.

⁴ Gerard Loughran, *Birth of a Nation: The Story of a Newspaper in Kenya* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

⁵ Carol Summers, 'Slander, Buzz and Spin: Telegrams, Politics and Global Communications in the Uganda Protectorate, 1945-55', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 16, no. 3 (2015).

⁶ Jim Ocitti, *Press Politics and Public Policy in Uganda: The Role of Journalism in Democratisation* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

⁷ Spencer Mawby, *The End of Empire in Uganda: Decolonisation and Institutional Conflict, 1945-79* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p. 107.

emphasise the ways in which women made use of the public sphere that was a newspaper, in spite of oppressive power dynamics that restricted freedom of expression in both Kenya and Uganda.

Other bodies of scholarship investigate the ways in which the press in East Africa created connections both globally and locally amongst its readerships. James Brennan provides an analysis of the business of newspaper production for Indian newspapers in colonial Tanganyika, while Bodil Folke Frederiksen emphasises the ways in which Indian and African networks intertwined in printing enterprises in colonial Kenya.⁸ The various ways Indian Ocean worlds were connected through press and print culture is interrogated by Isabel Hofmeyr, Preben Kaarshom and Bodil Folke Frederiksen, who argue that “the newspaper as an institution” was a “[site] for capturing the transnational strands that make up the skein of East and Southern African nationalisms.”⁹ In her examination of print media in colonial Tanganyika, Emma Hunter discusses the ways in which newspapers help create global communities, through the creation of an “an imagined social identity that transcended the colonial territories in which they lived.”¹⁰ In a colonial Ugandan context, the role of newspapers and media in the circulation of gossip and rumours in 1950s Kampala is examined by White.¹¹ This focus on communities amongst different readerships will provide a framework for this chapter, which investigates the imagined community of women that the journalists and letter-writers were addressing with their words. A specific focus on women’s contributions to print culture is provided by Kenda Mutongi, who discusses the advice columnist “Dolly” for the East African editions of *Drum* magazine, and the role this column played in shaping young adults’ sexualities in post-colonial East Africa.¹² Andrew Ivaska, in his examination of the mini-skirt ban in Tanzania under ‘Operation Vijana’, emphasises women’s vehement reactions to this control of their bodies this in their letters to the editor, thereby taking their grievances to the public sphere.¹³ These works

⁸ James R. Brennan, ‘Politics and Business in the Indian Newspapers of Colonial Tanganyika’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 81, no. 1 (2011): 42–67; Bodil Folke Frederiksen, ‘Print, Newspapers and Audiences in Colonial Kenya: African and Indian Improvement, Protest and Connections’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 81, no. 1 (2011): 155–72.

⁹ Isabel Hofmeyr, Preben Kaarsholm, and Bodil Folke Frederiksen, ‘Introduction: Print Cultures, Nationalism and Publics of the Indian Ocean’, *Africa* 81, no. 1 (2011): 1–22, at p. 8.

¹⁰ Hunter, Emma, ‘Modernity, Print Media, and the Middle Class in Colonial East Africa’, in *The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire*, ed. Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 105–22, at p. 106.

¹¹ Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumour and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

¹² Kenda Mutongi, ‘“Dear Dolly’s” Advice: Representations of Youth, Courtship, and Sexualities in Africa, 1960–1980’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33, no. 1 (2000): 1–23.

¹³ Andrew M. Ivaska, ‘In the “Age of Minis”: Women, Work and Masculinity Downtown’, in *Dar Es Salaam: Histories from an Emerging African Metropolis*, ed. James Brennan, Andrew Burton, and Yusuf Lawi (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki Na Nyota, 2007), 213–31.

will help inform analyses of letters to the editor by women in Kenyan and Ugandan newspapers after independence in this chapter.

Building on this literature, this chapter will use women's contributions to print culture and the editorial life of newspapers to examine how they constructed a vibrant late colonial and early post-colonial public sphere. Through the newspaper, the women debated the meaning of Africanisation and decolonisation, and how these applied particularly to the quotidian lives of women. This perspective will shed new light on histories of the press in East Africa, which largely provide analyses of male voices, and a study of women's contributions to press and print culture has yet to be conducted. The articles and letters to the editor discussed here represent a broad cross-section of issues women broached in the public sphere, and a representational of the extensive nature of their debates. With their words, the writers act as proxies for wider communities of women, and use the platform they have in the state's cultural interior to represent them. This chapter will highlight the polyphonic nature of debate and dissent, and that even among women there were disagreements on the nature of independence and decolonisation. These contradictions highlight the broad nature of Africanisation debates within East African societies, which the women in this chapter represented with their texts.

In this chapter, a focussed analysis will be made of women's contributions to the late colonial and early post-colonial press in East Africa, and through their print culture contributions, examine their mobilisation and political activism. The pages of a newspaper became a space for women to express their grievances with the colonial and post-colonial state, and a site for activism where they could lobby for their rights. A newspaper became a public arena for women's agency, accessible to literate women in a way few other public spaces were at the time. Reading these women's words on the pages of a newspaper provides an insight into their perceptions of politics and society in this period, allowing for, according to Hunter, "an exploration of the ways in which ideas changed over time and in relation to changing economic or political contexts".¹⁴ The letters to the editor especially – some in response to previous letters written by women – demonstrate women's understandings of post-colonialism and decolonisation, which was to include gender inequality, as well as their individual and transformative agency. As Daniel Branch argues, "public letter-writing was a political act", and "the letters show us much about how their authors understood the processes of decolonisation, wrestled with the imperfections of the post-colonial state, and how they imagined their

¹⁴ Emma Hunter, 'Newspapers as Sources for African History'. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.228>, p. 12.

future.”¹⁵ The women’s contributions reveal their discontentment with patriarchal structures of the post-colonial state and society that infringed on their rights, and the ways in which they used their individual and collective agency to persuade, inspire and, ultimately, mobilise fellow women to make demands of their governments. Unlike the texts examined in previous chapters, these letters and articles had a higher scale of consumption, and the messages and voices of their writers, therefore, reached a wider readership.

History of the Press in East Africa

A brief overview of the press in East Africa is provided here, to better contextualise the press contributions by the women examined in this chapter. Newspapers in the region were introduced by Christian missionaries, and the first English-language papers included the *East African Standard* – established in 1902 by Kenyan-Asian Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee – in Kenya, and the *Uganda Argus* – launched in 1955 – in Uganda.¹⁶ These were initially printed for an audience of white settlers and expatriates, and colonial officials, though as a greater number of Africans gained literacy in English, over time, the readership also included educated and elite Africans.¹⁷ Newspapers for an African readership published in African languages included the Gikuyu-language *Muigwithania*, which was edited by Jomo Kenyatta, or the Luganda *Uganda Empya (New Uganda)*, which was established in 1953 by Ugandan editor Eridadi Mulira.¹⁸ In 1972, the *Uganda Argus* was renamed *Voice of Uganda*, which became a government-owned daily and printed news favourable to then President Idi Amin’s dictatorship.¹⁹ A notable woman contributor to *Voice of Uganda* was Rebecca Katumba, who discussed women’s issues in her articles, and which will be discussed below. In Kenya, the newspaper *Daily Nation* was established in October 1960, as an initiative designed to create a new medium for an independent country with an African readership.²⁰ The *Daily Nation* covered news across East Africa, and its correspondents included Barbara Kimenye in Kampala, and Rose Kasambala in Dar es Salaam. Newspapers like the *East African Standard*, the *Uganda Argus* and *Voice of Uganda* had weekly women’s pages, dedicated to fashion, beauty, cooking, and similar highly

¹⁵ Daniel Branch, ‘Public Letters and the Culture of Politics in Kenya, c. 1960-75’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 2021, 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2021.1907703>, at p. 2.

¹⁶ Loughran, *Birth of a Nation: The Story of a Newspaper in Kenya*; Mawby, *The End of Empire in Uganda: Decolonisation and Institutional Conflict, 1945-79*; For a broad overview of media in African history, see: James R. Brennan, ‘Communications and Media in African History’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History*, ed. John Parker and Richard Reid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 493–510.

¹⁷ Peterson and Emma Hunter, ‘Print Culture in Colonial Africa’, p. 8-9.

¹⁸ Hunter, ‘Newspapers as Sources for African History’.

¹⁹ Mawby, *The End of Empire in Uganda: Decolonisation and Institutional Conflict, 1945-79*, p. 122; Ocitti, *Press Politics and Public Policy in Uganda: The Role of Journalism in Democratisation*, p. 53.

²⁰ Loughran, *Birth of a Nation: The Story of a Newspaper in Kenya*, p. 26-7.

gendered topics, with most articles written by expatriate women journalists. With the exception of Kimenye, Katumba and Kasambala, however, most press constitutions by African women consisted of letters to the editor.

The discussions in this chapter are structured as follows: firstly, it will examine the topic of women, work and the economy, highlighting the articles by Ugandan journalists Barbara Kimenye and Rebecca Katumba, and the ways in which they discussed working women in East Africa. Following this, the chapter will interrogate women's involvement in politics in East Africa, emphasising letters to the editor and articles by women on topics around taxation, women's suffrage, and women politicians. Finally, it will discuss women's rights in marriage and the private sphere, analysing the ways in which women mobilised across racial lines, and their views on a modern marriage. The articles and letters to the editor showcase a lively public sphere with debates on aspects of decolonisation and Africanisation led by women that extended broadly across society.

Women, work, and the economy

This section discusses the ways in which working women were portrayed and discussed by the Ugandan journalists Barbara Kimenye for *Daily Nation* and Rebecca Katumba for *Voice of Uganda*. Five articles will be examined, in which the two journalists profiled various Ugandan working women and their professional successes. Writing for an imagined audience of fellow-women, the journalists use these profiles to inspire and mobilise East African women after independence. As the nature and intention of mobilisation differed between the two journalists, in the context of Africanisation and decolonisation, collectively, the articles highlight the polyphonic nature of debates on the topics.

In order to place the articles by Kimenye and Katumba into context, a brief history of women's work in Uganda is given here. At the eve of independence in 1962, Uganda's economy largely still resembled its early twentieth-century predecessor, reliant primarily on peasant-based agricultural production to export coffee, tea, cotton, tobacco and copper.²¹ For rural women, subsistence agriculture remained the main form of income, as it had been in previous decades.²² Quantitative documentation for such women's work in Uganda in this period is lacking; however, a 1970 study of rural women in the regions of Buganda, Bugisu, and West Nile

²¹ Phares Mukasa Mutibwa, *A History of Uganda: The First 100 Years 1894-1995* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2016), p. 199.

²² Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo and Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Women, Work and Domestic Virtue in Uganda, 1900-2003* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), p. 123-54

documented that their “non-financial employment” included “digging the subsistence crops, assisting on the family shamba, working in the house, cooking, caring for siblings, and if they are married, for their own children.”²³ After independence, as Kampala grew, so did urban economic opportunities for women, as they sold food and drink at markets, and brewed and sold alcohol. A 1964 survey of markets in the greater Kampala area counted 1,664 vendors, of which 41% were women.²⁴ By contrast, in 1955, a study of Katwe market in Kampala found that only 9% of produce vendors were women.²⁵ Craftwork and its marketisation also became a lucrative source of income, as will be discussed below. The expansion of Uganda’s middle class meant that more working-class women could work as domestic helpers in urban households. For middle-class African women, socially acceptable forms of employment included nursing and teaching, of which the former was reflected in contemporary figures: in 1967, 99% of workers employed as nurses were Ugandan, and 75% of the total employees were women.²⁶ Although these figures do not indicate the exact numbers of foreign and Ugandan nurses, given that almost all workers were Ugandan, it can be assumed that the majority of these were Ugandan women.²⁷ Public attitudes – by the government and in the press – towards economically active women were largely positive, with women’s contributions to the economy receiving public praise, in the desire to shape international perceptions of Uganda as a progressive nation. However, this praise remained performative, as the independent government did very little to assist women in gaining formal employment.²⁸ In the private sphere, women equally faced difficulties: in addition to the requirement of women’s unpaid domestic labour, husbands and other male family members were unhappy with women’s greater economic freedom, seeing this as an infringement on their position as heads of households.²⁹

The economic instability brought about by the Amin regime from 1971 onwards also decreased women’s economic opportunities, reducing their activities to physical survival and the need to keep their families alive. Most rural women and their families survived on subsistence agriculture, while others migrated to urban areas to sell food and drink.³⁰ A small number of women with access to capital were able to open businesses, such as the florist Tereza Mbire,

²³ Christine C. Wallace and Sheldon G. Weeks, ‘Success or Failure in Rural Uganda: A Study of Young People’ (Kampala: Makerere Institute of Social Research, 1974), p. 19.

²⁴ Paul H. Temple, ‘The Urban Markets of Greater Kampala’, *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 60 (1969): 346–59.

²⁵ Kyomuhendo and McIntosh, *Women, Work and Domestic Virtue in Uganda*, p. 99.

²⁶ Ugandan Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, *High Level Manpower Survey*, 1967, cited in: *Ibid.* p. 21.

²⁷ Kyomuhendo and McIntosh, *Women, Work and Domestic Virtue in Uganda*, p. 123-5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170-72.

who is discussed below. Other women, such as Juliet Sekabanja, also discussed below, profited from Uganda's economic war, which entailed the expulsion of the country's Asian community in 1972, and the seizure of Asian-owned business, which were redistributed to Ugandan Africans. However, it became dangerous for women to be visibly successful economically, as this placed them at risk of extortion from soldiers and other armed men.³¹ The government and government-owned media discouraged women's economic activity, emphasising "female submission and deference ... and husbands were encouraged to discipline their wives."³² Women working in the public sphere – in whichever economic capacity – were condoned and denounced as prostitutes, in line with government efforts to control women's behaviour.³³

It is within this context outlined here that Kimenye and Katumba penned articles for two different East African dailies. Kimenye's articles were written in 1964, while those of Katumba in 1973; nearly a decade apart, their writing will be interrogated to reveal the ways in which their words mobilised and inspired fellow women.

Barbara Kimenye for Daily Nation

As the Kampala correspondent for the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation*, Barbara Kimenye – in addition to her work as an author – was the first Black woman to work as a journalist in Uganda (a more expansive biography of Barbara Kimenye is provided in Chapter 2).³⁴ Kimenye's weekly column, which, according to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "was followed by the thousands"³⁵, recounted local news and events around Kampala, discussed fashion and beauty, politics, women's issues, as well as profiled exceptional women in Kampala. In 1965, Kimenye moved to Nairobi, where she continued to write for *Daily Nation* as women's feature editor.³⁶

On 18 May 1964, Kimenye profiled the South African nurse Jessie Okondo – who was living and working in Kampala at the time – in a column titled "Jessie has her hands full ... and she loves her job".³⁷ The column describes Okondo's work as a nurse "in charge of the Dispensary and Maternity Unit at Nsambya Police Barracks" in Kampala. Okondo treated "all ranks of

³¹ Ibid., p. 150, 172.

³² Ibid., p. 162.

³³ Ibid., p. 162-3; See also: Alicia C. Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow: Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014).

³⁴ Elizabeth F. Oldfield, *Transgressing Boundaries: Gender, Identity, Culture, and the 'Other' in Postcolonial Women's Narratives in East Africa*, *Cross/Cultures* 164 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), p. xvi.

³⁵ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer's Awakening* (New York: The New Press, 2016), p. 225.

³⁶ Oldfield, *Transgressing Boundaries*, p. xvi.

³⁷ Barbara Kimenye, 'Jessie has her hands full ... and she loves her job', *Daily Nation*, Monday 18 May 1964, p. 10.

police personnel” and was very proud of the barracks’ maternity unit. Kimenye reports that Okondo was passionate about her work, writing that the latter found it “soul-rewarding”. Though it is not mentioned in the column, Kimenye later wrote in her unpublished memoirs of her friendship with Okondo, as two of the few divorced women in Kampala at the time.³⁸

In another column titled “Putting skills to work”, published on 10 November 1964, Kimenye profiled Mary Kiwanuka, who established the first women’s cooperative society in Uganda.³⁹ Describing Kiwanuka as “a middle-aged homespun sort”, Kimenye reports on her activity with rural women’s craft clubs, and her decision to “form the first women’s co-operative society which could market the things made.”⁴⁰ Kimenye praises Kiwanuka’s humility, her hard work “without hitting the headlines”, declaring that “she really has made history”. With the formation of the cooperative, Kiwanuka hoped that this would “encourage other women throughout Uganda” to do the same.⁴¹

Two days later, on 12 November 1964, Kimenye’s article “What’s this? A lady cashier at the bank?”⁴² was published, which profiled Edith Tibasaga, the first African woman to be promoted to the position of cashier at National and Grindlays Bank in Uganda. Kimenye commends Tibasaga for this achievement “in the masculine world of banking”, stating that the promotion “most certainly has not left her over-awed, and she looks as much at home behind that imposing cash desk as she undoubtedly is in her kitchen.” The column also comments on the sexist work culture of National and Grindlays Bank, which saw both male employees and customers discomfited with a woman cashier. In humorous, yet frank, tones, Kimenye lambasts the male bankers, stating that Tibasaga received the promotion “because, in competition with men, she has proved herself capable, efficient, reliable and worthy of holding such a responsible job.”⁴³ In discussing equal opportunities for women in the workplace, Kimenye concludes the column, stating that “the whole business would reflect better if [bankers] would stop trying to explain why, and merely give credit where credit is obviously due.”⁴⁴

³⁸ Kimenye’s memoirs were serialised by the newspaper *Daily Monitor*. See: Barbara Kimenye, ‘Bob Astles Is Rejected by Kabaka, Hangs onto Obote, Amin’, *Daily Monitor*, 7 November 2015, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/bob-astles-is-rejected-by-kabaka-hangs-onto-obote-amin-1630002> (accessed 19 August 2021).

³⁹ Barbara Kimenye, ‘Putting skills to work’, *Daily Nation*, Tuesday 10 November 1964, p. 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Barbara Kimenye, ‘What’s this? A lady cashier at the bank?’, *Daily Nation*, Thursday 12 November 1964, p. 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Collectively, these articles by Barbara Kimenye serve to highlight African women's achievements and their agency in a highly patriarchal era. They demonstrate the women thriving in spite of structural barriers to their professional success, and their work being viewed with condescension by men. In choosing to write about these women as a journalist, Kimenye used her platform – a column “followed by the thousands”⁴⁵ – to showcase and celebrate African women's professional achievements, as well as critique patriarchal structures. As Kimenye's words are printed in an English-language newspaper, her imagined audience was a small literate minority of middle-class women. Acting as a proxy for broader communities of women, Kimenye addresses them using her profiles to inspire women readers to mobilise and potentially also become economically active. The articles appeared two years after Ugandan independence, at a time when the hope and euphoria of decolonisation were still present in the public sphere. Kimenye's simultaneous celebration and mobilisation of women are characteristic of contemporary government and press efforts to encourage women's economic activity, as discussed above. She was also well aware of prevailing sexism and discrimination towards professional women – as evidenced from her profile on Tibasaga – and her words were therefore also intended to critique patriarchal systems through highlighting women's professional achievements. As the only Black woman journalist for a newspaper with an editorial staff consisting largely of expatriate European and African men reporters, with her columns, Kimenye actively contributed to shaping a positive discourse around African women in the public sphere.⁴⁶ Kimenye's articles emphasise additional dimensions to established views of Uganda's Africanisation, showing that women were active participants in a discourse of optimism and hope after independence.

Rebecca Katumba for Voice of Uganda

Rebecca Katumba was a reporter for the government-owned daily *Voice of Uganda* – the successor to the *Uganda Argus* – in the 1970s and was also one of Uganda's first women journalists. Her name was well-known in Ugandan newspaper-reading circles, and she was described by journalist Mageseso Namungalu in the newspaper *Sunday Monitor* as “a woman of great beauty and already a celebrity.”⁴⁷ *Voice of Uganda* was a vehemently anti-imperialist newspaper, expressing pro-Black sentiments, and Katumba penned articles on events around

⁴⁵ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer's Awakening*, p. 225.

⁴⁶ Loughran, *Birth of a Nation: The Story of a Newspaper in Kenya*, p. 26-7.

⁴⁷ Mageseso Namungalu, 'Tribute to Vicky Mukasa, Other Fallen Journalists', *Sunday Monitor*, 11 November 2001.

Kampala, local businesses, society, marriage, and women's issues and women's liberation. Like Kimenye, she also profiled successful African women, which will be discussed here.

One profile Katumba wrote, titled "Love of flowers – a delicate business", published on 5 January 1973 in *Voice of Uganda's* 'Women's World' rubric, was on the Kampala-based florist Tereza Mbire, today one of Uganda's wealthiest businesswomen.⁴⁸ Katumba describes Mrs Mbire's life and career, which began as a primary school teacher, before she "went abroad ... where she managed to change her profession and [take] a course in hotel management", which included a subject on flower arrangement.⁴⁹ Upon Mrs Mbire's return to Uganda, she worked in the hotel industry, with some of her tasks involving "training housekeepers and arranging flowers".⁵⁰ At the time of article publication, Mrs Mbire had recently acquired her flower business – stating that business was still "slack" – and served "customers of all races, creed and colour", including "housewives, banks, some officers, wedding parties, mourners as well as some hotels."⁵¹

In another article, published a few weeks later, on 25 January 1973, titled "Women acquired businesses", Katumba wrote a profile on the Ugandan businesswoman and dressmaker, Juliet Sekabanja.⁵² Mrs Sekabanja had profited from the Ugandan economic war – which entailed the expulsion of Uganda's Asian community – having received one of the formerly Asian-owned businesses, which she used to sell her dresses. Katumba discusses Mrs Sekabanja's background and education in Britain, her return to Uganda and her struggles to set up a business as an African woman in Kampala. Katumba reports that "in business, it seemed [Sekabanja] would never succeed. An African by that time was not very much thought of even by fellow Ugandans."⁵³ Due to these difficulties, Mrs Sekabanja worked as a primary school teacher for some time. During the economic war's initiative to Africanise businesses in Uganda, through the allocation of "businesses to the indigenous Ugandans, [an] exercise [that] was done on merit, irrespective of sex", Mrs Sekabanja was "one of the lucky women who acquired

⁴⁸ Rebecca Katumba, 'Love of flowers – a delicate business', *Voice of Uganda*, 5 January 1973. See also: Shifa Mwesigye, 'Women's Business Secrets', *The Observer*, 26 March 2013, <https://observer.ug/business/79-businessstories/24417-womens-business-secrets> (accessed 21 August 2021); Kyomuhendo and McIntosh, *Women, Work and Domestic Virtue in Uganda, 1900-2003*, p. 172..

⁴⁹ Katumba, 'Love of flowers – a delicate business'

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Rebecca Katumba, 'Women acquired businesses', *Voice of Uganda*, 25 January 1973.

⁵³ Ibid.

businesses”.⁵⁴ She became “a professional dress-maker” and owner of “Sekabanja City Fashions, which [had] two departments.”⁵⁵

Both articles by Katumba demonstrate the agency of African women, their tenacity and determination to succeed economically in a time when both their gender and race placed severe limitations on their achievements, even with their privileges of mobility and having been able to study abroad. Like Kimenye, Katumba used her platform to celebrate the achievements of other African woman in the public sphere, and contribute to a positive discourse on them. However, it remains relevant that Katumba’s articles were published in *Voice of Uganda*, which was government-owned, and therefore a means of propaganda for Amin. Using the newspaper, Amin was able “to address, summon, and direct the actions of Uganda’s people”, and its broad readership “made it possible for the authorities to address particular government groups who would otherwise fall outside the reach of government bureaucracy.”⁵⁶ Writing for such a paper, Katumba’s immediate intended audience were middle-class women literate women. However, as the paper was in English, it would also be consumed by an international readership, to whom the Amin government would have wanted to display a positive image of Uganda, in contrast to the negative discourse on him circulating in international media.⁵⁷ Hunter discusses “the important role governments and other agencies have always played in producing newspapers, as part of a wider struggle to control information and interpretation”, which can be observed with *Voice of Uganda*.⁵⁸ Katumba’s profiles were written and published in the midst of Uganda’s economic Africanisation initiative, and her praise of the women’s successes, were part of the government’s pro-African and anti-foreign propaganda. In some ways, the feminist intentions behind Katumba’s words are well worth scrutinising, given their publication in the mouthpiece of a government that in other capacities actively oppressed women.⁵⁹ The individuals Katumba chose to profile were women whose achievements reflected favourably on the Amin’s government, highlighting the successes of the Africanisation of Uganda’s economy.

Kimenye and Katumba wrote for different East African newspapers at different times; however, they shared a common topic in their reporting – that of women. The articles of both journalists

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Derek R. Peterson and Edgar Taylor, ‘Rethinking the State in Idi Amin’s Uganda: The Politics of Exhortation’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 58–82, at p. 59.

⁵⁷ See: Mawby, *The End of Empire in Uganda: Decolonisation and Institutional Conflict, 1945-79*, p. 122.

⁵⁸ Hunter, ‘Newspapers as Sources for African History’, p. 2.

⁵⁹ For discussions of women in Idi Amin’s Uganda, see: Decker, *In Idi Amin’s Shadow: Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*.

showcase African women's ingenuity and agency in work and business. This celebratory mobilisation differed to the texts in previous chapters, which expressed state critique and disillusionment, as they were read much more widely than other texts, and primarily by women. However, the intentions behind the journalists' individual agency differed: while Kimenye's words were intended to inspire and mobilise fellow women, Katumba's, although still a celebration of women's economic success, held elements of propaganda, and were designed to portray Amin's regime in a favourable light. Collectively, Kimenye and Katumba's articles underscore the multivocality of the debates, and the myriad of ways – and the intentions behind these – women were celebrated and mobilised. All columns enriched contemporary discourse on Africanisation and decolonisation through the addition of women's perspectives, while at the same time emphasising the diversity of the discourse, even among women.

Women's involvement in politics

Women's involvement in politics dominated a large portion of their discourse in their journalism and press contributions, and will be discussed in this section, using their letters to the editor. An examination of the topic of women and taxation in Uganda is given, followed by an interrogation of press contributions by Kenyan women on the subject of parliamentary representation. The letters to the editor showcase their writers' collective agency in making demands and holding the state accountable, as they use tools of persuasion to mobilise other women. The polyphony of their voices will be highlighted, to demonstrate the myriad of ways women debated decolonisation.

Women and taxation

The women's movement in Uganda in the 1960s was – among other things – characterised by mobilisation around taxation, with middle-class and elite women lobbying for the right for women to pay taxes. The reasons for this lay at the heart of the desire for gender equality, and, as Aili Mari Tripp argues, “if women were to be accepted as equal to men, they would need to act as full-fledged citizens and pay taxes like men.”⁶⁰ In 1960, the Uganda Council of Women (UCW) passed a resolution on the taxation of women, designed as “a contribution to the development to full citizenship of their country by giving them the right to vote and stand for elections.”⁶¹ It was on this issue, however, that the salience of class differences among Ugandan women became prominent: those opposing the issue of tax did so on the grounds that women

⁶⁰ Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda* (Oxford: James Currey Ltd, 2000), p. 46.

⁶¹ Report of the UCW Conference on The Status of Women in Relation to Marriage Laws, cited in Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, p. 47.

already paid their social debts through unpaid childcare and housework in the home.⁶² In 1962, women in Buganda were forbidden from paying tax; however, by 1968, nearly every district council in Uganda was permitted to levy taxes on women above the age of 18.⁶³

It is within this context that two letters to the editor were published in the *Uganda Argus* in July 1960 that will be discussed here. The first letter, titled “A woman’s tax scheme is not so easy”, published on Wednesday 20 July 1960, was written by Ugandan politician and women’s movement activist Rhoda Kalema.⁶⁴ Born on 10 May 1929, Kalema was educated at Gayaza High School, King’s College Budo and the University of Edinburgh. She was active in the Ugandan women’s movement as a member of the UCW, in addition to working as a Community Development Officer with the Ministry for Social and Community Development between 1958 and 1966. In 1979-1980, Kalema was the Deputy Minister of Culture and Development, and in 1989-1991 the Deputy Minister of Public Service and Cabinet Affairs.⁶⁵ In her letter to the editor, Kalema makes the argument for the taxation of women. She acknowledges the views of “the traditionalists” for whom “it is sacrilegious for women to pay tax for ‘then women would be exactly on the same level as men, and so will be ungovernable.’”⁶⁶ Kalema discusses the levying of an income tax, which she describes as “the fairest way of taxing citizens in the country, and if one’s income is below subsistence level no tax is paid on it.”⁶⁷ She continues that this would be logical for “women with sufficient income”, as “there are a considerable number of women all over the country who are self-employed or get income from land which is often much higher than that of the professionals’ salaries a year.”⁶⁸ Kalema states that this would only be feasible if “there is ‘full employment’ in the country controlled by the government, to make it easy to check on women who are employed and getting income at any time.”⁶⁹

A week after Kalema’s letter was published, on Wednesday 27 July, Mrs S. V. Mukasa, based in Ntinda, Kampala, wrote a response to Kalema in the *Uganda Argus*, in a letter titled “Women and taxes”.⁷⁰ Mukasa expresses her agreement with Kalema, stating that “it should be a social

⁶² Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, p. 47.

⁶³ ‘Married women and graduated tax’, *Uganda Argus*, 9 December 1968, p. 6, cited in Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, p. 46.

⁶⁴ Rhoda Kalema, ‘A women’s tax scheme is not so easy’, *Uganda Argus*, 20 July 1960.

⁶⁵ Rhoda Nakibuka Nsibirwa Kalema, *My Life Is But a Weaving* (Nairobi: Moran Publishers, 2021); Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, p. xxxvi, 39, 43, 51.

⁶⁶ Kalema, ‘A women’s tax scheme is not so easy’.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ S. V. Mukasa, ‘Women and taxes’, *Uganda Argus*, 27 July 1960.

obligation for every woman to pay tax”, and makes suggestions as to what form the taxation of women should take.⁷¹ She argues that “all adult women, like men, should pay tax ... on a flat rate to cover married and unmarried women.”⁷² As taxation is only possible if a woman is employed, Mukasa continues that “each woman should be expected to find employment for herself” and that “we should not expect the Government to find employment for every woman.”⁷³

As sources, both of these letters demonstrate the agency of their writers, as well as their vocality in lobbying for gender equality through the form of taxation. Based on the written interaction between Mukasa and Kalema, the imagined audience for both writers was fellow women, whom they aim to mobilise using techniques of persuasion. The writers used their collective agency to lobby and make demands of the state to be seen as equals in the public sphere. At the same time, the sources highlight the prominent class differences within the Ugandan women’s movement, as the writers lobby for the taxation of women based on the condition of employment. Their class bias remains evident: as educated members of Uganda’s elite, fluent in English, their background would have granted them access to greater employment opportunities (though, of course, far fewer than men) than rural and working-class women in Uganda. Mukasa’s statement that “we should not expect the Government to find employment for every woman” indicates an unawareness of the difficulties disadvantaged women would have faced in finding formal employment without Government help. While demonstrating class cleavages, the sources highlight the ways in which women actively engaged in wider political debate with each other, using their collective agency to achieve their aims. These letters represent the ways in which women collectively debated the meaning of independence for themselves, expressed within the public sphere of the pages of a newspaper.

Women MPs in Kenya

Kenya had an active civil society space that focussed on women’s issues after independence, with organisations such as *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, the Federation of University Women and the Kenya National Council of Women lobbying for greater women’s rights.⁷⁴ However, in the political sphere, they remained grossly under-represented in the first decade of independence. In the late colonial era, the first African women to be elected to Kenya’s Legislative Council

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Audrey Wipper, ‘Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 9, no. 3 (1971): 429–42, p. 432.

were Jemica Gecaga and Priscilla Abwao in 1958 and 1961 respectively. After independence, the first woman mayor Kenya voted into office in 1965 was Grace Onyango in Kisumu, and in 1970 Margaret Kenyatta was elected the first woman mayor of Nairobi.⁷⁵ The National Assembly, however, only consisted of male parliamentarians, who objected strongly to women being permitted to join. When debating the issue of women MPs in the National Assembly, Minister Ngala Mwendwa stated: “The first duty of a woman, any woman, is to get a husband. ... If she fails to get a husband, she has failed her first examination and she is not worthy to represent anybody.”⁷⁶ It was only in 1969 that the first woman, Grace Onyango, was voted into the Kenyan National Assembly.⁷⁷

On Wednesday 23 March 1966, the *Daily Nation* published a letter to the editor from Miss Mary Awori, a Kenyan woman – presumably a student – resident in Makerere, Uganda. Titled “Women of Kenya, come forward!”, the letter is an encouragement to Kenyan women for greater participation in politics.⁷⁸ Miss Awori begins with acknowledging that there is not “a single woman MP” in Kenya, and “that other obstacles lie in [their] way.”⁷⁹ However, she criticises fellow Kenyan women for their internalised patriarchy and lacking interest in politics: “We all tend to think our places are in the home only. We think politics is for men. We have had stupid ideas of inferiority pumped into us. I think the time has come for the women of Kenya to begin to take an active interest in their nation. We pick up the newspapers, but what do we look at? The women’s page only!”⁸⁰ The letter calls on women to “awake from this political slumber and passiveness”, declaring that “Kenya does not need only wives and mothers but also active party members, MPs, Ministers and Presidents.”⁸¹

One week after Miss Mary Awori’s letter was published, the *Daily Nation* published another letter – ‘Women, let’s put our house in order first’ – on Wednesday 30 March 1966, from Miss D. Lubembe, also on the subject of women’s involvement in politics, and the necessity of women’s self-improvement and education.⁸² Miss Lubembe begins her letter by acknowledging

⁷⁵ See: Ibid; Mi Yung Yoon and Christol Okeke, ‘Kenya: Women’s Suffrage and Political Participation as Voters’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Women’s Political Rights*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan, Gender and Politics (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 243–56; Phoebe Musandu, ‘Tokenism or Representation? The Political Careers of the First African Women in Kenya’s Legislative Council (LEGCO), 1958-1962’, *Women’s History Review* 28, no. 4 (2019): 587–606.

⁷⁶ House of Representatives Report, 9 March 1966, col. 1886, cited in: Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence*, p. 202.

⁷⁷ Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 218.

⁷⁸ Mary Awori, ‘Women of Kenya, come forward!’, *Daily Nation*, Wednesday 23 March 1966, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² D. Lubembe, ‘Women, let’s put our house in order first’, *Daily Nation*, Wednesday 30 March 1966.

gender inequality in Kenya, due to “tribal social structure ... which only allowed greater opportunities to man than woman [to] progress.”⁸³ She discusses the achievement of independence, arguing that “men fought for their rights from colonial domination and achieved their ambition”, while “women ... are still fighting for their rights.”⁸⁴ The letter also discusses women’s internalised patriarchy and sexism, as Lubembe states that “there is more prejudice and contempt among fellow women than there is among men and women”.⁸⁵ She appeals to those women “who have achieved more ... to help ignorant, ordinary women to understand their position and that they can achieve as much and therefore promote unity.”⁸⁶ Lubembe concludes her letter calling for greater respect and support among women in order to “build a nation”, and the importance of “[recognising] the cheap tactics of men [to win women’s] support.”⁸⁷

These letters form part of a broader contemporary public discourse on African women in politics in Kenya: in the same month of their publication, women in the Nakuru branch of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) were lobbying for the presence of women in the Kenyan parliament. Politician and doctor Njoroge Mungai – brother to Jemima Gecaga – stated his expectation of women occupying parliamentary seats in the next general elections.⁸⁸ As Mary Awori was based in Makerere at the time of writing, it can be assumed that she was a student, and therefore a part of Kenya and East Africa’s educated elite minority. Her criticism of fellow women’s passiveness may well be the result of her higher education; however, her statements remain large generalisations of an entire population sub-section, many of whom did not have the same advantages Awori had that allowed her to study at Makerere. Lubembe shares a similar stance in her views on fellow women, and addresses them using techniques of persuasion and critique. Using overt lobbying in the public pages of a newspaper, both Awori and Lubembe address an audience of fellow women to mobilise them into political activity. As sources, these letters shed light on the nuances within the women’s movement, demonstrating its non-uniformity, and internal disagreements among women, as well as highlighting that the category of Kenyan women is far from a monolith. Awori and Lubembe use the public space of a newspaper to discuss their own visions for decolonisation, which was to include greater female presence in politics and the public sphere.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ ‘How long to a two-sex Parliament?’, *Daily Nation*, 18 March 1966, p. 9.

This section demonstrated the political involvement of women, as discussed by them in the public arena of the newspaper, in the form of letters to the editor. Women lobbying for taxation, and greater political involvement and parliamentary representation were discussed, to illustrate how women's involvement in politics developed between 1960 and 1973. The press contributions in different ways rally for women's involvement in politics in a public arena. They address women readers in a myriad of different ways, using techniques of persuasion and critique to bring about female political mobilisation. The writers express their views of decolonisation, which was to entail the overt presence of women in the public sphere and women's empowerment. At the same time, the article and letters demonstrate the multi-vocality of women's views on gender equality and political involvement, showing the nuances and contradictions in this movement. The sources highlight the polyphonic nature of such discourse, and the far-reaching nature of Africanisation and decolonisation debates in Kenyan and Ugandan society.

Women's rights in marriage and the private sphere

This section examines the construction and exertion of Ugandan women's agency in the public sphere, as they discuss their rights in marriage and the private sphere. The agency and sisterhood of Ugandan women across racial lines, as they lobbied for greater Asian women's rights is discussed, before interrogating shifting ideas around modern marriage. The sources demonstrate how women, through their press contributions, merged the private with the public sphere, as they wrote about marriage issues in newspapers. In examining contributions from Asian and African, and Hindu and Muslim women, the diversity of Ugandan and East African women will be highlighted. The wide debates on Africanisation and decolonisation will be emphasised, through showing the intersectional nature of their struggles and oppression.

Sisterhood across racial lines

In 1957 the UCW published a report titled 'The Status of Women in Relation to Marriage Laws'. The report contained the results of an investigation into Ugandan women's marriage rights under protectorate and customary law, as well as discussing issues around bridewealth and property inheritance. It also examined Hindu women's marriage rights, detailing that "Hindu marriage [was] not recognised by Protectorate Law" and "Hindu married women [had] no rights under the Laws of Uganda."⁸⁹ These lacking rights were the cause of much abuse Asian-Ugandan women suffered in their own homes, through, for instance, being burned alive,

⁸⁹ 'The Status of Women in Relation to Marriage Laws' (Kampala: The Uganda Council of Women, 1957), p. 5.

or poisoned by their mother-in-law.⁹⁰ Following this publication, the UCW set up its sub-committee, Status of Asian Women, which was co-chaired by Sarla Markandya, Hemantini Bhatia, Neela Korde (a lawyer), and Nalini Patel (Secretary to Speaker of Parliament).⁹¹ The sub-committee lobbied for greater marriage rights for Hindu women through holding meetings in the Hindu community, writing to legislators and newspapers, and keeping the issue in the public sphere. Initially, there was resistance and pushback from some members of the Hindu community, including from the Indian Women's Association, but by March 1960 the latter joined forces with the UCW to pressure legislators to codify Hindu women's rights.⁹² In 1961, Sarah Ntiro, the Uganda Legislative Council's (LEGCO) second African woman member, introduced to the LEGCO the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act, which was later passed. In an interview, she later stated that she was asked to do so by the UCW because Hindu women involved in the activism were more comfortable with a non-Asian lobbying for the matter on the LEGCO.⁹³

It is within this context that on Wednesday 23 March 1960, Neela Korde penned a letter to the editor of the *Uganda Argus*, titled "Status of Indian Women", in which she discussed the position of Asian women in marriage in Uganda.⁹⁴ Neela Korde was an Asian-Ugandan lawyer, and one of the first women in Uganda to be admitted to the bar.⁹⁵ She was a member of the UCW and co-chair of the sub-committee Status of Asian Women. In her letter, Korde writes that Indian women "do not have any status to speak of" and "that a Hindu married woman does not even have a legal status in Uganda."⁹⁶ In light of the contemporary discussions around African marriage laws held by the UCW, Korde questions why a similar public enquiry could not be made "to deal with the legal status and perhaps get a true picture of the social status of [Asian] women (especially in their homes)."⁹⁷ She concludes that such an investigation within Indian households in Uganda would reveal that "an Indian woman spends her life serving father,

⁹⁰ Carolyn Day White, 'The Role of Women as an Interest Group in the Ugandan Political System' (MA thesis, Makerere University, 1973), p. 145-6, cited in Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, p. 44.

⁹¹ Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, p. 45.

⁹² 'Meetings support welcomed by I.W.A.', *Uganda Argus*, 8 November 1960, p. 5, cited in Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, p. 45.

⁹³ Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, p. 44-45; Telephone discussion, Sarah Ntiro, Kampala, 7 June 2000, cited in Tripp, 'Women's Mobilisation in Uganda: Nonracial Ideologies in European-African-Asian Encounters, 1945-1962', p. 559.

⁹⁴ Neela Korde, 'Status of Indian Women', *Uganda Argus*, 23 March 1960.

⁹⁵ Aili Mari Tripp, 'Women's Mobilisation in Uganda: Nonracial Ideologies in European-African-Asian Encounters, 1945-1962', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34, no. 3 (2001): 543-64, at p. 559.

⁹⁶ Korde, 'Status of Indian Women'.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

husband, brother or any other person who acts as a Pater familias to her.”⁹⁸ As a source, Korde’s letter demonstrates the agency of Ugandan-Asian women: in spite of their lacking rights in the public and private sphere, they nevertheless mobilised collectively to publicise their issue in the pages of a newspaper. Addressed to an imagined audience of fellow Ugandan women, the letter also serves to highlight the intersectionality of issues that Ugandan women faced: while African women may have had some *de jure* marriage rights – although *de facto* may still have faced similar oppression to that of their Asian sisters – Asian women had none, though they occupied higher position in a colonial-created hierarchy than their African sisters.

The creation of the UCW’s Sub-Committee on the Status of Asian women was subject to much criticism, even from women within the Ugandan Asian community. Contributing to this discourse was Mrs F. Ahmed, the President of the Muslim Women’s Society in Uganda, one of the nine women’s organisations active in Uganda at the time.⁹⁹ She wrote a letter to the editor, titled “And the President of the Muslim Women’s Society writes”, which was published in the *Uganda Argus* on Wednesday 22 June 1960.¹⁰⁰ In the letter, Ahmed publicly distances herself from the sub-committee, stating that “the [Muslim Society] was neither consulted nor approached with regard to the formation of this new [Sub-Committee].”¹⁰¹ She continues that any individual member of the Muslim Women’s Society “who has accepted the appointment has therefore done so in her own personal capacity” and that “her views should therefore by no means be taken as the policy or statement from the Society.”¹⁰² In Ahmed’s view, “the right procedure would have been for the [UCW] to write to both the Indian Women’s Association and the Muslim Women’s Society asking them to first discuss this very delicate subject.”¹⁰³ The letter concludes with the sentiment “that the status of Muslim women is much higher than what is being conceived as present”, and that the laws of Prophet Mohamed “give Muslim women as much right as that accorded to men.”¹⁰⁴

Ahmed’s letter is a stark contrast to that of Korde and provides a perspective on the nuances within the late-colonial Ugandan women’s movement. The UCW’s Sub-Committee on the Status of Asian Women was clearly a very contentious topic, one that struck a chord with different women in the Ugandan Asian community, as is demonstrated by Ahmed’s

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Hilda Mary Tadria, ‘Uganda Women’s Organisations: Their Contribution towards Raising Uganda’s Standard of Living’, *Africa Spectrum* 8, no. 2 (1973): 217–26, at p. 218.

¹⁰⁰ F. Ahmed, ‘And the President of the Muslim Women’s Society writes’, *Uganda Argus*, 22 June 1960.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

contribution to this discourse in the public arena of a newspaper. Ahmed's views, however, are reflective of her own class bias: her ability to read and write in English, and position of Chair of the Muslim Women's Society point towards a middle-class background. Her statements about Muslim women's equality with men may ring true for her positionality, and her class status signified she would have experienced gendered oppression different to, for instance, working class Muslim women. Comparing the two viewpoints of both Ugandan Asian women – one Hindu and one Muslim – underscores the fact that the women's movement was a heterogeneous one, with women of different walks of life expressing different views on gender equality in an era of independence.

As the weeks passed in 1960, the critique of the Sub-Committee on the Status of Asian women became heated to the point that Pumla Kisosonkole, the President of the UCW, had to make a public statement on the matter. In a letter to the editor titled "President of the U.C.W. replies", published in the *Uganda Argus* on Saturday 25 June 1960, Kisosonkole responded to the public criticism that had been directed at the UCW's investigation of Asian women's rights.¹⁰⁵ She underscores the UCW's liberal values, the fact that "membership ... is open to women of all races, and that one of their objects is 'To work for the establishment of legal, economic and social conditions which will enable them freely to make their full contribution to the community'."¹⁰⁶ She remains transparent about the UCW's investigative procedures with regard to the status of Asian women: "It is the duty of the sub-committee to enquire into the problem, consulting other interested groups, getting their cooperation and seeking expert assistance to advise them thereafter reporting back to the Executive Committee."¹⁰⁷ The letter states that "action is only taken when the council is satisfied with the carefully considered evidence submitted to it that a problem exists and that it may be possible to agree with all concerned on a course of action to alleviate it."¹⁰⁸ Kisosonkole finally adds that "the sub-committee on the Status of Asian Women has been given the same terms of reference, and the Uganda Council of Women is confident that they will follow them wisely."¹⁰⁹

The solidarity between Asian and African Ugandan women within the UCW was remarkable, given the general anti-Asian sentiment that abounded in Uganda in this period. In 1959, for instance, the political movement Uganda National Movement organised a boycott of all Asian-owned businesses in Buganda, in protest against large-scale Asian control of the Ugandan

¹⁰⁵ Pumla Kisosonkole, 'President of U.C.W. replies', *Uganda Argus*, 25 June 1960.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

economy. The supporters of the boycott met Asians and their business patrons with violence and intimidation. While the violence ended when the *Kabaka* of Buganda called for an end to it, animosity towards Asians, who were seen as a separate socio-economic class, abounded, culminating in their expulsion in 1972 by Idi Amin.¹¹⁰

Kisasonkole's letter not only highlights the internal organisation of the UCW, but also demonstrates the liberal stance of the organisation, through her reference to openness towards "women of all races". Along with Korde's letter, the press contributions demonstrate the elite nature of the UCW: both Korde and Kisasonkole were educated, literate and fluent in English, and members of Uganda's upper class. Their alliance in the UCW highlights the fact that, in late colonial and early post-colonial Uganda "class differences ... were perhaps more salient than racial differences."¹¹¹ Tripp argues that due to the "large number of highly educated women in Uganda", this "had something of a levelling effect for women of [the upper class] irrespective of race", and "meant that some Africans and Europeans could relate to one another with relatively greater ease because they shared common cultural and educational experiences."¹¹² While a liberal feminist reading of this might applaud this cross-racial sisterhood, the UCW's membership also exposed its exclusive feminism, one that did not extend to working-class or rural women. The UCW worked with grassroots and community development clubs, but had few non-English-speaking or rural members. It was only in 1965, five years after the letters discussed here were published, that the Council expanded its membership to include non-English-speaking women, and began working with rural women to alleviate malnutrition, illiteracy, and poverty.¹¹³

The three letters to the editor examined in this section – one from a Hindu, one from a Muslim, and one from an African woman – illustrate the differences in the Ugandan women's movement and the agency of their writers in contributing to the public discourse on marriage. The women used techniques of persuasion and critique to address and mobilise fellow women, and their words show their collective agency in bringing about change. The letters to the editor reveal these women's visions for decolonisation, one that entailed gender equality and greater rights for women. As the press contributions on women's rights in marriage show, the discussions on decolonisation and women's equality affected the private sphere, including women's position

¹¹⁰ Mutibwa, *A History of Uganda: The First 100 Years 1894-1995*, p. 163-4.

¹¹¹ Tripp, 'Women's Mobilisation in Uganda: Nonracial Ideologies in European-African-Asian Encounters, 1945-1962', p. 555.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p. 554.

¹¹³ 'U.C.W. talks open today: 159 delegates are expected', *Uganda Argus*, 23 November 1965, cited in Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, p. 38.

in the institution of marriage. Ugandan women were vocal about this in the public arena, as they brought their debates and activism to the public sphere of print media.

Modern Marriage

This sub-section analyses two press contributions on the topic of modern marriage: a letter to the editor from Juliet Namutebi in the *Uganda Argus* on Wednesday 10 April 1963, and an article by Rebecca Katumba in *Voice of Uganda*, on 23 February 1973. Published a decade apart, the two contributions are a reflection of debates on modernity and decolonisation after Ugandan independence. In her letter to the editor in April 1963, Juliet Namutebi, based in Natete, Kampala, responds to a previous letter in the *Uganda Argus* from a male reader, a Mr Mujuli, who had aired his views on marriage.¹¹⁴ Namutebi disagrees with Mujuli's views on prevailing polygamy in Uganda due to social customs, writing that "generations change from generations ... we are not going to stick to our parents' ways because they are our parents' ways."¹¹⁵ She responds to Mujuli's lamentations of a greater number of women initiating separation, and states that "it is not always a woman's fault, sometimes it can be a man's fault."¹¹⁶ Namutebi concludes her letter, arguing that "if two people find that they can't at all live together why not [separate]. ... It is all up to one's own opinion to do his convenience."¹¹⁷

A decade later, on Friday 23 February 1973, in her column "Civilisation versus marriage life" for *Voice of Uganda's* 'World of Women' section, Rebecca Katumba discusses the notion of modern marriage in Uganda.¹¹⁸ Katumba examines the issue of financial inequality in a marriage, stating that women without incomes are unable "to initiate divorce proceedings" and "go away quietly from their husbands because then they will not get any financial help from them."¹¹⁹ For such women, Katumba argues, "marriage is in name but not in practice: she is still exercising the old tradition that a woman's place is in the kitchen and her duty is to rear children and keeping the home – happiness, forget."¹²⁰ Katumba also criticises marriages based on infatuation, which she terms "the so-called 'falling in love'".¹²¹ In such cases, "such marriages will last for a short time and in fact after the first three months of marriage, love would pack off and go away."¹²² She observes finally that times are changing, acknowledging

¹¹⁴ Juliet Namutebi, Letter to the editor, *Uganda Argus*, 10 April 1963.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Rebecca Katumba, 'Civilisation versus marriage life', *Voice of Uganda*, 23 February 1973.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

“that ours is a modern society and pairing off expecting a happy marriage is an old system.”¹²³ Katumba reminds the reader that they alone “have to choose [their] path in life and nobody else. And [their] marriage whether happy or not will depend on the way [they] play [their] cards.”¹²⁴

These press contributions reflect debates on modernity and decolonisation that educated women were concerned with in this period. Namutebi’s letter, written six months after Uganda gained independence shows an increasingly liberal attitude towards the institution of marriage, one that places a woman’s happiness as a priority over social expectations. As an urban woman based in Kampala, it is likely she was influenced by shifting ideas of modernity and women’s rights in marriage, not in the least due to the UCW’s public awareness-raising on the matter. Katumba’s article was written a decade after Namutebi penned her letter, and further highlights this debate on decolonisation and modernity. The article expresses liberal views on a woman’s place in marriage, critiquing financial inequality in a household and the tradition of women in the kitchen. Katumba’s emphasis on the individual and individual happiness represents a shift in social attitudes towards the self, vis-à-vis the community, a possible result of increasing exposure to Western norms in urban areas. These shifting views on marriage and a woman’s place within the institution, however, are expressed by two English-speaking urban women; the writers’ views were unlikely to have been shared by all women in Uganda, depending on religion, class, or geography. Using the public space of the newspaper, Namutembi and Katumba’s press contributions emphasise a discourse on Africanisation and decolonisation in institutions that affect women in the private sphere. While the articles do not contain information on the varied experiences of marriage by women in Uganda, they reflect the nature of the ideas on marriage that were being debated by educated and urban women, thereby highlighting the far-reaching nature of such discourse.

This section examined women in Uganda’s discourse on women’s rights and the institution of marriage, as discussed in the public sphere of print media. The letters to the editor about the UCW’s Sub-Committee on the Status of Indian women highlight the differences in the Ugandan women’s movement, as well as its elite nature. Written to persuade and to inspire, the writers’ words highlight Ugandan women’s collective agency in lobbying for their rights in the public arena. The press contributions on modern marriage, on the other hand, reflect debates on the institution being held by urban, educated women. Collectively, these letters to the editor showcase the diversity of the Ugandan women’s movement, the various views held by women

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

in the country, and the ways in which they debated issues affecting them in the public sphere. Their debates formed part of a discourse on Africanisation and decolonisation, one that was far-reaching and inclusive towards women's issues.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined women's journalism and press contributions to various East African newspapers, consisting of columns, articles, and letters to the editor. Their writing reveals the construction of their own agency, and how they understood this period of decolonisation, as they expressed their ideas in the public space of the newspaper pages. Using a repertoire of techniques that included inspiration, persuasion, overt lobbying and activism, the writers discussed in this chapter communicated with fellow women, with the aim of mobilising them and to hold the post-colonial state accountable. The sources demonstrate the women's views of decolonisation, which was to include gender equality and a deconstruction of patriarchal structures. The mobilisation of women was heightened due to the mass media consumption of print journalism, and the women's words were read by a much wider audience than texts examined in previous chapters.

Within the category of women, work and the economy, Barbara Kimenye's articles in her *Daily Nation* column were analysed, and the ways they celebrated other African women's professional achievements. Rebecca Katumba's articles in *Voice of Uganda* revealed similar ideas, even though these were published in a pro-Amin government newspaper. Together, their articles demonstrated the ways in which techniques of inspiration were used to mobilise women. The press contributions on the topic of women's involvement in politics were examined, investigating how African women in Uganda lobbied for their taxation in 1960, through their letters to the editor. In Kenya, letters to the editor demonstrated women's pressure for female representation in parliament, as they discussed the importance of women as politicians. With the topic of marriage, the private sphere was brought to the public, and Ugandan women lobbied for an investigation into the status of Asian women within the institution of marriage. These letters demonstrated the diversity within the category of Ugandan women, as Asians, Africans, as well as Hindus and Muslims contributed to the discourse. While the correspondence highlighted sisterhood across racial lines, it also revealed a class solidarity that accompanied the marginalisation of working class and rural Ugandan women's experiences in the discourse. An examination of ideas around modern marriages was also expressed in the *Uganda Argus* through various letters to the editor by women, which were reflections of contemporary debates on marriage held by educated urban women.

The women's writing in the newspapers discussed in this chapter reveals the extent of their public debates on Africanisation and decolonisation in Uganda and Kenya after independence. Their words demonstrate the distinctions in the East African women's movements, the diversity in opinion, as well as of the figures that held them. The letters to the editor and articles also demonstrate the salience of class in this period, as a means for expression in the public sphere, as the majority of the women examined in this chapter were English-speaking, educated elite women. With a variety of techniques, the sources demonstrate the aim to mobilise and educate fellow women, through inspiration, critique, and lobbying. The press contributions reveal the salience of the debates, and the ways in which women expressed their visions for independence. The multivocality of the discourse demonstrates how women were expanding its boundaries, as they lobbied for a form of decolonisation that would also include them.

Chapter 5

Non-fiction

Introduction

The late colonial and early post-colonial period in Kenya and Uganda saw the civil society sphere occupied by a dynamic women's movement, one that was primarily led by elite women. Women's organisations such as *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* and the Kenya Women's Society in Kenya, or the Uganda Council for Women, the Mothers' Union, and the Young Woman's Christian Association in Uganda, were all active in promoting women's interests and improving their situation after independence. Many of the women in these organisations also wrote about issues facing women for wider circulation around East Africa, and to reach a broader audience. Their texts were written in various formats for different purposes and published in different media, such as academic journals or books. This chapter examines this non-fiction writing by Kenyan and Ugandan women politicians and activists in the 1950s and 1960s. In discussing the ways in which they wrote about women's issues and gender inequality, the diversity in their opinion and the multivocal nature of the discourse will be highlighted.

In the awareness that 'non-fiction' is a loose term, the texts examined here comprise a collection of speeches, articles and essays that examine social, economic, and political issues in post-colonial East Africa, as they affect women and society more broadly. Three overlapping themes of girls' education, women and society, and women and the family, featured heavily in the women's writing discussed here, and, for this reason, the texts will be interrogated in these rubrics. The writers whose work will be analysed include Florence Lubega, Joyce Mpanga, Rebecca Mulira and Miria Obote from Uganda, as well as Grace Ogot, Celina Oloo and Virginia Cone from Kenya. With the exception of Grace Ogot, none of these figures were authors or writers; they were public figures, politicians, civil society and women's rights activists, who authored texts to express their grievances with the state. An interrogation of these women's words will demonstrate their visions for decolonisation, which were to include greater space for women in the public and private sphere, as well as their critiques of elite East African nationalist movements that marginalised women. Simultaneously, the ways in which some women's opinions on women and society resembled that of patriarchal control will be showcased, in order to demonstrate the heterogeneous views expressed.

The texts examined here were all published in a variety of formats: some were included in the anthology *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, edited by Amandina Lihamba et al., others collated as a book published by the East African Publishing House (EAPH), another

published in the newspaper *East African Standard*, while others in the publication *East Africa Journal*. The various media in which the texts were published targeted different readerships and audiences, reflective of the broad and multi-vocal nature of the writers' dissent and the groups in society they wished to reach. The women used different formats to challenge the nation-state, to proffer their views for decolonisation, and to argue for greater inclusion of girls' and women's issues in social and political life. The arguments the writers used, and their perspectives on social issues varied, depending on the audience they were writing for, demonstrating the heterogeneity of the category of 'East African women'.

It is significant to note that most of the women discussed in this chapter, as public figures, were members of East Africa's social and political elite, connected to it either through birth or marriage. Most of the Ugandan women, for instance, were from the Baganda ethnic group, whose proximity under colonialism to social, political and economic capital was greater than that of other ethnicities, due to British perceptions of Buganda exceptionalism.¹ For instance, Florence Lubega, was the daughter of Samuel Wamala, who served as *Katikkiro* (Prime Minister) of the Buganda kingdom; Rebecca Mulira was the daughter of Ham Mukasa, a Baganda politician and historian, and whose family Pumla Kisosonkole – of South African origin – had married into.² Miria Obote, as Uganda's First Lady, was the wife of Ugandan Prime Minister and later President Milton Obote. Grace Ogot had privileges of mobility, and was educated and worked in Uganda, Britain and Kenya, as well as being married to Bethwell Ogot, Kenya's leading historian and academic (a biography of Grace Ogot is provided in Chapter 2). As Musisi argues, these women's positionality "gave them entrance into places where decisions were made which other women would not have had" – although of course they still faced marginalisation due to their gender – and "the issues they raised concerned them directly as the modern elite of women."³ This will be demonstrated in subsequent discussions in this chapter: with the exceptions of Lubega, Mpanga and Ogot, most of these women's elite bias is made clear, as they express arguments for the advancement of primarily elite women's interests, writing for an audience for fellow middle and upper-class women. Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué's observations of elite women's political mobilisation in Cameroon can be applied to

¹ See: Richard J. Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 16-24.

² Nakanyike B. Musisi, 'Transformations of Baganda Women: From the Earliest Times to the Demise of the Kingdom in 1966' (PhD thesis, Toronto, University of Toronto, 1991), p. 338; Jonathan L. Earle, 'Mulira, Rebecca', in *Dictionary of African Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Emmanuel Akyeampong, and Steven J. Niven (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011),

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195382075.001.0001/acref-9780195382075-e-1446>.

³ Musisi, 'Transformations of Baganda Women: From the Earliest Times to the Demise of the Kingdom in 1966', p. 338.

an East African context: women political elites “frequently focused on the actions of their formally educated counterparts” and in doing so, “[they] strove to protect class boundaries even as they sought to improve women’s economic, social, educational, and political conditions.”⁴

There is a broad scope in literature that examines women and politics in East Africa throughout history. In the Kenyan colonial context, a certain body of scholarship interrogates the role of politics in addressing female circumcision, particularly among the Gikuyu. Lynn Thomas analyses this politicisation of the female body, emphasising the centrality of women’s reproductive capacities to political struggles in the colonial era in Kenya.⁵ She further investigates the nature of control of female circumcision by the colonial state, and its intervention in women’s affairs and communities.⁶ This is substantiated by Katherine Luongo, who analyses the absence of women’s voices in debates on the female circumcision controversy in Kenya, and the exploitation of African women’s bodies by men for their own political agendas.⁷ This chapter will address themes of women’s health and bodies; however, rather than emphasising their silencing by colonial and patriarchal forces, through highlighting their contributions to the public sphere, their voices will be brought to the forefront.

The role of women in the high political arena in the late colonial and early post-colonial period in East Africa has also been subject to scholarly debate. This is analysed by Phoebe Musandu in a Kenyan context, providing an investigation of female political representation in the Kenya Legislative Council shortly before independence. She argues that as a cosmetic appointment, the presence of two women on the Council failed to address issues of gender inequality in Kenya.⁸ Sylvia Tamale traces the development of female parliamentary representation in Uganda after independence, analysing its connections to the Ugandan women’s movement.⁹ In a Tanganyikan context, Susan Geiger interrogates women’s role in supporting male-dominated nationalist movements, and challenges their erasure from history.¹⁰ This scholarship informs

⁴ Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), p. 4.

⁵ Lynn M. Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁶ Lynn M. Thomas, ‘Imperial Concerns and “Women’s Affairs”: State Efforts to Regulate Clitoridectomy and Eradicate Abortion in Meru, Kenya, c. 1910-1950’.

⁷ Katherine Angela Luongo, ‘The Clitoridectomy Controversy in Kenya: The “Woman’s Affair” That Wasn’t’, *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 28, no. 2–3 (2000): 105–36.

⁸ Musandu, ‘Tokenism or Representation? The Political Careers of the First African Women in Kenya’s Legislative Council (LEGCO), 1958-1962’, *Women’s History Review* 28, no. 4 (2019): 587-606.

⁹ Sylvia Tamale, *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1999).

¹⁰ Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1998).

this chapter, which interrogates the ways in which women in East Africa used their positions in high politics to challenge the state and represent other women.

Another body of literature investigates women in East African civil society. Claire Robertson, for instance, examines the development of grassroots women's organisations in Kenya in the 20th century, as it evolved from efforts of "controlling sexuality and fertility to a more class-based women's solidarity ... as part of an overall shift within Kenyan society linked to class formation."¹¹ This emphasis on class solidarity is also made by Aili Mari Tripp in her analysis of multi-racial women's organisations in late colonial and early post-colonial Uganda, highlighting the salience of class differences over racial difference in certain civil society spaces.¹² Tripp further demonstrates the fight of women's organisations to maintain their own autonomy in both the colonial and post-colonial era in Uganda, as well as underscoring, alongside scholar Sarah Ntiro, these organisations' role in expanding women's opportunities in professional spaces outside the home.¹³ These approaches will be developed in this chapter, to investigate the ways in which women sustained their activism with the movement in the public sphere through their writing and textual production.

This chapter builds on this literature to showcase the ways in which women activists and politicians used non-fiction writing to debate Africanisation, independence and decolonisation in the post-colonial public sphere. With their writing, the women examined in this chapter critiqued androcentric nationalist movements that did not serve them, acting as proxies for wider communities of women, as they protested the sustained oppression of women in the independence era. The women used their words to express their disillusionment with decolonisation processes, and to call for greater inclusivity in all aspects of state and society towards women. At the same time, the chapter will highlight the ways in which some of the women's views aligned with that of the state patriarchy, in perpetuating stereotypes of womanhood. The variety of media in which the texts were published and the different audiences they were written for reflect the broad nature of these debates, as they affected all aspects of society. The multivocality of the discourse, and the differing views expressed by the writers, reflect the diversity of East African women, offering "no standardised vision, but many visions,

¹¹ Claire Robertson, 'Grassroots in Kenya: Women, Genital Mutilation, and Collective Action, 1920-1990', *Signs* 21, no. 3 (1996): 615-42, at p. 617.

¹² Aili Mari Tripp, 'Women's Mobilisation in Uganda: Nonracial Ideologies in European-African-Asian Encounters, 1945-1962'.

¹³ Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda* (Oxford: James Currey Ltd, 2000); Aili Mari Tripp and Sarah Ntiro, 'Women's Activism in Colonial Uganda', in *The Women's Movement in Uganda: History, Challenges, and Prospects*, ed. Aili Mari Tripp and Joy C. Kwesiga (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2002), 23-37.

often in conflict, often irreconcilable ... [revealing] uniformity only in ... unevenness, multivalence, and pluralism.”¹⁴ In examining the texts produced by women public figures in Uganda and Kenya in this period, the vibrancy of the state’s cultural interior, and the wide scope of debates on Africanisation, will be demonstrated.

This chapter is structured as follows: it will first address the topic of girls’ education, through examining political speeches written by Florence Lubega and Joyce Mpanga on the matter. It will then analyse texts on the topic of women and society, comprising an article by Rebecca Mulira and an essay collection co-authored by Celina Oloo and Virginia Cone. Finally, the chapter interrogates the rubric of women and the family, consisting of essays penned by Miria Obote and Grace Ogot. Even though all of these women protested the nature of independence and the way in marginalised fellow women in their writing, their views on the matter varied. The texts underscore both the multivocality of the debate, as well as the breadth of the discourse on Africanisation in the cultural interiority of the state.

Girls’ Education

This section analyses two speeches given by Ugandan women politicians Florence Lubega and Joyce Mpanga to the Ugandan Legislative Council (LEGCO). Both Lubega and Mpanga acted as legislators on the Council, as some of the few African women on a Council of 49 men (although it also included two European women).¹⁵ The speeches are unique in comparison to other texts examined in this thesis, as they were written in a style befitting political monologues, and were not intended for literary consumption per se. However, through their later inclusion in the print culture volume *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, edited by Amandina Lihamba et al, the speeches have longer lives as manifestos. An examination of the speeches reveals gendered objections towards the colonial and post-colonial state, and the voices of dissent that critiqued nationalist movements in Uganda and East Africa.

In order to contextualise the speeches below, a brief history of Ugandan women in politics, as well as girls’ education in Uganda is provided here. Women in Uganda in the 1960s were, to a large degree, conspicuously absent from politics. Tamale argues that “not only had they been completely sidestepped in all negotiations leading up to independence, but colonialism had

¹⁴ Kara Moskowitz, *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945-1980* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), p. 9.

¹⁵ Florence Ebila and Austin Bukenya, ‘Debate on Higher Education’, in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, ed. Amandina Lihamba et al. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), 192–93, at p. 192; Austin Bukenya, ‘On Education’, in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, ed. Amandina Lihamba et al. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), 199–200, at p. 199.

systematically alienated them from the redefined political structure”. After independence, this “was maintained by the nationalist parties, with women playing only marginal roles in decision-making processes and in the designation of political priorities at the time.”¹⁶ At parliamentary level in Uganda, there were in total four African women elected to the LEGCO, a British colonial-created governing body. The first African members were appointed to the LEGCO in 1945, and the first European women, Barbara Saben and Alice Boase, in 1954.¹⁷ The first African woman elected to the LEGCO was Pumla Kisosonkole in 1956, followed by Sara Ntiro in 1958. Later on, Florence Lubega, Joyce Mpanga, Frances Akello and European W. H. L. Gordon were also elected to the LEGCO.¹⁸ Janet Wesonga made history as the first African woman mayor in Uganda, when she became mayor of Mbale in 1967. Her European peer, Barbara Saben, was the first woman mayor of Kampala in 1961-62.¹⁹

Girls’ education by independence in 1962 was still lagging behind that of boys. Joy Kwesiga argues that various socio-economic factors contributed to this: for instance, parental attitudes around the “male-child preference” signified that “girls’ educational achievement and attainment [received] less direct ... parental support and encouragement.”²⁰ The family’s socio-economic status also played a role, in that if a family could only afford to send one child to school, it would be the boy who would benefit from this.²¹ Gendered divisions of labour also contributed to lagging female education, which saw more girls staying at home to perform household tasks, thereby “[reducing] the perceived value attached to girls’ higher educational attainment, in comparison with their male counterparts.”²² This educational inequality was reflected in secondary school enrolment rates in the 1960s: for example, in 1964, at lower secondary level, S1-S4, 8,881 boys were enrolled, in comparison to only 2,828 girls. These numbers were reduced at higher secondary, S5-S6: 783 boys enrolled in school, and only 169 girls.²³ Country-wide, the number of students taking school examinations reflected the inequalities in education in 1964: of the 20,494 candidates who took the Junior Leaving Secondary Examination, only 4,705 of these were girls. The Cambridge School Certificate saw 2,491 candidates, of whom 442 were girls, and out of the 403 students who sat for the Higher

¹⁶ Tamale, *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*, p. 14.

¹⁷ Tripp, ‘Uganda: Achievements and Challenges for Women in Elected Office’ p. 578.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 578, 590, endnote no. 2.

¹⁹ Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, p. 39.

²⁰ Joy C. Kwesiga, *Women’s Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda’s Experience* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2002), p. 165.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

²³ Uganda Annual Report of Education, cited in Kwesiga, *Women’s Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda’s Experience*, p. 199.

School Certificate, only 64 were girls.²⁴ In the same year, only 19 Ugandan African women gained admission to Makerere College.²⁵ The effects these inequalities had on policy-making – especially on that of women politicians – will be discussed below.

“Debate on Higher Education”, Florence Lubega

Florence Lubega was one of Uganda’s first female legislators on the country’s LEGCO, appointed in 1959 and 1962, and Uganda’s first woman Member of Parliament, serving the then-Ssingu North West Constituency (today Mityana and Mubende District).²⁶ Born in 1917, Lubega was educated at some of the best schools in Uganda and around the world, including Gayaza High School, Makerere College – as one of the first women to be admitted – and the University of Oxford.²⁷ She passed away in October 2021. As a legislator on Uganda’s LEGCO, in 1959, Lubega made a speech in parliament, responding to a report on higher education in East Africa, produced by the region’s Working Party.²⁸ In her speech, Lubega argues against the creation of the Royal Technical College in Nairobi – later University College, Nairobi, and, even later, the University of Nairobi – calling instead for the need to “expand secondary education” in East Africa, as at the time its “standards [could not] meet the requirements of two universities.” She states that “if Makerere were filled to net capacity then [they could] open up a new university.”²⁹ Furthermore, Makerere College was struggling with staff recruitment, listing over twenty vacancies in August 1958, and that current staff were overworked with little time for research.³⁰

To illustrate her points on poor secondary education, Lubega gives the example of science education in schools across Uganda, which she decries as “very poor indeed, because there [were] not enough teachers and not enough equipment.” She emphasises that this is especially the case in girls’ schools, and lambasts the lip service paid to gender equality in education: “if we are to expect to have women doctors and women science teachers, more science laboratories

²⁴ The Uganda Society Library: ‘Uganda Report 1964’ (Entebbe: Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism, 1965), p. 144.

²⁵ Kwesiga, *Women’s Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda’s Experience*, p. 207.

²⁶ Ebila and Bukonya, ‘Debate on Higher Education’, p. 192; Eronie Kamukama, ‘Will New Women Leaders Carry on the Legacy?’, *Daily Monitor*, 30 January 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/full-woman/will-new-women-leaders-carry-on-the-legacy--3273858> (accessed 16 July 2021).

²⁷ Henry Lubulwa, ‘Uganda’s First Female Legislator Recounts Life in Corridors of Power’, *Daily Monitor*, 11 February 2017, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/Magazines/PeoplePower/Uganda-s-first-female-legislator-corridors-of-power/689844-3809020-106tn0cz/index.html> (accessed 19 July 2021).

²⁸ ‘Report of the Working Party on Higher Education in East Africa’ (East Africa High Commission, 1958).

²⁹ Florence Lubega, ‘Debate on Higher Education’, in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, ed. Amandina Lihamba et al. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), 192–99, at p. 194.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194-5.

should be established in girls' schools."³¹ Lubega also discusses the importance of an improvement in English-language teaching in Uganda, condemning the fact that many intelligent young men and women "failed to get into Makerere ... because they had a bad start learning English and they have not had good teachers to teach them the language."³² She calls on the Minister of Education and Labour "to look into the question of teacher training in Uganda, to see if [they] could not raise the standards in many of the colleges, and to see that the teachers receive extra time to study the teaching of English."³³

Held in 1959 – two years before Ugandan flag independence – Lubega's speech demonstrates that even before the end of formal colonialism, women were contesting the direction of decolonisation. The nature of the colonial – and later post-colonial – gatekeeper state signified that its socio-cultural interior remained overlooked, including gender and class inequalities. Using her positionality as LEGCO member, Lubega advocated for girls and other marginalised children, critiquing the states' failure to provide for those on its periphery. Lubega presents a vision of decolonisation that is inclusive towards those on the margin of the state, a bottom-up approach contrary to the elitist androcentric visions held by male nationalists at the time.

"On Education", Joyce Mpanga

Joyce Mpanga is a retired Ugandan politician, and a champion for women's rights and progressive educational policies.³⁴ Born in 1935 in the Buganda region of Uganda, Mpanga attended some of the best schools in Uganda, including Lady Irene College in Ndejje and Gayaza High School. She read History at Makerere College, and later graduated from Indiana University with a postgraduate degree in Education in 1962. When she returned to Uganda, she worked at her alma mater, Gayaza High School, as the first African deputy headteacher.³⁵ Shortly before independence in 1962, Mpanga was nominated to the LEGCO, and in the same year, she was elected to parliament, as part of Milton Obote's first coalition government. As a young woman in Parliament, she was subject to sexist remarks from her male colleagues, which she later reveals in her memoirs: "In the lobby, men would say, 'The young girl is coming' ... They would change their conversation topics if they had been talking about women."³⁶ In 1966,

³¹ Ibid., p. 197.

³² Ibid., p. 197-8.

³³ Ibid., p. 198.

³⁴ Bukenya, 'On Education', p. 199; Brian Magoba, 'Joyce Mpanga: A Quiet Champion for Women's Rights', *Daily Monitor*, 12 October 2012, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/Magazines/Full-Woman/Joyce-Mpanga--A-quiet-champion-for-women-s-rights/689842-1531966-ctdgc5/index.html> (accessed 19 July 2021).

³⁵ Joyce R. Mpanga, *'It's a Pity She's Not a Boy!'* (Kampala: First Printing, 2019); Bukenya, 'On Education', p. 199.

³⁶ Mpanga, *'It's a Pity She's Not a Boy!'*, p. 140

Mpanga and her family were forced to flee to London, after Obote repealed the independence constitution and overturned the autonomous government of the kingdom of Buganda, in which Fred Mpanga, Joyce Mpanga's husband, was employed as an attorney general.³⁷ Joyce Mpanga returned to Uganda in 1972, and over the decades remained active in education and politics, as a champion for women's rights.³⁸

In June 1961, Mpanga, in her capacity as legislator, delivered a speech to the LEGCO, in which she announced her opposition to the motion in support of the Ministry of Education's budget. Mpanga argued for universal children's education in Uganda, and criticised the reduced education budget allocated to schools, resulting in increased fees. The latter, she stated, would result in parents struggling to afford their children's education, which would negatively impact girls, as "very often when a parent cannot afford school fees he always asks the girl to stay at home because he believes that a boy needs it more."³⁹ Mpanga discussed the curriculum's failure in preparing children – especially girls – for work in the real world, citing the example of agriculture, which, in Uganda, at the time, was primarily undertaken by women. However, she stated that there were not enough agricultural courses for girls at schools across Uganda, and that if the government wanted to concentrate on "increased production and girls' education, [they] should give girls more facilities for agriculture training and production."⁴⁰ Mpanga also criticised the Ministry of Education's failure to work towards inclusivity of children with disabilities and other marginalised students.⁴¹ Her speech was met with success, and fellow LEGCO member William Wilberforce Nadiope II, the *Kyabazinga* (king) of Busoga, congratulated Mpanga with the words: "You spoke like a man", to which Mpanga retorted, "Thanks, Sir, but I speak like the woman I am."⁴²

Like that of Lubega, Mpanga's speech serves as a reminder of the ways in which Africanisation and decolonisation disregarded certain demographics in Uganda. While some women – such as those examined in this thesis – did indeed have privileges of class, education and mobility, they remained an exception, with many girls and women unable to access education at all.⁴³ Mpanga's speech was also held before the end of formal colonialism in Uganda, demonstrating

³⁷ See: A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

³⁸ Bukenya, 'On Education', p. 199; Mpanga, *'It's a Pity She's Not a Boy!'*.

³⁹ Joyce Masembe Mpanga, 'On Education', ed. Amandina Lihamba et al. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), 199–204, at p. 201.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Mpanga, *'It's a Pity She's Not a Boy!'*, p. 140.

⁴³ See: Kwesiga, *Women's Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda's Experience*.

that even before independence, its meaning for women and other marginalised actors was being debated. In critiquing the colonial state's failure to address gender inequalities, she simultaneously implies her hope for independence to rectify this. While creative writing by women that discussed social issues may have encouraged its readers to examine their society more critically, Mpanga's speech castigates those in power directly, as a contribution to policymaking.

Both Lubega and Mpanga's speeches express their visions for decolonisation even before independence was to take place, in bringing the social inequalities of this period of globalisation and decolonisation in Uganda to the forefront. In a time when more Africans gained access to institutions they had previously been barred from on account of their race, this was largely the reserve of men. Most women and girls remained on the fringes of this 'development', some unable to gain a full education, as was discussed above. Lubega and Mpanga, two women part of Uganda's political elite who had benefitted from an excellent education both in Uganda and abroad, took it upon themselves with their speeches to advocate for those who did not have the same privileges. Through these two speeches, they cemented themselves within the Ugandan women's movement, which was to grow over the years following the end of formal colonialism.⁴⁴ In critiquing the inequalities brought about by the colonial state, their speeches demonstrate their hopes for independence, which was to entail greater gender and class inclusivity. An analysis of Lubega and Mpanga's speeches reveals alternative visions for decolonisation to those held by male nationalist leaders, and the women's voices of dissent that called for a different way forward with independence.

Women and Society

This section investigates the ways in which prominent women in the Ugandan women's movement envisioned their country's decolonisation, and the role women were to play in this. Two texts on the subject will be investigated: "East African women's place in today's society" by Rebecca Mulira, and the essay collection *Kenya Women Look Ahead* by Celina Oloo and Virginia Cone. The texts demonstrate women's hopes for independence that included greater involvement by women in the private and public spheres. The writers critique the male-centric nature of nationalist movements in East Africa, calling for greater women's involvement in national mobilisation. However, the arguments are made in a highly gendered manner, couched

⁴⁴ See: Aili Mari Tripp and Joy C. Kwesiga, eds., *The Women's Movement in Uganda: History, Challenges, and Prospects* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2002); and Tamale, *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*.

in feminine respectability politics, and highlights class differences. The medium and message of these texts differed to that of the speeches discussed above, highlighting the broad nature of Africanisation debates and the multivocality of this public sphere.

“East African women’s place in today’s society”, Rebecca Mulira

Civil society activist and a champion for women’s rights in Uganda, Rebecca Mulira – née Mukasa – was born in Kampala in 1920 to chief and Baganda leader Ham Mukasa and his wife, Sarah Nabikolo Mukasa, also a women’s rights activist. Rebecca Mulira was educated at Gayaza High School, and, after completing her education, became involved with women’s rights and Ugandan civil society organisations. Mulira was active in the Uganda Council of Women – acting president between 1962 and 1964 – and helped found a branch of the Young Women’s Christian Association in Uganda, lobbying to make it inclusive to Muslim women. When *Kabaka* Edward Mutesa II, the then-king of Buganda, was deported by the British colonial government in 1953, Mulira spearheaded women’s protests to this, in writing letters and regularly appealing to colonial officials. Mulira served as president of the Young Wives group, one of the many women’s organisations in Uganda, in 1957, and was the city councillor for Kampala City Council between 1962 and 1967, in addition to her membership in a variety of church societies. Mulira passed away in 2002.⁴⁵

In February 1964, Mulira presented her paper, ‘East African women’s place in today’s society’ at the six-day seminar on ‘African Socialism and its Challenges, organised by the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs (EAISCA) in Nairobi.⁴⁶ Mulira’s paper was subsequently published in the newspaper *East African Standard* on 11 February 1964. Founded in 1963, the EAISCA was “a private organisation which ... [served] as a discussion forum on problems of regional public interest”.⁴⁷ As a non-profit organisation, its primary role was to provide a meeting space for intellectuals, journalists, and writers to debate East African current affairs. With its headquarters in Nairobi, and branch offices in Dar es Salaam and Kampala, the EAISCA patrons were Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere and Milton Obote, and Bethwell Ogot was Secretary-General. The Institute’s publications included *East African Journal* (discussed

⁴⁵ Earle, ‘Mulira, Rebecca’; Rhoda Nakibuka Nsibirwa Kalema, *My Life Is But a Weaving* (Nairobi: Moran Publishers, 2021), p. 85-7.

⁴⁶ Rebecca Mulira, ‘E. African women’s place in today’s society’, *The East African Standard*, 11 February 1964, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Bethwell A. Ogot, ‘East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs, Nairobi’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 2 (1965): 283–85, at p. 284.

further below), and it regularly held seminars on current issues, including trade unionism, community and economic development, and racial tensions in East Africa.⁴⁸

In her paper, Mulira discusses East African women's position in society after independence, stating that "many more women in Africa are seeking the advancement of [their] position in this modern world, and to see that husband and wife are on equal footing".⁴⁹ Within the family, women can help in "building a changing world" through "giving our husbands security, ... bringing up children who will be the citizens of tomorrow in the best way possible" and by "making the home a happy place where members of the family are properly nourished in body and spirit."⁵⁰ Outside of the family, "African women are becoming more aware of their personality and they are claiming their proper place of influence in their countries ... using their intelligence to the highest."⁵¹ Mulira continues to describe the role of "educated women" in East Africa, who should be "responsible enough to [their] fellow women".⁵² She encourages "educated women" to help their sisters "to improve their living standards by trying to mix with them in every way possible ... in this way [helping] them to get new ideas and to broaden their knowledge."⁵³ Mulira calls on women to become more politically involved, stating that "we women must take a keener interest in the affairs of our countries if we are going to make our contribution felt." She emphasises the important role of women in independent East Africa, and writes, "while man is the head, woman is the neck that turns the head ... women of today are the neck on which the head of our society turns; we can turn society anywhere we choose but it must be in a good direction for the good of our beloved Africa."⁵⁴

With her paper, Mulira presents her views on East African decolonisation and the role women were to play in society after independence: she envisions gender equality, greater women's involvement in politics and civil society, and a rightful place for women in the public and private sphere. In spite of her proposals for equality, there are elements of middle-class condescension in her words, as she calls upon fellow "educated women" to help their lesser-educated sisters, in the spirit of philanthropy. Additionally, Mulira's words illustrate a highly gendered form of womanhood – demonstrating their complicity with state patriarchy – as one that draws on Western middle-class traditions of women's duty to the family and the home, and

⁴⁸ Ibid.; Bethwell A. Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time* (Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd, 2003), p. 193-196.

⁴⁹ Mulira, 'E. African women's place in today's society'.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

their role as child bearers. Her paper, therefore, represents and speaks for a small community of elite women in East Africa, expressing views on a decolonisation that would benefit them. The publication of Mulira's paper in *The East African Standard* demonstrates her desire to publicly mobilise women across all walks of life, even though the *Standard's* readership consisted primarily of European expatriates, Asians and educated Africans.⁵⁵ Mulira's text highlights her visions for East African decolonisation, contesting male-dominated nationalist movements, and discussing the role – primarily middle-class – women were to play in this. As a source, it expresses the relevance of Africanisation and decolonisation in women's lives – albeit a very small community of women – while at the same time espousing a highly gendered form of womanhood. These conflicting viewpoints highlight the breadth of these debates within the public sphere.

“Kenya Women Look Ahead”, Celina Oloo and Virginia Cone

Kenya Women Look Ahead is an essay collection co-authored by Kenyan Celina Oloo and American Virginia Cone, published by the East African Literature Bureau (a subsidiary of the EAISCA) in 1965. Celina Oloo is a Kenyan woman who, at the time of publication of *Kenya Women Look Ahead*, was working as a teacher at the Kenya-Israel School of Social Service in Nairobi. She had studied at the International Institute for Social Studies in Rome, graduating in 1961, and, upon her return to Kenya, was active as a community development worker in Meru and Nyeri. Virginia Cone was an American woman who was living in Kenya at the time of writing, the wife of a lecturer at the Kenya Institute of Administration. She had previously lived with her husband in Ghana for a year, teaching in the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at the University of Ghana, which inspired her book *Africa: A World in Progress* (Exposition Banner, 1960).⁵⁶

The essays in *Kenya Women Look Ahead* discuss “the problems of the modern woman in Kenya” after independence, with the aim of inspiring “ideas [for] some of the Kenya women leaders.”⁵⁷ The premise of the book lies in the evolving Kenya middle-class society post-independence, as Kenyan women stand on the cusp of “old traditions and customs”, and a Westernised world. The writers discuss Kenyan women's changing role, and the challenges an increasing workload in a ‘modern’ world present, as they balance full-time jobs both

⁵⁵ Derek R. Peterson and Emma Hunter, ‘Print Culture in Colonial Africa’, in *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Derek R. Peterson et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 1–46, at p. 8-9.

⁵⁶ Celina Nyai Oloo and Virginia Cone, *Kenya Women Look Ahead* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1965).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

professionally and personally, the latter through childcare and housework. Oloo and Cone argue that while such urban women might not “carry water, chop wood and carry it on their heads as did their mothers”, they do, however, “work longer hours and live under greater tensions.”⁵⁸ A discussion of “old traditions and customs” follows, examining bridewealth, female circumcision, and traditions around pregnancy and childbirth. While Kenyan women “agreed that the African culture must be preserved”, they do “admit today that they want to adopt what is practical in the new.”⁵⁹

The Kenyan woman, according to Oloo and Cone, occupies “two worlds”: in one “she wears western clothes, learns new methods of doing things, meets all kinds of people”, but in the other, when “she returns to her village ... she reverts to her childhood role ... helps with the work, carries water and chops wood.” They praise Kenyan women’s adaptability, in that they are “at home in either modern or traditional clothes, equally at ease in the village hut or modern city apartment.”⁶⁰ In another essay, Oloo and Cone discuss men’s attitudes towards women, of which they state that in such changing times, these are characterised by resentment and the inability to acknowledge women’s changing role. They give the example of a Kenyan Makerere student who states that “in one of her classes, only three out of ten men thought women were equal intellectually to men,” adding that “many men resent women having the same courses and educational opportunities as they.”⁶¹

Oloo and Cone continue to assert that progress towards gender equality in Kenya was not fast enough, arguing that “there are still no Kenyan women doctors, lawyers, dentists, engineers or technicians”, nor sufficient female parliamentary representation.⁶² They also call for the need for “the educated woman [to] share her knowledge and experience with the uneducated woman.”⁶³ The issue of raising children in such a changing society is also discussed in one essay, as Oloo and Cone examine the challenges mothers face in bringing up children in this environment: such a woman, they argue, “wants her children to have a different kind of childhood from that she had, but she has no rule book or examples to go by.”⁶⁴

With this publication, Oloo and Cone reveal their visions for an independent Kenya, and the place middle-class and elite women would occupy in its society. One particular item of note in

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶² Ibid., p. 48-9.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 55.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

this collection of essays is the neo-colonial nature of its authorship and publication through its co-authorship by a white American and a Kenyan woman. Based on Cone's biography, there was little in her professional life that qualified her to discuss Kenyan women's issues in this period. Apart from her brief time at the University of Ghana, there seems to be a dearth in experience that lent her the authority to write a book such as *Kenya Women Look Ahead*. Oloo, on the other hand, is Kenyan, and through her work as a community development worker presumably was confronted in her professional life with many social challenges Kenyan women faced. She seemed to be more qualified than Cone to write about such a topic; however, the fact that she was only able to become published through co-authorship with a white American woman – who had only spent a few years in Africa – speaks legions to the racialised nature of the publishing industry. Even though Cone was university educated and had privileges of mobility abroad, the publication of *Kenya Women Look Ahead* reveals the prevailing colonial social structures, based on racism, that remained after independence and made it difficult for African women to become published (see Chapter 2 for a further discussion on this). It therefore begs the questions to what extent the hopes for women in an independent Kenya and the views expressed in *Kenya Women Look Ahead* were shaped by Cone's Anglo-American perspective.

Kenya Women Look Ahead makes criticisms of the male-centric nature of the post-colonial state, and a form of nation-building that has no role for women. It contests this in discussing problems elite women in Kenya faced, and providing solutions to these, as well as identifying a place for women in both the public and private sphere in the new nation. It is no coincidence that the book's title addresses "Kenya women", rather than women of a specific ethnic group: in writing for women across Kenya, the authors actively resisted contributing to the entrenchment of ethnic cleavages. Contemporary Kenyan politics saw a rift developing between President Kenyatta and politicians Odinga and Mboya, which pitted the Gikuyu and Luo ethnic groups against each other (see the introduction to this thesis for a further discussion on this). Oloo and Cone were writing with the ideal of a united Kenya in mind, as they do not reference any ethnicities, thereby expressing their hope for independence of a Kenya that would see ethnic unity, rather than division.

However, the essays in *Kenya Women Look Ahead* are also revealing of the increased class disparities in a newly independent Kenya. The urban middle-class bias of the book quickly becomes clear through the type of "Kenya woman" it discusses. Middle-class, educated women are the figures of discussion here, as many of the social changes that Oloo and Cone reference are ones that would not have been felt by rural and working-class women. This is further

augmented through their discussion on women's equality: in calling for more women doctors, engineers and lawyers, and the need for "educated" women to share their skills and experiences with their "uneducated" sisters, the elite liberal bias of the authors is demonstrated. Rather than advocating for greater access to education for all women and girls, and radical systemic change in the current social system that perpetuated colonial-induced class and gender inequalities, the authors merely promote cosmetic change. *Kenya Women Look Ahead* reveals the class inequalities that intersect with women's oppression in post-colonial Kenya, and a changing social order in the 1960s that did not alter the reality of rural and working-class women. Therefore, while Oloo and Cone might have called for national over ethnic unity, in addressing "Kenya women", the fact that they address and discuss elite women demonstrates affinities with the neoliberal turn taken by the Kenyan state after independence. *Kenya Women Look Ahead* reveals its authors' criticisms of male-centric nationalist movements, and their visions for decolonisation in Kenya, which were the creation of a society that was inclusive towards primarily middle-class women, and opportunities for women to thrive in both the public and private sphere.

The texts authored by Mulira, and Oloo and Cone demonstrate their writers' views for decolonisation in Uganda and East Africa: in contesting mainstream androcentric nation-building efforts, they highlight the important role women play in mobilisation, not only within East African society, but also globally. However, the sources reveal their writers' middle-class bias – especially in how they discuss their duties to their "uneducated" sisters – in addition to espousing gendered views on womanhood and women's role in the family and society. The texts argue for a more inclusive society towards solely middle-class women, and, while the writers urge for a form of exchange with lesser privileged women, they do not advocate for structural change to improve all women's lot, unlike the speeches delivered by Lubega and Mpanga, discussed above. It is relevant that Mulira and Kisosonkole's texts were published under the auspices of the East African Institute for Social and Cultural Affairs: a space for the intellectual elite, it thereby acted as a quasi-gatekeeper for indigenous knowledge and cultural production. The East African Literature Bureau, as a daughter company of the EAISCA and one of the few publishing houses active in the region held a similar role in gatekeeping knowledge (see Chapters 2 and 3 for further discussions on this). The thematic parallels in the texts by Mulira, and Oloo and Cone, testify to the limited space for women's intellectual originality and divergence in such a male-dominated environment, thus perpetuating middle-class women's respectability politics. Therefore, even the public space women had to articulate their views on decolonisation, was dependent on male gatekeeping practices. As sources, the

texts discussed in this section demonstrate elite women's views on independence, and decolonisation which entailed greater inclusivity towards women than those of their male peers. In writing about women and the changing nature of family after independence, the texts highlight the broad scope of Africanisation debates, in accessing all facets of society. The viewpoints and communities the women represent are indicative of the multivocal nature of debates on decolonisation.

Women and the family

This section examines two essays on the topic of women and the family written by prominent East African figures in the 1960s: "Woman in a Changing Society" by Miria Obote and "Family Planning for African Women" by Grace Ogot. The essays are based on papers delivered by their authors at the conference 'Woman in a Changing Society', organised by the Kenya National Council of Women and the EAISCA, held in Nairobi in April 1967. The papers were subsequently published in the *East Africa Journal*, the publication of the EAISCA, in July 1967.⁶⁵

"Woman in a Changing Society", Miria Obote

Miria Obote, or "Mama Obote", as she was known to her supporters, was born in Kampala in 1936, educated at the prestigious Gayaza High School, and later enrolled at Makerere College. Her education also saw her move to London, where she undertook secretarial training, and she later worked as a secretary for the United Nations and the Ugandan Consulate in New York. She married Prime Minister – and later President – Milton Obote, and in her capacity as First Lady, Miria Obote also presided over the Uganda Association of Women's Organisations. When her husband's government was overthrown by Idi Amin in 1971, the Obotes fled to Tanzania, where they lived in exile until 1980. They returned to Uganda and lived there for five years, during which time Milton Obote led a brutal and repressive government. The couple fled Uganda again in 1985, and Miria Obote only returned to Uganda in 2005, following her husband's death. In 2006, she became the leader of the Uganda People's Congress, her husband's political party, and ran for presidency in the country's national election, the first woman to do so in Uganda's history.⁶⁶

"Woman in a Changing Society" is an article penned for Volume 4, Number 4 of *East Africa Journal* in 1967 by Miria Obote in her capacity as First Lady. As the title suggests, Obote's

⁶⁵ Grace Ogot, *Days of My Life* (Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd, 2012), p. 163-171.

⁶⁶ Ebila, Florence and Margaret MacPherson, 'Miria Obote', in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, ed. Amandina Lihamba et al. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), 286–87.

article discusses the role and status of African women in a rapidly changing post-independence society. Obote stresses that any problems women face “must be the concern of the entire population”, and also treats the issue of African women inhabiting “two worlds”, arguing that “the mass of women ... are living in the world of our mothers and grandmothers and at the same time they are living in the second half of the 20th Century.”⁶⁷ The article proceeds to discuss the importance of the nuclear family, and the position a wife and mother occupies in this. Obote states that while “the father may preside over the family ... it is the mother who keeps the family together”, and that “the role of the mother of today in moulding the character of the children ... is a service to the whole nation.”⁶⁸ The mothers, according to Obote, have a duty to preserve and transmit customs and culture to their children, in the form of songs and dances, in addition to “the spirit of voluntary work, charity and honesty [which] are all a part of the responsibility of the mother to her children” and which “benefits the whole nation.”⁶⁹ She concludes with calling on greater government programmes and services towards mothers and home-makers, so they may continue to thrive “in the special position of the Mother of the Nation.”⁷⁰

Obote’s article demonstrates her visions for decolonisation in East Africa, and the role women were to play in national mobilisation. Like Mulira, Obote prescribes to a traditional Western middle-class view of womanhood and women’s role in society, in using these practically interchangeably with motherhood. Through her ideas of a gendered division of society, Obote perpetuates harmful patriarchal stereotypes of women as nurturing caregivers, thereby defining womanhood by women’s reproductive capacities. Her Western ideas of social relations are further demonstrated through her references to the nuclear family, consisting of a presiding father and a mother whose “role in this unit is ... a unifying one.”⁷¹ As Mougoué argues when discussing female political elites in Cameroon, “women worked to legitimise their political activities by emphasising that they ‘mothered’ the well-being of society and ultimately, that of the nation”, which can also be observed with Obote, whose position as First Lady and her duties as the President’s wife helped shape the views she expresses in her article.⁷² The role of “Mother of the Nation”, which she references, is one she envisioned for herself: while Milton Obote, as

⁶⁷ Makerere University Library: *East Africa Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 4, July 1967, Miria Obote, “Woman in a Changing Society”, p. 29-30.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷¹ Makerere University Library: *East Africa Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 4, July 1967, Obote, “Woman in a Changing Society”, p. 31.

⁷² Mougoué, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon*, p. 4.

the father, was to “preside over” the family of Uganda, she, as the mother was to “keep the family together”, as well as to promote the “nation’s cultural heritage and traditions”, thereby imposing Western middle-class familial compositions on Uganda.⁷³ Given the traditional views of womanhood and motherhood Miria Obote espouses in the article, it is little wonder, therefore, that she has been described as “one of the most soft spoken among Uganda’s first ladies”⁷⁴ – soft-spokenness being another stereotypical characteristic of womanhood and femininity. Obote’s essay demonstrates her views for independence in East Africa, and what part middle-class women were to play in the male-dominated domain of nation-building. Although she only represents a small community of East African women, as a source, the text showcases the depth of Africanisation debates, and the ways in which it was debated among different demographics in society.

“Family Planning for African Women”, Grace Ogot

Trained as a nurse, but later working as a journalist, politician, and diplomat, as well as becoming one of East Africa’s most celebrated literary figures, Grace Ogot wrote the article “Family Planning for African Women” for Volume 4, Number 4 of *East Africa Journal* in July 1967 (a more extensive biography of Ogot is provided in Chapter 2). Ogot interrogates the cultural importance of having many children to women and families, stating that “to the African woman, whether educated or uneducated, child-bearing is still the sole basis of a happy and permanent marriage.”⁷⁵ She cites this as “the challenge the society has put on her”, becoming the singular “axis of life on which her whole world rotates.”⁷⁶ The article discusses the role of religion and the Church in Africa, before proceeding to discuss various family planning policies on the continent. Ogot cites the slow uptake of this in Africa, arguing that “African women are sceptical about the western idea of Family Planning i.e. of using scientific devices to stop birth temporarily” was because of the “fear that interfering with reproductive organs may result in not being able to have babies ... and thus render themselves useless in the eye of society.”⁷⁷

Various forms of contraception, and how these are used and perceived in East Africa are reviewed, including the pill, the intrauterine device, the cap, foam tablets, as well as condoms. The accurate descriptions of each contraceptive device are noteworthy, testimony to Ogot’s occupation as a nurse. While “a handful of educated women” were already using the pill in East

⁷³ Ibid., p. 31-2.

⁷⁴ Ebila, Florence and MacPherson, ‘Miria Obote’, p. 286.

⁷⁵ Makerere University Library: *East Africa Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 4, July 1967, Grace Ogot, “Family Planning for African Women”, p. 19-20.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

Africa by the 1960s, most women, according to Ogot, were afraid to do so, due to “a rumour that it was a new drug *Wazungu* (Europeans) had manufactured to sterilise African women.”⁷⁸ Finally, Ogot examines the role of the West in population control in East Africa: calling on “foreign experts” to “refrain from issuing alarmist statements about population problems in Kenya”, she argues that as “colonialism is still fresh in the minds of East Africans, ... it would, therefore, not be difficult to interpret the foreign experts’ over-enthusiasm for family planning in Africa as a kind of neo-colonialist trick to keep the African population down.”⁷⁹

The article provides insights into Ogot’s views on decolonisation, and her contentions with the post-colonial state, which saw the exclusion of women in nation-building. Reproduction and the female body had formed part of Kenyan political discourse for decades: in the colonial era, this dealt with issues around female circumcision, and, in the post-colonial era, transitioning to concerns with population growth and HIV/AIDS. Controversies about reproduction in Kenyan history highlight power dynamics, and the ways in which both the public and private spheres intersected.⁸⁰ In the 1960s and 1970s, the number of children born alive on average to a Kenyan woman lay between 6.0 and 8.0, and Kenya became the site for Western population control initiatives.⁸¹ Ogot’s essay, therefore, was a response to these foreign-led activities in Kenya.

Ogot highlights the important role women play in a newly developing post-independence society, through her discussion of family planning: in any economy, family planning is vital for its development, in terms of distribution of resources, state services, as well as management of household income. Women, therefore, have an important part in this, despite the fact that they remained marginalised from high politics in East Africa after independence. In her article, Ogot recentres women in the discourse around family planning and development, highlighting their significance in the creation of a new society. In a decade of globalisation and decolonisation, which saw nation-building and construction in Uganda and Kenya, this text highlights the part women played in national development. In discussing the social and economic importance of family planning, and the vital part women played in this, Ogot critiques the post-colonial Kenyan state that fails to account for women in its nation-building.

The social change that birth control in Africa presented is discussed by Ogot in terms of neo-colonialism, as she emphasises the clash between African traditions of large families, and Western notions of family planning, which came to the fore through African women’s

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 20-21.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁸⁰ See: Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya*.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 20.

suspensions of Western contraceptive devices. This fear was not unfounded, given a long history of forced sterilisation of women of colour globally, as well as across Africa – suspicions to which Ogot alludes through her references to a “neo-colonialist trick.”⁸² After independence, as Tirop Peter Simatei argues, the Kenyan nation-state became “an instrument of neo-colonial exploitation of the masses”, which many writers criticised in their works (see Chapter 2 for further discussions on this). It is this aspect of decolonisation that Ogot critiques with her essay: the perniciousness of neo-colonialism, its highly intimate nature, one that permeated all aspects of society, including the family, and, ultimately, affected women.⁸³ With her essay, Ogot acts as a proxy for a broad community of women, bringing intimate issues around birth control and family planning as they affect women to the public sphere, making a vital contribution to the discourse of decolonisation and Africanisation in the state’s cultural interior.

The two essays discussed in this section by Obote and Ogot represent two very different perspectives on the issue of women and the family after independence in East Africa. Obote espouses traditional and conservative views on the role of women in the new nation, discussing this in terms of motherhood, while Ogot makes a critique of neo-colonialism and development efforts that marginalise and harm African women. The writers’ essays demonstrate the polyphonic nature of dissent by women and the variety of ways they challenged the post-colonial state in the 1960s. The fact that both pieces were published in the *East Africa Journal*, the publication of the EAISCA is equally relevant, as this was an indigenous cultural organisation that readily provided a platform for African women to express their views on decolonisation. East African women were certainly not a monolith, and the views expressed by Ogot and Obote cannot be taken as representative of all women in the region. However, the diversity in opinion underscores the multifaceted nature of the debates, and the broad nature of the discourse on Africanisation .

Conclusion

This chapter examined the ways in which East African women critiqued post-colonial states and expressed their visions for independence, which was to include greater gender equality, in texts authored by them. Published in different media for various audiences, the speeches, essays

⁸² For further discussions on women of colour and reproductive politics, see, for instance: Angela Davis, ‘Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive Rights’, in *Women, Race and Class* (London: Penguin Classics, 2019); Johanna Schoen, *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare*, 1st edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Nicole C. Bourbonnais, *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁸³ Tirop Peter Simatei, *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa*, Bayreuth University African Studies ; No. 55 (Bayreuth: Bayreuth University, 2001).

and articles written by these women – most of who were public figures – demonstrate the rich cultural interiority of the post-colonial East African state, one that offered criticisms of nationalist movements and post-colonial state-building that marginalised women. The multi-vocal nature of this dissent was highlighted, through the differing views proffered by the authors of the texts.

Under the topic of girls' education, two speeches by Florence Lubega and Joyce Mpanga – both on the Ugandan LEGCO – written in 1959 and 1961 respectively, were examined. Lubega's speech highlights the use of the English language in education as a marker of class, one that hindered many intelligent students from gaining entrance to higher education institutions. Mpanga discussed the gendered inequalities in education, as many girls faced social barriers in accessing schooling. Both speeches collectively demonstrate the class and gender-based inequalities that characterised society in Uganda and East Africa in the late colonial and early post-colonial period, an issue both politicians wanted the soon-to-be independent state to resolve.

The theme of women and society was addressed in various essays and articles: Rebecca Mulira's paper, "East African women's place in today's society", published in the *East African Standard*, expresses her views on the role elite East African women should play in helping to build their society after independence. The essays published in *Kenya Women Look Ahead* by Celina Oloo and Virginia Cone demonstrate the writers' hopes for a unified Kenya, one in which middle-class educated women could play a role in. Collectively, the texts demonstrate their writers' desires for a greater social inclusivity towards women after independence, at the expense, however, of neglecting working-class and rural women.

Within the topic of women and the family two essays by Miria Obote and Grace Ogot, both published in *East Africa Journal*, were examined. In "Woman in a Changing Society", Obote presents a gendered and stereotypical view of womanhood in East Africa, reverting to archaic stereotypes of softness and the role of the nurturing caregiver, in her discussion of the role of women in an Africa emerging from colonialism. Grace Ogot examines the neo-colonial nature of various forms of contraception in "Family Planning for African Women", and implicitly reveals the important role African women play in their countries' development through equal access to birth control. Both texts are markedly different in their authors' perspectives, reflective of the diversity of East African women's dissent on the post-colonial state.

The texts examined in this chapter demonstrate the variety of ways in which women criticised nation-building after independence and expressed alternative ways forward after independence

that would be more inclusive to women. The diversity in topics discussed and perspectives – some of which aligned with that of the patriarchy – put forward reflect the multi-vocal nature of dissent and the heterogeneity of East African women. Their voices formed part of the cultural interiority of the state, and made critiques of the male-dominated nature of nationalism and mobilisation that did not serve women. With their texts, the women expanded the boundaries of debates around Africanisation, in curating their own public sphere that comprised discussions around how decolonisation impacted them. In addressing gender equality and offering ideas for the role women could play in nation-building, the women put pressure on the post-colonial state and created a place for themselves in both the public and private spheres after independence. The broad and sometimes contradictory nature of the discourse, as well as its multivocality highlighted the dynamism of the cultural interiority of the state.

Conclusion

Writing a review of the poetry anthology *Poems of Black Africa* (Heinemann, 1975), Kenyan writer and teacher Rebeka Njau insisted, “African literature must communicate. Art for art’s sake is a luxury a country like ours can hardly afford. Writing that is mere intellectualism is not for a country that is full of social ills and miserable poverty.”¹ This is precisely what the women examined in this thesis did with their writing: using their pens as political placards, they wrote to protest oppression and inequality, to address the “social ills and miserable poverty”, and thereby debate the meaning of Africanisation in the era of independence. Micere Mugo once argued, “The writer too has a class position. We have only a few writers who have chosen to side with the oppressed majority, who have actually taken a clear ideological position in which they are going to use their writing as a weapon in the struggle for liberation.”² For the most part, the writers in this thesis were a part of this “struggle”: in a time when authoritarian regimes in both Kenya and Uganda were threatening any vocal form of opposition, the women represented and lobbied for wider marginalised communities with their writing. The ways in which they did so varied, as was demonstrated through the type of texts women wrote, and even their views on independence and what form Africanisation should take. The public space the women’s texts constructed was dynamic, heterogeneous, and contained multitudes of voices debating the nature of decolonisation.

This public sphere, created by women’s writing, was an integral part of the post-colonial cultural interiority of the state, a crucible for discourse about decolonisation and independence. The colonial – and later, post-colonial – gatekeeper state prioritised external relations, standing at the entry between the internal and external worlds of its territory and did not have the means or resources for accessing its interior socio-cultural life.³ Additionally, through their facilitation of the centralisation of power, the structures of the gatekeeper state brought about the conditions for oppression that women protested with their writing, and are what created what the cultural interiority of the state. This cultural interior harboured a dynamic public sphere, one that acted as a crucible for debate, dissent and cultural life within the state. It was broad in nature, and the texts discussed in this thesis formed only a small part of it. Women did engage and were certainly very vocal in political discourse in the public sphere; however, their voices were marginalised by the very structures of the gatekeeper state that they critiqued. This thesis

¹ Quoted in: Adeola James, ed., *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk* (London: James Currey, 1990), p. 106-7.

² James, *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, p. 96.

³ See: Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

investigated how women navigated these challenges, represented wider communities, and constructed their own platforms for debate and dissent.

Chapter 1 examined the ways in which student writing by women was used as a tool for political discourse, highlighting the essays, poems, short stories and plays published in Makerere College's *Penpoint* and *Dhana*, and University College, Nairobi's *Nexus* and *Busara*. In three overlapping rubrics of social inequalities, the new African petty bourgeoisie, and literary analysis and pedagogy, the texts by the women in this chapter were a part of the Africanisation movements of their respective universities. With their prose and poetry, they reflected on their social environments, both within and outside of the ivory tower, made criticisms of patriarchy, state authority and of neo-colonialism, and represented the perspectives of the broader communities around them. Studying at a regional institution such as the University of East Africa, allowed for opportunities to interact with students from across the region, exposing them to new perspectives, but also illuminating shared goals of decolonisation. This lent their texts a unique quality, and highlighted the plurality of ways in which women students specifically imagined a decolonised world. The chapter also discussed the process of 'becoming a writer', and the great potential women held for the East African literary scene. Writing for a department magazine, a friendly training ground for those who would later become professional writers, allowed them to develop talents and express themselves, free from the constraints that the gatekeepers of the publishing industry placed on professional writers. Some of the contributors later became renowned literary figures in East Africa, such as Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, Rose Mbowa, Harriet Masembe, or Ellen Kitonga. Writing for these student magazines not only allowed women to express their views for independence, but was also a means to self-identify as a writer, in ways that structural barriers later on made difficult to do so.

In focussing on professional writers, Chapter 2 interrogated fiction by women produced in the post-independence period, and the ways in which they used their creative writing to protest oppression and inequality in the post-colonial state. The texts included short stories, novels, poetry, and drama, and were examined within the overlapping themes of disillusionment with independence, globalism and regionalism, as well as women and patriarchal oppression. The writers examined in this chapter included celebrated writers, such as Grace Ogot, Barbara Kimenye, Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, Marjorie Macgoye, Muthoni Likimani and Miriam Khamadi Were. Through their plot and characters, the women critiqued the nature of independence, and the conditions of oppression brought about by the structures of the gatekeeper state. The women writers were proxies for wider communities of marginalised

individuals, and highlighted issues such as corruption, class and gender inequality, as well as immigration, providing an insight into the ways in which women responded to independence politics. The use of literary works as historical sources is particularly useful, given the importance of literature as a tool for protesting oppression in East Africa in this period, which women writers made use of. In the same way that women's organisations in Kenya and Uganda were active in working towards gender equality, the texts by women were a means of protest within the civil society space. Producing such political literature as a woman was a particularly laudable task, given the nature of the market-driven publishing industry, in which foreign publishers largely only published male writers, as these were more likely to increase profit margins. Newly formed indigenous publishing companies published more women in comparison, lending them the platform to voice their criticisms of independence. With their fiction, the women in this chapter curated a dynamic public sphere that contained their dissent and visions for Africanisation.

Chapter 3 provided an examination of literature for children produced by women in this period, and the ways in which the educational nature of these texts made debates on decolonisation accessible for a younger audience. These texts were authored by literary figures that included Marjorie Macgoye, Barbara Kimenye, Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, Asenath Bole Odaga, Anne Matindi, Pamela Kola, and Miriam Khamadi Were. Within the genres of fictional novels, folk tales and educational and school textbook literature, the lessons and morals for children that were provided for children in novels, traditional stories, and poems, were examined. The women discussed issues around traditional customs, the importance of morality and integrity, and contemporary East African social issues, using characters and topics that would allow for easy identification with on the part of Kenyan and Ugandan children. With their texts, the women expressed their disillusionment with independence, and made critiques of the current state of decolonisation, while simultaneously placing their hopes for a better future on their young readers. The didactic nature of the texts – as these were either produced in textbooks or as supplementary educational readers – provided children with the tools to understand the world around them. This was a unique and novel means of expanding the public sphere of the cultural interiority of the state, especially given the lacking interest in children's book publishing in Kenya and Uganda at independence. The majority of the texts discussed in this chapter were published by the indigenous publishing company East African Publishing House, emphasising again how this regional body played a vital role in providing a platform for women to be heard. Contemporary academic and political debates around Africanisation in this way reached all levels of education, the labour of which was largely performed by women.

The print culture medium of journalism was the topic of examination in Chapter 4, and the ways in which Kenyan and Ugandan women used the pages of the newspaper as a public sphere for dissent and debate. The broad topics of women and work, women's involvement in politics, and women's rights in marriage and the private sphere were used to discuss articles and letters to the editor by journalists and women's rights activists in East Africa. The journalists examined were Ugandan reporters Barbara Kimenye and Rebecca Katumba, while the authors of the letters to the editor included prominent East African civil society activists, such as Rhoda Kalema. Writing for an imagined audience of fellow-women, the writers used techniques of inspiration, celebration and critique, in order to mobilise women to put pressure on the post-colonial state. They represented wider communities of women with their texts, and presented their visions for decolonisation, interrogating specifically what independence was to signify for women. In examining articles and letters to the editor by African, Asian, Hindu and Muslim women, the chapter highlighted the diversity of women in East Africa, and the views on decolonisation that they harboured. Using the pages of the newspaper, the women constructed a public sphere for themselves that contained a platform for debates on the nature of independence and Africanisation.

Within the broad category of non-fiction, Chapter 5 examined essays and speeches penned by politicians and women's rights activists in Kenya and Uganda in the late 1950s and 1960s, including Grace Ogot, Florence Lubega, Miria Obote, Joyce Mpanga and Rebecca Mulira. Using the overlapping topics of girls' education, women and society, and women and the family, the texts by prominent women were discussed to showcase the ways in which they responded to decolonisation processes. The texts were a criticism of nationalist movements in East Africa that marginalised women, and the oppression of women that the structures of the gatekeeper state brought about. With their words, the women proffered their visions for independence, which was to entail greater inclusivity towards women in both the public and private spheres. The women were published in different types of media and wrote for different audiences, thereby highlighting the variety of messages that were imparted. Their ideas and views on Africanisation differed and contradicted each other in ways that underscored the multivocal nature of debate, as well as the expansiveness of the post-colonial public sphere.

One of the primary aims of this thesis was to amplify voices otherwise lost in obscurity, to illuminate historical figures side-lined in historiographies, and thereby contribute to a social history 'from below'. Historiographies of East Africa generally employ an androcentric focus, privileging male historical actors and the political structures they create. While, of course, these

are all valuable narratives, at the same time, such a historiographical emphasis perpetuates the same structural inequalities that marginalised women actors. This marginalisation can also be observed in historical archives, institutions in which the selective assemblage of records already privileges certain perspectives over others, which, in the case of East African historiography is that of male actors. It is for this reason why archival research for this thesis remained challenging, and creative writing and other texts by women were used as historical sources, supplemented by archival documents. This methodology utilised disparate archives and libraries around the world, due to insufficient information on women's lives contained in a singular institution. However, put together, these sources illuminate a vibrant narrative of experiences of decolonisation in East Africa by women, a perspective that has hitherto largely been unexplored. It is these perspectives and voices that this thesis has sought to highlight, and thereby contribute to redressing some of the inequalities within East African historiography.

At the same time, in addition to amplification, this thesis also created an aggregation of a wider variety of women's voices in the East African post-colonial period than has been performed to date. The rise of modern East African literature has burgeoned scholarly interrogations of twenty-first century women's texts, for example, those by Jennifer Makumbi or Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor.⁴ However, in comparison, there is much less written on women writers in the 1960s and 1970s, and those who are mentioned are highly prominent figures, such as Grace Ogot or Rebeka Njau – who were themselves married to renowned cultural figures. This thesis is, therefore, the first study to aggregate a collective of women's voices, both more and lesser known, in a full study of their post-colonial writing in East Africa. The use of texts authored by women as a primary source was chosen specifically for this thesis to examine the ways in which women constructed their own public spheres in responses to decolonisation and Africanisation. Through the aggregation of their voices in this thesis, this has transformed hitherto rather narrow understandings of post-colonial public cultures in East Africa, as they responded to the conditions of oppression that the gatekeeper state brought about. The collective of women's writing highlights the diversity of the public sphere in the region, as well as the writers' debates on the meaning of independence and decolonisation, and the ways in which they broaden the terms of the discourse.

⁴ See, for example: Thando Njovane, 'Colonial Monuments, Postcolonial Selves: History, Trauma and Silence in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust*', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2020, 1–14; Bwesigye Bwa Mwesigire, 'Beyond the Afropolitan Postnation: The Contemporaneity of Jennifer Makumbi's *Kintu*', *Research in African Literatures* 49, no. 1 (2018): 103–16.

Previous East African post-colonial historiography has focused on state and nation-building, and high political issues, emphasising party politics and their manoeuvring, often along ethnic lines.⁵ More recent scholarship explores the boundaries beyond nationalist histories, examining regionalism, and the ways in which citizens participated in political discourse and constructed their own meanings of decolonisation.⁶ A recent focus on print cultures also informs the ways in which debates on independence were construed in textual formats in the late colonial and early post-colonial period.⁷ However, there has been very little specific focus on women's voices, and is what this thesis has attempted to rectify. In utilising texts produced by professional writers, civil society activists, politicians, teachers and journalists, this thesis has underscored the ways in which women diversified debates on the meaning of independence and decolonisation. In addition to contributing to existing discussions on inequality and class oppression, they were also adding a new dynamic to decolonisation debates, namely that of patriarchal oppression and women's rights. While Chapters 1, 2 and 5, through their focus on student writing, fiction, and non-fiction, broaden these debates to also encapsulate women's issues, Chapters 3 and 4 highlight their depth, as they reach more participants and audiences with children's literature and newspaper articles. Through creating a public sphere more inclusive and diverse than previously imagined, the women discussed in this thesis remain avantgarde cultural figures in East Africa.

The different social issues that women addressed in their texts overlapped between the various textual formats this thesis divided its interrogation in, underscoring that there was, therefore, no singular genre of women's writing. For example, the topic of the institution of marriage was not only addressed by Muthoni Likimani with her narrative ballad *What Does a Man Want?* (Kenya Literature Bureau, 1974), but also by Miria Obote in her essay "Woman in a changing

⁵ See, for example: Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Daniel Branch and Nic Cheeseman, 'Introduction: Our Turn to Eat', in *Our Turn to Eat: Politics in Kenya since 1950*, ed. Daniel Branch, Nic Cheeseman, and Leigh Gardner (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2010), 1–21; Gabrielle Lynch, 'Histories of Association and Difference: The Construction and Negotiation of Ethnicity', in *Our Turn to Eat: Politics in Kenya since 1990*, ed. Daniel Branch, Nic Cheeseman, and Leigh Gardner (Berlin: LIT, 2010), 177–97; Samwiri Rubaraza Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 2010th ed. (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1989); Jonathan L. Earle and J.J. Carney, *Contesting Catholics: Benedicto Kiwanuka and the Birth of Postcolonial Uganda* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2021).

⁶ Chris Vaughan et al., 'Thinking East African: Debating Federation and Regionalism, 1960-1977', in *Visions of African Unity, New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects*, ed. Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits, *African Histories and Modernities* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 49–75; Ismay Milford et al., 'Another World? East Africa, Decolonisation, and the Global History of the Mid-Twentieth Century', *The Journal of African History*, 2021, 1–17; Julie MacArthur, *Cartography and the Political Imagination: Mapping Community in Colonial Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016); Kara Moskowitz, *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945-1980* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019).

⁷ For example, see: Emily Callaci, *Street Archives and City Life: Popular Intellectuals in Postcolonial Tanzania, Radical Perspectives* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017).

society” (*East Africa Journal*, Volume 4, Number 4, 1967), as well as by the various letters to the editor written by members of the Uganda Council for Women lobbying for greater women’s rights in marriage in 1960. Social inequalities were addressed broadly across textual formats, with Violet Kokunda’s short story *Kefa Kazana* (*Penpoint* 16, 1964), Micere Mugo’s poem *I took my son by the hand* (in *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, Oxford University Press, 1976), or Grace Ogot’s essay “Family planning for African women” (*East Africa Journal*, Volume 4, Number 4, 1967). Part of the overlap between the different writing formats of these – and other – topics is due to the comparatively low number of women writing in English in East Africa at the time, with many writing across different formats and genres. In this thesis, for instance, Grace Ogot features in the categories of fiction and non-fiction, with a novel, short story and essay. Similarly, Barbara Kimenye’s works are interrogated in the rubrics of fiction, children’s literature and journalism, indicative of the broad nature of her writing. Some women began writing as students at Makerere or Nairobi, and later gained fame as professional writers, such as Elvania Zirimu, whose work is examined in the student-writing, fiction and children’s literature categories. This overlap also highlights the ways in which the topics women treated were understood in different ways, depending on the medium they used, and the audience they were writing for.

As discussed above, primary research for this thesis consisted of consulting an eclectic collection of sources, ranging from novels, plays, and poetry, through magazines and newspapers, to archival documents, located in both East Africa and the United Kingdom, supplemented by oral history interviews. Unfortunately, this was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting movement restrictions, which prevented further archival research, especially in Kenya, leading to an under-representation of Kenyan writers in certain chapters in this thesis. It is hoped, however, that the collection of women’s voices, as they are presented in this thesis, forms a springing point for further research on the role of women in public culture in East Africa, particularly also with the use of sources in African languages.

In spite of the vibrant cultural life women writers created, they still faced immense obstacles in the way of literary production and becoming published. In addition to structural barriers, based on racism and sexism in a post-colonial world, these women were also forced to contend with the demands of the market that publishers catered towards, and did not deem African women’s writing as suitable for. Additionally, the authoritarian regimes of Obote and Amin in Uganda, and Kenyatta in Kenya placed limitations on freedom of expression for many writers, compounded by more immediate pressing needs to make a living. However, in spite of these

obstacles, women played an important role in shaping the public sphere and curating cultural life with a diverse range of debates on the meaning of independence. Their words were designed to reach all levels of society, ranging from high politics with speeches, academic circles with essays, or children with educational literature. The depth of these debates, as well as the potential for social change they harboured in East African society, were highlighted in this thesis. The multivocal nature of this discourse pushed the boundaries of debates, and broadened a dynamic public sphere in the cultural interiority of the state, augmented by the intellectual and cultural worlds women created.

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