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Male Identity and Female Space in the Fiction of Ugandan Women Writers

By Abasi Kiyimba¹

Abstract

This article focuses on the voices of protest by Uganda women writers against age-old discriminative habits, and on the rebuttal made by women on questions of social and political power. The article particularly assesses the way women writers approach generally assumed positions on the power relations between men and women, a theme that runs through all the writing by Ugandan women. As part of the discussion, the paper inevitably pays particular attention to the presentation of male characters, and on the prominence given to issues of male dominance, injustice and discrimination against women, which take place at several levels of society. All women writers, including Barbara Kimenye who writes in the mid-1960s, deal directly or indirectly with these questions. Predictably, Kimenye's tone in the earlier works is quite moderate, but it is unequivocal. The more recent writers on the other hand, deal more explicitly with questions of male-female relations in the home and in society. They also tackle the subject of sex in a manner that would have been quite shocking at the time when Kimenye wrote her first works. While an attempt is made to draw in other female writers, this discussion mainly focuses on the work of Kimenye, Okurut, Kyomuhendo and Barungi, all of whom have written at least two substantial works of fiction. The article investigates in depth the presentation in the fiction by Ugandan women writers of questions of male brutality and female vulnerability, female silence as enforced by the social system, the emergence of the unconventional Female and the inevitable clash with the intransigent male, and the role of art in the process of psychologically empowering women.

Keywords: gender, Ugandan fiction, male identity

Introduction

In 1999, Sylvia Tamale, the outspoken feminist activist and Makerere University Professor of Law published a book curiously entitled When Hens Begin to Crow, and introduced it with the following words:

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Female chickens normally do not crow. At least popular mythology claims they cannot. Hence, in many African cultures a crowing hen is considered an omen of bad tidings that must be expiated through the immediate slaughter of the offending bird (Tamale 1999:1).

The subject of Tamale's book is "Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda", and she reviews the impact made on Uganda's politics by the women who dared to tread where only men were initially allowed to tread. Her work is fascinating because of the way it details the impact that has been made in the arena of politics by those women who have chosen to step forward and speak up or *begin to crow*.¹

Because of Uganda's multiple legacies – colonial, cultural, social, educational etc. – the lists of Ugandan writers have mainly been dominated by men. They have traditionally had more access to the country's English-based educational system than women, and they have consequently had more opportunities to express themselves in creative writing. A few women writers, such as Barbara Kimenye, Elvania Zirimu, Jane Jagers Bakaluba and Grace Akelo, have been quite outstanding, but they have always been clearly outnumbered.² To compound the problem, women rarely feature as significant characters in men's writing. With the exception Lawino in Okot P'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, there is no memorable female character in Ugandan literature in English by men. In the writings of male writers like Robert Serumaga, David Rubadiri, Peter Nazareth, Davis Sebukima and Godfrey Kalimugogo for example, women are assigned peripheral roles. There are even some embarrassing cases in which some novels (by male writers) do not have a single female character.³ Consequently, women have had little opportunity to "*crow*" in Ugandan literature, and the images that have been used to present society in this literature have been unfortunate replicas of those in the oral literature of the various Ugandan societies.⁴

The last fifteen years or so have seen the emergence of new writing in English by Ugandan women, considerably altering the picture of a hitherto male-dominated Ugandan literary landscape. Because of this increased activity, the Uganda literary landscape is now richer by some of the following names: Mary Karoro Okurut, Rose Rwakasisi, Jane Bakaluba, Grace Birabwa, Violet Barungi, Goretti Kyomuhendo, Lillian Tindyebwa, Hope Keshubi, Jane Kaberuka, usan Kiguli, Regina Amollo, Christine Oryema-Lalobo, Monica Arac de Nyeko, Anne Ayeta Wangusa, Hope Kabeiruka, Judith Omollo, Christine Lalobo, Mildred Kiconco Barya and Jane Okot P'Bitek. Along with these new names has come a broad spectrum of new ideas and new approaches to old issues. Apart from enabling Ugandan Literature to contribute meaningfully to the contemporary gender debate, women writers have enriched the discussion on subjects that had been tackled by men earlier. Memorable for example is Lillian Tindyebwa's exploration of corruption in *Recipe for Disaster*. Also outstanding in Susan Kiguli's rich alignment of images in *The African Saga*, among them, the unprecedented tributes to maternity as in the poem "Mother" (p.53). The simplicity of Regina Amollo's *A Season of Mirth* is also quite refreshing. Her precise and powerful description of the rhythm of daily life in a remote eastern Ugandan village is as valuable a contribution to Ugandan literature as the exposition of the Chauvinist nature of the Okanyas of Uganda.

Breaking the Silence: Subdued Protest Voices

This article focuses on the voices of protest by Uganda women writers against age-old discriminative habits, and on the rebuttal made by women on questions of social and political power. The article particularly assesses the way women writers approach generally assumed positions on the power relations between men and women, a theme that runs through all the writing by Ugandan women. As part of the discussion, the paper inevitably pays particular attention to the presentation of male characters, and on the prominence given to issues of male dominance, injustice and discrimination against women, which take place at several levels of society. All women writers, including Barbara Kimenye who writes in the mid-1960s, deal directly or indirectly with these questions. Predictably, Kimenye's tone in the earlier works is quite moderate, but it is unequivocal. The more recent writers on the other hand, deal more explicitly with questions of male-female relations in the home and in society. They also tackle the subject of sex in a manner that would have been quite shocking at the time when Kimenye wrote her first works. While an attempt will be made to draw in other female writers, this discussion will mainly focus on the work of Kimenye, Okurut, Kyomuhendo and Barungi, all of whom have written at least two substantial works of fiction.

Barbara Kimenye is the most prolific of all Ugandan writers, male and female. Her writing spans a period of more than thirty years, during which she has produced over thirty works of fiction, and at least one work on a non-literary subject.⁵ The majority of her books are written for children, even though they make interesting reading for adults, and are quite thematically focused. Indeed, in her latest publications, *Beauty Queen* (1997) and *Prettyboy Beware* (1997), she deals with the contemporary issues of *beauty contests* and *homosexuality*, respectively. In *Beauty Queen*, Adela and Keti jokingly enter a beauty contest, but they soon find that they have to confront greater dangers than they had bargained for. In *Prettyboy Beware*, a combination of social misfortunes and financial deprivation leave Mathew at the mercy of a European homosexual, who takes advantage of him. Eventually, the boy degenerates into a male prostitute, and is infected with the HIV virus by the tourists from whom he has learnt to earn his living. The lessons in this work are quite heavy; and like many of Kimenye's other writings, they can not be dismissed off-hand simply because their primary audience is children.

This article deals with Kimenye's two earliest and major literary works, *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited*, whose primary audience are adults. Both are set in the kingdom of Buganda (in Uganda), before the political turbulence of the mid-1960s.⁶ They are a series of interconnected stories, which have the consistence of a novel. They tackle issues of political power, family structure, religion, culture and day-to-day social organization and interaction. The background against which she makes her social analysis is one of an ordinary village life, but the social comment that she makes is far-reaching, and can be true of many other localities in Buganda and elsewhere. Kimenye's work gives the impression of a pro-establishment writer that is amusing herself with the follies of members of society, since there are no overt anti-establishment sentiments of social protests, such as those that occur in the work of Mary Okurut, Goretti Kyomuhendo and others who write in a later generation. But the work itself speaks a language of its own which independently communicates on the above issues. For example, the male nature of

the political establishment in the society that Kimenye writes about is quite conspicuous in her work. The king is male, so is the Gombolola chief and the village chief. The Gombolola chief has a string of wives; and while the ladies of the Christian Union find it objectionable because it goes against the Christian principle of one-man one-wife, they dare not confront him directly, nor do they question his legitimacy as *chief*. Neither Kimenye nor her characters concern themselves with the ideal of *equality* between the sexes; even questions of equity do not seem to be a principle concern.

The family structure that comes through Kimenye's work protects the position of the man at its helm. As soon as the women get married, their lives and wishes are interpreted in terms of how they relate to their husbands. The change of surnames to those of the husbands' is a status symbol, and they proudly style themselves as "the Lutaayas", "the Mukasas", "the Kigonyas, the Mulindwas, the Kajumbas", the Kizitos, the Kigozis, etc. The women of the Mothers' Union are quite radical, and seem to be women of initiative, when it comes to defending their perception of inviolable Christian values. The husbands seem to be less enthusiastic about Christian values, but the women are also quite tame in relation to them, as prescribed by the social system. An incident that clearly illustrates this is the stand-off between Mrs Mukasa and her husband. She drives his car to town in his absence, and then leaves it outside the house because the fuel is finished. The tyres are stolen, and this invites his cold anger, and he refuses to speak to her. Peace is only restored between them after she has torn up her driving permit, on the advice of the village chief. Also, Mrs Kigozi promptly relinquishes her membership of the Kalasanda Mothers' Union when her husband expresses her disapproval of it.

Kimenye also seems to unquestioningly adopt certain age-old sexist stereotypes into her work. It goes without saying that the village gossip should be a woman, as in the character of Nantondo. Maria, the bar woman who is feared by all married women "for taking their men," is also a common stereotype. Even the scuffle that takes place in her bar when Antoni beats her up after realising that she has been selling his gifts to other people is quite predictable. But probably the most remarkable aspect of the man-woman power relationship in Kimenye's work is highlighted by Maria's refusal to press charges against Antoni for beating her and causing destruction of her property, despite Daudi's persistent advice to do so. She knows she is carrying his baby, and Baganda women do not raise their hands (or even voices) against the fathers of their children. And finally, there is the picture of the westernised woman that Lamek Waswa brings from the city. She is clearly a social misfit in the community: she wears a wig, and she does not socialise with other people. For this, she earns the wrath of the village. This portrait of her is not helped by her action of stealing clothes belonging to Waswa's customers. On the other hand, the young men such as Antoni and Waswa who also come from the city are given friendly outlines. They are quite amiable, and they get along with villagers very well. When they later leave after encountering problems, which have incidentally been caused by women, they are objects of sympathy rather than ridicule. All the women do not seem to develop beyond the stereotypical roles that traditional society assigns them, and which Kimenye unquestioningly adopts into her work.

Thus far, Kimenye would seem to have created a society that is completely a man's world. But she creates a remarkable female character, whose demeanor would jolt even the most bigoted male chauvinist in this male-dominated society. Victoria, the girl

engaged by Antoni as a shop assistant, is a no nonsense woman for whom money comes first. She has no time for gossip, and she alone among the people in Kalasanda stands up to Nantondo's gossipy character by bluntly refusing to answer any of her questions, or even entertaining her very presence on the verandah of her shop. She also sternly points out to Antoni that he has been wasting his money on the bar woman, and he should not wonder that the stock in the shop is getting depleted. When they eventually patch up their quarrel with Antoni and get married, it is a small practical wedding; she does not believe in big wasteful weddings. Victoria aside, Kimenye does not spare her male characters either. She raises several laughs at their expense, for having power (both social and political), but often acting naïve and stupid. Pius Ndawula is driven into marriage by a very forceful woman who takes over the management of his home, while actually cajoling him to believe that he is the one in charge. Then there is Daudi who has become the village laughing stock because of his endless hunt for scholarships. The young dobbi (Lamek Waswa) and the shopkeeper (Antoni), while their predicament is pitiable, also come up for ridicule. One is naïve enough to take on a seasoned city crook for a wife, while the other spends his hard-earned money on a bar-woman that has several other men-friends. Then there is the grotesque picture of Mr. Lubowa, the Honourable Member of Parliament who gets snuff poured into his eyes. And finally, there is the unpleasant character of Mr Kibuuka, the unequivocal male chauvinist who ridicules Daudi's scholarship because the tailoring-related subject that he is going to study is for women! Kimenye may be pro-establishment in many areas that traditionally place men in positions of authority vis-à-vis women, but careful analysis of her work would show that she does not flatter the men, and she certainly does not condone male incongruity.

Identifying the Roots of the Problem: Male Brutality and Female Vulnerability

Mary Karoolo Okurut has authored three novels – The Invisible Weevil and Child of a Delegate and The Official Wife. She has also published a play - The Curse of the Sacred Cow and a short story anthology entitled Milking the Lioness and Other Stories. She has also co-edited and contributed to A Woman's Voice: an Anthology of Short Stories by Ugandan Women. Her other play, The Trial of Thomas Sankara, has not yet been published. The analysis of Okurut's work in this article will mainly focus on The Invisible Weevil and Child of a Delegate.

In The Invisible Weevil, Okurut takes the contemporary Ugandan socio-political situation "by the horns", and makes it the setting for her comments. In the process, she deals with closely entangled social contradictions that are a common feature of the Ugandan society. Nkwanzu and Genesis love each other, and have done so for a long time. But Nkwanzu will not give in to pre-marital sex because she wants to be virgin on her marriage day, to "redden" the traditional white sheet and honour her parents, as according to custom. As a result, Genesis seeks prostitutes for his sexual satisfaction while maintaining his love for Nkwanzu, as he waits for the marriage day. Their love story runs side by side with, and is affected by the political instability in the country, which forces Genesis to flee to "the bush" to join the rebel forces fighting the government in power. When he is arrested and detained in one of the regime's torture chambers, Rex, a University-time contemporary running the torture chamber, demands sex from Nkwanzu as a pre-condition for the release of her fiancée. Genesis is released, and Nkwanzu is able

to escape the forced sex by hurting Rex's genitals at the last minute. Later, Rex turns around and joins the rebel forces, in anticipation of the fall of the government he was serving as a torture agent. He thus remains a constant menace in the lives and relationship of Genesis and Nkwanzu. And indeed, on their wedding day, Rex finds Nkwanzu naked on her bed, fantasising about the pleasure she was about to give Genesis, and succeeds in raping her. This puts an end to Nkwanzu's "white-red-sheet dream", and introduces a new crisis in her vision of herself as a woman and in her relationship with Genesis.

By raping her, Rex brings Nkwanzu into direct confrontation with an aspect of tradition that she had not paid attention to up to that moment. Her aunt, Senga, insists that she should not report the rape to the police. She should just get married, and forget the rape as simply an unfortunate incident. She says:

This terrible matter is buried in our stomachs, the three of us. No one must ever hear of it. We must swear never, never to breathe it to anybody. This is a shame that should never, never be known by anybody else. This unspeakable act of rape is a weevil and the only way we can keep this evil buried is by keeping quiet. If we talk, the weevil will come to the surface (p.182).

In effect, Senga suggests that Rex should be left to get away with the crime of rape, as is traditionally done in the society. But Nkwanzu's friend, *Mama*, insists that she should report the crime to the police, and break the cycle of silence, in order to give a voice to the many girls and women who have, for many generations, endured rape in silence. Otherwise, inconsiderate males will continue to assert their masculinity over the female sex using rape. After moments of internal struggle, Nkwanzu decides to report the rape to the police, and Rex is arrested.

The arrest of Rex however, leaves other problems staring at Nkwanzu. She still has to come to terms with the humiliation of rape. Secondly, she has to cope with the psychological disorientation of Genesis who, for a long time after their marriage, fails to have sex with her because he is haunted by the memory of the rape. After this has been overcome, she has to nurse his ego, which is bruised when she is appointed to a ministerial post in the new government, leaving him to sulk over this challenge to his manhood. Eventually, Genesis gets himself a girl friend, and even deserts their home. And from these extra-marital misadventures, he catches the killer disease AIDS. In the end he comes back to his childhood love and wife, Nkwanzu, and she agrees to take care of him in his last moments. As novel closes, he is expected to die anytime.

The various levels of violence and suffering make The Invisible Weevil a complex novel, despite its apparent simplicity. At one level, there is the social inequality and inequity between men and women, on which Okurut dwells for a very long time, especially as she deals with Nkwanzu's early life. These inequities also keep flashing through the novel in the images of the lives of the other women, such as that of Kaka. There is also the particularly ugly fate of Goora (Nkwanzu's friend), who drops out of school due to pregnancy. Goora's father gets very angry because of the money he has wasted on her school fees, beats her severely, and when the mother attempts to intervene on behalf of her daughter, he beats her as well, accusing her of being a harlot. In addition,

he beats Goora's innocent younger sisters and withdraws all of them from school, declaring that they are all harlots. As if that is not bad enough, Goora is forced to marry a dirty and beastly old man that already has several wives and thirty children. The women and the children all sleep in one room, and this is the surrounding in which Goora's sub-human husband forces her into sex on her arrival. To get to the home, they walk an incredibly long distance on foot, but that is a trifle compared to the gruesome experience that follows her arrival, and of which she writes to her friend Nkwanzi. Okurut's description of Goora's plight and the circumstances of her new home, in form of the letter that Goora writes to Nkwanzi, is as revolting as it is incredible. Part of it is reproduced below for purposes of presenting Goora's plight in detail:

I lay down on the grass-covered floor. The woman gave us a threadbare blanket.

The groom pushed one part of the blanket to me. I pushed it back. I did not care whether I covered myself or not. I was too exhausted to care, my whole body ached. Then I felt the "groom's" hand move roughly between my legs. My God, in the presence of these children and his wife! Roughly, he threw my legs apart. I gritted my teeth and creased brow awaiting the worst. I could not refuse.

As a sharp pain seared through the centre of my very being, the stench from the "groom" mixed with pain and humiliation made me dizzy and mercifully, I fell into a semi-conscious state ... It seemed like eternity before I woke up. The sound of thunder woke me up and I covered my ears as it tore the sky. Flashes of lightening lit up the dark interior of the house and I wished it could strike me dead ... And then the downpour came - in torrents. It was as if we were sleeping in the open. The grass was full of holes, and soon we were drenched to the skin.

When the torrent became a drizzle, my 'husband' told me roughly to get up and go to dig. With difficulty, I got up. I went outside. He threw a hoe at me and ordered me to follow him to the garden. Following him with difficulty, I went to dig (pp78-79).

The extract has problems of credibility; but it serves Okurut's purpose. It is a loud protest against the lot of women in societies that still treat them as chattels to be acquired and added to a labour reserve. The scene described is so grim that it seems to dwarf the crimes of other villains like Matayo, the fake *mulokole* (saved man) who attempts to defile baby Nkwanzi.

The other level of violence and suffering has to do with the general conflict in the community. Cycles of misrule and war have caused a general moral decay in the society. The decay is epitomised by such pictures as those of a dead woman lying in the street with her baby still sucking at her breast, which Okurut describes with jolting attention to detail. Even within this cycle of violence and suffering that seems to be quite general, the

specific abuse of womanhood cannot go unnoted. It is significant, for example, that when Genesis is arrested, it is Nkwanzu who is in danger of being physically violated as a precondition for his release, as is demanded by his jailer Rex.

At yet another level, there is the AIDS scourge, which continues to afflict Uganda and other societies. Okurut carefully pulls it into her thematic fold by presenting it alongside Genesis' chagrin over Nkwanzu's ministerial appointment, which leads him to seek other women that infect him with the AIDS virus. On the surface, it is easy to simply read "the invisible weevil" as the HIV virus, but this would be the easier way out. When the whole context of Okurut's work is assessed, "the weevil" seems to be much bigger than just the affliction of an individual or indeed than a single affliction. It is the entire system of patriarchy that defines people's relationships to each other and to social phenomena in terms of their sex and gender.⁷ It is because of this system, for example, that Genesis and Nkwanzu have different values about virginity. Nkwanzu strives to retain hers for the wedding day while Genesis easily gives up his to a prostitute. It is also because of the same system that Rex feels that he can mess with Nkwanzu's body without her consent. Finally, it is because of this system that Genesis is chagrined at Nkwanzu's appointment as a minister while he remains a common man. Okurut's work seems to be a comprehensive protest, as well as a power bid on behalf of a section of the dispossessed - the women.

In this work, there is no female villain. The female is either a victim of the system (as in the case of the prostitute who takes Genesis' virginity) or a passive accomplice of the system (such as Senga who does not want Nkwanzu to report the rape to the police) or a fighter (such as *Mama*, Nkwanzu's friend who insists that she should report the rape to the police) or in transition, like Nkwanzu herself. This lack of female villains is even more pronounced in Okurut's other work The Child of a Delegate, in which she makes a more vicious attack on the male-dominated establishment.

The image of the brutal male is also the subject of Ayeta Wangusa's Memoirs of a Mother. But unlike Okurut, Wangusa uses her short novel to explore the complexities of the domestic power struggle in greater depth. When she becomes pregnant before marriage, Elizabeth Sera is rejected by both her family and by the man responsible for her pregnancy. She thus has to struggle with life with the assistance of a few friends. Later, she gets a man that marries her, but he does not want her first child in the home. She very grudgingly hands over the child to a foster parent who brings her up with love. The pain of separation from her daughter does not heal, but there is nothing she can do about it if she wants to remain married to JB. But the real incredulity of her position and powerlessness does not fully dawn upon her until her husband brings home a child by another woman and wants her to bring her up as her own. When she protests and reminds him of her own child whom she had to take to other parents, she is bluntly told:

I want my child here and you have to look after her since you are my wife...Your daughter does not belong to my clan, and it is only wise that she kept away from here. Joanna belongs here and if you are not willing to behave like a wife, I can replace you with Joanna's mother. (p.53)

Sera's thoughts after this brutal jolt actually spell out the nature of power relations and define the odds that the woman is up against in seeking to live with dignity alongside her male counterpart. She says:

I was beginning to realize that I was a replaceable object. Was there no way out of a woman's humiliation? Here I was being threatened with divorce if I refused to look after this child that had been dropped in my house. For god's sake, how cruel must a man be? How low must a woman bend? (pp 53-54)

This struggle between men and women rages through the literature of nearly all Ugandan women writers. What is significant about is not so much that a solution is found to the old questions – because none is – but that it highlighted for debate instead of “keeping this evil buried by keeping quiet,” as Okurut's Senga in *The Invisible Weevil* would suggest.

At the end of the *Memoirs of a Mother*, Sera is a broken and lonely woman, who in addition to being deserted by the two men in her life has to take blame for the decision by Mercy (her daughter) to marry a close blood relative because she did not tell her who her father is. When her daughter finally comes round to visit her, she gives her the memoirs of her life, in which she explains why she took the decision to be silent about her father. One hopes that mother and daughter will reconcile after Mercy has read the memoirs; but the damage that has been done is colossal.

Sera is not a fighter in the sense of Kyomuhendo's Kasemiire or Okurut's Hero as we see later; but her pathetic situation at the end of the novel, her silent struggle with forces that are far mightier than her, and her powerlessness to change her situation come through as a very loud form of protest by Ayeta Wangusa.

The Unconventional Female Vs Male Intransigence

The Child of a Delegate, Okurut's second novel, focuses on the phenomenon of street children. Okurut places the blame for the escalation of this evil squarely at the feet of the men. She then lashes out at them for the prejudices that they harbour against the innocent members of this tribe that they have created, as is seen later in Cain's refusal to marry Hero when she reveals to him that she is a street child.

An unnamed delegate arrives in Kampala for a conference on the rights of children. At the end of the day's session, he goes looking for a prostitute for sex. While the woman would have protected herself with a condom, he negotiates for "a live show" and pays more for it. As a result, the girl gets pregnant and brings forth a child that she cannot support. She therefore decides to abandon it at the gate of "Mirembe Babies Home," a home for abandoned children in Kampala. It is this home that protects the child, named Hero by the mother, during her most vulnerable times as a baby. The story of this girl, which is also the story of the novel, is a loud social protest. Okurut begins by protesting against the very way in which she is conceived. She vents her anger at the men both for seeking street sex and for irresponsibly using their financial power to coerce women into unprotected sex. Hero stays in the babies' home until the age of seven when war disrupts the relative security that her life was beginning to assume. The home is bombed, and the Matron who was looking after them is killed by a stray bullet, and Hero

and other children find themselves on the street among gangs of street children. After sometime, the same delegate who fathered her comes to Kampala again, to attend a follow-up conference to the earlier one. He sees the girl through the window when she comes to beg at his car, recognises the near-mirror image of his mother, and concludes that this must be his child, fathered in the encounter with the unknown prostitute. In a moment of remorse, he cries out "Yaya Yaya" (meaning "mother mother"), and gives her a bundle of US dollar notes. The girl takes the money to a charitable organization called "Daughters of Charity" where the Sister in charge administers the money that she brought and sees her through school. At school, Hero adopts "Yaya" as her surname because she can not think of any other.

The episode of Hero's chance-encounter with her biological father is clearly over-contrived, and is therefore artistically unconvincing. It involves the same delegate returning to Kampala several years later, chancing to see the very girl that he fathered and identifying her through the car window when it stops at the traffic lights, having a bundle of notes ready to give to her there and then, and Hero's having the presence of mind to recognise the value of the money, and to manage to take it across Kampala to the offices of the "Daughters of Charity" organization without being assaulted by other street children and seasoned Kampala criminals. It is also amazing that the amounts should be so big as to be sufficient to see Hero through school. The coincidences are too many to be convincing, but this is Okurut's story. Convincing or unconvincing however, the coincidences turn the plot of the novel around by providing the link between the Hero who seemed destined to walk the streets (probably eventually getting pregnant like her mother), and Hero Yaya the University graduate that almost marries into a wealthy "respectable" family. In so doing, it enables the author to closely explore the moral rot in the society whose pillars produce Hero and "her tribe" and then unashamedly glare at her with open prejudice.

The process of Hero's growth and movement through the education system is also an education process for the reader about the nature of the society in which she is bred. To begin with, Okurut's shows the education system to be rotten to the core. The children are coached to pass the examinations, and nothing more, and even the reading of any book that is not a textbook is forbidden. She then moves on to expose greater social evils as the men that Hero meets in positions of responsibility are betrayed by their sexual greed and test her innocence. When Hero joins University and is made non-resident, the Registrar wants sex from her in exchange for getting her a place in a Hall of Residence.

There is also the very memorable encounter between Hero and one of her lecturers who tells her that she has to "co-operate" by offering sex or she will not get a degree at all, let alone a first class degree which he has promised if she cooperates full. This incident enables us to witness Hero's fighter spirit at its strongest. Instead of the usual fear that he meets in the eyes of the other of whom he takes advantage, in Hero's eyes, he meets "cold steal." She outwits him by claiming that she has recorded their conversation.

This incident is particularly significant because it reveals that the lecturer's attempt to take sexual advantage of Hero is not just driven by an individual sexual urge as is the case with Kyomuhendo's Matayo when he rapes Marina, it is a perception of power relations between men and women. It is based on an age-old exploitative philosophy that

primarily perceives the woman as a sexual object, even in circumstances when she merits a first class degree as Hero does. The lecturer tells Hero:

You were not born yesterday... You are definitely in need of some money. And yet you do not seem to be aware that you carry a bank on your body, a forex bureau. With a body like yours, you can get any currency you want in the world – Give and Take Forex Bureau. (p.48)

These demands for sex in exchange for what is legitimately hers follow Hero even after her graduation, as the ultimate damnation of this society in which men think that might is right. One of the prospective employers is actually “shocked” when Hero restrains him as “he inched his hand towards her blouse, trying to push it up in order to touch her nipple.” (p.66). He then asks her whether she is seriously looking for a job, and assures her that she will *never* get it if she does not “play along.”

Hero’s relationship to Cain is also symbolic of the persistent power contest between men and women. Instead of waiting for Cain to approach her with a love proposal, Hero makes the first move in the form of the note below:

*Cain,
I have been watching you for the few months we have been here and I like
you. Can we please go out for disco tonight?
Hero (p.39).*

Cain’s objection is not to Hero herself as a girl, but to the fact that she has made the first move, and this makes their relationship problematic. Cain has never been approached by a girl the Hero has, and he does not like it; but Hero sees nothing wrong with it since she likes him and has only said this simple truth.

During the three years of her undergraduate studies, Hero gains respect from her colleagues for her intellectual independence and social discipline. These are some of the qualities that make Cain return to ask for her hand in marriage. But the prejudices in this society are very strong. When Cain learns that Hero is a street child, he changes his mind about the marriage, and all the qualities he knew her to possess seem to evaporate, as do the memories of the mutually satisfying sexual encounters they have had during the period of courtship.

Even though Hero encounters several odds, the fight she puts is interesting and is largely attributable to the fact that her education has significantly empowered her. However, the power game between men and women is such that even our empowered Hero must still accept certain patriarchal arrangements as “unmovables”. It gives Cain a lot of satisfaction to hear her say that she does not like men who cook, and that she would like to cook for the man she loves. When he notes with pleasure that she is “not one of those so-called liberated women after all”, she simply remarks: “I don’t want to be liberated from cooking for the man I love. This is not Europe.” (p.73)

But while Hero is willing to submit to some traditional power arrangements, her education has empowered her to firmly indicate that she will not accept the entire male-favouring menu in the traditional marital arrangement. She tells Cain that:

I will not clamour for total equality in marriage. I believe that it is not possible to have total equality between man and wife and have a successful marriage. But if you ever have an extra-marital and I get to know, I will also have one and make sure that you know. On that one I don't want to deceive you. (pp. 73-4)

The above firmness, together with the revelation of her background as a street child costs her the marriage. But she is sufficiently empowered her to manage and to focus on the mission of trying to make the lives of street children better.

In both The Invisible Weevil and Child of a Delegate, Okurut is dealing with questions of power - social, financial and political power - which seems to be entirely in the hands of men. In both works, her protest is loud and clear, and her attack against the male establishment is vicious; and yet the absence of female villains tends to leave the point half made, and constitutes a major weakness in the work. For, is it possible for males to sustain a system of oppression without female complicity at all levels? To suggest this would be to attempt to oversimplify the way society operates. But Okurut's work contains some very vital lessons on the subject of male-female power relations. Indeed, her close exploration of the relationship between prostitution and the phenomenon of street children, together with her somewhat over-projected presentation of the role of males in the perpetuation of the two social problems is an eye opener.⁸ No Ugandan writer before her has linked these two issues, and attended to them in such detail.

Goretti Kyomuhendo has authored several works, which include novels, short stories, children's books, poetry works, and has also edited several short story anthologies. Her children's book, Different Worlds, is very inspiring to children. All her works, including the two novels that are studied in this article (The First Daughter and Secrets No More), unequivocally focus on the problems of gender equity and equality, as does Whispers From Vera, which explores in greater depth the interests and concerns of women beyond the bilateral power struggle with men.

The First Daughter, closely examines traditional conceptions of the woman's role and place in a society that is greatly conservative. It opens with the expression of a variety of views about women by male villagers, some of which sound incredibly callous, such as the following:

You know, Kyamanywa, the only damn thing I have ever seen you do is sending your daughters to school."

Kyamanywa only smiled at the man's rudeness.

"A woman's place is in the kitchen," another man retorted. Give them education and they will rebel."

The weaker sex," another drunkard observed, "they have to squat down while urinating, be under a man while playing sex and even

say 'thank you' afterwards, what a breed!" All the men burst into laughter; including Kyamanywa.

"Give them education!" the drunkard continued, "which means that they will never be able to perform the only thing they are capable of on this earth!"

"What is that?" Kyamanywa asked inquisitively.

"To be sold off when they are ripe, just as a farmer would sell a ripe pumpkin, then bring home cows and produce heirs!" (p.8)

The work also has grim descriptions of the violence of the men against their wives and daughters. The barbaric violence visited upon Kasemiire's mother by her father when he suspects that she has been up to some mischief with a young man is quite memorable. It is as a result of this that Kyamanywa, the young man in question, decides to marry her. Kyomuhendo also describes the Okonkwo-like character of Kyamanywa in detail, and presents him to us as the real personification of the oppression against women. Below is part of the description:

Kyamanywa was also a man who believed strongly. For instance, he believed that women were put on this earth solely for men's pleasure and he therefore held a very low opinion of them. His principle was that a man should acquire as many women as he wished so long as he could maintain them. Women and children have no say according to the Banyoro's custom and he always made sure that this custom was strictly observed in his household. (p.6)

Elsewhere, Kyamanywa says to Kasemiire's mother that: "Women and children are a yardstick to measure a man's wealth!" (p.23) When his second wife disobeys him by going to visit her parents when he had refused, his reaction is according to pattern. He beats her thoroughly, until she cries for mercy; then he "led her to bed and ordered her to spread her legs wide apart, then spent a full month without visiting her bed chamber." (p.7)

Everything about Kyamanywa shows that he is a standard male chauvinist. This makes it difficult to understand why he decides to take his daughters to school; but he does, and this is in spite of the disapproval of his male village-mates. For Kasemiire's mother's however, the education of her daughters, especially Kasemiire, represents an opportunity to escape from the position in which fate had placed her as a woman in this society. Indeed, when the girl passes her primary leaving examinations very well, the mother's hopes are strengthened. Kasemiire would go to secondary school, get a good education, and later rescue her from her misery. But this required both the blessing and financial commitment of the husband. And yet she dared not raise the matter with Kyamanywa, because she knew for sure that he would bark at her (p.11). The power to

decide on financial matters lay with the man, and the woman had no say - a matter that Kyomuhendo keeps returning to in various parts of her work.

Kyomuhendo also tackles other features of male-female power relations, and simultaneously protests against the injustices inherent in the way they are taken for granted and further propagated. One such feature is the direct gender programming that young members of society are subjected to at a very early age. When Kasemiire, at the age of nine, has a fight with her brother Mugabi who is two years older, her mother does not listen to the reasons for the fight. She gives her daughter a very strong beating, and as she does so, she asks her: "Since when did women start beating men..." (p.21). So even when the woman has reason and opportunity to fight back, society says *women must not fight men*. What is even grimmer is that it is the women who enforce this "law" upon their daughters. It is the kind of programming from which children rarely recover. Caught in a situation like this, one can understand why Kasemiire's mother should look to another force, *education*, for liberation. One can also understand why the male members of this chauvinist society fear education as having the potential to make women "rebel," and will go out their way to deny them education.

Kyamanywa's decision to take Kasemiire to school, puzzling as it is, is a turning point both in the life of the family, and in the plot of the novel. Kasemiire herself is excited about school, and her mother looks at this development as a promise of liberation. This hope is raised even higher when she qualifies for secondary school. But the intricacies of male-female relations vis-à-vis the other realities of life make Kasemiire a victim of forces that are more powerful than her young mind can comprehend. She is brilliant and hard working, but falls victim to a naïve love relationship with her classmate. When she gets pregnant, her aspirations to higher education, and her mother's hopes for a better future are dashed. As in the case of Mary Okurut's Goora in The Invisible Weevil, Kyamanywa beats Kasemiire very severely for this betrayal, and her mother and younger sisters suffer as well. The mother suffers psychological torture, while the young girls are withdrawn from school because of Kasemiire's offence.

Kasemiire had a promise from Steven that he would marry her, but as a result of intrigue from her supposedly best friend, this promise does not materialise. So she goes through phases of suffering during which she experiences kindness and cruelty from both men and women. For example, there is the attempted rape by Mr. Mutyaba, a man she had come to respect as a father, and there is the humiliation by Mrs Mutyaba, who throws her out into the cold on the basis of an unverified report from the houseboy to the effect that she is sleeping with her man. What follows is a painful experience; and Kasemiire has to endure it in order to get the education that eventually enables her to become a lawyer. In addition to her academic achievements, her sufferings constitute learning experiences that harden and prepare her to face life in this bigoted society.

As fate would have it, Kasemiire and Steven later meet and get married. At the same time, the tables are turned on the cruel Mrs Mutyaba; her husband deserts her and marries a younger woman. By the end of the novel, Kasemiire is both empowered and happy with her husband, even though her dream of giving her mother life does not materialise. Her father, for his part, is a broken old man.

The protest voices in The First Daughter, which are characterized by constant finger-pointing against males, are set against a deeply rooted patriarchal socio-cultural

system. There is a powerful interplay of the experiences of men and women of different generations like Mukaaka (Kasemiire's grandmother), Ngonzi (Kasemiire's mother) and Kasemiire. They all relate differently to the system, whose definition of power tilts in favour of the male. The female characters in the work, such as Mukaaka, Ngonzi, Kasemiire, and even Mrs Mutyaba all experience forms of suffering that directly result from the way the system defines them, but their responses are dictated by their temporal entry points. The suffering experienced by women of the earlier generations, such as Kasemiire's mother, is extended to her daughters, but the changing times dictate that it takes a different pattern. By the time Kasemiire securely settles down, she has gone through terrible trials, the worst of which have a causal relationship to her being female. There is for example, the fact that while she has sex with Steven, she alone takes biological and social responsibility for it. The fact that her suffering is partly due to by a fellow female and supposed best friend Anita, seems to be of little consequence. Even her triumph over adversity, which in itself is quite symbolic, is marred by the death of her mother at a time when she would have wanted her to enjoy her success. But she is a winner where men like Kyamanywa are losers. Indeed, the contrast between the fates of both Kasemiire and Kyamanywa is part of the major point of the novel. Kyomuhendo seems to be suggesting that the power that men seem to hold can also be treacherous and illusionary, and it keeps them in a form of bondage out of which only the brave can break. The miserable image of Kyamanywa during his last encounter with Kasemiire is very illustrative. The contrast between Kasemiire, the fresh and confident graduate of law, and her now broken and tear-shedding father is the ultimate humiliation to the male sex:

"Who am I to forgive you?" he whispered, "I have done more wrongs than you have. Life has changed, I am a poor man now, no longer the harsh uncompromising and proud father I used to be."

He was sobbing quietly now. Kasemiire was moved. She had not expected her father to bend so low!

"Look, look what I have done to you, your sisters and your poor mother!" The man was actually crying openly now." Kasemiire did not know what to do, she could not comfort him, something had died inside her regarding this pathetic man who was supposed to be her father. They could never be close again.

"Go," he whispered, "go and comfort your miserable mother. Give her what she deserves in this world. I have no more to say." (P.128)

And when Kasemiire's mother dies, Kyamanywa weeps bitterly, blaming himself for killing her because of his poor treatment of her. Kyamanywa is now a very poor shadow of his former self, and it is tempting to say that he deserves it; but his show of remorse, together with the consideration that he at least sent Kasemiire to school while other men opposed it, should redeem him a little. But Kyomuhendo is not yet through with him.

Towards the end of the novel, news reaches the family members in the city that Kyamanywa has run away with someone's young wife, and this has caused the offended party to commit arson, killing the son of Kasemiire's sister in the fire. The offender is arrested, and he later takes his own life. The family of the deceased man swears to take revenge on anyone connected with Kyamanywa. In effect, Kyamanywa has made the whole of his family insecure. But the presentation of this whole episode is very problematic. When Kyamanywa was last seen on the pages of the book, he was a sick, broken old man waiting for his death - a kind of "man-ghost." He had deserted his family and was living with an old woman who had property. Why, the reader would ask, would any one's young wife suddenly want to run away with this propertyless "ghost," leaving behind her husband or other eligible young men? This may, of course, be possible, but this kind of development is completely out of step with the facts of the story as given to us earlier in the novel. It would therefore seem like Kyomuhendo is now witch-hunting Kyamanywa, seeking to make him a bigger devil than he already is. She seems determined to take revenge on Kyamanywa (and on the entire male sex?) for the suffering that Kasemiire has gone through. To achieve this, she even attempts to deny him the benefit of the remorse that she twice takes him through - at his last encounter with Kasemiire, and on the death of Kasemiire's mother. However, even if we accept the Kyamanywa that Kyomuhendo gives us, he is not a total loser. True, he begins as a proud authoritarian head of his home, and ends as a disgraced semi-ghost and wife-stealer, but he should at least be given some credit for having taken Kasemiire to school when all odds were against such a move. This suggests that bad as the prejudices against women in this society are, there are men with soft corners in their hearts, but who are trapped in the age-old complex web of traditional power relations, which has the capacity to destroy them, as it does Kyamanywa.

Alongside Kyamanywa, there are also female losers. Anita, Kasemiire's school-time friend and room-mate, who gets engaged to Kasemiire's lover by treachery, and Mrs Mutyaba, the woman who throws Kasemiire into the cold at a time when she most needed security, are demonstrations that vice is gender blind. They lose out both materially and morally. Anita dies disgraced and hated by Steven, and Mrs Mutyaba also looks quite pathetic when Kasemiire chance-encounters her towards the end of the novel, and has nothing to show for all the power she exercised when she endangered Kasemiire's life. It is this creation of both male and female losers that makes The First Daughter a sophisticated cry against a system that dehumanises both men and women. At the same time, the general finger-pointing against men as the unwitting beneficiaries of the system is also quite clear. The general view of the men in the text seems to be that women are second-class humans to them. Even educated ones like Mutyaba do not differ much from the uneducated Kyamanywas because they all think of women as solely intended for their sexual pleasure. There is of course, Steven, the blameless and ever constant lover of Kasemiire that is the victim of Anita's manipulation. But from the artistic point of view, Steven represents the weakest point of Kyomuhendo's novel. He sounds too much of Mr. Right, like one of those immaculate handsome males in the folktales of the Banyoro who emerge from pythons or trees, marry the suffering girl, and they live happily thereafter. His only possible fault is the unforgiving ruthlessness with which he has come to regard Anita even after her death, as is shown in the disgust that he shows towards kasemiire for

mourning her. But even this is prompted by his undying love for Kasemiire. He is too good to be real, and is clearly intended as an example for the "bad guys" to emulate. However, he fails to emerge from the shadows. Kyamanywa, with all his failings (and probably because of them), is more convincing as a literary character.

Sex and the Male-Female Power Game

Secrets No More is set in turbulent world of the Rwanda genocide of the 1990s. Out of this general societal tragedy, Kyomuhendo curves the personal tragedy of Marina, the Rwandan child whose entire family is exterminated during the genocide. She escapes into neighbouring Uganda, and is lucky to come under the protective custody of an Italian priest. But while she left the genocide behind, other dangers continue to stare at her. In the immediate run, these dangers take the form of the sexual aggression of Matayo, who changes the entire course of her life from that which Father Marcel was planning for her. The rape scene in which Matayo takes Marina's virginity is horrifying, both for the pain that Marina experiences and for the injustice that it represents, especially when looked at against the background of the experiences she has just gone through. And yet, more misery is to follow when this encounter with Matayo results into a pregnancy. After giving birth, Marina runs away to the city, leaving her child under the custody of the Italian priest. In the city, Marina hopes to bury her past experiences and start life anew. But this is not to be. Her experience with Matayo numbed her, and makes her unable to enjoy a sexual relationship with her husband George and this partly contributes to her adulterous misadventure with Dee.

Unlike The First Daughter in which there is an attempt to evenly represent the faults of both men and women, Secrets No More takes a sterner view of the male sex. Genocide is placed at the doorstep of the males, in spite of the fact that women like Chantal are accomplices in acts of genocide. Men are also responsible for the subsequent woes that afflict Marina after she has escaped the genocide. The soldiers rape Marina's mother in the presence of her father and other children, to humiliate the Tutsi, and this has a lasting psychological impact on Marina. Matayo rapes Marina, and thus denies her the opportunity to recover from the original shock, and in future sex largely becomes a form of torture, making her unable to properly relate to the male sex (including her husband George), until her encounter with Dee. The Matayo rape also cuts short her educational career, and thus denies her the empowerment that education brings into the lives of girls like Kasemiire and Hero.

The directness with which Kyomuhendo writes about sex, which is traditionally a taboo subject among her people, is likely to cause many eyebrows to rise. Indeed, it is the one point on which she has had to defend herself. Responding to comments that her work had obscene scenes, Kyomuhendo accuses her critics of chauvinist bias because "you get sex scenes in male writers too, and nobody ever considers them obscene."⁹ On this point, Kyomuhendo is partly right. Descriptions of sex are not new in Ugandan literature. In Alan Taca's The Silent Rebel, sex is present on many pages. Particularly memorable is the use of it as an instrument of the terror machine, in the scene in which Mrs Lamo is raped before she is killed together with her husband. What is unique about Kyomuhendo's descriptions is the attention to detail, and in the case of the sex scene between Marina and Dee, the apparent invitation to the reader to enjoy it.¹⁰

Whatever the attitude one takes towards Kyomuhendo's sex scenes, they each represent different aspects of the message of the work. The first scene in which Marina's mother is raped represents sex as a tool of organised and systematic torture and humiliation. The soldier does not rape merely because he wants to satisfy an individual sexual urge. Bizimana must watch while Colonel Renzaho rapes his wife, and this is part of the wider point of the genocide. And as the Colonel "pounds" at Marina's mother, he is assisted by some of the junior officers who hold her down. It is of course intriguing that under these circumstances, Kyomuhendo should attend to the details of the soldier's sexual movements, but of greater significance is the impact of the scene on young Marina's mind. She is to remember it later at the time when Matayo rapes her.

In the second sex scene, Matayo rapes Marina in response to a spontaneous sexual urge under the influence of alcohol; but looked at in the broader framework of patriarchy as a system the rape is a symbolic demonstration of the extent of female vulnerability. From Kyomuhendo's description of the Matayo-Marina sex scene, the rape is not pre-meditated. It is only after the event that he "seemed to wake up from his stupor and realises what he had just done" (p 57). But the damage has been done, and it is both physical and psychological. The two acts of rape, while equally reprehensible, make separate comments on both human nature and social order. On the one hand, there is this married woman that is raped in the full view of both her family and cheering soldiers – as part of a wider socio-political conflict. This episode presents human nature at its lowest moral ebb. On the other hand, there is this young girl that has gone through so much suffering, and has now acquired a certain degree of stability in her life. Then her sense of security is suddenly shattered in this rude reminder that the rules of the game are not the same for both men and women.

Marina married George in search of both company and security, but somehow she fails to get over the sexual inhibition that the two previous rapes have imposed on her. She therefore does not experience sex as part of the marriage package, and George constantly complains about this. But there is nothing Marina can do about it.

The third scene in which Marina freely cooperates and enjoys sex with Dee is presented against the background of the rules of social order that married people, especially women, are subjected to. Marina is a married woman, and her involvement in extra-marital sex is an act of adultery that would be condemned or at least frowned upon in many societies. Whatever one may say about this sex scene however, it is a new experience for Marina, as it presents the other side of sex - an exciting form of human contact in which two human beings can consent to celebrate one of the marvels of creation. But it is also clear from Kyomuhendo's work that if sex is not handled with care, it has the potential to place the woman in unworthy hands. While Dee appeals to the body, he is the kind of character that no serious woman would consider for a life's partner. And in preferring to marry the sexually unpromising Mr Magezi at the end of the novel, as against Dee who gave her sexual pleasure, Marina chooses social security and psychological tranquility for herself and her daughter, as against sensual pleasure. She also seems to say that she has "seen it all" in its various forms – the rape of her mother, the rape of herself, and the fugitive but pleasurable sex with Dee. Given the extent to which she enjoyed the sex with Dee, the decision is a remarkable act of self-denial, but it

is also a rejection of the politics of sexual control. If she were to take the decision basing on a promise of sexual excitement, she should have gone with Dee, but this would have made her a sexual object with little or no security. So while Marina does not have the advantage of the education that Kasemiire has in The First Daughter, her experiences sufficiently empower her to make the more beneficial decision under the circumstances.

Character as Destiny: Art and the Process of Psychological Empowerment

Violet Barungi, who sometimes writes under the pen name of Hope Maya, is the author of two novels - The Shadow and the Substance and Cassandra. In addition, she has written a play entitled Over My Dead Body, and is also the author of several short stories such as "Kefa Kazaana", "Kenda", and "The Man in the Basket". The two novels are her major literary achievements, even though the play, Over My Dead Body, is also quite topical and forceful in its exploration of the relationship between men, women and the changing world.

The Shadow and the Substance is the story of a naïve college girl called Rose, who gets herself entangled into a web of complex human relations and emotions. She has a regular boyfriend called Mike, a fellow student at college, and is comfortable with him until a wealthy, charming but playboyish older man comes along and rocks her world. Patrick Rumanyika (or Ricky as the older man is popularly known) is, by his own confession, "not serious about her" (p.28), but she is powerfully attracted to him. In her own words, a touch from him "wrecks havoc" on her. This attraction blossoms into an erotic affair that turns out to be only a preamble to a wholesome menu of romance, jealousy, intrigue and tragedy that dominates the novel.

Mike, Rose's regular boyfriend, is quiet and serious about life, and is deeply in love with her. After meeting Ricky, she realises that Mike does not physically attract her as Ricky does, but she is aware of his inherent goodness as a person. This creates a lot of confusion for her, because she wants to have the inherent goodness of one and also enjoy the physical attraction of the other. So she begins her story on a note of despair that reflects her inner confusion, as reflected in the following words:

Mike was really a good boy and I liked him very much, oh why couldn't life be simple? Why did loving Ricky mean hurting Mike? Why couldn't I keep both of them? (p.18)

In this state of mind, she ends up having sex with both of them on the same day. First, she sleeps with Mike in a state of atonement and confusion after he nearly catches her with Ricky in her room. And later she spends the night with Ricky at his home after a day out. But rather than solve her problems, the double sex only intensifies her inner confusion, and she says so in her narrative:

But the truth was that I was more disgusted with myself. What kind of a person rushed from one man's arms into another's just like that? (p.19)

Unknown to her, her struggle with the invisible forces of life that involve the male sex is just beginning, and will continue throughout the novel.

At about the same time, Ricky has a sexual relationship with a beautiful but spiteful girl called Florence, who publicly passes for his sister. From the time of their first meeting, a feud develops between the two girls, even though its real nature does not come to light until much later. When Rose discovers that Ricky has a sexual relationship with his "sister," she takes the immediate decision to terminate her relationship with him. From that time onwards, she decides to lead the life of a recluse, until one day, she is persuaded by her friend Joyce to come out of this life and try to repair her social life. As fate would have it, it is on the day she decides to go out to see a film with Mike that Ricky makes contact with her again, and then dies moments later in a car crash.

The real drama of the story begins after the death of Ricky, Rose's older lover, which sparks off a chain of events. First, Rose collapses and passes out for several days when she learns of the death of Ricky, while Mike, "the lover she does not love so much," diligently looks after her. Secondly, she has to struggle with the ready-made situation that makes her beholden to Mike who has sacrificed so much to save her life, as well as cope with the emotions related to the death of Ricky. While Mike is physically present and very helpful and understanding, the spell of the dead Patrick Rumanyika lives with her and makes her unable to settle into a proper relationship with Mike. Even when she eventually marries Mike, the ghost of Ricky will not go away.

The lives of Rose and Mike are projected centre-stage in the novel, but they are surrounded by those of friends, contemporaries and the wider families from both sides. It is in the creation of a strong circle of relationships, and having them impact on the lives of the major characters and on the central theme of the novel, that the real power of The Shadow and the Substance lies. Joyce, Rose's close friend, seems to have a steady relationship with Andrew, but it ends in tragedy. Andrew runs away from Joyce because she is so motherly and bossy, and with a wife like her, in Mike's words, "the poor blighter would not have been able to call his soul his own" (p...66). In terms of the plotting of the novel, it is the desertion of Joyce by Andrew that later brings back Florence into Rose's life, when Andrew marries her and returns to become Mike's partner in the clinic business. Later still, when the marriage between Andrew and Florence fails, Andrew starts a relationship with Robinah Olimi, the secretary in Mike and Andrew's clinic, who has a lot of respect for Rose and turns to her for advice about the relationship. Mary Mbagwa, Rose's other friend, marries George Muloki, who is a former boyfriend to Florence. This strengthens the alliance between Rose and Mary, since they are jointly threatened by Florence, with whom they have both shared a man in the past. At the same time, Clement, Mary's brother, has a special interest in Rose, and Mary attempts to encourage it, even though it does not materialise. Clement eventually marries a white girl, and this introduces us to the other side of Mary Muloki (formerly Mbagwa). She seemed to be such a strong voice of commonsense in the novel that it is quite shocking that she should reject Clement's wife simply because of her skin colour. The other couples in the novel, such as Lucy and Stanley Ario, Esta and Martin, the Joseph Odimis, John and Diana Nkongwe, Dr and Mrs Muddu, as well as other members of this closed ultra-western educated Christian middle class Ugandan society such as Dr. Olweny and the maverick Anne Kigoye (cousin of Joyce) and Peter Okidi, are all part of the web of relations whose social adventures and misadventures Barungi explores with keen attention to social detail.¹¹

On the sidelines of the Kampala circle of relationships are the village-based families from which both Rose and Mike originate. We constantly get a glimpse of them when relatives visit from the village or when our principle characters travel to the countryside. The information we acquire from these occasional contacts provides very important insights into the characters of both Rose and Mike. Significantly for example, it is when Rose and Mike go to the village to bury Mike's mother that we learn that Mike has a child by another woman; and this child is later to play an important role in revealing aspects of both Rose's and Mike's character. We also learn that Mike decided to do medicine because his father died during an operation, and this is also the reason why his mother will not agree to be operated on. We also learn about the silent crisis between Rose and her mother, because Rose resents her mother's excessive fussing. Apart from these and one or two other highlights the major action of the novel is played out in Kampala. But the village part of the characters' lives forms an important component of the general environment within which the drama of the novel is played out.

It is within this wider environment that the very personal emotional struggle between Rose and Mike, on the one hand, and between them and their pasts on the other, is placed. Their struggle is also, in a very subtle way, a struggle between the sexes. In the relationship between Rose and Mike, it is Rose who seems to be in the greater confusion, since she is the one that has to come to terms with the idea of having two lovers - even after one of them has died. On the surface, Mike seems to be a simple male that is unfortunate enough to love a woman that loves someone else. But closer examination of his character shows that he is a complex character. He is capable of profound love and patience, as is demonstrated by his performance as he waits for Rose to get over her ordeal. But he is also a closed character whose inner emotions are hardly accessible even to those that are closest to him. When these bottled-up emotions explode - and they do so a couple of times on the pages - they make him a formidable character that would make any person, and especially his wife, hold him in great awe. Because of this aspect of his personality, Rose often refrains from answering back directly, even when she wishes to disagree, and is left to grumble alone, as in the following words:

I hated it when Mike acted the Lord of manor. You do this, you do that, who was he to order me about? (p.98)

And yet this was the very question she dared not ask him to his face. Episodes that involve jealousy and anger leave Rose even more powerless. An example is when Rose unconsciously calls out her dead lover's name while in the act of love with Mike. She tries to make amends by touching him in a conciliatory gesture, but he flings her hand violently away and says to her:

"Don't touch me, you ghost lover," he hissed through his clenched teeth.
 "There is a limit to how much one can take from anybody, and I've had all I can take from you, Rose. If you can't see the difference between the living and the dead, then I am sorry for you. Why didn't you end it together that night? You look surprised, no wonder you didn't know that that I knew that you had sneaked out of the theatre to meet him, did you?"

He glared at me, his face contorted with jealousy and hatred. I shrank away in fear and for a long time after he had left the room, I remained in the same position, bereft of all emotion, my eyes staring vacantly into space.

The image of the formidable Dr. Mike Ngombe hovers over the entire novel, as he unwittingly intimidates all women characters, and is even a little feared by his fellow males. Andrew, his close friend and colleague, dares not confide in him over his extra-marital affair with Robinah Olimi, the Secretary in their clinic, and even observes that Rose is his (Mike's) only weakness. His wife, Rose, often has to shrink away in fear or to appease or mollify him. Episodes such as the above, in which Mike's emotions explode place a lot of strain on both Rose as a person and the marriage itself. And yet, paradoxically, they are a vital part of the latent power struggle between men and women that runs through the novel, and they make Mike a winning player in the male team.

The women, however, also have their say. Rose's friend Mary takes marriage in her stride. To her,

Marriage is an understanding between two consenting adults guaranteed by their mutual love and respect. For those whose guarantee falls through, there is always divorce. In my case I don't think that situation will ever arise (p.75-6)

Mary believes in playing on male frivolities and using the right "techniques" to make a husband feel "a man." She knows when to assert her rights, when to withdraw, and always avoids "hitting below the belt." When Rose has a crisis in her marriage, she goes to Mary for help, and she gives her a piece of feminine commonsense. She says to her:

"... go after him in the only way which never fails and he'll be eating out of your hands in no time ... a man can do anything for you, or at least promise to if caught at the right time ... make him make love to you, I don't care how you do it but do it ... (p.116)

Contrary to images of the man as the perpetual dominant partner in the male-female relationships, such as those described by Okurut, Kyomuhendo and Ayeta Wangusa, the drama in The Shadow and the Substance is a constant battle for control from either side - using different techniques. Indeed, reference has already been made to the relationship between Andrew and Joyce in which Andrew decides to flee to Britain to escape from the domineering and mothering personality of his fiancée.

The animosity between Rose and Florence starts as a woman-to-woman rivalry. But it soon graduates into an exposition of fundamental evil in the human being, and it also plays an important role in the empowerment of Rose as a character that can even stand to Mike. When Florence returns from Britain with Andrew as her husband, it is clear that she is set to continue her earlier feud with Rose with the ultimate intention of breaking Rose's marriage. It is with such a scheme in mind that she brings Paul, Ricky's brother, to Rose's home to conjure up images of Rose's dead lover - and she succeeds.

But Mary tells Rose to put on a brave face and call the bluff. Rose however has not yet learnt to be tough. Later we see her getting tougher and tougher in her dealings with Florence and this in turn boosts her self-confidence as she deals with her husband. By the time Florence leaves for Britain, the Rose we see talking to Mike is a different one from the Rose we knew earlier, and this leaves Mike in total wonder. It is in this sense that the personality of Florence helps to empower Rose in her relationship with Mike.

The broad variety of characters that Barungi creates in this novel enables her to tackle different understandings of life. And in the interaction of these characters, are undercurrents of a power struggle of a very unique kind - a struggle in which the management of human feelings is key to the exposing of the strengths and limitations of both male and female players in this grim melodrama.

Violet Barungi's other novel, Cassandra, confronts issues of inter-gender power struggle in a broader sense. The main character, Cassandra, is determined right from the start, to take the male-dominated society and its rules head on. She is independent-minded and ambitious, and wishes to make something of her life "without being beholden to men", as she puts it (p.13). In order to fulfill her ambitions, she tries to avoid getting involved with men. The author tells us:

"She was committed to making something worthwhile of her life and if she allowed anybody or anything to interfere with that commitment, she would end up like thousands of other women, behind a kitchen sink and a line of dripping nappies. Men were the reason why the majority of women were still lagging behind in social economic and political development. Once you allowed a man into your life, it was goodbye to ambitions of meaningful existence." (p.3)

The above commitment is the backdrop against which the author presents the trials that Cassandra goes through as she confronts the grim realities of life in a society with heavily gendered social structures. Later in the story, we are told that

"Cassandra belonged to the new feminine breed which liked nothing better than crossing swords with fascist males." (p.142)

But the forces that she has to confront are enormous and have historical roots, and not all the women share her views. Marie is good-natured and wishes Cassandra well. But she is concerned that in spite of the odds that they as women have to face, her friend is going about it the wrong way. She regards as foolhardy Cassandra's project of aggressively confronting the male world and attempting to change the rules by which the power games are played. She therefore advises her friend to take a course in Natural Law and History of Creation. She then elaborates:

Men are not women's enemies, Cassandra, they're their allies. The two're meant to complement each other, not to collide or counteract each other's moves. We cook for them and bear their children, and boost their egos and

they pamper us and sweeten us up by spending on us. Wise up girl and take what's your due or you'll end up an embittered old maid." (p.13)

This kind of advice, coming from a well-meaning and reliable friend, tends to complicate the odds that Cassandra is up against, but she is fighter.

In Cassandra, violet Barungi creates a character that has not been seen before on the pages of Ugandan literature. She is beautiful and therefore fits into the general stereotype of the beautiful heroine, but she is also strong-willed and independent-minded. People as close to her as her sister Melinda and her mother even consider her arrogant. However, Cassandra has deep-set emotional weaknesses that greatly surprise and even please other characters when they surface. When she embraces Tonia, her brother's bride, she is described as stepping out of character (p.85). Significantly also, she sometimes finds herself helpless in the face of inter-gender power complications, and has to uncharacteristically resort to tears. She is reduced to such a situation by a confrontation between her lover Raymond and his former wife Belinda. It is in this state of utter helplessness that she first meets Samantha, in a washroom. Samantha correctly assumes that behind the tears, there is a man. She therefore instinctively offers her the advice below:

You don't have to let him know that he has that much power over you. Never let a man know that he is the beginning and end of everything for you. ... They are bad enough without our going out of our way to inflate their egos. (p.44)

The softer side of Cassandra also surfaces when her sister Melinda loses her husband. She sets everything else aside and stands by her, and is the epitome of the compassion that Melinda needs to survive the storm of Horace's death (p.67-8). Also, she later breaks down and cries when her mother gives her the hard mother's talk on the subject of getting emotionally involved with a married man. But all this is nothing compared to the way her feelings for Raymond shake her. In her desire for Raymond, she literally throws herself at George and as good as begs him to make love to her. Later that same night, she brushes aside Raymond's scruples and prevails over him to break her virginity, and thereby usher in a relationship that is to prove quite turbulent for her.

Her relationship with Raymond Agutamba is the beginning of a serious education process that crudely awakens her to other realities of life. Her world begins to undergo a transformation, and she watches with bewilderment as her youthful emotions place her under the control of another human being. Her happiest moments are when she is with Raymond, and in his company, she is a dark outline of her strong-willed self. At this rate, it was becoming increasingly possible for Cassandra to "end up like thousands of other women, behind a kitchen sink and a line of dripping nappies." But as fate would have it, the very house where she experienced so much bliss is where the pain begins when reveals to Raymond that she is pregnant. Raymond is convinced that she has been seeing another man since it was medically established that he can not father a child; whereas on her part, Cassandra is convinced that Raymond is the only man she has been to bed with. This confusion inevitably leads to their estrangement.

The pain and confusion that the separation from Raymond causes is also a great trial on Cassandra's character strength. It is a marvel that she manages it quietly, and even continues to perform at her place of work, albeit with great difficulty. Also, her fighter spirit is not diminished by her emotional turmoil. This is evident in her confrontation with the doctor who suggests that she terminates the pregnancy (p.146-7), and with Raymond over the fatherhood of the baby (p.165-169).

In addition to Cassandra's emotional turbulence, the novel also deals with several problematic issues in the social and economic power relations between men and women. Much of this debate takes place on the outlines of Cassandra's career path, but it is also easy for the reader to sort out the very general issues that Barungi is presenting for debate, independent of the perceptions of Cassandra the character. While it is possible to accept the male dominance of senior positions at Lotus International where Cassandra works, it is also impossible not to notice the sexual power politics that play themselves out on a daily basis. When Cassandra joins Lotus International, she immediately becomes the target of the elderly Mr. Wakilo who wants to exploit her sexually. He plans to include her on a team that was to go to Nairobi for a working trip, which was one of his known traps for young female workmates that he wanted to seduce. Cassandra is advised about this, and she manages to get out of it by using the death of a relative as an excuse to avoid the trip. But she is advised that he will soon try again; and in order to be safe from him, she has to team up with someone male that would be perceived as her lover. This would keep off predators like Mr. Wakilo. When Mr. Wakilo goes for further studies, he is replaced as Chief Editor by Mr Ndiwalala; and when Ndiwalala absconds into self exile, Collin Kiiza is promoted to his position. Cassandra considered her work to be just as good as that of Collin, if not better; but she accepts his promotion with good grace, since as Senior Editor, Collin was already a step ahead of her anyway. However, both Cassandra and other members of the publishing firm were not prepared for the shock that follows. It was obvious to everybody that Cassandra should move into the position of senior editor, which had just been vacated by Collin. To everybody's surprise, a completely new man is brought in from outside to become Cassandra's boss.

It was bad enough that Cassandra had to devise means of fighting off unwanted amorous advances of the likes of Mr. Wakilo, and to suffer the humiliation of being denied promotion when she merited it. But she was even more angry that Juliet, whom she despised for her culture of sleeping her way upwards, should treat her with constant animosity because she regarded her as a threat in the competition for Mr. Wakilo's attentions. It is her friend Marie who puts the whole thing in perspective for her in the following words:

These office intrigues go on every day, every where in the country, if not in the world and there is nothing you can do about them ... (p.16)

The fact that a person of Cassandra's strong-mindedness has to attach herself to some male so as to discourage unwanted advances tells a very grim story indeed. So without realizing it, she begins to concede that indeed the rules of the game are not the same; at least not yet. But she must survive the present to be able to fight in the future.

The humiliation that Cassandra suffers in being passed over for promotion, in favour of a total stranger, forces even the more mild Marie to open her eyes to the depth of the problem of gendered discrimination. It is in a state of utter frustration that she gives voice to the question that is on everybody's mind: "what could have made the committee disregard Cassandra's abilities?" (p.184). She then puts the whole episode in a broader picture through the following observation:

... as a woman the odds were against you from right from the beginning
... a man always starts out with advantages over a woman. The
interviewers are almost always men and it stands to reason that they would
favour their own kind. (p.184)

The decision by the committee to sideline Cassandra proves to be the firm's undoing; for it is after that that Cassandra and Marie decide to quit and start their own publishing company. But the lesson that it delivers is significant.

There are several other reference points in the power debate, which reference points make a collective statement about the nature of the inter-gender power struggle, and also highlight the odds that confront Cassandra and others with similar determination to change the rules of the gender power game. First, we have the seductive macho males like Raymond Agutamba who look at women in terms of how regularly they can make "easy conquests" (201). Speaking about Raymond Agutamba in particular, Melinda, Cassandra's sister observes that every woman in town below the age of seventy knows about him. His brother, Bevis, is the very opposite of him. He is an introvert, that is as reminiscent of Dr Mike Ngombe in The Shadow and the Substance as Raymond Agutamba is of Patrick Rumanyika. Bevis loves Cassandra deeply, and has done so for a long time; and this adds to the complications in Cassandra's situation. At the beginning of the novel, she wanted to keep all men at arms distance, but she ends being pursued by two brothers, and is powerless to ward them off. In the end she gets pregnant and is uncertain about which brother is responsible. The fact is that there are too many forces at play in Cassandra's life, and sometimes they threaten to overwhelm her. That is why it takes her far too long to realize that she was always up in arms against Bevis because there was a strong force pulling them together, which force is later responsible for the child they produce (p.225). And even after they have had a child, she continues to fight, and in one of her fighting moods, she tells him:

"In my scheme of things, there is no place for a husband, let alone one
encumbered with the name Agutamba" (p.186).

Ironically, it is at a time when she almost loses him to Byensi's bullet that she realizes how much he meant to her. As Marie observed, Cassandra needed lessons in natural law, and Barungi carefully guides her through them.

While Okurut and Kyomuhendo deal with the situation of women in broader contexts such as those of national and even global conflict, Barungi concentrates on interpersonal power struggles between males and females. The closest that she comes to

involvement with the wider eco-political issues in society is in the incidental complaints of characters like Esta in The Shadow and the Substance about the poor Doctors pay, and the mismanagement of the country by men (p.92-93). Nor does she overtly tackle general social issues in the way that Okurut does in Child of a Delegate or Kyomuhendo in Secrets No More. She concentrates on personalities and personal relationships, out of which the wider societal power evolves. She is however quite effective in demonstrating that the macro conflicts that she deals with lie at the heart of the debate on the evil of gender discrimination.

The odds against the female writers are many, not least among them being the age-old system of patriarchy that defines both men and women differently. In the face of these odds, it would seem like the women writers are attempting an impossible task. But their writings offer the reading public new and refreshing experiences that were hitherto unfamiliar in readings of Ugandan literature. In the first instance, they help to straighten the record in the face of some of the previous writing (by men), which had painted the picture of an all male society. This they do by introducing to the literary scene several female characters, playing leading roles. Secondly, they attack established stereotypes and injustices in the society in a manner that has not been attempted in Ugandan literature before. Issues of brutality against women, as in the literature by Kyomuhendo, Wangusa and Okurut are firmly placed on the discussion table. Thirdly, they make an effective power bid. The explorations of character psychology, such as those done by Barungi, and the creation of empowered female characters such as Okurut's Hero and Kyomuhendo's Kasemiire, are direct statements about the world that women writers envisage for the Uganda in which gender equity and equality reign. Through all the works studied in this article, and others not studied, the protest against gender inequity and inequality is as loud as the power bid (on behalf of women) is clear. By being so purposeful in their writing, Ugandan women writers have made a significant contribution to the mission of empowering society to eliminate discriminatory practices against women.

Notes

¹ The metaphor used in the title of the book is derived from a proverb in the Luganda language which runs as follows:

Enseera ne bw'eyiga okukokolima, esigala nga y'erina okubiika amagi n'okugaalula

Translation: *Even when the hen learns to crow, it still has to lay the eggs and to hatch them.*

² Barbara Kimenye is one of the earliest Ugandan fiction writers. She is the author of Kalasanda and Kalasanda Revisited, published in the mid 1960s. She has also written several short stories, some of which are set in Kenya where she worked for a long time as a journalist with Daily Nation. This explains why she is often assumed to be a Kenyan. Elvania Zirimu is the author of a play entitled Keeping up with the Mukasas, and she also wrote several plays before her death in 1980. Grace Akelo is the author of My Barren Song, in addition to compiling a very valuable collection of folktales from Teso entitled Iteso Thought Patterns in Tales. Jane Bakaluba's is the author of the very intriguing work Honeymoon for Three, whose excitement begins with the title. Honeymoon for Three In several compilations of country bibliographies, these writers are often inexplicably left out.

³ Godfrey Kalimugogo's Pilgrimage to Nowhere does not have a female character at all; and in other works by the same author, such as The Department, the female characters that are featured are assigned such inconsequential roles as tea girls. In Peter Nazareth's In a Brown Mantle, there is the prostitute whom Chota pays for no work done, there is the sad picture of Pius wife mourning her husband, there is the adulterous Mrs Gomes and the demunitive Maria Numes with whom Chota has a brief affair – none of these characters is really of any consequence. The picture in The General is Up is not very different. Likewise, the images of the women in Davis Sebukima's Son of Kabira and The Half-Brothers are neither instrumental in the events nor independent in their thinking. In Robert Serumaga's Return to the Shadows, the women characters are the subjects of sexual battering by men, and they do not seem to develop beyond that. Even Okot P'Bitek's Lawino is controversial. While she is articulate and intelligent, there are many instances where she seems to be singing a male song given to her by the author.

⁴ The oral literature of the Ugandan people occurs against the background of an age old social system that defines both men and women differently, and even constrains their views of the world. This system partly reproduces itself in this very literary production. In the case of oral literature, many scholars have observed that it is used to define the space of both men and women, in a way that marginalises women. Recent scholarly reaction to the oral literature that is perceived to be "anti-women" has been very articulate in its condemnation of it. (See Chesaina (1994), Kabira (1993 & 1994) and Mugambi 1994:48)

⁵ Kimenye is author of The Modern African Vegetable Cookbook, 1997.

⁶ The Baganda of central Uganda have had a kingdom for many centuries, probably 12 centuries. In 1894, the British government imposed colonial over a vast land in this region, and included this kingdom within one political structure that was eventually called Uganda. The British ruled the Baganda through their king in a system of indirect rule. In the 1962 constitution under which Uganda was given independence, the kingdom of Buganda was given a federal status, while other kingdoms in Western Uganda such as Tooro got a semi-federal status. The other parts of Uganda were administered directly by the central government. In 1965/66, a crisis erupted between the central government (led by Prime Minister Milton Obote) and the Kingdom of Buganda (led by Edward Mutesa) who was both the Kabaka (King) of Buganda and the ceremonial president of Uganda. He was exiled to Britain, where he later died in 1969. Since that time, Uganda has had a turbulent political climate, sporadically interrupted by short phases of peace.

⁷ Eliesha Lema defines patriarchy as follows:

It is a social system which has defined how men and women will relate in all spheres of life, including private life, right down to the way we love and have sex. It has determined how father, brother, husband, uncle will treat the woman - the wife, sister, mother and daughter related to them. It is an ideology that has given the man the authority to decide, to act, to give or with-hold, to access or retain anything ... It is complex. It is a web in which, ultimately, even those privileged can become victims ... (Lema 2001:182)

⁸ Okurut is aware of the other factors responsible for children coming onto the street, such in-family cruelty and violence, poverty, HIV/AIDS, ethnic conflict, war, famine etc. She refers to these factors in general terms in various parts of her work, but creates the impression that prostitution is almost entirely responsible for the street-children phenomenon.

⁹ From a biographical note of Goretti Kyomuhendo on the website: <http://www.internationales-literaturfestival-berlin.de/>

¹⁰ If one of the aims of Kyomuhendo's work is to empower young girls, it may have a counter productive effect. In countries like Uganda where the reading culture is still weak, the school is still the most reliable access that authors have to the young reader and to the market. The inclusion of detailed sex scenes makes

the work a very likely target for censorship. The result is that it will not get to the young reader, and it will miss out on a very important part of the market. This has been one of the problems of Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah, whose books have a very liberal allowance of sex descriptions, and have thus been kept out of school syllabi in many countries.

¹¹ Barungi's range of characters comprises of educated Christian Ugandans, and the society she creates is therefore closed to the less educated, the poor and those of other religions. One reading the novel would not even guess that there are any Muslims in the environment. For example, when they are organising a party to welcome Andrew and his wife, Rose suggests that they buy soft drinks for tee-tottlers, and Mike asks: "Are there any tee-tottlers left?" (p.97).

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