

1. An Examination of Post-Independence Failures in Uganda as Represented in Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles*

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ABSTRACT

Postcolonial crisis, failures, confusion, absurdities and pain have continued to provoke debate in Ugandan literature. Poets, dramatists and novelists have all tried to reveal the effects of colonialism on Africa and written about the selfishness, tyranny, dictatorship and corruption of the post-independence leaders of colonial powers. Moses Isegawa's novel *Abyssinian Chronicles* is one of those works of art that interweaves personal narratives and issues of post-independence pain, failures and confusion in postcolonial Uganda. The novel tells a story of the arbitrariness of the life of characters due to the selfishness, incompetence, inadequacies and hypocrisy of the first generation of leaders after colonialism. In this paper, we argue that the failures of the post-independence regimes had far reaching consequences on the individuals, family and society at large. However, the eventual triumph of the protagonist signifies the unwavering African spirit that endures to the end. Qualitative research approach. Textual analysis methodology was used to come up with the findings. Post-colonial theory tenets were applied for a better understanding of the primary text.

Keywords: *Postcolonial, Identity, Absurdity, Authoritarianism*

INTRODUCTION

In a Foreword by Ngugi wa Thion'go, in "Unmasking the African Dictator: Essays on Postcolonial African Literature," he points out that even civilian regimes in the 1960s and 70s became undistinguishable from the military, as both mirrored the images of the undemocratic and authoritarianism of the colonial era since the dawn of independence was followed by dwindling hope (Ndirigiri, 2014).

Abyssinian Chronicles is Moses Isegawa's 1998 novel set in Uganda. It tackles the history of the country and the political turmoil of post-independence as narrated by its main character, Mugezi. It elaborates on the hopelessness of ordinary people and the bitter compromises of the effects of colonialism. Mugezi is the omniscient narrator and the main character of the novel. He and others find themselves entangled in the chaos that defines their troubled country. Owing to his intelligence and larger-than-life presence, Mugezi is used by the author as the mouthpiece to tell the story of the quagmire of family and country. The characters in this recitation try to find their own space in an unjust and arbitrary Uganda by reconstructing their own identity and survival mechanisms. Sometimes they succeed, other times they fail miserably.

In this article, we examine the post-independence crisis as portrayed through the shortcomings of the National leaders and how this affects the ordinary folk in *Abyssinian Chronicles*. We argue that this prose fiction is Isegawa's way of narrating colonial contamination, postcolonial failures, confusion, pain, selfishness and corruption of the first-generation leaders who took over power after colonial domination. While there is quite substantial scholarship on the interconnectedness of personal stories to illuminate the larger postcolonial Uganda, the focus of this paper

is to analyse the pain and tragedies of postcolonial Uganda that affect Mugezi's family in their personal narratives and also discuss how the first-generation rulers who took over power after independence were not any different from their colonial masters. Drawing from Frantz Fanon's judgment of the first rulers after independence in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), we argue that arbitrariness of the lives of the characters in the novel is due to the Machiavellian political maneuvers that are centered on interpersonal manipulation, emotional coldness and indifference to morality; coupled with the cruel, complacent and haphazard attitudes of the leaders who took over power from the whites after independence.

During the colonial era, most of the local leaders embraced the ideas, views and practices of the colonial masters, apart from a few anti-colonial forces such as Kabalega, the Omukama of Bunyoro from 1869 to 1899. He was the last great king of one of the greatest kingdoms in the Great Lakes Region. According to Kasule *The Monitor* (20220), he resisted imperialism from 1872 when he defeated Sir Samuel Baker's troops, to January 1, 1894, when the British declared war against him and up to April 9, 1899 when he was shot, wounded in the arm and captured alongside Kabaka Mwanga by Semei Kakungulu and Andeleya Luwandagga, two Baganda military generals who were collaborating with the British. Kabalega was consistent in his attempt to defend his kingdom from imperial avarice, even if it meant dying while at it. He stands out among the isolated patriots that had the rare attribute of putting their country first.

When independence ushered in a new epoch, there was a series of short-lived governments. Uganda changed presidents with and by the barrel of the gun, a procedure that led to the rise of authoritarian dictatorial leaders such as Obote I and Obote II regimes, which were characterized by chaos, oppression, killings,

corruption and violence. Amin's military reign from 1971-1979 followed after. Obote II's regime was also overthrown by the current government of Yoweri Kaguta Museveni in 1986. All this pointed to a postcolonial space that was turbulent. There was great insecurity, instability and destruction of lives and properties. Political greed that caused coups and short-lived governments in Uganda led to moral degeneration which eventually catapulted people bereft of human decency into power, as the situation progressed from bad to worse.

Mushemeza (2001) observes that the postcolonial state maintained the use of violence as an instrument of control, which led to the destruction of the Ugandan state and its economy. He goes on to note that postcolonial leaders exercised their power outside the constitution. For example, in 1966, Milton Obote used the army to attack the Kabaka's palace in Mengo whereupon he established an army garrison so as to perpetuate and consolidate his dictatorial tendencies. Obote also abrogated the 1962 Constitution and introduced the 1967 Constitution which vested all the powers with the president. Thereafter, people were subjected to harassment by State Security Agencies manned by misfits, criminals, prostitutes and opportunists. This led to a coup by general Amin in 1971. He also used the military to control all the sectors of the State. The subsequent governments also opted for violence as a way of toppling dictators and consolidating their hegemonies.

Abasi Kiyimba (1998), in "The Ghost of Idi Amin in Ugandan Literature," notes that in the 1960s, writers began to express concern about the political direction that the country was taking. He goes on to note that David Rubadiri in *No Bride Price* (1967), Robert Serumaga in *Return to the Shadows* (1969), and Peter Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle* (1971) all predict military coups long before Idi Amin takes over power. After

independence, the country was ruled by men who had discovered a philosophy of violence and repression and were determined to sustain it. Life was almost meaningless as postcolonial Ugandan leaders ignored even the bare minimum standards of running a government such as observance of human rights. Many people lost hope, most especially during the regime of Idi Amin, the two dictatorships of Milton Obote and the periods of chaos in between, during which time a larger part of the populace struggled to find themselves and their new identity while reasserting themselves in postcolonial Uganda. It was not until 26 January that the National Resistance Army headed by Yoweri Museveni took over power, returning relative peace to most areas of the country (Breitinger, 2000).

Abyssinian Chronicles narrates contributes to Uganda's national history. Isegawa structures the narrative along the lines of traditional chronicles and uses the bildungsroman as a narrative strategy with large anecdotal sections to tell and retell the history of Uganda from the colonial period of the 1930s to the 1990s. This format allows the author to inquire into the role of the nation in the building of identities, of place, of being and of belonging, by integrating the social process with the development of a person (Armstrong, 2009). Because these periods were marked by violence, chaos, segregation, power struggle and uncertainty, the same flaws are mirrored in the conduct of characters, both in the real and fictitious world created by the novelist.

The novel describes the struggles of different generations as they try to cope with the turbulent history of Uganda. Mugezi describes the emptiness of his grandfather's life in trying to cope with colonial and postcolonial periods. There is inter-religious strife and segregation. Isegawa presents to us the Muslim, Protestant and the Catholic interreligious conflicts. The

grandfather of the main character suffers because of marred religious sectarianism where he is brought down from his position as the local clan chief. These, along with other postcolonial failures lead to the disintegration of the aforementioned house head's family and his eventual loneliness.

According to Armstrong (2009), *Isegawa* recasts and reenacts a period of recent Ugandan history marked by violence and chaos, emanating from Idi Amin's dictatorship. While the details of Mugezi's life as the omniscient narrator provide a foundation for *Isegawa's* brilliant and profoundly illuminating portrait of the contemporary postcolonial Ugandan experience, the novel is filled with other extraordinary characters who are also struggling publicly or secretly with corrupt dictatorships after independence.

As such, *Isegawa* portrays the anguish and suffering caused by Amin's tyranny and dictatorship and the characters' difficulty in finding themselves in an arbitrary postcolonial Uganda. Serenity, the protagonist's father, for example, wishes to live a life free of worry and have a better job just like the post-independence elite should. However, this is seldom achieved. He finds himself thrust into a life of competition, hatred, segregation and uncertainty as he wonders how he will make money to take care of his children. *Isegawa* exposes the rot in Amin's military regime where there is corruption, deceit, tribalism, segregation and violence. Serenity represents the confusion and pain of postcolonial transition during Amin's regime. As a man who has never known or been involved in conflicts prior to this state of affairs, he and other characters, find themselves in a precarious environ (*Isegawa*, 127). This diversion from the expected norm leads to immeasurable angst especially through the indignities of the low- class citizens who suffer the most.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach was employed during this study. Qualitative data was used to provide in-depth analysis of the topic. The works of previous scholars were also alluded to in order to tap into the comparative notions of this post-independence trajectory. This document analysis enriched the study with the relevant data.

Electronic sources, journals, Google scholar and other articles were interacted with, to trace and establish post-independence analysis. This information was used as both primary and secondary data in this paper.

Purposive sampling was employed to specifically use *Abyssinian Chronicles (1998)* by Moses Isegawa as the primary text. It is a narrative in which Mugezi, the protagonist manages to navigate through the hellhole regime of Idi Amin, as he faces the most unfortunate aspects of the Ugandan family (home-based cruelty from a callous mother and an indifferent father) and societal incapacitation of success. Being set in the postcolonial 1970s and 80s, when power struggles are the order of the day qualifies this novel as a key source of data for understanding the post-independence storm that ravages Uganda.

The study mainly followed the qualitative approach. The source of data was textual/documental. There were also quality control measures employed to ensure reliability and validity. The novel characters' experiences were focused on as the guidelines for realizing the intentions of writing this paper. In some instances, sections of the texts were transcribed but the researcher ensured that the key message of the author was maintained.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The post-colonial theory that was applied to this paper recommends that one explains the effects that colonization had on the people and societies that were once ruled by the colonial powers. There are economic, political and emotional after effects that have a bearing on both the colonizer and the colonized. In the novel *Abyssinian Chronicles*, it becomes apparently clear that the many years of control under the British rule do not prepare the new breed of African leaders for the responsibility handed to them at independence. This explains the lack of direction, selfishness and undemocratic tendencies exhibited by the neocolonial regimes.

Mantooth (2023) observes that by looking at literature through a post-colonial lens, the reader is able to assess the ways in which colonialism affects the plot, the characters and their motivations. This also exposes the reader to a better understanding of the consequences of colonialism as an entity of its own. This happens to be the purpose of post-colonial literature as a whole. It is thus a given that most literature therein follows the same recipe whereby a main character's life is ravaged by the consequences of colonialism. Mugezi's aspiration of becoming a lawyer is thwarted due to the corruption that denies him an admission into the much coveted law school. Most of the elite characters in the novel are overruled by the unschooled military personnel who are at the center of political control. The consequence of this diversion from the norm is a society that is dancing with the devil.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Mugezi describes the suspension of the constitution just after four years of Uganda's independence from the British rule and the

declaration of a state of emergency during Obote's corrupt regime:

Nineteen sixty-six. Four years after Independence. The constitution was suspended, a state of emergency declared in the central region. Armed soldiers were stationed in Grandpa's village for the first time in national history (Isegawa, 123).

The suspension of the constitution and the dictatorship and corruption of Obote's government lead to a coup by Idi Amin who takes over the presidency of the country. This turn of events, as described in the novel shocks Mugezi's grandfather: "General Idi Amin's coup took Grandpa by surprise: either he had misjudged, or a quirk of fate had manifested itself (pp: 123).

Much as Mugezi's grandfather thinks that Amin will lead the country better than Obote, he also fears for the future, most especially with the death of his favourite sister which also leads to the dwindling of his political ambitions. Mugezi describes the sorrowful and hopeless state of his grandfather by commenting thus: "Intoxicated by sorrow and uncertainty, and left on his own without his favourite adviser, adversary and sister, Grandpa suspended his political musings and soliloquies." (Isegawa, 124). The political climate during Amin's regime becomes hostile. Here, Isegawa reconstructs the image of the postcolonial leaders as selfish, dictatorial and war mongers who take over power by the barrel of the gun. Also, these leaders cause suffering to the citizens. The removal of the constitution breeds discrimination, class struggle, violence and impunity as the leaders act the way they wish.

The above is what Jones (2000) observes, arguing that *Abyssinian Chronicles* engages with the political climate under the dictatorship of Idi Amin in the 1970s and concerns itself thematically with violence, political upheaval, anarchy, chaos and

uncertainty. Jones goes on to observe that Isegawa has the ability to demonstrate the interconnectedness of politics and one's private life, including individual consciousness.

Barasa (2017) also re-echoes this sentiment and notes that the creative works are a product of a narrator's personal experiences of the violence at both the personal and public levels during the post-independence decades. *Abyssinian chronicles* is thus Isegawa's way of navigating the complexities of post-independence violence through the lives of individual characters as well as issues of personal independence and identity. It also paints a portrait of the aftermaths of British rule in Uganda composed of segregation, tribalism and racism, among others. Though it amplifies the larger stories of the post-colonial nation state with its problems, individual characters are also affected. They struggle to live and have a new approach to life. They work hard to succeed despite the prevailing circumstances. Relatedly, the absorption of foreign culture in subtle ways impacted the perceptions of the leaders who later turned into dictators that ensured a nightmarish and damned existence for the citizens. The country inherited a number of social and political problems which were developed and nurtured by her colonial masters. Mugezi's grandfather, for example, is shocked when the former is barred from enrolling in a law school due to corruption. This segregation and inequality provoke him into fighting the British colonial system. He campaigns, is selected as the sub-county chief and later as a county chief. These positions give him a better view of how the colonial system works and that is when he decides to fight it.

Barasa (2017) observes that colonialism breeds racism and class discrimination against the black race. It further divides the black people and oppresses them through forced taxation and forced participation in the war abroad. Power relations during the

times of war and colonialism focus on the colonial masters, who are portrayed as superior to the Africans. The eerie similarity of repression for example, in spite of the various masks under which they replicate themselves, is evidently highlighted and is, in many ways, the recurring motif of Isegawa's creative production. While a student at the seminary, for instance, Mugezi encounters the power excesses of Fr. Mindi, who doubles as the seminary bursar and a disciplinary master. Specifically, Fr. Mindi is accused of ensuring that the boys are fed on unpalatable posho and weeville-infested beans (p.199). Fr. Mindi's unwelcome decision is due to his rather hypocritical, ironic and (mis)guided philosophy that such bad food makes good seminarians and ultimately good priests (p200). Yet, it is not lost on the students that this priest and his colleagues eat niceties and sumptuous meals.

The country goes into a loss just like Mugezi, his father Serenity and his grandfather as she struggles on a journey to achieve progress with difficulty. Through the lives of these characters, the novel traverses the painful years of living in Ugandan with post-colonial leaders and the characters' inability to go back to their traditional ways. Simon Gikandi (1992) rightly observes that one of the damaging features of the post-colonial dictatorship is that it cuts people from their past and has made it difficult for them to inherit their history and cultural traditions. Much as Mugezi's parents are fairly well off and can afford the necessities and the comforts of Ugandan life at that time, it is ironical that he himself is far from being happy, the reason being that these parents have lost the natural bonds of child upbringing which are emphasized in the African tradition.

Isegawa presents the hopelessness of the people as they search for identities and a sense of self-worth during the Amin regime. Mugezi for example undergoes the despair of a younger generation facing the hopelessness of a violent transition. In

trying to find himself, Mugezi also loses his ethical balance in post-colonial Uganda during Amin's regime. He looks at Amin as a godfather and a role model, arguing that the latter had exhorted every citizen to walk tall, to act proud and not to let anyone deny them their rights, their dignity or their self-worth. The theme of abuse of power and its effect on the characters is portrayed through Mugezi's parents, Padlock and Serenity who he terms as "the despots." He tries to resist the tyranny of his parents and occasionally gets back at them, to the extent that he even attempts to wreck their marriage (Isegawa, 148).

According to (Ogungbesan, 1978, p. vi), as cited in Agboola (2010), the African politicians who took over the reins of governance from the white colonialists were corrupt, selfish and worse than the colonial masters. He goes on to point out that the African writers and people discovered this selfishness too late: "The ruling elite was more interested in considering its own dominance, and in monopolizing the continent's natural resources than in improving the abject condition of the common people."

Ndigirigi (2014), while giving the example of Amin, notes that the latter had styled himself a Field Marshal in the post-colonial Ugandan army. He had appeared to be the model of post-colonial rule until his uncontrollable outrages made him a liability to the former political masters. He then sought the fraternity of other dictators in Libya and Eastern Germany. His police state later turns into what his Health Minister, Henry Kyemba, terms 'A State of Blood.'

This is the view that Fanon (1961) stresses when he argues that there are blacks who are whiter than the whites themselves. Fanon is referring to the African state beneficiaries who do not want to give up the luxurious and comfortable life that they are already enjoying. Also, they tend to ignore the needs and desires of the colonized in rural areas, as they fight for their own interests.

As such, the elites tried to grab more power after independence, seeking to overtake the positions previously held by the colonialists instead of eliminating such hierarchical positions of power altogether.

In other words, they re-created colonial situations in the decolonized nation. Fanon (1961), goes on to observe that the political educator ought to lead them to modify this attitude by getting them to understand that certain fractions of the population have particular interests and that these do not always coincide with the national agenda. The people will thus come to understand that national independence sheds light upon many facts which are sometimes divergent and antagonistic. Taking stock of the situation at this precise moment of the struggle is decisive, for it allows the people to pass from total, indiscriminating nationalism to social and economic awareness. He adds:

The people who at the beginning of the struggle had adopted the primitive Manicheism of the settler Blacks and Whites, Arabs and Christians realize as they go along that it sometimes happens that you get Blacks who are whiter than the Whites and that the fact of having a national flag and the hope of an independent nation does not always tempt certain strata of the population to give up their interests or privileges (Fanon, pp: 144).

In *Abyssinian Chronicles*, Mugezi vividly describes how the postcolonial leaders recreate these situations which later turn the country into what the author calls the abyss:

The seventies were dominated by self-made men who, defying their limited backgrounds, rose to vertiginous heights of power before dashing their chariots into the abyss (Isegawa 283).

Mugezi as the omniscient narrator, protagonist and the main character in *Abyssinian Chronicles* finds himself entangled in the

chaos and troubled postcolonial Uganda. The details of Mugezi's life provide a foundation for Isegawa's brilliant and profoundly illuminating portrait of the contemporary, postcolonial Ugandan experience and pain. He does not live a happy life though his family is quite well off and can afford all the necessities and a comfortable life:

By their own standards, the two dictators had done well. They had moved from the rural obscurity of Serenity's village house to the red-roofed pretension of a big Indian bungalow. For Serenity, living here was a form of upward mobility, because these were formerly segregated areas. In those days, this part of Kampala was called Mini Bombay. (Isegawa, pp: 90-91).

Yet, not even this short-lived upward mobility in the standards of living translates into a better quality of the existence of the characters. For example, Padlock, who is Mugezi's mother and a fanatic catholic, mistreats him whenever she gets a chance to, as she metamorphoses from a mother to a monster. His father Serenity is also a dictator though he does it indirectly by delegating his authority to his wife to enforce the maltreatment in this household. She is like a terrifying idol in his childhood.

Mugezi also represents the confusion and despair of the new and young generation over the uncertainties of transitions and its own prospects. He, for example, suffers at the hands of his despotic parents as he is babysitting his siblings who he calls the shitters.

His confusion is further exemplified in the observations of Kahyana (2014): "To spite Padlock, Mugezi deliberately transgresses, including feigning having sexual intercourse with a neighbour's wife, Lusanani. Padlock and Mugezi's father, Serenity, then banish him from home to the seminary." (p. 173). Mugezi's shenanigans are indications that the excesses of the

wayward regime have had a negative impact on even the children, who should ideally be allowed to enjoy their age of innocence. Padlock also forces Mugezi to kneel before her for long hours. This is a metaphor for the punitive postcolonial environment and the regimes that he and other characters find themselves trapped into. He further describes how Obote's overthrow on 25 January, 1971 had turned his world upside down, robbing him of his grandmother and sending his childhood in an unexpected direction.

In the course of the narrative, Mugezi becomes a guerilla activist, a teacher and eventually leaves for Amsterdam. Though there are constant shifts in the politics of the country, such as the overthrow of Obote on 25 January 1971 and later the overthrow of Amin in 1979, or "postcolonial entanglement" as Adesanmi (2004) calls it and elaboration of discursive positions underpinned by sentiments of despair and hopelessness as cited in Mbembe (2006), Mugezi adjusts and he reinvents his own personality. He flees from his country and embarks on a new life as a black man in the land of the colonizers.

Isegawa's thematic concern e, periodically and sometimes haphazardly inserted, is that the implants of colonialism, proselytizing religions, party politics, capitalism, militarism and international financial aid have distorted Uganda's authenticity and rendered it a realm of baleful imagination. The marriage of Mugezi's parents is a metaphor for the pollution and destruction of the country's values by the colonial British rule. The colonial power structure and system had already been established through the chiefs and as such, the natives could only adapt to the lifestyle of the colonizers. Mugezi's grandfather, for example, advises him to read hard and not to get involved in the coffee smuggling business which is very rampant as a way of youths making quick money. Living off an illegal activity is an indicator of state

failure. The citizenry is largely on their own, trying to fill the gaps created by an inefficient regime.

Mugezi lives and is caught up in a suffocating world: a world that is very unjust, arbitrary and full of hypocrisy. There is brutality, hypocrisy, violence and tyranny at almost every level. Post-colonial dictatorship and power are also extended to the Roman Catholic seminary which mirrors the position of the colonial powers that stand as the centers of influence. Gikandi (1992:77) observes that one of the damaging features of post-colonial dictatorships is that they cut people from their pasts and made it difficult for them to inherit their history and cultural traditions. Hypocrisy of religion, for example, most especially in the Roman Catholic Church is seen through Padlock who fails to become a nun and unleashes unmatched tyranny and slavery on Mugezi, her biological child. Nabutanyi (2016) recollects a vivid description of this shocking exhibition of cruelty, made all the more painful because it comes from an angle where utmost love is expected:

“The first serious incident of corporal punishment in the novel happens when Padlock beats Mugezi on the day she leaves the village for the city. She cringes and with blinding speed, drives her palm full into his face. She raises her foot, the yellowish sole flashing, as if she is going to plant it full in his face. The verb “cringed” and images of “fire of her hatred” depict the intensity of Padlock’s blows, delivered because her child has dared to challenge her authority.” It should be noted that this parental bankruptcy is a reflection of what is happening at the national level. In a trickle down scenario, the custodians of children’s rights turn abusers because they themselves are victims of state failure. In Padlock’s case, for example, a typical case of displaced hostility is laid bare. She suffers abuse as a child and is

therefore inclined to be violent when she grows up, even if the recipients of this derangement are the fruits of her womb.

There is also continuous conflict between the Protestants, Catholics, Moslems and those who believe in tribal religion, which is an extension of the many things that have gone wrong in this country.

Mugezi's babysitting duties under the supervision of his despotic mother – appropriately nicknamed Padlock - is a metaphor for the oppressive regime of post-colonial practices. This makes him to wage a guerilla war and occasionally get back at his parents most especially his mother. In all, while unleashing resistance to post-colonial dictatorship from his parents and towards the seminary structure, Mugezi operates alone and in secret. By this, he seems to be detached from the world he lives in and the people he lives with. He is a representation of the aftereffects of the harsh realities meted on the colonized by the controlling and overbearing dominators. As the country goes into decadence and disintegration, Mugezi also goes into hibernation after the overthrow of Amin. When he resurfaces, he falls prey to the hydras of corruption and bribery. When Amin painfully expels Indians from the country, Mugezi like others around him, sees an opportunity in the hardships of another race. He uses the chaos of war as a chance to prosper as a smuggler and to find romantic conquests among the survivors. However, he is also like a lost soul searching for a metaphorical home; he is full of the contradictions and confusions which come with adolescence and forced early adulthood. He perseveres because – as

This is most especially coupled with the newly independent post-colonial Africa's own early coming to terms with its freedoms and the openings for oppression and corruption coupled with brutality at every level. In turn, these drive the country into an abyss where the potential to flourish is crushed. Mugezi in his

own words says: “I now saw Amin as a ghostly specter who had come to destabilize and pollute the nation by accentuating the evil within. My uninformed view was that the seeds sown were going to germinate and that the worst was yet to come... The only thing most people agreed on was the desire for Amin’s head on a platter.”(317-318). At first, he admires Amin’s strength and charisma but as acts of brutality and violence occur at different levels, he changes his mind when the former’s regime turns into utter brutality, murderous tendencies and mismanagement of the country.

As Mugezi outgrows his childhood, and tries to redefine his identity, he is afraid of facing the world as an adult because the future seems bleak. However, he unconsciously liberates himself from his despotic parents and Amin: ‘My childhood was undergoing a death of sorts... I was moving in a new direction... My flirtation with General Amin had ended, killed by the murderous light of truth. I felt I had more or less outgrown the fight with Serenity and Padlock’ (284). Thus, Isegawa presents Mugezi as an intelligent and optimistic survivor. He tells the story with flamboyance and keen sociopolitical insight. The reality of the direction the country is taking dawns on Mugezi. He discovers that Amin is not actually a role model but a despot who has driven the country into the depths of violence, corruption and tribalism, among others. What follows is transition into maturity as the protagonist starts finding himself anew.

Relatedly, the protagonist describes how the country, under Idi Amin as a postcolonial leader, loses her shine. There is scarcity of commodities and massacres. By the time Mugezi leaves the seminary, the country has been almost completely corrupted. He cannot get a place at the university to study law - his grandfather's dream for him for it now depends on one’s social connections, bribes and sheer luck. Even the resourceful Mugezi

cannot navigate this particular web. The country is moving from one state of rot to another. There is unprecedented violence. The motherland turns into an abyss and some sort of hell. Mugezi narrates this kind of hopelessness: “Amin’s machinations became things happening in a cartoon film. The people found dead in forests became like characters playing dead. The scarcity of essential commodities and the general hardship became transient phenomena that would vanish as soon as the picture was over...

He laments Thus: “I was neither the first nor the last seminarian to groan under the tremendous burden” (Isegawa 285). By this, Isegawa is describing the excessive abuse of power during Amin’s regime but also hoping that all the problems that Amin caused and the collapse of the nation would culminate in another overthrow that would end with the coming of another leader.

Towards the end of the book, Mugezi, rootless, bitter, battered, bruised and sickened by personal loss and tragedy, ends up leaving Uganda for the Netherlands. He has to relocate from a country whose traditions have been destroyed and its dream of advancement totally evaporated. He can no longer bear to use the name Uganda, preferring to call it Abyssinia. In a phenomenological connection, just like the fictitious Mugezi who runs from personal loss and a turbulent country, Isegawa also goes to Netherlands and becomes a Dutch citizen, whereupon he bluntly says in an interview with Jacqui Jones (2000):

“I think the ‘abyss’ part of it was really lamentable. When Amin came to power, the publishers ran away because the money could not add up and they were afraid for their lives... The reading went down and books were no longer important... So I think that is when things really diminished, when the reading culture waned and intellectual life was seen as laughable... So

if I was running from an ‘abyss’, I was running from a place where books were devalued (pp: 16).

Mugezi’s departure from the country to Amsterdam disconnects him from the physical Ugandan environment and also the socio-cultural practices and environment that were part of him. He feels displaced from his own country and as such, he is exposed to despair, bitterness and degradation. Nevertheless, in the end, he finds his new identity – a European with a false passport. He is determined to make his life better after the death of his parents which he calls the ‘demise of the despots.’

Armstrong (2009) points out that as the society becomes torn and fragmented, so too does Mugezi who sinks into a life of decadence in the final section of the novel while in exile in the Netherlands. Much as he expects to live a better life overseas, he finds himself once again living in a ghetto with its own brand of chaos that reminds him of Uganda during the guerilla war. His new abode resembles Uganda during the guerilla war where the day belonged to the forces of law and order, and the night to pirates and their minions and victims. He also starts visiting drug dealers and engaging into sexual encounters with prostitutes. While in Uganda, Mugezi tries to free himself from any form of domination and he succeeds.

However, when he moves to the Netherlands, he gets involved in a love affair with two women who want to dominate him; the same thing he was running away from. This kind of dictatorship reminds him of his mother in particular and it makes him remark: “I was about to convince myself that this was Padlock’s ghost come back to torment me one last time when I hear her voice.” He frees himself from these women because it is his dream to redefine himself.

Armstrong (2009) goes on to observe that it is from this ‘authorial’ location/position that Mugezi, as narrator, relates the

most sardonic ‘chronicle’ in the collection – ‘Ghettoblaster’. The two chronicles – ‘Ghettoblaster’ and ‘Triangular Revelations’, report some of the most disturbing features in Mugezi’s life, and mirror the doubts, confusion and difficulty in finding himself and his place in the society.

This quagmire notwithstanding, Mugezi always attempts to succeed, regardless of the obstacles in his way. Having got accustomed to resilience back home, he never despairs, even in the most troublesome of circumstances. Through his village life, to the city, the seminary years, Amin’s regime, the post Amin regime and until he finds himself leaving the country, he comes to some kind of post-colonial maturity. He is grown and free though he is alone, homeless and with no friends. As Kahyana (2014) argues:

Yet, this ever-present Uganda is the country in which he suffers terribly at the hands of his brutal parents, tyrannical priests and the infernal Trinity (the three female soldiers who rape him) and where he has lost the people he loves- his Grandma (to arson), his grandpa (to civil war), his uncle, Kawayida, and his aunt, Lwandeka (both to HIV/AIDS).

Mugezi uses the strategies he deployed to defeat dictators in Uganda- cunning and wiliness- to beat racist Europe. This in itself means that at all times he sees his present situation against the background of his past. (p: 205)

In this text, the author contradicts the notion that exile is meant to erode the dignity and identity of the emigrant by portraying moments of new opportunities and possibilities. Mugezi is able to pick up the broken pieces of his dreams and aspirations; remodeling his life anew in the land yonder.

He even has the confidence to challenge the imposed identity and picture of Uganda by the Europeans. He refuses to represent

his country based on the guidelines of the colonial powers, choosing instead to write the real-life experiences of his people. At the end of the novel, Isegawa leaves his protagonist with the zeal and determination to start life again. For example, Mugezi finds himself sitting at the Central Station, alone, friendless and homeless but this time mature and free from all the dictatorships and domination.

CONCLUSION

It conclusively, it is apparent that there is a big contrast between the expectations of the post-colonial governance and the reality meted out on the citizenry. Isegawa ably captures the disillusionment, loss of property and life, pain and suffering that the characters face in this surreal tale. However, the resilience of Mugezi, in spite of the several travails he is exposed to and eventual opportunity to experience new beginnings in the diaspora, is symbolic of the unwavering African spirit, a solid determination to always rise from the ashes. Also, the mistakes of the initial post-colonial regimes do not have to define African governance but rather, serve as a lesson for better times ahead. Ugandans and Africans at large, deserve better from their leaders, especially when it comes to living in a violence-free society.

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