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Contemporary Art in Uganda: A Nexus between Art and Politics

Angelo Kakande

Volume 1: Text

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Contemporary Art in Uganda: A Nexus between Art and Politics

Abstract

The nexus between Uganda's contemporary art and politics forms the overarching theme of this thesis. The trajectory of Uganda's contemporary art as a political expression has been retraced. The different political dispensations which have shaped Uganda's political art have been analysed. The political postures and visual symbols Uganda's contemporary artists have engaged have been analysed in the context of the wider socio-political discussions which have shaped, and been shaped by, the country. It has been contended that different political epochs have invited response from Uganda's artists since the early-1940s. Whereas this debate has been attempted by varied scholars, it has not been rigorously pursued. Formalist discourses seeking to prioritise formal aesthetics have been engaged; conclusions that after 1986 contemporary Ugandan art[ists] became apolitical have been made. With emphasis on two contemporary artists—Fred Kato Mutebi and Bruno Sserunkuuma—this formalist reading has been decentred; the socio-political relevance of Uganda's contemporary art has been retraced and prioritised. It has been argued that although initially depoliticised through colonial modernity, Uganda's contemporary artists have been sensitive to the socio-political conditions affecting their space and time; issues of governance and service delivery have preoccupied them albeit in different but often complementary ways.

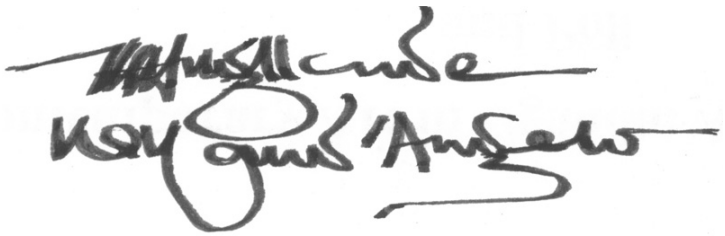
Keywords:

Art and Politics, Bruno Sserunkuuma, Contemporary Ugandan Art, Fred Mutebi, Makerere Art School

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Signed:



……

Angelo KAKANDE

On this **29th** day of **May**, 20**08**

Dedicated to Amanda

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Chapter One

Introduction

In 1992 the President of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, officially launched an exhibition of contemporary Ugandan art in Vienna, Austria. Although its archive is not accessible, Alexander Calder and Joseph Kivubiro posted a review of the show on the internet[1]. In their review Calder and Kivubiro suggest that the show celebrated Uganda's re-entry into the global art market and paradigm. We learn from their essay that two artists, Geoffrey Mukasa and Fabian Mpagi, presented their paintings at the exhibition. We also read that President Museveni made the following remarks about the exhibition:

> As those destructive years have regrettably shown, art cannot flourish in a situation plagued with terror and human indifference. Peace and security has returned to our country. We have gone a long way to encourage the revival of arts. The fine works exhibited are a vivid testimony that art has come to life again in Uganda. Certainly, both the public and the critics will recognize that Uganda has taken up her place in the world of modern art. It is an opportune moment for us to portray through these paintings a promising new picture of the "New Uganda".[2]

Unfortunately Fabian Mpagi died in 2001 and his oeuvre was subsequently scattered. Mukasa is, however, still active and I have seen some of his works. Mukasa graduated from Lucknow University, in India (1980–1984). After graduating he worked briefly with Uganda Television before resorting to full-time painting. Little information about Mukasa's early works is available. He has, however, explored the same themes and modernist style he did in the early-1990s. For example although he did his *Sitting Lady* (1994; plate 1) six years before he did his *Nude* (2000; plate 2), the two paintings are thematically and stylistically close. In 1993 Mukasa did his *Self in the Market* (1993; plate 3), a painting that portrays a busy market on a brilliant day. The

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[1] See: Calder Alexander and Kivubiro Joseph, *Uganda's International Art Renaissance*. http://www.theartroom-sf.com/essay14.htm (accessed November 2, 2006).

[2] President Yoweri Museveni's statement, cited by Alexander Calder and Kivubiro Joseph, *Uganda's International Art Renaissance.* http://www.theartroom-sf.com/essay14.htm (accessed November 2, 2006).

artist depicts figures whose youthfulness, energy, luminosity and modern fashion elicit freshness and vitality. His frugal application of colour renders his work transparent; his use of masks evokes a semblance of a ritualised procession: a performance. However, the mood in the painting, compared to the morbid themes, especially of the seventies and early-eighties (which we will see in chapter six), signals advancement and progress. If this painting was intended as a continuation of the themes Mukasa presented in Vienna, then it could be argued that the President was right to suggest that the exhibition reflected a new political dispensation — a "New Uganda". It was different from the oppositional art of the seventies and early-eighties; it was a testimony to a new lease of life in Uganda's modern art.

The "New Uganda" took shape after the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took power on January 26, 1986. The NRM captured power after a protracted guerrilla war against a largely unpopular Obote regime. It successfully implemented economic, social and political reforms and is currently still in power. However, the NRM's reform programme has not been without challenges. President Museveni himself wrote about these challenges in his *What is Africa's Problem* (1992) and *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Uganda* (1997)[3]. Both books, alongside Museveni's discussions through the local and international press, essays, speeches and pamphlets, have catalogued the NRM's history, successes and, most importantly, failures. The split of the NRM itself in 1999 can be attributed to these failures; they also ended the NRM's no-party[4] dispensation in 2006. Because of its failures, since 1992 the NRM's performance has been increasingly criticised. Some artists have shaped and have been shaped by this critique. These artists demonstrate that after 1986

[3] Museveni's participation in scholarly debates has prompted some political scientists to review their generalisations about military regimes in Africa. Kassimir makes this point arguing that Museveni heads a military regime. Yet he has engaged his critics through his writings and his regime has permitted more criticism than many civilian regimes in Uganda's postcolonial history. For more on this see Kassimir Ronald, "Reading Museveni: Structure, Agency and Pedagogy in Ugandan Politics", *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 33, no. 2/3, Special Issue: French-Speaking Central Africa: Political Dynamics of Identities and Representations (1999), 649-673.

[4] NRM had outlawed multiparty democracy in 1986. Due to local and international criticism, President Museveni was forced to return the country to multiparty democracy. On 23 February 2006 Uganda held its first multiparty election in twenty six years.

Uganda's contemporary art continued to criticise bad governance – a critique which, as this thesis is about to demonstrate, dates back to the 1940s. They confirm that there is a nexus between Uganda's contemporary art and the country's politics.

It is the post-1986 art-politics nexus that is central to this thesis. I examine in detail the political positions two artists have taken since the 1990s and how they have radicalised their pictorial narratives into critical metaphors/voices and used them to counter the NRM's policies and rhetoric. This study seeks to decentre recent suggestions that after 1986 (all of) Uganda's contemporary artists disengaged from making artworks which questioned the health of the nation-state, and turned to "formal content" issues of ethnic identity and market-oriented art (Kyeyune 2003; 2004). In this task, I [re-]examine the work of Bruno Sserukuuma and Fred Kato Mutebi, because the two have in different yet complementary ways (and more than others), invented appropriate vocabularies with which they question the NRM's administration without being subversive, without attracting sanctions and without compromising their ability to sell their works. The idioms of Sserunkuuma and Mutebi are thus instructive and insightful on how an artist can survive in a globalising market without being disengaged from debates on urgent issues such as bad governance and corruption which continue to haunt Uganda.

Uganda is situated in East Africa between the Sudan to the north, Kenya to the East, Tanzania and Rwanda to the South, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the West. Kampala is its capital city (see map). Its statehood can be traced back to the colony which the British forged in the late-nineteenth century when they amalgamated various pre-colonial polities into what was to become a modern state on October 10, 1962. It is a small country covering a total area of 93,072 square miles (241,038 square km) with a population of about twenty five million people divided into more than fifty ethnic groups.

Uganda's pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial regimes, its ethnic complexity and geopolitical locus, have all informed its fluid political history. It is within this matrix that Margaret Trowell started the teaching of contemporary art in Uganda in the late-1930s. Trowell's initial teaching was humble: adult students and civil servants would attend art lessons at the veranda of her house. By 1939 this humble experiment had grown into an art department informally attached to Makerere College. Art instruction entered the mainstream university curriculum in the 1940s. The department expanded in the 1950s and today it continues to thrive as the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts (MTSIFA).

Trowell wanted to produce an artistic genre derived from oral and craft traditions in an area with limited classical sculpture. By 1939 she had succeeded in prompting celebrations in Kampala and London. Two years later her project became interlaced with the wider politics of the Second World War, late-colonialism and anti-colonialism. These broad political issues decisively altered the path of Trowell's curriculum and ultimately Uganda's modern art: it became political.

By the mid-fifties Uganda's modern artists had disengaged from the country's political discussions, albeit differently. When the country's politics became intensely anti-colonial and radical, Trowell withdrew and advised restraint until 1958 when she retired. Charles Ssekintu, her student, became politically active; his art mirrored radical politics. Ssekintu, however, prematurely withdrew from anti-colonial nationalism and Uganda's politics in 1952. Trowell's former student, and later her colleague, Gregory Maloba, did sculptures which would have been thematically anti-colonial in the early-forties. Thereafter he withdrew from political themes, save for specific commissions. He turned his attention to musical and non-critical themes. In the midst of wider discourses on anti-colonial nationalism and independence, however, the case for disengagement became problematic. Some artists made horizontal shifts and relocated into a wider socio-political discussion on national and international issues which defined their space and time.

Contemporary art was embroiled in the debate on national independence; a few artists made works to embody national[ist] identity. New symbols grew out of fusing the old and the new: the traditional and the modern.

Uganda's first post-colonial government interrupted this burgeoning cultural debate. In 1966 Milton Obote, the country's first Premier, engineered a coup; later he abolished the 1962 constitution. He instituted a militaristic autocracy which Amin Dada usurped in 1971 through a coup. Amin unfolded an atrocious regime until he was overthrown in 1979 by a combined force of Ugandan dissidents and the Tanzanian Army.

And yet order, and meaningful cultural debate, was not restored by the so-called "liberators". Instead Obote returned in 1980 to commit atrocities worse than those of his lieutenant, Amin. Freedom of expression was lost. There was economic mismanagement, corruption and hopelessness. Under these conditions, artists invented metaphors to contest the draconian state, enunciate the dangers they faced and the loss of civil liberties they confronted in the period 1966–1986. Religious, cultural, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms veiled pointed criticism against the state. Uganda's contemporary art was disengaged from the global aesthetic discourse; many artists fled the country under self-imposed or forced exile.

Through its Ten Point Programme, the National Resistance Movement, under Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, ended this cycle of turmoil and tyranny. The NRM vowed to return good governance, end corruption, reconstruct the war ravaged infrastructure and the economy. Locally, and internationally, the NRM's reform package was received positively. However, by 1992 the NRM's failures began to show; they attracted sustained criticism from the civil society. Visual artists joined academics, writers, performers, local and international media in questioning the NRM's policies. Sserunkuuma and Mutebi formed part of this simmering criticism. This brief exegesis then sets the background for the key questions I would like to isolate and focus on in this thesis.

It is important to concede at the outset that my discussion is implicitly wedged into a complex question (Sanyal 2000), namely: whose politics do I [re]present here? Is it the politics of art history — implying the ideological contest between social/sociological theories and formal theories of art? Is it the politics in the artworks — where art is a *reconstruction* of the world in which the artists and their oeuvre are located? Is it the NRM's politics? Or is it Uganda's politics? The list is long; such questions can never be resolved by this thesis. I, however, insist that the artworks I analyse as part of this study are not "floating signifier[s]" (Edelman 1995, 9) on which the art historian can endlessly impose political interests and ideologies. The artists whose works I analyse deliberately avoid this possibility by using symbols which can be traced from the wider public discussion: they use symbols, gestures and themes which elicit the political contexts, ideologies, spaces and times in which they did their work. These issues and attributes, limit meaning. I work around them as I [re]write the nexus between Uganda's modern art and politics.

Then too, the late-twentieth century saw the relevance of traditional African art to the global aesthetic discourse being acknowledged and affirmed. Exhibitions such as *The Treasures of Ancient Nigeria* (1983), *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984), *Les Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), and others which I discuss later as I build my argument, confirm this claim albeit in different and sometimes problematic ways[5]. In the wake of these exhibitions there has been an increasing interest in contemporary art in North, West, Central and Southern Africa (Sanyal 2000, 8).

Debate on Uganda, and indeed the rest of East Africa, still "remains largely ignored" (ibid). There are two likely reasons for this state of affairs, the first being Uganda's rugged political past which led to the country's isolation from

[5] And this point is made in McEvilley Thomas, *Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity* (Kingston, New York: Documentex McPherson & Company, 1992), 153-158.

the global aesthetic discourse. Hence between the late-1960s and the 1992 Mukasa and Mpagi show in Vienna, exhibitions which showcased Uganda's contribution to the continental and global aesthetic discourse were few and far between. Eli Nathan Kyeyune's participation in the 1977 Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (Festac 77) in Lagos (Nigeria) and the *Sanaa: Contemporary Art from East Africa* (1984)[6] can be cited as exceptions. The second reason could be that Uganda, like most countries in East Africa, lacks a tradition of politically-charged plastic arts that is comparable to the tradition of the mask in Central[7] and West Africa[8]. Whereas masks can be found in Uganda, they have no political resonances. Neither does Uganda have a figurative sculptural tradition comparable to those seen in other parts of Africa — for example the Nok tradition in West Africa. The Acholi from Northern Uganda have representations of human forms but mainly as "dolls" associated with fertility rituals. The Baganda, from Central Uganda, have the *Luzira Pottery Figure* (1750?). This anthropomorphic representation has however generated more controversy than agreements within the academia. Its pedigree and archaeology are locked in competing discourses. Equally controversial has been the rock art in Western Uganda whose pedigree, political and social contexts are still under reconstruction.

There is general agreement, however, that Uganda has a rich tradition of making crafts (see Trowell 1953) some of which are used to build, legitimate and dispense power and authority (Trowell 1954) — for example the *Mpiima* (or royal dagger) among the Baganda (Kivubiro 1998). But because Uganda's modern political art does not spring directly from these traditions,

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[6] The exhibition was part of a cultural wave in London in which the African Centre Gallery held regular exhibitions at Convent Garden featuring artists still "unknown" in Europe (Niven 1985, 191). Hosted at the Commonwealth Institute in London, this exhibition recalled the shows Trowell had organised at the Institute during 1939 and 1949. It represented a selection of artists' work – 40% of whom were graduates from Makerere Art School (Court 1985, 36). It provided Margaret Trowell an occasion to meet some of her students and appreciate their progress (ibid) before she died a year later.

[7] There is an interesting discussion on the politics of masks in Strother S. Zoe, *Agency and History in the Art of the Central Pende*, 1998.

[8] For more on this see: Babatunde Lawal *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender and Social Harmony in an African Culture*, 1996. Also see: Nunley, W. J. *Moving with the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa*, 1987.

the questions about its "authenticity" remain unresolved and locked into the wider questions on contemporary art in East Africa, namely: "is there contemporary art in East Africa?" If it does exist, it is part of the wider cultural discourse which has taken shape elsewhere on the continent?

The problem resides in the unresolved debate on the Western-style pedagogy in which Uganda's contemporary art was born and which the Makerere Art School inherited. Trowell encouraged a cross fertilisation between traditions and modern visual vocabulary. Yet it is because of these qualities of hybridity that the "authenticity" of Uganda's contemporary art has been doubted. As if to confirm this, fifty-five odd years after the beginning of contemporary art in Uganda, Jean Kennedy argued that a renaissance in the visual arts has yet to unfold in Uganda because Trowell's colonial education "hampered the development of a modern art movement…" (Kennedy 1992, 143).

This attitude is currently being contested. For example, Wanjiku Nyachae applauded Trowell for launching "the successful establishment of art" in Uganda and elsewhere in East Africa (Nyachae 1995, 164). Rose-Marie Rychnner celebrated a "post-war renaissance" (Rychnner 1996, 8-10) in Uganda's contemporary art. Rychnner was referring to Uganda's art after 1986; she recalled the mood Museveni had earlier expressed in Vienna during the Mpagi and Mukasa show (see p. 1 above). Alexander Calder and Joseph Kivubiro[9] agreed with Rychnner in proclaiming that there is an "international art renaissance in Uganda". These claims about a renaissance of the art counter Jean Kennedy's argument, and confirm that contemporary art in Uganda is part of the continental renaissance of the arts.

However, this renaissance is itself embedded in a wider "African Renaissance" which President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa pronounced in 1998 as a rebirth of a continent committed to progress but struggling with famine, war and bad governance. A continent riddled with corruption which

[9] See their paper online at: http://www.theartroom-sf.com/essay14.htm (accessed November 2, 2006).

"remains an endemic feature of the private and public sectors"[10] Implicit in Mbeki's admission is the anxiety that, in spite of economic and political progress (which for him was the African Renaissance), the continent is still haunted with problems of governance, democratisation, economic mismanagement and corruption.

Mbeki's admission ultimately calls for civic vigilance in order to improve governance and service delivery and to curb corruption. Some artists have joined a civic campaign against those whom Uganda's playwright, John Ruganda, characterised in his famous play, *The Burdens* (1987), as "…power hungry bastards with twitching hands…eager to grab and get rich, get rich quickly…" (Ruganda 1987, v-vi). It is within critical modes, like those of Ruganda, that some artists participated in the debate on the 2001 electoral process through the *2001 Presidential Elections in the Eyes of the artists (Sweet and Sour)* exhibition hosted by the Nommo Gallery in May 2001. The exhibition attracted various mediums, forms and voices: some were critical others were supportive of the state. Launching the exhibition, Aziz Kasujja, the chairman of the Electoral Commission conceded: "I'm now convinced that Fine Artists are equally politically informed and alert as well."[11]

Yet scholars have been slow to make similar concessions in relation to some post-civil war artists who criticise the NRM regime. Major exhibitions like the landmark *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (1995) at the White Chapel in London did not fill the gap. *Seven Stories* produced the first post-1986 catalogue on Uganda's contemporary art. Unlike the Mpagi and Mukasa show in Vienna and others that individual artists hosted abroad between 1986 and 1995, the catalogue for *Seven Stories* was widely circulated in Uganda. Although substantial in many ways, the catalogue did

[10] President Thabo Mbeki expressed this concern during his speech at the African Renaissance Conference. Speech available online at www.ourplanet.com/imgversn/132/moosa.html. Also see Mbeki's speech at the United Nations available online at http://www.unu.edu/unupress/mbeki.html (accessed June 29, 2006).

[11] See: Kasujja Aziz, "Speech by the Guest of Honour", in *2001 Presidential Elections in the Eyes of the Artist (Sweet and Sour) Art Exhibition 10th-30th May 2001* (Kampala: Nommo Gallery, 2001).

not provoke discussion on the weaknesses of the NRM. Instead it provoked debate on the draconian rule of past regimes and how the NRM had unfolded a new dispensation conducive to art production. We see related sentiments in Sydney Kasfir's *Contemporary African Art* (1999) another important publication which, like *Seven Stories,* put Uganda's art in a continental context.

Obviously then, the current (positive) debate has not reflected Mbeki's anxiety and criticism. It does not address the fact that the gap between the NRM's public rhetoric and delivery had become obvious by the early-1990s. For example by 1992 it had become clear that the much publicised $161 million "emergency relief and rehabilitation programme" (Mugaju 1999, 1) which the NRM launched in March 1986 to rehabilitate areas which had been ravaged by the 1981– 1986 war (the so-called Luweero Triangle) had not yielded much. There was fear that the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts were hampered by corruption. Neither has art history admitted the fact that the NRM has grappled with persistent armed resistance to its rule (the most notorious of them all being the Kony Rebellion under the so-called Lords Resistance Army), and a crippling structural adjustment programme imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

And yet these concerns have meant that woes and criticism have paralleled the celebration of the "New Uganda" pronounced in President Museveni's speech which is also rehearsed in recent scholarship (see Kyeyune 2004 among others). Consequently civic society has engaged the liberalised print media[12], broadcast media[13] and scholarly work to question the NRM's internal contradictions[14] and failures. The NRM has deployed its cadres: they

[12] By 1991 a few newspapers were on the market with *The New Vision*, a government owned daily, dominating the market. This situation changed in 1993 when the *Monitor* came on the market. Others were to follow later. Today Uganda has several newspapers including tabloids.

[13] Since the colonial times, government had maintained control over the electronic media. Radio Uganda, Uganda Television and the Uganda Posts and Telecommunications Corporation were all state- owned monopolies. By 1992 Radio Sanyu joined the air waves; Capital Radio followed a year later. Today Uganda has 175 radio stations, 32 Television stations, and 4 telephone service providers.

[14] See, for example, Mamdani Mahmood, *And Fire Does Not Always Beget Ash: Critical Reflections on the NRM* (Kampala: Monitor Publication, 1995). Also see Oloka-Onyango Joe, "New Wine or

have spiritedly fought to better its image. It seems to me the NRM has strong cadres in the visual art community too. These 'Pro-NRM Artists' have been non-reflective in their choice of symbols and support for the NRM (and I will illustrate this claim in chapter six). On the other hand, however, are the reflective artists who use their idioms to acknowledge the NRM's positive contributions but question its failures as well. Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi belong to this second category.

By 1990 Bruno Sserunkuuma did what, for want of a better term, I call "experimental pottery". He experimented with forms and material (clay, glazes, colorants, etc) in order to produce better pottery and improve the position of local pottery on the international art market (see Sserunkuuma 1992). By 1992 he had started to deploy his forms for political action: his pot-forms became mediums to critique and devolve power. Fred Mutebi's work, in 1992 showed attributes of surreal dreams. By 1994 he too had transformed his art into a political tool. He redeployed his experiments with form, material and themes to critique the impact of corruption on governance and democratic institutions in Uganda.

And yet this reading is still missing from the available record on contemporary Ugandan art. George Kyeyune, in his doctoral thesis *Art in Uganda in the 20th Century* (2003), was the first, and thus far the only, scholar to have done extensive research on both artists. He based his choice of the two artists on their;

> …usefulness in explaining some of the major artistic currents in post-civil-war Uganda, a period which has been characterised by innovation and experimentation, and an increasing sense of personal and collective identity. (p. 224).

He then "carefully examined" (p.181) the two as artists whose "vigilance in the post-civil war period" (ibid) has ensured that ceramics (for Sserunkuuma) and printmaking (for Mutebi) regain significance on the world art circuit (ibid). Kyeyune followed up on the claims in his thesis with reviews and

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New Bottles: Movement Politics and One-partyism in Uganda" in *No-Party Democracy in Uganda: Myths and Realities, eds,* Justus Mugaju & Joe Oloka-Onyango (Kampala: Fountain Publishers Ltd, 2000).

commentaries in exhibition catalogues. I critique and cross reference his writings with recent discussions I conducted with the two artists, and evidence from primary and secondary readings, while further articulating the critical gap which my thesis seeks to fill.

Kyeyune has engaged a very ambitious project through his writings. For example in his thesis he analysed "the major trends and transformations in Uganda's modern art practice since its inception at Makerere in the 1930s by Margaret Trowell" (Kyeyune 2003, 5) until the new millennium. His study is insightful about some of the political developments that have defined the space in which Uganda's modern artists work. For example, whereas many scholars before him (for example Kasule 2002) had in different ways mourned the 1970s and early-1980s as a period noted by no artistic progress, Kyeyune saw ironies resulting from its "turmoil, decay and innovation" (Kyeyune 2003, 156-188). One, Kyeyune agreed with Kasfir (1999, 151), that artists gained from lucrative commissions funded by Amin's regime. Yet at the same time artists created "overtly political images, which expressed disgust for" Amin's misrule (Kyeyune 2003, 5) and later Obote's! Two, for Kyeyune this period encouraged innovation. Faced with mounting scarcity of imported materials (on which contemporary art had depended since its nascence), artists investigated alternatives. Batik-making as a novel form of visual expression and source of survival gained unprecedented popularity among the graduates of the Makerere Art School. Because batiks involved low production costs, artists produced them and sold them at affordable rates. Many Ugandans afforded them; "for the first time, art was democratised" (Kyeyune 2004, 7).

However, in spite of its positive contribution to our understanding of politics in twentieth century Ugandan art, Kyeyune's exegesis has been overwhelmed[15] by the challenge of accounting for the nexus between post-1986 governance and Uganda's modern art: he has disengaged Uganda's contemporary art

[15] During an informal discussion between him, Amanda Tumusiime and the author in 2004, Kyeyune conceded that indeed he was "overwhelmed" by the politics in Uganda's modern art. I am basing this claim on his admission.

from its political reality. As if to demonstrate, in his doctoral thesis Kyeyune argued that the

> *...stability of the 1990s freed artists from investigating political issues and interest in the general themes of technique and design were revived.* Fostering international links, and survival in a competitive art market, are pressing current concerns. (Kyeyune 2003, 5; my emphasis).

Kyeyune's own later discussion of Mutebi's oeuvre does not support the above argument. For example, he analysed how Mutebi explored new formal and stylistic grounds which he has deployed to articulate socio-political commentaries (Kyeyune 2003, 229) since the 1990s. It is my contention that, like Nigeria's Demas Nwoko (Kennedy 1992, 53), Mutebi dramatises aspects of the human condition. He goes beyond commentary to express his revulsion and criticism on governance, continental and global issues. I however admit that his art is hard to situate because it defeats strict categorisation. It cannot be categorised in the same way as that of a group of South Africans who produced "Resistance Art" to counter the ills imposed by the supremacist Apartheid state during the eighties[16]. He is also not ready to take the risk (and posture) individual African dissident artists like Fela Anikulapo-Kuti[17] (among others) have taken in order to openly criticise their post-colonial states. Neither does his art have the wider audience his contemporary, Fred Sennoga, enjoyed in the nineties with the comic strips he drew. Yet intriguingly Mutebi reminds us of all these political artists as he

[16] Informed by the Soweto uprisings of 1976, and located in a highhanded Apartheid state in which even the most "peaceful protest was met with police gunfire" (Williamson 1989, 8), a group of South Africa's "resistance" artists rejected the elitist disengagement of art from addressing its political concerns as "head-burying" (ibid). Instead they turned their art into one of the possibilities for political action. Their activities became overtly counter-state; their art became a visual form of "popular cultural resistance" (ibid). It was radical and sometimes grotesque. For reasons which will become clear in this thesis, these attributes cannot be read in Mutebi's, or Sserunkuuma's, art.

[17] Fela (1938-1997) was a contemporary musician from Nigeria. He altered the course of his "apolitical…highlife jazz" (Olaniyani 2004, 7) in the seventies as he launched his outspoken onslaught on misrule, corruption, and dictatorship in Nigeria. He became a "social rebel" (Olaniyani 2004, 50) who earned acclaim for using his "music as a weapon" (ibid) against political and social injustices. To achieve this end, he invented what Olaniyan calls "political Afrobeat" (ibid) in the seventies: a music genre which is confrontational, overtly "antistate" and oftentimes "countercultural" (Olaniyani 2004, 51). His music is popular among the disadvantaged and oppressed. It however attracted the wrath of six consecutive Nigerian governments both civilian and military. He was jailed for it although his largely bohemian life style involving antisocial activities like drug-abuse may as well have contributed to his incarceration and should not be condoned. Again for reasons that will become clear in this thesis, Mutebi and Sserunkuuma cannot wear Fela's political cloak.

fights the folly and vice that have become the hallmarks of the NRM state. Conceding to this claim motivates the need to expand the debate on Mutebi's oeuvre; it brings me to my next contention.

Mutebi's attack on folly and vice cannot be fully apprehended if his oeuvre is considered in a piecemeal way. The artist argues that:

> "art is about writing a book…when I'm doing my art…I'm writing a book. When I'm putting up an exhibition, I'm writing a book. I read all the scope of what is happening in Uganda and each piece is a chapter in the book…if I have thirty pieces it means I have thirty chapters and [it is until] people [re]read the whole book [that] they will understand the essence of [what] the author wrote about…." (Mutebi, interview 2006)

This then invites a more holistic approach than what Kyeyune (2003) admits. Kyeyune engages the artist's print *Going to the Market* (late-1990s) to demonstrate the artist's technical skills and *Kampala Sky* (1994) to demonstrate the artist's social commentary. Kyeyune therefore shielded us from the other side of the artist's political discussion. In fact, Mutebi has appropriated his women and fruit market (in his *Going to the Market*) and marabou storks (in his *Kampala Sky*) as leitmotifs to write other chapters in a book on public policy, environmental protection, women's activism, war, children's rights, corruption, etc. His oeuvre is not limited to print-making, as Kyeyune seems to suggest. He has done paintings which are as pointedly critical (and antistate) as the two prints in Kyeyune's thesis.

Now, Kyeyune also suggests that "like Mutebi Bruno Sserunkuuma is a young artist whose career started during the beginning of the recovery period after the [1981-86] civil war…." (Kyeyune 2003, 229). Kyeyune's views of Mutebi can therefore be applied to Sserunkuuma and they invite similar criticism. He, however, rightly suggests that Sserunkuuma has radically altered pottery in Uganda through his (unconventional) experiments with forms and textures. He argues that for themes and subject matter

> Sserunkuuma specifically derives his inspiration from the changing traditions of [Uganda's two ethnic groups] the Ganda and Hima. He is particularly interested in the daily life of the rural and urban woman, and her role as a mother and wife. Elegant stylised black figures narrating the lives of ordinary people, cloaked in colourful patterned

> local fashions crowd the surfaces of these hand thrown pots in moods of celebration and passion. Popular subjects include *Okwanjula*…" (Kyeyune 2003, 231)

and other aspects of the rural economy in his region, Buganda. This contention has some validity. But it needs revision because Sserunkuuma has, since 1992, used his pottery to express strong opinions about issues of governance. It is true that he domesticates women in Buganda, but there is ambivalence in his gendered pottery which merits exploration because he has used it to express interesting political stances. Kyeyune does not explore this. Neither does he admit that Sserunkuuma has redeployed his rural and woman themes, and the theme of *Okwanjula*[18], to reconstitute the state, redistribute its power and reject the NRM's policy of local governance called the Decentralisation Policy. In fact in this thesis a picture will emerge in which his women, *Okwanjula* and ruralised motifs are postulated as veiled enunciations of a vibrant, productive, polis premised on social capital — an ideal polis the artist envisages as a panacea to Uganda's failing post-colonial state.

And yet, save for Kyeyune, the debate on Sserunkuuma and Mutebi has not been attempted by other scholars. It is understandable why. The scholarship has been overwhelmed by political biographies which inform contemporary art in Uganda. Unable to deal with the complex political narratives; scholars have reduced politically-laden oeuvres to self-contained, self-referential forms (for example see Namono, 1996). Consequently, social, political narratives enunciated through images have been reduced to a backdrop against which contemporary art has been read as an "expression of visual form" in sculpture or painting (in Openyto 1997). Such readings would not have deepened our understanding of Sserunkuuma's and Mutebi's oeuvres even if Namono and Openyto, for example, had considered the two artists during their investigation.

Consistent with this study is a long overdue inquiry into how post-1986 contemporary artists have questioned the health of the "New Uganda". I

[18] *Okwanjula* in traditional terms refers to the payment of dowry.

expand the debate beyond the recurrent interest in the survival of artists in a globalised art market. I interrogate how two post-civil war artists have accessed, and participated in, a wider civic criticism on governance. Rather than seeing these artists as individuals disengaged from the imperfect social and political conditions in which they are located, I trace their relocation into, continued agitation for, and commitment to, improved conditions in their communities through their art. That way the social political negotiations in which Uganda's contemporary artists find themselves cease to be residual backdrops for their works. Instead, the two intricately fuse.

Because Mutebi and Sserunkuuma redeploy strategies which have evolved together with Uganda's political history and that of the art school, I re-examine this history. In this re-examination I redraw the contours between contemporary art and its often fluid political space and time. This re-examination is important because through it I trace many threads which have developed over time; threads which Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi have re-explored, and/or refined, to construct their political idioms.

To perform my task, I have held conversations with Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi on issues surrounding their work. I have also held discussions with other artists and key personalities to get a wider view on the claims made by the artists. The two artists have prodigious careers but much of their production is sold on the international market leaving limited documentation at home. At best the artists have kept a picture or two of each work, whose quality is not wholly satisfactory but whose role as a form of record-keeping cannot be underestimated. This problem is, however, not restricted to these two artists. This problem occurs so often that scholars on contemporary Ugandan art no longer have to apologise for it; they simply acknowledge it (Sanyal 2000). In addition, I have accessed literary and visual records, concerning their oeuvres, which are scattered over the internet[19],

[19] Much of Mutebi's work during the mid to late nineties can be found at Mutebi's work at http://www.kentaro-art.com/artists/Mutebi/mutebi_en.htm (accessed October 5, 2006).

newspapers, published and unpublished materials and catalogues for additional information about the two artists and their work.

During our discussions, the artists expressed knowledge of literature outside art and art history. Such literature has informed their political stances and visual strategies. I re-read such literature to pick up strings which relate to the artists' works. I have also read other literature on Uganda's social, political, economic and cultural development to widen my understanding of Uganda's rugged political history — a history which the artists are aware of; a history which informs their work.

Uganda has a vibrant print and electronic media through which the artists, as they have indicated to me, access current political issues and debates — issues and debates which permeate their idioms. I therefore have cross-read their productions with the issues unfolding in the media (radio, television and the internet). They also insisted that they derive their themes from other arts (such as theatre and *Kadongokamu*[20] traditional music). I have accessed such sources to trace the cross-fertilisations between the high and low, the visual and non-visual, which we confront in the pictorial narratives of the two artists.

Literary discourse on Uganda's art history is still limited. Some debates are recorded in journals such as the *Uganda Journal* (the oldest scholarly journal in Uganda) and *Transition*; the rest can be found in theses, catalogues and a few published books. Given Uganda's turbulent history, many of these invaluable resources are scattered or lost. Where available, I have accessed such materials. In order to reorient the record of Uganda's art history, I have accessed previously read and unread archival material from Makerere University's Africana Section, Entebbe National Archive, the Uganda Museum and the Uganda Society (the oldest academic society in Uganda which is also the publisher of the *Uganda Journal*). In the absence of a national collection, Makerere Art Gallery remains the sole accessible archive

[20] Kadongokamu is a genre of traditional music which combines modern instruments.

for contemporary art in Uganda. Its collection has, however, also not escaped the disruptive history in which it finds itself. Many important archival items have been lost or are poorly managed. I have had to settle for the few that are available.

Now, Kyeyune suggests that Uganda's modern art has grown from a "single source" into different directions mediated at every stage of its development by the demands and expectations of formal art training as well as by political and social conditions (Kyeyune 2003, 254). This is the trajectory in which he has located the two artists. I admit Kyeyune's assertion as a point of departure and in order to locate the two artists into the trajectory of Uganda's modern art. In chapters one to six I historicise Uganda's art and its political nexus while testing Kyeyune's claim for a single source for it. In the course of this historicisation I will highlight threads useful for our understanding of Mutebi's and Sserunkuuma's idioms which I analyse in chapters seven and eight respectively.

Put differently, in **chapter two** I retrace the colonial history of Uganda's modern art. I expose the competing sources in which Uganda's modern art emerged before Trowell picked it up. In **chapter three**, I analyse how Trowell grappled with, and harmonised, competing discourses and directions which Uganda's modern art was taking by the mid-1930s. This analysis will set the stage for the instruction of Uganda's modern art which started at Makerere College under the guidance of Margaret Trowell and the challenges she faced.

In **chapter four** I demonstrate how the instruction of art at Makerere became interlaced in the activities of the Second World War. I show that this was the beginning of the nexus between the state and contemporary art in Uganda: it was the birth of Uganda's political art. This nexus followed a convoluted path marked firstly, by engagement, then by disengagement in some cases. The two patterns of engagement and disengagement which emerged in the forties and fifties have resurfaced under different histories of Uganda's

contemporary art. In **chapter five** I show artists vigorously reengaging their political space in support of Uganda's claim for independence from Britain in 1962. I demonstrate how they produced forms which embodied the collective ideology, ideals, hopes and the overly enthusiastic expectations of Ugandans — attributes seen in the *Independence Monument.*

Because the nationalist leadership reneged on its promises of good governance, economic prosperity, democratisation and service delivery and instead ruled through brutal regimes, corruption, mismanagement and misrule, the euphoric 'pro-state mode' seen in the art of the early-sixties gave way to the enunciation of anxiety, fear, death, mayhem and hopelessness. In **chapter six** I demonstrate how contemporary artists invented new, and inverted old, symbolisms as art was produced in an oppositional manner. I demonstrate that this is the critical mode which was altered by the NRM's assumption of power in 1986 when the NRM brought new hopes persuading some artists to celebrate this while others explored the new possibilities it unfolded and disengaged from the production of art forms which questioned the state.

Because Mutebi and Sserunkuuma have critiqued the NRM's public policy, in **chapter seven** I follow Mutebi's advice to apprehend the book he has written on what he calls the "corruption by politicians" (Mutebi, interview 2006) and the metaphorical visual vocabulary he has used to write it. In **chapter eight** I unmask the politics behind Sserunkuuma's political pottery. I apprehend the political discourse he veils in his traditional voluntarism, community cohesion and need for social capital. Lastly I provide a conclusion to this study.

I have presented the thesis in two complementary volumes. Volume one contains the text; volume two has the plates, references and appendices.

Chapter Two

The Early Development of Uganda's Modern Art: False Starts and Grounds for New Directions

> Sometimes I have visited a bush school and asked the teacher what crafts are being taught here, and he has proudly led me in to watch a drawing class at work. Rows of small black urchins sit huddled together on benches, each with his small slate and squeaking pencil; some with furrowed brow and tongue thrust hard against cheek strive desperately to copy from the board a queer conglomeration of lines labelled 'BOX'; others have obviously given up and have lost interest in this queer pastime. I have no interest in it either; I want to see carving, basketwork, or the rich patterns with which the African knows so well to decorate his shields and stools. But when I ask for these I am told almost contemptuously that the children do not come to school to learn that; they come to learn the skill of the European (Trowell 1937, 2-3).

Introduction:

Albert Cook was a medical doctor and member of the Church Missionary Society. In 1897 he founded Mengo Hospital located in Kampala. In 1937 the *Uganda Herald* published a speech[21] in which Cook summarised over forty years of his (and colonial) work in [B]Uganda[22] (1897–1937). He observed that between 1897 and 1937, Uganda became "modern". He spoke about the changes missionaries and colonialists introduced in order to modernise Uganda. He praised the altruism, patience and resilience of successive colonial administrators, and the missionaries, who persevered to modernise Uganda.

Cook's speech is important for my discussion because it coincided with the start of Trowell's art classes in Uganda. Most importantly, however, implicit in

[21] See: Cook Albert, "Albert Cook and Lady Cook: 40th Anniversary", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. XLVI, No. 1290, February 24, 1937.

[22] Before 1900 Buganda became a popular destination for Arab/Swahili merchants. It is during this contact that the name Uganda became evolved. It must, however, be noted that these merchants also dealt with other peoples than the Baganda (people of the Buganda kingdom). Consequently it looks like their reference to "Uganda" (territory) and "Waganda" (people) were initially used as generic terms to refer to the area (and people) found north of Mirambo's territory, Unyamwezi, in Tanzania. The name "Uganda" was later adopted to refer to the modern state. From here onwards I will use [B]Uganda wherever I deem any overlaps to exist between Uganda (the country) and Buganda (the kingdom).

Cook's version of modernity are the recurrent themes which informed the early missionary (and colonial) formal education of Africans, through what Trowell called the "bush schools". For Trowell these schools taught a modern art which, far from being contemporary African art, was a "queer pastime" (see quote). Secondly, alongside modernising Uganda, colonialism and missionary work, which Cook praised, were also responsible for the local appetite for what Trowell called "the skill of the European". Whereas this *skill-of-the-European* was a necessary prerequisite for entry into the colonial capitalist economy, its instruction entailed the destruction of the local arts that Trowell wanted to see integrated into Uganda's modern art.

In this chapter I retrace colonial modernity and how it informed the birth of Uganda's modern art in the period between 1875 and 1935. These issues set the complex initial path for the trajectory which Trowell picked up to become the midwife of Uganda's contemporary art — a trajectory in which Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi are located. This chapter is important because through it I also counter suggestions in Sanyal (2000) that "modern" art did not exist in Uganda before Trowell. As we learn from Trowell (see quote) European missionaries taught some form of visual expression although, in her view, their instruction excluded local artistic traditions and culture. I engage this early aesthetic to expose some of its political resonances as I trace the complex beginnings of what Kyeyune (2003) calls the "single source" of Bruno Sserunkuuma's and Fred Mutebi's art practices. As Cook zealously illuminates in his speech, modernity, and therefore the beginning of modern art, was rooted in missionary and colonial activities in Buganda and that is, therefore, where I trace it.

Interests, Explorations and Discoveries: The Coming of Europeans to Uganda

Early European contact with Uganda came as a result of two convergent interests: Buganda's interests and the British (or more broadly put, Western) interests. Buganda's interests can be traced from the reign of Muteesa I (reigned 1956–1884). Muteesa I welcomed Europeans into [B]Uganda for a

number of reasons but below I discuss those which are important for my debate.

Commercial contacts between coastal traders and the Buganda kingdom date back to the thirteenth century (Reid 2002, 150). Scholars suggest that, starting with the reign of Kabaka[23] Kyabaggu in the mid-eighteenth century, contacts with Arabs became intense and lucrative. The Buganda kingdom exchanged slaves and ivory for exotic oriental products such as mirrors, porcelain and cotton cloth. For example, Kabaka Kyabaggu (reigned during the late-1700s) acquired porcelain and Kabaka Ssemakookiro (reigned 1797–1814) bought cotton cloth. Both kings traded in ivory with Arabs and Swahili merchants (Reid 2002). Thus up to the reign of Muteesa I (reigned 1857–1884), Buganda interacted with Arab/Swahili merchants because of commercial interests[24] and Buganda's neighbours did the same.

Let me parenthetically highlight some aspects of this pre-colonial commercialisation of [B]Uganda's economy which are important to my discussion. This early economic revolution exposes the ideological underpinnings of Albert Cook's claims that [B]Uganda's modern economy started with colonialism. Through pre-colonial trade with Arab/Swahili merchants, [B]Uganda's economy was monetised. In the thirteenth century Arab traders introduced cowrie shells into Africa's pre-colonial economies. Cowrie shells became a means of exchange. In [B]Uganda they were introduced from Egypt through trade along the Nile basin and also through trade with the coast of East Africa. However, like in many other parts of the continent, cowrie shells could not run the complex colonial capitalist economy. By 1900 they had lost their commercial/economic value in [B]Uganda. They were replaced with rupees and later shillings. They were, however, traditionalised as symbols of economic, apotropaic and religious

[23] The name of the king in Buganda is always pronounced with a title Kabaka. The English equivalent for this title would be king.

[24] Because Uganda's pre-colonial politics did not draw a fine line between what was for the person of the king/chief and that which was for the collective, it is not clear whether these commercial interests benefited the whole population or only the person of the king. I do not intend to make this distinction in my discussion.

value. This strand should be borne in mind. Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi use cowrie shells in their work and it is in this context that their work should be read.

By the 1850s, intense rivalries between Buganda and her neighbours over the control of the lucrative trade and trade routes were rife. The rivalry, and the military activities which resulted from them, threatened Buganda's political interests. Muteesa I sought for new and stronger allies to preserve his kingdom. Whereas trade with Arabs/Swahili merchants was dominated by luxury merchandise, for example porcelain, cotton cloth, musical instruments and mirrors (Reid 2002, 152), Europeans supplied modern ammunition[25] or what Alexander Maitland calls the "grains of the Mzungu's gunpowder" (Maitland 1971, 149)[26]. Europeans therefore demonstrated their potential to reinforce Muteesa's political ambitions and tilt the regional balance of power in his favour. This is the context in which Muteesa I was elated as he received John Hannington Speke and James Augustus Grant, the first Western travellers to reach his palace in 1862; it brings us to the European interests. Why did Speke and Grant come to Buganda?

The area which in the period 1862-1962 evolved into Uganda as a modern state had for long attracted European inquiry because it is home to the Rwenzori Mountains, located at the Western border separating Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the "source" of the world's longest river, the Nile. Both landmarks, and the link between them (i.e. that the

[25] For example on his maiden visit, Speke gave Muteesa gifts of rifled carbines, sword-bayonets, a rifle, a revolver pistol, a box of ammunition, a box of bullets, a box of gun-caps among other luxury items. Surely Speke donated more fire-power than Abdullah Khamis. Just before Speke and Grant arrived Khamis presented Arab cloth, gold embroidered jackets, crimson slippers, silk sashes although he also included a rifle and daggers. See: Eva Hope, *Stanley and Africa*, p.123. Also see: Maitland, *Speke*, p.151

[26] *[o]Muzungu* and, its plural *Abazungu*, is a Luganda word which denotes any white person. Its current usage is however sometimes sophisticated. For example in economic terms, it means the bilateral and multilateral Western donors who sustain Uganda's economy and support Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). However, its late-nineteenth century usage was limited. For example when Muteesa I cried out "Oh, the Mzungu, the mzungu! He does indeed want to see me" while welcoming Speke, the word denoted "an important English traveller". This is the context in which I am using it here. For more on Muteesa I encounter with Speke see: Maitland, *Speke*, pp.148-49.

Rwenzori Mountains were the “source” of the Nile), have since classical times generated curiosity among Europeans. It is against this backdrop that John Hanning Speke and Richard Francis Burton became interested in this region (Thrower 1999, 155) and attempted, in 1857, to discover the “source of the Nile” albeit unsuccessfully. In 1862 Speke, accompanied by James Grant returned, reached Buganda and "discovered" the "source" of the Nile[27]. The two laid the path which Henry Morton Stanley followed in the 1870s. It was Stanley who wrote a letter inviting missionaries, colonialism, and thus the Western modernity which Albert Cook celebrated, to [B]Uganda. I turn to him next.

Proselytising the Noble Savage: Stanley and the Call for Missionary Activity in Buganda

Henry Morton Stanley (1841–1904) was an American journalist and explorer. He came to the kingdom of Buganda in 1875. He had positive impressions about the kingdom. For example he noted how its king Muteesa I “asked a number of questions about various things, thereby showing a vast amount of curiosity, and great intelligence” ([Hope] n.d, 118). Actually this character description was commonly used by explorers and missionaries who came to Buganda. This is mainly because, starting in the fifteenth century, Buganda

[27] The curiosity over the Rwenzori Mountains and their connection with the Nile continued to grow after Speke’s "discovery" of the “source of the Nile”. There were further expeditions by Samuel Baker and then David Livingstone until Henry Morton Stanley became the first European to see the Rwenzori in 1887. Later in 1906, Italy’s Duke Abruzzi became the first European to climb the Rwenzori mountains and confirm that indeed they had the “source of the Nile”. It is important to note however that there are other rivers originating from the Great Lakes region which drain into the Nile. Hence it is probably more accurate to speak about sources of the Nile rather than any single source. This, however, does nothing to quell the insatiable curiosity in Europe over the “source of the Nile”. As late as 2006, some Europeans are still curious about the source of the Nile. After an 80-day expedition, three Europeans McGregor, Cam McLeay and Garth MacIntyre concluded that Nyungwe forest in southern Rwanda was, indeed, the “true source of River Nile”. The news came on March 31, 2006. This late “source of the Nile” claim sparked a new wave of discussions with fears that the claim could even escalate tensions in the volatile Great Lakes region. For example, there were talks of war erupting between Uganda and Rwanda over who owns the source of the Nile. However, that the three European adventurers satisfied their curiosity 149 years after their predecessors had made competing claims for the “true” source the Nile demonstrates that this 2006 expedition was just another adventure which will not rest European debate and curiosity over the “true” source of the Nile. This is especially likely considering that the point of departure for this latest expedition was the contention that Lake Victoria was “too small” to be the source of the Nile. This then begs the question of whether Southern Rwanda is not equally too small to be the source of the Nile! For the full story on this latest expedition see: “Kagame trashes Nile debate”, in *The New Vision*, June 22, 2006. Also available online at http://newvision.co.ug/D/8/13/505240 (accessed June 22, 2006).

emerged in the Great Lakes region as a strong political and territorial kingdom (Reid 2002). By the nineteenth century the kingdom had evolved a centralised political system headed by a monarch (or Kabaka). It also had a strong army with which it extended and consolidated its borders; it had a powerful economy given its control over important trade routes to the East African coast. Because of this sophisticated political, economic and social structure, missionaries and explorers considered the Baganda less primitive and exemplary. As a result their kingdom became a core around which Uganda as a modern state took shape (Mutibwa 2008). Most immediately (and notably), by the 1890s colonial administrators had converted Buganda into a pool for enthusiastic but highly unpopular chiefs[28] whom they deployed to expand and extend the British colony. Mainly graduates from the bush schools (which I am about to explain), these chiefs extended and implemented the colonial regime all over Uganda — and here I am thinking of Semei Kakungulu[29]. Later colonial administrators replaced the Baganda with local (read tribal) chiefs who were graduates of missionary education. This thread is important for the reason that, because they were driven by avarice and greed, these chiefs became the first breed of corrupt leaders in Uganda (Mutibwa 1992, 3). In chapter eight I will come back to this strand to critique the position Bruno Sserunkuuma has adopted towards traditional leadership and authority in Uganda.

We learn from Lugira (1970, 150) that by the time Stanley arrived there was "improvement of political conditions in Buganda". Lugira's claim is plausible and might help us understand the relationship between Stanley and the Baganda. Speke had narrated that grotesque murder rituals and mass killings existed in Buganda during his visit (Maitland 1971, 144–45). In spite

[28] For example in Bunyoro this unpopularity provoked the *Kanyangire Revolt* of 1907-8.
[29] Semei Kakungulu extended British rule to northern Uganda through the east where he initially established his headquarters at place called Bukedi. He particularly impressed his colonial masters with his level of intelligence and style of administration. It is in this context that Kakungulu, and indeed other Baganda agents, played a key role in the expansion and consolidation of British colonialism in Uganda. As if to confirm my claim, Kasozi cites a colonial official who recommended that Baganda administrators be deployed in the north to ensure efficient administration of the area. "The Lango [from northern Uganda] are raw savages" the officer observed before prescribing that "the only system which these people can be dealt with is throught the use of intelligent [Baganda] agents as has been done in Bukedi" (Kasozi 1994, 24).

of its colonial biases I suggest that we admit Speke's account for the following reasons. First, between 1856 and 1860 Buganda was reft by power rivalry resulting from the power vacuum left behind by Kabaka Ssuuna's death in 1856 and the failure of the traditional institution to find a popular replacement. Amid such political fluidity one of his sons, Muteesa I, succeeded him. Muteesa I was not popular and in order to assert his authority, he brutally murdered many of his subjects (ibid). If this account holds true, then Speke was right to suggest that there were grotesque murder scenes in Buganda at the time of his visit to the kingdom.

Second, Buganda was involved in regional wars on several fronts[30] manifesting also the fear of an imminent attack from the Turks[31] (Reid 2002, 198). Most important, and decisive of them all, was the bloody, and initially frustrating, battle which Muteesa I fought against Buvuma in 1875. After emerging victorious, tension eased in Buganda's capital, Mengo. It is in this normalcy that Stanley was given a joyous reception on April 4, 1975. He recounts that:

> I landed amid a concourse of two thousand people, who saluted me with a deafening volley of musketry and waving flags. Katikiro [meaning the Prime Minister] of Uganda[32], then conducted me to comfortable quarters, to which shortly afterwards were brought sixteen goats, ten oxen, an immense quantity of bananas, plantains, sweet potatoes, besides eggs, chickens, milk, rice, ghee, and butter. After a royal bountiful gift I felt more curiosity than ever to see the generous monarch ([Hope] n.d, 116).

It is not clear what flags these were. Even if cloth had come to Buganda it is less likely that the kingdom of Buganda had adopted a flag as a political symbol. But the practice of waving banana leaves to honour important guests has a long history. It is most probable that Stanley mistook banana leaves for

[30] For example in Busoga (to the East), in Buvuma, Karagwe, Nyamwenzi, and Rwanda (in the South).

[31] Due to dwindling ivory stocks, public outcry in Europe over slave trade and shifting strategic interests, Europeans had withdrawn their interests from the Equatorial Province by the 1860s. A rapacious group of Arabs from Northern Sudan, Egypt and Syria remained behind. It raided for, and traded in, slaves and ivory. The affected territories to the south of the Nile Basin, including Buganda, referred to this group as "the Turks" (or Abaturuuki in Buganda). The term Turks here should therefore be understood in that context.

[32] What Stanley calls "Uganda" must be distanced from what was called Uganda starting with 1900 to today. Whereas the same name Uganda was maintained in 1900 and inherited by the current nation-state in 1962 it must be clarified that in this context Stanley's "Uganda" refers to Buganda.

flags, either imputing a form of "modernity" in relation to the notion of "nation" to the Buganda kingdom, or simply exaggerating his account of Buganda's "civilization" to feed the "spectatorial lust" (Coombes 1994, 63) of his Western audience.

We also notice in Stanley's account a cocktail of cultural practices in Buganda at the time. For example while rice, among other foods, was probably introduced by the Arabs, the use of food to define and cement the relationship between Stanley and the king is couched in Ganda cultural terms[33]. Elsewhere Stanley recounts more Arabic resonances at the palace, discounting earlier claims by Speke for low civilisation at the palace[34]. For example he was received, amid drumming and the firing of guns, by a king "dressed in Arab costume"([Hope] n.d, 102). The drumming and ululations were Ganda; the guns were probably acquired from Speke and through contact with Arabs — a contact which was also manifest in the way the king was dressed. He was dressed in Arab costume we are told. This Arab costume probably refers to what Khamis gave to Muteesa I as "Arab cloth". It, however, merits further discussion before I proceed with my discussion on Stanley and the beginning of missionary work, because it relates to the ways in which dress and identity are used to play out political issues in contemporary Ugandan art. This discussion will set the stage on which I will analyse, in chapters four, five, seven and eight, various artworks in which traditionalised dress codes, drawing on Arab and Ganda cultures, have been used to symbolise and elicit profound political statements.

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[33] That this is traditional is borne out by the Luganda proverb *Oluganda kulya, olugenda enjala terudda* (literally translated food bonds relationships). Also, the word "ganda" is a "static root or stem" (Lugira 1970, 3). Initial vowels, prefixes, infixes and suffices are added to it to denote issues and aspects for/from Buganda. For example the land is Buganda, the people are Baganda; the language is Luganda, etc. But the word is also used as an adjective. Unless otherwise stated, I use it, here and elsewhere in this thesis, as an adjective.

[34] Speke went as far as illustrating a naked king as if to illustrate the extent of primitivism at Mengo. Suffice to note that in Ganda culture it would be taboo, more so for a Kabaka, to undress before an English stranger who stayed at the palace for a couple of months. For Speke's drawing of a naked Muteesa I, see Maitland, *Speke*, p.102.

Before contact with Arab and Swahili cultures, the Baganda wore hides, skins, fibre-mats, bark-cloth[35] among others. Bark-cloth was particularly prominent probably because of its association with the palace and ruling elite. Men wore bark-cloth toga-wise and secured it with a knot over one shoulder. Women wrapped their bodies in bark-cloth from below the armpits downwards to the ankles and fastened it at the waist with a belt[36].

By the beginning of the twentieth-century a style called *okwesiba essuuka* (literally translated to wrap oneself in cotton cloth) had emerged as a fashion for the privileged female members of the ruling aristocracy. As was the fashion with bark-cloth, women wrapped their bodies from the armpits down to the ankles and fastened it at the waist with a belt. This fashion evolved into what became a *busuuti* in the early-twentieth-century. The *busuuti* evolved at Gayaza High School, one of the missionary schools in Buganda. At Gayaza the fashion of *okwesiba essuuka* was considered inappropriate by the European educator Allen White because it exposed supposedly erogenous parts of the woman's body. In its place a new fashion deriving from a fusion of the Western blouse and traditional women's fashion (*okwesiba essuuka*) evolved. It was called *okwesiba/okwambala busuuti* (literally translated wrapping/dressing oneself in a *busuuti*). The *busuuti* has a square neck, a yoke and short sleeves. It is worn to cover the arms down to the elbows. It also covers the upper body. It is wrapped around the body to the ankle and fastened at the waist with elaborate long belts. It therefore suited Allen White's (Edwardian) notions of respectability and decency and hence modernity and civilisation. This is not to suggest that there is

[35] Bark-cloth, and its making, is one of the ancient traditions in Buganda. The origins of bark-cloth are enshrouded in heroic myths which are hard to confirm or dispute. That it is not only the Baganda, who claim it as a tradition, makes the trace for its origin even more difficult because other cultures in the region make contrasting claims. The tradition, however, enjoys respect among the Baganda. It involves the extraction of "fabric" material from the ficus tree, called *Omutuba* in Buganda. Different mallets are used to flatten the bark into soft material; the quality of the tree-bark and the experience of the bark-cloth-maker (called *Omukomazi* in Buganda) will yield different textures, varying qualities and colours ranging from coffee brown to terracotta. Bark-cloth is used in rituals and ceremonies (see Roscoe 1911); the practice continues today.

[36] I call it a belt for want of a better term. Actually the Baganda call it *ekitambaala* (meaning a long strip of cloth). *Ekitambaala* is usually made out of elaborate cloth, decorated on the ends and reinforced with stiff material. It is tied around the waist to fasten the *busuuti* but also to give a sense of elegance to the woman.

consensus about the history of the evolution of the *busuuti,* because there is not[37]. Notwithstanding the dissenting views the *busuuti* has been traditionalised in Buganda. It has continued to evolve with new modifications so that today it is a revered women's fashion. It attracts all Baganda (elite and non-elite) alike. This thread is important. In chapters five, seven and eight I will make reference to these traditionalised women's fashions, because artists have adopted them to vernacularise their works, enunciate [B]Uganda's collective ideology and veil political statements.

Alongside the *ssuuka/busuuti* for women, a *kanzu* evolved as a traditional male garb. Like the *busuuti* the *kanzu* derives from a mixture of traditional Ganda dressing styles and ideas from Arab/Swahili fashions. Arab (and Swahili) men wear a long-sleeved, one-piece tunic called a *dishdashah* or *thoub* in Arabic*.* It is worn to cover the whole body. It is usually white. It has a short collar-like neck and (sometimes) a pocket on the left breast. It is also open in front from the neck to the stomach, with buttons. The *kanzu* follows

[37] Take for example in 1967 a radical postcolonial nationalist S. J. Luyimbaazi-Zaake (a Minister of Education in Uganda's first postcolonial government), attempted to erase Allen White's contribution to the evolution of the *busuuti* albeit problematically. Luyimbaazi-Zaake conceded that White may have played a role in the "invention" of the *busuuti*. He, however, simultaneously rejected her contribution on the grounds that White was just "a mere teacher" who "neither had the ingenuity to put it together, nor an idea" of ensuring that it suited its purpose. Instead he praised A. G. Gomes, a Goan tailor for the invention. He suggested that Gomes transformed the *ssuuka* style, which he rightly traced back to the use of bark cloth in Buganda, into a *busuuti* with modifications. Luyimbaazi-Zaake was correct to suggest that Gomes played a role in the evolution of the *ssuuka* style into a *busuuti.* Actually A. G. Gomes was one of the owners of the shop, Gomes and Bros, which White contracted to design the *busuuti* as a school uniform for students of Gayaza High School. But Luyimbaazi-Zaake was wrong to reject White's contribution when he energetically suggested that "do not let us be carried away by emotional attachment to Miss Allen. This *Busu[u]ti* was the idea of Mr [A. G.] Gomes. I take off my hat for him". The grounds for his claim are weak and unsustainable. For example he referred to the fact that the *busuuti* is also called *gomesi* (a reference to Gomes) to prove his point. Yet the *busuuti* is also called *Alleni/Buwalleni* (a reference to Allen White), alongside other names like *kinnaggayaaza* (meaning the Gayaza fashion), *bboodingi* (a reference to boarding school which Gayaza was) and *busuuti* (whose sources are not clear) and Luyimbaazi-Zaake was aware of this! Besides, the claim that A.G. Gomes "invented" the *busuuti* could not be confirmed by Gomes's own brother, and business partner, C. M. Gomes in the late sixties. C. M. Gomes came to Uganda in 1908 three years after A. G. Gomes (who came in 1905). Interviewed on whether his brother invented the garb, C. M. Gomes "could not say whether it was his elder brother [A. G. Gomes] who really originally designed the dress". Instead he confirmed his own contribution to the popularity of the *busuuti*, outside Gayaza High School and its transition into, and adoption as, a Ganda dress. C. M. Gomesi argued that it was after one of the wives of King Daudi Chwa II (1896-1939) wore a *busuuti* which he (C. M. Gomes) had designed, that the *busuuti* became a popular Ganda dress. For more on this debate see: "Whose Busuti? Mr Zake Explains How the Buganda Traditional Dress Evolved" in *Uganda Argus* No. 4045, December 27, 1967. Also see: "Mr. Gomes is Not Sure" in *Uganda Argus* No. 4045, December 27, 1967.

the same pattern, save that it does not have a collar or a pocket and its front opening stops mid-way down the chest. It has no buttons but carries some trimmings in front. Recently I saw an article in the press suggesting that the differences between the *kanzu* and the *thoub* can be attributed to the fact that the Baganda failed to copy the *thoub* correctly[38]. Such claims underestimate the innovative processes in which the *kanzu*, like the *busuuti*, was born and so they can be discounted.

The earliest visual representation of the *kanzu* among the Baganda (and it was probably in Buganda that it evolved), is a picture of king Muteesa I of Buganda. However, Stanley suggests that the entire royal household and ruling aristocracy wore *kanzu*. For example he records that "the chiefs were very respectable-looking people, dressed richly in the Arab costume" ([Hope], n.d., 116). But even the guards wore *kanzu*-like garbs or "white cotton dresses" as Stanley calls them (ibid, p.120). There is also a surviving image of Muteesa I's successor, and son, wearing a hybrid from Arab/Swahili and Baganda cultures — probably a *kanzu* and a turban (?). This visual archive, and the fact that currently the king and all Baganda wear the *kanzu,* suggests that the *kanzu* has survived all social, political, cultural [ex]changes in Uganda. Like the *busuuti,* today the *kanzu* is one of the most cherished cultural symbols and 'traditional'[39] dresses among the Baganda. It continues to be used alongside Western fashions, such as London suits. This thread should be borne in mind because in chapters four, five, seven and eight I repeatedly refer to the *kanzu* to explain political works where contemporary artists have referenced it.

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[38] Ssegirinya makes the case that the *kanzu* looks the way it is because the Baganda failed to copy the Arab tunic — the *thoub*. For his article see: Ssegirinya Ibrahim, "Ekkanzu: Yaleetebwa Bawarabu mu Uganda, Abaganda ne Bagyezza" in *Bukedde*, September 1, 2006. Also available online at: http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/58/68/518561/okutunga (accessed September 1, 2006).

[39] As it is clear from my discussion on their evolution, the *kanzu* and *busuuti* are hybrids of Arabic and Western influences. This would then render the use of the notion 'traditional' to qualify such dresses problematic. My use of this word here however arises from the fact that in spite of their hybridity these dresses have been received and respected as traditional constumes. Hence notions like "*ennyambala y'abaganda*", which translates the traditional fashions among the Baganda, are commonly used in reference to the *kanzu* and *busuuti*. It is in this context that I am using this notion here and elsewhere in this thesis.

Now, Stanley saw the Baganda as rare natives led by a “powerful monarch” ([Hope] n.d., 116), noted by hygiene, civilisation and royalty comparable to that of Europeans (ibid, p.117). Put in short for Stanley the Baganda were "noble savages". As if to confirm my claim and also to impress his Western audience, he argued that “if you will recollect, however that Mtesa[40] is a native of Central Africa, and that he had seen but three white men until I came, you will perhaps, be as much astonished at all this as I was” (ibid). The three white men referred to here were Speke and Grant, who visited Buganda in 1862, and Colonel de Bellefonds[41] who met Stanley at Muteesa I’s palace in 1875. For Stanley it was therefore amazing that such civilisation existed in the middle of savagery and primitivity especially as it had not been supervised by a white man. We should interrogate [t]his stance for two reasons. First, acceptance of the claim for civilisation in Buganda would have rendered the colonial project unnecessary. Second, Stanley himself did not take this unsupervised civilisation seriously.

However, convinced, as he was, of the level of "civilisation" in Buganda, Stanley saw Buganda as a nucleus for the spread of Christianity in the Great Lakes region ([Hope] n.d,119, 124). Consequently, although he ruthlessly imposed his will on much of Africa, Stanley negotiated with king Muteesa I over the evangelisation of the Buganda kingdom to which Muteesa I "agreed". Alexander Mackay, C. T. Wilson and Shergold Smith of the Church Missionary Society arrived in Buganda in 1877. In 1879 the French Catholic White Fathers, stationed in Algiers, sent Father Siméon Lourdel and Brother Amans who arrived at Mengo, Buganda’s capital, in 1879. These were the pioneers of missionary work in Uganda.

Despite the smooth start missionary work did not proceed well in the 1880s. The monarchy (under Muteesa I and later his successors) failed to control religious rivalries. Because of this failure Buganda witnessed a political

[40] Much of the early European and Arab/Swahili accounts use this name: “Mtesa”. Where it is in a citation I leave it at Mtesa but the correct spelling is Muteesa. The difference is orthographic.
[41] According to Stanley (cited in [Hope] n.d, 106), Bellefonds was there to “to make a treaty of commerce between Mtesa and the Egyptian Government” headed by Charles Gordon.

paralysis, a bloody Muslim revolution and a Christian counter-revolution (Twaddle 1972). The kingdom's economy stagnated as competing forces engaged in shifting alliances and rivalries which undermined traditional authority.

Secondly, as religious houses competed to court members of the Ganda aristocracy into opposing camps, their adherents took on, and jealously guarded, new identities[42]. The Muslims lost their 'Ganda-ness' and assumed an Arab/Swahili identity: they became *Abaisiramu*[43]. In the period 1888-89 they brutally attacked Buganda's traditions[44]. Their choices of social interaction, food, language, etc were oriented towards Arab/Swahili culture. Hence the phrase "*Si Muganda, Muisiramu*: 'He's not a Muganda, he's a Muslim" (Twaddle 1972, 71). Those who converted to Catholicism and Protestantism also took on new identities. The catholics became *Abakatoliki*[45]*;* the Protestants became *Abapurotesitanti*[46]. These last two identified with Western cultures which they adopted through missionary education; the need to Europeanise them informed the claim that children come to "learn the skill of the European" (in the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter). But before we further explore this dynamic, the implications of this reconfiguration for the health of the once mighty Buganda kingdom, and development of Uganda as a British Protectorate, deserves comment.

[42] Pre-colonial society in Buganda was layered in a pyramidal structure with the aristocracy at the top, followed by commoners and the slaves at the bottom. (The public service was an exception: its membership was recruited basing on merit.) These new identities were premised on cultural (religious) affiliations; they cut across 'traditional' class stratifications.
[43] Literally translated those who belong to Islam.
[44] This suppression cast Islam in bad light; it attracted resentment; it strained the shaky Muslim-led alliance which orchestrated an anti-Mwanga II coup in 1888 and created a sultanate in Buganda (under prince Kalema). Colonials and missionaries exploited this anti-Islam backlash, formed a numerically strong Catholic-Protestant alliance, allied with the traditionalist, and with support from Lugard's firepower they overthrew the Kalema-led Muslim theocracy in 1889.
[45] Literally translated the Catholics but also called *Abafaransa* meaning those from France.
[46] Literally translated the Protestants but also *Abangereza* meaning those from England.

The Collapse of Buganda: Rivalries, Wars and the Creation of Uganda

Ambitious palace officials representing opposing *Abakatoliki, Abaisiramu, Abapulotesitanti* and the traditionalists (diviner or *ab'emmandwa/abalaguzi)* factions sowed seeds of disloyalty to Buganda's traditional authority as they formed shifting alliances for and against the monarchy in the period 1877-91 (see Twaddle 1972). Disloyalty started at the royal palace; it crept into the army, leading to the loss of successive battles in the 1880s, and later it permeated the entire kingdom (Reid 2002). Amid such immense political pressure, Muteesa I died in 1884. His son Mwanga II succeeded him. Mwanga II faced a challenge of asserting his authority which was severely downgraded as converts, palace officials, pages and commoners defied him publicly. In order to gain control he set up a group of wealthy, young, trusted royal guards. This had no significant effect; instead it alienated the conservative, elderly and experienced chiefs (the *bakungu).* Secondly he became a ruthless dictator. He ordered a mass execution of converts at Namugongo in June 1885. These became Uganda's martyrs[47]. But this too did not help. Instead it drove dissenters underground from where they fomented rumours to undermine his authority. By October 1888 the kingdom was rife with rumours and fears of mass killings. It was rumoured that the king planned to purge the aristocracy, public service, and the civil society of religious converts. Fearing for their lives, the Muslims led a bloody coup. They replaced Mwanga II with his son Kiwewa whom they subsequently overthrew and replaced him with his brother Kalema before Mwanga II was restored through a bloody Christian-led assault on the palace in 1889.

[47] As Mwanga faced the challenge of legitimating his first administration, he ordered all his subjects to deny Christianity. This was not unusual: from antiquity the king's word in Buganda has always been law. In short, Mwanga made a law and his word should have been obeyed by all. And yet this time it was not obeyed. A confrontation ensued culminating in religious persecutions in 1885-1887; the most notorious of which happened at a place called Namugongo (on June 3, 1885) where a number of defiant converts were burnt alive. On October 18, 1964 the Vatican canonised the Catholic converts who died in the fire. Since the mid-1970s impressive shrines have been built at Namugongo; June 3 is a public holiday for Ugandans to commemorate the show of religious faith which the converts exhibited. Namugongo has become a pilgrimage site for the faithful from Uganda and beyond.

In the middle of this confusion, blood-letting, revenge, carnage and uncertainty, the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) came to Uganda to represent British and its own commercial interests following the conclusion of the Berlin Conference in 1884–1885. Convened at Berlin, under the auspices of Germany Chancellor Bismarck, the Berlin Conference merged the territory currently called Uganda and Kenya into the British sphere of influence. Under the stewardship of Captain Fredrick Lugard the IBEA led shifting alliances as it fought wars to expand its commercial interests, curb inter-religious wars in Buganda and assert British authority. In the process Mwanga II's second regime collapsed. He fled into exile from where he mounted a protracted guerrilla war. He was captured on April 9 1899 and deported to Seychelles where he died on May 21 1902 (Cisternino 2004).

As a result of the upheavals the IBEAC ran into "serious financial trouble" (Seftel 1994, 5); it could not meet the cost of adminstering British interests in Buganda and the surrounding areas. Thus, in 1894 the British government took direct control over Buganda and other areas designated as the British Protectorate by the Berlin Conference. It negotiated the Buganda Agreement[48] with the Christian chiefs and regents[49] who rulled the kingdom after the fall of Mwanga. Signed in 1900, the Buganda Agreement formed the framework in which British rule was declared over Uganda as a British Protectorate. Administered through the system Lugard had earlier conceived

[48] It was also called the 1900 Agreement (or *Endagaano y'Olwenda* in Luganda). Harry Johnston concluded it. It defined the powers of the king and those of the British and how the two were to interact. It was a complex document which created a Buganda state within a Uganda state (Mutibwa 1992, 3) sowing seeds for the conflicts which have haunted Uganda up to today (ibid). It also led to conflicts between the British and the Baganda in the 1950s leading to the collapse of the 1900 Agreement itself in 1955 and its revision into the 1955 Buganda Agreement. See: *The Uganda Agreement of 1900* available online at: http://www.buganda.com/buga1900.htm (accessed January, 2006). The 1955 agreement is also published online at http://www.buganda.com/buga1955.htm (accessed January 10, 2006).

[49] After his refusal to submit to British sovereignty and reign as a puppet king of terms set by Lugard, Mwanga fled his capital and waged a guerrilla campaign in August 1897 (Cisternino 2004,196). His one year-old son Daudi Chwa II was installed as king. Three regents oversaw the kingdom until Daudi Chwa II was old enough to rein. These were: Apollo Kaggwa, Stanislasi Mugwanya and Zakariya Kisingiri (Jørgensen 1981, 46).

as the Dual Mandate[50], the 1900 Agreement effectively placed Buganda into Uganda and the current state of Uganda took shape. Through further negotiations and force during the first quarter of the twentieth-century, Uganda's final borders were drawn with the last one (its border with Kenya) drawn in 1926. In 1962 Uganda's first post-colonial national government inherited these borders, and the problems that defined them, marking the end of the period 1862–1962 whereby Uganda became a "modern" state. It is this modern state that Fred Mutebi and Bruno Sserunkuuma engage within their art. Let me now pick up that strand of my discussion on Western modernity in Buganda and extend it.

Salvaging Savages? Missionary work and the Project of Modernity

In his letter published in the *Daily Telegraph* on April 28, 1874*,* Stanley justified the case for immediate missionary activity in [B]Uganda by using the following statement: "What a field and harvest ripe for the sickle of civilisation" (Stanley cited in [Hope], n.d, 126). He then went on to spell out the qualities which the best man to do the harvesting had to possess. He wrote that:

> It is not the mere preacher, however, that is wanted here [in Buganda]. The bishops of Great Britain collected, with all their classic youth of Oxford and Cambridge would affect nothing by mere talk with the intelligent people of Uganda. It is the practical Christian tutor, who can teach people how to become Christians, cure their diseases, construct dwellings, understand and exemplify agriculture, and turn his hand to anything…this a man who is wanted. Such a one, if he can be found, would become the saviour of Africa (ibid.).

We see a paradox here. The Baganda are intelligent we are told. Yet they cannot produce enough food. They are in poor health, lack housing and are in need of missionary help! Elsewhere Stanley writes that the one man (and in fact the only one man) to save B[U]ganda, and indeed the whole of Africa, "*must belong to no nation in particular, but the entire white race*" (Stanley cited in [Hope] n.d.,126, my emphasis). And here lies the gist of the matter.

[50] Lugard based his Dual Mandate on a polygenist assumption that natives are different from whites. He therefore urged the subleasing of power. He argued that colonial administration could only succeed if, and only if, power was dispensed through native authorities. In Uganda he set up a system where colonial administration was dispensed through kings, chiefs and headmen. Lugard used a similar system in Nigeria when he left Uganda. For more on the Dual Mandate see: Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 1922.

Stanley constructed Europeans as a single, close-nit, homogeneous “white race” which he ordained with the duty to Christianise and civilise Africans. This is intriguing for the following reasons:

First, Stanley’s single “white race” glossed over varied professions, nationalities and interests. Stanley himself was a British-American explorer, journalist, and a self-professed “no missionary”, who shared with Muteesa I basics such as the Ten Commandments ([Hope] n.d., 124). During his time in Buganda he met Colonel Linant de Bellefonds at Muteesa I’s palace. Bellefonds was different from him because he was a Belgian, Calvinist merchant who made no attempt to evangelise. Then too, the two missions which responded to Stanley’s letter in the late-1870s were (as I have already indicated) the British Church Missionary Society and the French White Fathers. These held conflicting views and identities as manifest in the rival camps they led in Buganda and elsewhere in Africa.

Second, missionaries were never uniformly aligned with the colonial policy; “missionary societies were arguably the more active agents in both the promotion and criticism of colonial policy…” as Annie Coombes rightly observes (Coombes 1994, 160). For example, as Harry Johnston drafted the terms of the 1900 Buganda Agreement, the 1900 Toro Agreement, et cetera, missionaries in Uganda sided with the Africans for whom they acted as ‘advisors’ and interpreters! Although the missions did this in order to promote “themselves as the more humanitarian and philanthropic face of colonialism, through the rhetoric of ‘brotherly love’” (ibid), it cannot be denied that the Baganda (as indeed it was the case with other “African natives”) benefited from missionary advice. This of course does not take away from the fact that missionaries sometimes subscribed to Stanley’s archetypal “white race”. For example the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa agreed with the notion of the “white race” as it supported Apartheid in South Africa. Neither is it to deny the fact that the French White Fathers served the colonial machine in the French territories. It does not negate the fact that in the Tanganyika Territory (currently Tanzania) British Governors Horace Byatt (1920–24) and

Donald Cameron (1925–31), among others, often colluded with the Church Missionary Society against German missions. Neither does it deny the gendered colonial discourses in which European women were marginalised on the fringes of the colonial economy (McClintock 1995). Rather, it is to assert that missionary activities were in many ways dynamic and complex (Neill 1966, 14) and that to speak of an homogeneous, overarching, "white race", as Stanley did, was more of an ideological imagination than a lived reality. This then begs the question: Why did Stanley insist on the "white race"?

Implicit in Stanley's "white race" are two issues. One of them is evident in the way Stanley explored the possibilities of the white (middle class, male-dominated) race. Clearly his "white race" overlapped all professional, national and religious distinctions. Put succinctly, being American, Belgian, English, French, Anglican, Calvinist, Catholic, Methodist, or evangelist or trader was irrelevant according to Stanley. For Stanley, what mattered was a civilised "white race" ordained with the mission of salvaging [B]Uganda (and Africa) held back by paganism, disease, hunger and poor living conditions. To remind ourselves, he wanted the "white race" to "teach people how to become Christians, cure their diseases, construct dwellings, understand and exemplify agriculture". In the process Stanley unashamedly abandoned all his pretensions about the uniqueness, and apparently European-style civilisation, which, as we saw earlier on in this discussion, he found in Buganda. He knitted the Baganda back into an essentialised world defined on the eighteenth-century epithet of the Dark Continent against which the pre-colonial progress in Buganda he had previously lauded, lost ground. As we notice in the rest of his mail despatch, he relocated Buganda into what Mudimbe (1994) calls the geography of monstrosity: a primitive, barbaric, uncivilised way of life which sharply contrasted with the modern, civilised, God-fearing West. Against this (ideological) backdrop Stanley relocated the same Muteesa I, whom he earlier, in the same mail published in the *Daily Telegraph,* described as a "delighted…follower of Islam" (Stanley cited in [Hope] n.d., 125) thus insinuating that Muteesa I was not pagan, into a

stereotypic pagan world while motivating the question: “Now, where is there in all the *Pagan world* a more promising field for a mission than Uganda?” (Stanley cited in [Hope] n.d., 126, my emphasis)

At the heart of Stanley’s notion of a “practical Christian tutor” belonging to a “white race” saving an “all…Pagan world” lay the intention to construct an “Africa of ‘popular imagination’” (Coombes 1994, 81). These issues informed the nineteenth-century paternalistic rhetoric in which colonialism became “politically expedient” (ibid). Although obviously grounded in racist, capitalist and imperialist interests (and discourses), it was argued that colonialism was in the interest of Africans. Notions like “benevolent racism”, “sympathetic discrimination”, “race of children” or Frederick Lugard’s African as a “late-born child in the family of nations” (cited in Sanyal 2000, 31) gained currency. Africans were condescendingly patronised through colonial discourse as unwilling victims of heathenism and despotism, but ultimately salvageable and susceptible to training under the firm guidance of the [white, middle-class] race which was more fortunate than themselves (Sanyal 2000).

Now, in Buganda this privileged white race was represented by two missions: the Church Missionary Society and the French White Fathers. In order to salvage and train the Baganda and launch them into modernity, a launch Albert Cook zealously celebrated in 1937, the two missions initiated “bush schools” in the 1890s. These schools started in Buganda before they spread to other parts as and when they came under missionary/colonial influence. They were important instruments of modernisation. For instance they improved literacy in Uganda. Harry Johnston, Governor of Uganda in 1900, estimated that at least 200,000 Ugandans (mainly Baganda) were literate by the turn of the nineteenth-century (quoted in Scotton 1973, 212). But because, as we see in the quote from Trowell at the beginning of this chapter, these are the very schools in which modern ideas about art evolved, I will, in the next section, analyse how the attitude of missionaries, which was inimical to traditional Ganda [and African] art, informed the bush school

curriculum thus resulting in the situation which, as we read in the quote at the beginning of the chapter, Trowell observed.

Colonial Violence and the Banishment of Buganda's Traditional Arts: Discourses and Ideology

Bush schools were catechism schools — usually grass-thatched mud-houses — in the rural areas (Marriot 1933, 58). They became important institutions through which many Baganda and later Ugandans were proselytised (or, put simply, modernised). By 1937 Uganda had 5500 bush schools scattered all over the countryside. Through such institutions active young men shot to the limelight among the rural masses. They formed the initial Western-educated elite and a pool of enthusiastic Baganda who were recruited into the lower ranks of the colonial bureaucracy.

Bush schools did not encourage the continuity of old African traditions into the modernising social life of converts. This is not what their "curriculum" intended. Rather, they engaged in;

> …rigorous efforts to change the social and cultural fabric of African life. Training in hygiene and social etiquette became integral to mission education [at the bush schools] and became popularly know as the 'gospel of the clean shirt'. The ultimate goal of this gospel was to make an African dress, speak, and act similar to a European. Missionaries, in short, launched a [systematic] campaign to the best of their abilities to disassemble, and then reshape African identities, because that was the only modern they knew by which heathen souls could be saved (Sanyal 2000, 26).

And this is where the *Abapulotesitanti/Abangereza* (or Protestants) and *Abakatoliki/Abafaransa* (or Catholics) identities were shaped. But there was something else more intriguing namely that whereas Buganda's

> contact with coastal and other traders from the Islamic world and from Europe to begin with had been on a more-or-less reciprocal basis, direct contact with Europe[ean missionaries] from the late 19th century onwards… served, among other things, to establish an alienation between local people and their cultural heritage (Kyeyune 2003, 23).

Let me concede that probably Kyeyune belaboured his case for harmony and reciprocation because the available record suggests otherwise. For example

there is limited evidence to certify what the Arab/Swahili culture received from Buganda. The *kanzu*, which is a hybrid between the two cultures, is more Ganda, and accepted as such, than Arabic/Swahili. As it has been discussed above (see p.32), Muslims radically rejected local traditions – atleast in the late-1880s. Secondly, although after 1890 colonial/missionary activities brutally suppressed traditional practices, and therefore the local arts (and I extend this debate in a moment), earlier the colonial attitude towards traditions in Buganda was nuanced and interlaced in complex political negotiations (mainly in the period 1884-1891) in which traditionalists were strong power brokers (Twaddle 1972). But Kyeyune's claim is admissible because it highlights the non-compromising stance with which European modernity was introduced in Baganda. Put differently, "acculturation meant, in practice, a radical conversion" (Mudimbe 1994, 89) from Ganda traditions to the Western mode of life.

This complex (new) dynamic was socialised among the Baganda through the creation of a new class of Baganda called the readers (Sanyal 2000, 39) or *Abasomi* (Kyeyune 2003, 33), existing alongside other more specific identities like *Abafaransa*/*Abakatoliki*, and *Abangereza/Abapolotesitanti*. It became important for one to gain the tools of modernity and to join the *Abasomi* club. This then explains the attitude of *children-come-to-school-to-learn-the-skill-of-the-European-way-of-life* which Trowell observed in the bush schools. Secondly, aware of their new identities, the *Abasomi* shifted loyalties from traditional African institutions to European institutions. As indicated earlier, Muteesa I, and his successor Mwanga, struggled against the activities of this club. Supported by the IBEA, and the missionaries, the *Abasomi* eventually took power and dominated politics and the economy, first in Buganda and later in Uganda. Many *Abasomi* (mainly as chiefs) became landed aristocrats. They used their access to the colonial authority to personalise ownership of community land, sowing seeds for confrontations over land (Jørgensen 1981, 84) which continue to manifest in varied, and sometimes bloody, forms today.

Also, through bush schools missionaries demonised Buganda's traditional forms of (oral and material) art. Although some had magico-religious values, not all traditional African art forms were religious[51]. Some were aesthetic: jewellery (armlets, anklets, etc) serves as an example. Others were functional on a day to day basis, for example mats, baskets and pots. Some were used to promote community cohesion and productiveness — there are fifty-two clan symbols which fall in this category. Some legitimated and transmitted power — take for instance the *empiima* (or royal dagger). Still others had educative value. For example, before missionary education Buganda had oral and practical education through which important artisanal, medicinal, economic and cultural knowledge was preserved and passed on to successive generations. It is true that some traditional artefacts had cross-cutting usages. For instance smoking pipes were used for recreational, "evil" and apotropaic purposes depending on their shapes and the intention of the user. But notwithstanding their socio-political complexity, missionaries demonised, marginalised and excluded all traditional arts from missionary education in Buganda[52].

George Kyeyune gives a plausible explanation for this banishment and the negative attitudes in which it was grounded. He argues that:

> In Uganda as elsewhere in Africa, art had always been an integral part of community life. The two were inseparable. Religion was bound up with a whole range of art practices, which included music, dance and drama, myths and legends, poetry and oral traditions. I argue that to introduce art in [bush] schools as a subject of cultural reflection at the time when conversion to Christianity was in its embryonic stage would have inflamed cultural tensions and contradictions between Christianity and local life. For the development of evangelism, this was most undesirable. Since their primary duty was to evangelise, and to deliver the African from 'heathen' worship, it was imperative that missionaries watched with caution and regulated disciplines, which

[51] And Trowell wrote extensively to draw this distinction. For example although she was sensitive to overlaps, she came up with two separate categories: the "spirit-regarding" (religious) art and the "court or man-regarding" (secular) art. For example see: Trowell, *Classical African Sculpture,* 1970.
[52] In fact this attitude was not unique to late-ninetieth century missionary education in Buganda, it affected academic discourse too. As Annie Coombes (1994) rightly observes, the problem affected the entire East African region since unlike the rest of Africa, "material culture from East Africa in particular was usually dismissed in rather disparaging tones in anthropological circles" (p. 77).

> would bring into focus traditional institutions and their attendant ideologies (Kyeyune 2003, 35).

To achieve this objective, missions in Buganda unleashed a harsh, indiscriminate regime in which traditional artefacts were ostracised, as objects of witchcraft and sorcery. Through such colonial violence (McClintock 1995, 16) converts were forced to burn artefacts in their possession, during public spectacles, before admission to the church. Traditional art was displaced with Western art forms and practices.

And then the New Aesthetic: The introduction of 'Western Art' in Buganda

In the letter to the *Daily Telegraph* (to which I have already referred extensively), Stanley debriefed the missions on what they should carry to Buganda to facilitate their work. Stanley suggested that:

> For the mission's use it should bring with it a supply of hammers, saws, augers, chisels, axes, hatchets adzes, carpenter's and blacksmiths' tools, since the Waganda[53] are apt pupils; iron drills and powder for blasting purposes, trowels, a couple of good-sized anvils, a forge and bellows, an assortment of nails and tacks, a plough, spades, shovels, pick axes, and a couple of light buggies as specimens, with such other small things as their own common sense would suggest to the men whom I invite. Most desirable would be…white lead, linseed oil, brushes, *a few volumes of illustrated journals*, *gaudy prints*, a lantern, rockets, and *a photographic apparatus*. ([Hope] n.d, 127; my emphasis)

Clearly as Stanley prepared his invitees to settle into Buganda, he simultaneously set the direction for an artisanal, building and aesthetic revolution. For example we learn through later missionary accounts that the Baganda demonstrated their eagerness to accept the modern tools, equipment and aesthetics as Stanley had predicted.

John Roscoe was a missionary scholar who published extensively on Uganda's ethnic diversity. In 1911 Roscoe wrote that, by the first decade of the twentieth-century, the Baganda (being Stanley's apt pupils) had

[53] This term originates in Swahili. It refers to the Baganda (singular Muganda) being the people of Buganda.

religiously integrated all aspects on Stanley's list of equipments, and skills, and modernised their life styles. He writes that:

> One of the remarkable characteristics of the Muganda is his power of imitation, especially in all kinds of mechanism. Give a man time to examine an object, and he will apprehend the mode of its instruction, and he will go and produce one so much like it that it is often well-nigh impossible to tell which is the original. Chairs, tables, shoes, etc, have each in their turn been closely copied. This power of reproduction extends to house-building in all its details. Thus there are numbers of houses made of sun-dried bricks with iron roof, which natives themselves have built and completed without supervision from Europeans (Roscoe 1911, 365)

Like Stanley's, Roscoe's account poignantly suggests that Europe was the "quintessence of modernity, the Mecca to which peoples from non-Western societies go for inspiration and knowledge…thought and action in pursuit of the development of their societies and transition to modernity" (Gyekye 1997, 264). As such, attaining the tools and skills of Europeans became a necessary prerequisite to modernity; the path to modernity had to be supervised by the "critical eye of the European" (Roscoe 1911, 366).

Also, Stanley could have meant anything with his reference to "volumes of illustrated journals". He could have meant religious or popular prints which were mass-produced through lithographs since these were common in Europe during the late-nineteenth-century. Perhaps he meant the Catholic illustrated catechism or illustrated Bibles. Because he was not so piously evangelistic himself he could have meant illustrated secular journals like the *Academy* or illustrated magazines like *Gentleman's Magazine* or any others which were popular in Europe at the time. What he referred to as "gaudy prints" could have been a reference to the Java prints similar to what the Dutch introduced to West Africa or the cloth the Lutheran missions introduced among the Herero of Southern Africa although we need more evidence to confirm any of these speculations.

However, the available record indicates that the French White Fathers responded positively to Stanley's advice. They came with liturgical images (prints, statuettes, rosaries, etc). But the response of the White fathers also

resonated with some ideological underpinnings which need to be exposed. Given the role of religious iconography in the Catholic Church, it could also be argued that the White Fathers' response was inevitable. After all, Catholicism and religious iconography are intertwined.

Although grounded in religious conventions, this argument is weak because of the following reasons. The White Fathers were dispatched by Monsignor Lavigerie from Algiers. Lavigerie had earlier advised Pope Pius IX and Leo XIII that Africa is for Africans and missionaries "must be permitted to develop it along its natural lines" (Lavigerie cited in Lugira 1970,152). In this case Lavigerie engaged a polygenist idea to reject the cultural imperialism and the capitalist economy which the conveners of the Brussels Conference of 1876 intended to impose on Africa under the auspices of king Léopold II of Belgium. Arguably then Lavigerie should have preferred a local Ganda aesthetic to the mass-produced reproductions of religious iconography shipped from Europe.

Yet, as Lugira rightly observes, Lavigerie abandoned his initial idea. For Lugira he did this for "practicability's sake" (Lugira 1970, 158): it was a pragmatic move which served to facilitate the spread of Catholicism in Buganda. I do not intend to become another apologist for Lavigerie. I would rather view the French White Fathers' turn around through Sanyal's lenses. For Sanyal the introduction of Western iconography was the only systematic campaign to disassemble, and then reshape African identities which the missionaries (and in this case the White Fathers) knew (Sanyal 2000, 26). Indeed the new images were used to construct new identities in Buganda; civility, among the Catholics, became synonymous with the wearing of rosaries. Although, as we are about to see, this identity was itself a subject of attack.

Therefore the White Fathers were the first to introduce ("modern") Western representational art into Buganda. On arrival in the late-1870s, the first gifts the White Fathers presented to Muteesa I were an illustrated catechism in

addition to a New Testament Bible translated into Arabic. Lugira suggests that Muteesa I accepted both gifts to “study them” (Lugira, 1970, 157). Catholic missionaries also distributed “medals, scapulars and other images…crucifixes, pictures of the Sacred Heart, Our Lady, St. Joseph and others mostly imported from Europe” (ibid, p.157). On 21 September 1879, they mounted the first exhibition of "modern" art in Uganda. The show included Christian liturgical art (ibid, p.156).

Liturgical art had two consequences for the development of "modern" art in Buganda. On the one hand it became the index of good art and, as indicated above, civilisation for the Catholics. On the other hand it changed deep-seated traditional Ganda ideologies against representational art. Before the coming of Europeans, the Baganda feared figurative representation (Lugira 1970, 112). However when the Catholic missionaries introduced liturgical art, the “overwhelming superstition regarding pictures began to diminish” (ibid, p.114). This is because unlike the traditional representations called *Ebikookolo* (singular *akakookolo/ekikookolo*) meaning “disfigured human form” (ibid, p.112), and thus pejorative, the new aesthetic was glossed with numinousness, civilising effect and protective power. Those who possessed liturgical art were respected among their communities as trustworthy, learnt, and on the road to eternal life.

Lugira cites a report by the leader of the White Fathers, Father Lourdel (locally called Mapeera), to explain how the new aesthetic entered many households. In 1881 Father Lourdel reported that he donated a sculpture of the Virgin Mary to the king of Buganda on arrival at the palace in 1879. On receiving the artefact, Lourdel recollected that Muteesa I greatly admired it and ordered the placement of similar artefacts on all tables in the palace (Lugira 1970, 12). Hence the attitude towards representational art was decisively changed at the palace. Lugira also explains that, because many Baganda adopted trends from the palace, the popularity of images cascaded down to the rest of Buganda. “Hence arose the enthusiasm of the Baganda for medals, scapulars and other images distributed by the [Catholic]

missionaries…crucifixes, pictures of the Sacred Heart, Our Lady, St. Joseph and others, mostly imported from Europe, held the devotion and admiration of the Baganda" (Lugira 1970, 157). Put simply representational artefacts "turned from fear-inspiring to enthusiastically coveted objects" (ibid, p.114).

Stanley's "photographic equipment" was also put to work as photography became a new form of visual representation in Buganda. It is not exactly clear what camera was used, but one can speculate that the missions could have used Frederick Scott Archer's photographic equipment. Archer invented this facility in the 1850s. It was easy to transport and it was popular by the 1870s when missionaries came to Buganda. If my speculation is valid then it could be arguable that this facility was responsible for the early photography in the kingdom which (by the way) became a new mode of constructing and transmitting traditional power and authority. Portraits of Muteesa I (plate 4) and Mwanga II (plate 5) have survived Buganda's turbulent history. Images of Kabaka Daudi Chwa II are also available (see for example plate 6).

These images capture the posture and persona of the subject. They display power, authority and class. They demonstrate an elaborate decorative programme inscribed in accoutrements. Muteesa II was Chwa II's son and heir. He too posed for official portraits in postures reminiscent of his father's (Victorian?) portraits (see plate 7). In the 1950s he diversified the new 'politico-aesthetic'. He commissioned British artist, Augustus John, and the Italian artist, Oliver Messel, to paint his portraits. Though reported in the press, the portrait by Augustus John is probably lost. However his successor, and son, Mutebi II repossessed Messel's portrait through an auction by the Sotheby's in mid-1990s[54]. Mutebi II is the sitting king of Buganda. He also records and transmits his power through photography (see plate 8). Arguably, then, the earliest traces of the nexus between Uganda's modern art and politics was built through the camera. Today the use of the camera has gone beyond the construction and transmission of power and authority. For example Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi use cameras to gather

[54] See: "Mutebi buys father's portrait for shs 8m" in *The Monitor*, July 1-3, 1993.

vital material, broaden their themes and to archive their work. Photography is also currently an academic discipline. Since the late-1990s Makerere Art School has introduced photography in its curriculum.

Alongside lithurgical art and photography a "Ganda style of representational art" (Lugira 1970, 114) evolved: the motto art. The online Oxford English Dictionary[55] defines a motto (plural mottoes) as a "…a word or sentence of special significance to the bearer… a pithy expression, a saying…." Ganda mottoes have such characteristics. They are often pinned on walls in shops and homes (public and private spaces). They carry special didactic and socio-political significance. They draw heavily on Western religious representations for example the illuminated manuscripts and Romanesque frescoes. It is not clear when mottoes were first made in Buganda and why. However by the 1930s mottoes were popular depicting subjects who were identifiably African. They depicted texts: biblical citations or "Ganda sayings in form of riddles" (Lugira 1970, 115). They were complex in form and theme; images were added to enrich the text. For example some were popular for depicting the Baganda martyrs represented with haloes (to embody their divinity), dressed in traditional Ganda fashions and accompanied with traditional artefacts and totemic symbols (to assert their identity). Luganda newspapers like *Matalisi* (first published in 1924) and *Gambuuze* (first published in 1928) published, and popularised, mottoes. The two newspapers used mottoes to articulate socio-political issues: expressing ethnic loyalty, cultural identity, providence and social commentary or a combination of all of these. Many Baganda owned mottoes.

Mottoes are still being produced today. Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi knew Ganda mottoes as children. The flatness we will find in their artworks was initially seen in mottoes although it does not originate from them since graduates of Makerere University do not take mottoes seriously. This is because the formation at Makerere has always relegated such art to the low art category. This then suggests that after the camera the motto emerged as

[55] See: http://www.oed.com (accessed January 10, 2006).

a new medium for political art. Unlike the camera however, the motto, like lithurgical art, had a wider (mass) audience; it allowed for the democratisation of the arts long before batiks did in the 1970s.

Although the Anglican Bishop Tucker College (now Uganda Martyrs University) located at Mukono, reproduced mottoes (Lugira 1970, 115), Protestants have had an ambivalent attitude towards representational art. To begin with, like their Catholic counterparts, Anglicans demanded that all converts destroyed traditional artefacts before admission into the church. But in addition the Church Missionary Society also accused White Fathers (and their converts) of idol worship translated into Luganda as *Abasinza ebifaananyi* (meaning those who worship images). For example Lugira cites an incident, in the 1870s, in which Alexander Mackay maligned the Catholics accusing them of "image worship" (Lugira 1970, 155–156). In effect, then, the Church Missionary Society rejected the traditional arts together with the Western replacements the Catholic missions introduced. Although nuanced, this attitude still exists today; it has spread to other parts of Uganda[56].

It is in the midst of this complex aesthetic matrix that missionaries introduced modern art into the bush schools. In the next section I analyse the kind of art which the missions introduced in the bush schools. I emphasise the art education which the Anglican missionaries unfolded because I believe it was the most problematic given the ambivalence Anglican missions had towards traditional and Western art. Let me also concede that unlike architecture and photos there is no visual archive to show the art produced in the bush schools until the 1930s when Kawalya made a painting, supervised by Mary Fisher, which we will encounter shortly. However Trowell's and mission accounts give some clues. I therefore trace 'bush school art' from there.

[56] To cite one example, recently I learnt that in South-western Uganda, among the Bakiga, the identity of *Abaranya ebiswhani*, which is the equivalent of *Abasinza ebifaananyi*, is still used pejoratively to refer to Catholics.

Uganda's Modern Art in the Bush Schools: A Problematic Aesthetic?

Bishop Alfred Robert Tucker introduced art into the Anglican school curriculum in the late-nineteenth-century. His idea was not wholly embraced by all Anglican missionaries. For example, by 1914 H. T. C. Weatherhead the headmaster of King's College Budo was still resisting Tucker's idea of teaching art in the bush schools (Kalyankolo 1974). Notwithstanding the internal resistance to his project however, in 1897 Tucker commissioned C. W. Hattersley[57] to breathe new life into the curriculum which the Anglicans offered in their bush schools. By 1901 Hattersley had revamped the bush school curriculum and added drawing, not for art's sake, but as a new medium of instruction.

Kyeyune analyses what kind of drawing Hattersley introduced and the kind of "modern art" it informed:

> Hettersley (sic) explains that the aim of teaching drawing was to use it as a tool to make geometrical diagrams and maps. This attitude towards drawing shows that it was not conceived in a broad sense as a subject that would benefit the development of art. Rather it was useful as a resource for the experiments in spinning, lace making, and tailoring which Hattersey (sic) refers to as having spread to different schools in the Protectorate by 1910 (Kyeyune 2003, 34)

We are told that Hattersley introduced drawing as a visual grammar necessary for *Abapulotesitanti* to perfect their skills in the modern crafts of spinning, lace making, and tailoring. Curiously some Catholic missions had projects in lace-making and tailoring. For example, opened in 1910, the catholic convent, the Bwanda Banabikira Convent, instructed nuns in needlework (Kasule 2002, 61). I suspect geometric drawing could have been introduced at Bwanda to help the reproduction of patterns. I, however, have no evidence to generalise this claim to all Catholic mission schools. This would then confirm that by the turn of the century traditional arts and crafts had been totally erased from the teaching of "modern art" in Uganda. As we read in Kyeyune (2003), by the 1910 Hattersley had introduced a new (and rigid) visual language in the bush schools. Pictorial grammar built on

[57] Hattersley was the first missionary-educationist in Uganda.

diagrammatic lineal constructions displaced basketry and pottery among other crafts. Chalk and board, pencil and paper replaced traditional pattern-making learnt through observation and oral narratives. Against this backdrop Trowell's mention of small black urchins huddled together on benches, squeaking pencils desperately copying "from the board a queer conglomeration of lines labelled 'BOX'" becomes literal rather than figurative. It becomes a graphic recapitulation of a lived reality in which the definition of modernity in art meant rejecting traditional forms; art and art-making meant copying and reproducing the technical skill of the Europeans.

But the bush schools posed a problem, namely that they bred their own resistance. In the next four sections I demonstrate how graduates of the bush schools participated in a campaign to undo the very bush schools which catapulted them to prominence. I show how the colonial government responded to African demands for better education, and its economic objectives, thus redirecting the bush school curriculum into new directions. I demonstrate how, in the wider quest for a new direction, other Europeans intervened and altered the path for art education in the bush schools thus setting the stage for Trowell. It is also in the quest for a new direction that Makerere College was born. Makerere College has been important to the instruction of modern art in Uganda and East Africa: Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi are among its alumni.

The Backlash: Calls for New Directions in African Education

Stanislas Mugwanya was a member of the *Abasomi* club. Most importantly, he was one of the new leaders who emerged in the wake of the collapse of the traditional Ganda hierarchy and who had their positions legitimised through the 1900 Buganda Agreement, becoming one of the three regents for Kabaka Daudi Chwa II.

In 1899 Mugwanya led Baganda Catholic chiefs to discuss the issue of upgrading the bush school curriculum in the Catholic bush schools. The limited accessible record confirms that Mugwanya's idea was later discussed

at the 1900 "White Fathers' General Chapter at Algiers"[58] and adopted before Father Gaudipea (a member of the White Fathers) translated it into a new curriculum in 1901. Under the 'new' curriculum new schools were set up: For instance the Mill Hill Fathers[59] founded Namilyango College (1902); the White Fathers founded St Mary's College Kisubi (1906). On the other hand Anglican chiefs also demanded better schools: Gayaza High School was opened (in 1905) to educate their daughters; King's College Budo was started for their sons in 1906. These schools, among others, still exist today. Successive governments have taken over their administration since 1917 when the Protectorate government first instituted the Educational Advisory Board to coordinate and improve missionary education in Uganda.

Mugwanya's concerns coincided with a recommitment to traditions and the need to record them. Firstly, the colonial establishment was concerned (and rightly so) that African traditions were in danger of extinction. As we read in the *Uganda Herald* of May 31 1939, in 1901 the Governor, Harry Johnston, ordered all local administrators to collect and record all ethnological materials in their areas. This being the time when Johnston was consolidating British suzerainty over Uganda, arguably his concerns and commitment to the protection of Uganda's traditional arts resonate with Anderson's argument on the politics of "museums and museumizing" (Anderson 1991, 178). Anderson suggests that the collection of ethnological specimens by competing colonial powers drew from nineteenth-century colonial archaeology (ibid). Yet at the height of territorial acquisitions, and administration, museums became effective colonial devices deployed to secure territories as competing powers

[58] See: http://www.smack.sc.ug/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=57 (accessed October 29, 2006).

[59] The history of the Mill Hill Fathers in Uganda is interesting; it warrants a particular mention here. The group originated from Britain and arrived in Uganda in 1895, three years after the conclusion of the Catholic-Anglican open wars of 1892 which saw the Catholics expelled (at least temporarily) from Mengo. According to the official website of Namiryango College, these priests came to Uganda to "help break down the mentality of many of the peasantry, that 'Protestantism is English and Catholicism is French.'" The intention was well-conceived: divisions between these two had gotten so bad culminating in the polarisation of the Christian community and open war. Paradoxically however, the entry of the Mill Hill Fathers did not totally eliminate the divisions between Catholics and Protestants; neither did it eliminate the *Abafaransa/Abangereza* dichotomy whose nuances still exist today. For more on the College and the Mill Hill Fathers see http://www.angelfire.com/nc/namicol/history.htm (assessed April 4, 2006).

carefully and expeditiously gathered and labelled ethnological specimens to protect commercial and territorial claims, support native education, and to monitor the impact of modernity on native culture. Johnston seems to have had a cocktail of these interests as he "carefully *marked and indexed…*"[60] Uganda's surviving traditional artefacts. In 1907 Hesketh Bell built a museum at Old Kampala: a spot where Fredrick Lugard had previously built a fort. The museum however failed to take off effectively due to poor funding, bureaucratic interference, and lack of initiative and focus. The project was shelved. It would be Margaret Trowell who successfully re-launched the museum in 1942. Alongside Bell's museum, missionaries like John Roscoe wrote extensively about ethnographic materials amid growing concerns for their complete demise in the face of colonial modernity.

Secondly, some Baganda graduates of the missionary education became important scholars. Ironically, rather than eternally rejecting their traditions, which outcome the bush schools had intended, the Baganda used their newly acquired European skills to conserve their traditions. Erudite men like Apollo Kaggwa and Michael Nsimbi meticulously, and passionately as well, recorded aspects of Ganda culture; they salvaged whatever was left of it by the beginning of the twentieth-century.

The resurgent Ganda intimacy with "native" traditions resonated global and local counter-hegemonic developments. Internationally Paris hosted the first pan-African Congress in 1919. Among other things, the congress resolved that: "Allied and Associated Powers establish a code of law for the international protection of the natives of Africa"; "it shall be the right of every native child to learn to read and write his own language"; and that "the natives of Africa must have the right to participate in the Government as fast as their development permits, in conformity with the principle that the Government exists for the natives, and not the natives for the Government"[61].

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[60] See: "Uganda Museum Committee: Admirable Report, But Government Regrets…" in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1465, May 31, 1939. My emphasis.
[61] See resolutions of the conference online at http://members.tripod.com/~DuBois/pan19.html (accessed September 3, 2006).

Although these voices carried colonial vocabulary (for example they could not escape the use of categories like “native” and “child”) the congress mediated an important counter-hegemonic struggle. It is in the context of this counter-hegemonic struggle that Uganda witnessed a wave of political activity as “natives” pressed for political recognition and economic emancipation. Ethnic political movements, led by graduates of missionary education and beneficiaries from the colonial economy (the farmers and traders), took shape all over the Protectorate (Jørgensen 1981, 179).

Located in this discussion was Daudi Chwa II the Kabaka of Buganda. Trained under special English tutors, Chwa II adopted many British mannerisms including the title of “Sir”. He was the first Europeanised monarch in Buganda; all those after him have been equally Europeanised albeit by different circumstances[62]. Intriguingly Chwa II distanced his own Europeanisation from what he rejected as “foreignisation” and urged a reform of the bush school mentality. His story merits interrogation because: one, it raises complex issues about the way the most Europeanised in Buganda accepted colonial modernity while redrawing its borders. Two, it reflects on modernity in ways which have been engaged by Fred Mutebi and Bruno Sserunkuuma through their work.

In the 1930s Chwa II criticised the training offered by the bush schools because for him it rejected Ganda traditions. He attacked the wholesale transformation of the Baganda into *Abafaransa* and *Abangereza.* He argued that

> instead of the Baganda acquiring proper education at the various [bush] schools and of availing themselves of the legitimate amenities of civilisation the young generation of this country are merely drifting in wholesale ‘foreignisation’ of their natural instincts and is discarding its native and traditional customs, habits and good breedings[63] (Chwa 1935, 108).

[62] For example after him Muteesa II (his son) had special English tutors and studied at Cambridge. The current monarch Mutebi II (Muteesa II’s son) grew up in England after Milton Obote had expelled his father Muteesa II in 1966.

[63] Daudi Chwa grew up under the care of an English tutor John Sturrock. He absorbed the best in English aristocracy. He, however, wrote the article “Ideology of Buganda” from a personal

This statement is important because it is grounded in an Africanist backlash against colonial modernity. It suggests that Chwa II, who received the best of European instruction afforded to Africans, was rejecting such education as sheer “foreignisation” which alienated its graduates from their communities and cultures. I have already argued that the bush school curriculum was intended to wipe out local custom. Chwa II’s concern therefore confirms that it achieved its intended purpose.

It would then be tempting to reject Chwa II for being atavistic. I however suggest that he was not because he did not advocate for the recovery of Buganda’s pre-colonial past which would have been inimical to missionary education. Rather he rejected the continued polarisation between traditions and modernity which was inscribed in missionary education. It is this distantiation that he summarised as “wholesale foreignisation”. He called for the revision of the missionary education curriculum if it was to emancipate its recipients and prevent their alienation.

Gyekye suggests three positions why traditions cannot be discarded. His positions are useful for explaining Chwa II’s criticism and its underlying concerns (Gyekye 1997, 270). Firstly, he suggests that non-Western cultures can immensely benefit from European modern culture and scientific progress. Secondly, he adds that not everything Western is worth emulating. And thirdly, but mainly in light of one and two, he concludes that non-Western cultures have some good aspects of their own which they must keep in spite of embracing Western modernity. In summary Gyekye, like Chwa II, rejects “wholesale foreignisation”. Put in other words, Chwa II articulated what Gross called “something attractive about the idea of retreat, particularly since it contains an implicitly critical attitude (i.e., an attitude based on a refusal of ‘what is’)” (Gross 1992, 5). This inherent “refusal of what is” always insists that modernity is inherently flawed. It therefore allows

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experience in contestation of what he perceived to be a skewed cultural and social development of Buganda and Uganda as a whole.

the subject to use his/her tradition to question his unsatisfactory modern present with a view to correcting it (Gross 1992).

In light of Gyekye's and Gross's postulations, the panacea for a woeful modern present, which for Chwa II alienated the educated elite from their traditional roots, lay in the recovery of Buganda's dispersed traditions and using them to improve the modern present from outside modernity's own borders (cf. Gross 1992, 87). I am not suggesting that Chwa II unfolded a post-modern critique, neither would Gyekye or Gross. Suggesting a post-modern stance would imply that Chwa II made deliberate efforts to terminate modernity. In spite of his overt scepticism over modernity, this does not seem to have been the case. What Chwa II called for is what Gyekye calls "revisions and amendments to modernity" (Gyekye 1997, 266). It was a kind of self-reflection.

This thread is useful to my discussion. In chapter seven we will see Fred Mutebi using strands from it. In chapter eight we will see Bruno Sserunkuuma engaging it to radicalise his pottery. Immediately it preoccupied pan-Africanist and traditionalist movements starting with the 1920s. These movements intensified their activities in the 1940s (Jørgensen 1981) as a result of negritudist, anti-colonial and post-colonial discourses. They partly informed an irreversible shift in the direction of colonial policy on education. The change in colonial education saw the birth of Makerere College. Makerere College marked another important phase in the evolution of modern art in Uganda. It is at Makerere that Margaret Trowell altered the woeful aesthetic she rejected for being a "queer pastime" (see quote at the beginning of the chapter) as she instituted a new vision. Mutebi and Sserunkuuma are indirect heirs to Trowell's new direction.

Changes after the Twenties: New Directions in Colonial Cultural Policy and Education

The 1920s witnessed a change of direction from the missionary-led bush school curriculum to one in which colonial administration had a say, however

minimal in the beginning. This was a result of local demand for “better education” as Africans demanded better preparation to enhance their access to new opportunities in the colonial (globalised) economy (Low 1971, 52). It was probably also a response to the demands from the pan-African Congress in Paris (seen above). Other scholars (for example Kyeyune 2003, 38; Jørgensen 1981) suggest that government intervention was mediated by the post-World War I need to produce cheap local manpower to run the lower echelons of the civil service. Or, perhaps, it was a combination of all these. Whatever the speculation however, it is clear that by the late-thirties the colonial government had decisively altered its education policies in [B]Uganda marking a shift from missionary-led bush schools to colonial bush schools supervised by the colonial administration.

In 1921 the colonial establishment introduced "higher" education. This is how Makerere College was born. Makerere initially trained Africans to run critical areas of the colonial economy: it produced clerks, telegraph operators, carpenters, elementary school teachers and foremen. It went through systematic upgrades. By 1935 it awarded Cambridge Certificates before it became a Higher College in 1939. In 1949 Makerere became a University awarding degrees and Diplomas from the University of London. Its curriculum continued to be upgraded to meet varied economic and political challenges during the 1960s and beyond.

However, art education did not begin in earnest in 1921; it was not essential until the mid-twenties when a report was published on the status of the arts in Uganda. The report expressed concern that:

> It does not appear that endeavours are being made comparable for instance to the highly intelligent experiments undertaken by the French in Morocco to develop native handicrafts upon an improved method…we regret a tendency to inculcate Kensington patterns and formulas rather than to elaborate and improve African patterns and aesthetic traditions. Even in East Africa, such traditions exist (Uganda Protectorate Education Report, 1926 cited in Kyeyune 2003, 23).

In 1924 the colonial government commissioned Phelps Stokes to advise it on how to improve colonial education in order to suit post-World War I and the

changing African and colonial economic needs. It also commissioned the Advisory Committee on Native Education in British Tropical Africa headed by Ormsby-Gore in 1925. Alongside emphasising vocational education both commissions called for the preservation of what was good in local traditions and the rejection of what was considered defective. What we have here is a colonial establishment, expressing concern over the negative consequences of the introduction of Kensington (textile) patterns (and therefore Stanley's "gaudy prints"), Hattersley's drawing formulas and modern crafts like lace-making. Instead of promoting such alien modern artefacts and practices the Protectorate government recognised the presence of traditional artefacts whose integration in the colonial modern economy it favoured. Put in short after being marginalised, and spending decades at the fringes of the colonial polity, during the 1920s Uganda's indigenous arts came to the fore of colonial policy. This was not just a major indictment of missionary art education, it was a decisive shift in colonial cultural policy in Uganda.

We, however, need to look beyond the theory, because in practice the result was hopeless. By adopting the French model, government was following a domineering path. For example, we learn from Irbouh (2005) that after Morocco had informed radical developments in French culture through the work of modernists like Henri Matisse, the French colonial policy towards the Moroccan colony, in 1912–1956, was one of cultural domination through art education. Traditional art in the service of the people translated into a tool in the service of colonial legitimation and hegemonic control. Irbouh argues that traditional Moroccan artists were deliberately targeted, herded into workshops and used to propagate France's hegemonic interests. The point I am making is this that if the Protectorate government was looking to the French model of art education then it was looking to an imperialist model under which local artistic traditions would remain alienated from the Ugandans. Fortunately, although it is not clear why, the project did not materialise; it remained a suggestion.

In the early-1940s government looked to Ghana (then the Gold Coast) for an alternative model. There were discussions about inviting an expert from Ghana's Achimota College to advise the Education Department (and Makerere College) on how to modernise the local crafts sector through improved production and marketing (Sanyal 2000, 78). The debate centred on whether such a project would be feasible within the fledgling Makerere College. Although this project would have benefited the local craft sector, it too failed to materialise due to administrative and resource constraints. However, the interest expressed by the colonial government, amid local concerns over the plight of traditions, invited alternative solutions outside government — and three immediately come to mind here: Reverend Mathers's and Geraldine Fisher's. Because the third, Margaret Trowell's, had lasting effect and, in my opinion, it harmonised Mathers's and Fisher's models, while linking African art into Uganda's collegiate education and politics, it merits a more detailed analysis. I will turn to it in the next chapter. In the following two sections I highlight Mathers's and Fisher's initiatives, starting with Mathers's.

Modernising Traditional Arts? Mathers's Effort

Information on Mathers's biography and intervention in Uganda's arts is scanty, but we know from the press that he was a priest who worked in Eastern Uganda during the 1930s. We also learn from the *Uganda Herald*[64] that in 1922 Reverend Mathers started a project, which later covered the entire Protectorate, aiming to improve the standards of traditional art through market-driven yearly exhibitions. Because he intended to emancipate local communities, Mathers therefore represented a new thinking in Uganda's cultural discourse. The first exhibition Mathers held in 1922 was less successful. For colonial cynics it showcased the "crudest; weird elliptical pots, mats which had little shape but all sorts of patterns" [65]. However the press also reported that by the time of the May 1937 Exhibition, which was

[64] See: Upper Nile Lucian, "Native Crafts" in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. XVI, No. 1301, May 12, 1937.
[65] Ibid.

hosted at a place called Nabumali, traditional Ugandan art had earned respect among both Africans and non-Africans[66].

Let me admit parenthetically that the colonial critique, in the *Uganda Herald,* highlighted a monologic, hierarchised, Hegelian teacher-learner narrative in which instruction must be European and the instructed African. It is possible that by 1937 some artisans could have been self-motivated, seeking to benefit from the new market opportunity created by the exhibitions, although I have no evidence for this. In spite of its paternalistic undertones however, the article is instructive as it establishes the fact that Mathers re-energised traditional arts; it confirms that the missionary re-established the relevance of Uganda's crafts for the African society from which they had been alienated through Christianity, missionary education and colonial modernity.

Mathers's model was picked up and modified in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. For example through its East African Technical Advisory Committee, the colonial government studied the availability and suitability of local clays for modern pottery and tile industries. In the forties a pottery industry based on traditional forms was envisaged[67] to supply a market niche created by the scarcity of imported goods due to World War II. Through funds provided by the Uganda Development Corporation (UDC), a public corporation which was established to modernise the Protectorate's economy, Michael Gill set up a training workshop equipped with modern pottery-making equipments (kilns, potters wheels, etc) in the late-1950s. Through the workshop students were acquainted with modern pottery skills before further training at Michael Cardew's Abuja Training Pottery, in Nigeria, and Bernard Leach's Leach Pottery in England. Graduates were given start-up loans (through the UDC) to take back their skills to the rural areas where "they would then make utensils for use by local people, trying with what they already knew of local traditions and needs" (Miller 1975, 66). Gill also helped to establish the

[66] See: "Notes from the Country Districts: Mbale Exhibition of Native Handicrafts" in the *Uganda Herald,* Vol. XLVIII, No. 1474, November 23, 1938.
[67] See: "Uganda Industrial Committee: Pottery" in the *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L, No. 1747, February 23, 1944.

Nnammanve Pottery[68] and Busega Pottery which produced modern cups, pitchers, lamp-stands to supply the urban sector. In the 1960s Uganda's post-colonial government (through its Ministry of Culture and Community Development) organised exhibitions (see Miller 1975, 65-66) which recalled Mathers's model. These issues should be borne in mind; I will revisit them in chapter eight because Bruno Sserunkuuma has tapped into them.

Simultaneously, however, Mathers continued to de-link traditional art from the global aesthetic in an era when African art had radicalised modern Western art and ultimately Western culture. Neither did he develop its political symbolism. Instead he restricted local art to the production of utilitarian domestic ware: mats, pots, mortars and pestles, baskets, et cetera. Mathers's project sought to preserve the traditionalised mould surrounding Uganda's arts — which mould was itself recently re-invented through anthropological writings (for example Roscoe's) and colonial ethnographic collections (for example the Uganda Museum). He was interested in the perfection of form for which, by 1938, certificates of merit were being awarded. Thus Mathers's project made a tremendous contribution, so to speak, but it left a void which Geraldine Fisher sought to fill. I now turn to her contribution.

New Directions in [B]Uganda's modern art: Mary Fisher's Effort

Geraldine Fisher came to Uganda in the mid-1930s. She was a British artist from the Slade School of Art. Unlike Mathers she, arguably, was the first European artist to wedge Buganda's (and Uganda's) modern art into the global aesthetic. She introduced modern easel painting (Kyeyune 2003, 61) at Gayaza High School in the mid-1930s.

Fisher believed African art emancipates through the visualisation of an imagined African reality. This, to her, was an aesthetic which would bring to light the "idea of truth and of the beautiful" (Fisher 1940, 239). She persuaded her students to imagine an untapped African world of beauty and

[68] See: "Go Ahead Giant Pot-makers of UDC" in the Uganda Argus, No. 4031, December 30, 1967.

depict it as lived reality. She, with hypnotising effect, suggested to her students to “just think what a world of beauty there is, still unexpressed in the heart of great Africa” (ibid). For Fisher this (romantic) aesthetic was “a soul still to be brought forth in some created form [for] the betterment of its people” (ibid). Arguably then, for Fisher modern art had to have socio-political relevance.

Few examples have survived to demonstrate how Fisher’s Romanticist ideas translated into an aesthetic discourse, and how they permeated her students’ works, save for one painting by one of her students, Florence Kawalya. In the mid-1930s Kawalya painted her *Returning Home* (1935; plate 9). She demonstrated some skill in draughtsmanship; she paid attention to essential details, lineal perspective and clarity of the message. Her use of flat, raw colours and boldness is fauvist. Her composition emphasises geometric patterns and limited realism. Her theme and subjects are unambiguously Ganda; her technique and materials are European. Thus *Returning Home* answers the concerns of the colonial government, namely the question of how to improve the method of rendering Uganda’s aesthetic without resorting to foreign ideas (Kensington patterns and formulas). It avoids the foreignisation which Chwa II rejected. It is also distant from the contemptuous aesthetic which Trowell was to reject.

Kawalya depicts an idyllic but rare polity. Her huts recall the traditional Ganda hut; they are however synthetic derivatives of it. They seem to be framed together in the same space, yet many are randomly dispersed with limited [inter-]connecting footpaths. Hence the composition suggests an alienation which is rare in rural Buganda! This would then suggest that the artist is capturing an imagined reality on Fisher’s terms. She is expressing her soul since Fisher also believed that art is a medium of imagination in which “the creation of [aesthetic] objects…give[s] expression to the soul of the people…” (Fisher 1935). It could also be postulated that Kawalya was a school girl, with elementary training, making naïve images. (And this is plausible considering that Gayaza was a school for young girls.)

Whatever our speculations, Kawalya's painting reverberates some political realities. For example, Kawalya joins two huts with a well-defined footpath: one hut is open and invaded by two reptiles; the other (to its extreme right) is secured from such and other intrusions. This suggests a commentary on the harsh conditions, and income disparities, in rural Buganda mediated by the colonial cash crop economy and the new class differentiation it imposed. Also, since she was a student at Gayaza High School (a school for the daughters of the ruling aristocracy and middle-class), it is likely that she was a daughter of a chief or a prosperous farmer from Buganda. Hence the painting could have been a kind of self-reflection, a veiled critique, on Kawalya's own privileged upbringing, which alienated her (or her soul) from the plight of the majority: the unsecured; the scattered; the unguarded; those dispersed at the fringes of the colonial economy. In which case then Kawalya invests reptiles to express political criticism. These threads must be borne in mind. In chapter four we will see the problem of having Africans dispersed on the fringes of the colonial economy escalating into riots and the anti-colonial debate while informing Uganda's modern art. In chapter six we will see artists using reptiles to critique Amin's and Obote's regimes as the use of reptiles as political symbols, which is ambiguous in *Returning Home*, will be given sharp relief in the seventies and eighties. The artist also represents a minor who carries a big Ganda pot on her head. S/he walks behind an adult welding a walking-stick. I suggest we bear in mind this symbolism of carrying a pot. In chapter eight we will see Sserunkuuma using it to define domesticity through femininity and fecundity although the reasons for its deployment are ambiguous in this painting.

I am conscious that little is known about Kawalya's practice after this painting; it would be difficult to speculate if she refined the issues in this work. But surely her *Returning Home* marked a giant step; it was part of a significant development the trajectory of Uganda's modern art in which Mutebi and Sserunkuuma are located. The socio-political issues she visualised are not as articulate as they would become in the course of time.

However, it is clear that over the past five decades Uganda's contemporary artists have revisited, refined and overlapped her ideas to engage varied political moments. In different ways Sserunkuuma and Mutebi have revisited, extended the margins of, and attempted to resolve, the socio-political debate she was tapping into.

Thus Fisher nurtured and significantly altered the direction of art education in the bush schools. To celebrate her contribution, in 1938, Fisher's students took part in a ground-breaking exhibition which she organised together with Margaret Trowell and others. In chapter three I will detail the significance of this exhibition to the development of Uganda's modern art. In the same year Mathers organised a successful show of traditional artefacts, the *Nabumali Show 1938,* which Margaret Trowell and Governor Mitchell officiated with Trowell awarding certificates to the excelling individuals[69]. Equally important is that, starting in 1937, Trowell harmonised Fisher's success and Mathers's initiatives in an effort to link the teaching of modern art into Uganda's revered institution for higher education Makerere College (now University) as she sought to resolve the contradictions raised in the except at the beginning of this chapter.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

"Negotiations" between Henry Morton Stanley, and Kabaka Muteesa I, saw the coming of missionaries to [B]Uganda. Missionary activities informed a cultural revolution; they laid the ground for the modernisation of Uganda. The introduction of modern art in Uganda was embedded in this introduction of Western modernity. This, then, counters suggestions in some accounts on Uganda's modern art that Uganda's contemporary art has a single source, namely Trowell's Art School. The historical record suggests that Uganda's contemporary art evolved out of complex institutions, negotiations and sources which spanned decades before Trowell came to Uganda; it was introduced into formal education through missionary bush schools

[69] See: "Notes From the Country Districts: Mbale Exhibition of Native Handicrafts" in *Uganda Herald* Vol. XLVIII, No. 1474, November 23, 1938.

(something which Trowell herself was aware of). However, since it was grounded in colonial violence (ref. McClintock 1995), the early instruction of modern art was inimical to local artistic traditions; it sought to wipe them out as Ugandans became Europeanised and alienated from their own social fabrics. By the 1920s this initial model was considered inappropriate by the colonial government and rejected by the local educated elite. This invited interventions from within and outside of government. These are the interventions Trowell responded to, refined, harmonised and introduced into university education in 1939 before her teaching became entangled into Uganda's (late-colonial) politics. In the next chapter I pick up this strand and extend it.

Chapter Three

Margaret Trowell and the Teaching of Contemporary Art in Uganda: Ideas, Successes and Political Challenges

Introduction:

At the beginning of chapter two, I cited an excerpt from Margaret Trowell's scholarship before I discussed the problems surrounding the modern art which missionaries unfolded in Uganda. In this chapter I engage the important discussion of how Trowell combined African and Western ideas and produced an alternative model, the successes she registered and the political challenges she confronted. This chapter is important because, in the following chapters I will keep referring back to Trowell's instruction to explain issues as I progress with my discussion from this point onwards.

Trowell and the Founding of the Art School in Uganda

Margaret Katherine Trowell was a British artist. Born in 1904, she was a daughter of William Turner, owner of a map store (called The Map House) on St. James's Street, London. By looking at the maps in her father's shop Trowell became interested in travelling: "I literally grew up on maps and I always wanted to travel" (cited in Court 1985, 36). Indeed she travelled to East Africa and settled in Uganda for more than two decades. It was during this stay that she started the teaching of modern art at Makerere University.

Margaret Trowell received her initial education at St. Paul's Girls' School before joining the prestigious Slade School of Art in 1924. In 1926 she graduated with a Diploma in Art. Thereafter she enrolled for a one year course in Art Education at the University of London from where she received instruction from Marion Richardson. Richardson was a pioneer of an alternative approach to academic art training called "the New Art Teaching" (Trowell cited in Court 1985, 36) grounded in the Child Art Movement. The Child Art Movement emphasised self-expression as opposed to the exact

and intelligent observation of the drawings of great masters (Court 1985, 36) which Professor Henry Tonks (1861-1936) emphasised at the Slade (ibid). This issue, as we will see in a moment, became pivotal to Trowell's curriculum. Also, Richardson nurtured Trowell's interest in classical African art. As she writes: "Marion Richardson…prepared my mind for speculation on the course of the development in the art of primitive people" (Trowell 1957, 17-18). As a result, between the 1930s and 1981 Trowell studied classical African art seeking to apprehend its "social and technical ramifications" (ibid). Using this knowledge she gave a series of lectures and published a series of books and essays. Her corpus of academic work was intended to encourage students of the embryonic Art School to integrate their rich African heritage into their art practice (Trowell 1970, 6). This then allowed Trowell to set Uganda's collegiate art education, and modern art, on an enviable path. Through this model she radically departed from the colonial bush school (art) curriculum which, as we saw in the preceding chapter, Europeanised learners and alienated them from their African culture – an approach the king of Buganda rejected as wholesale foreignisation.

Margaret Trowell was a devout Christian and a member of the Anglican High Church. During her College days, but mainly as a result of her Christian background and interest in travelling, Margaret Trowell joined a group of other enthusiasts to form the East African Study Group: a philanthropic organisation interested in improving "the quality of life in Africa" (Court 1985, 37). Here she met Hugh Trowell, a medical student at St. Thomas Hospital (London), "who had a similar outlook" (Trowell cited in Court 1985, 37), and married him. After her marriage, and in accordance with colonial gender discourses inscribed in notions of domesticity (McClintock 1995), she assumed the identity of Margaret Trowell with which her fame has been identified[70].

[70] In the local press she also used to refer to herself as KMT or Margaret K. Trowell or Margaret Trowell. I saw a print, which I will also refer to later, on which she simply signed MT. To many of her students she was Mrs Trowell. I also saw a review about her activities in the *Uganda Herald* of 10 July 1946, in which she was referred to as "Mrs H. C. Trowell"— initials which do not derive from her names. I, however, have to add that the name Trowell in Uganda is used more in reference to Margaret than with Hugh. Hence I refer to her as Trowell in the rest of my discussion.

In the late-twenties, Hugh Trowell was recruited into the colonial service and deployed to East Africa. In 1929 the Trowells left England for Kenya's Machakos District where Hugh Trowell served briefly as a Medical Officer. While in Kenya, Trowell acquainted herself with Kenya's artistic traditions. She also observed how missionary/colonial education was "limited to the spread of Christianity and the vocational training of semi-skilled workers such as clerks and carpenters" (Court 1985, 37). Secondly, Trowell learnt that because missionary/colonial education was biased against African cultures, it did not reflect local traditions (Carline 1968). Hence Court observes that Trowell "faced the double challenge of understanding the purpose of art and the art forms of new and diverse cultures and the negative attitude toward art apparent in both colonial and missionary education" (Court 1985, 37) — a situation which, as I demonstrated in the last chapter, was not limited to Kenya. Against this background, and in light of her instruction under Richardson, Trowell resolved to initiate art instruction in East Africa with a view to alter the status quo.

In 1935 Hugh Trowell was redeployed to Mulago Hospital which was (and still is) both a referral and teaching hospital in Uganda. The hospital has always been attached to Makerere College. Thus Margaret Trowell found herself in proximity to Uganda's only institution of higher learning (Sanyal 2000, 66). This provided her with the opportunity to start art education in Uganda.

It was, however, Kenneth Murray's exhibition of works by formally trained Nigerian artists in London which gave Trowell a sense of direction. Working with Nigeria's colonial Department of Education and later Department of Antiquities[71], Murray produced the first group of artists trained in Western art disciplines[72]. He exhibited their artworks in London. For Trowell what Murray

[71] See Murray C. Kenneth "Arts and Crafts of Nigeria: Their Past and Future" in *Africa* (October 1943), 155-163.
[72] Trowell K. Margaret, "Tribute to Kenneth Murray" in *African Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, Summer 1976), 76.

exhibited was “exactly the kind of thing” (Trowell 1976, 76) she hoped to do in Uganda; when she saw Murray’s exhibition she decided that “if they could do it there [in Nigeria], we could do it here [in Uganda] too” (Trowell 1960a, 70). Here, then, Trowell had found the appropriate model which she modified to fit East Africa’s unique[73] circumstances.

Inspired by Murray, and because she was close to Uganda’s institution of higher learning, Trowell started the teaching of art in Uganda. To refine her pedagogy, she explored two aspects of the Child Art Movement[74], namely: (a) “its respect for a genre of child art” (Court 1985, 36), and (b) “its ‘positive stimulation for self-expression’” (ibid). Throughout her teaching career at Makerere College and publications, Trowell advocated for the need to allow African children to have a unique form of art education which allowed direct expression unencumbered by the imitation of western styles. For her realistic (imitative) representation was subordinate to self-expression. As she wrote: “we do not just copy sights but we use them as materials for our pictures” (Trowell 1952, 13). This then would suggest that, for Trowell, the ideas of the Child Art Movement [in]formed a pragmatic approach which encouraged the evolution of modern African art. She engaged such ideas to correct the limitations she had observed (as we saw in the last chapter), while avoiding to revert to Western (and western-oriented) models of art instruction and expression. This was, as she writes, a “practical experiment” intended to encourage “the African’s innate sense of art to flow along new channels” (Trowell 1957, 18): a radical (modernist) stance with which she rejected what Pierre Romain-Desfossés[75] called the “uniformizing aesthetics of White masters” (cited in Mudimbe 1994, 156).

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[73] I say “unique” because unlike Murray’s Nigeria, Uganda, and much of East Africa, does not have a tradition of plastic arts. Rather it has a variety of artefacts (vessels, pottery, basketry, stools, bark cloth, etc.) made by Uganda’s numerous ethnic groups and Trowell was aware of this (see Trowell 1970).

[74] With roots in the philosophy of Jean Jacques Rousseau which affirmed that each child is unique and requires a unique type of education which suits its level of development and needs, the Child Art Movement was born in the 1930s. Its proponents, for example Franz Cizek, argued for the need to allow children to freely express their artistic ideas uninhibited by adult influences.

[75] Like Trowell, Pierre Romain-Desfossés, introduced formal art education (and modern art) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He founded the Atelier d’Art at Lubumbashi. Just like Trowell, Romain-Desfossés, was part of a group of Europeans who pioneered the evolution of a uniquely

This, however, does not completely vindicate Trowell's patronising views (Sanyal 2000). She, like many colonial instructors and administrators of her time, harboured patronising — but mainly Darwinist — views towards Africans[76]. This may explain why she used the blanket term "child" (common in colonial literature) to refer to her art students. For example in her first book *African Arts and Crafts: Their Development in the School* (1937) Trowell wrote that "art is absolutely necessary to religion...[but]...it is far more important in the education of the child…" (p. 16).

The first part of Trowell's contention which relates to her devout Christian biases is not central to my argument. This is not to suggest that religion did not play a key role in her teaching. Indeed Trowell wanted to evolve a new Christian art genre grounded in African oral narratives and objects. Her students produced liturgical art. In the late-1950s, for example, she mounted the *And Was Made Man, The Life of Our Lord in Pictures Exhibition*[77] in London, the first (and probably last) show of its kind in the history of contemporary Ugandan art. But I want to highlight her notion of the "child". In the second part of her statement Trowell advocated the introduction of art education into Uganda's formal education. With statements like these Trowell negotiated for space for art instruction at Makerere College, an institution for educating adults, which was granted in 1939. In fact one of the students who attended Trowell's early classes at Makerere, Gregory Maloba (and I will come back to him later), recalls that many of her classes, at least by the time Maloba came to Uganda in 1940, were for adults. This, then, suggests that the "child" in the above quote draws from the *African-as-a-child* common in the missionary accounts and colonial rhetoric to which I referred in chapter two (see p. 36 above).

African modern art integrating African traditions and Western aesthetic vocabulary, materials and tools. Others included Kenneth Murray (in Nigeria), Frank McEwen and Bloomfield (in Zimbabwe), Pierre Lods, Victor Wallenda and Rolf Italiander (in the Democratic Republic of Congo), etc.

[76] See chapter two of this thesis. Also see: Mudimbe V. Y, *The Idea of Africa*, pp. 156-159.

[77] The exhibition was funded by Cadbury Trust Fund; The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, in London printed the catalogue.

Although she was entangled in colonial discourses, we must credit Trowell for the effort she took to Africanise Uganda's modern art. As she outlined in the press;

> the aims of the [Makerere Art] Department [were] to develop modern African Art rooted as far as possible in African tradition and secondly to encourage students to be genuinely creative[78].

This excerpt is important to my discussion for two reasons. One is that it shows the two issues at the heart of Trowell's activities in Uganda as evident in her lectures and publications. Secondly, it demonstrates that Trowell's views contradicted those held by fellow Europeans, and mainstream anthropological discourses, which had been used to undermine East Africa's traditional arts and their relevance to modernity. As if to demonstrate, Trowell argued that the East African aesthetic is not, as anthropologists had persuaded many to believe, an archetypal model passed on to successive generations (Trowell 1937). Rather, it was premised on agency and creativity; the artist has control over his/her production. Hence for Trowell traditional artefacts were not "relics" (Trowell 1937, 4) marginalised on the fringes of modernity (as moderns like Albert Cook would have us believe). Rather, they were inseparably embedded into the local economy as

> …occupations of a peasant community…done at home and used at home…for it is only out of the homely crafts of weaving, carving and modelling that great art and great artists have arisen (ibid).

Basing her project on this social theory of art, Trowell rejected as superficial any (formalist) attempt to sever the link between the African and his/her traditional art. Implicitly suggesting that indeed this is what missionary/colonial education had done, she declared that her priority was to design a curriculum through which Uganda's (alienated) modern art would gain a relevance to its society. As she put it: "my chief concern is to make it plain that art is of the people…and that it is only by understanding this [that] we can hope to do good and not harm in our efforts to teach" modern art in Africa (ibid).

[78] See: "Makerere Art Department Exhibition" in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1830, July 10, 1946.

Although radical, Africanist and (arguably) anti-imperialist, Trowell's model had a positive reception. Notice how the prestigious *Uganda Journal* acclaimed the first public lecture in which Trowell presented her model:

> Mrs Trowell on April 20th [1938] gave a most interesting lecture on African Arts and Crafts…Those who have read her recently published work will not be surprised to find that she has formed such an appreciation of African Art and has done so much by her keenness and voluntary labour to stimulate it. However it is just this stimulation and hope…that Mrs Trowell will for long be able to foster, encourage and advise our local artists and craftsmen"[79].

The same paper reported that H. Jowitt, the head of the Department of Education in Uganda's colonial government, expressed a similar sentiment. If in the last chapter I demonstrated that the Education Department was shopping around for better ways of improving the instruction of art in Uganda, it is clear here that Trowell had supplied one. The excerpt also suggests that Trowell had bridged the post-Renaissance polarisation between African art and craft (Sanyal 2000, 84). Put in other words, Trowell extended the delicate process of redrawing the borders of modern art in Uganda which Mathers and Fisher had started by the mid-thirties.

Because her project had few, and equally ambitious, precedents, Trowell engaged a rigorous four-fold strategy to secure a space for it in Makerere College, and sell it to a (rather sceptical) public. First, she started art classes for volunteers, mainly civil servants, before she persuaded the Makerere establishment, and government, to allow Makerere students to pursue it as an extra-mural (if recreational) activity. Starting in 1940 she taught one professional student, namely Gregory Maloba. The number of professional students has increased exponentially over the years. Today the school has over 600 fulltime students. It offers a variety of courses in art practice, history and theory.

Second, Trowell did detailed ethnographic studies on the traditional arts in Uganda, Africa and Oceania. As a result of her ethnographic field studies, she collected varied samples of Uganda's material culture. In 1939 she

[79] "Uganda Society Notices", *Uganda Journal,* vol. I, 1(July 1938), iv.

donated part of it to the Department of Ethnography at the British Museum (Braunholtz 1953, iii) adding to the popularity of her initiative in London[80]. Her studies also led to the first comprehensive catalogue of Uganda's traditional artefacts which was later published as *Tribal Crafts of Uganda* (1953). She also restarted and expanded the stalled Uganda Museum which Harry Johnston had initiated in 1901. Reopened in 1942, the museum became a significant resource for educational purposes. With the help of assistants Trowell gave lectures[81] at the museum on aspects of Ugandan traditional arts like bark cloth making[82] and pottery among others. As a result, the museum became a visual archive for the fast-changing aspects of Uganda's political and cultural landscapes. It also provided a space in which the (traditional) local and its (Western) Other interacted. For example, Trowell held an exhibition of loaned European works there in the early-1940s. By the mid-1960s works from the rest of the continent, America and Europe (including Henry Moore's) had been exhibited in the Uganda Museum. Moore, and other modernist artists, would influence some works done by some contemporary Ugandan artists including Maloba's *Independence Monument* (which I will discuss in chapter five).

Third, Trowell kept art in the public domain. She mounted a vigorous publicity campaign through her own exhibitions[83]. She pursued public debates

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[80] Her popularity in London was helpful in the 1940s when she successfully fought against attempts to exclude art from collegiate education (and I will come back to this in a moment).

[81] Starting from 15th April 1943, Trowell gave a series of lectures under the theme "Clues on African Tribal Customs". She, sometimes with the help of African assistants (like Lubwama, Aslem Musoke, etc.), used artefacts from the Uganda Museum not as "odd curios" but as valuable specimens to demonstrate her claims for the role of traditions in African art education. See: *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L. No. 1703, April 28, 1943. Also see: Trowell, K. Margaret "Uganda Museum Schools Service", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L. No. 1745, April 16, 1944.

[82] Trowell, with the help of Aslem Musoke, gave a lecture on bark cloth to a selection of schools and members of the public on 26th April 1944. See: Trowell, K. M. "The Craft of Bark Cloth", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L. No. 1755, April 19, 1944.

[83] Between 3 and 6 November 1937, Trowell exhibited her work for the first time in Uganda. The show consisted of paintings and colour prints: a "collection of both local landscapes and portraits". In the early-1950s she helped the formation of a group of occasional art students. This was the Uganda Art Club (UAC). It evolved from her classes of 1937-1939. Initially it held its classes during weekdays and on weekends. By the late-1950s classes were held on Sundays. The club attracted expatriates, wives of expatriates and educated Ganda elite. Trowell gave lectures in art history and regular criticisms on works done by members of the UAC. The club held regular annual exhibitions and discussions about art in Uganda, sometimes attracting foreign guests. It was active after Trowell's

through the *Uganda Herald* newspaper, the Uganda Society, the Literary Debating and Social Club[84] and the Uganda Education Association[85]. In the process she popularised African art and its education in Uganda — a popularity which she exploited in the 1940s to fight bureaucratic antipathy towards her project as we will see in a moment. She also held successful annual student exhibitions in Uganda and the United Kingdom which became big public extravaganzas. In this thesis I discuss several successful exhibitions but at this stage two exhibitions — one at Nnamirembe (the *Synod Exhibition*) and the other in London (the *Ugandan Arts and Crafts Exhibition*) — merit review, because through them what Trowell intended to develop as an alternative model for Uganda's modern art became clear to the public (and colonial government) in Uganda.

The *Synod Exhibition* and *Ugandan Arts and Crafts Exhibition*: Launching an Alternative Model for Contemporary Ugandan Art

The *Synod Exhibition* (also called *Nnamirembe Exhibition*) was hosted at Nnamirembe Synod Hall on 29 - 30 July 1938. The exhibition was celebrated as the "first exhibition of African art" in Uganda[86]. It was a big function: the clergy, Heads of Government Departments, traditional leaders and the civic population attended. H. Jowitt (Director of Education), Trowell, Mary Fisher and the African Art Society[87] organised the show. The exhibition showcased artefacts from East, Central and West Africa. Baskets, mats, masks, sculptures, and paintings were on show. Clearly this shows the resources Trowell was about to deploy in order to vernacularise (and reorient) Uganda's modern art.

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retirement until 1975 when Idi Amin's military machine forced its last chairman, Charles Ssekintu, to flee into exile.

[84] She gave a ground-breaking lecture on *African Art* at the Literary Debating and Social Club premises at Mengo. She also joined hands with K. T. Wachsmann to give public lectures on *An Approach to African Art*. See: "Personal, Social and Otherwise", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1454, July 6,1938; "The Uganda Society Lecture", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1444, April 27, 1938. Also see: "African Music and the Supernatural: Uganda Society Lecture", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1456, July 20, 1938.

[85] For example see Trowell Margaret, *Art Teaching in African Schools* (London: Longmans, 1952).

[86] See: "African Art Society: Successful First Exhibition Opened by His Excellence", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1458, August 3, 1938.

[87] Under its patron the Kabaka Mutesa II of Buganda, the African Art Society was a loose configuration of art enthusiasts, art educators, volunteers and political activists.

The visual archive for this exhibition has been lost but a critic in the mainstream press did a review which I refer to in this discussion. It would require more than a lone critique in a colonial merchant press (Jørgensen 1981, 184) to rate the strength of any exhibition. This, however, should not detract from the useful points the article raises. For example, we learn from the review that easel painting showed the new direction in Uganda's art. This was a departure from pattern-drawing in the bush schools and Mathers's interest in traditional crafts. It was an extension of Fisher's initiative; it marked the beginning of the popularity of easel painting as a medium of artistic expression in Uganda's contemporary art. Many contemporary artists in Uganda are easel painters including the two main subjects of this study: Sserunkuuma and Mutebi.

The *Uganda Herald* also reported that the themes exhibited in the works were African. Stylistically some paintings echoed (modernist) impressionist, realist and fauvist tendencies in which Ugandan painters demonstrated varied degrees of understanding pictorial anatomy[88]. This too is useful. Following Fisher, Trowell intended that African artists use Western materials and vocabulary to express African themes and many contemporary artists who have studied at Makerere can be traced along these threads. Based on the account in the *Uganda Herald* we can argue that it was through Trowell's teaching that these strands entered art instruction at Makerere. Over the next five chapters I will discuss the ways in which several artists (including Sserunkuuma and Mutebi) have engaged a related strategy of integrating Western materials and vocabulary to construct idioms based on African themes, although some of them will not be directly linked to Trowell's teaching.

We also learn that the *Synod Exhibition* confounded moderns and sceptics; it allayed fears that:

[88] See: "Personal, Social and Otherwise", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1454, July 6, 1938.

> the African student might be so taught in European methods of 'drawing' that instead of being given new and exciting ways of expressing himself he was merely given a new and uninspiring subject to be learnt, with the deplorable result that his drawing became an unintelligent copying of European mannerisms[89].

The end product would be total alienation, and, as we saw in the last chapter, this is what missionaries had done. As it turned out, the *Synod Exhibition* demonstrated that such a disastrous spectacle could be avoided. Because late-nineteenth-century missionary art instruction was likely, according to Trowell, to produce such a spectacle, then it is arguable that Trowell had "corrected" the anomaly. She demonstrated that "modern methods of art teaching where technique is kept in its proper place as a servant of picture…making"[90] could lead to art works "of real artistic value and are of great interest in that they give promise of the development of genuine Africa[n art]"[91].

We also learn front the *Uganda Herald* that the exhibition demonstrated a turning point in higher education and cultural development of Uganda. Although the college had started in the 1920s to prepare (cheap) "skilled" labour for the colonial bureaucracy (see chapter two) and the African looked to it as an opportunity to get into the colonial bureaucracy (Sanyal 2000) and capitalist economy (Jørgensen 1981), art was to neutralise this materialist attitude. Notice how the press celebrated this development:

> …in view of the academic developments now in progress [at Makerere], exemplified by the building of the new college; anything which stressed the aesthetic and artistic side of life should receive every encouragement; it was not desired that the new college should start on a purely utilitarian and materialistic basis[92].

And Trowell was to receive "every encouragement" even from administrators who diametrically opposed her (Africanist) views on Africans. For instance, Governor Mitchell held condescending and paternalistic views about Africans. In May 1938, he suggested that there was only one way to educate the African and that was: the British way. The British for Mitchell (as indeed

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] See: "Nnamirembe Exhibition", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1454, June 6, 1938.

for Stanley) had a moral (and ordained) duty to pull Africans out of backwardness and launch them into the realm of modernity and civilisation. Mitchell articulated [t]his position thus:

> But there is only one civilisation and one culture to which we are fitted to lead the people of these [African] countries [that is] our own: we know no other and we cannot dissect the one we know and take out this piece or that as being good or bad for Africans…We British ...Our task, indeed, if we have any faith in our civilisation and ourselves is boldly to lead the African peoples forward along the road we ourselves are following, confident that if we do that we shall have discharged our duty as guardians for them and shall have set them upon courses which as they march onwards in the generations to come, will bring them even closer to us and to the things in which we believe[93].

Later in 1954, Mitchell revisited his theme while accenting his arrogant attitude and articulating the "backwardness" of Africans. As the Governor of Kenya, Mitchell published his "afterthoughts"[94] about Africans, rejecting suggestions that civilisation in Africa could ever be realised without colonial intervention. This led him to conclude that Great Zimbabwe owed its existence to "colonising or exploring people" (Mitchell 1954, 21) who occupied that part of Southern Africa a few hundred years ago (ibid). However, Trowell disagreed with Mitchell's claims. For instance, she rejected the connection between the Great Zimbabwe and King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. She based her arguments on archaeological evidence, and maintained that such suggestions (to which Mitchell subscribed) were romantic "folklore passed on by the later Portuguese discoverers" (Trowell 1979, 180) into European public opinion. For Trowell Great Zimbabwe was constructed by (Bantu-speaking) Africans who migrated from East Africa (Trowell 1979, 181). Although Trowell strongly disagreed with Mitchell's views (and ideology?) about Africans, she received support from him. For example Mitchell argued that what Trowell had initiated "would have a profound influence on the life of the college and therefore life of the

[93] Mitchell took this position during a conference on African education hosted at Makerere College. See: "Minutes of the Inter-territorial Conference" May 21-24, 1938.
[94] Mitchell, Philip. *African Afterthought* .(London: Hutchinson, 1954).

country"[95]. To celebrate this achievement, Mitchell offered to fund the exhibition to tour London where it was hosted at the Imperial Institute South Kensington, London as the *Exhibition of Ugandan Arts and Crafts* (1939).

Again the archive for the London exhibition is not easily accessible. But we learn from the *Uganda Herald* of 10 May 1939 that, launched by Lord Hailey, the exhibition was successful. It featured paintings, pottery, carvings and ironwork and that it represented the combined efforts of Governor Mitchell, Trowell and Mary Fisher (ibid). Students from Makerere, Gayaza Girl's School and local craftsmen contributed exhibits. That the exhibition demonstrated how students had effectively used "the principles of art and use of materials" (ibid) to express their (African) messages reflects in many ways the conclusions drawn from the *Synod Exhibition.*

The press record also indicates that although Ugandans supplied most of the works, the exhibition also contained some contributions from Kenya, Zanzibar and Tanganyika (ibid). This addition needs to be highlighted for it featured in the *Synod Exhibition* as well. Most importantly, however, it shows that right from the beginning, the definition of Uganda's modern art was regional (rather than strictly national or tribal). Second, it shows that Trowell insisted that the exhibition reflected the wider East African community which the embryonic art school intended to serve. I say this because in the mid-forties a review on the activities of the Art School suggested that:

> Everyone…will agree that not only Uganda, but the whole of East Africa, is extremely fortunate in having had the services of Mrs Trowell during these first steps in creating a modern African art: future generations will, we hope, continue in the tradition that she has soundly established[96].

These threads should be borne in mind because in chapters four, five and six I will refer to artists who were not Ugandan but whose contribution to Uganda's modern art is considerable and inseparable.

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[95] See: Mitchell, ibid.
[96] See: "Modern African Art Makerere Students Exhibition: East Africa's Debt to Mrs Trowell" in *The Uganda Herald,* Vol. L, 1831, July 17, 1946.

When she returned from London in late-1939, Trowell engaged the arduous task of refining her ideas into a collegiate “art curriculum”. She also continued to exhibit her students’ work, improve and publish her thoughts on African art, until she retired in 1958. However, in spite of her successful start, Trowell faced mounting political challenges during her tenure at Makerere College. Between 1939 and 1958 Trowell had to confront hostile politics and policies, which threatened to exclude the embryonic Art School from the prestigious Makerere College. I explain them in the next section and establish how Trowell deployed her personality, negotiation skills and the growing popularity of collegiate art education, to guarantee space for the instruction of modern art at Makerere College. This debate is important because it informed important directions in Trowell’s curriculum in the late-forties and early-fifties. I will also refer to it in chapter eight because Sserunkuuma did a project in the early-nineties whose sources can be traced back to this debate.

The Battle for Survival: Trowell and the politics/policies at Makerere College

Trowell fought tirelessly for the survival of the Art School and securing its independence and uniqueness during the two decades she spent in Uganda. The problems she confronted were varied. For instance, World War II imposed serious challenges and constraints on the expansion of the College between 1939 and 1945 (Macpherson 1964). It was hard to recruit staff because the position of the Art School in the College was ill-defined. Consequently, Trowell remained the only instructor, serving as a volunteer, before she enlisted Gregory Maloba, her former student, in the early-forties and others later. In addition, the school experienced major hardships between 1945 and 1949. In this period the college underwent major restructuring during the “post-war development of higher education in the Colonies” which resulted from the Asquith Commission report (Macpherson 1964, 38) and this, in particular, put Trowell through immense strain.

In 1943 the Asquith Commission investigated and made recommendations on how to fuse higher education in the British colonies into British Universities. Pursuant to its recommendations the Makerere College Council, during its sitting on the 23rd of November 1948, resolved that for "educational and political reasons it was most important that early steps" be taken to grant students of Makerere College recognised degrees from British Universities[97]. Resultantly, steps were taken to introduce "higher courses in the Arts and Sciences" (Macpherson 1964, 40) as the College graduated from a vocational institution, which it had been since 1921, to a University. According to the *Uganda Herald* of 26th November 1949, Makerere College thus entered into a *Special Relations Scheme* which meant that students at Makerere College pursued courses leading to the award of degrees from the University of London.

These developments were positive; they however threatened the Art School. The reasons were diverse and complex ranging from bureaucratic delays to hostile administrators. For instance we learn from Macpherson that in the wider scheme of things the upgrading process was mired with bureaucratic red-tape:

> Members of staff complained bitterly of the amount of time wasted on committees, or in clerical work preparing for them, and yet when a new subject came up for discussion, the immediate reaction was an *ad hoc* committee to report to another committee to report to a third and so on (Macpherson 1964, 49).

This meant that the process of transformation was unnecessarily slow and frustrating. Worse for the Art School, the College administration changed hands. Douglas Tomblings who had supported Trowell's endeavours to start art classes at the University in 1939, left the college. George Turner followed Tomblings; he was equally supportive during the World War II era. Under Tomblings and Turner the school saw some small expansion. For example Trowell acquired a building at the main campus. In 1947 Turner left; William Lamont took over the administration of the College in the period 1947-1949. Lamont was a professor of moral philosophy who, as Kyeyune (2003)

[97] See: "Makerere Development Policy" in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. LIII, No. 228. December 11, 1948.

ironically puts it, “was less of an art enthusiast” (p.71). He displayed what Court calls a “bureaucratic antipathy” towards collegiate art education (Court 1985, 7); his reign was inimical to the presence of the Art School at the College.

Then too, the proposed London degree did not suit the peculiarities of Trowell’s art education. The London degree was entirely theory-oriented; art, as taught by Trowell, was primarily studio-based. As a result it was put to Trowell that the component of art history would be acceptable because it showed possibilities of theoretical discourse and research and most especially research which was the cornerstone of the Asquith Report (Macpherson 1964, 39). Much emphasis was also placed on English as a requirement for entry into Makerere. Trowell did not consider these to be important for the following reasons: First, as Trowell did not respect academism, she taught art history to augment her students’ thought processes and not as an independent academic discipline; research was part of her curriculum but it was not prioritised. In fact, it would be her successor, Cecil Todd, who emphasised the presence of (Western) art history and colour theory on the curriculum. Second, because she emphasised visual expression, Trowell considered English language as secondary, yet the new changes emphasised proficiency in the English language as a necessary condition for admission! As a result the “local authority” (being Trowell’s words) redefined art as a technical subject. It was then suggested that art education be relegated to a nearby Kampala Technical Institute where other technical disciplines were taught. In her *African Tapestry* (1957), Trowell puts it succinctly:

> According to one local authority the theoretical study of the History of Art [was] considered respectable, but the actual practice of the craft was not so, and it was suggested to me that we should rightly be shifted across to the Kampala Technical School amongst carpenters, mechanics and tailors (p. 108)

In summary: “Art was categorically ruled out as a subject for intermediate or general degree…” (Macpherson 1964, 57). For Trowell, this spelt the end of modern art education in Uganda. As we read in her reminisces cited by Court;

> The upgrading procedures cast a shadow of possible abandonment over collegiate art education. Mrs Trowell recalls, "these years were a time of confusion, uncertainty, and tension for the embryo of [the] School of Art…it appeared as if closure was inevitable" (Court 1985, 40)

But Trowell manoeuvred around the problem. She mobilised public support from Uganda and Britain through lectures and personal appeals in order to save the school from relegation. Most cleverly she re-established the relevance of art to the changing academic environment within the college. She [re]interpreted the new College policy — the Asquith Report — to defeat the arrogance of the "local authority". The report observed that:

> Universities serve the double purpose of refining and maintaining all that is best in local traditions and cultures and at the same time providing a means whereby those brought up under the influence of these traditions and cultures may enter on a footing into the world wide community of intellect (Trowell 1960a, 108).

During the 21st meeting of the Academic Board, Trowell used this citation to question the logic behind the relegation of the Art School since there was evidence to suggest that it had had a respectable "prodigious" (Court 1985) decade-long record in which it had integrated Western vocabulary with local traditions. Put in other words, what the College was planning to implement in 1949, the Art School had implemented ten years before.

Trowell prevailed on the College Council. Luckily enough, Lamont left the college and was succeeded by Bernard de Bunsen. De Bunsen was, like Turner and Tomblings, supportive of Trowell's project; it was he who finally regularised Trowell's status in the College in 1949. Most importantly, the supreme administrative organ of college education in East Africa, the Inter-University Council, too, relaxed its stance and agreed to maintain the uniqueness of the Art School. It commissioned William Coldstream (a professor from the Slade School) and Maurice de Sausmarez (head of Fine Arts from the University of Leeds) to work with Trowell on a "unique" arrangement for the Art School. Consequently, as the rest of the University became part of the London University, the Art School linked up with the Slade School and the University of Leeds. These institutions would provide

external examiners but the Makerere Art School would plan its curriculum and examinations leading to the award of a three-year Certificate in Art.

However, Trowell continued to improve her curriculum in the following ways: First, by the mid-forties she had introduced disciplines like pottery and print-making to diversify her curriculum. Until then, she taught modelling and painting. Although she had introduced her students to art history and drawing by the mid-forties, these were supplementary to the core courses of painting and modelling. Secondly, she introduced courses which made students' skills relevant to Uganda's changing economic environment. For instance, in 1946 a student called Aguto was "taking a full-time course to become a book illustrator"[98]. This student would have been relevant to the fast-growing printing industry although little is known about his activities after he graduated. Trowell also taught textile printing in order to produce designers (and designs) for the textile industry. For example the *Uganda Herald* of 17 July 1946 reported that by the mid-forties fabric designs made by her students were exportable. This is borne out by the fact that the Manchester Calico Printing Association, from England, bought designs made by three of Trowell's students (Kahere, Wamboha and Sangai). Thirdly, by 1950 Trowell established the relevance of her students to Uganda's education sector: she started an Art Teacher's Certificate course. In addition she also published a series of five manuals on *Art Teaching in African Schools* (1951-1952) to guide the teaching of African art in Uganda's schools.

In 1954 Trowell further negotiated for the autonomy of the Art School from Makerere's Faculty of Education as she upgraded the curriculum to award a Diploma in Fine Arts. By the time she retired in 1958, Trowell had laid a formidable foundation on which the Art School remained in the fast-changing Makerere University where it still is today. In the mid-1970s it started to offer undergraduate and graduate academic programmes. It is the school which sharpened Sserunkuuma's and Mutebi's professional skills during the late-

[98] See: "Modern African Art Makerere Students Exhibition: East Africa's Debt to Mrs Trowell" in *The Uganda Herald*, Vol. L, 1831, July 17, 1946.

1980s and the early-1990s. I will therefore keep referring to it in the remaining part of this thesis.

The challenges and politics I have just outlined were, however, not limited to Trowell's era; they continued to the present day. This is important because whereas for Trowell they did not result in manifest visual expression, for Bruno Sserunkuuma and his instructor Francis Musangogwantamu they did. I will therefore pick up this thread in chapter eight to explain some of their works. Secondly, Trowell faced other defining political developments, for example her entry in Makerere College coincided with fears that Uganda would be directly affected by the Second World War. Then there was the anti-colonial politics which engulfed the Protectorate starting in the mid-forties. These issues forced the embryonic Art School to join the political discussions around it; the nexus between Uganda's modern art and the country's politics took shape. This is the trajectory in which Sserunkuuma and Mutebi are located. But before the two artists took up this political thread, it made varied turns as contemporary artists took political decisions and strategies to engage, and/or disengaged from, issues affecting their society.

Conclusion to Chapter Three

In this chapter I have [re]traced the founding of a modern Art School in Uganda. I have outlined the political and pedagogical issues and challenges Margaret Trowell engaged to redirect the teaching of modern art from the bush school curriculum which (as we saw in the quote at the beginning of chapter two) she identified as being inappropriate. I have demonstrated that she used strands other Europeans such as Mathers and Fisher engaged, but I argue that her project was more academic and involved much negotiation, research and publication. These all marked Trowell's twenty-year career in Uganda.

I also demonstrated that although her interests were initially academic, Trowell was dragged into serious political negotiations which altered the

direction of her curriculum. Whereas I have limited the discussion in this chapter to issues at the college, it is imperative to note that these issues tapped into the wider [late/anti-] colonial debates and global politics. Uganda's modern art resonated this wider angle too. In the next chapter I pick up this thread and chart the convergences between Uganda's contemporary art (instructed at Makerere College) and the [late/anti-] colonial and global politics in which the county found itself.

Chapter Four

Art-as-Politics: The Birth of the Nexus between Uganda's Contemporary Art and Politics

Introduction:

Whereas the epicentre of World War II was in Europe, anxiety had spread to the British colonies in East Africa by the end of 1939. This was because Mussolini had interests in Ethiopia and there was growing fear that the Nazis would attack the British interests in East Africa. As it was reported in the *Uganda Herald* of 9 March 1938, there was concern in Uganda over "the possibility of war". In January 1940 speculation had transformed into reality; Kenya's Tsiolo District (on the border with Ethiopia) witnessed skirmishes between Allied and Italian forces[99]. Anxiety and hysteria ensued in Uganda and a national response — codenamed *The War Effort* — was set up. The Protectorate's priorities changed decisively. With so much economic and political stress, debate on the academic progress and expansion of Makerere which had started in the late-1930s[100] was suspended; all resources were geared towards the *War Effort*. After the war, Uganda was engulfed in late-/anti-colonial politics. These developments informed Uganda's modern art[ists].

In this chapter I discuss Trowell's activities and the works of a few of her early students to shed light on the political strategies through which contemporary artists initially confronted the radical political events which unfolded in the forties and fifties. This debate is important. Through it I trace the birth of the nexus between Uganda's politics and contemporary art which Sserunkuuma and Mutebi are currently engaging. Implicit in this discussion is my contention that Uganda's modern art has a political dimension dating

[99] See: "'War' in East Africa: Two incidents", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L, No. 1541, March 6, 1940.
[100] See: Nemo, "Topical Topics" in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. XLVIII, No. 1453, June 29, 1938.

back to the forties but which until now has remained unarticulated. I begin with the role of art in the *War Effort.*

Called to Serve: Uganda's Contemporary Art and the *War Effort*

As we read in the *Uganda Herald* of 26 March 1941 the *War Effort* was a series of voluntary and state-funded activities intended to "furnish the [protectorate's] means to fight" although, as it turned out, it ultimately became a mechanism to support the Allied offensive against the Nazis. All skills were mobilised to participate in the *War Effort* as a demonstration of patriotism[101]; even the most mundane activities served the purpose[102]. Launched in 1940, by 1941 the *War Effort* had proliferated into several charities[103] and activities which involved the arts. The state deployed propaganda cinema[104] and the visual arts played a unique and important role as Western and African artists participated in exhibitions at the Entebbe Club and Makerere College, respectively, in order to contribute to the *War Effort*. This link between Uganda's politics during World War II and the arts was unprecedented: its scale has never been equalled; it set the frame in which contemporary artists relocated into mainstream political activity and served the official ideology. A detailed discussion of these exhibitions (two by

[101] For example Lady Mitchell was the wife of Philip Mitchell the Governor of Uganda. She launched the Lady Mitchell's Comfort Fund through which European women, but mainly the wives of colonial expatriates, made warm clothing to be supplied to the Allied forces threatened by the harsh Polish winter.

[102] For example the press reported a one Mrs Gee who sold her seven-week old puppy "to the highest bidder in aid of the War Fund". See: Serius, "A Puppy for the Good Cause", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1589, February 5, 1941.

[103] Funds generated through the War Effort helped the activities of: The Air Raid Relief, British Red Cross, Canteens Fund, East African War Charities, Fire Fighting Services, Greek Red Cross, K. A. R (King's African Rifles), Kampala Branch Red Cross, King George V Fund for Sailors, Lady Mitchell's Comfort Fund, Local Ambulance, Refugees, Uganda War Charities Fund, Uganda War Fund, Women's Emergency Organisation, and the Warships Fund.

[104] For example one Captain Pitman made a series of documentaries capturing varied aspects of Uganda's flora and fauna. However in the 1940s Lady Mitchell used Pitman's documentaries to support her Lady Mitchell's Comfort Fund. The government itself used Pitman's documentary to raise funds through what was popularised as "the *Entebbe Flicks*". Also, we notice from the press that the colonial administration in Uganda resolved to "…have as many…films as possible…" to help the *War Effort*. For instance it used Edmund Goulding's film *The Dawn Patrol* (1938)—which was a remake of Howard Hawks' *The Dawn Patrol* (renamed *Flight Commander;* 1930)—to raise public sympathy for the British forces. Goulding's movie, just like the first version by Howard Hawks, featured grisly World War I combat scenes involving massive loss of life faced by the British Royal Flying Corps of the 59th Division stationed in France. See: "Entebbe Flicks" in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1535, March 27, 1940. Also see: "War Films at the Central Cinema", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1643. February 18, 1942.

European artists and two by indigenous African artists) will demonstrate my claim. Although I am particularly interested in the African participation, I begin with the Europeans' exhibitions because (as it will be demonstrated in a moment) these paved a way for the Africans' exhibitions.

Redrawing the Boundaries of Art Exhibitions in Uganda: The *Entebbe Art Exhibition 1940* and the War Effort

On 15th June 1940, Governor Mitchell launched the *Entebbe Art Exhibition* at Entebbe Club[105]. It is hard to trace its archive as the documentation is scattered and the catalogues are lost. *The Uganda Herald* published reviews on the exhibition which are not comprehensive but they nevertheless shed light on aspects that are important for my discussion. For example, it was reported that Mrs Campbell[106], Mrs Smithburn, Mrs Lang, C. T. Mitchell and D. O. Mathews organised the exhibition. Two hundred works were exhibited and over 20 Europeans artists participated, many of them wives of colonial expatriates. This then is a very interesting record which highlights the hitherto unacknowledged role that the wives of colonial expatriates, and women in general, played in the development of Uganda's modern art. Mary Fisher and Trowell, of course, are exceptions to this rule of anonymity.

As is evident from readings in the press the exhibitors did not represent subject matter directly connected with World War II. Some artists explored religious subject matter, for example Mrs D. C. Campbell who exhibited a

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[105] See: "Entebbe Art Exhibition", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L. No1556, June 19, 1940.

[106] Many wives of colonial expatriates were known only by their married names. This practice was common in Britain, France, Germany, Austria and Italy (with exceptions being the Netherlands and Spain). In Uganda the practice can be traced from Britain. Bram Dijkstra (1986) says that around the 1840s English Common Law enforced that women be known and called by their husbands' names. In 1913, the Anglican Synod enforced it in Uganda when it passed a resolution that married women in Uganda be known by their husbands' names. This had a moralising effect since "calling women by their husbands' names was also meant to distinguish them from unmarried women who were presumed to be morally loose" (Musisi 2001, 176). Apart from a few, like Margaret Trowell and Mary Fisher, the initials, and first names, of many European female artists, active in Uganda, were never made public. Feminist critics reject these identities, and the laws/resolutions supporting them, arguing that they were intended to legitimate the male hegemony (Tumusiime 2005). However, because it is hard to find a record of their initials and names today, and in order to avoid confusion, I accompany the names of such colonial women artists with their marital titles. In essence I present the artists as they were represented in the press. See "Entebbe Art Exhibition", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L. No1556. June 19, 1940.

work titled *Heaven is Open for Those Who are Ready to Receive It,* while others exhibited work based on the genre "scenes of African life"[107]. To cite some examples, they articulated:

(a) recent professions in Uganda, for example Mrs. Campbell's *African Carpenter*

(b) flora, for example a tree study in Mrs Smithburn's *Nakiwogo* (a revered tree which used to be on Entebbe Road)

(c) African habitations as in Mrs Mahaffy's *His Castle,* and

(d) scenic rural vistas as in Margaret Trowell's *On the Slopes of Mount Elgon*.

Other artists represented colonial personalities, for example Mrs Rainfords' portraits of *Betty* and *Mr Middlemas* while a few revealed interests in human anatomy for example Mowbray Thomas's S*tudy of a Hand*.

The press reported that the artists prioritised technical expediencies — colour harmony, drawing, materials and composition (ibid). This is important because it confirms that European artists in Uganda, as indeed the case elsewhere, prioritised creative genius, technical expediencies and naturalistic representation — the Kantian aesthetic. This explains why, writing in the *Uganda Herald,* 22 May 1940, a critic called Belinda concluded that the exhibition showcased "art for arts sake". Most importantly, this emphasis on skill brought the contrasts between Western art and what Trowell taught at Makerere into sharp relief. As Trowell later revealed to a reporter in the *Uganda Herald* of 10 July 1946, she did not prioritise skill in her art instruction at Makerere. This was the case because she believed that for the African artist "technical skill is not the primary aim [and that] it is a tool rather than a master" (ibid).

The exhibition also served the objectives of the *War Effort.* Through it artists expressed patriotism and solidarity with the Allied forces. They raised money through a raffle and the sale of catalogues, and added 15% of the sale of exhibits to this, to donate to the *War Charities Fund*. The record does not

[107] See "Entebbe Art Exhibition", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L. No1556. June 19, 1940.

mention how much money was raised. Considering the huge bill that was spent on the war, this was a miniscule token. However, the gesture was unprecedented in the history of modern (European and African) art in Uganda. As a critic remarked in the *Uganda Herald* of 19 June 1940, the show "undoubtedly proved a great success" — a success which motivated another (Europeans only) show which opened on 10 August 1941.

Aesthetics-as-Politics? Art as a Site for Late-colonial Politics in Uganda

Recorded in the press as *the Entebbe Art Show,* the show was popular. Just like the 1940 show, the 1941 show was dominated by wives of colonial expatriates further consolidating their role in the development of visual art in Uganda. Themes were diverse although it is clear from the record that many artists were interested in African themes. Styles were diverse too. We read in the *Uganda Herald* of 20 August 1941 that professionalism varied from that of enthusiasts whose work "lacked dynamism" (ibid), to that of refined professionals. In the latter category Trowell was singled out "as an exemplar" (ibid). "For power and certainty of colouring of line" we are told, "a high place must be accorded to Mrs Trowell's 'Back Verandah' and 'Banana' both of them [d]instinct with deep feeling for Africa, its homes and its colours" (ibid). This on the one hand confirms Trowell's soaring popularity. Most importantly, however, it affirms that Trowell practised what she preached. Although she could not escape the Western academic traditions and hence demonstrated a "sureness of touch, unhesitating draughtsmanship and unerring colours" (ibid), she grounded her work in African subject matter: her art was rooted in its African society. She demonstrated her passion for Africa (as we are told); she illustrated the practicality of what she was teaching at the embryonic Makerere Art School.

Also, in his opening speech Governor Charles Dundas made the following remarks:

> I am afraid we in Africa are rather materialistically minded, and anything done in the direction of art and the progress of culture is very much to be encouraged[108].

Clearly here Dundas was reaffirming colonial cultural imperialism and the arrogance of Western modernity. We have earlier seen related sentiments in statements made by Hanning Stanley, John Roscoe, Albert Cook and Philip Mitchell. This explains why Dundas also remarked that:

> …I am quite convinced that whereas in Africa we advance the people of the country in practical ways, we must also secure development on their aesthetic sense. I am very pleased indeed that a lead in this direction should be given by the European community[109].

But Dundas's claim that Trowell's instruction had dematerialised the mind of the African elite is admissible. It reflects the popular sentiment of the day. It confirms that Trowell had decisively found the right (and most importantly un-imperialist) model of art instruction. To celebrate the development Dundas announced that: "A little later in the year I shall be opening a show of Art by Africans and I shall do so with particular pleasure"[110]. The show Dundas so delightedly announced was the *Makerere Art Show* of October 1941 to which I turn in the next section.

The *Makerere Art Show* 1941: Linking African Art to the Politics of War

Launched on 5th October 1941, the *Makerere Art Show* celebrated the inauguration of Makerere College's administrative building. This building is important as it is the nerve-centre in which policies in Makerere are made. The Protectorate Governor, Charles Dundas, and the king Muteesa II of Buganda presided over the occasion. "Owing to the economy of paper, no personal invitations"[111] and catalogues were printed. As such, the reviews in the *Uganda Herald* form the basis of my discussion.

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[108] See: Runn, O. "Art Exhibition at Entebbe: 10th August 1941" in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L. No. 1616, August 13, 1941.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] See: Trowell, K. Margaret cited in "Exhibition of African Art", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1622, September 24, 1941.

We read in the press that the *Makerere Art Show* was the first major exhibition hosted at Makerere College[112]. The African Art Society, the group behind the 1938 *Synod Exhibition*, and especially Trowell, were instrumental in organising it. The exhibition redressed the failure of the Entebbe (European only) shows to admit (traditional and contemporary) African art on grounds that there was "no space"[113]. Here every African artist was welcome: drum-makers, potters, harp-makers, backcloth-makers exhibited together with students from kindergarten all through to College. Like the Synod and London shows, this show was also regional: exhibitors came from Uganda and Kenya[114]. It however also has to be noted that the *Makerere Art Show* itself did not escape the racial stereotypes of the time, especially as no Europeans, Indian/Goans exhibited here.

Following Mathers's contribution to the development of the traditional arts in Uganda which we saw in the last chapter, surely the crafts must have been interesting. But the press, arguably biased by Trowell's personality and intention to popularise the nascent collegiate art education, focussed more on developments in the embryonic contemporary art at Makerere College which is the focus for my discussion.

Trowell was quoted in the *Uganda Herald* of 24 September 1941 to have said that painting, carving and modelling were displayed and that Makerere artists (being Uganda's contemporary artists) explored themes of contemporary African life. The same article highlighted two students who merit further mention: Rwakikara who exhibited a painting entitled *Picking Cotton* and Okello who did a painting titled *Ginnery*. These titles imply the artists reflected on aspects of the cotton economy which the colonial administration engineered to reform the local economy, allow for self-sustained growth and reduce dependence on the metropolis (Jørgensen

[112] Let us not forget that the two earlier major African exhibitions were hosted outside the college — one at Nnamirembe (3 kilometres away from it) and the other in London.
[113] See: "Entebbe Art Show", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L No. 1607, June 11, 1941.
[114] See: K.K.K. "African Art Society: Second Local Exhibition", in *Uganda Herald.* Vol. L. No. 1624. October 8, 1941.

1981). The cultivation of cotton in Uganda started in 1905. Although in the mid- and late-forties African artists were to critique the colonial economy, it is less likely that this critique would have received visual expression in 1941. If my contention is valid then it can be concluded that Rwakikara and Okello celebrated (rather than critiqued) the (exploitative) colonial economy[115] using their art. I suggest that this thread be borne in mind because it will reappear. In chapter five I recall it to demonstrate how Sam Ntiro developed it to celebrate a modern[ising] postcolonial state-led economy in the region. In chapter six we will see Elly Tumwine, and others, picking aspects of it to celebrate the NRM's post-1986 reforms.

We also read in Trowell's article that two other artists explored traditional myths and legends related to death. Trowell may have intended the use of indigenous myths for subject matter as a way of vernacularising Uganda's modern art. Because death is inextricably woven into numerous legends and myths in Uganda, it may thus have found its way into these works. Lugoloobi and Gregory Maloba explored two[116] such myths which I need to analyse because in visualising such myths the two artists tapped into debates on World War II.

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[115] During the colonial days, many rural folks paid for the education of their sons and daughters using money from the colonial cash crop economy and this may have been the case for Rwakikara and Okello. The colonial cash crop economy led to 'economic emancipation' of Africans. It is likely that the artists endorsed the conventional thinking at the time that cotton cultivation led to the economic emancipation of many rural folks.

[116] But of course there are more. The most popular of them all being the one related to the beginning of the Buganda kingdom. It involves five allegorical characters: Ggulu, Kintu, Nambi, Walumbe and Kayikuuzi. Ggulu is believed to be supernatural. He resides in heaven. In the beginning he fathered three children: Walumbe, Kayikuuzi and Nambi. Walumbe is the cause of death. Kayikuuzi, the excavator is his brother. The Baganda allege that long ago Kintu leaved alone on earth. One day he ascended to heaven, the domain of Ggulu, in search of a wife. Here he met, and later married, Nambi. After their wedding the couple planned to resettle on the earth where Nambi and Kintu were to become the mother and father of Buganda respectively. Ggulu warned them to move stealthy such that Walumbe would not follow them. If Walumbe followed them, Ggulu warned, he was to eat (read kill) their children. At first the plan worked. The couple descended without Walumbe. Nambi had a favourite hen which she departed with. Unfortunately she forgot its only feed: millet. She had to return to heaven to collect it. In the event, Walumbe caught up with her and insisted the two descended together. Ggulu sent Kayikuuzi to capture and return Walumbe to heaven in order to save humanity. Kayikuuzi spiritedly hunted Walumbe, both on top and under the earth's surface, but he failed to capture him. He abandoned the hunt and returned to heaven. Walumbe remained on earth where he still resides and continues, as Ggulu had predicted, to kill generations of Nambi's children: the Baganda. Although grounded in Ganda traditions, the allegory carries some obvious resonances of the Biblical story of Eden which remain unexplained.

Lugoloobi painted *The Tale of Mpoobe.* The title of his work referred to a Luganda legend narrating an encounter between humanity and death — between Mpoobe and Walumbe. Briefly, the tale has two main characters: Mpoobe representing man and Walumbe representing the spirit that beckons man to his last journey towards death. The story goes that once upon a time there was a successful hunter by the name of Mpoobe. In one of his hunting expeditions he met Walumbe who ordered him never to tell anyone that the two had met. In the event that Mpoobe told anyone, Walumbe threatened to kill him. Mpoobe, however, later narrated the encounter to his wife. Walumbe carried through his threat and killed Mpoobe. The story has didactic qualities and is told to children in Buganda to nurture a culture of trust and commitment to honour promises.

Save for the commentary in the *Uganda Herald* of 8 October 1941, the record for Lugoloobi's painting has been lost. However the critic in the *Uganda Herald* insisted that Lugoloobi's tale was not successfully translated into a visual representation of the allegory of death. Without access to other opinions or the visual archive of the work itself, it is difficult to validate (or contradict) the critic's sharp criticism. I, however, speculate that what the paper meant by "limited success" was because Lugoloobi's symbolism did not provoke as much response from a public anxious over World War II as Maloba's work.

Gregory Maloba did his "most outstanding"[117] carving *Death* (which by the way was also called *Walumbe* by the critic in the *Uganda Herald*). It is still accessible as part of the Uganda Museum's permanent collection. In the next section I discuss why Maloba's work was considered more "successful" by the press and Trowell. I engage Maloba's *Death* to demonstrate how a sculptural allegory based on traditional mythology became an embodiment of the official war rhetoric and colonial ideology. This story is absorbing: it starts

[117] See review in: K.K.K., "African Art Society Second Local Exhibition", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L, No. 1624, October 8, 1941.

the journey through which contemporary Ugandan art progressed from the fringes to the centre of the protectorate's political discussions.

Co-opted into the Rhetoric of War? Maloba's *Death* as an Embodiment of World War II

Gregory Maloba, a sculptor, was among the first generation of contemporary artists in Uganda although he is originally from Western Kenya where, as in many parts of East Africa, the tradition of figurative art is limited. Thus Maloba's initial involvement with sculpture was self-motivated and arose out of fascination with religious iconographies or what he called "Catholic plaster Saints"[118]. His primary school instructors and parents, however, initially discouraged him from pursuing his art career. This might be explained by the fact that the preferred "professions" which guaranteed one's entry into the colonial economy were, among others, those of clerical officer and foreman; art was not seen to guarantee this entry. However, Maloba continued to follow his chosen profession albeit discreetly.

Later, during his secondary education, Maloba received help from the head of his school, Brother Morris, who identified his talent by accident. Maloba had a sculpture, of the "Virgin [Mary]", which he "kept" under his "pillow" as a source of "protection". "Very much later", Maloba reminisced, "it was discovered by Brother Morris] the headmaster" of his school during a routine inspection on the boys' dormitory. He "called [Maloba] in front of the whole school and gave [him] a sermon on how people should not conceal their talents…it was something to be praised". But Morris did not know how else to help the young artist, except to encourage him to practice his art informally and exhibit annually at the school[119].

Maloba's breakthrough came in 1940 when at the end of his secondary education the Governor of Kenya, his wife (herself, like Trowell, a graduate

[118] See: Maloba Gregory, Interviewed by Rajat Neogy, in *Transition,* no. 11 (Kampala: Nov., 1963): 20.
[119] See: Maloba Gregory, Interviewed by Rajat Neogy, in *Transition,* no. 11 (Kampala: Nov., 1963): 20-22.

of the Slade School) and Brother Morris recommended that Maloba pursue further art education at Makerere Art School. Later, in the 1950s, Maloba pursued further studies at the Bath Academy in England. He also taught at the Makerere Art School until 1966 when he returned to his native Kenya to start an Art Department at the University of Nairobi.

Maloba was Trowell's first professional art student. He joined the Art School in 1940. As he explains:

> Mrs Trowell, at this time [in 1940], was giving a sort of compulsory art hobby course for students doing higher studies…But the Trowells built me a little studio in their garden where I could work by myself alone. After a year she let me do things as I pleased and work my way out, offering some criticism from time to time[120].

This quote confirms Court's argument that Trowell's family played an important role in the development of Uganda's modern art (see Court 1985, 37). Maloba's mention of "a hobby course" is important because it is a reference to the first arrangement in which all college students were obliged to take art education starting in 1939. This was government policy. In the words of Governor Charles Dundas it was intended "de-materialise the African psyche". While inaugurating the *Makerere Art Show 1941 Exhibition* he "urged Africans to take interest in art…and make it a companion of their leisure hours rather than as a means of making a living"[121]. Consequently all college students did art and the arrangement lasted until the late-forties when Makerere's curriculum was revised, following the Asquith Commission report, to accommodate degrees awarded from the University of London. And this is where Maloba's notion of "hobby course" comes from. Because he was the first professional art student, who was to make a living out of art, we are told that Maloba followed a separate curriculum in a humble studio at Trowell's residence at Lweza. This sets the conditions in which Maloba did his *Death* (1941).

Death (plate 10a) represents a giant, half-human-half-animal allegorical figure grasping a human being. The kneeling posture, elongation and frailty

[120] See: Maloba Gregory, Interviewed by Rajat Neogy, 1963.
[121] K.K.K. "Exhibition of African Art", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1622, September 24, 1941.

in the limbs of the human being suggest the vulnerability of the human condition (see plate 10b). There is pathos on the face of the human being which elicits a sense of anguish. It also exudes a sense of brutality suffered at the hands of the allegorical creature (see plate 10c). The sculpture represents an imaginary form via an allegorical figure rather than a "real" death scene. It however embodied a number of other interesting issues which I need to sketch out. For the artist *Death* demonstrated a fascination with the material, wood, which informed the size of the work. As he explains:

> When carving Death—it was one of my first carvings—I looked at that piece of wood and liked it. Grovillia is a 'delicious' wood and when the chisel cut into it I liked its mark on the wood. It gave me joy to see the grain immediately. And so I hacked out this big figure[122].

It was also an embodiment of a complex cosmological inquiry into the realm of Christian beliefs and local myths pertaining to death. The artist explained his experience thus:

> I thought of traditional dancers at a funeral. They danced to the same tunes as those of rejoicing. So I thought Death is very powerful, more powerful than humans, but not more than God. It was a queer elementary philosophical feeling[123].

It is not clear what tradition of dancing at a funeral Maloba referred to here. It is true that some people from northern Uganda dance during funeral rituals. But in many parts of Uganda (though I must add it could be a similar case in Kenya where Maloba comes from) funeral rituals do not involve dancing and rejoicing. There is however a belief that night-dancers feast on the dead[124]. This is particularly so among Uganda's Bantu-speaking peoples. The belief involves a lot of speculation and sometimes results in the stigmatisation of those suspected of being night-dancers. Whatever its sources, Maloba's

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[122] See: Maloba Gregory, interviewed by Rajat Neogy, 1963.
[123] See Maloba, interviewed by Rajat Neogy, 1963.
[124] There is a widely held belief that night dancers have supernatural powers which they use to call the dead out of their graves, cause them to walk to the callers' houses, where the callers eat them. In Luganda they are called *Abasezi* (translated night dancers) although all the other Bantu-speaking communities have a word for them (for example in Western and South-western Uganda they are called *Abakyekyezi*). In Buganda people perform a lot of rituals during burial ceremonies to prevent their loved ones from being secretly walked out of their graves and eaten. The fear of night dancers is rife. Children who walk about in their sleep, especially those who study in boarding schools, face a lot of difficulties. I however must add that it is probable that most of the people who have been accused of being night-dancers, especially as a result of walking about during sleep, are in fact somnambulist.

inquest on burial rituals and myths informed the ambiguous, existential, philosophical inquiry which he visualised although he mixed it with Christian thoughts. His philosophical inquiry is clearly hybrid and individual: it drew on contradictory sources in which the Christian "belief" is acceptable and the indigenous "belief" is irrational 'superstition'. This was a radical combination which was unusual (queer being his word for if) in colonial rationality.

On the other hand Trowell described *Death* as Maloba's "best carving" (Trowell 1960a, 42). She suggested that its posture was Buddha-like (Trowell 1947, 7); she asserted Maloba's reference to Jacob Epstein's work. Maloba's reference to Epstein's work is probably a more persuasive reading because we know, through Trowell's and Maloba's accounts, that the artist looked through Jacob Epstein's illustrated biography which he found on Trowell's bookshelf. As Trowell explains:

> He [Maloba] found Epstein's illustrated biography on my book-shelves and looked at it one day when I was out. When I returned he burst out, "At last here is a European whose work I can understand…" (Trowell 1947, 6-7).

Epstein's biography provided answers for Maloba's formal and stylistic questions. Short of Epstein's influence, Maloba's *Death* would probably have been closer to the Western academism which Trowell abhorred but which we confront in his earlier work *The Crib* (1940; plate 11).

The Crib is a vernacularised, naturalistic, representation of the nativity. The subjects are African. They are dressed in the African garbs I explained in chapter two: the man is dressed in a *kanzu,* the woman in the middle is dressed in a *busuuti,* and the woman on the left is dressed in *essuuka*. Its formalism, academism and narrative content recall a work, *De-la Mennais and His Students* (1940s; plate 12), which Italian artist Galgani did at the same time, a terracotta sculpture located at Kisubi on Entebbe road, in Uganda. It was funded by one of the numerous catholic congregations in Uganda called the Brothers of Christian Instruction[125]. It is a three-figure

[125] The Brothers of Christian Instruction is a Catholic religious sect responsible for the building and running of many Catholic schools in Uganda. According to an online catholic encyclopaedia, Jean-Marie-Robert de la Mennais (1780-1860) founded the congregation in 1817 at Saint-Brieuc, Côtes-

sculpture showing Jean-Marie-Robert de la Mennais with two Africans, one of whom is already a member of the congregation and the other is aspiring to join. It is a didactic group sculpture raising notions of humility and patriarchal order. It announced the proselytisation of Africans, and the expansion of the Brothers of Christian Instruction, through a figure group that is intensely naturalistic and reworks neo-classical styles. The fact that Maloba had contact with Galgani at the time he did his *Crib* (Kyeyune 2003) confirms that he was influenced by the Italian sculptor, although the attention to the vernacular in the *Crib* is probably informed by Trowell's instruction.

Thus, if the African mask informed modernism in Western art, we see in Maloba's *Death* that modernism returned to Uganda through what Benedict Anderson (1983; 1991) called "print-capitalism". A book on Jacob Epstein opened up a new era in Maloba's profession. Maloba agrees:

> Mrs Trowell had a very varied collection of books on art and artists, mainly European. A book on Epstein interested me very much. I found photographs of his work, very powerful, very expressive . . . Adam, his Day and Night, they seemed to me very powerful, the emotion was there and the sculpture was there (Maloba interviewed by Neogy, 1963).

Maloba's reference to *Day and Night* (plate 13) is particularly instructive. There are explicit formal and emotive links between *Day and Night* and his *Death.* Done in the 1920s, *Day and Night* represents a small nude male figure exposed to the wrath of a large bearded male figure, both of which are allegorical. In *Death* Maloba uses a similar arrangement of the figures and narrative of size and domination, but his large figure is more dehumanised, more animalistic. Arguably this was a poignant critique on the brutality of the Nazis — a critique with which the artist's audience could easily identify with. And against this backdrop we can understand why Maloba's Death, rather than Lugoloobi's painting (to which I referred earlier), was considered "successful".

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du-Nord, France, for the instruction of youths. For more on this see: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03711c.htm (accessed April 29, 2006).

Thus, unlike Epstein's *Day and Night* which provoked revulsion when it was first unveiled, Maloba's *Death* captivated its audience. It was seen to have a "feeling of power and vitality behind it"[126]. It was also part of an exhibition which highlighted certain aspects of African art which could serve a political agenda. For example in his speech, during the inauguration of the *Makerere Art Show* (in which *Death* was exhibited), Governor Dundas remarked that since

> "the Japanese, Chinese, European and other races have their own conception of art , and the African has his too…[then]…it is possible that the African may see things more from within and perhaps even deeper than we [Europeans] do[127].

Clearly we notice that by this time Dundas had (crossed the Rubicon and) abandoned his strictly Hegelian Eurocentric ideas (to which I referred earlier). As if to demonstrate my claim, in the same article Dunda also reminded his European audience that Uganda had an "…African art [which] needed awakening rather than teaching" while saluting Trowell for having recognised that in her teaching. Most importantly, however, Dundas's contention that the African had a deeper vision than that of his colonial master was tested in a more politically urgent way. In the process contemporary art emerged from being a preoccupation of Africans stuck at the margins of the colonial polis "many of them…of very low station in life" as Governor Dundas put it[128]; it became an embodiment of official ideology and war propaganda. The *Exhibition of War Paintings* was a site for this dynamic.

The war paintings were not the first political memorial the colonial state funded. By the 1920s the colonial administration had funded other projects like the *Nakivubo War Memorial Stadium* (in Kampala) and the *War Memorial* at Pece Stadium (probably Peace Stadium) in Gulu (Northern Uganda) which were constructed in honour of those who perished during World War I.

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[126] K.K.K. "African Art Society: Second Local Exhibition", in *Uganda Herald.* Vol. L. No. 1624. October 8, 1941.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Dundas used the notion of "low station" to define Africans; he reflected the conventional racial stereotyping which put Europeans at the top of the social ladder and Africans at its bottom. However his notion also betrayed the ambiguities of [late-]colonial modernity in which Africans were less civilised but (if paradoxically) able to create objects of aesthetic value. For more excerpts from Dundas's speech see: K.K.K. "African Art Society: Second Local Exhibition", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L. No. 1624. October 8, 1941.

Thereafter it funded the production of the commemorative windows at Nnamirembe Cathedral in honour of the life and able leadership of King George V in the late-thirties. Later it funded a cenotaph at the City (now Constitutional) Square to honour those who died in World War II. These projects were done by European artists/architects. Thus the war paintings were the first state-sponsored art project done by Uganda's contemporary African artists. The paintings concretised a direct collaboration between the artist and politics of World War II. Trowell did not print a catalogue for this exhibition. The *Uganda Herald* published some reviews which give information on the exhibition and which reveal the political and artistic decisions which Trowell, her students and the government took and how such decisions informed the works that were made. I turn to this exhibition in the next section because it furthers my argument that modern art in Uganda has always formed part of a political nexus.

The *Exhibition of War Paintings* (July 1942) and Uganda's Contemporary Art as a Site for War Propaganda

The available record shows that the *Exhibition of War Paintings* was officially opened on the 3rd of July 1942. African painters were commissioned by the protectorate's "Government to produce a number of pictures for inclusion in the War Artists collection" at the "request of the Imperial Government…in England"[129]. This then suggests that the exhibition served a wider imperial agenda and one can speculate it was intended to represent Britain's imperial view of World War II.

It is likely that Trowell purposefully selected those African artists who took part in the project. But unlike Paul Nash and Christopher Nevinson, among other British war artists, those she selected, including Maloba, Mukumbya, Obath and Kimera had no war experience, and certainly none of them had been in the trenches. In order to fill the gap, the Governor prescribed the themes. He preferred works based on the activities of the Kings African

[129] See: Clarissa. "War Paintings", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1662, July 15, 1942 and K. M. T. "Exhibition of War Painting", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1661, July 1, 1942.

Rifles (K.A.R.) during World War II: "'Recruiting', 'The K.A.R. in Training', 'The K.A.R. in Action' as well as a number of vivid imaginary pictures of air-raids, desert warfare, etc"[130]. This further supports my claim that the paintings, and the exhibition, propagated the official British version of events in World War II.

According to the *Uganda Herald* of 15 July 1942 Mukumbya did a painting titled *Desert Warfare* for this exhibition. He probably represented the Allied offensive in North Africa. Obath's work was titled *K.A.R. Drilling on the Plains of Mount Kenya,* probably a reference to the Allied preparation for the offensive against Mussolini's forces on the Kenyan-Ethiopia border. Maloba painted his *Air Raid on Malta,* in which he probably referred to the much acclaimed resilience of the British forces during the battle for the control of Malta under heavy aerial bombardment from Germany's *Luftwaffe*. Arguably then the artists also drew on the commentaries on the Allied offensive which came through the war cinemas and the media. Reading from the titles, it can also be concluded that the artists recalled topics which were featured in the propaganda films. This however should not detract from the potential of individual artists to explore such topics meaningfully. The multiplicity of titles suggests that individual artists 'freely' worked around the official themes to express individual thoughts about the war. I suggest that we take note of this thread. We will, in the next chapter, see how artists explored their freedom within an officially sanctioned ideology and limited scope of themes, to produce works that celebrated the independence of Uganda in the early-1960s.

According to press reports Trowell suggested that the standards of the works were high. The pictures showed admirable action through "vitality and movement"[131] — all of which were fundamental to the instruction she gave at Makerere. This may have been so but I have no means to validate her claims in the absence of visual evidence or other opinions. Most profoundly,

[130] See: K. M. T. "Exhibition of War Paintings" in *Uganda Herald* Vol. L, No.1661, July 1, 1942.
[131] See: K. M. T. "Exhibition of War Paintings" in *Uganda Herald* Vol. L, No.1661, July 1, 1942.

however, the exhibition marked another achievement in the cultural development of Uganda. I have indicated already that the Uganda Museum became an important space for local and international cultural discourse. Let me now add that its re-opening in 1942 launched *the Exhibition of War Paintings.* Both the opening of the museum and the exhibition helped to raise funds for the *War Effort.* The dynamic thus set up between the preservation of indigenous culture and the exhibition of a set of propaganda paintings merits an analysis.

The *Exhibition of War Paintings* and the [Re]Launch of the Uganda Museum

I indicated in chapter two that the Uganda Museum had failed to take off until Trowell intervened. Let me now extend this strand and add that with generous support from Makerere College and the King George V Memorial Fund, a "block of five well-lit rooms"[132] at the entrance of Makerere College opened as the new home for the Uganda Museum and provided space for the heretofore homeless material culture which had been accumulated from many parts of Uganda since 1901[133]. Governor Charles Dundas [re-] opened the Uganda Museum on 3rd July 1942 amid pomp and ceremony[134]. It remained at the College until later in 1951 when it was transferred to its current location on Old Kira Road. But the re-launch of the museum also served a wider political purpose. According to the *Uganda Herald* of July 1, 1942, the museum was recreational and therapeutic during the days of anxiety over war. We learn that it was to save the public "from becoming stale in days of war". If this reflects the opinion of the day then it also signals how in the early-forties every aspect of culture was mobilised towards the *War Effort*.

To contextualise the *Exhibition of War Paintings* into the Museum collection and the *War Effort,* Trowell set objects in categories following a comparative paradigm across themes rather than presenting them according to their

[132]. See: "The Uganda Museum", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L., No. 1661, July 1, 1942.
[133] See: "Central Cinema", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L. No. 1659, June 24, 1942.
[134] See: "The Uganda Museum", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L., No. 1661, July 1, 1942.

ethnic categories. This strategy seems to indicate that Trowell did not present artefacts according to ethnological categories as she later did in the publication, *Tribal Crafts of Uganda* (1953) in which she catalogued the museum collection, although she was conscious of artefacts which overlapped ethnic borders — an idea she later reemphasised in her *Classical African Sculpture* (1954; 1970). Using this strategy, Trowell set up what she called the "*war and chase*"[135] category. It consisted of traditional instruments of warfare collected from Uganda. We do not have the specifics. Uganda has many traditional instruments of war, which vary among Uganda's ethnic groups, although some cut across ethnic groups. I however suspect that bows, arrows, spears, machetes would have been included in the show.

The *war and chase* section allowed the public to decipher cross-currents between traditional arms and modern war arsenals which were deployed in World War II and which had been captured in the war paintings. It is not clear why this was necessary although it is tempting to speculate that the display of traditional weaponry was intended to contrast, and critique, the Western modern weapons of mass destruction which were used during the Second World War. If my speculation is sound then it is equally likely that Trowell based this comparison on Lips's *The Savage Hits Back or the White Man through Native Eyes* (1937)[136] to which she makes direct reference in her article *From Negro Sculpture to Modern Painting* (1938). She makes this reference in order to demonstrate that Ugandans used visual idioms to critique the mannerism/character of Europeans. Lips had explored this dynamic arguing that "natives" use oral and visual idioms to critique the behaviour of "the white man". Trowell argued in her article that she would be surprised "if this critical faculty did not carry over into works of" contemporary

[135] See: "The Uganda Museum", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L., No. 1661, July 1, 1942. Emphasis mine.
[136] In his book Lips (1937) undermined the deep-seated Nazi racial dogma premised on the claim that the German nation occupied a higher rang than the natives. He inverted this claim suggesting that the "black man [had] human personality and in fact critical power (p. xxvi). He then went on to carry out detailed ethnographic studies seeking to substantiate his claims. He attracted the wrath of the Third Reich. Forced into exile, Lips found refugee among the Algonquian Indians who, for him, allowed intellectual freedom (p. xxx) and were by far more civilised (p. xx) than the Germans whose civilisation had collapsed (p. xxvi) because of the bad politics of the Third Reich.

Ugandan artists (Trowell 1938, 173)[137]. If my postulation is valid then it could be arguable that for Trowell the *Exhibition of War Paintings* showcased the African's "critical faculty" on the behaviour of Europeans and the carnage of modern war. It could also be concluded that in displaying this "critical faculty" African artists redefined the conditions and challenges imposed by World War II. They demonstrated what Dundas called their ability to see things more from within and perhaps even more deeply than their colonial masters. In the process African art became the harbinger of political opinion and war rhetoric; African artists joined the centre of mainstream late-colonial political discourse.

The exhibition lasted three weeks. During this period Trowell placed a "collection box"[138] at the entrance in which visitors were encouraged to donate generously towards the *Warship Fund* — a practice which started with the *Entebbe Exhibitions* of 1940 and 1941. The *Warship Fund* wound down on the 15th of August 1942 just as Trowell readied the *Exhibition of War Paintings* for its next audience in England. By this time anxiety over a Nazi attack on Uganda had died down following the capitulation of Mussolini's forces in Ethiopia. The discussion had turned to the conditions of the African stuck on the fringes of the colonial economy and polis. The anti-colonial movement had begun; contemporary artists were drawn into it. An analysis of some of the works which were done, and the stances some artists took, is useful. First it allows an exploration of the strategies Trowell and her students used to cope with the events after the Second World War. Secondly, a pattern emerges in which the nexus between Uganda's contemporary art and politics is shown to be not lineal and uni-directional. In

[137] It is hard to ascertain which works Trowell referred to. But the description she makes fits the motto art I talked about in chapter two. It is likely that by the 1930s motto artists may have critiqued the character of Europeans in Uganda. It however has to be said that the politics behind the images which Lips, and Trowell, admired were sometimes complicated. Without access to other opinions and visual archives this issue cannot be resolved here. Suffice to note, however, that in some cases colonial images were complex forms of self-representation. For example in colonial days Africans used visual imageries to represent themselves as the other: the colonised represented themselves in the image of the colonial (or Lips' "white man") (see Gable 2002, 294-319). The point I am making is that some images produced by Ugandans during the colonial era may have been complex forms of self-representation although I am not suggesting that this was the case with the war paintings.

[138] See: K.K.K. "Exhibition of War Painting" in *The Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1661, July 1, 1942.

other words rather than propagating the official ideology and propaganda which was the case during the war, artists began to critique government policy. This critical mode would be picked up from the mid-sixties to the eighties before Sserunkuuma and Mutebi picked it up, so it is important to trace it back to where it first emerged.

And then the Aftermath of World War II? Contemporary Art and the Post-World War II Economic Crises

The World War II hysteria died down in Uganda following the entry of the Allied forces into Addis Ababa at the end of 1942; public attention turned to the dire living condition of Africans. This debate in itself was not new. Concern over the exploitation of the majority of peasant agriculturalists had been growing since the 1920s; in Buganda it informed the formation of populist nationalist groups like the Bataka Association (literally translated the Association of Elders)[139]. Concern over the exploitation of the working class had also been growing since the 1920s. It informed the emergence of groups like the Native Servants' Association in 1922 to emancipate African workers and force the Africanisation of the civil service (Jørgensen 1981, 179). Arguably economic problems of the forties, and the agitations against them, were not new. Or, simply put, they were exacerbated (and not caused) by World War II and the economic crises it imposed.

As we learn from the *Uganda Herald* of 28 January 1942, by 1942 government was under pressure from all sides to act, but it was slow to respond. The reasons for its delay were varied and complex: Hunter, writing in the *Uganda Herald* of 14 January 1942, cited racism as one of them. But we also read in the *Uganda Herald* of 28 June 1944 that government was constrained by limited resources, given the economic depression, and that it lacked policy. It therefore set up a commission of inquiry on whose findings and recommendation it was to take action. The worsening economic conditions in the Protectorate, however, merited immediate action because

[139] The association consisted of peasants aggrieved by the modern colonial economy, complex tax regime and land policy introduced by the 1900 Buganda Agreement. For more on this debate see Jørgensen, *Uganda a Modern History,* p.84.

they had pushed the African to the fringes of the colonial economy. By 1944 vices like alcoholism[140] were rampant in the urban and peri-urban areas. In short the majority of Africans were virtually destitute. And it was this destituteness that Maloba critiqued through his *The Beggar* (1944).

The Beggar was Maloba's third successive wood sculpture after his *Death*: his work *The Hunter* (1942) intervened between the two. He sold his *The Hunter* to a collector; its image, which I accessed, is less than satisfactory, although it furnishes us with some formal and thematic clues which are instructive. Before I proceed with my discussion of *The Beggar,* a discussion of *The Hunter* is useful. It allows me to trace some formal developments leading to *The Beggar;* it foregrounds a professional progression linking *Death* to *The Beggar.* This is not to suggest that Maloba had a lineal, unidirectional professional growth which stretches from his *Death* pervading his entire oeuvre: on the contrary Maloba's carrier has been complicated and multi-directional.

Maloba argues that *The Hunter* (plate 14) captures a "stalking figure"[141]. My reading of the work validates this claim. The figure's gestures indicate a calculated approach to ensure a successful hunt. Its realistic style recalls the artist's *Crib,* but *The Hunter* is more dramatic; it represents a secular rather than religious subject. It is also contemporary and not mythological. Whereas there was limited attention to anatomical detail in *Death,* in *The Hunter* the artist attends to anatomy and shows an understanding of the human form. Also the vulnerability in *Death* (and solemnity in *Crib*) has given way to an expression of aggressive survival instincts: a (satirized) representation of an economy grounded in the notion of survival for the fittest. Hunting was practiced in Uganda in the 1940s — and still is today. It is, however, likely that Maloba engaged the theme to reflect the problems of Africans scavenging for whatever little they could lay their hands on in order to

[140] See: "The Drink Problem and African Standard of Living" in *Uganda Herald* vol. L. No 1744, April 4, 1944.
[141] Gregory Maloba, interviewed by Neogy, 1963.

survive. If this is a valid reading, then this is the pathetic livelihood he enunciated in his *The Beggar.*

The Beggar (plate 15) is close to *The Hunter* in its narrativeness. The sculpture has a beggarly posture; it is provocatively expressive. It carries formal resonances from traditional African arts — and here I have in mind the Luba kneeling figures from the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Trowell used a Luba figure in her article and lecture in 1938; she also wrote about Luba figures in her books (for example see Trowell 1970). It is likely Maloba saw Trowell's article or even the physical artefact at the time when he made this work. Subsequent to this work he referred to classical African art to construct other artefacts recalling classical African sculpture. Other contemporary Ugandan artists have also made works which can be linked to traditional African sculpture. It is therefore important to note that it is here, in Maloba's *The Beggar,* that we can trace the initial attempt.

The Beggar should be seen as Maloba's early attempt to define issues of collective identity. His subject is Ugandan — a Muganda to be precise. As I explained in chapter two traditionally men in Buganda wrap bark-cloth around their bodies and tie it toga-wise into a knot on the shoulder. Maloba lived among the Baganda throughout his stay in Uganda. In a recent interview with George Kyeyune, Maloba poignantly reminisced how he had many Baganda friends[142] and enjoyed Matooke a banana dish popular in Buganda. This, in addition to Trowell's serialised lectures which included bark-cloth making and its use among the Baganda, at the Uganda Museum in 1943, could have influenced Maloba's use of the traditional Ganda accoutrements on his work. This, however, does not imply that the artwork itself is tribal. Rather, I am suggesting that the artist used the traditionalised fashion both to elicit the local character of his subject and, thereby, to critique the beggarly conditions prevalent in his African community. Maloba confirms my claim in the following statement:

[142] Gregory Maloba, Interviewed by George Kyeyune, 2001.

> In 1944 I did the Beggar, also emotional and dramatic. I did not enjoy the feel of material or the power of the tool so much, but the feeling I had about beggars came out[143].

Clearly then *The* Beggar was distant from his *Death* in which he enjoyed material and attended to formal content and skill. Here he visualised his empathy towards the destitution experienced by the majority of the Africans in the colonial polity — a destitution which resulted from colonial modernity. Hence his sculpture became the very embodiment of such destituteness; everything else was secondary. And, as Trowell would put it, Maloba "achieve[d] signal success" (Trowell 1938, 173).

Now, the destitution which provoked Maloba's critical response coincided with other matters of grave concern in the Protectorate. For instance writing in the *Uganda Herald* of 3 January 1945, one Mukwaya suggested that Uganda had a surplus of the African educated elite produced from Uganda's education system and abroad. These educated individuals had hoped to be absorbed into the colonial economy but by the 1940s the colonial bureaucracy had failed to absorb all of them. There was also the emergent "disturbing problem"[144] of the returning World War II veterans. These two classes joined into a constellation of dissenting African voices. They started a "political middleclass" which questioned the logic of its marginalisation on the fringes of the colonial polity. It demanded full economic and political integration. It agitated for its inclusion on the Legislative Council (the LEGCO)[145]. There were issues of African consciousness too. These informed the formation of the African Cultural Society in 1944. The society sought to interest "itself in all matters cultural, and membership [was] open to all Africans and peoples of African descent"[146]. This cocktail of issues formed

[143] See: Gregory Maloba, interviewed by Neogy, 1963.
[144] Governor Hathorn admitted this during his address to the Legislative Council — Uganda's colonial legislature. See: "Legislative Council Meeting: His Excellency's Address" in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L, No. 1795, June 20, 1945.
[145] The LEGCO was the legislature responsible for the protectorate. It was first introduced in the protectorate in the 1921. It took varied transformations until 1962 when it finally became Uganda's postcolonial parliament.
[146] See: "African Cultural Society: Concert at Kampala" in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1749, March 15, 1944.

the backdrop against which the Uganda African Welfare Association (UAWA) emerged in 1945.

UAWA was motivated by what Justus Mugaju calls the "wind of decolonisation" (Mugaju 2000, 12). It championed calls for the political and economic emancipation of Africans[147]. UAWA,s activities took a dramatic turn when the group supported sections of government employees who picketed demanding pay increases (Jørgensen 1981). As it is evident in the press, the colonial polis was inundated by the strike action as pickets spread to other sectors of the economy ending in a mass political campaign which crippled the economy[148]. Then too, UAWA set in motion a set of agitations which Ssemakula Mulumba exploited, in 1948-1949, as he led Abatakabbu (or Bataka Union). The Union resolved to fight all forms of exploitation and lack of representation[149]. These activities opened a violent anti-colonial chapter, in Uganda's late-colonial history, in which nationalist political party activities, under Ignatius Musaazi, evolved to fast-forward the move to self-government.

Ignatius Musaazi, and his colleagues, pioneered political party activity in Uganda (Mugaju 2000, 15). For Charles Ssekintu (Trowell's student) he was "the father of [political party] politics" (Ssekintu, interview 2006). In 1952 Musaazi became the first President of Uganda's first national[ist] political party — the Uganda National Congress (UNC). UNC was a new constellation of political forces that grew out of the Federation of Partnerships of Uganda African Farmers (UAF) which Musaazi led in the late-forties. UNC was a

[147] For example in the petition it handed to Creech Jones, the Secretary for Colonies during his visit to Uganda, the Uganda African Welfare Association demanded that issues of trade, land, unequal privileges, housing and lack of freedom of speech be addressed urgently. See: "Memorandum Presented to Mr. Creech Hones by 'Uganda African welfare Association'", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. L. No. 1837, August 28, 1945.
[148] See: "Widespread Strikes in Kampala: Picketers Cause many Disorders, Detachment of K.A.R. Called out", in *Uganda Herald* Vol. L. No. 1793, January 17, 1945.
[149] See: "Buganda Disturbances Report: Disturbances were a Planned Rebellion against the Kabaka and the Buganda Government; Semakula Mulumba more than any other Individual was responsible for the Disturbances", *Uganda Herald* Vol. LVI, No. 409, February 11, 1950.

multi-racial political collective[150]; it recruited from all parts of the country[151]. It agitated for the end of colonialism in Uganda before the crisis in Buganda diverted it[152].

The Buganda crisis resulted from a conflict between the kingdom of Buganda and the Protectorate government over remarks Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton made on June 30, 1953[153]. Lyttelton suggested that "federation, both politically and economically, will be of immense benefit" for the peoples of Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika. This for Lyttleton was because federation would lead to the creation of "larger…countries diverse and prosperous, and able to do without too much outside aid to defend themselves from some ordinary dangers which may assail them"[154]. Lyttelton's idea reminds one of issues of pan-Africanism; his disrespect for what Mudimbe calls "micro-nationalisms" (Mudimbe 1992, xix) is obvious. But he ignored (and disastrously so) the fact that the issue of regional integration had been unpopular with many Africans and non-Africans in the Protectorate[155] since the 1920s. As he learnt in the period 1954-1955, his comments were regrettable. They sparked events which altered Uganda's political landscape and energised the anti-colonial movement.

To further aggravate the situation, Lyttleton's remarks coincided with Governor Andrew Cohen's stated intention to reform the Protectorate (Forward 1999, 40) and increase African representation in political and

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[150] Admittedly UNC's composition was rare considering the racial divisions of the time but it was not unique. Women collectives like the Mothers Union and the Uganda Council for Women had cut across racial divisions earlier than Musaazi's UNC.

[151] According to Ssekintu (interviewed February 16, 2006), UNC had Dr. Barnabas Kununka from Bunyoro (Western Uganda), John Kale from present-day Kisoro (South-western Uganda), Okwerede from Teso (Eastern Uganda), Abanya from West Nile (North-western Uganda), Peter Oula from Acholi and Yekosofati Engur from Lango (Northern Uganda).

[152] I say the crisis in Buganda diverted it because after 1953 UNC's nationalist character waned because Musaazi became deeply involved in Buganda's issues. And this point was also made in: "Musazi Alters Congress Policy: Says Boycott is for Ex-Kabaka", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. LXIV, No. 1116, June 1, 1954.

[153] See: Forward, Alan. *You Have Been Allocated Uganda" Letters from a District Officer* (Dorset: Poyntington, 1999), 40.

[154] See: Lyttleton cited in "East African Federation" in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. LXIII, No. 976, July 14, 1953.

[155] See: "East African Federation" in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. LXII, No. 976, July 14, 1953.

economic institutions. Concomitantly, power was to move from traditional and colonial institutions defined in the 1900 Buganda Agreement (to which I referred in chapter two) to elected institutions. The traditional ruling elite were suspicious, the Kabaka resisted, Cohen insisted, a showdown was inevitable. Kabaka Muteesa II demanded an immediate renegotiation[156] of the terms of the 1900 Buganda Agreement and declaration of Buganda as an independent nation-state whose relationship with Britain was to be handled by the Foreign Office and not the Colonial Office (Mutibwa 1992, 14) as the case had been since 1900. The Colonial Office rejected the Kabaka's demands. A stalemate ensued. Governor Cohen used force to resolve it. He deposed and deported the king of Buganda to London in 1953[157] discounting any possibility for his reinstatement[158].

Predictably, Cohen's action was ill-advised. It caused further discontent, suspicion, racial conflicts and resistance. For example it informed a complex realignment of conservative ethnic interests which rose against non-African economic and progressive nationalist interests[159]. The UNC joined other radical Baganda groups, like the Katwe Group (KG), to unleash a vicious campaign of anarchy[160], civil disobedience and economic sabotage, with the result that many businesses closed[161]. These developments put immense

[156] See: "Buganda Lukiiko Asks for Date to be Fixed for Independence: Demand for 'Return' to Foreign Office Control, Opposition to Federation", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. LXIII, No. 1017, October 17, 1953.
[157] See: "Kabaka Deposed, He Broke Uganda Agreement: Exiled from Buganda" in *The Uganda Herald*, Vol. LXIII, No. 1036, December 1, 1953.
[158] See: "Kabaka's Deposal, Possibility of his Return 'must be Discounted': Minister of State's Announcement", in *The Uganda Herald*, Vol. LXIII, No. 1038, December 5, 1953.
[159] See: "Unruly Crowd outside Lukiiko: Anti-European Feeling, Newsmen's Interpreter Threatened", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. LXIV, No. 1051, January 7, 1954.
[160] See: "Mass Raid on Mengo Shops: Reports say Armed with Spears and Pangas", *Uganda Herald*, Vol. LXIV, No. 1112, May 27, 1954.
[161] Radicals launched a crippling boycott in April 1954 which seriously weakened Uganda's economy. It forced companies, including the publishers of *The Uganda Herald*, to close. The *Uganda Herald* collapsed in May 1955. See: "Uganda's Interim Budget Deficit in 1953" in *Uganda Herald*. Vol. LXIII, No. 1033, November 24, 1953; "Intimidation", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. LXIV, No. 1091, April 8,1954. Also see: "'The Uganda Herald' Ceases Publication", in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. LXV, No. 1321, May 31, 1955.

pressure on Uganda's multiracial society[162] and thereby opened a debate on Uganda's independence.

Right from 1945 different Governors responded to political challenges with maximum force in order to impose order. Reports in the press indicate that the colonial government resorted to massive arrests and harsh prison sentences[163], deportation orders[164], and economic penalties[165]. Government also proscribed the freedom of the vernacular press[166] and instituted a detailed spy network in order to detect and crush African dissent[167]. In chapter six we will see how Milton Obote built a similar spy-network in the sixties to crush dissent. The fact that this practice started under colonialism has eluded many historians and political commentators.

The political drama I have outlined lasted until 1955 when the Nnamirembe Conference revised the 1900 Buganda Agreement[168] through very complicated negotiations which redefined the position of Buganda in Uganda[169] and laid the foundation for equally complex negotiations over Uganda's independence which was finally achieved in 1962. We will later return to the independence period because it had a profound impact on art in

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[162] This anxiety was regularly expressed in the mainstream Press. See for example: "Appeal for Communal Harmony, Mr Jaffer's Address to Central Council of Indian Associations: 'No Heritages to Share but Responsibilities to Divide'", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No. 1839, September 18, 1946.
[163] See: "The Recent Rioting: Many Convictions", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L. No.1795, January 31, 1945.
[164] The colonial government invoked the infamous Defence Regulation No. 23. It detained several Africans and subsequently deported them to different parts of the Protectorate. See: "Official Communique", in *Uganda Herald,* No. 1791, May 5, 1945. Also see list of deportees in "The Deportation Ordinance", *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L, No. 1816, April 3, 1946; and "Musazi Deported", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. LVIII, No. 569, February 20, 1951.
[165] See: "Outlawed Society's Cotton Seized", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. LIV, No. 288, May 5, 1949.
[166] For example the Hathorn administration imposed harsh ordinances through which Editors of a vernacular paper, *Gambuze,* were incarcerated for publishing seditious material. See: "'Daily Express' Investigates Uganda Press Ordinance", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. LIII, No. 185, September 2, 1948; "Seditious Material in 'Gambuze'", *Uganda Herald,* Vol. LIII, No. 199, October 5, 1948.
[167] Hathorn instituted a commission of inquiry headed by Chief Justice N. H. P. Whitley, among other things, advised government on how to detect and mitigate future African unrest. Whitley recommended the institution of a network of government spies to mitigate future civil unrest. This network was used extensively starting with the late-forties. See: "Civil Disturbances Commission of Inquiry", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. L, No. 1780, March 7, 1945.
[168] The Hancock Commission, headed by Keith Hancock, convened the Nnamirembe Conference which changed the 1900 Agreement into the 1955 Buganda Agreement.
[169].See: "Nnamirembe Proposals Considered by Lukiiko: The Kabaka's Powers", in *Uganda Herald,* Vol. LXIV, No.1191, December 21, 1954.

Uganda. But the 1945-1955 shifting and highly charged political developments equally informed varied responses from Uganda's artists; a closer analysis of the reactions of some artists will render my claim less abstract.

Disengaged from "Made-up-Stories"? Gregory Maloba's Response to Anti-Colonial Nationalism

After his *The Beggar,* Maloba withdrew, temporarily, from exploring charged political themes. By 1950 he had altered his themes and forms. For example in 1950 he did his *Primitive Man* (plate 16). It is a wooden sculpture depicting a static, solemn subject attesting to the artist's interest in form and technical expediencies — issues which he had abandoned by the mid-forties. The work's abstract form, and theme of the primitive man, probably point to his interest in modernist primitivism.

Maloba also "started working on themes — musicians, for example — [he] modelled and carved them"[170] as he explains. He also did portraits. There is a caption in the *Uganda Argus* of April 20, 1960, showing Gregory Maloba studying a young Caucasian sitter, Shelley Harris (see plate 17). Actually, Maloba finally cast the work, also called *Shelley Harris,* in concrete and it is currently part of Makerere Art Gallery collection. In *Shelley Harris* (plate 18) Maloba captured a young girl stretching her arms to hold her knees and maintain an erect position. Unlike his *Primitive Man,* where the primary focus was on a reclusive form, in *Shelley Harris* he attended to feminine character and facial likeness. This attention to character was a culmination of, and grew from, his early works of the 1940s. However, in the 1950s he abandoned his generic subjects of the forties altogether and attended to mimetic representations of particular subjects – a process which culminated in his *Shelley Harris*.

In the early-1950s Maloba made two portraits, namely *Mikaili Wamala* (1952; plate 19) and *Ham Mukasa* (1952; plate 20). Done in the 1950s, these

[170] Maloba, interview with Neogy, 1963.

personal portraits testify to the demand for self-representation among the Ganda ruling and educated elite. To remind ourselves it was in the 1950s that Muteesa II commissioned European artists to make his portraits (see chapter two). Like his *Shelley Harris*, the two busts show Maloba's interest in character and facial likeness. Mikaili Wamala and Ham Mukasa were both Protestants and colonial collaborators; they played a key role in the expansion and consolidation of the colonial economy. Clearly, then, as he attended to musical themes and works like *Primitive Man, Mikaili Wamala, Ham Mukasa* and *Shelley Harris* Maloba dodged the fast-moving (nationalist/anti-colonial) politics which for him was led by unethical nationalist politicians who, in his own words, "made up stories"[171].

Advising Caution, Avoiding Sides: Trowell and the Post-war Political Unrests

Trowell did not support active participation in the fast moving nationalist politics either. However, unlike Maloba, she did not totally disengage from the controversial political debate which defined it. For instance there is evidence to confirm that in October 1946, Trowell, then President of the Uganda Society, organised a series of lectures, under the theme *Towards the New Africa,* to encourage interracial dialogue. Trowell observed that such dialogue was essential in order to resolve the political tensions of the day. In the first lecture in the series, under the topic *Culture Contact and Social Change*[172], which Trowell gave herself, she argued that the riots of 1945-1946 (to which I referred earlier) were the result of the disruptions and alienations colonial modernity had imposed on the "natives" and that they had the potential to degenerate into racial tensions. Suggesting that there were no easy solutions since the problems of modernity were in Uganda to stay, she called for an open, inter-racial, and intellectual discussion as the best way to resolve what she called the "problems of today".

[171] Maloba, interview with Neogy, 1963.
[172] See: "African's Changing Values, Conflict between Old and New: Uganda Society Presidential Address" in *Uganda Herald* Vol. L. No. 1846, October 30, 1946.

However Trowell's lecture attracted criticism. C. M. S. Kisosonkole, a Muganda woman who chaired it, criticised Trowell (albeit unfairly) for failing to come up with a "practical answer" and accusing Africans of laziness[173]. Secondly, since during the lecture she proudly identified herself as "having a well-balanced liberal mind", Trowell represented a minority view. The majority of the colonials, and colonial government officials, was dismissive of African dissent and paternalistic (Mugaju 2000, 12). Radical colonials held the view that "all those who sought to challenge colonial authoritarianism were…irresponsible agitators or, worse still, agents of communism" (ibid)[174] and had to be eliminated. In this context liberals like Trowell, were isolated and rejected as "Do-gooders"[175] — a pejorative term referencing their failure to come "down to reality"[176]. Some European commentators in the press rejected Trowell's lectures as "…idealistic theorising…"[177].

Within the Art School Trowell advised restraint and discouraged her students from taking radical sides. She suggested that aligning with any of the competing sides would reinforce the claims of either side[178]. And how did her views inform art? A review in the *Uganda Herald* of 17 July 1946 indicated that after the mid-forties Trowell encouraged her students, for example "Ntiro, Otieno, Farhan, Majale, Kamau, Obath, Senkatuuka and Viyuyu…", to explore generic themes like the "...*Storm…*with wind rushing through the trees…" and "…*Fire…*with an absolute riot of colour…." This, I would argue, was for Trowell an appropriate way of confronting the radical post-World War II politics and the changes it engendered. My contention is borne out by Trowell herself writing that she had encouraged themes like the storm, bush fire, famine, arson in this period (Trowell 1960a, 114). Although she does not explicitly say this, her recommendation of arson as a theme, for example,

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[173] See: "African's Changing Values, Conflict between Old and New: Uganda Society Presidential Address" in *Uganda Herald* Vol. L. No. 1846, October 30, 1946.
[174] Also see: "Communist Threat to Uganda" in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. LIII, No. 213, November 6, 1948.
[175] Ssekintu, Charles *Personal Interview with Author*, 2005, Uganda Museum, Kampala.
[176] See: "The African's Changing Values, Conflict between Old and New: Uganda Society Presidential Address", in *Uganda Herald.* Vol. L. No. 1846, October 30, 1946.
[177] See: *Uganda Herald*. October 30, 1946
[178] Ssekintu, Charles, Personal Interview with Author, Bulange, Mengo, 2005.

could have been informed by the incidents of arson which were common during the 1945-1946 riots. This, then, would suggest that in spite of her stated claim for neutrality, Trowell was not totally disengaged after all and the themes she encouraged in her classes in the 1950s would confirm my claim.

There is another strategy which merits our attention and Charles Ssekintu demonstrates it. Ssekintu is a Ugandan who joined the Art School in 1948. He painted *Cleansing the Temple* (1949) at the height of the 1948-1949 insurrections. The work is important for my discussion because it sheds some light on visual strategies some artists used to address the fluid politics in which they were located. Ssekintu's strategy has eluded current scholarship because the press and Trowell's writings do not highlight it. Ssekintu also took intriguing political stances in light of the nationalist rhetoric (or "made up stories") of the early-fifties which have not been admitted into the available record. I turn to him next.

Secularising Religious Iconography? Charles Ssekintu and the 1948-1949 Riots

Charles Ssekintu painted religious themes and also did some illustrative work and dioramas for the Uganda Museum. Later he pursued further studies in the USA. In the mid-1960s he was recruited as a curator by the Uganda Museum before serving as its Director until 1975 when Amin's operatives forced him to flee the country. He stayed in exile in Kenya and Lesotho where he served as a museum curator, returning after the fall of the Obote's second reign in 1986. He briefly served with the Uganda Museum before internal wrangling and bureaucratic red-tape disappointed him and he retired from museum activities in the late-1980s. Currently, he is heading a cultural office in the Buganda kingdom.

Ssekintu's *Cleansing the Temple* (plate 21) has strong contrasts in colour. The artist paid close attention to details such as gestures, dress and design and invested the image with drama and humour. He attended to issues of pictorial construction, taught at the Art School, as he set his scene against a

backdrop of open arches, doors and windows to suggest an interior space. Although since the 1990s arches have been used on secular buildings in Uganda, through the mid-twentieth-century arches were common only on churches and mosques. Hence the architecture, together with the title of the work which specifically refers to "Luke 19: 45, 46"[179], confirm that the painting symbolises "…a story from the bible…."[180].

But there is more to this work. Ssekintu explains that:

> When I did this picture, I did it as a subject from the bible. But since I was a human being living within a certain space, and time, inevitably those [two aspects] had to be reflected because I [was] operating within a *specific period*...You cannot avoid [space and time] because they give *character* to whatever you do…yes.[181]

This excerpt opens an interesting debate; it signals a chapter in Uganda's political art which requires analysis. Ostensibly the picture derives from Luke 19: 45-46 which critiques unethical conduct and moral degeneration. The Bible tells us that Jesus angrily rejected the diversion of divine structures for personal use and avarice. But in the context of the late-1940s (this being his "specific period"), Ssekintu mirrored the 1947-1949 riots in the painting as an allegory. I indicated earlier that these confrontations were a continuation of the 1945-1946 upheavals. They were, however, slightly different in the sense that they were sparked off by the realisation that mercantile processors and exporters of agricultural produce (mainly cotton), together with the colonial administration through its Price Assistance Fund, continued to offer low prices to the peasant farmers while making large profits on their products (Jørgensen 1981).

To mirror these riots, the artist poses a violent scene with two major protagonists (see plate 21). One is identifiably modern: he is dressed in Western fashion (with a brown coat, white shirt and a tie). If we compare him with the rest of the people around him, he is dressed like an elite business man: he is a middleman; he represents of the capitalist economy. That the

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[179] See: Trowell Margaret, *And Was Made Man, The Life of Our Lord in Pictures Exhibition,* Exhibition Catalogue (Essex: Talgot Press, 1967), not paginated.
[180] See: Kyeyune George, *Art in Uganda in the 20th Century*, p. 67.
[181] Ssekintu Charles, P*ersonal Interview with Author*, 2006, Bulange, Mengo, Kampala. My emphasis

market is agricultural is indicated by the presence of a weighing scale (on the table in front of the middleman), domesticated birds, animals and baskets full of fruits. Obviously the market has been disrupted by another man dressed in traditional *kanzu*, thus defined as a Muganda by his dress. The middleman is being provoked, a showdown is inevitable as furniture is thrown upside down, merchandise is scattered and everything else scampers for safety: people, animals and birds. Ssekintu has an interesting narrative to explain this flow of events. In the narrative he deploys two languages — English and Luganda. This is a communicative strategy which is not unique to him and I will explain (and interpret?) it in a moment. But first, Ssekintu narrates that:

> [This man was] managing the exchange. He sees this mad man is disturbing [laughter] *embwa egudde mu mayuba. Bano be bawooza: be bakulu b'ekerezia bannanyini sente ezigwa muno. Kaakati ye akola* resistance. What is going on? Who is this person, *ava wa*? What…? Everybody fled the birds went flying [deep sigh]. (Ssekintu, interview, March 16, 2006)

We notice here a (could I say) creolisation which should not be read as the artist's lack of fluency in English or Luganda[182]. Ssekintu was schooled under European instructors and he has travelled and worked in English-speaking countries. Also, it was fashionable before the 1970s for the educated elite from Makerere College to speak English the way the British did — or at least to try to — and not to "adulterate" it. Those who managed to "perfect" their English were widely respected within the African community[183]. Thus located in this matrix Ssekintu acquired excellent formation in English; he still speaks it fluently.

And yet it is obvious that Ssekintu mixes (or should I say adulterates) English and Luganda! During the interview he freely moved from English to Luganda

[182] I however must add that some Ugandans mix English and other languages because of lack of fluency in English. For example, in the 1970s Idi Amin used to swing between English and Swahili because he lacked fluency in English. Others creolise their languages as a subculture as I will indicate in chapter seven.

[183] Pilkington Ssengendo is an instructor at the Makerere Art School. He joined it as a student in 1962. In March 2006 he reminisced how he greatly admired the way the king of Buganda Muteesa II spoke "English like an Englishman". For example he still has a vivid recollection of how as a boy he heard the king pronounce the word "captain" not as "ka-pi-te-yi-ni" as a Muganda would otherwise have done, but as "kæptɪn" as the British pronounced it. Ssengendo's claim is plausible in light of what I have explained but also because the king of Buganda received European instruction and adopted a lot of British mannerisms, including the speech. See source of pronunciation for "captain" online at: http://www.oed.com (accessed July 20, 2006).

and back. In fact it seemed to me, during our conversation, that for him neither of the two languages was subordinate to the other. Rather, they were complementary. Contemporary East African artists (and here I mean: novelists like Ngugi wa Thiongo; poets like Okot p'Bitek; performers like James Ssenkubuge; musicians and visual artists like Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi) engage this strategy as an effective language economy. Literally translated Ssekintu's narrative would run like this:

> This man was managing the exchange. He sees this mad man is disturbing… [laughter]. The whole scene looks like one in which a dog has attacked a group of doves forcing them to run for their lives. These others are the tax collectors and leaders of the Ecclesia. The manager and the tax collectors, who are also the leaders of the church, own the money which is deposited inside here in the collection bags. Now, the manager reacts to the intrusion of the man on the right. What is going on? [gesturing surprise] Who is this person? Where does he come from? What…? Everybody else fled. The birds went flying as well [deep sigh].

Two points emerge. One is this that Ssekintu's narrative contracts and gains sharpness — especially if delivered to an audience which comprehends both English and Luganda. The second point is that some Luganda expressions lose their immediacy through translation. For example used in Luganda the expression "*embwa egudde mu mayuba*" provokes more energy than its longer English equivalent of "the whole scene looks like one in which a dog has attacked a group of doves forcing them to run for their lives". In fact the Luganda expression loses its idiomatic force, sharpness and meaning through translation. This is because the idiomatic expression "*embwa egudde mu mayuba*" carries, in Heron's sense, meaning "built up over years of familiarity with the words"[184]. Thus from this point on I present his creolised excerpts and follow them with literal translations. In my translation I include the parts he says in English. Short of this the translations become cumbersome, useless staccatos; they become inchoate representations of the artist's statements.

[184] See: Heron G. A. "Introduction" in p'Bitek Okot, *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol* (oxford: Heinemann, 1966 1967 1972), 9.

It can be concluded from the painting that Ssekintu departed from the visual conventions of many religious representations popular at the time. For example, according to the artist, the intrusive man dressed in a traditional Baganda *kanzu* is Jesus Christ. If we take Ssekintu's explanation then the artist's departure from conventional visual iconography becomes clear. Outside the Art School Jesus was always hallowed, youthful, energetic and Caucasian.

As expected, Trowell supported Ssekintu's Africanisation of religious iconography. To celebrate the moment, she included Ssekintu's painting in her *And Was Made Man, The Life of Our Lord in Pictures Exhibition* during the 1950s. In the catalogue she confirmed Ssekintu's reading that the man in a *kanzu* was Jesus who the artist presented "not historically in foreign dress, but as a man amongst men as we know them here [in Uganda], for Christianity belongs to every race and time..."[185] She confirmed that the artist had vernacularised religious iconography in order to bridge the gap between the laity and Christianity; religious iconography mirrored its society[186]. What Trowell does not mention is that Ssekintu was not only interested in Jesus as man in our midst but also as an embodiment of the (radical) African rebelling against his continuous marginalisation on the fringes of the colonial economy. Hence the artist skilfully introduced radical politics (and a secular theme) into religious iconography by means of allegory. This strand is useful. In the 1970s and 1980s artists will revise and invert [t]his strategy as they secularise religious iconography and use it to confront Amin Dada's and Milton Obote's ruthless regimes.

In the 1950s Ssekintu engaged this strategy to decorate the St Francis Chapel — an Anglican Church at Makerere University. He did a triptych for it

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[185] See Trowell Margaret, *And Was Made Man, The Life of Our Lord in Pictures Exhibition*, Exhibition Catalogue (Essex: Talgot Press, 1967), not paginated

[186] Trowell gave a public lecture on this issue. See: Margaret Trowell, "Art as a Mirror of its Times" in *Uganda Herald*, Vol. LIV, No. 407, February 7, 1950. For more see: Trowell Margaret, *Classical African Sculpture* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1954), 19.

called *The Resurrection* (1951? [187]). It is stylistically and technically refined, communicative and humorous as well. During the 1950s, and beyond, we see a proliferation of (Africanised) religious iconography in the churches in the region. Elimo Njau did murals for Fort Hall Chapel in Kenya during the 1950s. European instructors Jonathan Kingdon and Bruce Kent and African artists Peter Binaka, Kefa Ssempangi and Ignatius Sserulyo decorated St. Francis Chapel in the 1960s and 1970s. Located near the St. Francis Chapel is Makerere University's Catholic St Augustine Chapel. George Kakooza did Africanised work for it in the late-1960s to early-1970s. Outside Makerere University, during the late-fifties Tebbawebbula Kivubiro did an Africanised Virgin Mary at the Villa Maria Parish: a Catholic church in Masaka (West of Kampala).

The Africanisation of church art continued in the 1970s, although this activity was subdued given Amin's misrule. For example in 1977 the Catholic and Anglican churches funded representational decorative programmes to celebrate a century of Christianity in Uganda: these artworks are part of the Namugongo shrines. Not so much work was done during the 1980s until the end of Obote's tyranny when economic boom, introduced by the Museveni Administration, allowed Christian churches to sponsor more Africanised iconography. Ignatius Sserulyo did his *Sharing?* (1989): a group sculpture on the theme of sharing located at the Catholic Sharing Hall at Nsambya in Kampala. Mathias Muwonge did stained glass windows with Africanised motifs in the 1990s for a Catholic Parish in Luzira (South of Kampala); Bruno Sserunkuuma did work at a Chapel at Kamuli (West of Kampala) in 1999.

That stated, I need to add that there has never been absolute consensus in Uganda about the Africanisation of liturgical art. In fact there has been

[187] I spoke to Charles Ssekintu about this work. He however could not recollect the precise date when he made it although he conceded that he did it immediately after graduating from the Art School. As such, he and I guessed that probably he painted it in 1951—the year in which he graduated. This problem of imprecise dates is however not limited to this artist or indeed this work. It affects much of contemporary Ugandan art; it complicates the recording of its art history. Thus, as a way forward, where precise dates are not available, some scholars (for example see Sanyal 2000) have supplied guessed and empirical dates. This style of writing may have its flaws. I however find it useful. I have adopted it extensively in this paragraph and elsewhere in this thesis.

negative reaction to some of the works I have referred to, although the concept has been widely accepted. For instance Ssekintu admits that “I didn’t receive negative response until Bishop Brown” of Nnamirembe Cathedral came to see the triptych. It is then that “I noticed some sort of feeling that I didn’t quite understand. He thought perhaps it [the triptych] was a revolutionary idea” which did not conform to acceptable Anglican conventions (Ssekintu, interview 2006).

Now, it is hard to tell why Brown was particularly uncomfortable with Ssekintu’s iconography. In 1959, Brown consecrated a mural by Sam Ntiro located in Kakindo Parish in Hoima Diocese in Western Uganda. The mural contains Africanised religious iconography. Ntiro also executed a smaller painting *Kakindo Crucifixion* (1960s; plate 22) based on the mural at Kakindo Parish. Like the mural the small painting represents Africanised scenes of Jesus’s life and that of his disciples. Brown supported Ntiro’s iconography; he consecrated it. He is quoted in the *Uganda Argus* of 21 November 1959 as having argued that “Christianity is not just the white man’s religion”. He then echoed Ssekintu’s, and Trowell’s, dictum suggesting that “Jesus Christ was not a European — he belongs to everyone” (ibid) adding that “we must see him as ourselves and ourselves as belonging to him” (ibid).

But Ssekintu’s concern should not be dismissed entirely. Francis Musangogwantamu faced similar challenges selling his Africanised paintings to the Catholic Church in the fifties. Musangogwantamu (a Catholic Brother himself) did murals for the Catholic Church. However, the church rejected his forms, much to his disappointment, on grounds that they were radically Africanised (Kyeyune 2003). Sserunkuuma himself faced the challenge of convincing the Catholic clergy at Kamuli that Jesus could be represented as a black man. “Bruno have you ever seen a black Jesus?” Father Valodrama asked (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). “He was a Jew!” (ibid) Valodrama exclaimed insisting that Jesus was Caucasian and not African. As evident from Valodrama’s remarks, conservatives have rejected Ssekintu’s and Trowell’s claims for Jesus as a universal, multiracial icon. It is also clear that

attempts to secularise religious iconography which Ssekintu advocates, which Trowell supported and which Sserunkuuma has recently explored, have often received dissenting reactions.

Ssekintu also tried to join Uganda's nationalist politics of the early-1950s. After him, Sam Ntiro was active in nationalist politics. Recently Kefa Ssempangi, Elly Tumwine, Ruth Nnankabirwa, Simon Peter Wonanzefu, Hussein Kyanjo, among others have engaged in nationalist politics; they are members of parliament. Unlike Ntiro, Ssempangi, Tumwine, Nnankabirwa, Wonazefu and Kyanjo however, Ssekintu did not take up political responsibility at the national stage. In a recent discussion he revealed to me that he quit, and became "so much involved with [his] art and almost eccentric" to Uganda's politics (Ssekintu, interview 2006). Actually the available evidence suggests that he became more involved in museum (and recently cultural) activities than painting. However, the political events which forced him out of national politics, between the early-1950s and 2006, are revealing. They, therefore, merit explanation.

Betrayed through Lies and Demagoguery? Ssekintu Quits Nationalist Politics

In 1952 Charles Ssekintu was part of the political meetings and activities in which Musaazi's Uganda National Congress (the UNC), to which I referred earlier, was born. He still has a vivid recollection of the spaces, actors, events and processes through which Uganda's first political party, UNC, was born:

> Actually when it was first initiated *mu* Budonian Club *wano,* I attended the meeting. [Ignatius] Musaazi *yaliyo ne* Abu Mayanja *yaliyo, waaliwo n'omuzungu nga bamuyita* Henry Beard [who] was one of the speakers *ne* Dr. [Barnabas] Kununka…You see [I was an artist but] I was not blind to what was going on around me. I attended the first UNC meeting…[and another] at Mbarara. But I was not really in support of one group or the other. In fact I was more of an artist-observer so to speak (Ssekintu, interview 2006).

Literally translated:

> Actually when it was first initiated at the Budonian Club, I attended the meeting. Ignatius Musaazi, Abu Mayanja, there was an

> European called Henry Beard, who was one of the speakers, and Dr Barnabas Kununka…You see I was an artist but I was not blind to what was going on around me. I attended the first UNC meeting…and another at Mbarara. But I was not really in support of one group or the other. In fact I was more of an artist observer so to speak.

Mbarara is located in Western Uganda. The meetings Ssekintu recollects are two of the many meetings through which UNC took shape before it began to influence Uganda's politics. But Ssekintu's position as "artist-observer" warrants interrogation. Why did he attend such important meetings only as an observer? Was he being cautious about the fast-moving radical politics which had been taking shape since the mid-1940s? Or, perhaps, he had taken Trowell's advice not to take sides seriously? He does not answer these questions directly although he gives a few clues. For instance he suggests that:

> I didn't take sides [but] of course I appreciated what Musaazi was doing but later as a result of my observation of what was going on, I decided not to belong, I decided not to be a politician and for a long time, I've tried not to (Ssekintu, interview 2006).

This then suggests that Ssekintu had political sympathies for the UNC, but it is also clear that he lost such sympathies after observing its activities. So we can conclude that he was studying the UNC before joining its ranks, although this does not entirely eliminate other likely explanations. This then begs the question, what is it that the artist observed at Mbarara which made him quit nationalist politics? Ssekintu gives a graphic account of how events unfolded before he quit:

> During one of the meetings, we were in Mbarara…in a Cinema Hall: Abu Mayanja, Musaazi, myself, Kununka and a few other people. We were in a small room behind the screen drinking *soda*. Abu Mayanja was talking to people. After sometime he came and told Musaazi [whisper] do you know? S*simanyi kya kukola. Bye nnabadde ntegese mbyogedde mbimazeeyo naye ate abantu balabika bakyayagala.* [Musaazi naddamu] "*o-o-o baagala*! *Kaakati genda obalimbeyo ebintu ebi: bibiri. Bwebakyamuka nebakuba emizira, nga tuggalawo".* That thing did work properly. But for me, it pushed me away from these politicians…(Ssekintu interview 2006).

Literally translated:

> During one of the [political] meetings, we were in Mbarara…in a Cinema Hall: Abu Mayanja….Musaazi, myself, Kununka and a few other people. We were in a small room behind the screen taking soft drinks. Abu Mayanja was talking to people. After sometime he came and told Musaazi [whisper]: "do you know? I need help. I have given my prepared speech but the gathering still wants me to continue." [Musaazi responded] "o-o-o they still want you to continue? Now, you go and make two empty promises. This will throw the gathering into tremendous excitement. When they begin to ululate, we close the rally." That thing did work properly. But for me, it pushed me away from these politicians...

Clearly then Musaazi resorted to realpolitik, lies and demagoguery to excite the masses and gain political capital. This may have served a populist political agenda. In Ssekintu's observation it was, however, morally and ethically, not right. And why was it not right? Ssekintu explains;

> You see now I started thinking *nti kaakati bwe wanaayita emyaka ebiri esatu omuntu najjukira* meeting *eyali e Mbarara, kiki kyanajjukira ekyasinga okumusanyusa ennyo nnaakuba mu ngalo naye nga kirimbo*? You see? So from then I decided, and in fact I withdrew from political meetings *kubanga* here was a man — in fact he was the star of the day —*naye awadde amagezi nti genda obasanyuseemu bwebanaasanyuka olwo nga tuggalawo* meeting *bagende nga balina eky'okunumyako. Naye nga nze* that sent me [off]: that closed my door (Ssekintu, interview 2006).

Literally translated:

> You see, now I started thinking: What is going to happen after sometime should someone recall the political meeting at Mbarara? What will be the key issues to remember, the empty promises and demagoguery? You see? So from then I decided…and in fact I withdrew from political meetings. Here was a man — in fact he [Musaazi] was the star of the day. Yet the best advice he could give was that of deceit and demagoguery in order to move the masses! That sent me [off]: that closed my door.

Ssekintu's stance sparks off an interesting debate on Uganda's postcolonial leadership which which the artist does not want to extend. This is because discussions over Uganda's politics bring back the bad memories which surround the molestation and shooting incident in which he was reduced to a fugitive in his own country before he fled into exile in 1975. In hindsight however, it might be argued that Ssekintu's observation was correct. Uganda's nationalists gave no concrete solutions to the recurrent problems of food security, sectarianism, poverty, illiteracy, et cetera, which

beleaguered the nations they intended to inherit. Instead, they resorted to empty promises to help their bid to replace the colonial administration. This thread is critical to my argument because after Ssekintu many contemporary Ugandan artists have worked around it albeit differently since the late-1960s. I will pick it up repeatedly while discussing the politico-aesthetic of the late-1960s, 1970s, 1980s and the works of Sserunkuuma and Mutebi.

Many of the leaders Ssekintu names here went on to influence the negotiations that led Uganda to independence albeit through different political alignments. For example Abu Mayanja left the UNC and joined the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) which started in 1960. In the early-sixties, he played a key role in the “unholy merger” between Baganda nationalists, who had formed a party called Kabaka Yekka (or KY meaning the King alone), and Obote’s UPC. The merger was a loose, unstable “marriage of convenience” (Mutibwa 1992, 30) which led Uganda’s first post-colonial government before it collapsed. The events which followed the collapse of the KY/UPC alliance in 1964, and government in 1966, plunged Uganda into an abyss in which Ugandans were trapped for two decades (1966-1986). This strand is relevant to my debate. I will pick it up in chapters five, six, seven and eight.

Also, the issues mirrored in Ssekintu’s *Cleansing the Temple* (and Maloba’s *The Beggar* as well) were deeply embedded in the wider question of the ambiguities and strains which colonial modernity had imposed on life and culture in Africa. (And I have already submitted that Trowell engaged this issue in her lecture on *Culture Contact and Social Change*). These issues attracted serious debate; they informed the anti-colonial struggle and the quest for self-preservation, self-emancipation and independence. They were deliberated in the African Diaspora and on the continent; they informed political movements and philosophies like Négritude, African Personality and Pan-Africanism. From Martinique Aimé Cesaire had articulated them in his *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (1939). In Uganda Okot p’Bitek vividly and powerfully elicited them through his *Lak Tar (White Teeth)* (1953).

Elsewhere on the continent other novelists and playwrights Camara Laye, Chunua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiongo and Wole Soyinka among others engaged them. Arguably then two issues emerge from here. First, although he remained out of nationalist politics Ssekintu did not become apolitical. His active engagement in the administration of the Buganda kindom demonstrates my claim. Secondly, the political burdens of the 1950s, and beyond, demanded that artists take subjective positions on the issues that affected them and their society. Located in this political matrix Elimo Njau advocated that artists actively participate in the emancipation of their societies. I turn to him next because his position will help us understand how contemporary artists [re]joined the debate over national independence in the early-1960s.

Rejecting Eccentricity? Elimo Njau and the Art of Social Concerns

Elimo Njau is a Tanzanian. Born in 1932, he schooled at the Lutheran mission school, Marangu and the old Moshi Government School. Later he obtained a grade II Teacher's Certificate from Tabora College, before joining Makerere Art School where he pursued a Diploma in Fine Arts from 1953 to 1957. He is one of the three students who were the first to enrol for the Diploma in Fine Art which Trowell introduced in 1954 — the other two students being the Ugandans, Noor Kaddu and John Kisaka.

Like Maloba, Njau's career started in Uganda. He therefore cannot be distanced from the development of Uganda's modern art. The available archive suggests that Njau had an interest in religious themes. Like she did to Ssekintu's *Cleansing the Temple,* Trowell included Njau's *The Baptism* (1954) in the *And Was Made Man, The Life of Our Lord in Pictures Exhibition* I referred to earlier. Njau also invented a (modernist) pristine primitiveness as we see in his *The Baptism* (plate 23) in which he depicted half-clothed creatures attentively (and curiously) witnessing the baptism of Jesus at the river Jordan — a theme he revisited later in another *Baptism* (1962; plate 24). The artist's use of brush strokes and an expressionist style elicits a harsh and uninviting reality. These characteristics span most of the paintings

Njau did in the 1950s and 1960s before he left Uganda for Kenya where he founded the Paa ya Paa Art Centre in 1965[188] and Kibo Gallery at Marungu in Tanzania.

Njau also taught at Makerere Demonstration School in Uganda where he displayed exemplary inventiveness as an art teacher and encouraged self-reliance and innovation. He rejected the reliance on external sources for teaching materials. "The general tendency in most schools" Njau argued, "has been to focus the pupil's eyes on things abroad and as a result many school children don't care to look down to appreciate the colour of the soil beneath their feet". Consequently for Njau, art education became expensive; its beneficiaries were alienated from their social fabric. He tapped into the common postcolonial theme of import-substitution which many East African leaders touted at the time, to argue that "it is plain that as artists or teachers we really have no excuse for not being creative. We only have ourselves, laziness or blindness to blame." To change the situation, Njau argued, artists should look around, discover and use local materials which "hardly cost anything. They only cost us the looking and the spirit of adventure when trying them out. Why then should the school children in East Africa be deprived of art which is such a vital part of their education?" Njau wondered[189].

Unlike his contemporaries Noor Kaddu and John Kisaka whose careers receded into obscurity, Njau kept his career active. During November 22 to December 4, 1960 he mounted his first solo exhibition, *Dawning Africa* at the Uganda Museum[190]. Little is known about this exhibition save for its record in the press. The *Uganda Argus,* published on 16 August 1960, captured him finishing one of the paintings he put on the show. The work represents a contemporary couple; it resonates the middle-class life of the late-1950s.

[188] Paa ya Paa Art Centre became a pivot of international cultural interaction attracting students, tourists, visual and performing artists. Although it was destroyed by a fire in 1997, the centre is still active.
[189] See: Njau Elimo, "Art in an African School" in Kingdon J. *Roho 2: Journal of the Visual Arts in East Africa,* (Kampala: Makerere College, June 1962), 13.
[190] See: "Exhibition by African Artist", in *Uganda Argus,* No. 1755, August 16, 1960.

Basing on this painting we can speculate that Njau engaged themes based on contemporary African life in his secular work.

Before his first solo exhibition, Njau participated in a group show: the annual exhibition of the Uganda Art Club (UAC) in August 1960[191]. The UAC show was inaugurated and praised by Kampala's first African mayor, S. W. Kulubya, for whom it was an index of "civilisation". Njau exhibited alongside established artists like Cecil Todd although other newcomers such as Eli Nathan Kyeyune[192] also showed their work. I will refer to Eli Kyeyune again in chapter six. For now, let me say that Eli Kyeyune and Njau shared a common ideology; they tapped into the radical Africanist discourses of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

During the late-fifties and sixties Njau and Eli Kyeyune openly rejected the instruction at Makerere Art School which was dominated by white instructors; they agitated for its Africanisation. They went on a collision course (Kasfir 1999, 147) with Cecil Todd the new head of the Art School (I will detail Todd's career in the next chapter). Consequently, Kyeyune left the institution without having obtained a diploma. Njau was not absorbed into the staff at Makerere Art School which could have been the case given his excellent performance (Kyeyune 2003). This is because, as Maloba recently put it, Njau practiced "racism in reverse" [193]. What Maloba meant here was that Njau's (and Eli Kyeyune's) views could not have been acceptable at Makerere Art School, because the preferred theme there was one of accommodation, multiracialism and multiculturalism. In this case then radical pleas for Africanisation were considered intolerant and racist in reverse (as Maloba puts it). As Jonathan Kingdon reminisced:

> …the dismantling of Europe's colonial empires meant a respect for all cultures and acceptance of many faces of cultural and personal

[191] See: Uganda an Artist's Inspiration — Mayor", in *Uganda Argus*, No. 1746, August 4, 1960.
[192] Eli Nathan Kyeyune shares a clan with George Kyeyune whose scholarly work I have referred to extensively in this thesis. To avoid confusion from here onwards I refer to him as Eli Kyeyune.
[193] Although he admitted that he had nothing personal against Njau, Maloba compared Njau's views to those of the then Apartheid leaders in South Africa. He expressed this view in an interview he had with George Kyeyune in 2001.

> expression. It was in this tolerant climate that open minds, civil rights and self-discovery flourished (Kingdon n.d., 26)

at Makerere University during the sixties.

Let me, however, suggest that it would be incorrect to label Njau intolerant and racist simply because he held different views than those held by the centrists at the Art School. It seems to me his views were closer to issues of post-coloniality (and racialism?) than they were to racism. As if to confirm my assertion in a recent interview with George Kyeyune, Njau revisited his post-colonial views. He argued that:

> We have not washed our face[s] to see a new day with a new heart and soul after colonialism. When you look at yourself in the mirror and a shadow of your *colonial professor* is still standing behind you, you only see a blurred image of yourself."[194]

Njau's unease could be traced back to Chwa II's stance we saw in chapter two. However his concerns were contemporary. By the mid-1960s Uganda's intellectual climate was rife with questions over how to resolve the alienations colonial modernity had imposed on the Africans:

> At Makerere, poets and writers as well as historians were actively writing about cultural revivalism, which they saw as the only way of 'reconstructing' African communities 'broken' by Western intrusion (Kyeyune 2003, 105).

Located in this matrix Njau's radical views, and the past-ness in his paintings, begin to demonstrate his attempt to reconstruct African-ness; they bring his Africanist stance against colonial modernity to the fore. I, however, admit that his strong radical alignment would have been ambivalent in the context of his commitment to Christianity which is as hegemonic (and patriarchal) as the colonialism he rejected.

Njau was also interested in immediate socio-political matters beyond intellectual theorising. He criticised intellectuals who remained detached from the immediate socio-political concerns which affected their society. For example, in 1962 he mounted another successful exhibition, *Art Master's Hobby* (November 1962). The exhibition highlighted issues like drought

[194] Njau Elimo, interviewed and cited in Kyeyune, *Art in Uganda in the 20th Century*, p.107.

which is a recurrent problem in many areas inhabited by pastoral nomads in East Africa for example the Karamojong in Uganda, the Turkana and the Masai in Kenya. This problem has a long history although it had never been visualised before Njau. In his *Drought* (1962; plate 25) Njau used intense brush strokes to capture a deserted, rugged and anonymous landscape to elicit the harshness of drought. He also engaged Uganda's refugee problem. It is likely that his sculpture represented refugees from Rwanda who came to Uganda after the military coup in their country during the late-fifties. By 1962 the coup had sent a flood of refugees into South-western Uganda. But Rwandans were not the first to seek refugee in Uganda. Earlier Uganda played host to refugees from Europe during World War II[195]. Yet the problem of refugees had never received visual expression until Njau intervened. Although many of their works have since been dispersed, there is a record in the press suggesting that among the works his students exhibited at the Uganda Museum in February 1962 was one titled, *Refugees*[196]. In November Njau engaged the plight of refugees himself. He did his work *Refugees* (1962; plate 26), a sculpture with two figures glued together, like Siamese twins, to elicit a sense of mutual support and resilience. Although ambiguously expressed, mutual support and resilience were necessary for those who fled Rwanda. There was not enough external support for them because the refugee crisis strained resources in the area and sparked ethnic animosity from the host community. Besides, Obote's administration saw Rwandan refugees as a threat to national and regional security; it expelled them[197].

Njau's *Drought* and *Refugees* testify to the position he took on the role of artists in society. In an opening essay in the catalogue to his exhibition, Njau rejected the disengagement of the contemporary formally-trained artist from

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[195] See: Lwanyaga-Muyingo "Uganda's Long Connection with the Problem of Refugees: From the Polish Refugees of World War II to the Present" in Ginyera Pinychwa A. G. G [ed] *Uganda and the Problem of Refugees* (Kampala: Makerere University Press, 1998), 19-34.

[196] The exhibition was reported in the *Uganda Argus.* See: "Let Children Paint" in *Uganda Argus*, No. 2227, February 19, 1962.

[197] See: Deposed Rwanda King a Prohibited Immigrant in Uganda: Umwami must Leave, Criticism in Buganda at Expulsion", in *Uganda Argus*, No. 2699, August 24, 1963.

the social, political and economic needs of the wider society. He was concerned that the formally educated African artist had alienated himself from his socio-political reality and sought sanctuary in:

> ...a self-centred art world [whence he is] proclaimed the centre of creation by the public press and famed Sotheby's sale. His image has become that of a great sophisticated magician…and has great knowledge of styles, technique and artistic effects. These assets he manipulates wilfully to conquer the world. He insulates himself in an ivory tower or moves around in a small intellectual circle pretending to be ahead of his age or superior. This tendency insulates art from life and community. This destroys art. True art grows from the soil and the full community we live in (Njau 1962, n.d).

Clearly Njau urged African artists to abandon the aesthetic façade which some, like Maloba, had adopted since the mid-forties. He called on them to relocate from the elitist "ivory tower" and use their skills to emancipate their largely poor, illiterate communities. What Njau is explaining here is that which Ben Enwonwu, a contemporary Nigerian artist, called the political function of art. In the next section I outline Enwonwu's ideas. Although himself not a Ugandan, and not a product of the Makerere Art School, his ideas are important because, more than Njau's, they can be used to explain how Uganda's political symbols, discussed in chapter five, were born.

Asserting "the Political Function of Art"? Ben Enwonwu and the Case for Contemporary Art as an Embodiment of a Collective Ideology

Ben Enwonwu was a contemporary twentieth-century Nigerian aritist. He tapped into anti-colonial and negritudist views propagated by thinkers like Aimé Cesaire and Leopold Senghor. Hence by the mid-1950s Enwonwu's views had become unambiguously political. In 1956 he, together with Uganda's Sam Ntiro (whom we will see in the next chapter), were some of the few contemporary artists from Africa who attended the Congress of Negro Writers and Artists at Sorbonne. The congress was organised by a group of artists, intellectuals and activists who published the Africanist journal, Présence Africaine[198].

[198] Founded by the Senegalese, Alionne Diop, in 1947, Présence Africaine prided itself as "the voice of the silenced Africa". See Mudimbe V. Y. *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the*

During the conference, Enwonwu presented a paper in which he outlined the late-colonial economic, political, cultural and educational challenges which faced the African artist by the 1950s with a view of finding solutions for them[199]. Many of his solutions were defiant and leftist. He also belaboured some well-rehearsed aspects of contemporary art in Africa. For example he suggested "modern African artists can borrow the techniques of the west without copying European Art"[200]. For Enwonwu this was the best way to ensure a productive fusion between new and old forms — a fusion which was essential for contemporary African art. In Uganda, just as in his home country, Nigeria, this was probably a cliché by the late-fifties. But Enwonwu's emphasis on art as a political tool and his call for artists to participate in the struggle to decolonise Africa are vital for our understanding of the political stances artists in Uganda took and the idioms they made in the late-fifties and early-sixties.

Enwonwu was intrigued by the question of how "political situations affected art and the artist"[201] and how the artist responded to them to serve the "political function of art"[202]. This was because in his observation Africa's contemporary artists had a number of challenges. "Perhaps, the most pressing among these problems and therefore one which I feel personally should be given first attention" argued Enwonwu, "is the political"[203]. Insisting that contemporary art and artists had a secular role which could not be ignored during the struggle to decolonise Africa, Enwonwu argued that;

> …every true artist is bound…to express, even unconsciously, the political aspirations of his time. And for expressions to be true, they must be an embodiment of the struggle of self-preservation"[204].

Politics of Otherness 1947-1987. Edited by V. Y. Mudimbe (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), xvii.

[199] Enwonwu, Ben. Problems of the African Artist Today in *Ijele: Art eJournal of the African World,* Vol. 1 & 2 (2000). Also available at: http//:www.africaresource.com/ijele/vol1.2/enwonwu3.html (accessed June 24, 2004).

[200] Enwonwu, Ben, *Ijele,* 2000.

[201] Enwonwu, Ben. *Ijele,* 2000.

[202] Enwonwu, Ben. *Ijele,* 2000.

[203] Enwonwu, Ben. *Ijele,* 2000.

[204] Enwonwu, Ben. *Ijele,* 2000.

Indeed, by 1960 it had become inevitable that Uganda's contemporary artists had to join the anti-colonial struggles which shaped the country. Unlike Ssekintu, many artists produced artworks which embodied Uganda's (and regional) postcolonial aspirations. This thread is critical to my discussion; I pick it up in the next chapter.

Conclusion to Chapter Four

I this chapter I have traced the development of contemporary art in Uganda and its political nexus. I have analysed how the Art School became embroiled in World War II-related activities — *The War Effort* — and how modern art at Makerere College evolved into a 'politico-aesthetic'. I have demonstrated that Uganda's post-World War II political tensions overwhelmed Trowell and her students, albeit in different ways, forcing them to retreat from the radical political developments unfolding in their midst. I have further demonstrated that it was not politically prudent for artists to remain disengaged in the late-fifties and early-sixties, given the negritudist, Africanist and anti-colonial debates in which they were located. This strand is important. In chapters, five, six, seven and eight I will show how different artists tapped into it to produce idioms which embody the good and bad postcolonial dispensations they confronted. Most immediately, in the next chapter I interrogate how Uganda's modern artists joined the postcolonial debate and enunciated Uganda's collective ideology. This collective ideology gained sharp relief at the time of the country's independence in 1962; it is therefore intriguing to understand how artists translated it into visual expression marking yet another step in the trajectory in which Mutebi and Sserunkuuma are located.

Many of the works produced in the late-1930s to 1950s have been lost or scattered leaving no trace. The challenge to account for such works (and their political resonances) remains a daunting one and will remain so for some time. But the works (and activities of artists) considered in this chapter are historical; they demonstrate the artists' sensitivity to the political challenges of the day: challenges in which the colonial subject was defined.

In this chapter I have also demonstrated that different artists responded differently to conditions unfolding in their political milieus. This suggests that, right from its start, the nexus between contemporary art and Uganda's politics has not been formulaic. Neither has it followed any academic dogma, although formal instruction has equipped the artists with the relevant skills. These issues are important. They are implicit in the whole of my thesis.

Also, in this chapter I have referred to artists who are not natives from Uganda but were shaped by and in turn shaped Uganda's political art. Indeed this is one of the unique features of Uganda's political art. Unlike other parts of Africa which have strong traditions of political art, Uganda's contemporary political art does not spring from entirely local resources. It receives import from experiences and discourses emanating from the entire African continent and beyond. In other words, the trajectory of Uganda's contemporary art as a political idiom has multiple sources; it has thrived on imports from within and outside the Art School. This thread spans the rest of my thesis.

Chapter Five

Celebrating the "National Element": Contemporary Ugandan Art and the Independence Epoch

Introduction:

In this chapter I trace the development of Uganda's political art during the independence period. I chart the political stances artists took and the symbolism they employed in order to embody political and economic aspirations of their societies. This chapter is important for the following reasons. One is that political issues and strategies which were ambiguous in Kawalya's work of the mid-thirties (mentioned earlier in chapter two) were brought into sharp relief during the early-sixties — the independence period — before later artists revised them as I will show in chapters six, seven and eight. It is therefore important that I chart them to understand how they had evolved by the early-1960s. Two, the political connection between the artist and the state which emerged in the early-forties, through the *War Effort,* before it was interrupted by anti-colonial struggles, was affirmed and energetically given visual expression in the early-sixties as contemporary Ugandan art gained what Wassily Kandinsky called a "*national element*" (Kandinsky cited in Chipp 1996, 157). Kandinsky argued that "just as each individual artist has to make his word known, so does each people…to which this artist belongs. This [socio-political] connection is mirrored in the form and is characterised by the *national element* in the work" (ibid). This is the connection Njau and Enwonwu advocated. In tracing it, some artists who have made a substantial contribution to Uganda's political art, and are important to our understanding of the post-1986 'politico-aesthetics' (and Mutebi's and Sserunkuuma's works), enter the record of Uganda's art history. Others, for whom formalist readings have done less than justice, take their rightful position as important pillars in the development of Uganda's political art. One such artist is Sam Ntiro. I begin with his career.

The Village as a Portrait of the State: Sam Ntiro's Art as a Socialist State

Sam Ntiro (1923-1993) was born in rural Chaggaland in Tanganyika (currently Tanzania). Though he was a native of Tanzania, Sam Ntiro's career developed in Uganda. He also stayed in Uganda for a long time and married a Ugandan woman, Sarah Nyendwoha Ntiro[205]. He joined the Makerere Art School in 1944 and graduated in 1947. In the late-1940s he, together with Gregory Maloba and Wandera, were Trowell's assistants. Ntiro taught painting. In the early-1950s he received a grant from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund Scholarship of the Tanganyika Government to pursue studies leading to a Diploma in Art from the Slade School (1952-1955). Ntiro subsequently returned to Uganda and pursued an Art Teacher's Diploma (1955-1956) at the Institute of Education (Makerere University). Between 1956 and 1961 Ntiro taught at Makerere Art School. When Trowell retired in 1958, Ntiro headed the Art School for a year. His career at Makerere was complicated and unceremoniously interrupted by succession squabbles which characterised Trowell's departure and the biased attitude fellow instructors like Cecil Todd, Gregory Maloba and Jonathan Kingdon, had towards him and his visual idioms. He pursued a diplomatic career, representing his native Tanzania in England in 1961, before he served as a Commissioner in the Department of Culture in Julius Nyerere's post-colonial government until the mid-1960s when he joined Uganda's Institute of Teachers' Education Kyambogo (Kampala) and taught at the Department of Design (at Kyambogo).

The fact that Ntiro worked under Nyerere's socialist government and that he did paintings which, in my view, are evidence of his interest in this socialism, foregrounds the political symbolism, rather than strictly formal aesthetic, of his work. If, as discussed in the previous chapter, Rwakikara and Okello (see p.90 above) can be claimed to have articulated views on the colonial (cotton) economy, Ntiro can be claimed to have enunciated the post-colonial socialist

[205] Sarah Nyendwoha Ntiro herself had an excellent career as an educationalist. She is one to the few women who served in the colonial legislative council in 1959-1961.

state. As Enwonwu rightly put it "the political function of Art can…be determined by the subject matter of Art which can be differentiated from its aesthetic beauty."[206] In failing to admit this contention, Ntiro's formalist contemporaries (and art scholars) have rejected his genre; they have questioned his professional ability (see Kyeyune 2003, 102-103); they have missed the political text the artist intended through his lyrical, choreographed, densely populated and rustic compositions. By engaging the political function of his art, the formalist debate loses currency and Ntiro's contribution to the development of the nexus between Uganda's modern art and politics comes to the fore. His socialist sympathies become obvious although I am not suggesting that he became what André Breton and Leon Trotsky (angered by the way artists were used to propagate the Nazi regime in Germany) rejected as being a "domestic servant of the [socialist] regime" (cited in Chipp 1996, 484).

Sam Ntiro was an Africanist. He, together with Enwonwu and Gerard Sekoto, attended the Second Conference of Black Writers and Artists in Rome from March 26 to April 1 1959. Unlike the case of Enwonwu (from Nigeria) and Gerard Sekoto (from South Africa), the available archive does not detail what Sam Ntiro's contribution to the 1959 conference was. This, however, should not detain us here, for what is important, at least for this discussion, is the fact that Ntiro made art as an embodiment of the aspirations of the post-colonial nation-state. In doing so Ntiro extended the political debate, which remained ambiguously expressed in Kawalya's *Returning Home* (see plate 9), through his paintings.

Ntiro's visual archive (like those of many of his contemporaries) is dispersed. The murals he did in Makerere University have not been maintained well: those in Nothcote Hall are peeling off the walls; one which was in Mary Stuart Hall until 2001 was destroyed by rampaging students. Thus the full picture of his professional career, and its political nexus, remains incomplete. Based on the available evidence, however, it becomes clear that by the

[206] Enwonwu, Ben. *Ijele,* 2000.

1950s Ntiro was making landscapes with no specific reference to place or time. They were harsh, anonymous and desolate. The artist employed aerial perspective, rough texture, and a limited palette explored through dramatic tones. His *Mango Tree* (1950s?; plate 27) stands as an example of his early work although, judging by the press interest in his work which is evident from the mid-forties onwards, it would do him less than justice to suggest that this single painting wholly represents the entirety of his early work. By the 1960s, however, Ntiro had immensely populated his compositions. He depicted panoramic views of densely populated land with socialised, collectivised and industrious rural communities. These are the works I am most interested in because they carry resonances from the socialist ideology which became popular in the region.

It is interesting to note that a philanthropic organisation, the Harmon Foundation (USA), had identified Ntiro's political capabilities in the early-sixties albeit for different reasons. This is an important point of departure for this discussion because it confirms my contention that Ntiro's professional career (at least during the sixties) had multiple roles, one of which was socio-political. Thus although the Foundation funded a programme on contemporary African artists between 1947 and the late-1960s, it based its selection of Ntiro on political and religious expectations. Walter explains:

> [Mary Beattie] Brady described Ntiro and his wife as very articulate and "forward looking people" who were coming to the United States from the "advancing countries" and peoples of Africa. Writing to the Reverend Russell Brown in 1960, she stated confidently that artists such as Ntiro could be "helpful to us, and I think in turn if we can have a broad contact through the land with them that democracy and the Christian approach to life will triumph in the direction of peace and understanding."[207]

Brady's comments reflect the foundation's liberal attitude towards "the black race"[208]. During the Harlem Renaissance, William Harmon based his promotion of the arts of African Americans on such liberalism. After

[207] Walter C. John, "The Harmon Foundation and the Sponsorship of Contemporary African Artists, 1947-67" in *Contours: A Journal of the African Diaspora* Contours 1, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 199-218. Also available online at: http://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/contours/1.2/walter.html (accessed August 4, 2006).

[208] See: Walter C. John. *A Journal of the African Diaspora Contours,* 2003.

Harmon's death in 1928, the foundation's activities continued under the leadership of Mary Beattie Brady and Evelyn Brown. In 1947 Brady and Brown added the arts from Africa to the list of sponsored activities. The Foundation collected work done by 300 African artists — painters, sculptors, photographers, and ceramic artists[209] — between 1947 and 1967. Ntiro was one of these artists.

Also implicit in Brady's communication with Russell, is the suggestion that Ntiro engaged religious themes which propagated Christian values in the region. The works in the foundation's online archive which testify to this evaluation were Ntiro's *Conversion of Saint Paul* (1960s; plate 28) and *Kakindo Crucifixion* (to which I referred earlier see plate 22). The two paintings show stylised forms; through them the artist expressed the notion of communal life. Like Charles Ssekintu, he used contemporary African subjects to depict biblical themes. One of the facets of Trowell's teaching was to evolve a unique didactic genre of Christian art in Uganda. I have already suggested that Ntiro's *Kakindo Crucifixion* came from a mural he did for a church in Western Uganda. Brady's conviction that Ntiro's art could be an effective tool for Christianisation was therefore plausible.

That Ntiro served in Nyerere's government after his residence at the Foundation would confirm that he could influence political opinion in the region. It would, however, have been unlikely that Ntiro propagated a liberal American-style democracy on his return to East Africa, if this is what Brady expected. This would have been inimical to the dominant ideology in the region which, as I am about to demonstrate, was aligned to socialist (Marxist) ideals. But the available evidence suggests that Ntiro explored and intensified the industrious villages, rhythmic countryside and masses seen in his Christian art to develop a secular genre promoting the case for collective effort, and resonating the tenets of socialism as a form of good governance. This then suggests that indeed Ntiro propagated regional political issues using his art, a case which I demonstrate in the following ways.

[209] See: Walter C. John. *A Journal of the African Diaspora Contours,* 2003.

Ntiro observed all aspects of a progressive village through his secular art. In his *Making a Chagga Hut* (1960s; plate 29) the artist depicts a group of industrious men constructing a new hut[210]: a new home for a new family perhaps? Ntiro progressed from a (new) family unit to construct well-organised and socialised villages. His *Round Huts* (1960?; plate 30) testifies to this attempt. The clustering and density of population in his work betrays the artist's valorisation of communal life. His village is much more organic and less fractured than the very clearly defined elements of Kasapo's *My Village* (1960; plate 31) in as far as Ntiro's work has a more sophisticated feel than Kasapo's. Ntiro also explored the village symbolism more prodigiously, and politically, than Kasapo.

Through painting Ntiro enunciated his unwavering support for collective effort as a way of overcoming chores which would otherwise overwhelm an individual. His paintings elicit a kind of "associationalism" which allows for group effort, loyalty, reciprocity, shared values, a collectivised economy and a polity which is not subjected to vertical and foreign-mediated influences/ordering. I say this because there is a sense that, in his representation of village life, everybody is working, yet there is no one supervising the work! This is an unusual group dynamic which permeates his work; it insinuates an overarching ideology grounded in social capital.

Beyond building homes, Ntiro saw social capital as an essential requirement for the success of all village activities. We see this in his representation of food production. For example, his *In the Banana Grove* (1960s; plate 32) and *Banana Harvest* (1960; plate 33) exude the feeling that through collective effort, productivity increases, leading to surplus. He explores the possibility of surplus production, and its sale through rural, makeshift, unsophisticated

[210] The technique of constructing a new hut in Ntiro's *Making a Chagga Hut* is not unique to the Chagga in Tanzania but is shared by many hut-constructing communities in Africa although shapes may vary. Making a hut involves setting up a scaffold of poles which are then interlaced with reeds and covered with mud before being grass-thatched. The resultant product would be what we saw earlier in Kawalya's *Returning Home* and that which we see in Ntiro's and other artists' oeuvres including Bruno Sserunkuuma, a round hut.

markets involving barter-trade, in his *Market Day* (1960s; plate 34). *Market Day* elicits a lighter mood although it involves activities which are no less strenuous — for example the carrying of heavy loads of farm produce by the women. Its mood, accented through a warm colour palette, suggests that the painting celebrates a good harvest as opposed to affirming the work ethic seen in most of Ntiro's "villag-ised art".

Ntiro framed his rural motifs into romantic, nativised villages. It is likely that he may have been fascinated by John Constable's use of rurality to construct an authentic political space[211] during his studies at the Slade or through his readings on (Western) art history. His villages also resonate twentieth century post-colonial discourses. For example, his works recall the "Malinke villages" in Camara Laye's *African Child* (1954). Like Laye, Ntiro visualises villages "uncorrupted by the complexity and dislocation of the [modern colonial] world we know" (Laye 1954, 8).

Notwithstanding the above, some scholars have argued that Ntiro engaged rural scenes in order to suit a market paradigm. Rather than reading the links between the socialist ideology and Ntiro's work, such scholars have proposed that the artist deliberately primitivised his work to suit the "(colonial/Western) public taste" (see Sanyal 2000, 104). I disagree with this (formalist) reading because it distances Ntiro's interest in the rural narratives from their political reality, something which can be argued clearly in relation to Ntiro's visualisation of the socialist (rather than ethnic village) politics. I say this because by 1950 the Chagga constituted one of the two "powerful tribal groups with developing economies of their own" (Hodd 1988, 11), the other being the Wasakumu. This was arguably a result of the British policy of Indirect Rule (to which I also referred in chapter two) under which certain communities became more prosperous than others within the same colonial

[211] For a discussion on Constable's notion of a village as a political space see: Helsinger K. Elizabeth, *Rural Scenes and National Representation: Britain, 1815-1850* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

state[212]. This would then tempt us to read Ntiro's works as expressions of the artist's Chagga village and ethnic loyalties. However, while Ntiro's Chagga were among the 123 different ethnic groups which were inherited by the post-colonial nation-state in 1961, the definition and set up of "the village" (and the tribe) in Tanzania altered greatly starting with the early-1950s as Julius Nyerere spread his views of socialism. Ntiro clearly embraced these views, both through his subscription to the growing debates at Présence Africane and later through contact with the Nyerere administration.

To Nyerere the village was not a traditional closed-up tribal unit, but rather the smallest productive (and political) unit of the socialist state, a notion which Nyerere promoted at the time of Tanzania's independence in 1961. Consequently, the continuity of any tribal economy in Tanzania (inclusive of that of the Chagga) was constrained by the intervention of the state. In place of insular, tribal villages, government designed "bureaucratic villages" through a policy of villagisation. Nyerere transformed Tanzania into a bureaucratic "nation of village communities" (Hodd 1988, 10); the "modernised" bureaucratic (rather than a pre-colonial and colonial tribal) village became the basic structure of the nation-sate. The policy of villagisation was enshrined in Nyerere's brand of African socialism[213] or

[212] The British applied a similar system in Uganda. As a result Buganda's economy dominated that of Uganda at the time of independence. See: Jørgensen Jelmert, *Uganda a Modern History,* 1981.

[213] Popularised by many African nationalist in the 1950s and 1960s, and through different brands and interpretations, the philosophy of African socialism was grounded in "traditional" African belief in sharing resources. This was essential in the independence decade to ease the strains imposed by colonialism and to withstand the pressures of Western capitalism. However its proponents saw it as something more than just an antithesis to western capitalism. By the 1960s it became a way of [re]defining what it was to be African, a source of unity and collective development. Put in short, African socialism was a source of social capital and sustainable growth in a continent lagging behind in technological progress. Many postcolonial African leaders have preferred African socialism and implemented it albeit differently. The following can be cited as examples: Ahmed Sékou Touré (Guinea), Amílcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde), Didier Ratsiraka (Madagascar), Eduardo Mondlane (Mozambique), Jerry Rawlings (Ghana), Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia), Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), Michel Micombero (Burundi), Milton Obote (Uganda), Modibo Keita (Mali), Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Sam Nujoma (Namibia), Samora Machel (Mozambique), Thomas Sankara (Burkina Faso). After its failure to deliver meaningful progress, the implementation of African socialism after the 1980s has been inconsistent. Some leaders implemented it but later abandoned it. For example Yoweri Museveni (Uganda) implemented it in the late eighties before he abandoned it in the nineties. In Tanzania, African socialism was introduced through its key advocate Julius Kambarage Nyerere and his party Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). Nyerere's successor Ali Hassan Mwinyi, who also served under the socialist administration, abandoned the policy in the 1980s.

Ujamaa as it was called. This is how Nyerere controlled the tendency towards traditional insularity and open ethnic conflict which shaped, and subsequently ruptured, the post-colonial history of Tanzania's neighbours Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya. Tanzania "successfully" integrated her manifold ethnic villages into a relatively stable post-colonial nation-state under *Ujamaa.*

Nyerere's *Ujamaa* was probably as old as his political career. He conceived it in the 1950s. It became government policy immediately after Tanzania's independence in December 1961, and continued to be interpreted through his speeches and writings[214]. It was however in the *Arusha Declaration* of February 1967 that African socialism was most emphatically outlined as a basis for Tanzania's government policy. The *Arusha Declaration* called for the revamp of the country's economy in order to nurture the traditional system of sharing responsibility, reciprocity, self-reliance and the formation of well-planned, economically viable and productive villages. Populations dispersed among Tanzania's disparate, and ethnically defined, localities were shifted and reorganised into "official villages" — called the *Ujamaa viijijini* — "in which communities work[ed] and farm[ed] cooperatively" (Hodd 1988, 10).

By the late-1980s Tanzania had been redesigned into 8174 bureaucratic villages ran by "democratically" elected local governments. The village became a microcosm for a successful post-colonial polity. Inscribed in this village were the two aspects critical to Africa's development (at least in the opinion of the proponents of African socialism), namely: human and social capital. Nyerere pronounced them in his dictum: "the people of this continent are the weapon with which Africa has to defend itself, and the instrument with which Africa has to develop itself" (Nyerere 1968, 331). Although limited information is available on Ntiro's commitment to the socialist ideology by 1993, when he died, it is clear from his work during the sixties, that his

[214] See: Nyerere Julius, *Freedom and Socialism, Uhuru na Ujamaa: A Selection from Writings and Speeches*, 1968.

commitment to African socialism was unwavering. This on the one hand explains why he served in the Nyerere administration. And on the other, it affirms my contention that what we see in Ntiro's paintings are the official bureaucratic villages grounded in TANU's, but mainly Nyerere's, ideology of African socialism. Most intriguingly it would contradict scholarship which suggests that the artist primarily intended to satisfy Western insatiable appetite for exotic images through his village symbolism.

Just as in Tanzania, nationalist leaders in Kenya and Uganda touted African socialism at the time of independence, albeit differently. In 1963 Kenya's first post-colonial head of state, Jommo Kenyatta, declared his commitment to African socialism. During the 1960s Milton Obote, Uganda's first Prime Minister, was inspired by the developments in Tanzania, although his socialism was ill-defined and problematic. He cherished Nyerere's ideas but he also embraced some tribal sentiments which would have been inimical to the brand of socialism Nyerere deployed in Tanzania.

Ntiro's *Taking Beer to the Bride* (1960; plate 35), located in Makerere University's Nothcote Hall (in Uganda) was probably as ill-defined, eclectic and problematic as Obote's socialism. The painting probably recalled Ntiro's marriage ceremony in which he married a Ugandan woman, but in Western Uganda, where his wife hails from, beer does not have much symbolic significance in marriage rituals. Instead, dowry is paid in cows which are completely absent from Ntiro's work and the bride is hidden in a hut like the one we see enclosed in a palisade. It is among the Baganda, to which neither Ntiro nor his wife belonged, that "taking beer to the bride", foregrounded by the title of the work, remains a very important marriage ritual. That Ntiro engaged different tribal rituals then suggests that the painting did not legitimate tribal mores: it, like his other paintings, was a socio-political statement. However, the socio-politics to which the painting referred was ill-defined and problematic; it shifted endlessly until 1971 when Obote was ousted from power. We should, however, bear Ntiro's politicisation of marriage rituals in mind because in chapter eight we will see

how Bruno Sserunkuuma engaged in a similar theme to express his political opinion.

Ntiro did another painting he called *Chagga Beer Making* (1960s; plate 36) which, unlike his *Taking Beer to the Bride* specifically refers to his native Chaggaland although it is subtly different from it. Both paintings set the precedent for the populous drinking orgies we see in paintings done by Henry Tayali, Laban Nyerinda and Berlington Kaunda in the sixties, although Ntiro's do not carry the moral critique evident in them.

A native of Zambia, Tayali graduated in the sixties. He painted his *Village Bar* (late-1960s) in which he used a fauvist palette to articulate a narrative of activities in a bar including socialisation, alcoholism, drunkenness, etc (see plate 37). Laban Nyerinda was from Tanzania. He too graduated in the sixties. He engaged issues similar to Tayali's in his etching *In the Bar* (1964; plate 38) although he focussed on their potential to encourage promiscuity. By the mid-sixties urban bars like Suzana Night Club, which was located at Nakulabye (in Kampala) a kilometre away from Makerere University, were popular[215] as a space for socialisation. Traditionalists sharply criticised them for eroding African values. Although Nyirenda's bar is located in an anonymous space and Tayali's is based on a generic village scene, both works invoke a moralist critique on the breakdown in African values which could be traced from this critique — a critique Berlington Kaunda extended in his works.

Berlington Kaunda graduated from Makerere Art School in 1968. He, like Tayali, was a native of Zambia. During his stay in Uganda, he did his *Village Wedding* (mid-1960s; plate 39). He probably drew on wedding ceremonies in Zambia, or, possibly, he reconstructed Milton Obote's wedding of the mid-sixties, an event which attracted much attention. Whatever his sources, Kaunda depicted a popular, monetised and extravagant wedding ceremony, drawing on a European tradition stretching back to Breughel, and in which

[215] See caption in *Uganda Argus*, No. 3110, December 18, 1964.

there can be read a critique of European style excesses. He recalled Okot p'Bitek who, in his *Lak Tar* (White Teeth) (1953), critiqued the monetisation of marriages and its negative impact on the traditional institution of marriage — a critique we also see in Kaunda's *Village Jazz* (mid-1960s; plate 40). Kaunda's *Village Jazz* represented a scene which is unambiguously peri-urban and modernising. Women don post-traditional fashions, men wear London suits, although the quintessentially Ganda *kanzu* is popular, reminding us of a man dressed in *kanzu* we saw in Charles Ssekintu's *Cleansing the Temple*. Kaunda's village scenes were, unlike Kawalya's, but like Ntiro's, socialised, densely populated and contemporary. His villages, like Tayali's, raise a moral debate and do not carry the ideology we see in Ntiro's use of the village as a socio-political construct.

It must, however, be observed that implicit in Ntiro's subscription to the overarching socialist ideology was the artist's non-reflective depiction of the villagisation programme. For example, there is no sense of the weaknesses of African socialism within his work. The works I have accessed do not demonstrate sensitivity to the fact that socialist policies, as they were implemented by Nyerere and others, were inherently flawed. In the next chapter we will see how Obote failed miserably in Uganda. In Tanzania the policy failed due to corruption, international economic pressure, regional conflicts, huge government expenditure accompanied by massive borrowing and poor terms of trade. Also, Ntiro does not seem to be sensitive to the fact that the state meddled in the affairs of the villages through political and bureaucratic interferences designed, by the ruling party, to maintain itself at the helm of the one-party state[216]. Neither does his work acknowledge the possibility of dissent which could not be ignored by the proponents of the ideology of African socialism on which the villagisation programme, and Ntiro's villages, was premised. To demonstrate, Nyerere himself acknowledged that there was resistance to the villagisation programme in

[216] Until recently Tanzania was a single-party state under TANU. Today this has changed there is a growing multi-party democracy in the country.

Tanzania[217]. People resisted relocation into the officialised villages. Because of this resistance, the villagisation programme, which started off as a voluntary programme, had to be ruthlessly enforced leading to public resentment (Hodd 1988). These issues, among others, led to the collapse of Nyerere's villagisation programme itself in the 1970s: a collapse which is absent from Ntiro's work.

Ntiro's works are, however, significant. He demonstrates that by the late-1950s Uganda's modern art could not avoid the lure of embodying nationalist politics, and rhetoric, its effectiveness, ethicality and morality notwithstanding. It is this strand that his student and fellow Tanzanian Patricia Crole-Rees pursued, while combining three symbols: women, traditional pots and an improvised modern utensil called a petrol *debe* (which I will explain in a moment). Crole-Rees is also important for other reasons. First, she revised some of the views Trowell had in the late-thirties and her work, although absent in all available scholarship on Uganda's art history, is therefore probably one of the earliest, politically significant, works which manifest what is commonly referred to as the "post-Trowell era" (Kyeyune 2003, 27). Second, after Crole-Rees's work women became important political symbols in official art commissions (for example Uganda's *Independence Monument*) and the works of individual artists in Uganda (including Mutebi's and Sserunkuuma's). The politics in the symbolism of carrying a pot which remained ambiguous in Kawalya's *Returning Home* becomes clearer in this work before it will gain sharp relief in Bruno Sserunkuuma's "politico-pottery" as we will see in chapter eight. Against this backdrop I turn to her work next.

[217] For instance in 1967 Nyerere visited Zambia and addressed a conference for the ruling Zambian United National Independence Party. In his speech he conceded that dissent was inevitable and certainly it existed "in Tanzania on occasions" (Nyerere 1968, 331) a view which was not reflected in Ntiro's work.

Women, the Past and the Present as Symbols of Political Progress: Crole-Rees's *Maendeleo*

Like the other Tanzanians Sam Ntiro, Elimo Njau, and many others from the East African sub-region, Patricia Crole-Rees began her career in Uganda. She was a student at Makerere Art School in 1961 — probably one of the few exceptional women who obtained a Diploma in Fine Art from there by that time. Much of the work she did during her stay in Uganda is scattered or lost. But the available record suggests that she participated in a joint exhibition which celebrated Uganda's independence in 1962 in which she presented two works: *Hot Jazz* and *PWD*[218]. This would then suggest that the artist was interested in issues of popular culture (jazz), governance and service delivery (PWD).

Crole-Rees did the painting *Maendeleo* in 1961 which I want to discuss because of its political symbolism. The work was first exhibited during Uganda's much coveted Standard-Vacuum Calendar Competition[219] where it fetched the first prize. Thereafter the *Uganda Argus* published it leading to its extended popularity[220]. Although not visually satisfactory, the available visual archive of *Maendeleo* (plate 41) demonstrates that the artist engaged an expressionist style. Her work displays a sense of humour. Its title suggests that the work was premised on the theme of progress which pervaded post-colonial rhetoric in East Africa. (The Swahili word *maendeleo* means progress.)

Crole-Rees depicted a group of women carrying traditional and non-traditional containers from/to the well? She, unlike Ntiro, does not necessarily cast her women against a generic rural landscape. Although redeemed from the stereotype of women being rural, and thus arguably emancipative of the

[218] PWD is an acronym for the Public Works Department in Uganda. Introduced by the colonial establishment, PDW is still part of local administration structure.
[219] Started in the early-1950s, the Standard Vacuum Company (a company dealing in petroleum products) organised the competition at two levels. Competitions started at the national level where the best works were chosen to compete at a regional level. The competition continued, until the late-1960s, under petroleum giant ESSO.
[220] See "Makerere Student's Painting Wins" in *Uganda Argus,* No. 1963, April 15, 1961.

women as subjects in that sense, the painting is subtly problematic because it not only bears a sense of anonymity, it also denies women a sense of location, space and therefore identity.

There is more than one source for Crole-*Rees's Maendeleo*. For example the artist could have explored the theme of *Uhuru na Maendeleo* (literally translated freedom and progress) which was common to socialist rhetoric in her native Tanzania but also popular in Uganda and Kenya. Or the work may have been informed by *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization* (MYWO) an organisation formed by a group of women in 1952 to campaign for the improvement of the economic, social and political status of women in Kenya[221]. She could even have engaged with one of the resilient problems which socialism, in her native Tanzania, had failed to resolve i.e. the marginalisation of women. Nyerere himself presented a paper in September 1967, following the *Arusha Declaration,* in which he expressed concern over the marginalisation of women in the post-colonial Tanzania[222].

For Uganda's modern art however, Crole-Rees introduced the woman as an embodiment of political progress. Before Crole-Rees's painting, women symbolised domestication. For example Trowell had made a print named *Mother and Child* (1940s; plate 42) in which a local woman (probably a Munyankore from western Uganda) nurtures a healthy baby. But it is only after Crole-Rees's work that the image of a woman became a political icon.

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[221] This organisation is still active today. See the group's website: http://www.maendeleo-ya-wanawake.org/login.htm (accessed June 30, 2006).

[222] Nyerere wrote that:

> …although we try to hide the fact, and despite the exaggeration which our critics have frequently indulged in, it is true that the women in traditional society were regarded as having a place in the community which was not only different, but was also to some extent inferior. It is impossible to deny that the women did, and still do, more than their fair share of the work in the fields and in the homes. By virtue of their sex they suffered from inequalities which had nothing to do with their contribution to the family welfare. Although it is wrong to suggest that they have always been an oppressed group, it is true that within traditional society ill-treatment and enforced subservience could be their lot (Nyerere 1967, 339).

Nyerere conceded that this position was untenable in a socialist republic which claimed to grant equality for all; he called for an immediate end to marginalisation of women. This for Nyerere was the way to "full and quick progress" (ibid) in Tanzania.

In addition to the woman, Crole-Rees [re]deployed the *debe* and the pot. This needs further elaboration. Trowell in 1938 observed that good traditional art was passing away. She argued that "the traditional baskets and the pots are getting fewer because the petrol *debbe* [sic] is driving them away" (Trowell, 1938, 174). In "petrol *debbe*" Trowell was referring to the aluminium tin in which gasoline was imported into East Africa during much of the twentieth-century. This tin was locally called the "*debe*". *Debe* is a Swahili word which refers to measurement of 18.184 litres and the aluminium tin which can hold such a capacity. After using up its contents, Ugandans often appropriated the *debe* to many usages.

Thus there is some truth in Trowell's observation. The *debe* had a significant presence as a household utensil in Uganda (and across the entire third world) during most of the last century. It replaced some traditional utensils. For Trowell the petrol *debe* replaced the traditional pot and basket as a household container. However, many Ugandans resident in the peri-urban areas, who could not afford iron sheets, flattened it into roofing material, doors and windows. Also in the rural areas "debe-roofed" (and iron-roofed) houses existed alongside the traditional grass-thatched huts. The popularity of the *debe* as a household utensil waned in the late-1970s when the plastic jerry can[223] [dis/re]placed the *debe* as the preferred container in which liquid products were imported into the country and as a household container.

Now, if Trowell was concerned that the pot had lost ground, Crole-Rees thought otherwise. Coming twenty-three years after Trowell's paper, and three years after Trowell's retirement, Crole-Rees's work suggests that the traditional pot had survived to coexist with the *debe.* Of the four women in her painting, only the second last woman carries the *debe*. Thus Crole-Rees

[223] In the broad sense the jerry can refers to water containers which were initially used in World War II by the Allied forces. In Uganda, however, it refers to plastic containers which, like the *debe,* are used to import petroleum and industrial liquid materials among other things. The jerry can has not had as wide an application as the *debe.* However, like the *debe* before it, the jerry can has maintained pressure on traditional pottery. For example in late-seventies such pressure prompted the local press to echo Trowell's fears and suggest that traditional pottery was under threat. See: Katumba Rebecca, "Is Local Pottery a Dying Craft in Uganda?" in *Voice of Uganda*, October 24, 1977.

proposes the resilience of traditional pottery in the face of modernity as if to confirm her position in the post-Trowellian era.

Unlike Maloba, Ssekintu, Njau, Ntiro and other artists who were taught directly by Trowell, Crole-Rees was taught under new regimes — mainly under Jonathan Kingdon and Cecil Todd (and I will come back to Todd in a moment). Although he initially instructed graphic arts, when Ntiro left Makerere Art School, Jonathan Kingdon took over painting. Kingdon ardently supported expressionist styles. He (more than Todd) may have encouraged Crole-Rees's expressionism. Secondly, Kingdon did work to celebrate the independence era; his contribution to Uganda's political art can therefore not be overlooked. In the next section I consider Jonathan Kingdon's work and some of his political views.

Jonathan Kingdon: Views, Art and Politics

Kingdon was born in Tanganyika (currently Tanzania) in 1935. Although he was British and a son of a colonial expatriate, Kingdon took his early education in Tanganyika before proceeding to England where he pursued his secondary and college education. He developed a strong sense of African identity. For example, in an interview with George Kyeyune, Kingdon recently argued that:

> "My attitudes have always been of an African, I used to be surprised of my colour because I was surrounded entirely by African children. The children I played with were all Africans. It was a great element. I spoke Swahili at the same time as I spoke English" (Kingdon, interview by Kyeyune, 2002).

It is with this polyglot sense, commitment to African identity, and patriotism, that Kingdon painted his *Freedom March* (1963).

In *Freedom March* (1963; plate 43) Kingdon paints a crowd of people in a procession. Done in 1963, his *Freedom March* coincided with the independence of Kenya. But the painting does not make direct reference to any political symbol which would identify it with any of the three East African countries. Rather, the artist makes reference to the theme and political euphoria of the sixties. He depicts a group of people marching forward

carrying a banner with the inscription *UHURU* (meaning national independence). In front of the procession is a youth waving a triumphal (improvised) symbol. He is dressed in long white robe which covers most of his body — it is probably a Ganda *Kanzu* or any of its Arabic/Swahili equivalents. That the youth leader is dressed in white allows him to stand out from the crowd and conspicuously assume his leadership role. Arguably then the youth represents the new breed of leaders — the "elite-boys" — who inherited the mantle of power at the time of independence.

Kingdon's archive which remained in Uganda suggests that by the 1960s he used an expressionist style in his work. He paid limited attention to detail as he presents silhouetted figures submerged in a space and fused into each other. This is because he contended that it was the expression of an idea, rather than subservience to conventions and strict academism, which was important in artistic discourse. He sharply criticised artists who conformed to established academism and conventions. For Kingdon artists who engage academism pre-empt public reaction[224]. This was disastrous, Kingdon argued[225]. The best option was to make art as an expression of experience as opposed to being a representation of reality. As such he cynically rejected socialist realism. Socialist realism was for Kingdon "clumsy (and as doomed) as brontosaurus"[226] He preferred an expressionist visual vocabulary and subjective emotion. This is evident in his *Freedom March* and also in his *Sky Over Rwenzori* (1961; plate 44) which echoed European fascination and curiosity with the Rwenzori Mountains[227] although it has a vivid, jarring, dynamic force which can be traced back to the Expressionist Movement. For example it is close to Vincent Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (1889).

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[224] See: Kingdon Jonathan, "Reflections" in *Transition*, No. 6/7 (Oct., 1962), 36-37.
[225] See: Kingdon, *Transition*, 1962.
[226] A brontosaurus was an herbivorous dinosaur of the Jurassic period which had a small head, long neck and tail.
[227] I have brought to the fore European curiosity in the Rwenzori and how such curiosity informed European penetration of the East African interior. But in the late-1950s there was a curious debate on the Rwenzori in which Kingdon's painting seems to be located. For instance there was a discussion on whether one could stand on the Elgon Mountains on Uganda's Eastern border and see the Rwenzori Mountains on the Western border. See: Osmaston H. A. "Distant Views of Ruwenzori and Elgon", in Lawrence J. C. D., Morris F. & Thomas H. B eds, *The Uganda Journal: The Journal of the Uganda Society*, Vol. 23, No.2 (Sept., 1959): 196.

Kingdon's political sculpture was also expressionist as we see in his *Bishop Trevor Huddleston* (1966; plate 45). Huddleston was an activist honoured and respected for his anti-Apartheid stance. In South Africa Huddleston was nicknamed *Makhalipile* (literally meaning the one who is courageous). In 1955 he, together with Albert Luthuli and Yusuf Dadoo, was the first to receive the revered title of *Isitwalandwe* (meaning "the one who wears the plumes of the rare bird"). The African National Congress (ANC) bestows the title of *Isitwalandwe* "only on the bravest warriors [i.e.] on those who distinguished themselves in the eyes of all the people [as having] exceptional qualities of leadership and heroism."[228] Because of his outspoken views however, Huddleston attracted the wrath of the Apartheid regime. He was expelled from South Africa. He visited Uganda in the mid-1960s, during which visit Kingdon made this sculpture. Kingdon's *Bishop Trevor Huddleston* is thus an embodiment of the artist's views against Apartheid and his respect for Huddleston's devotion to the anti-Apartheid struggle.

Standing in stark contrast with Kingdon was Cecil Todd. Todd insisted on strict academicism. Because he made important political symbols for Uganda's post-colonial nation-state his work and views merit a closer analysis. I turn to him in the next section.

Cecil Todd: Art, Pedagogy and Political Symbol[ism]s

In 1959 Cecil Todd replaced Ntiro as the head of the Makerere Art School. A native of Scotland and a graduate of the Royal College, Todd came to Uganda from South Africa where he had taught art at Rhodes University. Unlike Trowell's, many of Todd's lectures were never published: ideas on his pedagogy and political activities/activism remain scattered. But we learn from the press that like Trowell Todd engaged the public directly through lectures. Also he, like Trowell and John Willings[229], worked with theatre. For example

[228] See: "Isitwalandwe/Seaparankoe: The Highest Award of Honour" at http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/awards/index.html (accessed June 29, 2006).

[229] John Willings joined the teaching staff in 1950s. He taught painting before he joined the English Department and participated in theatre activities.

in 1959 he designed costumes for a performance of Shakespeare's *Othello*[230] by the Makerere Players. Reviews in the press indicate that Todd's costumes received accolades[231]. Without other opinions it remains unclear why this was so. One can however speculate that the public lecture he gave on the "artistic, historical social and psychological aspects of the art of costume"[232] clarified to the public, and press, the issues behind the costumes he designed and boosted their popularity.

Todd also continued to lecture to, and critique work done by, members of the Uganda Art Club (UAC) which Trowell started in the early-1950s. As was the case under Trowell, members of the UAC used the School's facilities over the weekends before they moved to other premises in the 1960s. Although this cannot be blamed on Todd, evidence suggests that, unlike under Trowell, under Todd UAC's activities were restricted to drawing, painting and modelling although films were occasionally included[233]. Disciplines like print-making, pottery, etc, which Trowell encouraged alongside modelling and painting were excluded from the list of the clubs activities. However UAC continued to mount competitive exhibitions. Todd and other instructors at the Art School took part in such exhibitions as UAC tapped into the wider international visual conversations which unfolded in spaces like the Uganda Museum, the National Theatre and the Nommo Gallery. This international conversation intensified starting in the late-fifties: artists from Europe, Asia and America exhibited in Uganda; Embassies like the French Embassy through its Alliance Française; the American Embassy through its United States Information Service and the British Embassy through the British Council, became active spaces for cultural discourse. This interaction continued though the sixties until Amin radically terminated it in the seventies plunging the country into an isolation which lasted until 1986 when Museveni took power and pronounced a "New Uganda".

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[230] See: "Makerere Players to Stage Othello" in the *Uganda Argus,* No. 1502, October 23, 1959.
[231] See: "Othello Presented by Makerere Players" in the *Uganda Argus,* No. December 12, 1959.
[232] This excerpt was cited in *Uganda Argus*, No. 1533, November 28, 1959.
[233] Because it was an elite club of artists and enthusiasts, UAC regularly advertised its activities and events in the press. For more on its itinerary see *Uganda Herald* published in the fifties and *Uganda Argus* published in the sixties.

The press also indicated that in the early-1960s Todd gave a series of "five [public] lectures on Art in Africa — contemporary painting"[234] to the Uganda Society. Apart from brief references in the *Uganda Argus*, the content of his lectures have not survived. There should be no doubt, however, that the lectures left a profound impression on Todd's audience. Maloba recently reminisced that Todd impressed his audience with a command of English and knowledge of the subject and that he had an impressive sense of humour[235].

Todd's humour also took visual expression. For example his *Peep Show* (1985; plate 46) has a peep-hole with an eye peering at the viewer which gives the work a sense of humour because it reverses the normal direction of the gaze in a peep-show. Todd did his *Peep Show* (1985), a year before he died and more than a decade after he left Uganda[236]. It is a collage of varied objects — including a horse-shoe, an old photograph of a horse and a key — pasted on a grained board. Suggestions have been made that these are objects and memoirs which were of interest to Todd in the last stage of his life[237]. Without access to more information it becomes hard to validate these claims. But there is something else intriguing about this collage as an indicator of Todd's interests, namely: it carries a scrap of paper with a detail from the George Stubbs painting, *Hambletonian Rubbing Down* (1800; plate 47). George Stubbs's work can be argued to follow the strict academicism of the late 18th Century. Todd's reference to George Stubbs's work in many ways demonstrates the artist's lingering interest in strict academicism until his last days. And this is the academicism he intended to be the basis for the development of contemporary art in Uganda.

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[234] See: "Argus Diary" in the *Uganda Argus*, No. 1911, February 14, 1961.
[235] Maloba Gregory, interviewed by George Kyeyune, Eldoret, Kenya, 2001.
[236] Todd left Uganda for Nigeria and he stayed there in 1973-76. Thereafter he retired in England where he died in 1986. There is however limited information available on Todd's activities after he left Makerere. I got this work and information from the internet. For more on this work see: http://www.michaelstevenson.com/catalogues/2003_feb/item11c.htm (accessed June 12, 2006).
[237] See: http://www.michaelstevenson.com/catalogues/2003_feb/item11c.htm (accessed June 12, 2006).

Some of Todd's students are still around and they have influenced the development of Uganda's modern art. They also show profound respect for him. Although his colleagues referred to him as Sweeny (a nickname given to him after the Victorian popular fiction *Sweeny Todd the Barber*), to his students he is "the Professor". His students argue, and scholars agree (see Sanyal 2000; Kyeyune 2003), that Todd's pedagogy emphasised strict academicism. There are suggestions that Todd's insistence on strict academism, more than anything else, distanced his regime (and pedagogy?) from that of Trowell (and Ntiro's) before him (Kyeyune 2003). This claim can be validated. I have already posited that Trowell did not enforce a strict academic dogma and that her students moved in diverse directions. Neither is there evidence to suggest that Maloba, Kingdon and Ntiro (or indeed the other members of staff) insisted on strict academicism. Todd was rigid though. He insisted that his students reflect principles of art and accurate drawing. Mohammed Kamulegeya joined the Art School during 1967-1970. His case may be isolated; it could not be generalised on all students Todd taught between 1959 and 1971 when he left Uganda for West Africa. Yet it is indicative of how strict Todd was.

Kamulegeya lacked the skills for good draughtsmanship; he did not learn them and he did not enjoy the study of anatomy. Rather than developing a neo-classical or naturalistic style, which Todd preferred, the artist resorted to modernist vocabulary. He drew his themes and subjects from landscapes, and contemporary life, as he struggled with the depiction of human form. He engaged an expressive and simplified style — for example his *Walking People* (1969; plate 48). Alternatively, he avoided the human figure altogether and invested his energy in drawing traditional and geometric patterns as it is evident in his *I will Keep you Safe* (1970; plate 49) to create abstract works, reminiscent of those by Paul Klee. But he continued to apply the theories of colour, emphasised by Todd, in his modernist palette.

But Todd would not allow him to get away with it. For example Uganda's traditional objects are geometric but their shapes are not mathematical

because the traditional artisans who make them approximate rather than engage accurate measurements. Kamulegeya intended to take up this character but mainly as a cover up for his failure to draw accurately (Kyeyune 2003). Jonathan Kingdon agreed at least with the fact that traditional objects are not mathematical and therefore their representation cannot be subjected to strict measurement and rigid perfection. Todd insisted. As a compromise, Kamulegeya did two murals: in one mural he followed Todd's rigid geometry; in the other he did not emphasise accurateness. Kyeyune (2003) quotes the artist as saying that the second mural was considered more successful although without access to the works, and further opinions, it becomes hard to validate the artist's claim.

Todd maintained strict academicism in his own work too. In his *De Bunsen* (1962; plate 50) Todd demonstrated his interest in classical academism[238]: total control of the painting medium, technical refinement, the centrality of the human figure, vitality, character and personality. These qualities are demonstrably similar in both Stubbs's *Self Portrait* (1781; plate 51) and Todd's *De Bunsen* although the latter painting also reminds us of the academism in Mannerism and Surrealism. Todd depicted a bespectacled de Bunsen enrobed in red academic gowns posed next to an open window in a space painted in rich greens. He draws the curtains from the window to allow us to see the tower of Makerere University's neo-Georgian administration building — also called the Main Building — set against a cloudy sky. This association between Makerere University's ivory tower and de Bunsen, allows the painting to embody de Bunsen's accomplishments[239]; it elicits his

[238] As it is applied in discourses on art, music and poetry the term 'academism' refers to "a reliance on conventional artistic techniques or an emphasis on the formal aspects of an art form...". This is the context in which I have used this term here and elsewhere in this thesis. Also see: The Microsoft Encarta Dictionary available in software and also via internet at: http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_1861583173/academicism.html, (accessed on May 19, 2008).

[239] Bernard de Bunsen was an accomplished Education professor. I have already indicated that he was part of the negotiations in which Makerere entered the Special Relations Scheme with the University of London and that unlike his immediate predecessor Lamont, he supported Trowell's case for the Art School to remain in Makerere College (see p.77 above). I also indicated earlier that de Bunsen served as Makerere College's principal in the late-1940s. He held this post until 1964 when Yusuf Kironde Lule succeeded him to become the first African to head the institution. By the time Todd painted his portrait, de Bunsen was taking a new post as Vice Chancellor of the newly created University of East Africa. The University of East Africa was created in 1961 following the termination of the Special

contribution to the development of higher education in Makerere and East Africa. We see something similar in Margaret Macpherson's *They Build for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College 1922-1962* (1964). Like Todd before her, Macpherson presented a photograph of de Bunsen, cast against the Main Building, in order to celebrate his accomplishments and contribution to higher education in the region.

Todd was a political artist too. He used his skill and professionalism to create political icons and iconographies to embody Uganda's post-colonial statehood. To celebrate Uganda's independence in 1962, Todd designed ceremonial banners which were placed on all major roads leading to and out of Kampala in 1962. There is evidence in the *Uganda Argus,* of October 11 1962, to confirm that Todd gave his banners a sense of local identity: he depicted representations of Uganda's pre-colonial and colonial political institutions (see plate 52).

Todd also created the national *Coat of Arms of Uganda* (plate 53). It is elaborate; its symbolism draws from important aspects of Uganda's geographical, political, economic and traditional aspects of life. It is adorned with three layers of imagery: Uganda's drainage system (rivers and lakes) on top, the sun celebrating Uganda's location at the equator in the middle, and the drum representing Uganda's traditional character at the bottom. It has a shield placed centrally against two intersecting spears which symbolises nationalism and patriotism. The shield is flanked on the left by an animal — the Uganda Kob (*Adenota kob Thomasi*) which represents the country's diverse wildlife. On the right the shield is flanked by the Crested Crane (*Balearica Regulorum Gibbericeps*) Uganda's national bird. Below the Kob, shield and Crested Crane is a triangular green mound, representing Uganda's fertile land, interrupted by the river Nile (the source of Uganda's hydro-electricity and, until recently, mainstay of the country's industrial

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Relations Scheme in which Makerere had been linked to the University of London since 1949. It consisted of three upgraded institutions all of them elevated to the level of a University: Makerere University (in Kampala, Uganda), Royal College (in Nairobi, Kenya) and the University College (in Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania).

sector). On the left of the river Uganda's coffee is depicted and on its right there is cotton. The two crops represent Uganda's agricultural economy; they were major sources of Uganda's foreign earnings until recently. Finally at the bottom is the national motto: "for God and my country".

While Todd's portraits show his commitment to conservative neo-classical styles, his *Coat of Arms of Uganda* elicits a vocabulary linked to modernist abstraction which he fully explored in some of his works. His *Vertebrates and Invertebrates* (1961; plate 54) can be cited here: two mosaic panels decorating one of the buildings bordering Makerere University's Faculty of Science quadrangle. These works are reminiscent of Wassily Kandinsky's and Paul Klee's works. They represent varied zoological and botanical aspects — a reference to some of the disciplines taught in the Faculty of Science. His *Exchange and Barter* (1961; plate 55a and 55b) is also unequivocally modernist in its two-dimensional plane, abstraction of forms and non-naturalistic use of colour. It is located at the Tropical Africa Bank, in the centre of Kampala. Arranged on square and rectangular panels to constitute a larger panel, Todd used ceramic mosaics and terrazzo to visualise the different currencies which Ugandans had used since their initial contact with the Arabs. He included cowry shells, rupees, shillings, pound sterling, US dollars, *et cetera,* in the motif. He recalled the discussion on the evolution of Uganda's monetary policy which informed the exhibition — called *The Story of East Africa's Money* (1959)[240] — which Merrick Posnasky (as Director of the Uganda Museum) curated in November 1959. In the mid-sixties the evolution of Uganda's monetary policy culminated in the opening the country's central bank — the Bank of Uganda. Todd designed the banks corporate logo which he also translated into a modernist circular panel. Made out of ceramic mosaics and mounted on a concrete diamond-shaped pedestal in front of the bank, the work celebrates issues of hard work and monetary policy.

[240] See: "Argus Diary" in *Uganda Argus*, No. 1522, November 11, 1959.

In addition to the nationalist symbols he designed, Todd curated nationalist exhibitions which celebrated the dawn of independence in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. For instance, in 1961 Todd organised an exhibition to commemorate the independence of Tanzania. In 1962 he organised the *African Art Exhibition to Celebrate the Independence of Uganda* (1962). The exhibition had a continental and multiracial representation. Elimo Njau, Sam Ntiro, Crole-Rees and a host of other artists from Congo[241], Ethiopia[242], Ghana[243], Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria[244], South Africa[245], Sudan[246], Tanganyika, Uganda, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe[247] presented works. In 1963 Todd organised another exhibition to commemorate the independence of Kenya.

During the 1962 show to mark Uganda's independence, a selection of Africa's classical art was presented alongside many contemporary artworks (paintings in oil and tempera, drawings and water colour, lithographs, lino prints, etching, and sculptures). This exhibition in a way recalled Trowell's exhibitions of the late-thirties and forties, although Todd's agenda was different and problematical as is reflected in the essay which he contributed to the catalogue. Todd wrote that:

> This exhibition of African Art has been assembled and exhibited to mark the great occasion of attainment of the Independence of Uganda, and to show, in some measure, the artistic achievement of African people both in the past and the present…[it] represents a sphere of that human activity which is of the present and demonstrates the rich promise for the future (Todd 1962, 3).

In spite of his stated sensitivity to African art, Todd's gesture is objectionable because elsewhere in the same essay Todd also argued that the works on show constituted a "language that rises above national and racial limitations" (ibid). This assertion suggests, and this is evident elsewhere in his essay, that Todd believed in universal aesthetics and sought to impose this western-

[241] Okola, Olissa, and Zigoma represented Congo
[242] Skunder Boghosian represented Ethiopia.
[243] Ghana was represented by Vincent Kofi.
[244] Demas Nwoko and Uche Okeke from Nigeria two artists presented their work.
[245] The following artists came from South Africa: Amos Langdown, Christopher Chabuka, Gerard Sekoto, Maurice Louis and Peter Clarke.
[246] Tag Ahmed and Hassan el Hadi represented Sudan.
[247] C. Chabula, C. Fernando, J. Hlatywayo, J. Kekana, Mukorombogwa, K. Sambo and C. Sinyeo represented Zimbabwe.

oriented ideology on Uganda's contemporary art. Unlike Trowell he had limited respect for artefacts which did not fit in his universalised aesthetic paradigm. To confirm this, he omitted East Africa's rich array of crafts from the exhibition in contrast to Trowell's continued insistence on their presence (see chapter three). Thus, unlike Trowell, in practice Todd judged African art harshly, and from a standpoint firmly grounded in Western modernity and cultural imperialism. This partly explains the attitude he had towards Kamulegeya's murals and his insistence on Western academism.

In his essay Todd raised another issue which I need to probe because of its relevance to Uganda's *Independence Monument.* Todd persuaded his audience to accept that art embodies the aspirations — which he also called the "progress and advancement" (ibid) — of the people. This claim (which by the way contradicts his claim for universality) is important to my discussion because, while we know less about the other works on show, we at least know that during the *African Art Exhibition to Celebrate the Independence of Uganda* exhibition Gregory Maloba presented what Todd catalogued as the "sketch for the Independence Monument"[248]. Maloba's monument celebrates Uganda's post-colonial nation-building and statehood. As Todd rightly observed in the press, it is an embodiment of Uganda's "political progress and advancement", a "lasting symbol of the emergence of the new Uganda"[249]. Milton Obote, Uganda's first Premier, agreed with Todd's claims for the national monument. In his address to a well-attended ceremony marking the unveiling of the *Independence Monument* (1962; plate 56), Obote argued that the monument was "of great significance to Uganda" and that it was a permanent embodiment for the "nation's aspirations". He also argued that "in symbolic form, it portrays the past, present and future of the human race"[250].

[248] See: *African Art: An Exhibition to Celebrate the Independence of Uganda* (Makerere College: 1962), 10.
[249] See Todd's comments in: *Independence Supplement,* in *Uganda Argus,* October 1, 1962.
[250] See: Obote Milton, *Uganda Argus*, November 17, 1962.

Todd's and Obote's, claims for the political significance of the *Independence Monument* can be validated. Together with the *National Flag* (designed by Grace Ibingira), *National Anthem* (composed by George Wilberforce Kakoma) and the *Coat of Arms of Uganda* (designed by Todd), the *Independence Monument* marked the dawn of Uganda's nationhood; it symbolises national pride. Obote's claims about the symbolism of the monument, however, invite closer analysis. They beg the question, namely: How did Maloba engage past and contemporary aesthetic experiences in order to produce a sculptural allegory which embodied Uganda's post-colonial aspirations? In the next section I engage this question.

Uganda's *Independence Monument:* A Fusion of Experiences

Initially called the *Freedom Statue*[251] Uganda's *Independence Monument* is located next to the Jubilee Park in the centre of Kampala. The artist, Gregory Maloba, depicted an African mother, as a central figure, supporting a boy child in her arms and raising him aloft. The mother is draped in stylised traditional Ugandan fashion while the naked boy appears ecstatic — a vivid representation of the independence moment and euphoria of the early-sixties. Literally read, the mother-child image represents the birth of a new nation; it suited Uganda's independence ideal. In Enwonwu's words, it represents "the artist's function and duty to [the] country as an interpreter of the group['s] political ideology"[252]. However, because the country has no tradition of figurative 'politico-art', the artist drew on varied local and non-local references which must be traced and explained in order for us to fully comprehend the complex past and contemporary aesthetic experiences which Maloba engaged in order to produce an icon which embodied the country's aspirations.

Let me begin by noting that the national monument is symbolically different from other political symbols in Uganda which the (colonial and post-colonial) state funded. For instance it is not like the large wooden screen at Uganda's

[251] See: "Statue (after a Hitch) is Unveiled: Uganda's Freedom Statue" in the *Uganda Argus,* November 17, 1962.
[252] Enwonwu Ben, *The Problems of the African Artist Today,* 1956.

parliament which was commissioned during 1959-1960[253] to celebrate the birth of Uganda's parliamentary democracy. Done by Mayo the screen represents Uganda's politics using ecological symbols; it is thematically close to Todd's *Coat of Arms of Uganda*. The *Independence Monument* is also more representational than other (bourgeois) monuments which the state funded at the time. For example the *Independence Pavilion* (1962) is an architectural space which was added to the Uganda Museum to celebrate Uganda's quest for a strong industrial base. The pavilion is non-representational; it is close to the *Independence Arch* (1963). The arch (and I will refer to it again in a moment) was added to the entrance to the parliament in 1963; its political resonances can be traced back to the Western Triumphal Arches.

Uganda's *Independence Monument* is also distant from other monuments in the East African region. It is not like Tanzania's *Uhuru Monument* (1961) which is a towering, monolithic, architectural structure, with a torch mounted on its top, recalling Ethiopia's ancient obelisks. It is also not like Kenya's *Independence Monument* (1963) located in the Central Park in Nairobi. Although more representational and allegorical, Kenya's statue is as bourgeois as Tanzania's. It depicts a hand holding a torch(?) growing out of a complex allegorical form. The whole composition rests atop a piece of architecture decorated with additional symbolic motifs representing varied aspects from Kenya's society, geography and history. The reference to the torch in both Tanzania's and Kenya's monuments gestures back to America's *Statue of Liberty* which carries a torch symbolising political emancipation, liberty and freedom. I, however, must admit that Kenya's and Tanzania's monuments are distant from their American referent in as far as they do not employ the symbolism of a woman which we confront in the *Statue of Liberty* and Uganda's national icon.

[253] See: "Giant Wood-carving Took 18 Months to Make; Machines did the Work of the Craftsmen", in *Uganda Argus* No. 1785, September 19, 1960.

In order to make the monument, Maloba recalled some modernist experiences. His work carries resonances from Epstein's or Moore's works[254]. In 1958 Jacob Epstein completed his mother and child which is part of the Trade Union War Memorial located at the Trades Union Congress's Congress House in London. The work was a memorial to the trade unionists who lost their lives during World War I and World War II. Epstein confronts us with a lone mother holding a naked body of a soldier to invoke a sense of loss. Maloba's reference to the allegory of mother, child and nudity in a political symbol can be traced from Epstein's work, although Maloba's ecstatic child stands in sharp contrast to Epstein's motionless child. Henry Moore prodigiously engaged the symbolism of mother and child in etchings and sculptures in which he socialised and domesticated the woman. The available record in the press indicates that Henry Moore's work including his *Mother and Child* and *Family Group* were exhibited at the Uganda Museum from December 12, 1958, to January 3, 1959[255]. Maloba's passive, domesticated mother can be traced back to Moore's work although the stylisation is unambiguously Maloba's own.

Also, there are obvious formal and stylistic similarities between Lombe's work and Maloba's *Independence Monument.* Like Tayali and Kaunda, Lombe was a native of Zambia. He was Maloba's student in the late-fifties. He explored stylisation and strict angularity echoing sculptural traditions from Sudan and West Africa. He did works like *Masai Warrior* (late-1950s; plate 57), *Deprivation* (late-1950s; plate 58) and *Aspiration* (late-1950s) in which he commented on African life. His *Aspiration* merits further analysis because, like Maloba, Sserunkuuma has done work whose resonances can be traced to it. I will therefore refer to it again in chapter eight.

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[254] Maloba may also have seen Epstein's and Moore's work during his stay in Europe in the forties. But during the late 1950s, the press in Uganda published images of Epstein's and Moore's works depicting the mother and child symbolism which may have been of interest to Maloba. See: *Uganda Argus*, No. 1014, April 1, 1958. Also see: Alley Roland, "A Miner's Son among the Great" in the *Uganda Argus* No. 1234, December 13, 1958.

[255] See: "Henry Moore Exhibition" in the *Uganda Argus* December 15, 1958;

Located at the Makerere Art School premises, *Aspiration* (plate 59) represents a large androgynous figure, possibly a parent figure, supporting two smaller, but agile standing figures. They have conical heads. As if to capture the profound political expectations which marked the fifties, Lombe's agile figures raise their arms as they vivaciously reach upwards into space. They gesture back to the Nommo statues among the Dogon with their stylised bodies and raised arms[256]. Maloba himself wrote about *Aspiration* and suggested it resonated Western (probably Moore's) styles, "Sudanese Bambara and Dogon work" (Maloba 1962, 34). Maloba's argument is plausible. Since Lombe joined the Art School in the mid-fifties, we can trace Lombe's interest in African sculpture back to Trowell's teaching and literature. Then too, although he did not make reference to his work, it is obvious that Maloba's monument, like Lombe's *Aspirations,* also carries formal and stylistic values (as Maloba called them) from Bambara, Dogon and Western experiences thus confirming the formal and stylistic link's between Lombe's and Maloba's work.

It can also be argued that Maloba's *Independence Monument* unambiguously draws on local traditions of child-nurturing. I have already alluded to Trowell's *Mother and Child* as one of the earliest expressions of the symbolism of child-nurturing in Uganda's modern art. Maloba was aware of Trowell's work. But unlike Trowell, and rather like Crole-Rees, he explored the theme of womanhood (and motherhood) to construct a sculptural form which embodied the political aspirations of Ugandans.

Maloba's work also depicts a woman draped in flowing robes. This brings his work close to an advertisement, for the textile company called Nippon Rayon Co. Ltd, which was circulated in the *Uganda Argus* at the time of independence. The advertisement showed a woman wrapped in a traditional Ganda *busuuti* (plate 60) to assert notions of African identity — a dominant theme at the time of independence. Maloba seems to explore a similar

[256] And this point is made in: Sanyal Sunanda, "Imaging art, Making History: Two Generations of Makerere University" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2000): 121.

strategy in order to assert the Ugandan-ness of the monument (a strategy he had also engaged in his earlier works *Crib* and *The Beggar*). Unlike his earlier works and the ad however, his use of garment on the monument creates a sense of a mother being wrapped in burial cloth. This literally, and poignantly, reflects the theme of the day which emphasised the "birth" of a new era and the "death" of colonialism.

The point I am advancing here is that in the absence of traditional figurative court art, or what Trowell on many occasions referred to as "man-regarding art" (see Trowell 1954; Trowell 1970; Trowell & Nevermann 1979), Maloba drew from varied Western resources to construct the national monument. To identify his form with the aura of independence marked by Africanist, nationalistic and patriotic fervour, and affirm (what Enwonwu called) the political function of his form and bring what Wassily Kandinsky called the nationalist element to the fore, Maloba drew on African and Ganda traditional ideas. And, reading from Obote's comments, and the position the monument occupies as an embodiment of the collective psyche, it can be argued that Maloba scored what Trowell (1938) would call "signal success".

However, despite his success, it is important to admit that Maloba, like many other artists whose work shaped (and was shaped by) the independence celebrations, ignored certain political, economic and social challenges which confronted Uganda's post-colonial statehood. In the next section I expound on this claim. Intrinsically I do two things: First, I demonstrate that these challenges threatened the very nationalism and patriotism which was celebrated in 1962 and which Maloba, and the other artists, embodied in their work. They informed the collapse of the state. Second, I assert that the presence of these challenges, and the failure of post-colonial leaders to resolve them, shaped the radical history which altered the pattern of Uganda's political art from that of celebrating the post-colonial nation-state to that of assailing bad governance. By engaging in this debate I lay the stage on which chapters six, seven and eight will unfold.

Challenges of Uganda's Post-colonial statehood: Rivalries, Egos and Failures

Although they were temporarily suspended in 1962, Uganda's pre-colonial inter-ethnic rivalries could not be wished away; neither could they be overwritten by the nation-state. These problems were not new: they pre-dated colonialism although the British escalated them. For example, rivalry between the kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro (to which I referred in chapter two) has a long history. However, in the 1890s the British escalated the tension between the two kingdoms when they carved territories out of Bunyoro (the so-called "lost counties") and annexed them to Buganda. This was done to punish Bunyoro for her intransigence and to reward Buganda for her loyalty and support during the campaigns through which the rebellious Bunyoro kingdom was forcefully integrated into the British Protectorate. Anarchy ensured during the sixties as the Banyoro (people of the Bunyoro kingdom) agitated for the return of their territories. There were also the recurrent problems between the Toro Kingdom and the Bamba-Bakonzo nationalists. The British escalated tensions between these two when they integrated the Bamba-Bakonzo into the Toro kingdom during the early-twentieth-century. The Bamba-Bakonzo were bitter[257]; in 1962 they threatened to secede and form a separate republic[258].

Unfortunately the British left these problems unresolved. Critics (and in chapter eight we will see Bruno Sserunkuuma adopting a similar stance) argue that this was because "by 1961 the British were more anxious to quit Uganda than to sort out the mess which they had created" (Mugaju 1999, 14). But neither was Obote's government able to resolve these politically explosive issues. Instead it exploited them to ensure its stranglehold on power.

The other challenge was economic. For example one J. A. B. Ongula argued that:

[257] See: "Trouble again in Bwamba" in the *Uganda Argus*, November 2, 1962.
[258] See: "We Still Aim to Secede" in the *Uganda Argus*, November 17, 1962.

> Now that we have…become independent, we must remind ourselves that this achievement of political freedom would not complete its objectives unless we struggle hard to establish ourselves financially and otherwise self-supporting…the whole country will have to be mobilised to work wholeheartedly to put this nation in the position to launch an irreversible attack on poverty and disease[259]

Ongula's comment is valid in the sense that since independence Uganda has struggled to cope with the mounting challenges of "fighting ignorance, disease and poverty" (Jørgensen 1981, 214). As a result, as we learn from Ongula, calls to attend to the economic problems which faced the new nation, and the inevitable social problems they engenderred, became louder.

Also, there was scepticism over the independence gained from colonial Britain. It is true that Kwame Nkrumah had proclaimed that the emancipation of Africans rested in the achievement of political independence. As Ghana's first post-colonial President, Nkrumah coined the following theme: "seek ye first the political kingdom, and everything else shall be added on to it". However, as we read from Nyerere's foreword to Museveni's *What is Africa's Problem?*

> The newly independent states were poor, linked to an international trading and financial system in which they were more of victims than participants, and underdeveloped economically… (Nyerere in Museveni 1991, 11).

Granted that some scholars have reduced arguments, like Nyerere's, to a mere Leninist "fashionable label" (Crozier 1964, 107) propagated, through socialist rhetoric, to unjustly bash capitalism. However, Nyerere's contention is important. It helps to explain why Uganda's postcolonial economy (like many others) failed to take off and instead the country became dependent of foreign aid, imports, bilateral and multi-lateral borrowing. As we learn from Nyerere the end of colonialism did not translate into access to world markets and wealth: independence was not tantamount to economic emancipation. On the contrary, Africans were disenfranchised due to poor terms of trade; they were pushed to the margins of global capitalism where they remained

[259] See: Ongula J. A. B. "After Uhuru", in Uganda Argus, No. 2412, September 22, 1962.

pathetically dependent on hand-outs from the metropolis. This pathetic neo-colonial situation grabbed the attention of Uganda's artist Pilkington Ssengendo.

Pilkington Ssengendo is a contemporary Ugandan artist. He joined the Art School in the early-1960s and has lectured there since the mid-1970s. In 1962 Ssengendo created a sculpture in which he embodied the vulnerability of Uganda's post-colonial economy and its dependency on external support. In his terracotta sculpture called *Masikini* (1962; plate 61), a Swahili word which means the beggar, Ssengendo provocatively expressed the depressing, pathetic, economic conditions which post-colonial Uganda faced. The artist used the relationship between physical disability, the need for external support (crutches) and a pathetic human condition to, if satirically, ground his work into the issues at the heart of Ongula's and Nyerere's concerns mentioned above. He revisited the theme of beggars and begging — a theme Maloba had engaged in 1944 — to bring his (Leninist) critique on Uganda's post-colonial economy into sharp relief. For him the independent Uganda was economically dependent on foreign (donor) support and, unfortunately, this has remained the case until today. (Currently over 50% of Uganda's budget is funded from foreign sources.)

Alongside the inter-ethnic rivalry and economic challenges I have outlined, the post-colonial state also faced challenges of religious sectarianism. To demonstrate, Uganda's first democratic elections in 1961 took what Michael Twaddle (1988) called a "politico-religious" character. The question, at least the way it looked at the time of independence, was one of how to ensure that such tensions did not entangle the country's future into intractable conflicts[260]. Unfortunately, there was limited political will among the ruling elite to end religious sectarianism. Instead of deliberately stemming it and encouraging inter-religious harmony, the so-called UPC African nationalists entered into a coalition with radical Baganda nationalists who had formed the Kabaka Yekka (KY) movement. This merger was built on religious

[260] Kakonge cited in "Obote has Bridged the Gulf", in *Uganda Argus*, No. 2114, October 9, 1961.

allegiances as the Anglicans, who dominated UPC and KY, sought to grab power from the Catholics who dominated the ruling Democratic Party which had won Uganda's first democratic election in 1961. As it turned out this merger was shaky; it only served the self-aggrandisement of the power-hungry Milton Obote and his henchmen.

Uganda's post-colonial ruling elite thus failed to deal with Uganda's lingering political, economic and religious problems. Most importantly, Obote mishandled the subsequent attempts to resolve them through constitutional order. This led to further political confusion, protests and contests which tore the nation-state starting immediately after independence. The confusion disrupted the country as self-aggrandisement, greed and political insanity overwhelmed political prudence, nationalism and patriotism. All criticism of Obote's rule was quashed with an iron-hand. Personal gain superseded service to the nation as Milton Obote constructed himself a personality cult through which his image came to be synonymous with the nation-state. In fact by the mid-sixties Obote's portrait had been mass-produced and forcefully imposed onto all aspects of private and public life, setting in motion a practice which lasted until 1986 when Museveni ended it. For example, Amin forcefully imposed his portrait on all aspects of public life including the national currency. Obote did the same in the early-eighties continuing a practice which started with his *Obote Medallion* (1963).

Gregory Maloba made the *Obote Medallion* (plate 62) a circular portrait of Milton Obote cast in metal. It was hung on the *Independence Arch* — a triumphal entrance to Uganda's parliament I referred to earlier. It remained there until 1971 when Idi Amin Dada overthrew Obote in a military coup and relegated it to the Uganda Museum where it still is. The medallion's character can be traced from Maloba's works of the 1950s to which I referred in the last chapter. The artist's attention to academic portraiture resonated Todd's portrait of de Bunsen; his focus on facial detail as a way of eliciting character in some ways reminds one of Ibrahim El Salahi's *Head of Mahdiya Warrior* (1960s; plate 63).

On October 10 1963 Obote unveiled the arch and hailed it as "a symbol of the determination of [Ugandans] to strengthen anew the bonds of nationhood and freedom and justice for all mankind"[261]. Obviously, then, by imposing his image on such a symbol of national importance Obote personalised it and used it to fan his personal (rather than national) interests. This should not surprise us. By this time the nationalist element had collapsed as Obote ascended from what his adherents earlier touted as a "…remarkable man…one of the greatest leaders the country had ever had — a symbol of African nationalism"[262] — to become the very embodiment of the nation-state. Like he personalised the *Independence Arch,* Milton Obote personalised the ruling party as it became obvious in the new party slogan "UPC na Obote" (meaning UPC and Obote). Businesses were forced to display Obote's official portrait or risk closure. This caused concern[263]; it attracted resentment. As an expression of anger and revulsion, Obote's mass-circulated portraits were covertly attacked and destroyed[264].

By 1967 Obote had become unpopular. He wrestled for power, politicised and corrupted the army, ruined the economy, destroyed constitutional order, outlawed the 1962 constitution (and constitutionalism) and turned the country into a fascist state which he run under a state of emergency from 1966 to 1971. Justus Mugaju puts it succinctly:

> Shortly after independence, the country degenerated into anarchy, chaos, violence, war, economic collapse and moral degeneration. Constitutionalism and the rule of law ceased to exist. Extra judicial killings were elevated to the level of public policy. By 1986 Uganda had become a land of untold human misery and an object of pity in the world. Its human rights record was appalling. An estimated one million people languished in prison without trial or hope of liberation. Thousands more fled the country and were scattered all over the world. The economy was in shambles (Mugaju 1999, 10).

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[261] See: The Arch a Symbol of Our Achievement—Premier" in *Uganda Argus,* No 2739, October 10, 1963.
[262] See: "Obote has Bridged the Gulf", in *Uganda Argus,* No. 2114, October 9, 1961.
[263] And this concern was raised in an article entitled: "The Image for the Party" in *Argus,* No. 3982, October 9, 1967.
[264] See: "Premier's Portrait Damaged—Court Told" in *Uganda Argus,* No. 3174, March 5, 1965.

Although Ngugi wa Thiongo explored these issues in a play called *The Black Hermit* which he composed to celebrate Uganda's independence, Ntiro, Crole-Rees, Kingdon, Todd and most importantly Maloba, did not. Yet as I demonstrate in the next chapter, these issues, which Ngugi embodied in his play, haunted the very national element these artists embodied in the art of the independence era. The conditions which Mugaju elaborated disintegrated the collective ideology enunciated in the political art of the early-sixties; they shaped the end of the independence euphoria and marked the dawn of anguish. In response, the mood in Uganda's political art changed decisively: it shifted from patriotism to being what Olaniyan (2004) calls "antistate". Artistic idioms transformed from being embodiments of collective ideology, and shaping independence euphoria, to expressing worry, uncertainty, widespread death and hopelessness.

Enwonwu suggests that

> An artist can create while in a state of mental worries or when he suffers. Sometimes, his suffering can bring out the genius within him through emotional strife to externalize his burning desire, or say, as many people say, that an artist does his greatest work when he is suffering[265].

I concede that Enwonwu may have underestimated the impact of torture, anguish and suffering on the human subject. But he was right to suggest that confronted by torture, suffering and worry artists continue to produce art; the genre of political art continues to thrive. In the next chapter I put Enwonwu's thesis to test. I analyse how artists confronted the bad politics, anxiety and fear in which they were trapped for two decades (1966-1986) as Uganda's political art turned from enunciating euphoria to engaging covert criticism. It is important that I trace this antistate mode because Mutebi and Sserunkuuma have taken it up.

Conclusions to Chapter Five:

In this chapter, I have analysed and historicised artworks and artists of the independence era and how they shaped, and were shaped by, the

[265] Enwonwu Ben, *The Problems of the African Artist Today*, 1956.

celebrations, discussions and aspirations of the post-colonial nation-state. In light of the views of Njau and Enwonwu which I reviewed at the end of chapter four, I have traced how artistic symbolism embodied the aspirations of the post-colonial state. I have charted the interaction between the artist and the nation-state (the individual and the collective) which briefly started during the Second World War but stopped because artists disengaged from making political art. I have demonstrated that artists could not resist the call for reengagement spurred by the anti/post-colonial debate. I have demonstrated how artists, including those like Maloba who had become disengaged in the mid-forties, shaped, and were shaped by, collective ideologies even if such ideologies were dangerously flawed. This strand is important. At the end of chapter six, and in chapters seven and eight, we will see artists making (nationalist) works in order to celebrate the (contestable) achievements of the nation-state — a nationalist zealousness which started in the early-sixties. I need to develop this thread further because although Mutebi and Sserunkuuma have made “pro-state” art, they have also done antistate artworks whose history I need to trace. In the next chapter I will chart how this antistate mode evolved before Mutebi and Sserunkuuma picked it up in the nineties.

Chapter Six

Contemporary Ugandan Art as a Critique of Bad Governance: Idioms and Strategies

Introduction:

The Makerere College Students Dramatic Society performed a play called *The Black Hermit* (1962) at the National Theatre (Kampala, Uganda) in November 1962[266]. Written by Ngugi wa Thiongo, the play, also published as *A Play The Black Hermit* (1968), was a "contribution to the Uhuru [independence] celebrations" (Ngugi 1968, viii). Unlike the visual arts (discussed in chapter five), *The Black Hermit* was sharply critical of the new leadership; it stood in contrast to the independence euphoria. Ngugi made the case that Uganda's attainment of independence brought "nothing" (Ngugi 1968, 13) for the many who "agreed to fight the white-man and drive him away from the land" (ibid). Instead of hope, nationalists escalated pre-colonial and colonial tendencies and divisions "exploiting racial, tribal [and] religious differences" (Ngugi 1968, 29). They imposed regimes based on high-handedness, greed, corruption and misrule. Ngugi's criticism is admissible. As I have indicated towards the end of the last chapter, by the late-1960s Obote's governance had deteriorated before it was overthrown by Amin in 1971. Amin imposed his own dictatorship before a combined force of Ugandan dissidents and the Tanzanian army deposed him in 1979. Obote came back through a flawed election in 1981. He destroyed property and life before Tito Okello overthrew him in 1985. Order did not return until Museveni took power in 1986. In short, the attainment of independence brought new economic and political problems (Ngugi 1968, 22) without, as had been expected, resolving the old ones.

[266] Ngugi led a group called The Makerere College Students Dramatic Society. The group was formed in 1961during the time of intense discussions over Uganda's self-governance. Its composition was regional and multi-racial because it included British, Indian, Kenyan, Malawian, Tanzanian and Ugandan actors.

In this chapter, I analyse how new strategies and forms of expression came up between 1966 and the nineties and how old ones which had been in use since the 1930s, were revised to produce veiled metaphors, and covert political texts to confront post-colonial bad governance. This thread briefly developed in the 1940s when Maloba critiqued the colonial economy and how it marginalised the African majority in his *The Beggar* (see chapter four). It was, however, not as intense as it became in this later period because it was interrupted by the anti-colonial struggles and independence euphoria. I now expand on this political nexus in Uganda's art to the point where Mutebi and Sserunkuuma will engage it in the 1990s and explore it, albeit differently.

Critiquing the "Drift to Dictatorship"[267]: Uganda's Contemporary Art of the Late-Sixties

Nnaggenda is a contemporary Ugandan artist, a painter and sculptor. Unlike many contemporary artists in Uganda, Nnaggenda is not a product of Makerere Art School. In 1961-1963 he obtained a scholarship to pursue a Diploma in Art in France. He then took an apprenticeship in Switzerland before proceeding to Freiburg University in Germany where he completed his studies. This exposure enriched Nnaggenda's modernist style involving an unorthodox experimentation with African masks, classical African sculpture, and found materials for example scrap metal and wood[268]. Nnaggenda returned to Uganda in the mid-1960s. He lectured in Kenya and the United States of America before he joined Makerere Art School in 1978 from which he recently retired.

In the mid-sixties, Nnaggenda painted his *Politician* (1966); an emotive piece of work. But it elicits a different emotion than those in the other works the artist did between 1966 and the 1980s (works which need our attention before we apprehend the symbolism in his *Politician*). For example, his

[267] See, Mugaju Justus, "The Historical Context" in Mugaju J. *ed.*, *Uganda's Age of Reforms: A Critical Overview* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers Ltd, 1999), 17.
[268] Recently he has expanded his enterprise to the use of computer parts – circuits, keyboards, etc – together with wood and oil paint to invent a complex visual vocabulary. He has become a "cyborg" as he claims (Nnaggenda, *Interview*, 2006).

sculpture *Mother and Child* (1970s; plate 64), the drawing titled *Passion* (1970s; plate 65) and another drawing titled *The Couple* (1970s; plate 66) embody a degree of sensitivity, socialisation, affection, tenderness and calm within and between human subjects. Arguably these works resonate the stable political environments in Kenya and the US where the artist made them. However, his *Politician* is close to his *The Spirit within Man* (1967) which he did in the same space and time.

The Spirit within Man (plate 67a and 67b) is a complex work symbolising the traditional family and child nurturance. It is allegorical and experimental, illustrating the artist's ability to combine materials (metal, paint and wood). It draws on a host of conventional and synthetic symbols and metaphors. Its reference to the Bamana marionettes (from Mali) and Malinke masks (from Guinea) can also be seen. The work is a complex sculptural narrative grounded in the notion of Ganda family. It connotes parenthood and the role of ancestral spirits in the protection of a family (Kyeyune 2003) symbolised by the children located below the head. Their eyes glow as they gaze to the world under the watchful eye of a guardian figure. This narrative seems to be grounded in two proverbs concerning the tradition of parenthood in Buganda: one is "*omuto mbuzi erundwa wa kamwa*" (meaning children need parental guidance); the other is "*mwana omu ali ng'ekire ky'enkuba ekimu*" (meaning it is risky to have one child).

Far from his traditionalised *The Spirit within Man*, Nnaggenda's *Politician* (plate 68) embodies the unstable behaviour of Uganda's post-colonial politicians. If Maloba and Ssekintu were worried in 1952 that nationalist politicians were not to be trusted (see chapter four), by the mid-sixties this had become clear to Nnaggenda and many other Ugandans. If contemporary artists of the early-sixties enunciated the nationalist ideology, Nnaggenda, like Tebbawebbula Kivubiro, is questioning it.

Kivubiro is a contemporary Uganda artist. He joined the Art School in the late-sixties. In 1975 he left for Canada. Later he stayed in Australia, where

he worked in a museum and pursued a PhD in art history. Currently he is lecturing at Makerere Art School. As a student at Makerere, Kivubiro joined a secret group of Baganda students, called *Abaana ba Kintu* (literally meaning the children of Kintu the first king of Buganda), who shared sympathies for the Buganda kingdom. The group fought for Buganda which, it thought, was at that "point under siege by Obote government especially after 1966…" (Kivubiro, interview 2006). *Abaana ba Kintu* engaged in covert activities "for fear of being singled out by Obote's spies, who were many on [Makerere University] campus, and getting imprisoned" (ibid). Within this covert activity, Kivubiro recalls that artists criticised Obote's radical politics of the sixties through music and visual arts. He himself recollects having made a work in found metal. But, the work has been lost, together with its visual archive. The way Kivubiro explains it, however, he leaves no doubt that the work depicted the head of Milton Obote. He also makes it clear that the work was a visual, and satirical attack on the bad politician which Obote had become in the late-1960s. In this case then, Kivubiro's "*Head of Obote*" contrasted with Maloba's *Obote Medallion* and mass-circulated portraits to which I referred in the last chapter. Unlike those who expressed revulsion using the very public image which Obote mass-circulated (see p.171 above), Kivubiro invented a sculptural idiom in which he invested his attack. That his critique was not detected by the security operatives affirms the effectiveness of art in concealing political criticism. In a moment we will see this strategy being exploited during the seventies and early-eighties to critique repression and misrule. Most immediately, it can be argued that it is "covert attacks" like Kivubiro's that we are confronted with in Nnaggenda's *Politician.*

Nnaggenda's work, like Kivubiro's, critiques the political actions and bloodletting which characterised Uganda starting in the sixties as the "Lamb/ Uhuru" (Okot 1967, 143) became, as "Dead as stone" (ibid). By engaging a modernist vocabulary, Nnaggenda robustly exposed the character of post-colonial leadership. He used a cubistic strategy to embody the drifts in the political positions which Uganda's politicians took in the mid-1960s to the 1970s. He depicts their shifty character enunciating their unethical nature as

if to confront his inability to pin post-colonial leaders down on any of the public pronouncements they made on the rule of law and the protection of life and property. With eyes popping out of their sockets, Nnaggenda's *Politician* (see plate 68) represents a politician looking fixedly, and uninvitingly, at the beholder. As such the artist unambiguously uses contemporary art as the very site and fitting embodiment of brutality, aggressiveness, intransigence, intolerance and inhumanness. He accentuates these attributes by the dripping reds on the wall as his painting powerfully, and metaphorically, represents Uganda's

> first generation of post-colonial rulers [who] were more interested in power than fairness, justice and democracy. They believed in the philosophy of 'winner-take-all'. They were true Machiavellians. For them, the end – power – justified the means. Thus, after independence, Uganda drifted towards dictatorship whose consequences were worse than the evils of colonialism and from which the country is yet to recover (Mugaju 1999, 17).

As views, like Mugaju's, and Nnaggenda's, began to sink into the minds of many Ugandans, key questions began to emerge – and Okot p'Bitek posed them directly: "What did [we] reap / When uhuru ripened / And what was harvested?" (Okot p'Bitek 1967, 139). These issues have attracted intense scholarly and political debate since the 1960s; it is useless to belabour all their details here. However, some of the details merit attention because Sserunkuuma and Mutebi [re]raise them in their work and Nnaggenda, and Kivubiro, also raise them today as they did in the late-sixties. I raise them again as I proceed with my discussion from this point onwards.

I have already indicated that in 1962 UPC and KY joined into an unholy (Anglican) alliance (see pp.123-124 above). Let me now highlight a few important details, namely, that the agreement was that Obote was to become the Prime Minister and Muteesa II, the Kabaka of Buganda, would serve as Uganda's constitutional President. And this was the case. Obote became Prime Minister in October 1962. Muteesa became President and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces on October 8, 1963. And yet by November 1964 the political landscape had shifted rapidly and disastrously.

There was suspicion between the two leaders: Obote accused Muteesa II of espionage; Muteesa II felt undermined by Obote. Trouble resulted from the way Obote sought to resolve the colonial problem of the so-called "lost counties" which I have alluded to earlier (see pp.167-168 above). Because he lacked the charisma of leaders like Nyerere (of Tanzania) and Kenyatta (of Kenya), and yet he wanted to equal them, Obote used the issue of the "lost counties" to boost his public standing and personality cult. He organised an ill-conceived populist referendum which returned the "lost counties" to Bunyoro. The Buganda federal government[269] felt undermined. Muteesa II, the head of the Buganda kingdom and constitutional President of Uganda, refused to endorse the transfer. The UPC-KY alliance collapsed and anarchy ensued in which Obote was understandably insecure. His security apparatus sprung into action; people who opposed him were incarcerated or killed starting with the infamous Nakulabye Massacre of November 4, 1964 in which civilians were gunned down in cold blood. This was the beginning of the bloodletting we see referred to in Nnaggenda's *Politician:* bloodletting which was to continue until 1986.

In the midst of these developments Obote's popularity waned rapidly. Within the UPC ranks the party was split along ethnic lines and economic interests. In Buganda he was considered an enemy following the "lost counties" issue. Obote took radical steps to confront the mounting political challenges he faced. First, he politicised and later tribalised the army with disastrous consequences. It all started with the 1964 army mutiny which called for the dismantling of the colonial army. It is true that there were similar mutinies in Kenya and Tanzania. However, unlike his neighbours who penalised the rebellious soldiers (albeit in radically different ways)[270], Obote rewarded the mutineers (Lofchie 1972, 20-21) and invited the army into Uganda's post-

[269] According the 1962 Constitution, Uganda's first post-colonial constitution, the pre-colonial kingdoms of Ankole, Buganda, Bunyoro, Busoga and Toro, which the colonial establishment had preserved, were to remain in a federal arrangement with the national government. Buganda was the strongest of them all.

[270] Kenya's post-mutiny action towards the army was to neutralise it and distance it from national politics. Tanzania on the other hand integrated the army into the ruling TANU party. However, both parties clamped down on the mutineers through punishment and training. See: Lofchie F. Michael, "The Uganda Coup – Class Action" in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, i (1972): 19-35

colonial politics (Mugaju 1999, 21) where it remains a key power-broker and constituency[271]. This was important for Obote; he wanted the army to support his stranglehold on power given his growing unpopularity. He replaced "disloyal" experienced officers, like Shaban Opolot, with his own inept supporters whom he promoted rapidly. This is how Idi Amin came to the fore of Uganda's army and politics before he decisively altered the pattern of Uganda's art history and politics as we will see in a moment.

And more was to follow. In 1965 Obote and Amin were embroiled in a corruption scandal. They were accused of smuggling gold, ivory and coffee from the then Leopoldville (currently the Democratic Republic of Congo). There were legitimate calls on the floor of parliament for the suspension of Amin from military leadership and for an independent inquiry into the scandal. Obote blocked all these checks and balances. Worse still, on 22 February 1966 he detained five ministers, who were behind the inquiry, accusing them of conspiring against his government. Two days later, on 24 February, he drifted further down the road to dictatorship. On April 15, 1966, he suspended the 1962 constitution before he replaced it with the one he wrote with his henchman Lukongwa Binaisa. Under the new constitution, Obote became an executive president and ultimate authority. This drift aggravated the situation and rendered his leadership vulnerable to opposition. As would be expected Buganda rejected the new constitution thus giving Obote the necessary excuse to attack the kingdom in May 1966. Amin executed the attack, following which Muteesa II fled into exile where he died in 1969. There were massive riots in Buganda. Obote declared a long state of emergence (1966-1971); he deployed the full might of the army and his General Service Unit (GSU)[272] to enforce the curfew. The ingredients of

[271] Currently the national army, the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF), is considered a "special interest group" represented in the country's legislature by senior officers. It is probably only in Uganda that the national army votes its own representatives into the legislature.

[272] GSU was a spy network which Obote established on 1st April 1964. Like the colonial government in the late-forties (see p.110 above), Obote used his GSU to detect and clamp down on any opposition to his misrule. By 1970 GSU had permeated all aspects of the public service. Fresh graduates from Universities were recruited into its so-called "research unit". There are reports that it is under these circumstances that the incumbent President, Yoweri Museveni, briefly served in the GSU before

dictatorship were in place. Security organs became instruments of state-engineered repression. Intimidation, torture and bloodletting intensified. Many were killed, maimed, or imprisoned without trial. Civil society and civic action on government were constrained and they remained constrained until 1986.

Under the pretext of "one country, one people and one government" and using the rhetoric of "the common man", Obote signed into law the *Local Administration Act 1967* in which he centralised power (Nsibambi 1998, 1) into the person of the Presidency. He abolished all traditional institutions which had continued to thrive under the federal arrangement left behind by the British. This drift allowed Obote to eliminate regional autonomy and authority. Bruno Sserunkuuma argues that what Obote did was "a mistake" because he took away power from the people (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). Sserunkuuma's argument is admissible because what the artist refers to is the new arrangement under which Obote introduced District Councils as the pillars of local government. These councils, headed by state-appointed technocrats and bureaucrats but mainly supporters of the ruling UPC party, had limited authority. Besides, they did not emancipate the population. Rather, they rubberstamped Obote's draconian policies alongside being localised posts of the corruption oozing from the centre into all corners of the countryside. In the process Obote aggravated the corruption which started with the colonial technocracy (to which I alluded on p.25 above) as he personalised, tribalised and corrupted the civil service. His actions attracted popular resentment. In 1969 there was an attempt on his life as Buganda turned into a theatre of popular resistance[273] which was met with brute military force and repression.

Amin disbanded it and replaced it with his own State Research Bureau: equally repressive but more murderous.

[273] Some resistance was overt: for example the Baganda rioted and blocked roads. But there was also another form of resistance which was intriguing. It began in the 1950s during the standoff between Muteesa II and the colonial government (see pp.108-109 above) when hundreds of men refused to shave until the king was restored. They remained unkempt for two years to oppose Cohen's decision to deport Muteesa II to England. The same form of resistance was repeated in the late-sixties. Some men shaved in 1971 when it was confirmed that Muteesa II had died and Amin had given his body a

With the disenfranchisement of the civil society and erosion of political sanity came the collapse of state institutions and economic meltdown. Obote tried to breathe new life into the economy through what he called the "move to the left" in 1968-1970. This drift was informed by the "Mulungushi Club" which was convened at Mulungushi in Zambia in 1970[274]. Obote used his move-to-the-left to camouflage the idea of turning Uganda into a socialist one-party state. In July 1969 he published his *Common Man's Charter* which "was the manifesto and embodiment of the new socialist era" (Mugaju 1999, 25). Pursuant to the designs of the charter, in 1970 Obote announced the nationalisation of private businesses: banks, petroleum and manufacturing companies. Obviously Obote was emulating Nyerere's (or even the Maoist) style of economic management. However, with Uganda's state machinery already corrupt, and with a top-to-bottom centralised autocracy introduced through the *Local Government Act 1967*, one cannot help but marvel at the disaster Obote was unfolding here.

Also, Uganda had drifted into excessive crime mainly as a result of corruption and breakdown in law and order. By 1971 crime levels had "reached abnormal proportions" (Mushanga 1971, 214) with an "exceptionally high rate of criminal homicide" (ibid). This led to what was coined in common parlance as *Kondoism* – a reference to the murders and robberies of the time. Estimates indicated that by 1971, 1000 people died per annum through *Kondoism* (ibid). And yet government had no solutions (ibid). Hence;

> It is obvious that the period 1962-71 was a disaster for democracy… Independence which had been visualised as a new era for the people had turned into a period of worry, of state-inspired, directed and managed violence. A state of emergency had been declared and enforced. Freedom went into hiding as terror reigned. Human rights became refugees in political limbo. It

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state burial. However, others continued their resistance until the 1990s when Mutebi II was installed as king.

[274] The club brought together the following political party leaders to share socialist ideas: Milton Obote of UPC from Uganda, Julius Nyerere of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) from Tanzania, Kenneth Kaunda of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) from Zambia and Oliver Tambo of the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa.

> is therefore hardly surprising that when Amin took power on 25 January 1971, he was greeted with celebration (Kabwegyere 2000, 18).

And this is exactly what transpired when Obote was away in Singapore for a Commonwealth Conference. Amin took power amid ululations. I suggest that we bear these pro-Amin celebrations in mind because I refer to them in chapter eight in my discussion on politics in Bruno Sserunkuuma's pottery.

However, alongside the local political problems, economic meltdown and widespread anti-Obote feelings, there was a complex international problem which fuelled the coup in 1971. This was the Anyanya Rebellion in Southern Sudan. The rebellion involved the Acholi, Bari, Lotuko, Madi and Zande of Southern Sudan who fought for a separate homeland for the non-Arab population in Southern Sudan. It started during the 1950s, continued until 1972 when an agreement was signed to end it, before it erupted again in 1983 under John Garang's Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army and Movement (SPLA/M). In order to crush the insurrection, the predominantly Arab Sudanese government used brutal means. Its army massacred, maimed, raped, pillaged and disrupted livelihoods. Uganda played host to a flood of refugees from Southern Sudan[275]. These issues are important for my discussion because although located in Sudan they informed Uganda's modern art. Severino Matti painted a work whose symbolism can be traced from this carnage. He re-enacted the events in Southern Sudan. He gave us what Trowell would have called a "journalistic account" (Trowell 1938) of a brutal attack on villages in Southern Sudan. In the process he engaged a visual vocabulary which permeated the visual arts of the 1970s and 1980s as I demonstrate in the next two sections.

Assailing Military Brutality: Severino Matti and the Rebellion in Southern Sudan

Matti graduated from Makerere Art School in 1967 before lecturing there for two years (1975-1977). He was a native of Southern Sudan and therefore belonged to one of the tribes which were affected by the Anyanya and later

[275] See: "Refugees Find Help in Uganda", in the *Uganda Argus,* No. 2656, July 5, 1963.

the SPLA/M rebellions. Although he critiques an issue in Sudan, Matti's works, like those done by other "non-Ugandans" we saw earlier, touch on issues important to my discussion. Firstly, he revises visual strategies and idioms we have seen in works by Kawalya, Ntiro and others, in order to show the brutality of the army. Secondly, some of the signs and symbols Matti uses were to be exploited in the 1970s to mid-1980s as Uganda's contemporary artists Alacu, Atim, Banadda, Birabi, Driciru and Muwonge critiqued military brutality and misrule in Uganda.

Matti's paintings capture contemporary life. Although it is unlikely that Ntiro taught him directly, there are obvious stylistic similarities between the two artists' paintings. He, like Ntiro, uses standardised figuration. Like Ntiro's village idioms, Matti's pictorial narratives thrive on multiple centres of activity placed on a picture plane. For example, each figure (or group of figures) in his painting performs a certain act which is independent of the other acts in the pictorial space although all the acts fit together to tell a pictorial narrative split into plots. These identifiable plots give his narrative a tremendous amount of detail. Like Ntiro's works, Matti's paintings are also densely populated as seen in his *City* (late-1960s). This painting represents a modern, bustling, commercial, urban landscape packed with high-rise buildings, cars and people. In stark contrast to the prosperous city, Matti painted his *Village Massacre I (?)* (late-1960s; plate 69). The painting depicts a densely populated rural scene. Unlike Ntiro's villages, or his own *City,* his *Village Massacre I* represents destruction, torture and mayhem; it is a narrative capturing (in such graphic detail) a rapacious military which descended on a polis.

Matti explored the brutality of the Sudanese government army, and modern warfare, towards humanity. To give us a sense of geography, Matti uses the church to show that the carnage happened in the "Christian South" and not in the "Muslim North"[276]. Put simply, it is people in Southern Sudan who are

[276] These two terms have gained common parlance in discussions on Sudan's political problems. They are however simplistic and I am using them for want of better alternatives. I say they are

facing such a grisly murder scene. Now, if Charles Ssekintu started the strategy of secularising religious iconography in 1949, through Matti's work we see the total secularisation of religious symbols and their deployment to critique the health of the nation-state. Matti's critique became popular in the 1970s and 1980s; we should therefore bear this strand in mind because I refer to it again in the course of my discussion.

In his *Village Massacre I* Matti depicts military men overrunning a village with brute force. They rampage and indiscriminately kill animals and people, the young and the old. There is nowhere to hide or go since the village has been surrounded from all sides. There is a tattered flag in the middle of the painting. It designates a space where soldiers recklessly and inhumanely drag and heap bodies of the dead (and probably the injured). It probably belongs to the Red Cross or an overflowing hospital morgue – an ominous representation of the scale of the genocide being committed. Carrion eaters hover above, ready to feast on the many animals and humans killed in the raid. The artist also engages nakedness as an expression of trauma. These threads are important because they were also used by painters of the late-seventies and early-eighties to express their disgust towards Amin's and Obote's military campaigns as we are about to see in a moment.

In another painting, Matti articulates a genocide similar to the one in his *Village Massacre I*. The painting does not strictly repeat the events I have analysed above although the two are figuratively, thematically and stylistically close. Like the first painting, his *Village Massacre II (?)* (late-1960s; plate 70a) shows an equally graphic scene of carnage. The artist depicts military men attacking a village market. Similar to the imagery in *Village Massacre I*, here again we confront trigger-happy soldiers. People are shot at point-blank range as they beg for mercy. Soldiers commit mass-murder; they brutally rape their victims (see plate 70b). Roads are strewn

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simplistic because there are minority Muslims and followers of other (traditional) religions in the South just as there are minority Christians and followers of other religions in the North. Secondly neither the Southerners nor the Northerners are homogeneous. For example the conflict in Darfur demonstrates that there are serious contradictions among the Muslims.

with nude and half-naked bodies. Children are also becoming a powerful embodiment of vulnerability and torture. Matti provocatively projects a vulnerable child left unattended next to the corpse of its dead mother in the middle of the painting (see plate 70c). This thread is important because alongside decapitation and nakedness, vulnerable children will become important political symbols: artists will engage them to critique Amin's rule in the late-1970s and Obote's second regime in the early-1980s before Fred Mutebi will use them in another context.

Unlike Ntiro's village as a symbol of unique post-colonial economic and political progress (social capital), Matti is less nostalgic and obviously not interested in nationalistic legitimation. He confronts us with mass-murder committed by the use of modern warfare; he uses the village as space to frame this. Actually, Matti works in a post-realist mode to demonstrate how the agents of the post-colonial nation-state turned against the very citizens they were paid to protect (Sserumaga 2003). His villages show how the village had gained critical currency by the late-sixties: it had become a representation of misrule, bad governance and the total collapse of post-colonial governance. He picked up on the critical mode we found in Kaunda's and Tayali's villages although his has a counter-state, rather than moralist, force.

Intriguingly, in spite of the carnage unleashed by the army, and which Matti captured so graphically in his paintings, Obote aligned himself with the regime in Sudan under President Jaafar Muhammad an-Nimeiry. This should not surprise anyone. I have already presented visual (Nnaggenda's *Politician*) and historical evidence to make the case that by the late-sixties Obote himself had drifted to dictatorship; his military machine was brutalising the public. But Obote had other expectations too. Apparently, in a manner resonant with what he had done with the "lost counties" issue to which I have alluded elsewhere in this thesis, he sought to exploit the events in southern Sudan for political gain. Supporting the regime in Khartoum would have propped him as a true pan-Africanist who supported post-colonial

governments against dissenting micro-nationalists[277]. Unfortunately he failed[278]; the Anyanya Rebellion continued. Instead, he successfully antagonised Israel's geopolitical interests. The Israelis wanted to use Uganda and Ethiopia as convenient bases to support the Anyanya rebellion and disrupt the Islamic regime in Khartoum (Jørgensen 1981, 272). Obote stood in their way. They, together with the British (who disliked him because of his stance on South Africa), funded Amin to overthrow him in January 1971 (ibid).

But Amin did not resolve Obote's misrule nor was his own military regime any different from the military brutality imposed by Obote in Uganda or the regime in Sudan. Amin betrayed both Ugandans and his foreign backers. Initially he made a few gestures to appease his international barkers at least for the period 1971-1972 (Jørgensen 1981, 272). However, by the end of 1972 his bad side had begun to show; Amin reneged on all his promises. He expelled the Jews. He then forged a Muslim brotherhood with the Arabs – including those in Sudan – promising to help them in their military campaign against the Jews[279]. He antagonised the British. He launched a vitriolic attack on the South African government. Yet all these foreign parties had helped his ascent to power.

Locally, Amin returned the body of Muteesa II and won the support of the majority of the Baganda who were angry with Obote for expelling Muteesa II. He also disbanded the notorious GSU and promised a clampdown on Kondoism. These gestures boosted his popularity albeit not for long because by the end of 1972 the mood had decisively altered. He reneged on his promise to restore Buganda's lost glory. He blocked the installation of

[277] His support for Nimeiry led him to threaten to expel vulnerable refugees. See: "Uganda Warns Refugees" in *Uganda Argus*, No. 2661, July 11, 1963.
[278] Actually Obote had gambled with other trouble spots. He tried earlier in 1967 to gain political capital from Nigeria's Biafran War only to fail miserably. The Biafran War continued; one member of the Biafran delegation, which was in Kampala for "negotiations" with the Nigerian government under his auspices, was mysteriously shot dead in Kampala much to the embarrassment of Obote's regime. Following a similar path, with equally disastrous results, Obote tried to resolve the complex issues of Apartheid South Africa while obviously failing with those in his own backyard.
[279] He actually did this through an ill-advised adventure in which he allowed Palestinian hijackers to land a plane full of Israelis at Entebbe Airport in 1976.

Muteesa II's successor. This would be understandable considering that it was Amin who attacked the Mengo palace in 1966. Besides, it would be unlikely that Amin would have accommodated any other pillar of authority even if it were symbolic. It was therefore inevitable that he continued with the local administration structure which Obote imposed through the *1967 Local Government Act*. In addition, Amin ruled by decree and this worsened the misrule Obote had started in the sixties. He increased military spending, replaced Obote's pro-Langi and pro-Acholi favouritism, and tribalism, in the Army with his own pro-Nubian/Kakwa favouritism[280]. He, like Obote, "bought loyalty from officers and soldiers" (Jørgensen 1981, 275) of the Uganda Army. He based public policy on whims and dreams; for example he dreamed and then expelled all Ugandans of Asian decent in 1972 before launching his so-called "economic war".

The "economic war" was part of Amin's attempt to radically complete a process of Africanising the economy which Obote had started through his "move to the left". Amin confiscated Asians' properties and gave them to his cronies (Kyemba 1977) who quickly became rich. A new breed of non-productive wealth club called: the *Mafuta mingi* (literally translated, those that are fat) emerged. *The Mafuta mingi* club consisted of the super-corrupt in the private sector who colluded with the corrupt in the centralised civil service to destroy Uganda's economy in the 1970s and 1980s. In short, Amin applied a poorly conceived and irrational policy to expel the Asians. The action was initially celebrated as a radical move towards Africanising the country's economy. Yet the action saw Uganda's already battered economy taking a further meltdown. This thread is important. In chapter seven we will see Fred Mutebi referring back to it to claim that the NRM also inherited the corruption which thrived under Amin. I will demonstrate how he uses his prints and paintings to mount an unprecedented and sustained attack on the corrupt

[280] Amin was a Nubian. However, it has to be said that the Nubians were not a tribe but a group of mercenaries who came from various tribes in North-eastern Uganda, Southern Sudan, and North-western Congo and served Emin Pasha colonial army. When Pasha left for Zanzibar in the 1890s the Nubians became a permanent "culturally-defined occupational group" (Jørgensen 1981, 277) practising Islam and speaking Swahili. I am referring to the Nubians here in this context.

state. In chapter eight I will show how Bruno Sserunkuuma has interrogated these issues through his political pottery.

As Amin tightened his grip on power, he unleashed terror. Artists faced torture and death. I will now mention some examples to illustrate my claim. Robert Sserumaga, an erudite Ugandan economist, playwright and novelist wrote his novel *Return to the Shadow* (initially published in 1969) which was critical of Uganda's post-colonial regimes. Given his skill and creativity, his novel was used as required reading for secondary schools in Uganda in the 1970s. It was however "discomforting to the Idi Amin regime…leading to his escape from Uganda under the threat of arrest" (Sserumaga 2003, ix). Byron Kawadwa was a leading playwright during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1977, Kawadwa's play *Oluyimba Lwa Wankoko* (the Cock's Song; 1977) criticised Amin's regime. Amin's agents, the notorious State Research Bureau[281], literary dragged him off the stage and murdered him. Expedito Mwebe's case is also worth telling.

Mwebe is a contemporary Ugandan artist. He studied together with Elly Tumwine in the mid-seventies when he made a painting in which he criticised Idi Amin's military regime. He reiterated parlance which had gained common currency in the seventies to describe Amin's torture. Because people were killed and their bodies decapitated during his regime, Amin was called *Kijambiya.* In Luganda *ejjambiya* means a machete; *ekijambiya* might mean a big, old, or poorly crafted machete. The Baganda, however, coined the notion *Kijambiya* to represent the person, regime and butchery of Amin[282]. As the metonym gained popularity, the state machinery decoded it and one had to be careful when using it. Hence Sserumaga writes in his *Return to the Shadows:* "there was silence and then Joe nearly mentioned the butcher…but he thought better of it" (Sserumaga 2003, 20). Actually it was

[281] Earlier I mentioned that Amin disbanded the GSU. In its place, however, he instituted his State Research Bureau which was more vicious than the GSU he disbanded.
[282] See: Damasenti Ibin, "Amagye Gakwatibwe Bulungi Tuleme Kwejjusa", in *Bukedde,* October 10, 2004. Also available online at http://www.bukedde.co.ug/detail.php?mainNewsCategoryId=2&newsCategoryId=66&newsId=442842 (accessed October 10, 2004).

important for Joe to think twice before mentioning the word “butcher” because the butcher had become “a political time-bomb” (Sserumaga 2003, 27). Mwebe did not think twice. Or, if he did, he took the risk. He visualised Amin’s regime in a painting. It has, however, been lost together with its archive. But we learn from his contemporary, Elly Tumwine that Mwebe depicted a butcher slashing people (Tumwine, interview 2004). Because the painting literary interpreted the notion of *Kijambiya,* Amin’s agents hunted the artist down; he fled into exile (ibid) to escape torture and/or death.

These experiences are particularly enlightening on the challenges that faced Ugandans in general and academics and artists in particular. Clearly Kawadwa’s, Sserumaga’s or Mwebe’s openly critical themes attracted the attention of Amin’s torture and death machine. It is important to remember this thread because both Mutebi and Sserunkuuma have revealed to me that they are still mindful of the challenges of the 1970s. Although Museveni’s regime is radically different from those of Obote and Amin, both artists still think about this dangerous past. Rather than being literal, like Mwebe and others, they veil their own metaphors for worry of confronting the NRM regime head-on and attracting repression.

Surely, at least judging by Mwebe’s experience, the visual strategies of the late-sixties, as seen in Matti’s massacre, needed urgent modification to suit the political challenges of the 1970s. Against this backdrop, I demonstrate in the next section how artists invented veiled metaphors and new strategies to weather this storm. I recall Enwonwu’s argument to analyse how, amid anxiety, Uganda’s modern artists produced outstanding artworks which questioned the state, as contemporary art became a countervailing tool.

Assailing the Reign of Terror: Uganda’s Modern Art and the Politics of the 1970s

C. Driciru, like Mwebe, studied at Makerere Art School in the mid-1970s. She hails from West Nile, in Northern-western Uganda, a region which borders on Matti’s Southern Sudan. It is likely that Matti supervised her work *Crowds*

and Insects (1977?; plate 71) because he was then lecturing at the Art School. Yet Driciru's work is distant from her instructor's and that of the artists of the sixties. It is as densely peopled as those of Ntiro, Matti, Tayali and Kaunda, although the artist avoids any literal representation of the human subject. She instead drew on Kingdon's expressionism (see plate 43) to conceal her political critique.

The title of the painting, *Crowds and Insects,* poses a problem because in the work it is not obvious which are insects and which are crowds and crowds of what? She creates this puzzle and as I progress with this discussion this puzzle will emerge as a political strategy. The artist uses some subtle clues to distinguish between the crowds and insects although all her symbols are anthropomorphised. In the front of the painting we see two creatures. They wear crowns, feathers and wings. They are conspicuously and firmly located ahead of the carnival – a march-past? The relevance of their conspicuousness becomes clear when we realise that they carry two flags whose horizontal stripes are a reference to Uganda's national and army flags. Arguably they carry the symbols of the state and army as they march in front of a powerful, grotesque, improvised figure located on a pedestal to assert its power and authority. Behind them is a lone "insect" wielding a ceremonial sword. Following it is a group of other insects; playing in what is clearly a brass band. The insects are surrounded by hoards of forms which are suggested in standardised human silhouettes. Presumably these are the crowds.

All the insects are grotesque and satirised. Those playing in the brass-band have elephant trunks; the one wielding a ceremonial sword is winged while those in front carry long dispersed feathers and they are hunchbacked. The insects are bathed in army-green and cast in a procession resonant of official/military parades. Since the [pre-]colonial days every regime in Uganda has organised military march-pasts, led by flags and a brass-band. Soldiers march in front of leaders (symbolised by the grotesque figure on a pedestal) in the presence of large curious gatherings (Driciru's crowds).

Kyeyune details these issues in historical perspective as he explains Driciru's work:

> By taking the subject of 'brass band', and the 'march past parade', the artist is reflecting on the symbols of power and authority, an inheritance from the colonial legacy. Amin seized upon these elements to project his military might and to sustain himself in power. Through substituting insects for people, Driciru picks upon the tradition of embedding messages in myths and legends from her cultural past to reveal her disgust for oppressive regimes (Kyeyune 2003, 181).

Kyeyune's analysis suggests that the artist made reference to the way Amin deployed the convention of march-pasts to dispense his power and authority. Arguably then it is Amin whom the artist posed on the pedestal, the insects and brass band represent his army, the rest are the subordinated civilians – a poignant reflection of Amin's militarism and autocracy.

Equally important, Kyeyune identifies the sources of Driciru's visual strategy. We are told that the artist returned to her cultural past to find resources which she used to veil her critique on Amin's brutality. This is important because it confirms that if the artists of the independence epoch used traditions to construct post-colonial statehood (as we see in the *Independence Monument*), by the seventies culture was used to assail the post-colonial state which had lost its legitimacy. In this and the remaining chapters I will demonstrate how this dynamic gained currency and was deployed to confront bad governance by other artists. But it can also be argued that Driciru iterated a political strategy which theatre adopted in the mid-seventies. Placing Driciru's painting in this context extends the frame currently drawn around it by the available historical record; it brings to the fore the complex cultural discourse in which Amin used art to [re]construct his image just as his critics energetically and consistently used the same medium to assail it.

Following the death of Byron Kawadwa, argues Austin Bukenya, "dramatists dared not provoke the monsters in power in any way. They had to resort to the subtlest forms of camouflage to communicate significantly with their audiences" (Bukenya 1993, viii). This resulted in a new genre of cultural

expression which Bukenya calls “camouflage theatre” (ibid). Although it carried traditional resonances (for example its themes were often drawn from traditions), camouflage theatre was informed by political concerns. It was contemporary; it was part of popular culture. In a manner recalling the attacks on Obote’s portrait (to which I referred earlier) artists extended Kivubiro’s and Nnaggenda’s strategy as they covertly assailed the image Amin created of himself. Because Driciru seems to have engaged a similar strategy in order to attack the way Amin imaged himself, it is arguable that the artist engaged what, for want of a better term, I would call “camouflage art”. But how did this camouflage work? A closer look at Driciru’s work against the backdrop of “camouflage theatre” will help to unpack the complex strategies layered into the camouflage art of the seventies and early-eighties.

In the 1970s, camouflage theatre manifested in two forms. One was Sserumaga’s *Renga Moi* and *Amayirikiti*: two pieces of “wordless” political drama. Sserumaga, while in exile in Kenya, performed through actions with no spoken narrative because he knew spoken/written word could be used against him. In fact I have already submitted that his written word in *Return to the Shadow* led to his repression and eventual exile. The other form of camouflage theatre is that which Alex Mukulu engaged in his *Muzzukulu wa Kabangala* (1977).

Muzzukulu wa Kabangala was Mukulu’s first play. In the play Mukulu avoided open political criticism and instead engaged subtle social commentary in order to survive. Recently, but mainly because of the freedoms the NRM has restored in Uganda, Mukulu has engaged in open and direct criticism against the NRM administration. But so subtle was the message in his *Muzzukulu wa Kabangala* that Amin himself ordered to see it; he used it to better his image and propagate his regime. For Amin the play was part of a rubric of educative traditional processes which government could use to uphold African values, disseminate issues of hygiene, teach social responsibility, and to enhance agricultural production. These issues for Amin were critical to “good governance” and a prosperous nation. And this is how he explained

plays, like *Muzzukulu wa Kabangala,* in Barbet Schroeder's movie *Idi Amin Dada* (1976).

Schroeder's movie subtly "attacked" Amin's regime. In the accompanying narrative Schroeder countered some of the glosses Amin put on his misrule. For example, he pointed out that Amin killed his wife (Kay Adroa) and Michael Ondoga (his minister) accusing them of undermining the state. This would have contradicted Amin's professed claim for being a good and compassionate leader. Because of its subtlety, however, Amin used *Idi Amin Dada* to [re]construct his self-image which, by the mid-seventies, had been badly dented. He carefully selected the scenes to be filmed. He reconstructed himself as a social, compassionate father figure (inscribed in his name Dada); as an Africanist, pragmatic economist, outstanding leader and a member of the Muslim brotherhood. Amin believed his Minister of Foreign Affairs Minister, Michael Ondoga, had failed to do this – actually he repudiated him openly in the movie.

Nevertheless Schroeder's movie was sharply criticised as a propagandist reconstruction of Amin's image, by Amin himself, for the Western audience. Reviewing it Ebert Roger (1976) had this to say:

> "Idi Amin Dada" is not a particularly good documentary, but it's often a fascinating one. It's billed as a "self-portrait" of Gen[eral] Idi Amin, Uganda's dictator, and it shows us several days in the life of one of the world's most feared tyrants[283].

Actually Ebert was right. How could Amin possibly be a father figure of the nation when in addition to his wife, he also murdered two of his sons? This is an irony which the documentary does not resolve. Its critique was blunt and because of this bluntness Amin used it as a medium to circulate himself as an embodiment of a good state. It was a site for him to confirm his anti-Semitism as he postured himself as a redeemer of the Middle East. For example, he used the movie to stage attacks on the Golan Heights in the Middle East. During the attacks he demonstrated his ability to overrun the Jewish state and restore Arab/Muslim pride. This spectacle reminds one of

[283] See: http://rogerebert.suntimes.com (accessed July 10, 2006).

another in which he staged, and personally commanded, attacks on regimes in Southern Africa – attacks he won through a shooting spree in which his family took part and which was witnessed by a cheering crowd[284]. The attack on South Africa was part of his campaign to present himself as a champion of pan-Africanism and the emancipation of Africans in Africa and the Diaspora.

Besides cinema, Amin used visual art[ist]s to [re]construct his image and dispense his power and authority. During the Organisation of African Unity Summit in Kampala, Amin ordered the Makerere Art School to paint his life-size portrait. All other activities at the school grounded to a halt as both students and staff had to participate. The portrait was displayed together with those of other leaders who attended the Kampala Summit[285]. In the mid-seventies there were proposals to make a giant sculpture of him and perpetuate what Kyemba (1977) called “the portrait of Big Daddy” (p.192). Also in the mid-seventies Amin ordered that portraits of Ian Smith (of Rhodesia) and Pik Botha (of the Republic of South Africa) be painted. Fabian Mpagi, a graduate of Makerere Art School, painted them. Amin riddled them with bullets (Kyeyune 2003, 177) in front of cheering crowds to demonstrate that he could overrun the colonial and Apartheid regimes in Southern Africa. This propagandist use of contemporary art and cinema were part of a whole project through which Amin declared himself “his Excellency President for Life, Field Marshal Al Hadji Doctor Idi Amin, VC, DSO, MC, Lord of all the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Sea, and Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in general and Uganda in particular".

But, as we learn from Ebert, Amin’s spectacular public image was also subject to attack. Driciru used her *Crowds and Insects* to do exactly that.

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[284] He staged the spectacle on the Bulingugwe Islands on Lake Victoria. The positioning was right because it was in the south. It was a well attended spectacle witnessed by dignitaries who attended the OAU Summit. During the spectacle Amin attacked and announced the capture of Johannesburg and Cape Town in well publicised shooting exercises. See for example “Forces Capture Bulingugwe Is.” in the *Voice of Uganda*, Vol. 1, No. 1829, August 2, 1975.

[285] Some of these portraits were printed on fabrics and worn during the OAU Summit. See: *Voice of Uganda* July 17, 1975.

Unlike Ebert who was openly critical of Amin, Driciru was located in Uganda and she was probably aware of the fate of her contemporary, Expedito Mwebe. Because she did not have the freedom of expression that Ebert had (and, perhaps, cognisant of Mwebe's experience), Driciru engaged the strategy used in camouflage theatre to veil the politics in her idiom. With flags recreated, the topic referring to an insect march-past parade rather than military parade, and crowds reduced to suggestive silhouettes, Driciru acquired the necessary camouflage. She skilfully ridiculed Amin, and engaged political criticism, without attracting state repression.

Let me also add that Driciru's use of an insect to attack Amin's regime was itself part of wider contemporary usage of zoomorphic representations to reference Amin and Obote. Beginning in the late-1960s people, especially in Buganda, used reptiles in order to critique misrule. In 1969 the Baganda invented a lizard, locally known as *Embalasaasa,* to criticise Obote. By the mid-seventies a tortoise – translated *Envubu* in Luganda – was used to criticise Amin. It is not clear how the metonyms evolved because they have no traditional/cultural precedents. However, the *Embalasaasa* was mythical and assumed to be a very poisonous reptile – a reference to Obote's tortuous regime. The tortoise was probably engaged because of its hard protective shell: a reference to the strength of Amin's military – a strength which Amin himself overstated. In contrast, in the early-1980s the Baganda [re]created a friendly (domestic) cat to reference Museveni whom many supported against Obote's second regime.

I must, however, concede that not all visual references to reptiles attacked Amin's misrule. I indicated in chapter four that Eli Kyeyune cherished the Africanist/leftist ideology together with Elimo Njau (see p.129 above). This is strongly exemplified by the play he wrote in 1977, and later published in his *Bemba Musota Omuzannyo gw'Oluganda* (2004)*,* which, although grounded in Ganda mythologies, was a radical expression and cerebration of Africanism. It is also likely that Eli Kyeyune, like many leftist African[ist]s, idolised Idi Amin after he adopted the anti-Western leftwing stance in the

early-seventies although I cannot say this with certainty. However, in 1977 Eli Kyeyune produced two drawings based on reptiles. We learn from the government daily – the *Uganda Times* of 16 January 1977 – that the images were included in what Uganda presented at FESTAC 77 the second Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, Nigeria. Given the nepotism and political favouritism which were rampant during Amin's regime this would then suggest that Eli Kyeyune was connected to the system and that he was the preferred artist to represent the regime which, as we learn from the movie *Idi Amin Dada*, was eager to better its image abroad.

In one of the drawings, Eli Kyeyune depicted a smiling half-woman-half-reptile woman (plate 72) "as affected by the environment"[286]. Frankly it is not immediately clear what exactly the caption meant. Visually, and symbolically, it appears the drawing drew on the Garden of Eden[287] and the mythical mermaids.

In the other drawing Eli Kyeyune invoked a mythical Ganda allegory relating to a non-violent crocodile, called Lutembe, which, legend has it, does not harm people. Eli Kyeyune literally raises this harmlessness with patronising effect. We see Lutembe cuddling a man, supporting him with its tail and assuring him about the protection it can give to his wife and baby (plate 73). Related to the innocuous allegory of Lutembe, Eli Kyeyune's representation of a crocodilian father figure, caring, compassionate and jovial, is grounded in traditional Ganda narratives: its explanation and justification can be traced from there. Now, while the first image resonates the biblical story of creation, the second one reminds one of the portraits of Amin depicted in the movie *Idi Amin Dada* which I have referred to: that of Dada; the father of the nation.

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[286] See caption in *The Uganda Times*, January 16, 1977.

[287] Let me note here that although his reference to Christian-Judaism remained ambiguously expressed in his drawings, it was obvious in his play *Bemba Musota.* For example in his play he used the Bible to reinterpret a Ganda legend explaining the beginning of Buganda. (And I have already alluded to one see footnote 110, p.90 above). He also transformed Buganda's Kintu into the chief narrator of Jewish culture and traditions. In the process he intricately fused Ganda and Christian-Judaic traditions related to the origin of man. This, for Eli Kyeyune, helped to emancipate African knowledge, religion and traditions which, he argued, had been marginalised by Western modernism. See Kyeyune E. Nathan, *Bemba Musota: Omuzannyo gw'Oluganda,* p.v.

After his death, Eli Kyeyune's full story will never be told. Whatever he meant by these two images, however, he contrasted the reptilian representations of the time which enunciated anxiety. The ironies embedded in the use of such a grotesque animalistic reptile cuddling a family seem to suggest an ambivalence which, like Schroeder's *Idi Amin Dada,* may raise some [subtle] criticism although one needs more evidence to confirm such a claim.

That said Kyeyune's images unfold an interesting aspect of Uganda's contemporary art of the 1970s and 1980s, at least at a technical level, because they raise a key aspect initially critical for the survival of visual artists faced with a shrinking market. Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi have explored it in their careers. It is therefore important that I explain it here because I will refer to it in chapters seven and eight.

The caption below Eli Kyeyune's Lutembe reads; "This is also done simply with a bilo-pen [sic] and he [Eli Kyeyune] urges his fellow Ugandans to apply cheap drawing materials"[288]. First, this excerpt further confirms the congruity between Eli Kyeyune and Njau who had raised this idea of using cheap local materials in the early-1960s (see pp.128-129 above). Although this issue was not urgent in the early-sixties, during the 1970s the use of cheaper alternative materials gained immediacy. Amin's political and economic policies had placed Uganda into international isolation, household incomes had dwindled, the flow of art materials into the country was disrupted, and the expatriate community which sustained contemporary Ugandan art fled the country. A local market for art developed, demanding affordable artworks on the one hand, and insisting that such art did not reflect the political injustices of the time (Kyeyune 2003, 170-1) on the other. This scenario informed the development of batik art as a dominant art genre on the Ugandan market. Batik art involves the use of what Eli Kyeyune calls cheaper materials. Artists use dyes and wax in the repetition of patterns; they explore apolitical themes such as salvation (see plate 74), socialisation,

[288] Again see caption in *The Uganda Times*, January 16, 1977.

animal husbandry and traditions. Batiks became the mainstay of Uganda's art market during the seventies. They entered many Ugandan houses; many artists exported them through Kenya.

Batiks came to Uganda in the early-1960s. Suzanne Wenger from Nigeria was probably the first artist to exhibit batiks at the Uganda Museum[289]. After her, Todd exhibited what were catalogued as "batik prints" made by David Kithoma and Anila Vadagama from Kenya during the *1962 Independence Exhibition*. This confirms that batiks came to Uganda much earlier than recent scholars (e.g Kyeyune 2003; 2004) have admitted. It also affirms that the origins of batik art in Uganda cannot only be traced back to Kenya but also to Nigeria.

By the mid-sixties Geraldine Roberts was teaching batik in the Art Department at the School of Education (Makerere University). Batik was part of Roberts' "new slant"[290] in art instruction and making. Through her new slant Robert rejected academism. She, like Njau, encouraged her University students to reject traditional orthodoxy in art; she encouraged art teachers to "scratch around and use anything available…"[291] to produce art – a theme which Njau echoed in 1962. Roberts, like Theophilus Mazinga Kalyankolo, learnt batik-making in Kenya.

Theophilus Mazinga Kalyankolo is a contemporary Ugandan artist. He teaches art education at Makerere University's School of Education. By 1967 he had become Uganda's "first" batik artist. This may be an overstatement considering that Roberts may have trained others while Kalyankolo was still studying in Kenya. Kalyankolo acquired the skill of batik-making from Robin Anderson a batik artist he met in Kenya in the mid-1960s. His exhibition, with Jack Katalikawe[292] at the Nommo Gallery[293] in 1967, was among the first

[289] See: Adams Michael, "An Exhibition of Lino Prints by Suzanne Wenger" in *Transition,* No. 4, (June, 1962): 17.
[290] See: "Exhibition shows new slant in art", *Uganda Argus,* No. 4131, April 2, 1968.
[291] See: *Uganda Argus,* ibid.
[292] Jak Katalikawe learnt art through contact with Makerere Art School. Although he has not been formally trained he has placed his mark on Uganda's modern art. He is a painter.

batik exhibitions in Uganda. Later Mark Mutyaba[294] and Geraldine Roberts mounted batik exhibitions. By the turn of the decade the three had placed their mark on Uganda's batik art market. During the 1970s and 1980s batik art took centre stage as a medium of instruction in Uganda's secondary schools, and on the art market.

The Makerere Art School has always remained ambivalent towards batik art. It considers batik as low art. The School was also slow to reject traditional orthodoxy and academism before Nnaggenda joined the teaching staff in 1978 and introduced unorthodox means of art instruction, and production, amid open and covert resistance. Graduates of the Makerere Art School including Mark Mutyaba, Katongole Waswa, Charles Kaggwa and Josua Mbazzi learnt and excelled in batik-making outside Makerere Art School. Batik has been a major source of survival for many graduates from the Art School. After 1986 they abandoned batik-making as and when conditions improved for them in the art market. Both Bruno Sserunkuuma and Fred Mutebi are such artists.

Alongside Eli Kyeyune's "pro-regime" reptilian works and batik, however, visual artworks (mainly paintings) critical of Amin's regime thrived in the seventies. Artists camouflaged their anti-state statements in metaphors, allegories and reptilian forms. Admitting this claim allows us to access other counter-state artworks, other than Matti's and Driciru's, which came up in the seventies. Artists like John Alacu, Peter Mulindwa, V. Atim, and one who remained anonymous, offer good examples. I begin with Alacu's political works.

Alacu hails from Northern Uganda. He was a contemporary of Driciru. In the late-seventies he painted his *Mother's Dream* (late-1970s; plate 75). The painting has an over-all reptilian texture which he also explored in his *Broken Eggs* (late-1970s; plate 76). In most African communities the birth of twins

[293] See: "Lively art show at the Nommo", *Uganda Argus,* No. 3886, June 19, 1967.
[294] Mark Mutyaba held a solo exhibition of batiks in 1968. See "His first 'solo'", *Uganda Argus,* No. 4076, July 29, 1968.

attracts a lot of excitement, speculation and taboos. Alacu deals with the myths and taboos associated with the birth of twins in his *Broken Eggs.* Stylistically *Mother's Dream* is close to the artist's *Broken Eggs.* Yet his *Mother's Dream* expresses fear, anxiety and vulnerability through a nightmarish dream in which a predator gobbles a child in the presence of its sleeping mother. I have already indicated that during the forties Trowell engaged the theme of mother and child to raise notions of domesticity (and therefore civility), and that in the early-sixties Maloba engaged the same theme to embody political maturity/independence. Alacu revises the mother and child theme. He unambiguously uses his to contradict civility; his work questions Amin's draconian regime. It elicits fear, vulnerability and death, rampant at the time. In this process, he destabilises the theme and symbolism, of mother and child in a manner resonant of a work, I referred to earlier, in which Matti engaged an equally problematic relationship between a child and a dead mother in order to question the Nimeiry administration of Sudan. Alacu's dream is also important for another reason. Although located in another political dispensation, it is here that we trace the politicisation of a "woman's dream" which we will also confront in Fred Mutebi's *Rural Woman's Dream* which I analyse in chapter seven.

In his *Legend* (late-1970s; plate 77) Alacu heightened the fear, anxiety and vulnerability in his *Mother's Dream* to capture a gruesome, radical, uncompassionate polity full of torture, corruption (represented with two hands to the right of the composition exchanging a bundle of money), agony, anxiety and death. He intensified the carnage in Matti's works; he surreally incarnated a brute grotesqueness while avoiding direct reference to the army whose presence, "shoot-at-random" and "shoot-to-kill" attitude, he represents with a spitting gun in the centre of the painting. Tyranny reigns; there is limited chance for escape. To the left of centre a group of small figures throw a rope to help someone escape the carnage as another group seeks God's intercession behind it. In the upper left hand corner, someone is trying to reach out as if to escape from the brutal figure which squeezes a human figure (probably an infant?) and wrings its neck forcing contents to gush

through its mouth into the direction of a tormented but devout Christian. The artist deploys a mixture of religious and secular symbols as he secularises the apocalypse in order to express his anti-Amin message. For example, the Christian has a rosary loosely wrought around his neck. Its cross drops into a thick sludge of vomit as the Christian mortal struggles to strangle and detach himself from an invading creature threatening to metamorphose him into itself. A sense of tension and vulnerability looms; the artist compares it to that of a fowl under the attack of a hungry predator which we see in the immediate foreground of the painting. There is an ominous, intimidating fluidity which subjects everything in the painting to a state of flux — a reference to the political fluidity which started in the sixties. We also note the presence of a sharp instrument ready to stab. I presume this is a reference to the *kijambiya* I mentioned earlier although the artist avoids direct reference to the machete. Instead he redeploys an object which is close to Peter Mulindwa improvised killer-blades.

Peter Mulindwa is a contemporary Ugandan artist. He graduated from Makerere Art School in 1971 before teaching there during 1977-1980. Mulindwa's earlier works have mythical figures, rendered with limited three-dimensionality. They have sharp claws and sharp knives. In his *Untitled* (Tormented by a Vicious Attack; 1970s?; plate 78) Mulindwa articulates allegorical reptilian creatures hovering in a stylised (cloudy) atmosphere over an anxious crowd of people. The work manifests Mulindwa's reference to traditional allegories and myths as he expresses revulsion towards a repressive state.

The allegorical creatures in Mulindwa's idiom gained new shapes and became recognisable as vicious alligators in another work *Untitled* (Shadow of Death; late-1970s; plate 79) done by one V. Atim. The painting is rendered with clarity in rich blues and browns. It is surreal, depicting rampaging creatures, close to those in Mulindwa's mural, which have become powerful alligators and snakes. If Eli Kyeyune thought Lutembe was a friendly alligator, Atim is looking at the vicious type. His alligators have descended on

and are devouring the mortals. The work reminds one of the biblical figure, Jonah. If this is a valid reading then we can also conclude that like his contemporaries the artist secularised religious text.

In an interview with George Kyeyune in 2001, Mulindwa confirmed that during the late-seventies and early-eighties churches and religious symbols were used to express disgust with what he called “Aminism” – Aminism being a direct reference to Amin’s misrule. Admitting Mulindwa’s argument suggests that Atim recalled religious allegories to criticise the regime while camouflaging his anti-Amin message into an allegorical narrative. He revisited and updated Matti’s symbolisms of carrion eaters and nakedness to expose torture, brutality and vulnerability. In addition we see in the upper level of the painting someone hanged[295] against the background of a city (identified by modern architecture) but also on top of a village (identified by huts as it were in Kawalya’s *Returning Home,* Ntiro’s villages and others). Now, if Matti saw a city as a centre of brisk commercial activity and modern buildings in his *City* (referred to earlier), and he contrasted it with villages which for him were centres of destruction as in his *Village Massacre I* and *II*, then this painting suggests that by the late-seventies artists had combined the rural and the urban to question Amin’s dictatorship. Arguably this is because, as we read in Sserumaga (2003), both the rural and the urban were sites of torture.

We also see in Atim’s painting a moving skeleton menacingly advancing with supernatural force. Skeletons, walking or otherwise, were to become a political leitmotif in the early-eighties in paintings which critiqued Obote’s second reign of terror; before their popularity (and use as visual vocabulary) waned in the late-1980s. Lastly, Atim confronts us with a person chained and immobilised. This was a direct reference to the detentions in which many were locked away or caused to disappear leaving no trace. Few were lucky

[295] Hanging was one way in which the regime got rid of its adversaries; others included orchestrated accidents (and this is how Anglican Archbishop Janan Luwum and others were killed in 1977).

to be given decent burials[296]. (And I will extend this thread in a moment during my discussion on Godfrey Banadda's work).

The painting, *Untitled* (The Dusk of Aminism; late-1970s; plate 80) is also worth mentioning here because of its political symbolism, historical and visual narrative. Clearly it bears the footprints of the representations of the seventies in as far as it carries chains, naked bodies, vulnerable children, sharp blades, total anarchy and apocalyptic horror which shaped, and were shaped by, the "aminism" of the seventies. It is not signed; its title, like its artist, was not recorded. One can speculate that its anonymity, and that of the artist, resulted from fear of being repressed by the state, most especially considering that the artist directly referred to the military. In spite of its anonymity, the work opened a new page on anti-state art in the sense that, in the place of reptiles, the artist shows a dramatic scene in which two supernaturally powerful, humanlike creatures viciously torment humanity and destroy property. The artist persuades us to appreciate the strength of her/his superhuman creatures by suggesting, in the middle of the work, that they were so powerful that they neutralised elephants and held strong birds and mighty alligators in one arm while unleashing terror with the other. Some artists of the early-eighties would explore related symbolisms to criticise the tyranny of Obote's second regime.

Also, unlike the other counter-state paintings of the seventies, this one is the only painting which prophesised the vulnerability of Amin's dictatorial regime. It mirrors the events which decisively marked the end of Amin's tyranny represented in the man, dressed in military regalia, who is disabled and forced to capitulate to the invading, powerful beings. This symbolism is unique because it suggests the collapse of Amin's military machine imposed by another equally vicious regime. This flow of events was not as obvious in 1979 as in the early-eighties when it became clear that the forces which overthrew Amin were more vicious than the Amin they ousted. I turn to the

[296] For example on January 28, 2005, the remains of Shaban Kirunda Nkutu, a Minister in the 1960s whom Amin's operatives abducted, detained and subsequently killed in 1973, were found and given a decent burial. He is considered lucky; many like him will never be recovered.

viciousness of these forces in a moment because it also informed Uganda's modern art.

Amin's army was, however, considered invincible until a raid on Entebbe in 1976 (Mugaju 1999, 30) in which the Israelis attacked the very backbone of Amin's regime – the army – in order to end a hostage drama. The Israeli raid had far reaching consequences for Amin and the balance of power in the region. As we notice in Schroeder's *Idi Amin Dada,* Amin trusted his army; the attack on it was therefore humiliating. Now, in order to save face, Amin made territorial claims on Kenya's borders before invading Tanzania's Kagera Salient in October 1978 and annexing it. This attracted international condemnation; it galvanised political and military forces against his rule. Although, under the Front for National Salvation, Ugandan dissidents had attacked and failed to overthrow Amin in 1972, this time they joined hands with other groups to form the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF). Assisted by Tanzania's national army, the People's Defence Forces (TPDF), UNLF overthrew Amin in 1979. Amin's military machine was totally annihilated – the kind of annihilation that the anonymous artist poignantly represents in the symbolism of a neutralised soldier.

But the UNLF and the TPDF did not improve the health of the state; the fall of Amin did not bring lasting change. Or, if it did, then "this did not last for long" (Kabwegyere 2000, 19). In short the UNLF, and their backers the TPDF, were no better than the Amin they overthrew. First, the invading forces lacked clear guidelines and policy. They failed to stem the massive looting and lawlessness which followed the collapse of Amin as is articulated in Charles Mukasa's painting *Looting at Bombo* (1980; plate 81). This graduate of Makerere Art School articulates the collusion between the so-called liberators and members of the public to wreck the economy which had suffered under Amin. Second, although the fall of Amin was welcomed by many, the TPDF and the UNLF soon became unpopular. After a few months the TPDF had resorted to rape, robbery and tyranny. The UNLF itself had no concrete political agenda. The new government, installed in April 1979,

headed by Yusuf Lule, collapsed in 68 days. It was followed with another one, headed by Lukongwa Binaisa which collapsed within a year. Both governments collapsed because of internal wrangling (Kabwegyere 2000, 20), religious and political factionalism, greed and corruption (Museveni 1997, 116), before Obote returned to power through a flawed election in December 1980.

The poorly conceived, mismanaged and rigged election was “nothing more than a mockery” (Mugaju 2000, 22) of democracy and good governance in the post-Amin era. It split groups which had coalesced under UNLF. Many Ugandans who had hoped for a better future after the collapse of Amin’s regime were disillusioned. This was good fodder for Yoweri Museveni who disputed the election and its results. He launched a popular anti-Obote and anti-TPDF rebellion in 1981. The rebellion started in Buganda where Obote was most hated because he outlawed the Buganda kingdom. By 1984 most of Southern Uganda was engulfed in war. In order to quell the rebellion, Obote, like Nimeiry in Southern Sudan, supervised a tortuous regime in which many were raped, killed or maimed. Property was lost, the economy collapsed, bad governance and corruption thrived. Essentially Ugandans moved from Amin’s terror to Obote’s terror as the anonymous artist had predicted. Contemporary artist of the eighties had to confront Obote’s second regime making works in which they articulated fear, death and anxiety. In the next section I look at the artworks done by Godfrey Banadda, Mathias Muwonge and Allan Birabi to render my claims less abstract.

From Terror to More Terror: Contemporary Ugandan Art and the Obote II Terror

Godfrey Banadda graduated from Makerere Art School in 1983. Currently he lectures there. Banadda painted his *Last Hope* in 1983, a work in which he revisited the iconography of nakedness, tortoises, snakes, anxiety, killer-blades and apocalyptic scenes of the 1970s, to heighten anxiety and to consummate a political [con]text (see plate 82). The painting narrates a personal experience of the artist veiled in Christian eschatology. It represents

a near-death experience Banadda went through when Obote's operatives rounded him, and other students, up from Makerere University and took them to the notorious torture chambers at the Nile Mansions[297]. That he was later released was phenomenal; many did not live to tell their story. Banadda captures this experience in the painting[298]. He shows us a tug of war between life and death, at the lower right-hand section of the painting, a theme repeated in the hospital scene in the top right hand section of the painting. The clock ticks as those who lose the battle are carried off in coffins and lowered into graves to the left of the painting. But we also see them coming to life again. They open their coffins and joyously float to life. At least Banadda was hopeful I could say: his dead had a decent burial and hope for resurrection, a direct reference to his own escape.

Muwonge graduated from the Art School in 1985. He also currently lectures there. He, however, saw things differently. In 1985 he produced a series of works which depicted the carnage in the countryside. He was not directly targeted like Banadda, but because his family was located in southern Uganda, which had turned into a theatre of Obote's brutality, Muwonge could not entirely escape victimisation. He had to venture the numerous deadly roadblocks on the way home. He argues that the series of works he did on the theme titled *Misfortune* was "a summary of the Uganda of the mid-eighties"[299] which was ravaged by war and terror. Muwonge's claim is important because it confirms that his political art, like that of other political artists since the forties, was based on the human experience (or what Trowell called art as a mirror of its times) rather than strict academic dogma. Hence, despite the fact that his anti-state art, and that of his contemporaries, was done in his final year at university, it cannot be said that his theme was set by instructors. In fact, Pilkington Ssengendo, who supervised Muwonge's project, had disengaged from political art by the mid-eighties and resorted to

[297] This property was initially conceived in the late-sixties when Obote wanted to boost the local tourist sector. Amin completed it. During his second regime, however, Obote converted it into a torture chamber. Museveni recently sold it off.
[298] Banadda Godfrey, *Interview with the Author*, Makerere Art School, February 9, 2006.
[299] Muwonge Mathias Kyazze, *Interview with the Author*, Makerere Art School, March 1, 2005.

landscapes (Kyeyune 2003, 115). This, however, is not to deny entirely that instructors informed the decisions the artists took (especially the technical ones). Rather, it is to fuse Uganda's political art done at Makerere Art School into the factors, outside of the Art School itself, which informed it (factors whose existence the artists confirm as we note in Muwonge's comments).

In his painting, titled *Misfortune* (1985; plate 83), Muwonge veils his disgust towards the rapacious, brutal, murderous Obote II regime. He camouflaged his critique in fantastic, almost celestial, killer agents. We saw skeletal agents in the top section of Atim's work of the late-1970s. Muwonge engaged the vocabulary of such skeletons save that he clothed them into varied bodies. Muwonge's idiom symbolises apocalyptic horror in which the bloodletting we saw in Nnaggenda's *Politician* (see plate 68) has taken on epic proportion. We see a vicious skeletal body chaining and ripping open the womb of a pregnant woman. A premature baby is ejected. The smell of death and total carnage looms: limbs fly around only to be held back by chains. If Florence Kawalya's snakes were numb (see plate 9) here they are active and vicious. The artist also recalls the reptilian creatures we saw in Mulindwa's work (see plate 78), Atim's (see plate 79) and others of the late-seventies. They attack humanity driving their fangs into decapitated limbs. He introduced vicious and destructive insects into his composition – a visual affirmation of Tarsis Kabwegyere's contention that "the second Obote regime stung like a scorpion" (Kabwegyere 2000, 22).

Because there was resentment towards Obote in Buganda, Museveni launched his anti-Obote rebellion (to which I referred earlier) from a place called Luweero which is situated in Buganda. However by the time the artist did his *Misfortune* the whole of Buganda had become a theatre of war and torture; it had become the so-called Luweero Triangle which Allan Birabi captured in his *Luweero Triangle* (1985).

Allan Birabi graduated with Muwonge; the two worked together and shared resentment to Obote's bad rule. He is currently lecturing in the Department of

Architecture at Makerere University. In his *Luweero Triangle* (plate 84) Birabi recalled Pablo Picasso's *Guernica;* his narrative of military brutality can be traced from other works to which I have already made reference (for example see plates 69, 70a and 77). Birabi, like Banadda, came close to death when a vehicle, he was travelling in along Kampala-Bombo highway, was attacked[300]. This highway crossed the Luweero Triangle to the North of Uganda. Many ambushes took place here. Birabi survived one such ambush. But he did not depict his escape in direct terms; his work is not an autobiography. Being more concerned about the wider societal concerns, he visualised the broader conditions in the war-torn Luweero Triangle. He invented modernist super-human figures to represent a murderous state. In chapter eight we will see Bruno Sserunkuuma inventing super-human figures to represent the state, although differently. It is therefore important to notice how, after the late-seventies (as seen in plate 80), gigantism and super-humanity were deployed by some artists to symbolise the state before Sserunkuuma picked up this strategy. We see Birabi's gigantic figure wielding a Kalashnikov. It is an ominous representation of a draconian state which has reneged on its duty to protect its citizens and instead adopted a shoot-to-kill policy towards the very people and property it was mandated to protect.

To enunciate the gruesomeness of the murders, Birabi presents a ghoulish image which drives a sharp rod through a person, whose arms have been tied, before driving the same rod through a naked helpless child fallen on the ground littered with human skeletons. This gruesomeness is repeated on the left of the centre with the same shadowy figure driving another rod through the body of a fleeing woman. The artist persuades us to appreciate the brutality of the military by using the symbolism of a naked female body mercilessly pierced from the back and the helpless child stabbed through the stomach. The painting speaks of total destruction with impunity. Badly bruised and mutilated bodies and skeletons are scattered all over the space. Blood gushes out of all the victims as villages are set ablaze in the

[300] Birabi Allan, *Informal Conversation with the Author*, Makerere University, January, 2006.

background. In fact, what we see in this work is that which Phares Mutibwa calls a “holocaust” (Mutibwa 1992, xiv).

The holocaust in Birabi’s *Luweero Triangle* continued until Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM), and its military wing the National Resistance Army (NRA), took over power on January 26, 1986. NRM/NRA brought what Museveni called “a fundamental change” in the history of Uganda (Museveni 1992, 21). Museveni’s “fundamental change” was inscribed in a ten-point programme of action popularly called the “Ten Point Programme” (the TPP). Developed during the rebellion, the TPP became a “basis for a nationwide coalition of political and social forces which could usher in a better future for the long-suffering people of Uganda” (Museveni 1997, 217). It was intended to restore democracy, good governance and security of people and their property, eliminate sectarianism, improve the economy, rehabilitate the war ravaged country, emancipate the disadvantaged, and yes, fight corruption (ibid). Earlier I intimated that these problems were rooted in Uganda’s colonial past and that they were aggravated by Obote’s and Amin’s regimes (also see Museveni, 1992; 1997). Thus the TPP was received with approbation; to many it signalled hope.

Through its TPP the NRM unfolded what became Uganda’s “Renaissance”[301]. Internationally President Museveni was ranked among the “new breed of African leaders” as the President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton, later characterised him. Locally Museveni was “the defender of the underdogs” (Kabwegyere 2000, 34) because under his administration disadvantaged groups were emancipated, constitutional order was restored; democracy was [re]introduced, “freedom of speech and expression” was restored (ibid). The civil service was revamped; the economy improved. Now, if the arts of 1966-1986 visualised and critiqued, greed, self-aggrandisement, torture, brutality, decapitation, abuse of human

[301] See Cullimore Charles, “Uganda: The Making of a Constitution” in *The Journal of Modern African Studies,* 32, 4 (London: Cambridge Press, 1994), 707.

rights, and the loss of freedom of expression, located in this “new era”, or Museveni’s “New Uganda”, the “post civil war artists” (Kyeyune 2003, 258) resonated a different debate. Some artists revisited the pro-state nationalism of the early-sixties as they expressed (or could I say celebrated?) the NRM: its reforms and ideology. Other artists critically admitted the good in the reform package. While they appreciated the NRM’s TPP as a necessary reform package, but they also engaged the critical mode which evolved during 1966-1986 as they identified and questioned the NRM’s failures. In the next section I demonstrate how this dynamic unfolded.

Contemporary Art and Post-Civil War Uganda: New Directions

For one artist, whose work has been kept at the Nommo Gallery but whose name remains unknown, Museveni himself was the embodiment of constitutionalism in Uganda. In her/his *Untitled* (Return to Constitutionalism; late-1980s) the artist used wood and papier-mâché to construct a sculptural portrait of Museveni. His sculpture represents a middle-class man dressed in a London suit (plate 85a). The man’s pose suggests movement towards the beholder: the public. It wields a walking stick: a symbolism of good leadership and poignant representation of Kabwegyere’s metaphor of defender-of-the-underdogs. It guardedly holds a book clearly marked with the inscription “Constitution of Uganda” and the Coat of Arms of Uganda (plate 85b): a vivid reference to democracy and constitutionalism. The sculpture thus affirmed the return of sane leadership, constitutionalism, rule of law and democracy in Uganda and the artist saw Museveni as the very embodiment of such a return.

Elly Tumwine is a high-ranking officer in Uganda’s army: the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF). He is the first artist to hold this portfolio in Uganda’s history. He has occupied various portfolios in the executive, legislature, civil and military organs of the state. Unlike many other artists who have served in the top echelons of the NRM, Tumwine has continued to practice art. He is a painter, art teacher and art historian.

If Maloba celebrated the post-colonial euphoria and emancipation from colonial rule, Tumwine poignantly celebrated Uganda's emancipation from post-colonial misrule. In his *Struggle* (1990), *Bravo* (1992), *Freedom Fighter* (1992) and *Activist* (1992?) Tumwine celebrated political activism which had returned political and personal freedoms to Uganda in 1986. In his *Raising the Flag* (1990s), Tumwine represented a jubilant crowd with civilians and the military [re]raising the national flag (plate 86). Unlike Driciru's crowds, Tumwine's crowd, composed of civilians and the military, is identifiably euphoric. In *Raising the Flag* Tumwine bridges the link between the army (identified by green military fatigue) and the body politic. Making this bridge was a cornerstone of the NRM's rule. NRM vowed to "build confidence among the population" in the national force and give the army a national character (Museveni 1997, 174) – a character which it had lost since the 1960s. Tumwine also painted his *The Ten Point Programme* (*?*) in the 1990s (see plate 87). He combined national symbols (the crested crane decorated with the colours of the national flag), images and text into a visual narrative which unquestioningly celebrated and promoted the NRM ideology as inscribed in the organisation's Ten Point Programme and dictum of the "fundamental change" all of which are written in the painting.

The mood in Tumwine's work permeated works of other artists. For example, Rex Regis Semulya graduated in the late-eighties. Recalling Mexican muralist styles, Semulya did his *Untitled* (Post-war Reconstruction; 1987; plate 88) visualising the intense reconstruction effort that followed the civil war. Alex Baine painted her *Untitled* (Women's Emancipation in Uganda; 1988) celebrating the NRM's policy of affirmative action and the "new woman" (Tumusiime 2005) who emerged as a result of the policy. Like Tumwine's works, Ssemulya's and Baine's paintings totally contrasted with the lawlessness, anarchy, decapitation and destruction vividly imaged in the works of the 1970s and early-1980s. They were paradigmatically idealistic representations of Museveni's "New Uganda".

Other artists reacted differently. Located in this "new era", Mathias Kyazze Muwonge abandoned the production of art which questions the health of the nation-state. Why? He explains that because "art is a product of its immediate experience" (Muwonge, interview 2005), and such experience is informed by politics, changes in politics are bound to be reflected in art (ibid). Hence because Uganda's "politics…changed" in 1986, Muwonge's art changed too (ibid). But Muwonge did not just change his symbolism, he totally disengaged from questioning the state using his art. He turned to "market-oriented" art (ibid). He recalled the escapist[302] batiks of the seventies, and early-eighties, to produce works intended to suit the post-1986 art market.

Then too, given the changes in the political environment, improving economy and increase in the number of graduates[303] a competitive art market, consisting of many buyers (mainly Western tourists) and sellers (individual artists and art dealers), or what Raymonde Moulin (in another context) calls a "polypole" (Moulin 1987, 178), has evolved since the 1990s. This market is mainly driven by the hegemonic forces of Western consumer culture[304]; it has compelled many artists to produce only those artworks (mainly paintings) popular with the tourists. It is fragmented; formally trained, as well as auto-didactic, artists freely participate in it. It is mainly a non-bourgeois market with a taste for figurative art, genre scenes, wild life, etc. Since its buyers are not sophisticated, artists have been compelled to make works which border

[302] My use of this term recalls Kyeyune (2003) who, under the subtitle "'escaping reality': batik and political disengagement" (p.170), suggested that batik-artists, unlike the mainstream contemporary artists, avoided the political reality of the seventies: they were escapist.

[303] By 1990, Makerere was probably the only Art School in Uganda producing less than thirty graduates a year many of whom would end up teaching art in secondary schools. Today Makerere Art School alone produces about two-hundred graduates a year. Besides, many other Art Schools have come up; the overall number of graduates has increased.

[304] Sometimes, according to Mamiya (1987), the production art is about submitting to a hegemonic Western consumer culture (and the ideology of consumption), which sustains and perpetuates a certain genre. Hence Mamiya argues that America's pop art "endured and became the art movement of the 1960s" (p.viii) because of "its capitulation to market considerations" (p.233) and the "ideology of consumption which predominated in the late-1950s and 1960s…" (p.244). Although Uganda does not have a perfect consumer culture matching that in the West, certainly the tourists who buy the country's art do come from such a culture and have forced many artists to capitulate to their tastes. For more on this debate and how it informed pop art see: Mamiya, J. Chritin. "Super Market: Pop Art and the Ideology of Consumption." (PhD. diss., University of California, 1987).

on what Moulin called “junk painting” (Moulin 1987, 140-2): paintings that are not for the consumption of bourgeois buyers; paintings which are bought by the less sophisticated who would “not pay more than [they] can afford” (ibid). Located in this complex dynamic, and in order to serve this fast-growing market, Muwonge currently produces apolitical paintings depicting countryside folks and genre scenes (see plate 89), although he sometimes does commissions and mounts exhibitions for the bourgeois market.

There are other political artists of the period 1966-1986, who, like Muwonge, disengaged from “politico-aesthetics”. According to his online resume, Birabi is currently interested in “conservation and management of the built heritage and environment, urban ecological development and management, minimising poverty and sustaining ecosystems, public art and urban regeneration initiatives”[305]. Nnaggenda did his *The War Victim* (1988) after his *Politician.* His *War Victim* showed an energetic man tortured and mutilated but strong and resilient (see plates 90a and 90b). After his *The War Victim,* Nnaggenda turned to issues of cultural importance and identity. In the 1990s he served the Buganda kingdom as a Minister of Culture. In 1993 he led a group of Baganda artists, from Makerere Art School, who made a monument to celebrate the restoration of the Buganda kingdom. Tabawebbula Kivubiro is not currently engaged in anti-state art either. He is interested in issues of his Ganda identity: his doctoral thesis confirms my claim[306]. Banadda too disengaged from using his art for counter-state activities. He is currently engaged in issues of Ganda mythology and identity. There is no information available on Matti, Driciru, Alacu and many other political artists of the seventies. They probably, like many others, took on teaching positions in secondary schools and became less productive, or they fled into exile and never returned. Peter Mulindwa is still active although his art is not critical of the state. Therefore, if Kyeyune (2003) argues that after

[305] See: “Mr. Allan Kenneth Birabi’s Profile” available online at: http://www.makerere.ac.ug/technology/profiles/staff_detail.php?id=43 (accessed June 23, 2006).
[306] See: Kivubiro, J. M. Tabawebbula. “Baganda Material Culture since 1900, an Indigenous Interpretation: Indigenous Concepts of Beauty Meaning and Ritual in Baganda Material Culture The Baganda at the Turn of the Century and in the 1990s.” (PhD. thesis, Flinders University of Australia, 1998).

1986 artists disengaged from attacking the performance of government and concentrated on concerns over ethnic identity and the art market, then these are some of the artists who bear out his claim.

On the other hand, however, since the 1990s some scholars and activists have been debating whether the “fundamental change” which the NRM announced was really fundamental. A few artists have actively participated in this debate. Hussein Kyanjo graduated from the Art School in the 1980s. He is a vocal critic of the NRM. Recently he was elected to the legislature. He is a commercial graphic designer who has not used his art as a political tool. Or, if indeed he has, then his visual expressions have not been effective; they did not help his election bid. Instead his religion, Islam, and alignment with multi-party activism helped him win the heated election.

William Opolot Okitoi graduated in 1990. He used his art to critique the NRM’s failure to end what Museveni called the “cancer of corruption” (Museveni 1992, 88). Okitoi made his *Untitled* (Corruption; 1990; plate 91a). The painting resonates Ngugi’s *The Black Hermit* I alluded to earlier. Like Ngugi the artist critiques the greed and corruption of the (post-colonial) ruling elite. Concerned with the way the corrupt NRM elite exploited the rural masses, Okitoi used open hands at the centre of his composition to receive and convey the excess labour (on Marx’s terms) of the working, but mainly rural peasant agricultural class, through a tunnel which terminates on a table where the act of exploitation takes place (see and 91b). Okitoi recalls Ntiro’s working village folks. He, however, sees them as an exploited class – something Ntiro missed. As if to heighten emotions, Okitoi recalls the politics of naked and exposed children of the 1970s–1980s, albeit differently. He introduces a baby to the left of the composition. Here too the infant is naked and vulnerable. This presence of the baby accentuates the commitment of the working woman who unreservedly works the fields at the expense of tending to her vulnerable child. What we therefore confront in Okitoi’s work is a re-appropriation of earlier visual vocabularies to suit new challenges. He redeploys the mother and child symbolism to mount a pointed attack on the

corruption which NRM cadres inherited and perpetuated under the new dispensation. Little is known about Okitoi's pursuits after this work. Like Muwonge, and others, he may have abandoned making political statements to produce "market-oriented" art or, alternatively, he may have become an art teacher and become less productive although I have no evidence to support this claim.

That Okitoi and Kyanjo have criticised the performance of the state in two separate but complementary ways points to my next task. In the subsequent two chapters I interrogate and demonstrate how Fred Kato Mutebi and Bruno Sserunkuuma have, more than Okitoi and others, persistently, and consistently as well, revisited and revised the visual vocabularies and strategies, which we have seen this far, and turned them into a voice to question NRM policies on the environment, war, corruption and ultimately, governance. I start with Fred Kato Mutebi before proceeding with Bruno Sserunkuuma. This strategy defies strict chronology but it is fruitful because of the following: One, although Bruno Sserunkuuma joined the Art School before Fred Kato Mutebi, the two artists became interested in issues of governance and democratisation in the early-1990s. Two, and most importantly, is that although, as I will show in the next chapter, Mutebi predicts the collapse of the NRM government under the weight of corruption and poor service delivery, he does not propose any alternative through his art. In fact it is Sserunkuuma who does. Hence starting with Mutebi's work opens up into the political issues behind Bruno Sserunkuuma's political pottery.

Conclusion to Chapter Six:

In this chapter, I have retraced and reread the political moments and tensions which covered the country with a shadow of fear and anxiety. I analysed the ways in which artists embodied such moments and tensions in their works as the celebration over independence dawned into decades of anarchy, anxiety, genocide, mayhem, pillage and suffering. I have demonstrated that contemporary artists deployed multiple strategies which

evolved since the 1930s, and invented new ones, in order to embody the dangers Ugandans faced in the period 1966-1986. I have demonstrated and argued that a new genre, which, for want of a better term, can be called “antistate camouflage art”, evolved through which artists used their works to criticise bad governance and misrule.

By the end of the eighties a new mood, referred to as a “renaissance”, had engulfed the arts. This was the case because the NRM administration had ended Obote’s dictatorial regime and introduced reforms. It had unfolded a “New Uganda” which opened new opportunities for artists. I have posited that located in this new political dispensation some artists used their oeuvres to express their loyalty to the state. I have conceded that some artists abandoned the production of antistate art: they turned to the production of market-oriented art and using their work as a tool for cultural expression. However, I also demonstrated, and argued, that other artists identified and criticised NRM’s failures which had become obvious by the early-nineties: the genre of Uganda’s political art continued to thrive albeit differently. As I demonstrate in the next two chapters Fred Mutebi and Bruno Sserunkuuma have picked it up and extended it vigorously, and prodigiously, since the early-nineties.

Chapter Seven

"NRM has betrayed me": Mutebi Critiques Corruption in Uganda

> **It hurts, in a society that was ravaged by war, to see a group of people whose rich life-style is completely out of proportion to what is surrounding them, especially when it is well known that the wealth of some well-to-do Ugandans was acquired through dubious means, especially corruption.**
> Phares Mutibwa, *Uganda since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes*.

Introduction

Phares Mutibwa is a distinguished academician and supporter of the NRM regime. He has served it in different capacities: he was its Director of Research and Political Affairs; he served as a member of the Constitutional Commission in the late-eighties and early-nineties. But he refuses to be a sycophant and is one of the few NRM supporters who have questioned corruption in the NRM. Similarly, Fred Kato Mutebi is a supporter of the NRM, but is also not a sycophant. He is one of the few artists who are supporters of the NRM but who have also questioned the organisation's failure to eliminate corruption from the public service. "Basically I agree with Professor Mutibwa" he contends adding that the "NRM has failed because of corruption" (Mutebi, interview 2006). As if to embody his agreement with Mutibwa, and his contention that the NRM is collapsing under the burden of malfeasance, Mutebi has used his art to criticise corruption in the NRM.

My task in this chapter is to analyse how Mutebi has mobilised his art to identify and expose corruption in the NRM. I retrace the contours of his professional growth from 1989 at Makerere Art School until recently when he became a self-professed social and political critic (Mutebi, interview 2006). I interrogate how he has revised and redeployed imagery drawn from his home district, from the urban, carrion-eaters and women, among others, as critical symbols in order to define and critique corruption. This discussion in

important because it challenges claims that Uganda's post-civil war artists abandoned political art and returned to issues of art as an expression of cultural identity (Kyeyune 2003) and art as a reinterpretation of cultural objects into art forms (Sanyal 2000). It lies at the centre of the hypothesis I have developed in this thesis.

Fred Kato Mutebi's Career: Formation and Exposure

Fred Kato Mutebi is a contemporary Ugandan artist, a print-maker and painter. As I discussed in relation to Ntiro's work, Mutebi, similarly, deploys his rural countryside to talk about national, regional and global issues, and so a clear understanding of his origins is important. Mutebi was born and raised in Masaka District. This district is situated 100 kilometres to the west of Kampala, the capital of Uganda. Located near the equator, Masaka District receives ample rainfall; it produces a variety of tropical fruits like bananas and 89% of its population is rural. Its economy is predominantly rural and agricultural. By 1970, Masaka District was a major source of food for urban centres like Kampala. Recently however, as a result of pests, food production has fallen to subsistence levels, with limited surplus sold through robust makeshift markets along transit routes which go through Masaka town to Rwanda, the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo and northern Tanzania. Through such markets, traders (mainly women) supply fruits (e.g mangoes, plantains, bananas, etc) to travellers who ply the highway. In this chapter we are going to see how this space, and its economic activities, has informed the artist's visual vocabulary and political stance.

In 1989, after his primary and secondary school education, Mutebi joined Makerere Art School. As I indicated in chapter two, Margaret Trowell introduced modern art in Uganda in the late-1930s. I also indicated in chapter five that Cecil Todd expanded its component of art history and introduced colour theory after Trowell's retirement. Both instructors laid a foundation for the context in which Mutebi was taught. His own instructors, Pilkington Ssengendo (painter), Gracie Masembe (print-maker), among

others, were directly taught by Todd; they respect the role of art history and colour theory in art facture. Being part of the three-year Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) degree which Mutebi pursued in 1989-1992, art history introduced the artist to modernist styles. “Of course…I learnt a lot from art history” he asserts (Mutebi, interview 2006) confirming the role of formal art education in the shaping of a contemporary artist in Uganda (Sanyal 2000). His surrealism, his expressionist style, his fauvist palette and vibrant impastos confirm his claims, although he is also very pragmatic and avoids following strict academic schema which Trowell rejected and Cecil Todd advocated. For the artist, every artwork dictates its own methodology. He argues that in his practice he tends “to consider the composition, the colours, the intricacy of the piece” (Mutebi, interview 2006) and its political message rather than commitment to rigid academic dogma, in which case then he also recalls Jonathan Kingdon’s and Trowell’s convictions.

Mutebi graduated in 1992 and has, since then, attended international workshops. What Museveni called the “New Uganda”, opened up opportunities for artists like him to access international art discourses and markets. This global conversation has impacted the artist in two ways: First, he has become “an international artist” (Mutebi, interview 2006) unrestrained by tribal mores and national borders. Located in [t]his interdependent, rather than localised, space and time, Mutebi sees the world as a “global village” (ibid). He has held varied group and solo exhibitions, art workshops and forums to share his political message with audiences in Uganda, East and Southern Africa, Asia, Europe and the USA[307]. Secondly, Mutebi has gained a wealth of experience from international discussions which he has deployed to enhance the skills he gained from Makerere University. This has been particularly so with his print-making. “When I started about fifteen years ago I started with five” (ibid) repeats from each woodcut only a few of which were successful, he explains. However, after “going to international forums for print-makers, they encouraged me to start with as many as fifty” (ibid) repeats in each edition. Through experiment, experience and time he has

[307] See his curriculum vitae in volume two appendix one.

learnt that fifty was a very ambitious figure given the complexity of his motifs. He finally settled for twenty repeats, of which 17-18 would be successful. Thus many of the prints I refer to in this discussion are part of the several editions, which the artist has produced over the last fourteen years, on varied social and political themes. His paintings are an exception to this rule because while the artist believes he should mass-produce his paintings to make them affordable to Ugandans (Mutebi, interview 2005), he has not implemented this idea. He probably never will.

Against this background let me now turn to Mutebi's work. I trace his progress from a wide thematic frame and how he narrowed it down to critique the NRM's venality in a manner resonant with Mutibwa's book.

Fred Kato Mutebi: His Early Work and Visual Strategies

Although he started making art at his home[308], had formal art instruction during his secondary education and did a lot of work at Makerere[309], Mutebi's early works are rare. Fortunately, Makerere University Gallery kept the painting which the artist did in the early-1990s: *Rural Woman's Dream* (1992; plates 92a and b). The work shows not only the artist's forms, stylistic and thematic interests of the early-1990s, but it also contains symbols which the artist has been redefining over a period of fifteen years as he moved away from the psychoanalytic surreal dream world, of the early-nineties, to engage his political reality.

Rural Woman's Dream subtly reminds us of Trowell's teaching which emphasised a link between tradition and modernity. Mutebi engages a repository of traditional artefacts in this work. He recalls the works of the 1960s – for example Crole-Rees *Maendeleo* – in as much as the artist deliberately integrates traditional objects (drum, hoe, gourd, basket and

[308] Mutebi Kato Fred. E-mail message to the Author, October 8, 2005.
[309] Mutebi and the author joined the University in the same year. Thus the author knows this for a fact,

house), a "kerosene lamp" (called *munakutadooba* in Luganda)[310] and a woman, to construct his political narrative. He also recalls the surrealistic and apocalyptic moods of the late-seventies and early-eighties – for example his work reverberates with strands from the political dream represented in Alacu's *Mother's Dream* discussed in chapter six. As such *Rural Woman's Dream* fits in the trajectory of political art which I have traced this far.

Mutebi's *Rural Woman's Dream* suggests a modernist style which he has developed since the nineties. It has helped his profession in two complementary ways. First, as for Nnaggenda in the late-sixties, it allows the artist to create ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning. Second, in a manner resonant with the camouflage artists of the late-seventies and eighties, Mutebi engages modernism as a process of indirection in order to evade detection (and probably repression) by the state (and society) he critiques, while opening a window in (and through) which he communicates with[in] a global community.

In an interview I had with him, Mutebi passionately insisted that:

> I always want to talk about things that I know most…so I use the example of Masaka District where I come from and how it was twenty years ago and what is happening on the ground...[In] certain things NRM has done better but in some things there is corruption. In terms of corruption [NRM]…can be compared to [the regimes of 1962-1986] (Mutebi, interview 2006).

Although this statement does not tell us much about his *Rural Woman's Dream* whose location remains surreal and anonymous, it broadly defines the ambitious project Mutebi has engaged in over the past one-and-a-half decades. It is also useful because it suggests that the artist uses Masaka District to rate the NRM's track record. Perhaps he could be criticised for using such a small area as a basis to question the NRM's reform programme

[310] Like the petrol *debe* in Trowell's literature and Crole-Rees's painting (see chapter five), other aluminium tins used to import products in Uganda have been converted into usable objects after their initial contents were exhausted. Local artisans cut and fabricate small lamps, which use wicks and paraffin, and sell them. These paraffin lamps are common in the countryside. But I have to add that they are very dangerous. Many houses and people have perished in fires caused by these lamps. Mutebi does not seem to be sensitive to this or, if he is, then this is not obvious in his painting where a woman puts the lamp in her bed as she sleeps.

considering that by July 2006 Uganda had 78 districts, with some being more developed than others. However Mutebi grounds his strategy in a Luganda proverb which states that: "*omuto gyamanya enkuba gyetonnya*" (meaning that one can only judge the world basing on areas s/he knows most). Put in short for the artist the conditions in Masaka represent the big picture: Masaka is the microcosm for the NRM's bad governance, poor service delivery and corruption.

We also notice in the above quote that the artist is well aware of the bad governance and economic mismanagement which preceded the NRM regime. This explains his claim that in "certain things [the] NRM has done better". Actually he has expressed similar views elsewhere. Earlier, possibly during the nineties, he wrote that before the NRM came to power, the country underwent "political, social, cultural, economic…mismanagement" (Mutebi, *Artist's Statement,* n.d.). Recalling Amin's reign in particular, he claimed that it disrupted the country's cultural discourse: "Amin persecuted artists…they ended up fleeing to other countries" (ibid) he argued. He also has a vivid recollection of the notorious roadblocks on the Masaka Highway. These, as I noted earlier, are the same roadblocks which informed Mathias Muwonge's *Misfortune*. However unlike Muwonge, but like Banadda and Birabi, Mutebi narrowly escaped death when a soldier almost stabbed him during interrogation at a military checkpoint at a place called Nsimbe, 20 kilometres from Kampala on the Kampala-Masaka Highway (Mutebi, interview 2006).

Against this backdrop, the artist asserts that the NRM administration brought change (Mutebi, interview 2006). It ended the misrule of the sixties, seventies and early-eighties. It unfolded a new dispensation in which artists can move and express themselves "freely" (ibid). Because of [t]his contention he holds deep sympathies for the NRM. "I love NRM" (ibid) he vows. Until 2005 he actively participated in grassroots politics to bolster support for the organisation, and he served on the President Museveni's campaign team in 2001. In the mid-nineties he used his art to communicate to the "worldwide

community about his beautiful country (Uganda-the Pearl of Africa)..." (Mutebi, *Artist's statement,* n.d) governed under a new political dispensation. Mutebi's use of the term "the pearl of Africa" is drawn from Winston Churchill's rhetoric. On his visit to Uganda, in 1907, Churchill admired the country's (exotic) beauty calling it "the pearl of Africa". But what Mutebi described is also that which Museveni called the "New Uganda" in 1992 (see p.1 above). As I have already pointed out Mutebi is not the only one who used art to publicise the "New Uganda". In chapter one I discussed how Mpagi's and Mukasa's paintings were seen as representations of the "New Uganda" in Vienna (see p.1 above). I have also described how Tumwine, among others, did the same (see pp.211-212 above).

And yet we also notice in the excerpt (on p.222 above) that the artist contends that the NRM inherited corrupt tendencies from past regimes. To confirm, recently he argued that "in terms of corruption" the NRM is as bad as the regimes of 1962-1986 (Mutebi, interview 2006). In short the artist is questioning the NRM's claim for a "fundamental change". He has reasons to explain his stance. During a recent conversation I had with him, he lamented that whenever he goes to his home area he cries, because for him the locality has stalled (ibid). He blames this stunted regional growth on corruption (ibid) concluding that: "Yes [the NRM] has betrayed me" (ibid). He cited examples to explain his despondence. For example he noted the flawed privatisation process through which government has sold national assets to so-called "investors". He was particularly disappointed by the sale of the Uganda Commercial Bank (UCB). Founded in the sixties, the UCB was one of the symbols of Uganda's post-colonial nationhood. However, in 2001 it was privatised through the IMF and World Bank sponsored Divestiture Programme. Mutebi remarked that the privatisation was good because the institution had been mismanaged (Mutebi, interview 2006). But he argues strongly that the deal was mired by corruption and nepotism (ibid); and that the country lost in the process.

Mutebi's view (and the disappointment which framed it) was echoed in the wider debate which took shape in 2001. During this debate many, outside of government, opposed the deal[311], while those, inside government, vigorously defended[312] it, arguing that the buyer was a reputable investor with "reputable banking credentials"[313]. As it turned out the so-called reputable investor was a group of local businessmen including members of the President's family[314]. Hence, for Mutebi, the deal was a scam although he did not visually state his strong views in the manner Bbira did.

Bbira is a graduate of Makerere Art School. He painted his *Untitled* (The Sale of UCB; 2000; plate 93) in which he depicted a comic animal handing out bones to zombie figures in exchange for bags of money. He cast the transaction against a background in which two buildings, which are identifiable representations of the Uganda Commercial Bank (UCB), tower into the skyline. The animalistic figuration, zombie figures, and the symbolism of bones ominously bring to the fore the artist's anger and attack on the collusion between Uganda's bureaucracy and so-called investors to cheat ordinary Ugandans. Like many others, Bbira did not sustain his criticism but we see him redeploying the bones and fantastical imageries of the 1970s and 1980s to critique the NRM's monetary policy and venality, albeit satirically.

Although Mutebi would share Bbira's criticism, he would not accept the latter's figuration. Like Muwonge he insists that the symbols of the 1970s and 1980s are no longer appropriate to the current art market (Mutebi, interview 2006). His idea is shared by Bruno Sserunkuuma whom we will see in the

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[311] See: "Parliament blocks UCB sale" in *The New Vision,* August 24, 2001. Also available online at: http://newvision.co.ug/D/8/13/32289/westmont (accessed August 24, 2001).

[312] And those inside government included the President himself. See: "Museveni on sale of UCB" in *The New Vision,* October 5, 2001. Also available online at: http://newvision.co.ug/D/8/20/5111/westmont (accessed October 5, 2001).

[313] See: Osike Felix, "MPs oppose UCB sale" in *The New Vision,* July 24, 2001. Also available online at http://newvision.co.ug/D/8/13/31701/westmont (accessed July 24, 2001).

[314] For example Salim Saleh, the brother of the President, and Muhoozi Kainerugaba, his eldest son, were mentioned and summoned for interrogation by the members of parliament. See: Mugisha Anne & Nankinga Juliet, "Court summons Saleh, Muhoozi over UCB sale" in *The New Vision,* July 31, 2001. Also available online at: http://newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/9542/westmont (accessed July 31, 2001).

next chapter. Both choose their forms and palette to bring the political and the aesthetic together while avoiding to offend their audience. I would not say this is an issue of political correctness. Rather, I would insist it is a way of avoiding to outrage, or scandalise, their audience. For them art as a political tool must remain aesthetic as well: it must be pleasant to the eye. This contention has been critical for their survival in the current art market in Uganda which, as I earlier noted, is predominantly non-bourgeois and supported by the tourism sector which brought into the country 400,000,000 US Dollars in 2005 (thus by far outweighing Uganda's traditional foreign exchange earners, namely coffee, cotton, etc.). Mutebi and Sserunkuuma are aware that for such a market visual political statements like Bbira's (or indeed those of the 1970s and 1980s) would not be appropriate. However, unlike Muwonge, and others who cater for this market, Mutebi and Sserunkuuma produce political art. They maintain a delicate balance between catering for a predominantly non-bourgeois market, with no discretion and intellectual drive, and avoiding becoming beholden to their patronage. They have successfully woven together the avant-garde, political activism and the non-bourgeoisie art economy in Uganda[315]. In the process they have recalled the camouflage art of the seventies (to which I referred earlier) to develop a strategy of indirection (a way of avoiding direct mentioning of things). They have preserved their creative autonomy, artistic freedom and individuality. Hence their art has also appealed to the bourgeois market in Uganda and abroad. And I suggest this is the context in which their work should be approached.

Let me also add parenthetically that whereas Mutebi concedes that the NRM is a "good regime" (Mutebi, interview 2006), he does not want to test its patience. He can therefore not afford to be as daring as Expedito Mwebe whom I earlier discussed (see p.189-190 above) or his contemporaries Fred Sennoga or Stephen Gwotcho. Sennoga is a graduate of Makerere Art School. During the 1990s he worked for the *Monitor* which started in 1993 as

[315] See appendices, in volume two, for the various exhibitions the two artists have held in Uganda and elsewhere.

a weekly newspaper critical of the NRM's policies. Sennoga received no formal instruction in comic strip at Makerere University Art School because such is considered low art like batik and mottoes. However he used the skill he acquired in the drawing classes, and graphic design, to make a series of political cartoons attacking NRM's economic and political contradictions. He often made direct reference to the portrait of the President and other NRM leaders to make his point (for example compare plates 94a and 94b). Stephen Gwotcho is also a graduate of Makerere Art School. He too has critiqued NRM's venality. He painted an art work in which he subverted the national flag in order to express his disgust towards the NRM's poor service delivery and excesses (see plate 95). Mutebi does not favour Sennoga or Gwotcho's strategies and symbolisms; for him they are risky and literal involving what Austin Bukenya calls the "daring mention" of political issues (Bukenya 1992, ix). He prefers to invoke traditional court jesters at the royal palace in Buganda who were able, with impunity, to criticise the policies of Ganda kings through music, dance and poetry without being openly subversive. He argues that he "play[s] around with the concept" (Mutebi, interview 2005) to strategically engage in political discussions without attracting sanctions. Consequently his works, although not under immediate political repression, are as veiled as those of the 1970s and early-1980s. He camouflages his messages in metaphors of cultural artefacts such as baskets of fruits, banana-sellers, flautists, birds, women, animals and music, thereby avoiding literal references. He deploys these metaphors in his "art-activism". I suggest that, although he integrates traditional symbols into his art as Trowell would have wished (see chapter three), it is in this activist context that his use of culture must be understood. Against this background let me now analyse the nexus between Mutebi's art and politics in Uganda.

Mutebi's Political Activism: Sources, Themes, Symbols and Symbolisms

Mutebi's political activism started in the early-1990s. It has been growing, intensifying and becoming more focussed towards issues of democratisation and governance since then. In the process he has engaged almost all topical

issues. Citing a few of his prints will demonstrate my point. He did his *Artist's Dream after Visiting the Zoo* (mid-1990s; plate 96)*, Dancing Cranes* (mid-1990s; plate 97)*, Fish and More Fish* (mid-1990s; plate 98)*, Pelicans* (mid-1990s; plate 99)*, Tropical Paradise* (mid-1990s; plate 100)*, Zebras* (mid-1990s; plate 101)*,* and *Good Evening Africa* (late-1990s; plate 102). Through these prints he campaigns for a clean environment. He based these prints on his concern that there is no clear policy on environmental protection in Uganda (his country) and the United States of America (the country he has often visited). He calls this the "politics of the environment" (Mutebi, interview 2005). He did his *World Bank* (mid-1990s; plate 103) to critique the neo-liberal austerity economic package, which the World Bank and IMF have imposed on Uganda since the 1980s, and the social-economic contradictions associated with this (including corruption, poor service delivery, etc.). He calls this "politics in terms of economics" (ibid). We see the artist interested in the plight of those affected by war. In his *Fleeing Family* (1994; plate 104) he visualised the plight of the survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. He, however, avoided the grotesqueness and the kind of graphic details we confront in Matti's village massacres (see plate 70a). Instead, in a manner recalling Njau in 1962, he captured the refugee crisis which resulted from the Rwanda genocide[316].

Mutebi also recalled the symbolism of mother and child in his print *Mother and Child* (mid-1990s; plate 105) to, like Nnaggenda in the late-sixties, raise the issues of good parenting. His *Mother and Child* was part of his sustained commitment to addressing the plight of children in Uganda. For example, he highlighted the lack of clear policy on children's rights in Uganda. For the artist this lack of policy has perpetuated child abuse which he visualised in a

[316] I indicated in chapter four that refugees fled from Rwanda as far back as the late-fifties (see p.131 above). Let me now add that there was another influx of refugees from Rwanda in the late-sixties. By the nineties Uganda hosted a large number of refugees from Rwanda. Because the leadership in Rwanda failed to address their plight and facilitate their return to their home country, the Rwandan refugees in Uganda (and elsewhere) resorted to armed rebellion using Uganda as their base. However, the invasion, alongside the genocide which followed it, provoked another refugee crisis. Hence as some refugees were returning to Rwanda during the mid-nineties, others were running to Uganda as if to take up their positions. This is a complex problem which Mutebi confronted, although it is not obvious in his work.

print, *Children's Dreams* (mid-1990s; plate 106), in which he criticised child-battering in Uganda.

In addition, he has been interested in questions of democratisation and governance. In his *Explaining* (mid-1990s; plate 107) he shows a local (Ganda) politician explaining (or could I recall Ssekintu's claims and say he is making empty promises) to a curious audience. Looking at these prints we also notice that Mutebi widened his source of symbols and symbolisms beyond his Masaka home area. For example the wild game would not have been from his Masaka District; neither would be the genocide which took place in Rwanda.

Alongside the environmental, economic and socio-political activism above, Mutebi turned his art into a site for celebrating aspects of Uganda's various cultures. In his prints *Dancing Girls* (mid-1990s; plate 108)*, Ganda Dance* (mid-1990s; plate 109) and *Nankasa Dance* (mid-1990s; plate 110) he celebrated aspects of Ganda dance although his choice of dances is eclectic. For example the lyrical, sensuous dance in his *Dancing Girls* is probably a *Kinyarwanda* dance. Ganda dance is more energetic and requires certain gestures and costumes different from those we see in his *Dancing Girls.* The Baganda tie loose material (e.g. sisal and animal skins) around their waists and dance with their hips gesturing with their hands and feet as we see in his *Nankasa Dance* and *Ganda Dance*. This traditional Ganda dance is still popular today; the nation-state has adopted it to spread its ideology[317]. Mutebi also did a series of prints on the theme *Abalere* (flautists) in the mid-1990s in which he referenced traditional flute players and court jesters as we see in his *Abalere* (Flautists; mid-1990s; plate 111). That in this print the

[317] Kings and chiefs in Uganda, as it is the case elsewhere, had a long history of using troupes of royal entertainers to construct and dispense their power and authority. They still do. Obote's first regime took up this appropriation of dance and drama and used it to spread its ideology locally and internationally. In short the state re-appropriated the traditional use of community practices to the promotion of a nationalist ideology. To do this the Ministry of Culture created a dancing troupe, called the Heart Beat of Africa, in the mid-sixties. The group visited many parts of world where it featured in cultural shows. Amin Dada inherited the Heart Beat of Africa in the 1970s before the group ceased to exist in the 1980s. Recently President Museveni revived the idea. He has a group of Baganda dancers, headed by one Kawooya, who entertain official guests to the country.

figures are dressed in the traditional Ganda tunic – the *kanzu* – affirms the identity of flute-playing; it confirms the artist's intervention in the process of transmitting culture (a role many contemporary Uganda artists have assumed). Located into this context, he also depicted traditional marriage rituals. In his *Marriage Introduction* (late-1990s; plate 112) he clusters figures together to produce a large group of men and women on the way to perform a dowry ritual. In his *Thank you Trip* (mid-1990s; plate 113) he depicts a ritual in which a goat is returned to the parents of a bride in case she was found to be a virgin on the first day she sleeps with her husband. These ceremonies are still popular today. For example, although they have lost their traditional strictness, goats are still returned to the parents of the bride to celebrate virginity, albeit often symbolically. By producing such works, Mutebi saw himself as Uganda's "cultural ambassador" (Mutebi, interview 2006) sharing aspects of his culture on the global art circuit (or his "global village") under what he calls "the politics of culture" (ibid).

After the late-1990s Mutebi continued to address environmental, economic and cultural issues. He also revisited his anti-war activism in a series of prints. For instance in his *Message is Clear* (2003; plate 114) he calls for an immediate end to the war in Northern Uganda. This war has been called "Africa's forgotten war"[318]. It is also rated one of Africa's longest and "most brutal civil wars"[319], in which Joseph Kony and his Acholi sympathisers have, under the Lords Resistance Army (LRA), waged a long and gruesome rebellion. Many civilians have lost their limbs, lives and livelihood: they live in squalid camps. Children have been particularly affected as we see in Mutebi's *Bayiseewo* (2003; plate 115), in which he captured children hiding in a thicket[320], and his *Eggugu* (The Burden; 2005; plate 116). In *Eggugu* he

[318] See: Brownsback and Stearns E. Richard, "Africa's Forgotten War" in *Washington Post*, March 9, 2005. Also available online at: http://www.washtimes.com/op-ed/20050308-094129-9853r.htm (accessed March 9, 2005).
[319] See: Wallis Daniel, "Uganda Truce: End of One of Africa's Most Brutal Wars" in Mail and Guardian online, August 29, 2006. Available online at: http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=282322&area=/breaking_news/breaking_news__africa/ (accessed August 29, 2006)
[320] B*ayiseewo* is a Luganda word meaning "they have passed". It was first appropriated to political discussion in Buganda in the early-1980s alongside *baabobaabo* (meaning there they are). Obote's army used to raid villages in Buganda during the early-eighties. People would hide in bushes from

critiqued the immense pressure corruption (symbolised in marabou storks) and war (symbolised in the loads children carry) has put on children in the war-ravaged area. He also recalled the Aboke incident and did his *Aboke Girls* (2003). In 2003 LRA attacked St. Mary's College Boarding School at a place called Aboke (Northern Uganda) and abducted 139 girls. This abduction was massive, and grotesque as well, it was however not unique. Through such abductions Kony has built his rapacious army and amassed sex-slaves.

Alongside his anti-war activism Mutebi also visualised his personal biography. For example he visualised his professional career in his *Self-Portrait in the Studio* (late-1990s; plate 117), a print in which he highlighted the effort and personal commitment it has taken for him to become a professional print-maker. In his, *Omwami n'Abakyala* (Polygyny; 2005; plate 118) *Omukyala n'Abaami* (Polyandry; 2005; plate 119) and *Omwami n'Omukyala* (Monogamy; 2005; plate 120) he critiqued his family background. He revealed to me that having been raised in a polygamous family, he grew up to hate multiple relationships. His family is however not unique; multiple relations are common in Uganda. What is interesting is that it turned him into an anti-polygyny activist and informed his art.

Curiously, however, there is evidence in his anti-polygyny activism to suggest that, although grounded in a personal biography, Mutebi's debate on marriages is itself part of a wider gender discourse which unfolded during the late-1980s leading to the constitutionalisation of heterosexuality and monogamy[321]. The debate also saw the affirmation of the "rights of women" under chapter four, article 33, of the constitution of Uganda. This chapter was a product of women's activism. Starting in the late-eighties, women's rights activists championed the struggle for women's rights (Tumusiime

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where they would track the movements of the troops. On seeing the troops approaching, they would warn each other using the word *baabobaabo* and run into nearby bushes. If, or when, the troops left, they would alert each other using the word *bayiseewo.* It was a dangerous hide-and-seek game in which many people lost their lives.

[321] It is written in Uganda's constitution that "marriage shall be entered into with the free consent of a man and a woman intending to marry" (Government of Uganda 1996, 29).

2005) which led to varied changes in Uganda's laws. They, however, attracted harsh criticism which continues to rage. The criticism was not new in itself: in fact it was harsher under Amin's regime when women, like Elizabeth Bagaya, were exiled because of taking a strong stand on women's rights (ibid). Unlike under Amin, recent attacks have been subtler demonising women activists in order to undermine their struggle. Suggestions that they are corrupt, self-seeking individuals who masquerade as champions of women's rights have been made. In a recent interview Mutebi echoed similar criticism while explaining his print *Women Activists* (2005; plate 121a). Although it is obviously warmer, this print is a follow-up on a print under a similar theme and title, *Women Activists* (mid-1990; plate 121b), which he did earlier. In both prints he presents, a cluster of elaborately dressed, (self-indulgent) elite women. He gives them a kind of shiftiness which, as a political statement, could be traced back to the late-sixties in Nnaggenda's *Politician,* and, as we will see in a moment in more of his political art, he uses to expose the unreliable and corrupt nature of politicians. Here he is using it to make the point that rather than helping the marginalised rural women, the educated, elite, urban women activists run donor-funded projects while enjoying, like the elite male NRM cadres, the luxury of driving around in expensive cars and amassing personal wealth (Mutebi, interview 2006).

Starting in 1994 Mutebi has consistently fused and redeployed the themes, symbols and symbolisms seen above to derive intricate, veiled, artworks through which his attack on the NRM's corruption, and its impact on democratisation and governance, has come into sharp relief. In this enterprise he has expanded and sustained the visual anti-corruption campaign Okitoi launched in 1990 (see pp.216-217 above). It is the contours of [t]his anti-corruption activism that I trace in the remaining part this chapter.

Assailing the "*Disease of Corruption*"[322]: Mutebi's Art and/as a Critique on Governance

In 1994 Mutebi printed his *Kampala Sky* (1994). He recalled Theresa Musoke's paintings although his work is removed from them. Musoke is a female Ugandan artist. She graduated in the sixties and taught there before she fled into exile to Kenya during Amin's regime. She is a painter and produced her *Storks* (1992; plate 122) and *Marabou Tree* (1992; plate 123) in which she visualised marabou storks and their habitat. Mutebi is equally interested in the life of marabou storks, and their habitats, although he also uses them for political activism as we see in his *Kampala Sky*.

In *Kampala Sky* (plate 124) Mutebi used a fauvist palette, and expressionist style, to depict an aggressive marabou stork hovering in the sky. The print addressed two issues simultaneously. He argues that "by the way I did marabou storks not only to compare them to politicians but as a way of saving them" (Mutebi, interview 2005). There is a multifaceted strategy implied in this statement which needs to be unpacked. First, the artist tapped into the post-civil war studies on storks in Uganda and the need to protect them and their habitats. For instance, in the late-1980s Kasoma and Pomerry (1987) published a detailed inquiry on the status of storks and shoebills in East Africa. They argued that in the early-twentieth-century marabou storks were not common in areas inhabited by humans in Uganda. Yet in 1987 Uganda had 5,000 marabou storks commonly seen in areas settled by humans. This, according to the two scientists, was because humans had encroached on wetlands, the habitats of the storks, and storks are thus threatened by human activities. For Kasoma and Pomerry the nuisance posed by the storks to humans was therefore an index of a larger environmental catastrophe. They thus urged the need to protect the wetlands. Mutebi agrees with the two scientists. But he is also concerned that instead of looking at the broader ecological picture, the urban authorities poisoned the storks in order to reduce their numbers especially during the

[322] See: Mutibwa, Phares. *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers Ltd, 1992), 195.

1990s (Mutebi, interview 2006). This for him was a short-term, ill-informed response to a bigger problem.

Secondly, Kasoma and Pomerry also argued that the presence of uncollected refuse dumps attract marabou storks into towns (Kasoma & Pomerry 1987, 225). Mutebi addresses this issue too. For him it signalled the failure of local governance and urban authorities. He argues that the presence of marabou storks in Kampala, for example, is testimony to the failure of local administration and systems of service delivery (Mutebi, interview 2006). He is strongly convinced that if refuse dumps had been regularly maintained then storks would not have been common in Kampala (ibid)! Mutebi claims that through his *Kampala Sky* he expressed [t]his concern (ibid).

Later he extended his critique on urban authorities and service delivery in his print *Evening yet Morning* (2005; plate 125). He used luminous blues, reds and yellows to construct a buoyant world of storks*. Evening yet Morning* is more stylised and relaxed than his *Kampala Sky*. *Kampala Sky* has a kind of congestion and degeneracy seen in most artistic commentaries on Kampala. For example, E. A. Lutaakome is a graduate of Makerere Art School who did his *Untitled* (Kampala; 1984) depicting the joblessness, the congestion and the dilapidation of Kampala of the mid-eighties (see plate 126). I also need to add that the symbolism of a degenerated Kampala in Mutebi's and Lutaakome's idioms has remained a popular artistic symbol in Uganda's arts since the 1980s. It grew out of earlier idioms of the late-1970s (ref. chapter six) continuing in the 1990s. For example, Jane Okot p'Bitek[323], in her poetry published in *Song of Farewell* (1994), projected a Kampala like Lutaakome's: full "of rotting garbage…of *bayaye*[324]" (p. 60), polluted air and "tormented children" (ibid). What Jane Okot p'Bitek wrote about is what Charles Kaggwa had earlier visualised in his *Untitled* (Kampala*;* 1990). Kaggwa's Kampala shows extreme poverty, disease, homelessness, etc. (see plate 127a) and

[323] Jane Okot p'Bitek is a daughter of the legendary Okot p'Bitek I referred to earlier in this thesis.
[324] *Bayaye* means street children.

he also literally captured Kasoma and Pomerry's claim that marabou storks have recently become common in urban areas because of the presence of uncollected refuse. In Kaggwa's painting we are confronted with the presence of this uncollected refuse and the life it supports. We see a marabou stork, (stray) animals and a destitute person scavenging on uncollected refuse. Kaggwa also exposes the dangers which the destitute, marabou stork and (stray) animals face using the ominous presence of "rat poison" (see plate 127b). Kaggwa's Kampala was reverberated in Rogers Anguzu's painting in the late-1990s. Anguzu painted his *Untitled* (Kampala; 1999) engaging a graphic narrative showing a run-down urban space: it has uncollected refuse and violent crime; it lacks basic infrastructure, hygiene and housing (see plate 128). Paulo Kafeero's song, *Kampala mu Court* (Kampala in Court; 1990s) on his *Maanyi Ga Njegere* album, can also be cited here because it sums up all the above representations and opens up into Mutebi's *Evening yet Morning*. In his song Kafeero highlighted what he called "*enguzi etakuba ku matu*" (literally translated endless corruption) in order to draw our attention to the immense corruption in Kampala and how it hinders governance and service delivery.

Mutebi's *Evening yet Morning* recalls Kafeero's song; he is also conscious of the other visual and literary constructions I have mentioned. However, his print is distant from the graphic literal representations articulated in the other works because of his concern for client sensibilities. He thus skilfully exposes the corrupt without showing the uncollected refuse we see in Anguzu's and Kaggwa's murals; he avoided the congestion in Lutaakome's work as well. This is a strategic departure from convention for which I find two explanations. First, unlike Lutaakome, Kaggwa and Anguzu, whose work is part of Makerere Art Gallery collection, Mutebi sold his *Evening yet Morning* on a non-bourgeois market which has no discretion and intellectual drive. He therefore had to cater for its sensibilities and ensure that the political was aesthetic as well. Secondly, by referring to marabou storks in flight and an anonymous urban horizon Mutebi deliberately avoided literal representations;

he produced his sharp criticism without attracting official sanction and (probably) repression.

Whereas the urban-ness in his *Kampala Sky* remained implied in the title, in *Evening yet Morning* there is an urban presence implied in the horizon. The horizon symbolises high-rise modern architecture which, in Uganda, is synonymous with urban-ness. His symbolism is not far-fetched. Although governance in Kampala is unsatisfactory, and service delivery remains a problem, Kampala has recently gone through massive expansion with new buildings altering the city's horizon. But there is a dark side to these recent high-rise structures namely that some are built using wealth stolen from public coffers[325], others have been based on unsatisfactory plans and construction work often approved by corrupt city authorities. Arguably Mutebi's print engenders this multiplicity of symbolic gestures – a multiplicity which spans many of his works.

Also important to note is the fact that it is clear from the artist's *Kampala Sky* and *Evening yet Morning* that, in spite of his claim for conservation, the artist has engaged less of conservation and more of the politicisation of the marabou stork. He robustly, and prodigiously, engages the marabou stork's scavenging and predatory habits, which for him are indices of insatiability, greed and selfishness, to identify and expose the impact of corruption on NRM's governance (Mutebi, interview 2005). This strand must be borne in mind because I refer to it repeatedly in many other works we are about to explore.

Mutebi's use of a carrion eater as a political symbol gestures back to Matti's work. However Matti's work is remote from Mutebi's reinvention of this symbol. There are notable references, which have informed his process of reinvention, which I need to trace. For example, President Museveni likened

[325] And this was partly exposed in a probe by Justice Julia Ssebutinde in 2002. See; Wasike Alfred, "Shs500M Property Declared at 55M", in *The New Vision,* October 18, 2002. Also available online at: http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/13/91211/buildings%20kampala%20corruption (accessed October 18, 2002)

Amin's and Obote's regimes to "…political elites of former regimes who sat like vultures making merry over the carcasses of cows killed by an epidemic"[326]. He was characterising the way the two regimes ruined the country's economy through political mismanagement and corruption; he did not liken his own regime to vultures. Mutebi agrees with Museveni's characterisation, although he insists that because it inherited corruption from the "vultures of the past", NRM itself is a "carrion eater" which threatens the country (Mutebi, interview 2006). The artist is also aware of representations like "supplying air", "Pajero Tribe", among others, which came after the eighties to describe situations where NRM cadres used their access to the corridors of power to demand payment for public services and goods not delivered[327]. But he has found these less satisfactory. Instead he has chosen the marabou stork as the most fitting symbol to represent what he calls "people who are eating money" (Mutebi, interview 2006) and how such eating has ruined good governance and democracy in Uganda.

I must, however, hasten to add here that the artist is not strictly limited by/to marabou storks. He has a cocktail of other symbol[ism]s. For instance he has also represented the corrupt elite in his *Greed* (2001; plate 129). Here he used images of men – a poignant reference to the fact that Uganda's bureaucracy is dominated by men. To persuade us to appreciate the presence of greed, he worked with the dictum also seen in Mutibwa's literature. Mutibwa (1992) highlighted the insatiability of NRM's corrupt cadres asserting that, with the corrupt in Uganda "appetite grows with eating" (p.196). As if to echo Mutibwa's assertion, in his *Greed* (see plate 129), Mutebi visualised a group of elites (identified by the wearing of ties) struggling to reach something invisible: a sharp critique on the insatiability of the corrupt elite. In his recent works he has combined his storks and the neck-tied elite to intensify his onslaught on corruption for example in his *Abanyunyunsi* (The Parasites; 2005;).

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[326] See: Museveni, *Mustard Seed*. p209

[327] See: "Invitation to Corruption" in the *New Vision,* October 25, 2005. Also available online at http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/14/461744 (accessed October 25, 2005)

In *Abanyunyunsi* (plate 130a) Mutebi satirises the tradition of *malwa*-drinking. *Malwa* is a local potion commonly drunk in Eastern Uganda. It is made out of fermented millet flour. It is a source of socialisation in communities, like the Bagishu in Eastern Uganda. Friends (and/or relatives) share a pot filled with the brew, sucking it through long straws as seen in the artist's print. Many contemporary artists have explored "*malwa*-related" socialisation through batik-making – for example, Mark Mutyaba (see plate 131). Mutebi's print is, however, far removed from its antecedents and contemporaries. The word, *Abanyunyunsi* in its title is a plural of the noun *Omunyunyunsi;* it derives from the Luganda verb *okunyunyunta* meaning to suck. To call someone *omunyunyunsi* is however pejorative; it invokes a parasitic connotation. As such babies are not called *Abanyunyunsi* even if they suck from their mothers breasts. Neither is drinking *malwa,* or drinking a soft drink, through a straw referred to as *okunyunyunta.* Thus the link between *Abanyunyunsi* and *malwa* drinking which we see in this print is invented by the artist: it is political.

In *Abanyunyunsi* the artist emphasised the presence of the traditional Ganda pot. Now, if Crole-Rees used pots in an artwork symbolising post-colonial political progress (see p.149 above), Mutebi is, in a more provocative and graphic way, using the pot to expose vices which hamper such progress. This print, more than his *Greed,* is a sharp critique on the selfishness with which corrupt politicians use public resources for selfish gain and avarice. To invoke this meaning and to persuade us to see his point of view, Mutebi, unlike Mutyaba, overlaps his figures to express collusion in misdemeanour. To accent the corruption implied in his print he introduces two sets of marabou storks into the composition located strategically on either side of the print (see plate 130a). The storks seem isolated and alienated but their presence is strategic, it cannot be ignored. The artist explains that the presence of marabou storks here accents his disgust towards corruption in the government bureaucracy (Mutebi, interview 2006). This confirms that he redeploys the tradition of *malwa*-drinking (not necessarily traditional to his Masaka District) to express his political thought.

Unlike the familiar Ganda dress code represented in his *Explaining, Marriage Introduction*, and the virginity rituals depicted in his *Thank you Trip* (see plates 107, 112 and 113), in *Abanyunyunsi* we see an unconventional fashion statement to the left of the print (ref. plate 130a). We see a bespectacled figure which, according to the artist, symbolises elitism[328]. It is probably multilingual, speaking English and Luganda, which explains why it is clad in a neck-tie under a coat but over a traditional *kanzu.* I have discussed (in chapter four) how Ssekintu clad his Jesus in a *kanzu* in order to vernacularise, and politicise, his didactic Christian iconography. In chapter five I demonstrated how Berlington Kaunda introduced men clad in coats and *kanzus* to critique the excesses of modernity during the sixties. Mutebi has taken up these strands. He, however, radically and also satirically departed from his predecessors by introducing the tie. This dress code is unconventional; it testifies to the freedom and unorthodox ways in which the artists mobilises tradition as a critical vocabulary.

As we notice from the sharp curves on their cheeks, the corrupt aggressively suck through their winding straws to render the pot dry (see plate 130b). Clearly the artist uses gestures to critique selfishness and greed. Although in his earlier works he used quintessential attributes to define the racial and class identity of his subjects, here he turned to buggy, dolly, caricatured figures. His faces seem to suggest simplified forms based on Baule masks (from Ivory Coast) or Pende masks (from the Democratic Republic of Congo) or a mixture of both. However, the exact source of the dolly figures as satirical representations of politics and politicians we see in *Abanyunyunsi* has some local resonances which can be traced. For example, there is a

[328] Here the artist is deploying a stereotype which needs to be explained. Although spectacles are useful in correcting eye defects, they are commonly associated with the elite in Uganda. This is not because the non-elite do not have eye problems. On the contrary they do. But because spectacles are prohibitively expensive, and therefore beyond the means of the common man, they have come to be identified with the elite who can afford them. In this and other prints and paintings, however, the artist uses spectacles to critique elitism. He therefore recalled a strategy, Okot p'Bitek (1966; 1967) used in the late-1960s, where glasses (and neck-ties) represented the elitism of post-colonial leaders (p. 45). The artist redeployed it to critique greed and venality as he poignantly conflated elitism with corruption.

convention that those who are corrupt become round (or, simply put, obese). I speculate it started with the term *mafuta mingi* of the seventies (see p. 188 above) although I am not suggesting that obesity started with Amin's regime. Sennoga drew on this convention to produce a cartoon showing how the NRM bureaucracy ruined government parastatals through corruption and avarice (see plate 132). Mutebi may have traced his dolly figures from there in so far as he conflates obesity with corruption.

As if to confirm, in a recent interview Mutebi argued that he prefers to participate in the anti-corruption campaigns through the press because he is very sceptical about the activities of the so-called anti-corruption statutory bodies like the office of the Inspector General of Government (IGG), Public Accounts Committee (PAC), and others (Mutebi, interview 2006). He rejects their *modus operandi* which involves spending government and donor funds on lavish 4X4 vehicles, and conferences in Kampala, rather than consulting with the public on how to effectively monitor corruption (ibid). This is not to say that it is only through the press that the artist engages in anti-corruption crusades because he also admitted that he once participated in an anti-corruption exhibition organised by the Uganda Debt Network (UDN)[329]. But he unwaveringly trusts the Media. "I basically believe in the press and how it fights corruption"(ibid) he submits, suggesting that through talk shows and investigative journalism the corrupt will be exposed and defeated. He therefore argues that "as an artist I need to be part of the [press-oriented] movement and maybe at the end of the day we can put ideas together and fight it [corruption] completely"(ibid). This then brings his buggy figures closer to Sennoga's comic strip although it should not detract from his personal

[329] UDN is a non-governmental organisation monitoring Uganda's mounting debt burden. It uses theatre, visual art and poetry to spread its message. It is also actively engaged in the campaign against corruption in Uganda. It takes its anti-corruption campaign to schools. It publishes and distributes anti-corruption literature. It funded a mural which was done by many artists, activists and other members of the body politic. It has billboards located on major highways. See: Uganda Debt Network. *Corruption Illustrated: A Publication of Uganda Debt Network*, Issue 1, April 2001. For UDN's anti-debt campaign see: Uganda Debt Network. *The Debt Burden: Selected Poems and Essays on the Impact of External Debt on Social-economic Development in Uganda: A Publication of Uganda Debt Network,* September, 2001.

intervention because, as we see in his *Entertainer* (1998), the artist has distanced his dolly-figures from their antecedents.

In *Entertainer* (plate 133) Mutebi presents two dolly, buggy, cartoon-like male figures. He uses a grey palette while producing sharp contrasts through the introduction of light in a manner reminiscent of the renaissance artists. This print, and the politics it represents, followed a print he did in the mid-1990s which he called *Abalere* (Flautists; mid-1990s; plate 134). In *Abalere* the artist visualises three figures dressed in the Ganda *kanzu*; they blow flutes. Like *Entertainer,* there is a sense of shifting-ness, ambiguity and multiplicity – a refusal to be pinned down to any position – which is reflected on the faces and also seen in his cubistic *The Flute Players* (late-1990s; plate 135). This shifty character, a critique on untrustworthy and unethical conduct, can be traced back to Nnaggenda's *Politician* although Mutebi's prints are less intimidating.

Now, if for Trowell, in her *Tribal Crafts of Uganda* (1953), the flute was a traditional "notched flute made of swamp reed" (p. 360), for Mutebi it has political symbolism. He therefore moved beyond ethnography to use the flute (and the tradition of flute-playing) to express his political opinion. In a recent discussion I had with him he revealed that the flautists in his prints are politicians. If his explanation is valid then the cross-fertilisation between his prints and *Kadongokamu* music[330] becomes clear. Kadongokamu musician Fred Ssebatta produced a song *Ndi Muyaaye* (I am a Tramp; 1990s) in which he critiqued contemporary life in Buganda. In his song Ssebatta referred to flute-playing to symbolise empty talk, something Mutebi attributes to politicians. If Maloba thought politicians made up stories (see p.112 above), for Mutebi they engage "in empty talk" (Mutebi, interview 2005) and this is the criticism he brings to the fore in these prints.

[330] Mutebi often refers to Kadongokamu music although he also likes, and alludes to, other contemporary musicians for example Juliana Kanyomozi (Mutebi, *interview,* 2006).

Mutebi also explored the theme of flautists to reject suggestions that those who opposed the NRM had better political programmes than the NRM. In his painting *Veterans and Newcomers* (2005; plate 136) the artist depicts a choral display bathed in a brilliant fauvist palette. He shows three winking flute-players dominating a space. Others are less significant and scattered around the three central figures. The symbolism in this work is not obvious. But according to the artist the three flautists in the centre of the painting represent the NRM while those that are less significant, and dispersed, represent the opposition. If the artist's reading is valid, then this painting represents the artist's cynicism towards the political opposition in Uganda. Herman Basudde is a kadongokamu musician who, in the 1990s, expressed deep cynicism towards regime change and the political opposition in Uganda through his song *Pirisira* (Pricilla; 1990s). He argued that *"tugendere we twabadde"* (literally translated: "let us continue with the NRM in spite of its shortcomings because there are no better alternatives"). Mutebi echoes Basudde's view, which is also popular in Buganda where Basudde and Mutebi hail from, as he extends his contention that there is no better alternative to the NRM's rule in his painting *Pluralism* (2005; plate 137).

Mutebi did his *Pluralism* using a vibrant, fauvist palette and modernist style. He visualised the reason why he rejects claims that the political opposition in Uganda can nurture a less corrupt political environment. In the print we see a group of flautists being directed by marabou storks located in their midst. The lack of order in this work signals confusion; some of the gestures and facial expressions insinuate a commission of misdemeanour. He explains the symbolism in the print arguing that the disorganised flautists in *Pluralism* symbolise Uganda's politicians. He adds that the print represents his view that both the opposition and the NRM are equally corrupt and are led by selfish motives and greed (Mutebi, interview 2005). This then explains why he herded Uganda's politician into a single disorganised choir. Obviously the artist generalises here: not all of Uganda's politicians are corrupt and it is not entirely correct to say that the opposition has no alternative programmes. The artist is aware of this but he still insists that if the opposition is as corrupt

as the NRM how then could it be a better alternative to the NRM (Mutebi, interview 2005). In any case, he would rather that the NRM cleansed itself. In fact, “I feel really bad, I feel bad. It is the system I believed in and I’m looking [forward to] a time when [the NRM] will [recover] its good ideas”, he argued (Mutebi, interview 2006). Unfortunately the NRM does not seem to grant his wish. This concerns him even more because he believes that left unchecked corruption will affect the future of the country as we see in his print *Abaana Baffe* (Our Children; 2005 plate 138a).

In his print *Abaana Baffe* Mutebi highlights the negative impact of corruption on the future of the country. *Abaana Baffe* testifies to Mutebi’s mastery of skill and colour theory; it has an import from batiks. Mutebi recently revealed to me that he, like many contemporary artists from Makerere Art School, did batiks when he was a student and immediately after graduation before he abandoned them “about thirteen years ago” [331]. I indicated earlier that batik art has been, and still is, a *de facto* means of survival for graduates of the Art School – especially those who are freelance practitioners like Mutebi or Waswa Katongole, who graduated from Makerere in the sixties and went into exile during Amin’s and Obote’s reigns of terror. Katongole’s batik *Masai Women* (1980s; plate 139) demonstrates flatness, clarity and definition of design, simplicity and stylisation; attributes which we find in Mutebi’s work. It is therefore interesting to note how successfully Mutebi explored the design, colour definition and stylisation common to most batiks to enhance the clarity of his prints (and some paintings). We also see in *Abaana Baffe* the artist exploring zebra, giraffe and other motifs from nature. Reduced to basic designs, it is obvious that these motifs came from the print editions he did to express his “politics of the environment” although here he uses them to improve the aesthetic of his anti-state prints. This strategy allows him to make a political point which is aesthetic as well.

In *Abaana Baffe* Mutebi uses the symbolism of a bus with the inscription “clean me” on it (see plate 138b). His “clean me” comes from two sources

[331] Mutebi Fred, e-mail message to the author, May 8, 2006.

which I need to outline. One is a practice in which badly soiled vehicles in Uganda usually attract people who stealthily write through the dirt the words "clean me" supposedly to remind the owners to clean them. This is especially so during the rainy season when most cars would be soiled. The second one comes from NRM's adoption of a "yellow bus" as its political symbol[332]. The "NRM Bus" – as it is called – has been a subject of controversy and attacked by the opposition. In an interview, Mutebi suggested that this is the bus he captures in his *Abaana Baffe* – a vivid reference to his insistence that NRM needs to clean itself of corruption.

In front of the bus we see stylised women dressed in traditional Ganda *busuuti* (see plate 138a). Arguably they are common (rural) folks from his Masaka District. They raise their children towards the windows of buses as if performing a kind of ritual. They remind us of Maloba's *Independence Monument* (see plate 56). But if Maloba engaged the symbolism of a mother raising a child to enunciate hope in the future of independent Uganda, Mutebi has a reverse message which will become clear after we have considered other layers of symbolisms and meanings in this print in addition to other prints which he did as a build up to it.

In *Abaana Baffe* we see baskets of fruits rested on the ground to the left of the print (see plate 138a). These fruit-baskets could be traced back to the market scenes the artist explored in his batiks before he took up the theme in his print *Going to the Market* (1994). But the political symbolism in his *Abaana Baffe* resonates with an interesting political debate which he engaged in his modernist paintings: *Desperate Sellers* (2005; plate 140), *Tall Sellers* (2005; plate 141), *Short Sellers* (2005; plate 142), and *Lone Seller* (2005; plate 143). He insists that in these paintings he uses women vendors as metaphors to represent Uganda's politicians. For example, in his

[332] NRM initially conceived the bus to represent its ideology of "all-inclusiveness" with which it suspended political party activities in Uganda for two decades. Multiparty politics was restored in 2005 following an amendment of the constitution. NRM has become NRMO (the National Resistance Movement Organisation). NRMO has, however, maintained the "yellow bus" as its symbol.

Desperate Sellers he deployed a cubistic[333] simultaneity of form where images of faces, some at different angles, overlap each other in a constantly shifting and thus unstable manner, to show his cynicism towards politicians but also to bring their untrustworthiness into sharp relief. These works also suggest that the artist uses adjectives like desperate, tall, short and lone to critique different characteristics of Uganda's politicians. Some will do anything (including corrupting the electoral system) to win offices (Mutebi, interview 2005): they are desperate sellers. Others promise more than they can deliver (ibid): they are tall sellers. Some cannot measure up to the challenge (ibid): they are short sellers. Those who are articulate, and have good ideas, are few and isolated (ibid): they are lone sellers. In a moment we will see him exploring this use of adjectives in other prints a political strategy which can be traced back to an article published in *The Monitor* in the nineties in which Timothy Kalyegira used the comparative narrative of "long and short" as he distinguished between the good and the "low grade politicians" in the NRM administration[334].

Unlike in *Abaana Baffe,* there are no obvious political symbols in the above mentioned modernist paintings. We can only see heads, baskets and bananas. However, the artist explains that he uses the baskets and the bananas as metaphors for the programmes which politicians promise and that he compares Uganda's democratic process to a road-side market on the Masaka Highway where sellers accost travellers, persuading them to buy fruits – mainly bananas (Mutebi, interview 2005). He also argues that there is a bus implied in his *Desperate Sellers, Tall Sellers, Short Sellers,* and *Lone Seller.* Although we see a kind of window frame in all these works, his claim for the bus is not obvious. However, one gets a sense of a bus in his painting titled *Uninterested Buyers I* (2005) which he did before his two prints

[333] The artist suggests that this cubism comes from the analytical drawing he studied under the objective study course offered at Makerere Art School. This is likely. Since Cecil Todd introduced academic drawing, called objective study, at Makerere. It is still being taught there today as a core course and many artists have redeployed it to enhance their studio practice. In the next chapter we will see Sserunkuuma doing the same thing.

[334] See: Kalyegira N. Timothy, "The Long and Short of Our Politicians" in *The Monitor,* August 20-24, 1993.

Uninterested Buyers II (2005) and *Interested Buyers* (2005) although it is in *Uninterested Buyers II* and *Interested Buyers* where the "NRM Bus" is unambiguously expressed.

Mutebi's *Uninterested Buyers I* (plate 144) and *Uninterested Buyers II* (plate 145) are stylistically distant. However, according to the artist they carry the same theme. They depict an ideal scenario where the electorate refused to accept the money, empty talk and lies: they are uninterested. The two works signal his belief in the body politic's ability to control tendencies of realpolitik and corruption. To persuade us to accept this view, he shows the masses seated in the bus (which is suggested in *Uninterested Buyers I* but clearly expressed in *Uninterested Buyers II*) and looking on with a sort of bewilderment which can be read from their exaggerated eyes. The gesture of looking allows the civic population to exposed and mitigate corruption – a poignant reflection of his belief that through civic action, and monitoring, corruption can be mitigated. Now, if in these two prints he suggests that the body politic is moral, and sophisticated, in his *Interested Buyers* he confronts us with the opposite.

In his *Interested Buyers* (plate 146) we see a rush outside and inside the (NRM) bus as everybody stretches all out to grab/buy fruits. This print gestures back to his *Greed* which I referred to earlier (see plate 129). It is also close to his *Uninterested Buyers II* although the two are diametrically opposed. In both of them Mutebi explores the fruit-market, a bus, and the mother and child symbolism. His women carry children firmly tied on their backs as they haggle and hassle to sell fruits (mainly bananas) to passengers crowded in a bus. It is common on Uganda's major highways (for example Mutebi's Masaka Highway) to see women, with children on their backs, selling fruits to travellers. However, just like the marabou storks, flautists, malwa-drinking, etc., Mutebi uses the theme of fruit-selling as a political symbol. For him the fruit-sellers are the politicians; the passengers/buyers in the buses are the electorate. This implies then that the bus could also be read as a representation of the country, Uganda, although

it leaves unexplained the empty buses in *Abaana Baffe* (see plate 138a). To decisively contrast the moral/ethical conduct in his *Uninterested Buyers II* the artist, in his *Interested Buyers,* depicts fruits falling as the masses (adults and children alike) struggle to have some. Within this context the print begins to suggest that the body politic has joined in the very excesses of government it is obliged to check. This in many ways is a pointed criticism on the wastage of national resources which would result if the body politic joined the corrupt politicians in the pillaging of the country's resources. Most importantly, seen together these prints confirm that for Mutebi, just like it was for Okot p'Bitek (in his *Song of Ocol,* 1967), the body politic is responsible for the good and bad governance and service delivery in Uganda. (And I explore this further in a moment.)

Mutebi's use of women to symbolise corrupt politicians is reminiscent of a drawing which the Ndema Group exhibited during the *2001 Presidential Elections in the Eyes of the Artists (Sweet and Sour)*. Like Sennoga's comic strips, the drawing – *Sellers and Shares* (2001; plate 147) – is based on portraits of individuals. It shows the outspoken woman politician, Winnie Byanyima, buying off another politician Nasser Ntege Ssebaggala to join the new party, the Reform Agenda (RA), which was formed in 2001. Ssebaggala is the current Mayor of Kampala whose venality is well documented. For example, in 1998 Ssebaggala was convicted and jailed in Boston (USA) over charges of corruption and money laundering. Byanyima is an outspoken women's rights activist; currently she heads the Directorate of Women, Gender and Development at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Before going to Addis Ababa Byanyima was an official in RA which competed against the NRM in the 2001 elections, and, as such, symbolised women who confronted NRM's cadres. She competed against men and won the highly contested Mbarara Municipality seat in the 2001 elections. During the campaigns RA wooed Ssebaggala from the Democratic Party (DP) into its camp although it is not certain that money was involved and that Byanyima paid this. It is, however, obvious in *Sellers and Shares* that the artist used Byanyima to symbolise vote-rigging, corruption and muddy

politics[335], a view of politics in general that Mutebi poignantly visualises in his prints and paintings.

The artist also recalls the politicisation of bananas in a popular play called *30 Years of Bananas* (1992)[336] in which Alex Mukulu used the metaphor of bananas to represent Uganda's unreliable politicians and unstable political history. Unlike Mukulu, and also the Ndema Group, Mutebi does not literally use the portraits of political figures in his works. Rather, he invents a woman-market symbolism through which he runs the risk of being accused of engaging misogyny, and he, and the Ndema Group, just like Okot p'Bitek (ref. p. 125 above), may not escape criticism from Uganda's army of gender activists, because this usage implies that women are the most corrupt in the country.

There is another strand which weaves together Mutebi's theme of fruit-selling, namely that if politics is a market place of ideas in which the best policy emerges out of public discourses, in Uganda such a market place has been subverted, monetised and corrupted. This according to the artist raises three major concerns. One is that which we confront in his *Abaana Baffe* (plate 138a), namely that corruption threatens future generations. To make this point in his *Abaana Baffe* women have lowered the fruit-baskets they were selling in *Uninterested Buyers I, Uninterested Buyers II* and *Interested Buyers*: here they unashamedly peddle their children (Mutebi, interview 2006) and thus the future whose vulnerability he represents using symbolic nakedness (see plates 138a and 138c).

Mutebi's second concern relates to the monetisation of politics and the dangers it poses for governance and democratic institutions. As we notice in

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[335] The drawing was exhibited in the *2001 Presidential Elections in the Eyes of the artists (Sweet and Sour)* which was hosted at the Nommo Gallery, Kampala, in May 2001.

[336] In his play Mukulu used the banana to critique the lack of political progress in Uganda in the period 1962-1992. He also used it to questioned NRM's new political dispensation characterising it as a "one ball, one team" (Mukulu 1993, 107) being his direct reference to the restrictions the NRM imposed on the political space. See: Mukulu, Alex. *30 Years of Bananas* (Kampala: Oxford Press, 1993).

his *Interested Buyers* (see plate 146), the artist is concerned over the venality of the body politic itself. If for Okot p'Bitek the body politic could check malfeasance and realpolitik, for Mutebi this is an ideal which may not obtain under conditions of rural poverty common in Uganda's countryside. Because of poverty, he argues, corruption has permeated the body politic making it culpable in ruining Uganda's democratic institutions and processes (Mutebi, interview 2005). He engages this issue in his painting *The Blind Leading the Looking* (2005; plate 148).

The painting *The Blind Leading the Looking* is as complex, and as multi-layered, as Mutebi's *Abaana Baffe*. In it the artist explores a fauvist palette, expressionist style and technical skill; his composition has suggested forms with limited details. He depicts a procession led by three marabou storks. They stride across the picture plane displaying their clearly marked, inflated gular sacs. Behind them are bespectacled faces: some are identifiably black; others are white. The black faces represent the NRM ruling elite; the white faces depict the donor community (Mutebi, interview 2006) – a poignant representation of the major players in Uganda's political-economy. They carry walking sticks which for the artist are blind-persons sticks (ibid). This then would satirically suggest that the elite (and their bilateral and multilateral financiers) are blind. The blind are followed by mask-like heads clustered together to build a mass: the public. The public carries baskets full of ripe bananas and other tropical fruits (identified as such by their brilliant colour).

In the works I have discussed thus far, the artist has kept the body politic and the politicians apart. But in this one he fuses the two and queues them behind his "ultimate symbol" (Mutebi, interview 2005) of corruption: the marabou stork. Also, in the prints we have seen thus far the corrupt politicians have been depicted as the fruit-sellers while the electorate have been identified as the interested/un-interested buyers. Yet in this painting it is the electorate which is corrupt because they carry the baskets full of fruits: his other symbol of corruption. This choice of symbols is deliberate. But, just like the title of the work which speaks of the blind leading those who can see,

it renders his *The Blind Leading the Looking* complicated. However, the artist did other prints and paintings, through which his symbol[ism]s evolved, which we need to engage before we apprehend the symbolism in his *The Blind Leading the Looking.*

The "political storks" in *The Blind Leading the Looking* can be traced back to his *Kampala Sky* and *Evening yet Morning.* These however have another source: they recall those in his print entitled *Kakuyege* (2001; plate 149). In his print *Kakuyege* Mutebi represents a group of marabou storks. Set in tableau they seem to be hideously conniving to do something. The artist claims that in *Kakuyege* he criticised the way the NRM's campaign team conducted itself in his constituency during the 2001 presidential elections. He explains that the team, on which he served, was allocated money to distribute to the electorate[337]. He was, however, disappointed because rather than giving money to the intended beneficiaries, the local leadership "ate" it. He then came to the conclusion that this is what happened at the national level. This is the disappointment, and generalisation, he expressed through *Kakuyege*. He used strong colours to emphasise the gular sacs of the marabou storks which can be read as highlighting the greed and selfishness of the National Task Force (NRM's National Campaign Team). He also makes their bodies blend into one another so that they become indistinguishable from each other. This, together with their uniformly sharp beaks and sidelong glances make the storks even more menacing. It brings his critique on collusion in misdemeanour into sharp relief.

Thus from this print it can be argued that the artist inverted the NRM's *kakuyege*-rhetoric. *Kakuyege* is one of the metaphors the NRM uses to "…convey [its political] message clearly to the *wananchi*"[338]. The notion

[337] Mutebi does not say whether the money was to bribe the electorate through what is commonly called "vote-buying". It is, however, true that the NRM was sued in 2001 over electoral malpractice including "vote-buying". Although the court threw the case out, Mutebi's admission would suggest that money was used during the 2001 elections to influence voters although in the artist's home area the intended beneficiaries did not get it.

[338] *Wananchi* is a Swahili word meaning the population. However in NRM rhetoric the term is applied to refer to the diverse rural illiterate population. See: Museveni, *Mustard Seed*, p.209.

refers to a complex network of interactions involving the ruling and educated elite, business elite, NRM ideologues and the rural peasantry. President Museveni argued that the formation of this network, and the way it operates, reflects the life of harvester termites which have a complicated form of socialisation through which they fulfil tasks. Impressed by the successful life of the termites, and from the Luganda term for these termites, e*nkuyege*, President Museveni invented the notion *kakuyege* to evolve a strategy through which he has organised a complex campaign team — called the National Task Force — with diverse class, social and economic interests. Starting in 1996, Museveni has used the National Task Force (and *kakuyege*) in all elections and he has won all of them with a big margin (although his critics would add that he has rigged all of them).

Clearly then rather than representing the effectiveness of Museveni's *kakuyege*, in his print *Kakuyege* Mutebi exposed the way corruption has compromised Uganda's democratic institutions. It is this subversion, of the NRM's *kakuyege,* that Mutebi heightened and deployed through *The Blind Leading the Looking* as he furthered his critique on the way corruption has ruined Uganda's democratic processes. Unlike in his print *Kakuyege*, or indeed in his other print *Abanyunyunsi* (which I analysed earlier), in his painting *The Blind Leading the Looking* the storks have taken a leadership role. They stride across the picture frame taking behind them a group of donor-funded elites who are blinded by their venality.

According to the artist his symbolism of blindness recalls Brueghel's painting called *The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind* (1568 in Galleria Nazionale, Naples). Actually there are contextual and thematic resonances, in his painting, which can be traced back to Brueghel's work. It is also obvious, in the title, and indeed in the composition, of the painting that the artist has revised Brueghel's theme through a visual process which in itself merits analysis as I continue with my discussion on the visual processes through which Mutebi evolved the political symbolism in his *The Blind Leading the Looking.*

In the late-1990s Mutebi made a print titled *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1997; plate 150). Recalling Brueghel he captured a group of "blind people" struggling to trace their way along a rugged footpath. Some lose their sticks and reach around to find them. With his subjects donning Ganda *kanzus* and *busuutis*, the artist vernacularised Brueghel's theme and owned it. Also, with his subjects rendered blind, but not without eyes, the artist created an ambiguity with which he distanced his work from Brueghel's. Most importantly, he drew our attention away from blindness as a condition of disability and persuaded us to accept that corruption blinds people towards reality. This, in a way, is a sharp critique on the shamelessness[339] with which the corrupt bureaucracy steals the country's resources — a criticism he furthers in his painting *The Blind Leading the Blind* (2005; plate 151).

In his painting *The Blind Leading the Blind* Mutebi critiqued both the local and international dynamics of corruption in Uganda. He recalled a cartoon (to which I made reference earlier) in which Sennoga exposed the way the international community turns a blind eye to the NRM's misdemeanours (see plate 94a). He depicts a mixed crowd of people. Unlike in his print *The Blind Leading the Blind* (see plate 150) where all subjects are identifiably African, in the painting (see plate 151) we see a Caucasian, or what he calls "a white man" (Mutebi, interview 2005) at the extreme right of the composition. He is clustered together with the bespectacled Africans who lead the crowd. For the artist the Caucasian, as was the case in Sennoga's cartoon, represents Western complicity in Uganda's corruption while the bespectacled stand for the corrupt local elite whom he identifies using spectacles, just like in his *Abanyunyunsi*.

Now, if the bespectacled represents the corrupt elite and the "white man" stands for Western complicity, then how does he account for the other subjects in his painting *The Blind Leading the Blind*? For example, we see

[339] I use the word shamelessness here in O'Connor's context. O'Connor made the point that in Uganda the corrupt are shamelessly blinded towards reality. See: O'Connor Kevin, "We in Uganda Don't Feel Shame", in *Sunday Monitor*, October 4, 2006.

one man, he is conspicuously black and he is capped like a member of the clergy. He, like the corrupt elite, also holds a blind person's stick. The artist argues that he uses him to symbolise how the clergy are complicit in corruption in Uganda (Mutebi, interview 2006). If his reading is valid then it is arguable that he adopted a position also taken in a controversial movie *Murder in the City* (2006). Made by a Kampala-based theatre group called *The Diamonds Ensemble*[340], the movie highlighted the complicity of the clergy in Uganda's corruption something which could be read from Mutebi's work. We also see in Mutebi's painting other persons, seeking (or struggling) to come to the front, one of whom is holding a blind person's stick. They are not bespectacled, arguably they are not elite. According to the artist these represent the body politic which for him, and as we learnt from his *Interested Buyers*, has become corrupt (Mutebi, interview 2006). Hence it could be argued that as he does with the other works we have seen this far, the artists uses this print to express his concern over the negative consequences of corruption on civic institutions and good governance. He seems to make the point that with the donors, the NRM cadres, the clergy, the civic population all linked into a web of corrupt practices, corruption has become officialised and institutionalised.

This then unveils the layered symbolism, and criticism, in which the artist grounded his painting *The Blind Leading the Looking* (see plate 148) and the long process through which he sharpened its critical tools. Here marabou storks stride out in front of a crowd with their fully inflated gular sacs. This is a sharp criticism on the way greed and corruption in Uganda has been officialised. The storks lead a group of bespectacled blind persons, the NRM leadership, blinded by its venality. If in his *Abaana Baffe* (plate 138a) he was worried that corruption hurts the future, he makes a similar point with this

[340] The movie was based on a true story in which a cardiologist was accused of murdering his wife advocate Robinah Kiyingi. It, however, attacked the complicity of government bureaucrats and the clergy in corrupt practices. Strangely its director, Ashiraf Ssimwogerere, was kidnapped during its launch adding to its controversy. Allegedly the kidnappers wanted to confiscate the movie for reasons that remained unknown. See: Ahimbisibwe Fortunate, "City Actor Ssimwogerere Kidnapped" in *Sunday Vision*, November 19, 2006. Also available online at: http://www.sundayvision.co.ug/detail.php?mainNewsCategoryId=7&newsCategoryId=123&newsId=532954 (accessed November 19, 2006).

painting because following behind the corrupt NRM elite, and the complicitous donor community, are generations of common folks: the body politic. He persuades us to see how the young, just like the old, carry baskets full of tropical fruits, mainly bananas. He uses this symbolism, which comes from his metaphor of fruit-sellers (to which I referred a while ago), to confirm his contention that corruption has permeated all layers of the the country's political fabric. As a result the body politic has abandoned its obligation to monitor the excesses of the state; governance and democratic institutions have been subverted through greed (Mutebi, interview 2005).

This layered symbolism is plausible in the context of Uganda's popular culture and scholarly debates. For example, Kadongokamu artist Herman Basudde, sang his *Enguzi* (Corruption; 1990s) off his *Byemulinnanga Album* (1990s) arguing that corruption has moved from government and permeated the body politic. Phares Mutibwa agreed with Basudde when he wrote that, as the excessively corrupt public service continues to feed its insatiable appetite for financial and non-financial benefits, their constituents notice fast changes in their lifestyle. "In mitigation it has to be added that their constituents look to them for, among other things, material maintenance…" (Mutibwa 1992, 197). The civil servants give money to their constituents or else their constituents threaten to shift their political loyalties. This then forces resources to trickle down from the corrupt leadership to the grassroots through complex negotiations over material interests (ibid). In the process, the peasantry emancipates itself; politics becomes monetised. All government departments join in the practice (ibid). As the judiciary joins the race, offenders walk away with a slap on the wrist if ever apprehended (Mutibwa 1992, 198). All anti-corruption mechanisms become ineffectual (ibid). Corruption becomes institutionalised as institutions of good governance and democratisation become compromised. I would suggest this is the critical debate in which Mutebi fused his painting. By placing the marabou storks in a leading position, blinding the elite (if figuratively) and presenting the peasantry as equally corrupt, Mutebi's painting *The Blind*

Leading the Looking shapes (and is shaped by) the disturbing institutionalisation of corruption in Uganda.

This then brings us to Mutebi's third concern, namely that the institutionalisation of corruption discussed above will lead to the collapse of the state. He argues that;

> corruption has killed almost every programme that NRM came with [in 1986]. The Ten-Point Programme which NRM came with has been compromised by corruption. [The NRM] came with good ideas but corruption has eaten up everything…I don't know…it kills me to think about it but corruption has killed [the] NRM (Mutebi, interview, 2006).

Echoing Mutebi's concern, Mutibwa (1992) argued that "corruption…is thriving at such a rate that the consequences could well be disastrous – for the country, of course, but also for the NRM leadership itself" (p. 198). And Mutebi has given these concerns visual expression.

In his *Last Meeting* (1999; plate 152) Mutebi set a table as a space for cultural discourse. We see an interaction between coke bottles and traditional gourds. It is not obvious why the artist put emphasis on this cultural discourse. However, if in his print *Abanyunyunsi* (discussed earlier) he introduced a gourd, seen on the extreme right of his composition, whose presence is secondary and almost superfluous (see plate 130a), in his *Last Meeting* the artist deploys the gourd more actively. He invents a coke-gourd vocabulary and this allows his polyglot elites – symbolised as such using shirts and ties – to speak in local and global/capitalist languages. This, arguably, is a critique on the neo-liberalist economic regime which the NRM has unfolded since the 1990s.

It is obvious in his *Last Meeting* that order has broken down: the day's agenda is scattered on the table in the midst of fallen glasses and gourds – a reference to the collapse of the meeting itself. The commonest gesture, of the hand on the heart, seems to suggest a kind of self-recrimination engaged in by those in attendance. Although it is political and realistic, Mutebi's *Last Meeting* came from his abstract print, *Last Supper* (mid-1990s; plate 153).

Here he used abstract figures with dolly-heads, eyes shaped like cowrie shells and set in tableau around a table onto which he introduced bananas and other fruits. He vernacularised a religious theme. His composition reflects the doctrine of the Eucharist; it bears resonances from Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* (1498; Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan) a reading to which the artist agrees. But as he had done in reinterpreting Brueghel's work, Mutebi radically distanced his Eucharist from Da Vinci's *Last Supper* and in the process laid claim to the theme of the Eucharist. For example, we notice an obvious absence of a central figure (Jesus) from his print (see plate 153); he also used tropical fruits instead of bread and wine as is the case in many representations of the Eucharist.

The artist argued that in the late-1990s, major disagreements emerged in the NRM amid accusations and counter-accusations and that these are the disagreements he visualised in his *Last Meeting* (Mutebi, interview 2005). In fact his claim for disagreements in the NRM is verifiable. In a recent interview, Kiiza Besigye, a war veteran, and former NRM cadre who turned into its most fierce critic, revealed that "…top leaders in Museveni's government and Movement historicals [meaning NRM founder members] started getting concerned at the way things were going astray after the Constituent Assembly…."[341] in the mid-nineties. This may be so but it was only in the late-1990s that these concerns became public knowledge when Besigye presented a controversial paper accusing the NRM of corruption, mismanagement, misrule, etc. In 1999 Besigye, then a serving army officer, contravened the military code of conduct and published a detailed account of purported corruption in the NRM[342]. The NRM leadership, and the military, ruled him out of order; they rejected his claims. As a result Besigye resigned from the army and the NRM he helped to win power in 1986. He formed a

[341] The constituent convened in 1994 to write a new constitution for Uganda before it was promulgated in 1995. For Besigye's comments see: Nyanzi Peter and Walulya Gerald, "'Kigongo Chaired Meetings on Movt Corruption'", *The Monitor,* October 29, 2005.
[342] See: Kalema Ndawula Andrew, "Our Politicians: Warren Kizza Besigye" *Sunday Vision,* October 30, 2005. Also available online at: http://sundayvision.co.ug/detail.php?mainNewsCategoryId=7&newsCategoryId=416&newsId=463343 (accessed October 30, 2005).

renegade faction called the Reform Agenda (RA). Initially it was a group of former NRM cadres and sympathisers like Winnie Byanyima (whom I referred to a while ago) who had broken ranks with NRM for varied reasons. Later the RA became a coalition of anti-NRM and political party activists. I have already noted that the RA competed against the NRM during the 2001 elections which were violent: both the RA and NRM were culpable. After the elections RA's leader Kiiza Besigye fled to South Africa in self-imposed exile. He returned in October 2005, formed the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) and competed for the Presidency during the 2006 elections. Again he lost amid violence, accusations and counter-accusations of vote-rigging and litigations. Thus, the view that corruption caused major disagreements and [counter-]accusations within the NRM, as a result of which it disintegrated into two opposed factions, is valid. Mutebi explored this further to illustrate that these disagreements and [counter-]accusations split the NRM and thus making a case for his (and Mutibwa's) conviction that the NRM administration would collapse because of corruption.

In his painting *Parting Ways* (2005; plate 154) Mutebi upset the unity we saw in his print *Kakuyege* (see plate 149). Also, while in his *Blind Leading the Looking* (see plate 148) the storks could lead the compromised masses and the corrupt ruling elite, and its donor financiers, in a particular direction, in his *Parting Ways* they have lost orientation and common destiny. In which case, then, in his *Parting Ways* Mutebi alluded to Sennoga's cartoon, produced for the *Monitor* of 29th September 1993 (see plate 155), which reflected a showdown between the NRM and political party activists led by Michael Kaggwa. Michael Kaggwa wanted to pressurise the NRM to open up political space which had remained closed since the NRM had suspended political party activities in 1986 as it created the no-party movement system, which lasted until 2006. Kaggwa threatened to address a rally at Kampala City (now Constitutional) Square in which he would have questioned the NRM's record on democracy and public administration. This would have contravened the law. In a show of force government deployed the military in the air and around the City Square forcing the rally to "flop". In the cartoon,

Sennoga depicted these events. We see the military guarding the City Square (from the air and on the ground) which is occupied by two marabou storks looking in opposite directions. Although Sennoga used the City Square, and the storks, to represent the lack of dialogue between the NRM and its opponents, in *Parting Ways* Mutebi used them to show the split within the NRM itself. The process of the split was, however, not as drastic as the artist seems to suggest in his *Parting Ways*. It took some negotiations and tough decisions which, like the split itself, informed the artist's work. Thus between his *Last Meeting* and *Parting Ways* he did two paintings to delineate the issues which unfolded as the NRM disintegrated. These are his two paintings: *Third Term Wooers* (2005) and *Undecided* (2005). A close analysis of these two will bring to the fore the events and radical processes through which the disintegration of the NRM, which the artist visualised in his *Parting Ways,* took shape.

In his *Third Term Wooers* (plate 156) Mutebi painted a bright palette of yellows, blues and reds. He recalled his *Kakuyege* which I analysed earlier (see plate 149) to depict a colony of marabou storks. Like in his *Kakuyege,* this composition exposes connivance in a corrupt act (Mutebi, interview 2006). To persuade us to see his point of view, the artist attends to the bald, scab-encrusted heads of the storks arranged to show that they are in conversation. He also gives his storks sidelong looks, sharp bills and inflated gular sacs to characterise the conversation. He thus uses his analytical understanding of the anatomy of the stork, to critique the corruption and selfishness of the NRM cadres. But his reference to the "third term" merits further analysis because such an analysis sheds a different light on his painting and demonstrates that Mutebi was alluding to the events in which the NRM removed Article 105 (section 2) of the Constitution of Uganda.

Article 105 (section 2) had prescribed that "a person shall not be elected under this Constitution to hold office as President for more than two [five-year] terms" (Government of Uganda 1995, 66). Thus President Museveni could not have stood for office in the 2006 elections having been elected in

1996 and 2001. However, aware of this limitation in 2005 the NRM altered the constitution to allow unlimited term limits for the President. The move faced stiff opposition because it was interpreted as a plot to allow Museveni to stand for another term: a "*Third Term*", or "*Ekisanja"*, or "*Sad Term"* as it was called. The move divided the local and international community. In order to woo support, and neutralise vicious attacks from the opposition, the NRM deployed its cadres into the countryside. For the artist these were the "Third Term Wooers" (Mutebi, interview 2005). In addition the NRM paid a huge bill facilitating its parliamentarians "to report and consult with their constituencies" on the constitutional changes[343]. This facilitation has never been fully explained; it attracted heated debates including on the floor of parliament itself[344]. Critics argued that the NRM spent millions of the tax payers' money to bribe members of parliament to vote in Museveni's favour. The NRM strongly objected, suggesting that the money came from its (undisclosed) sources. This debate is probably more complicated than the artist's visual symbolism. It, however, shows the issues which informed the artist's scepticism towards the constitutional review process – a scepticism he visualised in his *Third Term Wooers*. For him the members of parliament were "bribed"; the "wooing-process" was more than insincere and mired by corruption (Mutebi, interview 2006).

In his painting *Undecided* (plate 157) the artist depicted two groups of marabou storks: one group saliently placed in the foreground; the other subdued and located in the background. He explains that those in the foreground have decided to stay with the NRM; those in the shadowy background are yet to decide (Mutebi, interview 2006). He argues that he used this painting to critique the indecision, during Uganda's elections, which started in 2000-2001 but also resurfaced in the 2005-2006 election season.

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[343] See Kalyango Ronald, "Rights Body condemns Sh 5m Kisanja Cash" in *The New Vision,* December 11, 2004. Also available online at: http://www.newvision.co.ug/detail.php?newsCategoryId=13&newsId=405247 (accessed December 11, 2004).

[344] For example see: Namutebi Joyce and Olupot Milton, "Kisanja Fight in Parliament", in *The New Vision,* November 17, 2004. Also available online at: http://www.newvision.co.ug/detail.php?newsCategoryId=12&newsId=400373 (accessed November 17, 2004).

Based on his explanation it is arguable that the painting shaped, and was shaped by, political reality. Since the 2000-2001 campaign season two campaign slogans have been used. The NRM has used the Luganda word "*ABEEWO*" which is translated as "NO CHANGE" implying that the incumbent must continue. The opposition (mainly Kiiza Besigye's RA and FDC) has used the Luganda word "*Agende*", translated as "WE WANT CHANGE", calling for Museveni's replacement. The opposition has cited NRM's corruption to call for change; NRM has cited its "successful record" on the economy, defence, education, etc., to argue for continuity. Because many politicians before (including the NRM cadres) have promised change and failed to deliver[345], people are often sceptical about promises for change. Consequently since 2000-2001 many have wondered whether it is better to stay with the devil (the NRM) they know or to join the angel (the RA or FDC) they do not know. This indecision played out most in 2001 as NRM and Besigye's Reform Agenda engaged a vicious campaign marked by violence. Tension mounted; the army was drawn in. The undecided were forced to take sides as the NRM and the RA drifted apart.

The above set of events explain why his *Parting Ways* (see plate 154) elicits a sense of tension as two rows of marabou storks surge into opposed directions. A rift emerges through the differentiation in background colour and the ominous presence of a rising/setting sun peering through the greens, reds and blues. It is not immediately clear why the setting/rising sun was used here. He also introduced the sun in his *Evening yet Morning* (see plate 125) and in his *Undecided* (see plate 157) too. It therefore can be read as a metaphor he uses to expose malfeasance. If my reading is valid then it could also be argued that the artist visualises what the Baganda (his ethnic group) call *okwanika* (meaning to put in light, to expose) which the Luganda newspaper, called *Bukedde,* has often used as a metaphor to expose the

[345] This phenomenon can be traced back to the 1950s; it decisively altered Charles Ssekintu attitude towards Uganda's post-colonial leaders (see chapter four). Recently a popular notion, *Byoya bya Nswa*, has entered common parlance in Buganda to reference the NRM's "empty promises" claims which the NRM has vehemently denied. For more on this debate see: Lubowa, Angel. "Nja kukozesa federo ngogole Mengo – Museveni" in *Bukedde,* June 1, 2005. Also available online at: http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/58/60/437348/byoya%20bya%20nswa (accessed June 1, 2005).

corrupt in the public service. It could also be postulated that in his *Parting Ways* he exposes the collapse of a political meeting whose membership has taken irreconcilable positions. Earlier he had done a print *Meeting Adjourned* (mid-1990s; plate 158) in which he depicted a colony of storks leaving a site and moving towards a luminous background. The claim for adjournment implied in the title is not obvious in the print. However, the clustering of the storks and their movement in the same direction does suggest some agreement to relocate to another venue probably to continue with the same business: an adjournment. It is this consensus which he upset in his *Parting Ways* (see plate 154). Recently Kiiza Besigye confirmed the issues which informed Mutebi's *Parting Ways.* He disclosed that "the National Resistance Movement vice chairman, Haji Moses Kigongo, chaired several meetings in his house intended to call President Yoweri Museveni to order when massive corruption started tainting his government…."[346] But because Museveni's response was unsatisfactory, Besigye radically, as we see in Mutebi's *Parting Ways*, "part[ed] ways"[347] with the NRM. It is thus interesting to see how Mutebi visualises this departure using his works. He skilfully goes beyond commentary; he expresses his revulsion; he sharpens his critical tools as he critiques some of the fluid alliances which have shaped Uganda's recent political history.

It is, however, equally true that the NRM administration did not collapse in the wake of these rifts. In fact subsequent to the rifts, the NRM has won two successive elections and a referendum; it dominates national and regional administrations in the country following the 2006 polls. Parties like Justice Forum (JEEMA), among others, which have a clean record, have one Member of Parliament in the current legislature: the contemporary artist Hussein Kyanjo. Kiiza Besigye's FDC has only 35 members in parliament. The NRM has 221 members (66%) out of the 333 members of the legislature. This implies, and ironically so, that the "corrupt" NRM is still the most popular political party among the electorate which, by the way, could be

[346] See: Nyanzi Peter and Walulya Gerald, "'Kigongo Chaired Meetings on Movt Corruption'", *The Monitor,* October 29, 2005.
[347] See: *Monitor,* ibid

read as a confirmation of the institutionalisation of corruption Mutebi visualised in his *Blind Leading the Looking* and which Mutibwa wrote about. In spite of its soaring popularity, however, Mutebi still insists that the NRM's collapse is inevitable. He explains why:

> I mean a state which does not actually fight corruption is vulnerable to collapse…corruption is about diverting funds…you have a road to be constructed and someone diverts the money so that [the] road won't be constructed… actually it's the ultimate reason why states collapse…and that's why I really put it into consideration . I mean it also tops the list of the things that really concern me [and] which I'm preoccupied with when I'm doing my art (Mutebi, interview 2006).

Would it then not have been prudent for the artist to join active politics and effect change? I have suggested that Hussein Kyanjo has done so through JEEMA – a party with no known corrupt record; other artists, whom I referred to earlier, have done the same (cf. p.121 above). Put differently, is the artist not seeking to better his own political opportunities in the event that the NRM collapses as he prophesised? The answer to this question is negative. Mutebi is not seeking to take up public office. He suggested to me that he wants to "keep away from top-level politics" (Mutebi, interview 2006). Instead, he insists that he will continue to speak though his art until the situation improves (ibid).

As we learn from the last excerpt the NRM will collapse because its cadres divert public funds to private business. The artist cited the pathetic conditions in the Luweero Triangle as a paradigmatic example to support his claim. Actually the artist's claim is verifiable. In chapter six I discussed how the Luweero Triangle became the theatre of the rebellion which toppled Obote's regime. As a result, much of the infrastructure and personal property in the area was destroyed by Obote's rapacious military machine. The NRM promised urgent reconstruction in 1986; it created the Ministry in Charge of Luweero Triangle to coordinate the reconstruction effort for which it received huge sums of money from national and donor sources. And yet, as I noted in chapter one (see p.10 above), there is little on the ground to justify the huge sums which have been sank into the ministry. Of course it has become fashionable for some NRM cadres to dismiss anti-corruption criticism

accusing critics of being unpatriotic. Rather than responding positively to calls to check the problem, they have cited their participation in the rebellion accusing critics of being uncharitable[348]. This has been rejected as a red herring intended to silence anti-corruption criticism[349]. After all it is obvious, and this is Mutebi's view, that today the Luweero Triangle is in a sorry state, confirming criticism that funds were misappropriated. "I wonder what happened to that money" Mutebi probes (Mutebi, interview 2006), adding that "there is hardly a project [in the area] twenty years down the road" (ibid) to show post-war recovery.

Phares Mutibwa offers a plausible explanation for the issues which Mutebi highlights while articulating their political ramifications. He acknowledges that funds were allocated to the post-war rehabilitation of the war-ravaged Luweero Triangle but

> …much of that money is alleged to have disappeared or failed to reach the people for whom it was meant. Up to this day, the people have continued to blame the NRM for abandoning them, when it was their support which enabled the NRM to win the war – a fact which even President Museveni has at times admitted. The peasants have even claimed that 'other Ugandans' – meaning non-Baganda – used the Baganda of Luweero Triangle as a ladder on the ascent to power forgetting them once that objective had been achieved (Mutibwa 1992, 195).

Now, we cannot doubt Mutibwa's claims because of the very reasons I gave in the introduction to this chapter; his contention was also debated in the press[350]. Mutibwa also reveals that President Museveni himself has expressed concern over these issues. Actually Mutibwa makes a valid point because in 1992 Museveni wrote that:

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[348] See: Ahimbisibwe Fortunate, "I'm witch-hunted – Muhwezi", in the Sunday Vision, April 2, 2006. Also available online at http://sundayvision.co.ug/detail.php?mainNewsCategoryId=7&newsCategoryId=123&newsId=490666 (accessed April 2, 2006).

[349] In one Luganda article an unhappy writer wrote that "tukooye abatujjukiza bwe balwana" literally meaning we are tired of people who divert criticism by citing how they fought in the anti-Obote rebellion. See: "Tukooye abatujjukiza bwe balwana", in *The New Vision,* April 3, 2006. Also available online at http://www.bukedde.co.ug/detail.php?mainNewsCategoryId=2&newsCategoryId=73&newsId=490454 (accessed April 3, 2006).

[350] For example see: Kayogoza W. Tumwebaze, "Twarire: Baganda Dining from Westerners" in *The Monitor,* September 28-October 1 1993.*r*

> I am convinced of the correctness of our handling of the economic, security and political matters in our country. *My worry, however, is in connection with the corruption of our public officials.* How can we hope to convince anyone of the rightness of our cause if our own people are violating our own programmes? Corruption is a cancer which, if not checked will hinder progress in all sectors of society (Museveni 1992, 88; My emphasis).

Recently Museveni has reiterated his concern that corruption is affecting the health of the NRM[351] although his critics argue that he is paying lip-service to the problem which warrants urgent attention and political will to be resolved.

We also learn from Mutibwa that by the early-nineties corruption had informed ethnic consciousness which translated into micro-nationalism as the Baganda identified themselves as a marginalised group, that they felt exploited or used as ladders by non-Baganda who accessed power and forgot them. These views have gained greater currency, since the nineties, as the Baganda call for the devolution of power in order to "empower local communities to take charge of their destines (sic) through local institutions of self governance and resource mobilisation…" (Mukyala-Makiika 1998, 96). Many demanded a return to the federal constitution which Obote abrogated in 1967[352]*.* Mutebi is aware of these issues and supports the call for regional autonomy to end corruption. "Actually I agree…that federalism is one of the ways of fighting corruption" he asserts (Mutebi, interview 2006). Unlike his anti-corruption campaign, however, Mutebi has not visualised ideas on the devolution of power.

Conclusion to Chapter Seven:

In this chapter I have traced Mutebi's professional career. I have demonstrated that his art goes beyond technical issues and enters a political realm. As a political artist he is as much a painter as he is a print-maker. For

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[351] See: Olupot Milton, "Graft threatens NRM – M7", in *The New Vision,* April 1, 2006. Also available online at http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/490469 (accessed April 1, 2006).

[352] For more on the link between the resurgence of Ganda ethnic nationalism and corruption in the NRM see: Asiimwe, M. Paul. "Don't blame Kabakaship blame 'pajero tribe'", The Monitor, April 6-8. 1993. Also see: Gwanga Mujje, *Lwaki Federo,* The Federo Papers—No. 1, Gwanga Mujje Emitwe, n.d

him traditions, women, men, children, the elite, the non-elite, rurality, urbanity, wild animals, marabou storks and mundane activities like fruit-selling, are poignant visual vocabularies which he uses to express his political opinion. But he also uses conventional political symbols, such as the "NRM Bus" (also called the "Yellow Bus") and *Kakuyege* – subverting them to make his point. Although issues of local governance, and most importantly, corruption concern him most, it has become clear that he also addresses national and international issues on culture, the economy, the environment, war, etc. I have also demonstrated how he has explored experiences, histories and strategies, which have evolved through the history of Uganda's contemporary art, to develop his skill, medium, visual vocabulary and to express his political thought as he confirms his position in the trajectory of Uganda's modern art and its nexus with politics. I have explored how he seeks to intervene in the continuing battle to improve governance and democracy in a country riddled with corruption: in a polity where there are few *uninterested buyers* – to use a title from his work. He thus addresses issues of political concern although he makes no claim for being a politician.

Mutebi's paintings and prints do not have a mass-circulation within Uganda: his audience is largely the non-bourgeoisie market (dominated by Western tourists) although he also exhibits in local and international galleries. This, however, does not take away from the fact that he deliberately seeks to wedge his prints and paintings into the wider debate on governance and democratisation seen in the print and electronic media, music and theatre. This web of conversations has been critical to the civic discussions on how to better the health of the nation-state. It has helped the artist to refine and appropriate his visual representations to expose what has become NRM's "disease of corruption". As Mutebi puts it; "discussion…is actually one of the ways that we should fight corruption"[353]. Hence although, like many before him, Mutebi has failed to come up with an alternative dispensation, I posit that that he taps into civic discourses and thus locates his art in a wider

[353] Mutebi, interviewn 2006.

discussion on democratisation and governance merits acknowledgement. I therefore strongly argue that his political voice must not be permanently silenced or relegated as secondary to the very prints and paintings the artist is using to shape it.

Chapter Eight

The motifs on Bruno Sserunkuuma's Pottery: A Site for Socio-Political Activism

> **My themes mainly originate from my immediate surroundings and the final decoration on the surfaces of my forms accounts a lot in my work**.
> – Bruno Sserunkuuma, *Statement of Intent*

Introduction:
Bruno Sserunkuuma, like Mutebi, argues that the nation-state has failed to deliver services, it is still autocratic like the other post-colonial governments before it, its reform programme is incomplete and it is hampered by corruption. However, unlike Mutebi, Sserunkuuma visualises an alternative power dispensation using the surfaces of his pottery. Put in other words Sserunkuuma's pottery has socio-political statements inscribed in its motifs. This, and in light of the above quote, decisively distances his pottery from its traditional antecedents whose relevance is inscribed in the contexts of their use; it persuades us to engage in the wider discourses, which the artist calls his "immediate surrounding" and which inform the motifs on his pottery.

In this chapter I interrogate how the artist has used his pottery to fight for the political emancipation of his region Buganda. I demonstrate how his ceramics has become a medium for raising important socio-political issues and a space for redistributing the political power and authority of the nation-state. I begin by [re]tracing the contours of the wider local/global, scholarly, historical and cultural discourses to locate him into the trajectory of Uganda's modern art, show how he developed his technical skills and analyse how he progressed from making utilitarian ware to producing vases, plates, and tile-panels on which he has raised important political debates.

Bruno Sserunkuuma: His Career Development

Before 1984, Sserunkuuma had the ambition of becoming a medical doctor. During his secondary school education, he took science subjects (Physics, Chemistry and Biology) in addition to Fine Art, in order to realise his dream. As it turned out, his performance in Biology could not secure his admission to Makerere University's Medical School; instead he was admitted for a Bachelor of Science which he rejected and applied for admission to the Art School. Because his performance in Fine Art was good, Sserunkuuma was admitted to Makerere Art School for a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts (BA (FA)) in 1984.

As a student at Makerere Art School, Sserunkuuma specialised in painting, graphics and ceramics. He writes his *Statement of Intent* (2000) that "in all my exhibitions my work[s] serve as an integral part of ceramics, painting and graphic designing" contending that he has applied the multi-disciplinary knowledge he gained at his BA(FA) to his pottery. Like Mutebi, and others, he also took courses in art history and colour theory. His cubistic and expressionist styles can be traced to his exposure to modern European styles through courses in the history of modern art. Some of his pots bear traces of classical Asian, Greek and Egyptian styles which he may have accessed through reading art history.

After completing his BA(FA), Sserunkuuma became a Graduate Fellow, someone who trains as he teaches at Makerere University. As a Graduate Fellow, he pursued a Master of Arts in Fine Arts (MA(FA)) degree specialising in Ceramics in the period 1989-1992. The stances he took and the experiments he did at his MA(FA) permeate the pottery he has done over the past seventeen years. In 1994 Sserunkuuma became a full-time lecturer at the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art (MTSIFA)[354]. He has served as Head of Department in the Department of Industrial Arts and Design (DIAD), Member of Senate Makerere University (1996-2001) and as

[354] In 1995 Makerere Art School became Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art or MTSIFA. From here onwards I refer to Makerere Art School in case of reference to events taking place at the school before 1995. For events after 1995 I use the acronym MTSIFA.

Dean of the Faculty (2000-2001)[355]. He has won international awards and has exhibited widely in local and international spaces[356]. Currently he is preparing for his PhD.

It is against this background that I examine his work. I begin with his early works tracing how and when it became the mirror of the artist's socio-political surrounding as he indicates in his "statement of intent".

Early Work and Progress towards Socio-Politics

Most of the works Sserunkuuma did as an undergraduate student have been bought or "destroyed" leaving no trace; all his MA(FA) work has been dispersed. However, in 1992 he wrote a catalogue (called a Guide Book) accompanying his MA(FA) exhibition. Kept in the University Library, his catalogue forms a useful literary and visual archive from which I trace his early professional growth and political stances starting in the late-eighties.

In his Guide Book Sserunkuuma details the basis of his MA(FA) research. He traced the archaeological, historical, scientific, theoretical, practical, traditional and modern development of ceramics in Uganda, Africa and beyond. Drawing comparisons between traditions of pottery in Uganda and elsewhere, he expressed dissatisfaction with the level of development in "Uganda's traditional pottery". He agreed with a report, written by Gregory Maloba in 1958, which suggested that Uganda's pottery could not compete on the "world" stage because it was fragile and made to suit local contexts (Maloba cited in Sserunkuuma 1992, 4). Sserunkuuma's position, just like Maloba's, is problematic in as far as he assumes that local pottery, which was made to suit local contexts, had to be judged using oriental and occidental standards[357]. Adopting it as a point of departure, however, he

[355] See his curriculum vitae in volume two, appendix two.
[356] Again see appendix two in volume two.
[357] As if to confirm my claim he argues that "it is obvious that the standards of the world's best pottery are again found in…the Tanga and Sung periods in China and the best of Ming Celadon….early Japanese tea-master's ware, early Pursian (sic), Syrian, Hirspo-Moresque (sic), German Bellarmines, some Delif (sic) and Fine English Slip wares". See Sserunkuuma, Bruno. "A

argued that it is essential for Ugandans to improve their pottery through research.

In raising this issue Sserunkuuma tapped into an issue which has concerned many since the early twentieth century. In addition to Maloba's report, Sserunkuuma cited Trowell's attempt to enhance pottery in Uganda (Sserunkuuma 1992, 7) which I also acknowledged in chapter three. In chapter two I discussed Mathers's contribution and demonstrated that colonial and post-colonial governments were interested in the plight of pottery; they funded projects to upgrade the sector. There has also been ongoing research on how to improve local pottery within and outside the academia since the 1960s. In 1963, John Francis joined the teaching staff at Makerere Art School and in 1964 he started a ceramics section equipped with modern facilities and a laboratory. The department produced individual studio potters and technical stuff to work in new ceramics industries, like African Ceramics Industries at Kasiyirize, which were intended to boost the local pottery sector[358]. Government also established a Department of Industrial Ceramics under the Uganda Polytechnic Kyambogo (now Kyambogo University) to train specialised potters and encourage the local pottery sector. Unfortunately, "it is discouraging to note that [the local pottery] industry has not fully taken off" as the artist rightly concludes (Sserunkuuma 1992, 5).

However, Sserunkuuma identified this frustrating situation as an opportunity for students of pottery to experiment and explore the possibilities of local pottery with a view of making it competitive on a post-civil war art market

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Study Towards Development of New and More Effective Clay Bodies in Ceramics for Makerere University." (MAFA guide book, Makerere University, 1992): 3.

[358] And this point was made in the Art School's annual report of 1967-1968 in which it was reported that:

> In the Department of Ceramics research continued on ceramic materials in Uganda in relation to the ceramics industry which is due to begin production in Uganda during the period 1968-69. As part of the close association between Uganda Development Corporation and the Department in the field of industrial ceramics, facilities were afforded to visiting Ceramic Technologists for the purpose of providing trials and prototype model making.

See: Makerere University College (University of East Africa). "The Margaret Trowell School of Fine Art Annual Report 1967-68". Reprinted from Makerere University College Reports, 1967-68.

which, as I have already suggested, is predominantly non-bourgeoisie. His postgraduate project, and much of the work he has done since 1992, are part of [t]his continued inquiry. He has collected and observed varied clay types and feldspars from different locations in Uganda and has mixed them in varied proportions to improve their natural properties and use them to experiment with varied traditional and non-traditional forms. He has improved his forms with colours and glazes. His products show varied degrees of success and all are documented: cracked tiles, collapsed pots, etc. His Guide Book contains a wealth of successful utilitarian wares which resulted from his early empirical study: “tea sets” (plate 159a, 159b and 159c), “bowls and vases” (plate 160a and 160b). Recalling the Bauhaus tradition of producing for a utopian market, some of his products are probably not suited for the uses he prescribes. For example his “bowls with handles” (plate 161), “tripod casserole” (plate 162), “water bottles” (plate 163), and “beer bottles” (plate 164) could possibly not be used for the purposes implied in their labels/titles. In fact they are more decorative than utilitarian, although he made wares which he described as decorative, for example his “ornamental beer bottles” (plate 165), “decorative plates” (plate 166) and “UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) Wall Mural” (plate 167).

Most importantly, Sserunkuuma put traditional Ganda pottery, such as those Mutebi used in his print *Abanyunyunsi* (see plate 130a) to new and unprecedented use. Traditionally the Baganda produced dimple pottery whose sizes and shapes were tied to their functions. Save for limited incisions at the neck of the pots, many have no surface decorations and have remained relatively unaltered since antiquity. Concerned that this traditional form is losing the battle in the face of aluminium and plastics (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005), and that specialist traditional groups like the Bajona who made royal pottery are no more (ibid)[359], the artist has championed the cause to “fight for traditional pottery” (ibid). It is interesting to

[359] Traditionally the Bajona produce pottery for the royal household. It is arguable that their role was disrupted when Obote outlawed the Buganda kingdom in 1967. However, although many royal servants have reclaimed their positions since 1993 when the kingdom was restored, the Bajona have not resurfaced. It is likely that they are no longer relevant.

note how he has done it. First, he has relentlessly and arduously experimented with form and material to generate new forms out of the old Ganda traditional pots.

Second, rather than seeing the traditional Ganda pot as a domestic utensil, he uses it as an art surface the way "a painter would use a canvass"[360]. Consequently he has redeemed the Ganda pot from its strictly traditional space and made it sellable on the bourgeois and non-bourgeois markets. He has maintained the broad shape of the Ganda pot but halved it, so to speak, into an artistic surface on which to express varied social, religious and political statements. For example on his *Ankore Introduction Ceremony* (late-1990s; plate 168) Sserunkuuma articulated marriage rituals among the Banyankore (people of Ankore in Western Uganda) [361]. This is the same ritual Sam Ntiro went through when he married Nyendwoha although it is not the one we see in his *Taking Beer to the Bride* (see plate 35). Sserunkuuma introduces into his composition all aspects, concerning dowry rituals in Western Uganda (huts, cows, etc), some of which were absent from Ntiro's work. Because it is small and less fragile, he sold his *Ankore Introduction Ceremony* abroad. Given its bulkiness, and fragility, its traditional Ganda referent cannot easily be exported; this has affected its competitiveness on the global art circuit. His *Kkubo Lya Musaalaba* (Way of the Cross; 1999) series also merit mention. These were a series of traditional Ganda dimple pots which the artist turned into bearers of religious iconography (see plate 169); he used them to represent the way of the cross in Kamuli Catholic Parish. Earlier I referred to the challenges he faced convincing a catholic priest about his choice of symbols (see p.120 above). That he succeeded to convince the conservative clergy to accept his unprecedented, and unorthodox, use of the traditional pot was phenomenal.

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[360] He made this point in a recent interview affirming claims he had made in his artist's statement. See Sserunkuuma Bruno, "Statement of Intent", n.d.

[361] I however must add that the Banyankore have had a long history of interaction with the Baganda. By the time Stanley came to Buganda (see chapter two) the royal household in Buganda had Bahima servants — probably slaves — from Ankore. Sserunkuuma says that in his home district the definition of Ganda-ness is relaxed. His own mother has parentage from the Banyankore. The Banyankore herd their cows in his area; many have settled there. Against this backdrop Sserunkuuma's pot gains a wider representation and definition of Ganda-ness.

This transformation of the Ganda pot was itself part of the wider experimental project which yielded various pot-forms – some improvised, others having classical referents – which he calls his “standard forms” (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005) or, his “canvasses”. His canvasses include: his “straight-trunk” pot-forms whose height ranges between 15cm and 60cm tall. They are rimless and tube-like, tapering abruptly at the foot and at the mouth although some open slightly at the mouth. He also has varied “near-hemispherical” pot-forms with heights ranging between 20cm and 50cm. These carry resonances from Greek, Egyptian and Ganda classical forms or a combination of ideas from two or all of them. They are rim-less and have narrow mouths widening at the shoulders and tapering towards a narrow base. Lastly he has done bowls, deriving from the traditional Ganda dish (called *ekibya*), vases which derive from a combination of all the attributes I have outlined, and flat plates. These are the forms on to which he has deployed his socio-political motifs. Being canvasses, many of them have similar shapes although their messages differ. This is so because, as we read in the quotation at the beginning of the chapter, for him the pot derives its symbolism from its surface-motif (a motif which also accounts for its title) although this is not to suggest that all his pots have preset titles. In fact, many of them do not while others (as we will see in a moment) have fluid titles.

After inventing his canvasses, Sserunkuuma progressed from experimentation and producing utilitarian/decorative ware, to using pottery forms as a vehicle for expressing ideas. He started off humbly. His early pots were apolitical and scholarly. For example his *Untitled* (Seated Model; 1990; plate 170) shows the artist’s interest in the female figure. In a recent interview he argued this motif came from drawings he did during his undergraduate life drawing classes, although it also betrays his access to Western styles as seen in the works of Pablo Picasso or Henri Matisse. Sometimes he incorporated traditional Ganda motifs to vernacularise the motifs he derived from his drawing classes confirming that beside the human

form, the artist is interested in conventional Ganda motifs (see plate 171). He explored aspects of nature in order to expand his decorative programme. For example he explored “hibiscus flowers” (plate 172), “the insect” (plate 173), “plant bulbs” (plate 174a and 174b), and “landscapes” (plate 175). He also did abstract modernist ideas for example his generic “abstract designs” (plate 176). With these he dissolved the border between art and craft and affirmed his position as a modern artist. The point to be made, then, is that Sserunkuuma’s early pots show the scholarly ideas he acquired through formal training and his personal initiative through research and experimentation. He confirms my reading when he argues that:

> Through continuous learning, researching and experimentation with a lot of Ugandan clays; and the scarce imported ceramic materials and limited facilities I have made a lot of studio discoveries in earthenware clay bodies and glazes in all firing conditions. This has greatly enhanced the aesthetic and functional content of my work both as a researcher and an independent ceramic artist (Sserunkuuma 2000).

By 1990 Sserunkuuma labelled his pots according to technique, material and function (or pottery as a craft): titles like “tea set high earthenware” were common. But, starting in the nineties his pottery became a space for political expression (or pottery as a socio-political motif). For example he critiqued the “academic politics” under which he trained and served, in his *The Senate* (1990s; plate 177), an assemblage of sliced heads wearing ties and suits which, like they were for Mutebi, symbolise elitism. The artist reproduced them through casting and individuated them using glazes. That all his subjects share a gesture suggests a kind of generalisation which would probably be rejected by the membership of the Makerere University Senate. Also, there is a subtle racial/ethnic profiling which could be read from the group although the artist denies it and instead cites the firing conditions which affected some of his pieces and altered their colours.

As implied in the title of the work the assemblage represents the Makerere University Senate, the highest academic organ in the university with representation from all faculties, schools and institutes. Sserunkuuma has

represented the Art School in the Senate and was often disappointed by the politics which unfolds during its debates. He observed people engaging in “unserious talk”, mutual suspicion and arrogance (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) a sharp criticism which could be read from the way his subjects grin inanely. But he was particularly bitter that the views expressed in the Senate were not usually sensitive to the needs of the Art School (ibid). To remind ourselves, the issues behind Sserunkuuma’s *The Senate* are as old as the Art School itself. Trowell confronted them in the forties; they almost spelt the closure of the Art School (see pp.76-80 above). Unlike Trowell, Sserunkuuma translated his concerns into visual expression while recalling a painting done by Francis Musangogwantamu in the mid-1980s. Musangogwantamu was Trowell’s student. He graduated in the 1950s. Currently he heads the Department of Art and Design at Nkumba University. During the late-eighties Musangogwantamu was head of MTSIFA and member of senate. He, like Sserunkuuma, was disappointed by the senate debates. For him they were full of “suspicion, fury, and indignation” (Kyeyune 2004, 38); they also “went on in circles, sometimes endlessly” (ibid). He did his *The Senate* (1980s; plate 178) to embody his concerns.

There is a strand, that I need to highlight, which permeates Sserunkuuma’s motifs – the ones we have seen this far and the political motifs we are about to see. This is the excellent draughtsmanship resulting from the rigorous process of drawing (or “sketching” as he calls it) through which the artist generates his motifs. He has a variety of motifs which he has drawn with care, incredible skill and patience (see plates 179a, 179b, 179c and 179d) although some are spontaneous showing a rapidity of ideas which flowed in the artist’s mind as he conceived them (see plate 180). The stylisation in his drawings/“sketches” resonates batik art forms sold in many tourist art shops in Kampala, although his interest in modernist abstraction is unmistakable (see plate 181 for example).

The batik resonances in Sserunkuuma’s drawings and motifs should not surprise us. He says his works reflect the batiks he sells in his art and craft

shop located in the precinct of the National Theatre (Kampala). But there is something else more profound which I need to highlight. Like Mutebi, and many others, Sserunkuuma did batik for survival, having learnt the skill from Josua Mbazzi, his friend and contemporary. He also admires the works of Mark Mutyaba, Bifilamunda, Richard Mayanja, Ali Ssonko, Bigombe and Kitimbo, all of whom make batiks for a living. Most importantly, however, the artist also reveals that "I like the batik kind of drawing because it…[allows me to stylise my figures]…as I pay attention to proportions and drawing" (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005).

But there is an irony hidden in his attitude towards batiks, namely that, despite the positive impact it has had on his motifs, Sserunkuuma is still prejudiced against batik art! As such he conflates the production of batiks (per se) with the loss of artistic genius. For him, just like it is for the MTSIFA, "batik is not…at the same standard as painting…." (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005). He takes this stance even when, and this is how I see it, he is introducing batik into MTSIFA albeit through another medium – pottery. Besides, within the Western tradition of academic art, which the artist cherishes, painting and sculpture are considered art – and he is aware of this because he mentions painting. Within this same [Kantian] aesthetic his pottery is as much a "craft" as is batik. In other words, his pottery is not taken at the same standard as painting, a position he has vowed to fight. For example he has written that:

> A lot of attention has been given to other fields of art like sculpture, painting…yet ceramics…has a very long history as one of the oldest crafts belonging to almost all tribal group[s]…in Uganda. I am extremely interested in developing and promoting…ceramics in Uganda which has been marginalised…(Sserunkuuma, *Statement of Intent,* n.d).

In spite of the ironies outlined above starting in 1990 Sserunkuuma deployed flat shapes and colours (his batik style) on his pottery. Sometimes he renders them a limited illusion of depth; sometimes he boldly delineates his motif with black outlines, giving them the kind of strict angularity seen in classical African sculpture. Yet some of his outlines are delicate and sophisticated.

For example, he has developed a technique where he coats his pottery with a thin layer of offwhite clay slip which he calls *engobe*. *Engobe* provides a buffer zone on to which he introduces a layer of black. He then scratches thin outlines through the black coat, exposes the underlying *engobe* and produces delicate, ornate designs and shapes. Often he adds a thin transparent glaze on top of his designs to protect them, but also to give the multi-layered political texts on his pots vibrancy and vitality.

Let me also mention that Sserunkuuma, like Mutebi, avoids direct mentioning of controversial political issues. Instead he advocates a kind of indirection which sets him apart from other artists who have literally engaged the pot to express political ideas. Citing a few examples here will help to demonstrate my claim. In chapter six I alluded to the fact that Alex Mukulu became openly critical towards the NRM regime in the 1990s (see p.193 above). As if to demonstrate, in 2005 Mukulu wrote a play called *Akattambwa* (2005) in which he saw continuums between the NRM and its post-colonial predecessors[362]. For example, Mukulu was concerned that the NRM had constrained political parties which he saw as an attack on the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and political association. In a poster advertising *Akattambwa* (plate 182) Mukulu highlighted the loss of freedom of speech using two signs. One was literal. The poster shows heads of men and women whose lips have been sealed – a sharp critique on the way the NRM had constrained political party activities. The second was more veiled: he placed his gagged victims into a pot placed on three stones arranged triangularly (being the traditional hearth). He introduced tinder and a blazing fire (marked with white, yellow and red) to suggest the act of torture, which is also elicited by the gestures on the faces of the victims being cooked. Here Mukulu made a pointed criticism on Uganda's post-colonial governance and human rights record and this is the way his play was received. Yet, in this second instance Mukulu recalled an incident which happened in October 2002 involving Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In October 2002 LRA

[362] See: "Mukulu's Cynical Views of Politics" in *The New Vision*, January 13, 2006. Also available online at http://newvision.co.ug/D/9/44/475770 (accessed January 13, 2006).

attacked and killed people at a place called Gang Pa Aculu in Northern Uganda. After the grisly murder, LRA performed another even more grisly ritual. The rebels chopped their victims to pieces, stuffed them into a traditional pot, prepared a fire in the middle of a trading centre and cooked them! This, for the LRA, was a way of challenging the Museveni administration and forcing the people to support its cause. The incident attracted local and international outcry and anger[363]. Sserunkuuma is aware of Mukulu's and Kony's usage of the traditional pot. He, like Mutebi, also thinks there are some mistakes from the past which the NRM has repeated. But, for reasons I have already outlined (see pp.225-226 above), he rejects such overt (and controversial) political usage the traditional pot as seen in Mukulu's poster. He was also outraged by Kony's inhumane use of the pot.

On the other hand, besides his technical excellence and formal training, the artist suggests that his career benefited from "his travels" (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005). He, like Mutebi, cites a Luganda proverb to substantiate his claim. In a recent conversation I had with him, the artist recalled a Luganda proverb "*Atannayitaayita y'atenda nnyina okufumba*" (ibid)[364], to suggest that before one is exposed to other experiences beyond MTSIFA, one's professional horizon is limited. Because his Curriculum Vitae details exhibitions he has held in many places[365] his contention is admissible; it however merits explanation.

Since 1996 students at MTSIFA have taken what is called "Industrial Training". Before this, and since the 1950s, students have written a Research Paper[366], they still do. In both cases, students work with small and medium industries, galleries, museums, designers, artisans, etc., to gain an

[363] For the complete story and graphic picture of the Gang Pa Aculu Massacre, see: Osike Felix, Moro Justin, Omwony Chris & Ocham M. "Kony Massacre Victims Named", in *The New Vision,* October 22, 2002. Also available online at http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/92953/Kony%20rebels%20pot (accessed October 22, 2002).
[364] This Luganda proverb means that before one travels beyond his/her immediate space, one cannot attain better standards.
[365] For a full list of his local and international exhibitions see appendix two in volume two.
[366] According to Charles Ssekintu Trowell introduced "some kind of research" into the Art School during the late-forties. By the sixties research had been emphasised as a compulsory examinable subject. Today students are examined for industrial training and research.

external input into their training. Sserunkuuma himself worked with a plastic industry during his BA studies in Fine Art[367]. During his Master's in Fine Arts he worked with other stakeholders in the ceramics sector in Uganda. This then confirms that MTSIFA exposes its students to issues beyond Makerere and that the artist was exposed to such influences during his undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

It seems to me then that what Sserunkuuma meant here is exposure to cultural discourses outside Uganda: the global cultural discourses. This then explains why he celebrates that "fortunately enough I have had a chance to travel and see what is happening in other parts of the world and then compare it to ours" (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). There is evidence in his pottery to confirm his encounter with Western, Oriental and African cultures outside his in Buganda. For example, his participation in the *Cairo International Biennale for Ceramics* has had immense impact on his practice. He has a pot in progress on which he added a motif he developed during his travel abroad which shows a mixture of Ganda (women dressed in *ssuuka*) and Egyptian resonances. It also has women wearing feathered hats (see plate 183) who could be from Northern Uganda or from other parts of Africa or the world. This ambiguity and multiplicity of sources give his motifs a global, rather than strictly tribal representation.

That stated, Sserunkuuma's "travels", most especially to Europe, have radicalised him and ultimately the cultural politics on his pot surfaces. His radical transformation is intriguing; in very many ways it corresponds with radical views expressed in traditional songs during the nineties. For example, Herman Basudde is one of Sserunkuuma's favourite Kadongokamu musicians[368]. In the 1990s Basudde sang his *Byetwalaba* (What We Saw;

[367] NICE is an industry which makes plastics in Uganda. Sserunkuuma did his research paper there. See his "Plastic Ceramics in the NICE Plastic Industry of Kampala" (Kampala: Makerere University, 1987).

[368] Actually Sserunkuuma has a lot of admiration for Basudde. He for example thinks Basudde is "very, very clever" (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) while characterising the way Basudde communicates his (oft controversial) political message without attracting official sanctions. But he admits that he likes all Kadongokamu music because it is rich in social, political and educative

1990s), off his *Abankuseere* Album, in which he narrated a visit to Europe. In the song he compared culture in Buganda to that in Europe. He rejected European modern culture suggesting that "…*tukuumire ddala byetulina ng'akalira*" (translated: the Baganda should preserve their culture and guard it jealously against modern Western influences). Fred Ssebatta, another of Sserunkuuma's favourite musicians, sang his title track *Ekijjulo ky'Ebulaaya* (A Feast in Europe; 1990s) in which he exaggerated the wrongs of modernity in Europe to justify the case that the Baganda should guard against Western cultural influences and zealously preserve their traditional values. Sserunkuuma's transformation being informed by a visit to Europe, must be read in relation to these two songs although, as we will see in a moment, his stance is closer to that of Kabaka Chwa II of Buganda (see pp.51-53 above): he seems (and I will demonstrate this in a moment) to advocate for the use of traditions as a way of controlling the excesses of modernity.

Following his travels to Europe Sserukuuma became a critic of the excesses of modernity. He argues strongly that:

> It is true…when you travel you can be able to gauge yourself and see how you are and start valuing your culture because when you see [bad and immoral] things being done…then you start respecting the way you are (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006).

In a recent discussion he recalled what Chwa II called wholesale foreignisation, and the uncritical importation of Western culture into Buganda, to explain what he meant in the above excerpt. First, he cited some habits which he saw in Europe, habits which, in his opinion, must not be imported (this being his word) into Buganda. For example he recalled an incident which happened in 1999 when he went to London for the first time and saw a gay couple kissing in a public space (ibid). This for the artist was bizarre, outrageous and totally unacceptable. "I thought our culture was better off" he concluded (ibid).

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commentary. In this chapter I refer to many other Kadongokamu artists who have informed his oeuvre.

Secondly, he rejected the Western cultural imperium. For instance, he criticised a beauty pageant sponsored by the multinational corporation Pepsi in the late-1990s(?). He did not attend the spectacle, but bought one of the pictures which was taken and sold by vendors. The photograph shows models on the cat-walk; they place their hands behind their backs (plate 184). Obviously many pictures, capturing the event from many angles, were taken and sold. It is not therefore clear why this particular picture was important to him. What is clear, however, is the fact that the beauty pageant, through this picture, informed his political motifs: it radicalised his pottery through a process which starts with a drawing in his collection.

The drawing recalls some aspects of the photograph in so far as both capture young women dressed skimpily. However, his drawing shows the artist's departure from the photo to visualise his radical rejection of beauty pageants as a Western cultural value. He transformed the idea in the photo into young women skimpily dressed in swim-suits, body stockings and wrappers (plate 185). This is not exactly what we see in the photo. Instead it betrays the artist's intervention with the intention to reduce the pageant to a ridiculous spectacle as he captures women, set in tableau, raising their arms. He Africanises them through the introduction of masks on their faces; his reference to Petson Lombe's *Aspirations* (see plate 59), through the raised arms, is unambiguous.

From the drawing Sserunkuuma made his *Beauty Contest* series. He has sold all the pots; the pictures he kept are not satisfactory. They however show that he developed the drawing into a motif which we see on his *Beauty Contest I* (2001; plate 186a). He further developed the idea into a motif we see on his *Beauty Contest II* (plate 186b). On the second pot he placed the models (in his drawing but also on his *Beauty Contest I*) against a backdrop of Baganda dressed in traditional garb. Unlike his drawing, *Beauty Contest I* (and the photo) which make the beholder the audience, on *Beauty Contest II* the artist captures both the models and their Ganda audience. On the one hand, the strategy enriches the composition; it introduces a sense of depth.

On the other, the artist seems to use his pot to persuade us to compare the traditional well-dressed Baganda and the modern “poorly-dressed” models. As such he, like Chwa during the forties, seems to invoke traditions to critique what he considers to be the excesses of modernity — a sharp critique on Western cultural imperialism. Admitting my reading foregrounds the context in which the artist has done many motifs since the late-1990s to celebrate the wearing of traditional garb in Buganda and we will see more as we progress with this discussion.

Sserunkuuma’s radical commitment to tradition was itself part of the wider cultural re-awakening which happened in Uganda during the 1990s. This re-awakening provoked an intense debate on African culture and its role in development. Debates in parliament often involved the invocation of culture to justify/reject dress-codes, action on minority rights, [im]morality, etc. Chapter 16, entitled “Institution of Traditional or Cultural Leaders”, was put in the constitution of Uganda to safeguard Uganda’s diverse cultural institutions and enhance their relevance to development. Uganda hosted the *7th Pan African Congress* (7th PAC) in Kampala in April 1994. The 7th PAC was a celebration of Africanism which Sserunkuuma visualised in his *African Shadows* (early-1990s; plate 187), three pots on which he represented African-ness using solid black motifs outlined in red. The motifs betray the artist’s negritudist definition of being an African – an attitude which permeates much of his pottery.

Sserunkuuma’s critique on beauty pageants and his negritudist definition of being an African betray the artist’s (but also the mainstream) conservative views on Ganda culture. The artist confirms my postulation when he confesses that he has a strong “attachment to the cultures of the Baganda” (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005). This “attachment” has raised the artist’s consciousness and ethnic nationalism, although other factors which we will see in a moment, are equally involved. As a declaration of his strong ethnic allegiance, in a conversation I had with him Sserunkuuma would emphatically begin many of his responses with assertions like: “you see I am

a Muganda…" (ibid) or "as a Muganda…" (ibid) or "we the Baganda…" (ibid): statements which confirm his strong commitment to Ganda nationalism.

To further express his profound ethnic loyalty, in 1990 he joined other Baganda activists to found the Nnembe Group. The group's membership includes artists, bankers and civil servants who share and express a strong sense of ethnic identity. It holds regular monthly meetings to discuss cultural, social, economic and political issues which affect Buganda. Like the *Abaana ba Kintu* to which Kivubiro belonged in the 1960s (see p.177 above), the *Nnembe Group* vows to fight for anything Ganda. Taking up this patriotism (and micro-nationalism) through his motifs, Sserunkuuma has vowed to use his ceramics to fight for the environment in Buganda. His *Life Tree* (1992; plate 188) is a step in this direction. It is an abstract representation of a tree in which he used a number of triangular tiles on to which he melted magenta, red, green and yellow pieces of glass. He glued the tiles on a board forming multi-coloured, geometric patterns inscribed in a simplified tree shape. This modernist motif was one of the motifs he based on issues of environmental activism the others being his *Circle of Life* (1990s) and *The Tree of Life* (2000) among others. Sserunkuuma's environmental activism can be traced from the wider environmental campaign, spearheaded by the Kabaka of Buganda himself, which called on the Baganda to protect the environment although the artist also engaged in a global campaign to protect the ecosystem which saw him participating in the *1001 Reasons to Love the Earth Exhibition* (February 2003) in Soul, South Korea.

Sserunkuuma has also deployed his activism to critique social problems which are haunting his Buganda region. Key on the list has been the problem of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Before I detail my analysis of his HIV/AIDS-related motifs, I need to sketch out the HIV/AIDS problem and the steps/stereotypes that were invented to confront it because these are important to our understanding of his motifs.

During the 1980s Uganda faced the worst part of the HIV/AIDS challenge. The disease claimed the most productive of the population. Consequently, religious, civic and State organs educated the battered population on how to deal with the scourge. Culture too was mobilised to revise conventional practices like "wife-inheritance", blood-brotherhood, female/male circumcision and traditional antenatal practices, for example. A spirit of openness, in which HIV/AIDS-related issues were discussed, was encouraged in schools, the Media, private and public forums. In the arts, theatre engaged themes that sought to open up discussion on the problem and counter public indifference.

However, because the Ugandan society is predominantly conservative, heterosexual and patriarchal, women were stereotyped as vectors for the spread of HIV/AIDS. Other potential problem areas like blood transfusion, narcotics abuse and homosexuality, among others, were mentioned but not emphasised because they are not common in Uganda. Most culpable, were the sex-workers in urban and peri-urban areas. Beginning in the mid-eighties common parlance and popular culture (song, film and theatre) stereotyped sex-workers as good-looking vectors who bleached their skins[369] and dressed skimpily in order to entice men and give them the killer disease – HIV/AIDS! This stereotype persists today; it will probably continue as long as the problem of HIV/AIDS remains. Tapping into this stereotype, popular culture used gestures, make-up, modern fashions, plaited hair, and bleached skins, to project sex-workers as materialistic agents of trouble. This representation was invented to dissuade promiscuity, pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationships. The visual arts adopted similar stereotypes. For instance in the late-1980s Francis Musangogwantamu painted his *Emptiness of Lust* (1988) in which he dismembered and materialised the woman's body while inventing a visual misogyny. Sserunkuuma's pots too, albeit inadvertently, weave into this stigmatisation as we notice in his *Prostitutes* series.

[369] It is not unusual for urban women in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa and the Diaspora to bleach their skins. Whereas bleaching one's skin does not necessary mean one is a sex-worker, most women with bleached skins are stereotyped as such.

The prostitute series are the best selling of the artist's motifs (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) because he has done a number of pots based on this motif and sold all of them (ibid). Surely there could be various reasons why this has been so, but without access to his buyers, one can never know. However, the pots raise an important debate which merits our attention. On *Prostitutes I* (2001; plate 189) the artist compared rural women (in the upper part) with urban women (in the rest of it). Like Kawalya, Ntiro and others, the artist uses quintessential and recognisably traditional aspects like huts to identify his upper part as rural. He also conflates rurality with being authentic, a notion seen in realist novels. He persuades us to compare the prostitutes with the rural women in a serene rural setting at the top. He thus introduces urban women as inauthentic and alienated: a point he reinforces by making them skimpily dressed and located in an anonymous space. Unlike his drawing of the beauty pageant in which women returned our gaze through their mask-like faces, here the women's heads are captured in a profile reminiscent of Egyptian classical motifs. This, however, is no doubt an effective tool which avails them to male sexual desire and further accentuates the artist's intention to project them as objects of sexual desire: they are prostitutes after all. He taps into the stereotype which associates sex-workers with bleached skins as he paints their arms and legs with a brown colour. But he maintains that they are African which explains why they have black faces (a poignant reference to their unstable identity). Sserunkuuma pursued a related critique on two other smaller pots – *Prostitutes II* (2001; plate 190) and *Prostitutes III* (2001; plate 191). On the latter he is not comparative; he therefore does not make specific reference to rurality. He, however, insists on the stereotype of bleached skins; that he conflates sex-workers with indecency and lost morals remains unambiguous.

In his *Ekiwuka Ekyagwa mu Ntamu* (2001; plate 192a) it becomes clear why his attack on (urban) prostitution was important. Like his prostitute series this motif is dominated by female figures. Far removed from his prostitute-series, however, the dress-code here is not controversial. The women wear long

dresses and skirts. One stands out conspicuously from the rest: she has long styled hair; her face and skin are bleached (a point he makes by painting the face and neck in ochre while the hands are painted in brown). The pot is intensely decorated pointing to the complexity of the theme he was engaged in: AIDS is a complex subject in Uganda; given its complexity many prefer not to talk about it.

The symbolism and title of this motif comes from Herman Basudde's song which might explain why it differs from his prostitute series. Basudde sang his *Ekiwuka Ekyagwa mu Ntamu* (1990s) to address the problem of AIDS in Buganda. *Ekiwuka ekyagwa mu ntamu* is a Luganda expression invoked to describe a difficult situation for which there is no easy solution. In the song Basudde narrates that AIDS is spread through [hetero]sexual intercourse. Yet he was concerned that although the problem could be mitigated through total abstinence, abstinence is not practical. Hence for him there was no easy solution to the problem of AIDS. Basudde's song is not important to my discussion because of the issues it raised but for the way the musician approached the problem of AIDS. Basudde described all dangers associated with sex without directly mentioning the taboo subject of sexual intercourse. Sserunkuuma found his strategy of indirect mention effective and politically un-explosive. He engaged it to approach the problem of AIDS in Buganda (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). This is true only in as far as he used a less controversial dress code, traditional symbols, a phallic symbol and a vulva in the form of a pot (see plates 192b and 192c) to avoid a direct reference to sexual intercourse. That he presented women as vectors of AIDS is still controversial nevertheless. It betrays his ideological underpinnings which, although not so obvious in this pot, become clear in his Ganda women series.

Sserunkuuma's Ganda women series bring his patriarchal underpinnings into sharp relief. For example, in his *Ganda Women 1999* (1999; plate 193) Sserunkuuma executes "portraits" of women. They wear intensely decorated *busuutis* and hold their chests although it is not immediately clear why they

glue their arms to their chests. Sserunkuuma evolved this motif into his *Ganda Women 2000* (2000; plate 194) except that in the latter motif the women are dressed in the *ssuuka* style which he later engaged in his *Ganda Women 2001* (2001; plate 195). Unlike his *Ganda Women 2000* the motif on his *Ganda Women 2001* involves the symbolism of carrying a pot, initially seen in Kawalya's painting in the 1930s (see plate 9) although it does not come from there. In *Ganda Women 2001* the artist drew on the symbolism of a woman carrying a vessel to affirm fecundity and virginity. The Baganda insist on fecundity and virginity as important attributes of a woman although they do not use the symbolism of carrying a vessel to express them. This then suggests Sserunkuuma drew from other cultures where such a practice exists. In addition to fecundity and virginity, the Baganda also insist on the submissiveness of a woman which Sserunkuuma reverberates in three other pots which I must mention here because they show his attention to issues of domesticity and women sexuality.

On his *Ganda Bride 2001a* (2001; plate 196) he depicted static women looking down: a direct reference to the convention which socialises women for the male gaze. (In Buganda, women are discouraged from looking men straight in the eyes.) He also revisited the symbolism of bowing, and recalled the gesture of walking in a queue, to articulate his *Ganda Bride 2001b* (2001; plate 197). Both pots, like Ntiro's villages, implicate an overarching ideological force which orders women to follow into a single file. Unlike Ntiro's paintings, here the gesture is more ordered and intended to symbolise submission to a male patriarchy. He reinforced this patriarchal order in his *Ganda Bride 2002* (2002; plate 198), where he depicts a kneeling figure carrying a small pot in her right hand. Here also, the small pot is not grounded in traditional Ganda custom, but the kneeling is. The Baganda traditionally required women to kneel to show their respect, obedience and submissiveness to men. Why this respect and submissiveness are important, is again not obvious in these motifs. But in a recent interview Sserunkuuma

argued that “a woman must submit [to the man] in order to sustain a cordial family”[370] – a contention he visualised in his Ganda family series.

The motif on Sserunkuuma’s *Ganda Family* (2002) derives from earlier motifs which require explanation. In 1999 he did his *The Couple* (1999; plate 199) depicting a husband holding a hoe and wife carrying a basket, to articulate the value of companionship in a family. He revisited the theme of companionship on his *Untitled* (The Couple; 2000; plate 200). In the latter he maintained the (stiff) poses in his *The Couple* while intensifying design and stylisation of figures. Paradoxically this motif also suggests that the man tied his garb in two ways. One is traditional: he wears his garb and ties it toga-wise as is the tradition in Buganda. The other is non-traditional: the same man ties his waist with a long belt similar to that of the woman. Obviously this is a contradiction; it betrays ambivalence in the artist’s ideological position which I turn to in a moment. Unlike its antecedents, however, on his *Ganda Family* (plate 201) he introduces children into the theme of companionship to consummate a stable (middle class?) family. The motif consists of a husband (identified by his garb tied toga-wise on the shoulder); a wife (identified by her *ssuuka* style) and two girls, dressed like their mother, standing in front of their parents.

Let me now further explore the contradiction in the artist’s ideological underpinnings because it is important for my discussion from this point onwards. In spite of his subscription to male patriarchy, Sserunkuuma has some alignment with feminism which draws from the fact that his mother played a tremendous role in his education (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). In this context he insists that “women play a very important role in Buganda” (ibid). He initially took up this theme in his *Uganda Women in Development* (early-1990s; plate 202), a group of five female figures arranged into an interesting narrative. In the immediate foreground is a traditional woman (traditionalised through a pot on her head). She carries more than one child on her back, a direct critique on the challenges imposed by the current rise in

[370] Sserunkuuma, *Conversation with the Author,* MTSIFA, January 12, 2006

fertility rates in Uganda[371]. After her are three women: a soldier on the right (identified by cap on her head and gun on her back); the other two are probably middle class (because they carry hand bags). Behind them is a woman located on a raised pedestal.

The political context of Sserunkuuma's *Uganda Women in Development* becomes clear if read in the context of Alex Baine's *Untitled* (Women's Emancipation in Uganda; 1988; plate 203) – to which I also referred in chapter six. Although Baine's painting offers more details on issues critical for women empowerment (such as higher education, entry into mainstream professions, etc.), both artists engage the issues which gathered pace starting in the late-1980s. They arrange their compositions into a narrative representing the varied processes through which women were emancipated, or took to the podium as the artists suggest. It is not immediately clear what Sserunkuuma's woman is doing on the pedestal. It is, however, clear that her "sister", in Baine's painting, has shed traditional encumbrances; she is dressed in a modern dress (not a *busuuti* or *essuuka*); she is a public (and not a domestic) figure. Compared to the woman in the foreground of Baine's painting, she is what Tumusiime (2005) calls a "New Woman": the emancipated woman. Because women's public presence was severely constrained until the NRM came to power, Baine's painting celebrated the empowerment of women through affirmative action. I suggest that Sserunkuuma's *Uganda Women in Development* be read in this context too.

It can be demonstrated that Sserunkuuma has put his ambivalent gender debate to political use. The pots we are about to see have motifs which recall activities and rituals which ideally would marginalise women. He, however (and ambivalently so), uses them as a visual language to express his strong political opinions. He invests them with controversial political issues, avoiding the direct mentioning of things, eluding detection and (as I am about to

[371] With the average of seven children for every woman, Uganda's fertility rate is the highest in Africa according to a recent report; it is also a cause for concern. See Wasike Afred, "Uganda's Fertility Rate Highest in Africa – UN", in *The New Vision*, September 8, 2006. Also available online at: http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/13/519984/high%20fertility (accessed September 8, 2006).

illustrate) engaging a visual process through which he re-configures Uganda's systems of governance and local administration. In the process he proposes a new (if ideal) power dispensation as a panacea to the bad governance, poor service delivery and corruption which lay at the heart of Fred Mutebi's oeuvre. His motifs then begin to be visual expressions of the reasons which saw him participating in the *Anti-corruption Exhibition* (1999) and the *2001 Presidential Elections in the Eyes of the Arts (Sweet and Sour)* (2001). As a result, and this will become clear in a moment, the traditionalised woman has become a leitmotif for his political ideas. I, therefore, suggest that it is in this context that we should read the pots I am about to analyse.

Sserunkuuma did his *Coronation* (mid-1990s; plate 204a) to celebrate the restitution of the Buganda kingdom in 1993. He activated women as they energetically marched behind the king (identified by his royal regalia) while carrying pots on their heads (see plate 204b). In conversation with him I learnt that earlier he had done another pot bearing a women-king motif although in the latter they also carried guns. Although he sold the pot without photographing it, I saw a drawing of its motif (plate 205). The drawing shows women dressed in trousers vigorously marching behind the king. They carry pots and guns. In the motifs we have seen thus far Sserunkuuma has posed women in submissive positions, on his coronation series we see them animated. The coronation ceremony, which he watched on television (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006), was dominated by men. However, the artist insisted on a women-dominated motif because for him the strength of Buganda lies in its women and the youth (ibid). I suggest that we grant his contention as a point of departure for our understanding of the various motifs, directly referring to women and the youth, which he has used to fight for the emancipation of his region Buganda.

Sserunkuuma considers the emancipation of Buganda to be important because he strongly believes that the Baganda "have been disadvantaged" (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) by the centralisation of power, which he

traces back to 1967, and that this has had negative consequences for economic development in Buganda (ibid). Towards the end of chapter seven we saw Mutibwa, Mukyala-Makiika and Mutebi grappling with these issues. Christopher Ssebadduka does this too in his song *Federal* off his *Federal Album* (1990s) while proposing a solution. Ssebadduka argues that "*enfuga y'ebitundu ye yokka eyinza okuleeta emirembe n'enkulakulana mu ggwanga*" (literally translated: it is only the decentralisation of power and granting autonomy to regions like Buganda which can bring peace and development into Uganda).

Sserunkuuma agrees. Like Ssebadduka, he believes that the changes in 1967, through which Milton Obote centralised power in the presidency, abolished the 1962 constitution and Buganda's autonomy, distorted development and disrupted service delivery in the region (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). He advocates a return to the status-quo. Unlike Ssebadduka and many Federalists however, he insists that Uganda must not be disintegrated along ethnic lines as such the Republic (which Obote declared in 1967) must be maintained. His position is ironical but he has political-economic reasons to explain it. "When you have small [tribal] units it becomes a problem in terms of sharing resources" (ibid) he warns while recalling Oliver Lyttelton's logic which was vehemently rejected by Ganda nationalists like him in the early-1950s (see p.108 above). Against this backdrop he does not advocate for a "Buganda State" (which would be an ethnic state). Instead he "would prefer Buganda within Uganda" (ibid). This decisively betrays his commitment to the nation-state; it brings to the fore the [quasi-]republicanism which informed his *Oh Uganda* (1991).

Oh Uganda (plate 206) is an anthropomorphised ensemble of eight pots. It has an interesting story which I must outline before I proceed because it concerns many of his pots; other political artists tap into it. In 1992 he called this group the "The Singing Pots" (see list of plates in Sserunkuuma 1992). But on a photograph he kept in his archive, he gave them a more politically-charged title: "Oh Uganda". This change in title should not distract us

because it is not limited to Sserunkuuma's pottery and I will re-address it in my conclusions. The point to be stressed at this stage is that Sserunkuuma derives the title *Oh Uganda* from the first stanza of the national anthem which reads:

> Oh Uganda may God uphold thee, we lay our future in thy hands. United, free, for liberty together we'll always stand.

These pots are therefore significant markers of the transitions the artist made as his levels of political consciousness and interest in matters of the state rose during the early-nineties. Like Mutebi, the artist uses his *Oh Uganda* to declare his commitment to the nation-state. Thus, although he harbours conservative ethnic sentiments, I suggest that we should read the pots he makes, to [re]define the nation-state, within this context rather than Ssebadduka's antagonistic, insular context. I believe the two are ethnic nationalists but they articulate, and circulate, the position of Buganda from two different angles.

Resolving Uganda's Political Failures: Sserunkuuma's Pottery and/as a Redefinition of the Nation-state

Sserunkuuma did his *Amin* (1991; plate 207a) in which he embodied the ambivalences of Amin's legacy. He avoided the apocalyptic symbolisms of the 1970s; he used other equally effective symbols. We for example see a tag marked with the year "1962" (see plate 207b). Near this we see another tag inscribed with the word "sing" facing another winding tag marked with the word "independence". This is a commentary on the euphoria which marked the end of colonialism in 1962 (see chapter five). The independence tag terminates in another tag inscribed with a mask. It is not clear what the mask symbolises here. But in a moment we will see more masks and understand their political symbolism. Next to "1962" is another tag labelled "1967". This tag represents the events which unfolded in 1967. To remind ourselves, Obote abrogated the 1962 constitution, outlawed Buganda, and centralised power preparing the ground for Amin's takeover (see chapter six) whose "portrait" (see plate 207c) and the year when he took over, "1971" (see plate 207d), are also represented. The artist explains the reasons for his references to Amin as follows:

> I think Amin made a lot of impact on Uganda's development politically, socially, economically… Amin brought…the economic war by chasing away the Indians and then he put the economic sector into the hands of Ugandans…a lot of Ugandans entered into business and most of them became entrepreneurs, some of them set up all sorts of enterprises…they became more business-minded than…they were before. That was an impact (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005).

Reading from this quote it could be argued that the pot betrays the artist's alignment with the leftist ideologies which Amin deployed in the 1970s and gained immense support in Africa. What he meant here by "an impact" is that Amin's coup had a positive socio-economic impact although he also adds that Amin's methodology "was crude" (ibid). His view is one that has been shared by many (especially the leftists) who have argued that through his economic war Amin gave Uganda's economy back to Ugandans. There were jubilant scenes in 1971 to celebrate this emancipation which Sserunkuuma symbolises by encircling his composition with representations of what he calls "joyful people" (ibid) celebrating Amin's takeover and economic war (see plate 207e). "Although I was still young" he recollects, "I remember people celebrated a lot during Amin's" (ibid) take-over he adds while suggesting that the events symbolised on his bowl are grounded in history and memory although the "portrait of Amin" was informed by a "postcard", of the decorated Amin, which the artist collected and kept in his archive (see plate 207f).

Sserunkuuma also did his *Victory* (1991; plate 208) in response to the NRM's assumption of power. *Victory* is a group of four pots: two have very abstract (human) motifs while the other two are representational and easier to read, I thus engage the latter for my discussion. In these motifs the artist captures a jubilant group through the gesture of raised arms. Although more realistic in its forms, it is figuratively close to his *Amin* even though he avoided any direct mentioning of the military (for instance he does not portray President Museveni's military credentials) and instead recalled prominent sculptures done in the late-fifties and early-sixties. For example, his figuration can be traced back to Lombe's *Aspirations* (see plate 59) and Maloba's *Independence Monument* (see plate 56).

There are two reasons why the NRM's victory was important to the artist. One, he "hated the way Obote was ruling the country…and…his political ideas…" (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005)[372]. Against this backdrop his *Victory* becomes an embodiment of the celebrations which followed the collapse of Obote's regime in January 1986. Secondly, the artist argues that:

> When Museveni came [to power] a lot of people had hope in him basing on his Ten Point Program…so people rejoiced and the external world also supported him. We saw he was going to be a messiah…the one to get Uganda out of what it had gone through" (ibid).

I have already engaged the local and international expectations (see p.210 above) which were generated by the Ten Point Programme (TPP) – expectations which the artist echoes. Also obvious is Sserunkuuma's subscription to Kabwegyere's character description of Museveni as the defender of the underdogs (Kabwegyere 2000, 34). His notion of Museveni-as-a-messiah is itself part of the wider political discussion in which the Bible has been invoked to characterise Museveni's persona and to justify the NRM's hold on power. For example, suggestions have been made that Museveni is to Ugandans what "Moses"[373] was to the Jews. President Museveni has also been compared to Jesus[374]. Recently two international evangelists, Mathew and Lowrie Crouch of the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) from the USA, [re]branded him as "…a blessing to Uganda…."[375] It could therefore be argued that the artist's contention, and his pot *Victory,* reflect views (about Museveni) which have been widely expressed since the 1980s.

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[372] And this view is highly popular in his Buganda region.

[373] See Ahimbisibwe, Fortunate, "I Forgave Obote, Says Museveni", *The New Vision,* October 17, 2005. Also available at http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/461199 (accessed October 17, 2005).

[374] For example see Kayangwe, K. Wilfred, "Museveni, Go on And Save Us, *The New Vision,* February 27, 2001. Also available online at http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/21/12987 (accessed February 27, 2001).

[375] See "Museveni Preaches at Namboole", *The New Vision,* October 16, 2005. Also available online at http://www.sundayvision.co.ug/detail.php?mainNewsCategoryId=7&newsCategoryId=128&newsId=460995 (accessed October 16, 2005).

Later Sserunkuuma did his *Mothers of Freedom* (2001; plate 209) to critique Uganda's 2001 election process. The pot has rows of masks arranged vertically between giant figures stretching their arms either up or down. Those stretching their arms up are identifiably women – we can see their breasts – while those stretching their arms down are (like the central figure in Lombe's *Aspirations*) apparently androgynous. All figures enclose women dressed in a fashion recalling the Ganda *ssuuka* style. There is a sense of protection offered to the women which is implied here. But the political symbolism of this motif is probably ambiguous. That its style and figuration are close to his *Beauty Contest* series*,* discussed earlier (see plates 185, 186a and 186b), further complicates its symbolism. However, two clues would help us to unpack the politics the artist intended, even if obliquely. Firstly, the artist insists that he was informed by the *Independence Monument* (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) which is Uganda's national monument*.* Given the political symbolism of the national monument it can be inferred that Sserunkuuma's motif is political: it, like the *Independence Monument,* embodies a commentary on Uganda's post-colonial statehood. Although this symbolism remains ambiguous in this particular motif, it will become clearer after we have seen other motifs related to it which I turn to in a moment.

The second clue is that the artist exhibited his *Mothers of Freedom* in the *2001 Presidential Elections in the Eyes of the Artist (Sweet and Sour)* hosted at the Nommo Gallery in May 2001*.* Inaugurating the exhibition Aziz Kasujja, the chairman of Uganda's Electoral Commission, reminded his audience that:

> You all know that for many years artists had been denied such opportunity and many of our artists…died or [went] into exile until this government ushered in the current peace and freedom. These are the fruits of the democratic era we are now enjoying (Kasujja 2001).

Kasujja's views have been widely rehearsed in available literature; at the beginning of chapter one I indicated that President Museveni himself had made similar remarks in Vienna in 1992 (see p.1 above). In chapter six we saw how Amin's and Obote's regimes denied freedoms of artistic expression

and forced artists to flee into exile – an issue which was also of concern to Mutebi (see chapter seven). Although I have no statistics on how many died there, it is true that some have never come back. They possibly died in exile. Most importantly Sserunkuuma agrees with Kasujja's claims. He also passionately adds that:

> NRM has done a lot for Uganda. It came when the country was almost shattered. It came with a positive…approach…It was accommodative trying to bring all people with different political views together so that they can work together and [re]build the country (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005).

This would then suggest (if obliquely) that the woman enclosed by a giant figure repeated on *Mother of Independence* represented the security guarantees which the NRM returned to Uganda. Admitting this reading would allow us to deduce that, like his *Victory,* the artist used his *Mothers of Independence* to celebrate the NRM's contribution to political sanity in Uganda – a point Kasujja made in his speech. The artist's contention that the NRM is "accommodative" draws from the policy of "all-inclusiveness" which the NRM adopted to show its willingness to accommodate its opponents. More so, Sserunkuuma visualised the NRM's accommodativeness on a flat plate titled *Compromise* (1992). Captured in a modernist style, *Compromise* (plate 210) depicts a tall and therefore symbolically more powerful cock, listening to a shorter and presumably weaker cock. [T]his symbolism contrasts other representations of cocks which often use confrontational cocks to represent socio-political antagonism in society – for example Mukiibi did exactly that in his *Village Cock* (2005; plate 211). Profoundly, it betrays the artist's subscription to the NRM's ideology.

And yet, like Mutebi and Mutibwa, Sserunkuuma has worries too. "A lot has happened but as you know politics changes" he contended, sighed, and then added: "so things have changed" (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005). What we see here is despondence and a view that one cannot trust Uganda's politicians because they cannot be pinned down on any position. As I have already demonstrated, the contention that Uganda's politicians are not to be trusted has worried many artists since the late-sixties. However Sserunkuuma has a more specific concern. He argues that the NRM

backtracked on its promises to reform the structures of local government and decentralise power as it had promised. This for him is NRM's biggest failure which is also a source of poor service delivery, bad governance and corruption.

But how did the NRM backtrack and on what? The first item on the TPP shows the NRM's commitment to the "restoration of democracy" (Museveni 1997, 217). Writing in his *What is Africa's Problem"* (1992) the President of Uganda, and leader of the NRM, explained exactly what this meant. It meant the setting up of a Constitutional (also called the Odoki) Commission in February 1989 to "evolve a popular and enduring constitution based on national consensus" (Museveni 1992, 99). The commission collected views from all stakeholders and included them in a report which was debated by an elected Constituency Assembly before it became the new constitution of Uganda in 1995. Sserunkuuma contends that this was a contract which the NRM made with Ugandans and that it was a good one (Sserunkuuma, interview 2004). But he takes exception to a parallel process which contradicted the NRM's claim for a national consensus. He subscribes that:

> I think there was much consultation [done by the] Odoki Commission. [But] because some of the points agreed on by the people were not included in the Decentralisation [Policy, then the policy] was an importation maybe from somewhere with some few changes here and there (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006).

The Decentralisation Policy, which the artist is contesting here, grew outside the constitutional review process which Museveni outlines above. For Sserunkuuma it was therefore imported from somewhere else, patched up and presented as if it were novel.

Probably his case for patching up is premised on the fact that the NRM conceived the Decentralisation Policy in October 1992, revised it in 1993 and again in 1997 (Nsibambi 1998). But for the NRM the Decentralisation Policy was pragmatic and intended to "redress" the problems created by the controversial *1967 Local Government Act* under which Obote destroyed local administration (see chapter six). Through the new policy the NRM "devolved" power to the regions. For the artist the policy had some good areas. For

example, it restored some form of grassroots participation in decision making (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) which was entirely denied by the Local Government Act of 1967. His opinion is borne out because, according to the Decentralisation Act (1997), local people are supposed to "monitor" the management of district, county, sub-county and village policies and funds (Nsibambi 1998).

But according to the artist the policy did not go far enough (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) — and scholars agree on this, albeit differently[376]. Secondly for Sserunkuuma the policy had no popular mandate because people were not consulted over it (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005) and it did not accommodate demands in Buganda for the restoration of the local governance structure supervised by the Buganda kingdom (ibid)[377]. When the NRM restored the Buganda kingdom in 1992 and 1993 there was hope that such governance was to be restored (ibid). Many in Buganda had demanded, through the Odoki Commission report, that Buganda's autonomy be restored. But this did not happen. Also, according to the Odoki Report, many Baganda advocated the return to *Federo* (federalism) a kind of power sharing between the centre and the regions similar to the one which was enshrined in the 1962 constitution. The 1962 constitution accorded Buganda full federal status; the kingdom had full autonomy over service delivery. The artist believes this constitution was good although the colonial establishment rushed it, "did not lay a good foundation for the transfer of power" to committed leaders (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) and thus "most of the problems we [Ugandans] are having today originate from that" (ibid). Now we earlier saw similar criticism being echoed by some scholars[378]. Most profoundly however, Sserunkuuma did his *Effect of Colonialism* (mid-1990s; plate 212a) to objectify his strong criticism.

[376] For example see: Nsibambi, *Decentralisation and Civil Society in Uganda*, p.140.
[377] And this view is shared by many Baganda who opposed the policy arguing that it was intended to pre-empt the conclusions of the Constituent Assembly.
[378] See related debate on pp.167-8 above.

Effect of Colonialism is a “politico-plate” on which the artist engaged a cubist style to make a composition with: open palms of four hands, rows of masks, abstract human figures and synthetic geometric patterns. Its composition is divided into four quadrants and framed in a richly ornate border. He arranged the masks in two of the quadrants and placed abstract figures in the other two. His masks are more stylised and repeated than the one we saw in *Amin* although they are close to those in his *Mothers of Freedom.* Although expressing a different opinion, his abstract figures grew from a motif he applied on a vase, *Untitled* (Ganda Community; mid-1990s; plate 212b), which attests to the artist’s use of pottery to [re]build communities. (And in a moment we will see why it is important for him, and for his region, to [re]build these communities.)

Seen in isolation the political debate on in his *Effect of Colonialism* is probably not easily accessible. This is because its symbolism comes from many sources which merit an extended discussion. For instance it is true the tradition of making masks does not exist in his region Buganda. But the Bagwere (see plate 213), Basoga (see plate 214), Batoro (see plate 215), among others, in Uganda make masks which the artist could have explored. Yet these are not the masks we see on his *Effect of Colonialism.* What we see are generic masks[379] which the artist invented (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) in the 1990s. Also, though notably absent from his plate Ganda artefacts like *Empiima* (royal dagger), shields and spears would have been appropriate here. In fact, they carry political symbolism which is immediately accessible. (And the artist is aware of these issues because in a moment we are going to see pots on which he applied motifs with shields and spears to critique the dispensation of political power and authority in Uganda.)

Then too, the artist insists that he did this politico-plate to critique the way the British rushed the political process through which Uganda became an independent country (ibid). It represents his contention that instead of the British handing over to responsible custodians of power, represented in the

[379] In an interview I recently had with him Sserunkuuma conceded that he invents all his masks.

masks on his plate, they handed over the state to hungry power-brokers, like Milton Obote, represented in the abstract human figures. First, this would suggest that the open palms represent Uganda's colonial government. Second, it would suggest that he positioned the abstract human forms (his hungry power-brokers) at the tips of the open palms to represent the transfer of power. Third, it would also render the masks (his responsible leaders) alienated to assert his contention that they were sidelined. If this is a valid reading then this political narrative is not obvious; it invites further analysis.

The artist offers some explanation to facilitate our entry into the political symbolism embodied in this motif. For example, he insists that his masks represent the numinous "spirits"[380] which double as custodians of political power in Buganda. This claim is indeed helpful. Traditionally the Baganda rest the strength of their kingdom in the power of several spirits which guide the king. However, such power is not invested in masks, or pots, or plates, as his medium seems to suggest. Thus the political resonances of his politico-plate can only become clear if read in the context of his other pots, and the wider discussion, in which the political symbolism of spirits in Buganda has been articulated.

That the artist is investing political power into pots suggests that he is aware of cultures in central African where such a tradition exists. Actually, he recently agreed with my claim. He suggested that he is aware of the Congolese *Minkisi* traditions (from the Democratic Republic of Congo) which use pottery to objectify and control spirits. But his idioms also remind us of

[380] The Baganda use the words *Emizimu* (singular *Omuzimu*) and *Amayembe* (singular *Ejjembe*) to reference spirits. The living have numinous spirits for example one's shadow is the visible sign of the presence of one's spirit. To harm one's shadow means harming one's spirit and often results in conflict. Upon death, the umbilical link between the spirit and its owner breaks as the body is buried and the spirit lingers on the earth as an invisible, or even sometimes extraterrestrial, being representing its owner. Spirits of some notable Baganda attained divine status during the reign of Kabaka Nakibinge (1524-1554); prominent military leaders like Kibuuka, Mukasa, among others, became spirits known as *Amayembe*. Left in the wild unattended, Ganda spirits can be disrupted and disruptive. Consequently, shrines (usually grass-thatched huts called *ebiggwa*) are constructed to permanently house the spirits*:* rituals are performed to appease spirits (both *Emizimu* and *Amayembe*). Failure to do so will force spirits to descend on the living and wreak havoc in the form of death, poverty, accidents, infertility, famine, et cetera.

traditions from Cameroon. There the Mafa and Bulahay (of Northern Cameroon) decorate pottery and use it to protect the mortal against deadly spirits (David *et al* 1988, 365). Sserunkuuma's pots are, however, far removed from their Congolese and Cameroonian referents even if the numinous protective power which he circulates can be traced from them. This is because he drew on local resources to translate protective spiritual power into political symbolism as we notice in his *Ganda Spirits* series.

In *Ganda Spirits I* (2000; plate 216) the artist develops a complex design. His composition is schematised, with resonances of classical African art. Unlike his *Effect of Colonialism* the political symbolism of this pot is more accessible. This is because the artist uses spears, which are obvious political symbols of power. In addition the pot has a complex design with stylised masks in addition to a host of other traditional and abstract symbols defined with sharp edges, rigid lines and geometry. The reasons behind the apparent disruption and tension in this motif are political and I will engage their sources in a moment.

The tension, total disruption and decomposition, close-packing and rigidity, in *Ganda Spirits I,* ease progressively through *Ganda Spirits II* (2000; plate 217). Here the artist recovers the mask as if to reconstitute the spirits from the total distortion in *Ganda Spirits I*. He maintains the sharp edges and strict angularity seen on his *Ganda Spirit I* although in *Ganda Spirits II* he cools off the tension one confronts in *Ganda Spirits I* by creating a containing, logical and coherent vertical structure for the images.

He also did his *Ganda Spirits III* (2000; plate 218a and 218b), two pots on which he completely eliminates tension and decomposition from the motif and creates a sense of the return of calm. The artist uses a mask and hand to invoke a gesture of care, with hands represented on the pot sympathetically handling an abstract object. According to the artist this object symbolised the Ganda spirits while the mask and the hand represented the custodian of the spirits. So then it is possible to read the pot as a whole as

connoting a delicate handling of the Ganda spirits. The amount of care implied in the motif on *Ganda Spirit III* elicits the skill of the handler and the concern to diligently avoid poor handling. In traditional practice among the Baganda, custodians of the spirits go through long initiation ceremonies to develop their skill and custodianship, in order to mitigate the chances of mishandling. The artist seems to resonate this convention here although the representation of the spirits and the handler is unambiguously his.

Fused into Sserunkuuma's Ganda spirit motifs is the political context in Peter Baligidde's song *Agawanaggana mu Nkoola* (The Disrupted Spirits in the Marshland; late-1980s) off the *Kanfube Album.* Baligidde politicised the custody of Ganda spirits as he articulated the disrupt[ive/ed]ness of unattended Ganda spirits. He, however, used his song to suggest that Uganda was unstable because Obote had destroyed Buganda's traditional political structure. He used the custody of spirits as a political metaphor. He implicitly rejected, and warned against, the continuing dissolution of the Buganda Kingdom and confiscation of Buganda's estate which Obote (who received the instruments of power from the colonial government) had imposed in 1967. Baligidde camouflaged his political opinion in mythological narrative, insisting that calm will only prevail after Buganda is granted (full) autonomy and power placed in the hands of responsible traditional leaders. The artist is aware of Baligidde's song and its political metaphors. He is also aware that in the late-1980s Baligidde's song was widely received, at least in Buganda, as a prediction of the successful rebellion against Obote and the eventual full restoration of the Buganda Kingdom (Sserunkuuma, interview 2004) which happened in 1992 although not on the terms that the Baganda nationalists would have wanted. He conceded that the compositions on his *Ganda Spirits* series recall the narrative in Baligidde's song (ibid). His admission would then confirm that his *Effect of Colonialism, Ganda Spirits I, Ganda Spirits II* and *Ganda Spirits III* all converge to complete a political narrative in which he uses masks, and other traditional artefacts, to critique the dislocation of the Buganda kingdom which was brought about by the emergence of the post-colonial state. It affirms that Sserunkuuma uses his

pottery to demand for the restoration of Buganda's autonomy (a narrative none of his motifs is in itself sufficient to tell if isolated from the others).

Arguably Sserunkuuma holds an opinion which is popular in Buganda. Many Baganda believe that the restoration of Buganda's autonomy will offer better governance, service delivery and eliminate corruption. Sserunkuuma, however, has stated reasons for his stance. He knows from experience, and available literature grounded in Ganda nationalism, that local governments in Buganda had respectable and devoted policy implementers. Constrained by traditions these officials were less corrupt. Appointed by the king, they supervised projects with devotion and helped to raise regional productivity. This debate is important because it informed his *Ggwanga Mujje* (2001; plate 219) in which he uses a motif of a drummer seated on a well-defined level above a gathering represented with a cluster of standardised masks. Unlike on his *Ganda Spirits* series and the other motifs we have seen this far, the masks here symbolise the Ganda public suggesting that the artist uses his generic mask to engender a multiplicity of symbolisms. The rest of the motif has traditional Ganda occupations like fishing and agriculture which he represents using conventionalised symbols. For example, he uses fish symbols to symbolise the fish industry (called *Obuvubi*) and banana leaves to represent food production (called *Obulimi*).

Ggwanga Mujje cannot, however, be understood in isolation, because it carries symbolism seen on two other pots. One is his *Untitled* (Ganda Economy; late-1990s; plate 220) on which the value of agriculture is stressed through the use of a combination of cowry shells and a hand holding a plant shoot. I did mention in chapter two that the Baganda have traditionalised cowry shells as symbols of economic value (see pp.22-3 above), and this is the way in which Sserunkuuma used them on this pot. His use of plant shoots to symbolise an agricultural economy probably comes from Uganda's official symbols. For instance, furnishments in Uganda's National Parliament (see plate 221), currency notes and Coat of Arms carry plants symbolising Uganda's predominantly agricultural economy. The second pot is his *Ganda*

Symbols of Power (2003; plate 222a) on which Sserunkuuma appears to refer to the need to industrialise production processes in Buganda. This is done through the addition of intricate abstract motifs drawn from "industrial cogwheels" (plate 222b). He uses this symbolism to urge the view that industrialisation is critical for Buganda's development. One "cannot speak about symbols of power if your economy is low" he warns, "so [in *Ganda Symbols of Power*] I was saying that Buganda wants to modernise" he explained (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). Now, whereas on his *Untitled* (Ganda Economy; see plate 220) and *Ganda Symbols of Power* (see plate 222a) Sserunkuuma engaged the issue of modernising Buganda's economy, on his *Ggwanga Mujje* (see plate 219) he highlighted the need for committed leaders to supervise the process of this modernisation.

Ggwanga Mujje is a Luganda phrase literally translated as "rise up nation". The phrase is usually invoked to mobilise the community for community work (called *Bulungi bwa nsi*) or when there is a need to defend a collective interest[381]. A representative of the Kabaka traverses the locality with a drum; he is usually the supervisor (also called *Nnampala* in Luganda). He beats the drum repeatedly to produce a sound verbalised as "*ggwanga mujje! Ggwanga mujje!"* In response the community converges on any agreed location to confront the issue at stake – road repair, fighting crime, sanitation, well-construction, etc. Therefore these supervisors are necessary in the rural economy not just in Buganda but in the country as a whole. For example in 1992 President Museveni wrote that "on countless occasions, I have had to act as *nyampara* or foreman to ensure that simple and routine things get done" (Museveni 1992, 77).

[381] President Museveni gave the phrase a national application. During a political rally at Namboole Stadium Kampala, the tough-talking Museveni cited this Luganda phrase to mobilise the peasantry to collectively defend its interests against the landed aristocracy. He was quoted in the local press as having said: "Those landlords who come with graders [meaning tractors] at night to chase you, you should report them, or call ggwanga mujje and you chase them." See Matsiko Grace, Kibuuka Ivan and Mutaizibwa Emma, "Museveni to fire judges over land", *The Monitor*, November 21, 2005.

What Museveni refers to here as *nyampara* is a Runyankore[382] word for what the Baganda call *Nnampala.* To make this statement the President was expressing concern that his administration had undedicated technocrats who "refuse to implement [but instead] sabotage government policies" (Museveni 1992, 78) in addition to abusing government property with impunity (ibid, p. 83). Museveni did not see these problems as inherent in the Decentralisation Policy his government introduced in 1992. Rather, he diagnosed them as an ideological problem stressing that people who are ideologically "backward do not regard social property as their own" (ibid). Aware of concerns like those of Museveni, the artist proposes an alternative system grounded in local practices and hence his *Ggwanga Mujje*. He suggests that Buganda's "traditional system" of governance, ordered in layers of *Bannampara* (plural for *Nnampala*), or Museveni's *Nyampara,* provides good and committed bureaucrats and technocrats.

The artist echoed the views of the sitting king of Buganda – Ronald Mutebi II. In 1997 Mutebi II decried the collapse of Buganda's economy after 1967[383]. He nostalgically, and romantically, submitted that the disruption resulted from the collapse of the network of "traditional village" structures linked to his "traditional authority". He recounted that such structures were headed by the "Representatives of the Kabaka" (called *Ababaka ba Kabaka*) who supervised developmental projects. By 1967 such representatives were part of the Buganda government headquartered at Mengo. As supervisors (or *Bannampala*) of the kings projects and community service they sounded *ggwanga mujje* drums to mobilise the community. "The system was well-organised and everything was working well", the artist observes, until Obote outlawed it through the *1967 Local Government Act* (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006).

[382] The president belongs to the Banyankore ethnic group whose language is Runyankore.
[383] See: Mutebi Muwenda Ronald, "Okwogera Kwa Ssaabasajja Kabaka Ku Mukolo Ogw'okuddizibwa Olubiri Nga 19th December 1997". http://www.buganda.com/lubirisp.htm (accessed June 30, 2005).

After visualising his belief in the effectiveness of the Kabaka's representatives through his *Ggwanga Mujje,* Sserunkuuma, in his *Village Chiefs* (1992; plate 223), enunciated the powers welded by the representatives of the Kabaka. He used symbolic shields and stylised motifs to construct their power and authority. He emphasised their role as vanguards of political power and authority. In a recent interview he contended that such attributes gave the king's representatives respect within the communities and enhanced their supervisory roles (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) – a point he affirms through his *Village Chiefs*.

We, however, need to pause and internalise the political system Sserunkuuma, and indeed the king of Buganda, foreground. First we are made to understand that the system is "traditional", but the traditionality of this system, which started with Muteesa I in 1856, invites scrutiny. While kings in Buganda have the power to begin and to terminate traditions, according to Reid, Muteesa I eroded a more representative system headed by clan heads and replaced it with a new system in which he centralised power in the person of the king (Reid 2002, 3). He radically imposed his personal representatives onto all layers of authority (see chapter two). This is how the representatives talked about by the king, and visualised in Sserunkuuma's *Ggwanga Mujje* and *Village Chiefs,* became pillars of Buganda's traditional authority and assumed the position formerly held by *Abataka* (Elders).

On the advent of colonialism these representatives became corrupt, power-hungry and greedy as they undermined the traditional institution itself and, as we saw in chapter two, expelled Kabaka Mwanga before they concluded the Buganda Agreement through which their authority was woven into the colonial capitalist economy. They became paid employees of the colonial polity; they levied taxes and dispensed power and authority on its behalf. Thus these so-called "Representatives of the Kabaka" neither have a long history, nor is their loyalty guaranteed, as Kabaka Mutebi II, and indeed Sserunkuuma, would have us believe. Secondly, the traditional structure they

represent is not accountable to the people, because the office-bearers are not elected. Attempts to democratise their positions in the 1950s met stiff resistance and were later compromised through a deal Obote concluded with Muteesa II in 1962. We have already seen how this arrangement led to the unfortunate and unstable UPC-KY alliance (see Chapters four and five) which collapsed in 1966 bringing untold suffering to the country (see chapter six).

But the artist (and the king) is right to suggest that this system of governance, and its assumed grounded-ness in the traditional institution of the Baganda, “put a lot of emphasis on the community: everything is done together [it is] a communal kind of system” (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). He is, however, concerned that this collective effort was not recognised in NRM’s Decentralisation Policy. For him, therefore, the policy could not resuscitate the productiveness in Buganda which was disrupted in 1967. Citing the experience in his area Kabulassoke-Gomba, he argues that rural productivity has gone down because of the collapse of traditional local governance (ibid). He warns that “if the Baganda are not careful within sometime we may completely disappear in terms of the economy” (ibid) adding that the problem of rural unproductiveness is a serious one “which society must realise and work on” (ibid). He posits that the Baganda are no longer productive because there is nobody to supervise them (ibid). Instead they spend their time on unproductive activities. And this is the debate which informed his gossip series.

On the plate titled *Gossiping under the New Village Moon* (1992; plate 224) Sserunkuuma poses, in tableau, a group of women bathed in a brown colour. They wear contemporary dresses as they look towards an object which is round and set in a clear empty sky. Arguably it is a moon. The conspicuousness of the moon, suggests that it is the centre of the discussion: the cause for gossip. However, although implied in the title, the

moon does not appear “new”: it is a full moon. The space, where the girls are standing, is anonymous: it has little to suggest it is a village. Also, the notion of gossip, implied in the title, is not immediately accessible. In fact, the motif seems to suggest a group of women who could be read as engaged into peer to peer networking. Such networking is a form of building social capital and it is encouraged in Buganda. The artist is aware of this because he also did a motif he called *Dialogue* (2000) symbolising the need for community networking in building communities as inscribed in the Luganda proverb “*enjogera nnungi, esuza empisi ku lusebenju*” (translated: good communication builds good neighbourhoods) for example.

The artist insists that his *Gossiping under the New Village Moon* is a critique on the way the youth in his home District indulge in unproductive activities. This, for him, has resulted in untold rural poverty (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). He uses gossip as a metaphor because in Buganda gossip is associated with unproductiveness, mischief and redundancy. Translated as *olugambo,* gossiping is strongly discouraged[384]. This then explains three things about his gossip motif: Firstly, it explains why we see women with exaggerated arms held as if to gesture inactivity/redundancy[385] – a body language which is also seen on his *Gossiping* (2000; plate 225). Secondly, that the artist uses similar gestures on his *Ganda Youths 2001* (2001; plate 226) confirms that he sees redundancy as a problem among the youths. This view is not unique to him. It forms part of the concerns in Uganda over youth gossip and how such gossip is an index of the wider problem created by modernity. For example, television and the internet have been blamed for encouraging youth gossip and disrupting productive work, especially in the urban areas. Thirdly, his use of a women motif is not to suggest that men do

[384] This is the point Uganda’s pop singer Milly Namukasa (a Muganda herself) makes in her song *Olugambo* (Gossip; 1988) off her *Ekikooti* Album. Another pop singer Djet expressed a similar concern in her song *Olugambo* (Gossip; 2002).

[385] In rural Buganda land is often abundant; everybody is expected to till the land. Hence the issue of “unemployment” is rejected as a form of redundancy although economists would disagree. Sserunkuuma seems to use the term redundancy in this generic sense.

not gossip, because they do[386]. Rather, it taps into stereotypes which, and pejoratively so, consider gossip as a women's pastime and this probably explains why he also did his *Women Gossiping on the Way* (1992).

His *Women Gossiping on the Way* (plate 227) shows three women dressed in garb which is not common in Uganda, although women in Western Uganda dress in similar fashion as those in this motif. They carry improvised vessels on their heads and other abstract objects (probably derivatives from baskets or handbags) in their hands. Like his *Gossiping under the New Village Moon*, his panel suggests an anonymous space. Unlike the other pots on his gossip theme, however, this panel has women who are heavily loaded which would suggest they are probably tired; that they have paused in a long journey? Against this backdrop the work begins to recall the Luganda saying "*Okuwummula ssi kutuuka*" (translated: to rest is not to abandon a chore). However, the fact that the artist makes reference to gossip insinuates (if ambivalently) that the women visualised on his tile panel are engaged in non-productive activity.

Alongside his concern for a poor regional economy and rural unproductiveness, the artist is also concerned that, through its Decentralisation Policy, the NRM replaced traditional "community-oriented governance" with the Resistance (or Local) Council system run by elected, populist leaders, assisted by corrupt technocrats. This, for him, has had a negative consequence namely that whereas "the NRM Government is committed to cleaning [the] Ugandan society of corruption" (Museveni, 1992, 79), the problem persists (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). Putnam (1993) suggests this is inevitable. He based his conclusion on a study on the success of traditionalised local governments in Italy. Putnam observed that

[386] Infact in the *New Vision* the point was made that although gossip is considered, in traditional stereotypes, as an activity for women it is fast becoming a problem of young men through television and the internet. See: "Who Said Men Don't Gossip" in *The New Vision*, November 23, 2002. Also available online at http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/26/98871/olugambo (accessed November 23, 2002).

through modelling and socialisation certain “norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement” (Putnam 1983, 171) evolve. They engender trustworthiness, social trust, cooperation, self-help, “restrain opportunism and resolve problems of collective action” (Putnam 1983, 172); they ultimately mitigate corruption. He then theorised that “norms and networks of civic engagement [bolster] the performance of the polity and the economy, rather than the reverse: Strong society, strong economy; strong society; strong state.” (Putnam 1983, 176).

Sserukuuma agrees with Putnam although he does not embrace a purely horizontal engagement. This is because he believes the central government must coordinate development although he simultaneously advocates the granting of autonomy to “traditional” governments in order to resolve the problems of rural unproductiveness, bad governance, poor service delivery and corruption in Uganda. This then confronts him with the challenge of defining exactly how much control the central government must preserve, a challenge we see in his *effumu* series.

Effumu is a Luganda word which translates “the spear”. In pre-colonial times the spear was instrumental in the acquisition and propagation of power and authority. Following the advent of modern weaponry, the spear has lost its position and assumed a symbolism of power. The artist engages this debate while explaining the symbolism of the spear in his motif:

> *Effumu* is one of the tools which were used by warriors. Due to the development of technology nowadays they use guns…I use *effumu* [to symbolise the dispensation of] power (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006).

On his *Effumu* (late-1990s; plate 228) the artist articulates the dispensation of power in Uganda. He applies the motif on two pots whose symbolism is not as obvious as his explanation for it. Miniature stylised human figures are encircled with large overbearing super-human figures, similar to those on his *Mother of Freedom* (see plate 209). They appear to (possessively?) offer protection to their subjects. If on his *Mother of Freedom* protective power

was embodied in the figures themselves, that is, power was personified and personalised, on his *Effumu* the superhuman figures draw strength from spears. The way they rest their bare fists on the tips of spears is theatrical; it elicits a sense of a spectacle through which the artist invokes ferocity. The ferocity, together with the imposing scale of the guardian-figures renders the protégée dependent on the guardian-figures. This narrative immediately transforms the guardian-figures from semi-human figures into possessors of awful power – state power – a point he reaffirms in another *Effumu* (2001; plate 229) in which the figures and spears gained immense sharpness.

Paradoxically however in spite of the autocracy implied in his *effumu* series, Sserunkuuma does not support an autocratic, centralised state: rather he believes in the decentralisation of power. He argues strongly that "when we talk about power…we need to share that kind of power…there must be sharing of power" between the centre and the regional governments (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). Obviously, then, there is a contradiction between the nature of the state he believes in and that which we read from his pottery. Put in other words his case for the devolution of power is ambiguously expressed on his pots.

Since he feels so strongly about his views would it then not have been prudent for him to engage the political space and change the situation? Given his strong views it might be argued that he attacks those in public office (bureaucrats and politicians alike) to enhance his own reputation and open his access to the corridors of power. Many in Uganda have done this. In fact, politics in Uganda is rife with name-calling and insults. Yet Sserukuuma, like Mutebi, is not seeking to gain leverage against those in public service. He indicated to me that his village folks have persuaded him to represent them in the legislature. "You see I come from a very poor part of Uganda" he disclosed before adding that:

> Whenever I go back to my village [I find] people criticising their members of parliament and then they say: "you our children since you have gone up to that level why don't you join politics and represent us?" (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006).

Clearly because he is highly educated, which here is implied in the notion of "you have gone to that level", his desperate village folk would want the artist to be what Museveni was to him in the early-nineties, namely: a messiah. He has however turned down the request because for him Uganda's politics is inherently corrupt and divisive. He would not want to join such a muddy exercise. He believes in sane politics – which does not exist in Uganda – because it is hard to build a nation through corruption and divisions (ibid). Therefore, like Mutebi, he prefers to articulate his political issues through his 'politico-pottery' (ibid). "When you look at those pots" he explains, "they show the communal kind of togetherness of the Baganda" (ibid) which is essential for regional growth. The statement betrays the artist's belief in social capital as a necessary prerequisite to regional development. He made it while pointing at two pots: one was his *Okwanjula* ("dowry"), the other was his *My Village*. These two pots have an involving political narrative which merits our attention.

In his *Okwanjula* (late-1990s; plate 230) depicting a well-attended dowry ceremony, women, in the foreground wearing *busuutis,* sit on the ground facing men seated on chairs (identified with their garbs tied toga-wise). Between them is a large gourd known as *ekita.* Traditionally during dowry rituals the *kita* is wrapped in well-prepared banana leaves, as we see in this motif, and filled with local beer called *omwenge omuganda* (literally translated Ganda beer). The groom presents the gourd to the father of the bride. To concede to the wedding, the father accepts the gourd. If he rejects it then the wedding aborts. The women on the right of the image bring more gifts, and the figures, identifiable as women, who stand behind the men create a sense of a well-attended ceremony while giving the motif a sense of depth. He uses a banana farm (called *olusuku*) and a palisade (called *ekisaakaate*) to identify his space as rural and supported by agriculture. The whole pot is bordered with a richly ornate design which enhances its aesthetic value while confirming the artist's contention that political art must be aesthetic as well. That the narrative is recorded on a form derived from the traditional hemispherical Ganda pot demonstrates how formal training

has empowered the artist to transform a traditional pot-form into an effective tool for reordering the dispensation of power and authority, something which is unprecedented in Ugandan art. It also demonstrates how the artist has used traditions for socio-political activism.

Traditionally dowry ceremonies would have been low-key and private. They would have involved a meeting between the family of the bride and that of the groom. This meeting was necessary to ensure that the couple did not belong to the same clan. It is taboo in Buganda for people of the same clan to have sexual/marital relationships and this rule is rigidly enforced[387]. Gifts, but mainly Ganda beer, would be given to the parents of the bride through a ritual called "taking beer to the bride" to quote the title of Ntiro's painting (see p.145 above). This tradition has, however, changed over time. Today it has been replaced by expensive public spectacles. Given the large number of people visualised in his *Okwanjula* motif, we can conclude that the artist is informed by a recent version of *okwanjula.*

Be that as it may, Sserunkuuma does not highlight the contradictions and embarrassments involved in these recent versions of *Okwanjula.* For example, some dowry ceremonies have been cancelled because the man does not have enough money[388]. Today, mainly because of economic hardships, a new type of marriage, called "cohabitation", is more common than the traditional, religious or civil marriages. Because cohabitation has become very popular, it was formalised through the Domestic Relations Bill (2003). The bill represents a pragmatic response to, and legal recognition of,

[387] For example recently one Namazzi wanted to wed one Kiwuuwa. The father objected because the two belonged to the *Endiga* (sheep) clan which, by the way, is also Bruno Sserunkuuma's clan. Because the two were born-again Christians they went to church notwithstanding the objection of the father. The father litigated, and the wedding was aborted at the pulpit. See: Anyoli Edward, "Woman for DNA Test over Marriage Objection", in *The New Vision*, July 13, 2006. Also available online at: http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/13/509188/namazzi (accessed July 13, 2006).

[388] Recently an *Okwanjula* ceremony was cancelled because the parents objected to their daughter being taken by a man who was poor. The man was embarrassed because he did not display wealth. He simply brought small gifts which were rejected as worthless. See: "Tafumbirwa mu Bwavu" in *Bukedde,* August 21, 2006. Also available online at: http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/58/68/516395/okwanjula (accessed August 21, 2006).

the numerous “marriages” in Buganda (and Uganda) which do not go through conventional rituals/institutions.

Sserunkuuma is aware of this reality (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006). He however insists on a serene, romanticised dowry ceremony in his dowry motif because he uses the institution of marriage for strategic and political reasons (ibid). This then helps to explain the obvious paradoxes in his dowry-narrative. It is arguable that because he is not legitimating cultural mores with [t]his *Okwanjula* motif, he was not bothered by traditional encumbrances. For example, in one of the sketches for his *Okwanjula* motif (see plate 231) it is clear that his initial idea centralised the woman as a subject of the composition. This presentation of the woman as a subject in a traditional ritual where she is normatively materialised as a commodity confirms the ambivalent gender debate in Sserunkuuma’s pottery I hinted at earlier. But it also draws from a pot, *Untitled* (Rural Women; 1996; plate 232), he did in the mid-1990s, which showed women seated at the mouth of a receding space framed by banana plantations. They seem to be engaged in some kind of dialogue or social networking. These are the same women we see on his *Okwanjula* pots where he still maintains their essentialised status as he denies them the right to sit on chairs.

I must, however, admit that what we see in this *Okwanjula* motif is irregular. In fact, apart from the bride’s paternal auntie (called *Ssenga*), women rarely participate in the *okwanjula* ritual as subjects, not even the bride. Intriguingly, however, this irrationality allows the artist to redeploy the tribal ritual for political agency. He argues that his marriage ceremonies provide the (visual) forums for depicting social interaction and cohesion in the Buganda (Sserunkuuma, interview 2006) which is badly needed, although the question of how to achieve it remains[389]. Sserunkuuma’s *Okwanjula* pots can

[389] Jolly Lutaaya, Minister in the new Buganda cabinet, demonstrated the urgent need for cohesion and interaction if the Baganda are to emancipate themselves. See Mutebi Patrick, “‘Abaganda mwegatte musobole okulwanirira eggwanga lyammwe’”, *Bukedde*, November 26, 2005. Also available online at http://www.bukedde.co.ug/detail.php?mainNewsCategoryId=2&newsCategoryId=71&newsId=468043 (accessed November 26, 2005).

therefore be seen as part of the search for ways to unite the Baganda and emancipate the region through social capital. It is this kind of community, and coherence, that he emphasises in his *My Village* as he visualises the village as a microcosm for a productive state.

Sserunkuuma's *My Village* motif can be traced back to Kasapo's *My Village* to which I referred earlier (see p.141 above) although its politics, and composition, is far from Kasapo's and close to Ntiro's works. In his *My Village* (2002; plate 233) Sserunkuuma unfolds an organised, undisturbed village with a large population. The artist used a black colour on an offwhite clay background through which he inscribed varied figures and objects. We see him exploring the figuration of gigantism to show the source of power. For example, some of his women are oversized, defining latitudinal spaces in which others are seated/bending in an obviously rural agricultural polity. Sserunkuuma alters the verticality, imposed by the straight-trunk form of a pot (and giant women figures), by snaking his population around it in a manner close to Fred Sennoga's *Wedding Procession* (1988; plate 234). The artist agreed with my reading, adding that Sennoga was his classmate and that he admired Sennoga's painting style and compositions (Sserunkuuma, interview 2004).

The artist argues that he visualised community ethos in his *My Village*. He claims that he based this pot on proverbial Ganda sayings which emphasise the community, rather than the individual, as the basis for a stable and productive society. His explanation is plausible. The Baganda use sayings like "*abataka abaagalana be balima akambugu*" (translated: unity can resolve even the hardest problem) to cultivate the spirit of collective action to improve community wellbeing and productiveness. However, this motif also evolved through other motifs which merit mentioning here. For example, in his *Ganda Homesteads I* (2000; plate 235) he painted black figures lined up in a rural polity (identified as such by the presence of bananas and huts). The elements of this design are given more space compared with the heavily packed motif on his *Ganda Homesteads II* (2001; plate 236), although the

two pots are figuratively and stylistically similar. Each of them has a dominant female figure whose overbearing presence accords her a supervisory role – she is a *Nnampala*. It is likely that this figure recalled the *Independence Monument,* as I argued was the case in his *Mother of Freedom.* As in the national symbol, the woman has taken centre-stage in this composition; subordinate figures queue towards her as she becomes the source of authority. She sits in a manner recalling the *kwanjula* motif although here her posture is stiffer; her presence is imposing and alienated. That all other women line up towards her, carrying vessels, and holding their hearts in a show of patriotism and ethnic loyalty, suggests a rigid initiation ceremony related to womanhood.

The notion of a dominant female figure seen in his *Ganda Homesteads* series is recalled in his *My Village.* In addition to being a mother (represented in two giant women carrying babies on their backs) the dominant woman is also an important pillar in the economy. The artist offers a socio-political explanation for this symbolism. “When you talk about the economy” he explains, “as far as the Baganda are concerned women do a lot of digging, a lot of farming” (ibid) he concludes suggesting the mainly agricultural rural economy in Buganda rests on women’s labour. He symbolises this important economic role by depicting, on the other side of the *My Village* pot, a giant woman standing on legs visualised as two women who also support a round object which the giant figure carries as its handbag and which also symbolises the rural community which women support (see plate 237). We also see multitudes of other women (visualised through repeated small figures) engaged in various activities which sustain the polity: farming, networking, etc. It is also important to note that although the artist insists that this motif reflects a rural agricultural economy, the giant figures seem to stand out as though they have access to the urban economy. This may suggest that they sell their excess produce to the urban centres – a common occurrence in Uganda. That they carry handbags and wear contemporary dresses confirms my claim. Admitting my reading allows us to appreciate the fact that unlike Ntiro, who visualised a barter economy in his *Market Day*

(see plate 34), Sserunkuuma is envisaging a commercial economy: a reference to his contention that Buganda needs a modern economy.

Although the artist addressed immediate political concerns, his *My Village* and *Okwanjula* motifs are fused into variants of nostalgia and romantic pasts interlaced with memory and repertoires from his parents (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005), from *kadongokamu* music and from written Ganda accounts. These resources helped the artist to imagine a rural, self-reliant, networked polity, as he translated the village into a microcosm for a productive polis. Indeed his motifs recall the villagisation we saw earlier in Ntiro's work. Unlike Ntiro, however, Sserunkuuma does not use his villagised motif to enunciate the official ideology. Instead, he counters it. He is also close to Fred Mutebi's visual strategy in so far as he suggests that his motifs critique the NRM's failures. However, unlike Fred Mutebi, Sserunkuuma deploys his pottery to envision an alternative state. He proposes the devolution of the powers and authority of the nation-state in order to resolve the problems associated with Uganda's post-colonial governance, corruption and poor service delivery although his own proposal remains an ideal which is hard to implement.

Conclusion to Chapter Eight:

In this chapter I have [re]traced Bruno Sserunkuuma's corpus of work and its political symbolism. I have demonstrated that the artist contradicts claims that contemporary Ugandan artists abandoned the production of art as a political tool after 1986. I have illustrated how, like his contemporary Fred Mutebi, Bruno Sserunkuuma explores experiences and conventions from his formal art education and home district to critique the performance of the nation-state. I have engaged his motifs to demonstrate how he constructs an ideal Uganda in which Buganda exists as an autonomous entity, this being what he sees as the solution to the recurrent inefficiencies, corruption and failures of the nation-state – and this is a popular view in Buganda. I argue that Sserunkuuma has gone beyond any of his contemporaries and those before him in so far as he has visualised an alternative dispensation to a failing post-colonial nation-state. However, his reference to Buganda, and

strong ethnic commitment, could be read as problematic given the developments in Rwanda in which micro-nationalism was exploited to commit one the worst genocides in human history.

The new Buganda which Sserunkuuma articulates and circulates is still amorphous; the political debate he taps into is controversial and fluid. We have seen some of his pots haunted by the ambiguity and ambivalences of this debate. Some of the political claims he makes are clearer verbally than is immediately visible on the pots. But this is a corollary of the complexity of his vocabulary and the debate he is tapping into. His position is not unusual. Buganda's lack of political shape, and the controversial political debates that condition this shapelessness, have informed the political stances that the Baganda have taken as they define their position in Uganda during the NRM era. The cohesion and peace so poignantly pronounced in aphorisms like "*[o]buganda buladde*" (translated: Buganda enjoys undisturbed prosperity, peace and unity) has always remained elusive. There have always been socio-political problems which militate against cohesion and peace in Buganda. For example, today as Buganda seeks regional autonomy, some of its constituent parts are seeking autonomy from it. Buruuli in Northern Buganda can be cited here as an example. Sserunkuuma's pottery is definitely not the space in which such calls for secession can be admitted, although he is aware of them. His pottery is about the affirmation of a particular ethnic identity (and ideology) as it informs and is informed by historical traditions.

It has become clear that Sserunkuuma's political message can only be understood if his oeuvre, like that of Fred Mutebi, is read holistically and fused into its socio-political context or what he calls his "immediate surrounding". Although pot-forms are important to him, they derive their meaning and symbolism from the motifs he adds to them, which motifs are themselves informed by his socio-political space and time. Hence, although he started off with a technical experiment which resulted in new forms, the same forms became surfaces, in fact canvasses, on which to express his

ideas. Currently the same forms have turned into an effective tool for political expression and activism. All these aspects of his profession are interlinked; none of them can be considered in isolation because the artist does not make his pottery that way. In fact, it has been demonstrated in this chapter that the artist engages many of his themes through a series of related motifs. These issues need to be admitted into the record on his work, short of that such a record remains incomplete.

Conclusion

Still Engaged, it has Always Been: Contemporary Ugandan Art as a Political motif

> **The intention of the craftsman when he carved or embroidered some animal or hieroglyphic was not to decorate his handiwork, not to depict some animal of which he was particularly fond, not even to make some mighty fetish, but to record a pictorial statement of an idea. The meaning may have been completely forgotten, nevertheless it was the original reason for his act, we might call it the motive of the motif.**
>
> —Margaret Trowell, *African Design.*

The above excerpt comes from Trowell's *African Design* (1960). The book was published two years after her retirement from Makerere University. But, as she argued in her *Classical African Sculpture* (1970), it was part of a corpus of literature which Trowell wrote for contemporary African artists "its purpose being to awaken in them an interest in the study of African culture" (Trowell 1970, 6). Trowell hoped that through such studies qualities from classical African art would be carried "over into the art forms of the new African world" (Trowell 1970, 15). This is because for Trowell art mirrored its times – a theme which she engaged in her public lecture in 1950 and publication in 1954. Colonial/missionary education ignored this reality. As a result Uganda's modern art was initially set on a problematic formalist course before Mathers, Fisher and, most importantly, Trowell redirected it. Under Trowell contemporary art was integrated into collegiate education, before it became a medium for expressing political ideas starting in the 1940s.

In the early-1940s artists joined activities related to World War II: the *War Effort.* Since then cases of political engagement and disengagement among artists have happened almost simultaneously. Thus, it is true that some contemporary artists had disengaged from making political art before the 1980-1986 civil war (for example Ssekintu resigned from political activities in the early-1950s; he is currently attending to matters of cultural identity). But

there is compelling evidence to suggest that other artists have become (if simultaneously) deeply engaged in politics: expressing a political idea has been the motive (or what Trowell called the “original reason”) behind their works. For instance, in the early-sixties works were made which became embodiments of collective ideology and national identity. During 1966-1986 Uganda descended to misrule and art became a tool for assailing bad governance which was inevitable because, according to Annette Cox (1982), as “issues and politics change…artists…also find it necessary to transcend, subvert, and evade the imperatives of politicians…twisting and turning…meaning and form to create ambiguity and multiplicity” (p. 164). As such since the mid-1960s Uganda’s contemporary artists engaged ambiguities and multiplicities of meaning to critique their fluid political space and time. Visual expression has become a metaphorical (if camouflaged) voice for the voiceless. Whereas this character initially surfaced in the 1940s, it became most pronounced during the seventies and eighties. It has never been completely lost since then.

Unlike in the past when a particular dominant trend would emerge, the picture has been mixed since 1986. Some artists have turned to matters of cultural importance. Others have resigned from using their art as a political tool. Some have served under the NRM and championed its ideology through organs of the state. Some have used their art to propagate the NRM’s ideology. With the NRM’s delivery falling far short of its rhetoric of reconstruction, and corruption affecting governance and democratic institutions, some artists have consistently and persistently used their art to take on the state and question its policies. Mutebi and Sserunkuuma are paradigmatic examples of this last trend.

Mutebi and Sserunkuuma have added print-making and pottery, respectively, to Uganda’s list of political art, hitherto dominated by painting and sculpture. Through their intervention, disciplines which Trowell had introduced as “subordinate” disciplines in the 1940s have become effective means of deconstructing power and exposing malfeasance. Their works show how

aspects of culture have become visual vocabularies which can be used to redefine the limits of state: Ganda *kanzus*, *busuutis*, pottery, spears, proverbs and traditional music have engendered new political symbolism. This invites us to rethink many of the other works which follow a similar pattern. Let me cite an example to make my suggestion less abstract. Pilkington Ssengendo recently made a painting in which he wrote: "*Nze Ssengendo ndi Muganda*" (translated: my name is Ssengendo, I am a Muganda). The painting is part of the body of work he has done recently. It has the civet as a main symbol supported by conventional and improvised motifs. Ssengendo belongs to the civet clan. Arguably in the painting he asserts his ethnic identity. Yet his claim for Ganda-ness reminds us of Sserunkuuma's pronouncements of "I am a Muganda…we the Baganda…" etc. One wonders whether Ssengendo's own genre must not be re-read more holistically. It could widen our understanding of what Mutebi called "the politics of culture" and the wider questions of ethnic nationalism which Sserunkuuma touches on.

The artists' political campaign has benefited from the inherent nature of pottery and print-making. Pottery and print-making are crafts and can therefore be reproduced. The artists have engaged this characteristic to approach a particular theme from different angles. But because they see their works as fine art, they alter many of their motifs and titles (or both) even if slightly. This allows many of their reproduced motifs to stand out as originals rather than as repeats; it also allows them to claim their rightful place as contemporary artists.

Mutebi and Sserunkuuma insist that art as a political tool must remain aesthetic as well. I recently read an article on the internet suggesting that "works that are 'being made politically' retain an intrinsic artistic quality. First it's art, and then it's art that has a political flavour, so the work remains first and foremost"[390] art before it is political. In other words political art does not

[390]For the full story see: http://campusprogress.org/soundvision/905/the-art-of-protest (accessed June 30, 2006).

necessarily have to be controversial. Mutebi and Sserunkuuma have chosen forms, compositions and colours to bring the political and the aesthetic together without offending the viewer.

Many (formalists?) would conflate this strategy with a loss of expressive autonomy. For example, Sserunkuuma relates that, during an exhibition in Egypt, he gave a presentation on art in Uganda during which he showed a couple of slides. His (formalist) audience, however, rejected Ugandan art as compromised and conformist. It was put to him that contemporary Ugandan art was illustrative and "intended to please somebody" (Sserunkuuma, interview 2005). Without access to the visual archive of the works he presented it becomes hard to explain what provoked such sharp criticism. But Sserunkuuma's experience is not unique. I also received similar responses when I shared some images on contemporary Ugandan art with an audience at Technikon Witwatersrand, South Africa, in 2004. The images were of works of contemporary artist from Uganda — mainly pottery.

These critics are right in so far as Ugandan artists work with a market in mind, hence the anti-art reminiscent of the Dada movement (for example) will probably not appeal to many artists. This is because, in a situation where there is only one museum (the Uganda Museum) and one that struggles to remain open, and where government, the corporate and the multinational sectors rarely collect art, Ugandan artists have to look to a less sophisticated non-bourgeois market. In the 1970s this market demanded batiks. Today it is demanding figurative and narrative forms. Making art with this market in mind has allowed artists like Mutebi and Sserunkuuma to excel. It is important that commentators put this dynamic into consideration that way the presence of Uganda's contemporary art in the global art world, which the artists claim, will thereby be affirmed and confirmed.

Let me also add here something related to the above because I think it is important for scholars interested in the political aspects of Uganda's art. Confronted with an uncertain political environment, and a non-bourgeois

market, artists have labelled their work either to camouflage their messages or to better its marketability. In the process artists have made politically profound claims which are not immediately evident in the works themselves. Some artworks have simply been left without titles or, in some cases, anabaptised as “UNTITLED” depending on the political circumstances. Also, many titles have remained in a state of flux changing over time and depending on audiences. Confronted by this scenario many scholars have been frustrated (I remember Sunanda Sanyal was frustrated in the late-1990s); they have excluded such works from the record.

My position is this: locating these works in the political discussions they take part in offers the solution. Many such works have clues which can lead us back to the wider discussions in which they are located, their titles (or lack of them) notwithstanding. The point I am probing here affects many contemporary artists in Uganda and it is this: It could be argued that the symbolism of a motif used by Sserunkuuma, as a postgraduate student, and exhibited in 1992 as *Gossiping under the New Village Moon* and later exhibited for sale in 2000 as *Gossiping under the New Moon* changes because of the circumstances of exhibition. Similarly his exhibiting a pot as *Protective Spirits* in 1992, before keeping it in his studio as *Ganda Spirits,* does not reduce the socio-political resonances of the said pot because such resonances can be traced. Neither does calling Uganda’s national icon the *Independence Monument* and not the *Freedom Statue* alter its political symbolism. Titles not withstanding these works cannot be read outside their political contexts. It would be a mistake for scholars to ignore this reality.

I am aware, just like Mutebi and Sserunkuuma, that Uganda’s “civil society is still weak” (Nsibambi 1998, 144); it is struggling to take its rightful place and check the extremes of the state. Located in the urban areas, the educated class, to which contemporary artists belong, is small and isolated. The NRM often overlooks it. Government prefers to deal directly with the rural folks (the *wanaichi* who constitute the majority of Ugandans), through its *kakuyege*, thus negating the relevance of the educated elite to debates on public policy.

Besides, critics argue that the "NRM always ignore criticism on policy"[391] thus questioning the relevance of civic discussion on government policy. I, however, posit that civic action is essential for better governance and democratisation. That Mutebi and Sserunkuuma are part of this civic action, and they circulate their critical voices on the international circuit, must therefore be acknowledged and applauded.

Realists would argue that "in the twenty-first century, it seems safe to say the revolution will be broadcast, not exhibited"[392]. They propose that;

> it's inconceivable today that government officials would look first to artists as harbingers of public opinion. More likely, they would look for clues [in the print and audio media]. In fact, despite the recent proliferation of political art, it is musicians who have arguably had the most decisive impact.[393]

Indeed it is music that has had the greatest impact in Uganda. Rival politicians have recruited musicians into their camps. Traditional dances like *Akadodi* (circumcision dance), from Eastern Uganda, have gained political agency. Save for photography as a means of transmitting power, which, as I indicated in chapter two, dates back to the late-nineteenth-century, Uganda's politicians do not take the visual arts so seriously. Thus Mutebi and Sserunkuuma may take longer before they impact the political space and alter the status-quo using their art. That the two artists do not intend to enter the political fray directly, and instead prefer to speak through their art, makes their chances even more remote.

Be that as it may, the visual arts are making significant inroads on the political scene. For example, during the 2006 presidential election effigies played a significant role. Pitched battles were fought through and over them. Blood was spilled as figurative representations of rival candidates (Besigye versus Museveni; FDC versus NRM) were venerated as important political icons. Also, artists mounted the *2001 Presidential Elections in the Eyes of the Artists (Sweet and Sour)* (2001) through which they opined on issues of

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[391] Mayiga Peter Charles, "Proposed hostels show lack of proper planning", in *The Monitor*, April 14, 2006.
[392] http://campusprogress.org/soundvision/905/the-art-of-protest (accessed June 30, 2006).
[393] http://campusprogress.org/ soundvision/905/the-art-of-protest (accessed June 30, 2006).

governance, constitutionalism and democratisation. These gestures are historically and politically significant; they merit further inquiry. But historians must adjust their lenses for this inquiry to succeed otherwise these important developments will remain unaccounted for, dismissed, or disputed.

Prioritising a socio-political, rather than a formalist, discourse on Uganda's political art is important in a wider context. Boime argues that whatever power "patriotic symbols possess depends in a large measure on what significations we assign to them. But these significations are not static" (Boime 1998, 7); they are constantly changing. Thus for Boime as the political mood drifts and the political climaxes which nationalist symbols represent recede into history, the symbols themselves get relegated and often assailed. Boime's argument is apposite. Uganda's *Independence Monument* is currently neglected[394] and yet it was a site for nationalist rituals and official pronouncements relevant to the nation-state in 1962. Also the once venerated *Obote medallion* is currently under poor custody even though huge national funds were spent on it in 1963. In July 2006 the management of Tropical Africa Bank tried to scrape Cecil Todd's *Exchange and Barter* off its walls ostensibly to provide room for Automated Teller Machines[395]. It can therefore be argued, and it is argued by some, that these works have outlived their relevance. But have they? I am motivating the point that if art historians consistently update the socio-political relevance, rather than the purely formal aesthetics, of Uganda's political artefacts then they would sustain public interest in them. Such interest is critical for the survival of the country's important political icons (and indeed it saved Todd's work) in a situation where policy on artistic heritage is yet to be in place and national resources are prioritised on defence, bread and butter.

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[394] See: "Desecrating our Nation" in *The New Vision,* August 7, 2006. Also available online at: http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/14/513775/maloba (accessed August 7, 2006).

[395] See: Serunjogi Titus, "Treasures of Art" in *The New Vision,* July 20, 2006. Also available online at: http://www.newvision.co.ug/detail.php?mainNewsCategoryId=9&newsCategoryId=44&newsId=510436 (accessed July 20, 2006).

And finally, I have reread the history of Uganda's modern art in order to locate the trajectory in which Mutebi's and Sserunkuuma's oeuvres are located. This has helped an understanding of how the two have in different but complementary ways (and more than others) invented appropriate vocabularies with which they question the NRM administration on issues of accountability, public policy, democratisation and governance. Kyeyune (2003) identified this link, but he left it unarticulated; he did not detail the numerous political narratives it strings together. My strategy can be explored to expand the discussion on Mutebi's and Sserunkuuma's contribution to debates which I have not sufficiently explored. Let me cite a few examples to demonstrate my contention. First, the two artists seem to be raising an interesting (if problematic) gender debate. Second, although they claim to be working in a global village they clearly assert the local within the global; they resist (Western) cultural imperialism. Third, the two artists raise issues of environmental activism. These issues need to be [re-]interrogated to extend the margins of the record on Uganda's contemporary art and art history. I am convinced that there could be other artists whose story can be revisited along these lines and in related contexts – a debate which needs to be pursued devotedly and vigorously. Short of this, the current formalist trend will persist. Works with profound political resonances will continue to be disengaged from their political [con]texts as the historical record admits them as depoliticised

> …epiphanic work…seen to possess a representational dimension in depicting the appearance of those objects or events with which a [socio-political] reality had somehow fused; but…often [forced to] shed almost all vestiges of representation in order to achieve a heightened self-sufficiency…(Heywood 1997, 94)