

## **Shifts and Gendered Role Reformation: Establishing the Overturms of Binaries in Moses Isegawa's *Snakepit* and *Abyssinian Chronicles***

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### **Abstract**

The traditional gender roles assigned to women are nurturance and caregiving. This for a long time has entrenched their relegation and domestication. Presentation of women's dehumanisation and domestication in fictional works reflects the marginal space they occupy within their actual societies. Most stories curated within the African communities emphasise the severity of the disadvantaged position of women without reiterating the resilience these women build in the face of their traumatisation to combat oppression. As a result, little attention has so far been paid to triggers of shifts oppression evokes in female characters who reconstruct their positions of subjugation after encountering violence. I discover that Moses Isegawa despite being a male writer vividly exemplifies how continued traumatisation incites psychological shifts in victimised characters to be perpetrators of crimes themselves in his *Abyssinian Chronicles* and *Snakepit*. Isegawa narrates the story of self-discoveries, resilience and dominance as delineations of power in victimised female characters. These depictions of proliferations of unpredictability in expressions of assigned roles attest strongly to the similitude of power operation as capable of deconstructing polarities in the imagination of roles and women's personalities. Hence, the submission of this paper aligns closely with the fact that although encounters with pains and traumas, in general, are devastating, they sometimes reinforce humans' determination to assert their autonomy without respect to anatomical distinctions.

**Keywords:** Traditional gendered roles, Dehumanisation, Violence, Psychological shifts, Moses Isegawa

### **Introduction**

This study interrogates revolts and fluidity as evidently unfolding the ontology of intersexuality in contemporary Ugandan fictions. The problem of binaries has long persisted in shaping the realities of bodily presentations in literary works. Although the enormity of its implication on gendered relationships may differ from one continent to another, it is undoubted that the menace of these hierarchical reflections affects the progression of gendered role presentation in most fictional narratives.

In this study, therefore, an effort is made towards uncovering strategies of duplications employed by Moses Isegawa, a contemporary Ugandan writer, to depict the sequence of similarities that foreground this theorisation of wholeness, which erases the norms of dichotomous gaps in the presentation of gendered characters. Besides, the article explores reinvention, dispossession, ordering and the discontinuation of objectification in imaginative space through the enactment of transformations. The symbolic emergence of new cultures among victimised characters is also examined.

### **Erasures of binary in gender roles through re-appropriations of violence**

Feminist writers, despite their diversities, have expressed their expectation for literary works whose expression of difference is not dependent on philosophies of sexual distinction. Although the portrayal of such imagery has rarely been attained in the appropriations of roles in fictional narratives, this study establishes that categorisation of differences is gradually moving beyond the matrix of anatomical classification. Gendered roles, after incidences of violence, engender fluid interactions between male and female duties, thus cancelling biological stereotypes of differences in the performances of their roles. As a result of this annulment, performative actions initiate a dynamic interconnection that merges most formerly polarised duties to reveal trajectories of interrelations that are more pronounced than the dichotomy of sexual distinctions.

Mazrui's (1991) explication reveals the paradox of gender and proposes war as one of the effective options which can erase duality in gender role apportionment. He reinstates that the division of roles between males and females is mainly a cultural construction which can only be destroyed through an understanding of the norms that form the basic tenets of society. He explicates the visibility of this duality in gendering roles. He names women as the senior partners in the adoption of reproductive roles while men are ranked the senior partners in destroying lives. The adoption of differences endorses the ratification of the self-based on the distinctions in their adopted duties, enabling the retention of a chasm in the description of duties which translates into the perpetual reflections of polarised gendered duties. However, Mazrui supposes that the solution to the permanent erasure of gender role division in imaginative writings has to evolve from the redistribution of roles which offers equal opportunities to both males and females. He suggests two main possibilities, namely the demilitarisation of African politics (get the boys back

into the barracks; military rule at the moment is more masculine); and the androgyny of the African military (arm the girls as well as the boys).

As valid as the first proposition sounds, its realisation might not be possible considering the enormous impact militarism has on all functioning states in the world. Burke (1998:7) asserts that the hold military display of power has on society and believes that militarism has close ties with the political running of any society since it is through it that authority and validation are given to the words of men and social leaders. Burke particularly stresses the fact that women recruited into military fields do not enjoy the authentic version of power display allowed to men. As a result of this denial, they are reduced to clerical and other service jobs. Also, military women are known to face higher rates of sexual violence which are perpetrated by their male colleagues. Although women in the military are challenging gendered role stereotypes by becoming soldiers, they are still being affected by these same stereotypes. Hence, it will take more than the eradication of the male presence from society, which itself is not plausible, since militarism itself is constructed on ideas of patriarchy which itself defends the use of binary in relation to self and others.

Mazrui (1991) considers the effect of sexism in Africa to have a direct correlation with malignant sexism which he describes basically as the most precarious of all forms of sexism. He discovers that this form of gendered polarisation evolved as a result of the depiction of women's biological weaknesses which has denied them relevancy in the most significant areas of the community. He ascribes the varied effects which emanate from the practices of malignant sexism to the main fact that women are basically allowed to nurture lives and are exempted from destroying lives when violent life-threatening situations occur. This, according to him, not only makes them mostly the victims of the situation but also the subjected other, owing to the inactive roles they are consigned to in violent situations.

Consequently, this inability of women to match the destructive capacity of men results in a paradox that controls gender inequality. Mazrui (1991) also asserts importantly that the continued existence of binary, especially in Africa, is premised on the fact that women's duties revolve mostly around nurturing children and men while those of men are mostly linked with destruction. This, according to his study, is the only plausible way to erase the duality associated with gender roles completely. Hence, he advises strictly the need for gender planning schemes which can empower women. But for true liberation to occur, he firmly proposes the androgyny

of Africa. His research depicts that it is only through the process of androgynisation that “genuine power-sharing between the two halves of the black world, male-female can be evenly distributed.” (1991: 5)

Mazrui’s observation about the causes of gender imbalance and the proffered solution sounds overtly logical, however, his most pronounced declaration for androgyny in Africa is contrary to his opinion and cannot be anchored in societies whose customary laws exaggerate the rights of fathers at the expense of those of women and mothers. Rather, if his suggestion of androgyny will be of any effect, it will be constructive to, not just superficially arm women alongside men, but allow women to see the need to take up arms themselves to defend their interests, especially in violent situations. Only then will the process of androgyny be effective because it will come from the determination of the marginalised “other halves of the black world”, to fight gender polarisation, to use Mazrui’s term. In conclusion, Mazrui’s investigation of gender and the troubles it faces in Africa identify the practice of sexism in Africa as malignant sexism which he affirms as the worst form of sexism. He also agrees with the fact that the eradication of this form of sexism and its effects, even in imaginative works, will need a forceful violence.

In affirmation of Mazrui’s thought about androgynisation, Significantly Butler corroborates the fact that, for gender roles and its perception to gain the equality it desires, “the frame must break with itself to reproduce itself and, within this reproduction, there must be an emergence of a site where a politically consequential break is possible (2009: 24)”. Besides, essential to the understanding of the need for non-conformity to normativity is Butler’s suggestion about the way recognition is framed to accommodate the dynamics of the duality, significance and precariousness of life. At this point, the essentiality of life, just like gendered roles, is also polarised to reveal its livability between the forces of existence in life and non-existence in death. She explicates further that existence itself is determined through the recognition of the differences between the ontologies that sustain the distinctions in the categorisations of all lives. She also affirms, based on her investigation of the way recognition plays a main role in effecting differences, that destructions and degenerations are vital to the visualisations of the processes of life. Hence, she identifies a synergy between these life ontologies and politics which asserts the importance of recognition in the allotment of positions to the different subcategories of people and refers to it as biopolitics.

According to Butler (2009), biopolitics gives an in-depth understanding of life and its diverse expressions. This causes a significant shift to occur in the perception of life and allows modifications to be introduced to the synergised concept of war and reproduction which are offshoots of the biopolitical system that exists in a frame. But she explains further that, because of the force that the biological roles of reproduction enforce on the structural shaping of the frame, it becomes breakable if it comes in contact with violent situations, specifically war. She expatiates further that biopolitics undergoes a severe change as a result of the fact that recognition based on sexual categorisation during times of violence becomes irrelevant as much as a person does not function in line with the roles they are allotted during the times of sanity in the society. She asserts that it is almost impossible to have the same functional duties in violent periods as other times because survival is uttermost; violence challenges the willpower of the individual to take on as many tasks as possible as long as it assures them of survival.

Although as a result of the biological differences between men and women, men have been repeatedly asserted as the subject and initiators of actions in violence, according to Butler's investigation, the realisation of unworthiness associated with the lives of individuals who are seen as minorities can lead to their determination to take subject positions through participation in destructive activities. Their assertion of will according to Judith Butler (2009:13) buttresses the fact that "we each have power to destroy and be destroyed by others".

Invariably, Butler's study affirms the fact that the continued existence of polarisation in gender roles is much a result of the lack of determination of the unvalued lives to strive for their worth and not necessarily because of gendered differences or biological distinctions. She significantly links the experiences of war and survival to the impact of resistance they have on the literary works which evolve from such violent situations and explicates this through her analysis of the works of poetic writers on insurgencies that there exists a synergic connection between torture, coercion and the sound of resistance in the speeches of imaginative characters.

The foregoing re-echoes Kate Mcloughlin's (2001) assertion of the recreative abilities of war when she states that war recreates. This confirms that insurgency can be a catalyst for a re-ordering within the society and, specifically, in the depiction of gendered duties in imaginative writings. Mcloughlin's (2001) testimony about the refashioning abilities of insurgencies buttresses Butler's recognition of the synergy that exists between torture, force and change in

gender role allocation, and further authenticates its potency for destroying binary in gender role assignment. Thus, it creates a fluid pictorial depiction of duties in imaginative writings that erases the biopolitical presentations of bodies in literary works.

### **Ugandan literature and narration of war and gendered role disruption**

The combined tension from internal regional wars and the conflict on territorial demarcations exposed Uganda to the protracted menace of brutality especially during Idi Amin's era. This consequently formed the subject of Ugandan literature. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many writers began to write long narratives to give expansive expressions on the decadent conditions of the country. Notable fictions of the 19th century are Barbara Kimenyi's *Kalasanda Revisited* (1969), Robert Serumaga's *The Return to the Shadow* (1969), Peter Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle* (1972), and Austin Bukonya's *The People's Bachelor* (1972). Most of these works depict the deteriorating state of Uganda.

Although cultural norms influenced the literature of the early nineteenth century, the latter periods of this era and the early twentieth century in Uganda witnessed the emergence of literary writers who recreated the horrors experienced in their diverse communities. This is done through the characterisation of individuals and groups of people in the community; and the effects of socio-economic and political realities on them. Therefore, the narratives of contemporary writers present confrontational reactions from different facets to the long suppression of violence. Such works include Timothy Wangusa's *Upon This Mountain* (1989); Julius Ocwinyo's *Fate of the Banished* (1997); Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles* (2000); *Snakepit* (2004); and Ocwinyo *Footprints of the Outside* (2002).

It should be noted that the Ugandan war triggered multiple reactions that provoked rebellion from both male and female authors. Female writers also began to raise gender concerns to refute oppression, pain, anguish, poverty and horror meted out to females. Themes of survival, transformation, resilience and victory dominate these works. Gerotti Kymuhendo's *First Daughter* (1997); *Secret No More* (1999), *waiting* (2006), and Mary Okurut's *Invisible Weevils* (1998) foreground similar thematic concerns about the margins of power, the rebirth of war and, the relationship between women and peacebuilding.

### **Theoretical framework**

The study is predicated on feminist poststructuralism. The theory is deployed to interrogate gender issues in the selected Ugandan novels. Feminist poststructuralism combines insights from both poststructuralist and feminist thoughts to emerge as a viable tool with which duality of gendered roles are investigated in almost all global contexts since it allows the expression of a diversity of opinions (Ahmad, 1992). According to feminist theorists, sex is central to women's oppression. Hence, gender issues in literary texts are deduced from the construal of females as sex objects. The objectification of human experiences substantiates the process of women's subjugation and promotes the foundation for inequality in the allotment of gendered roles to both male and female sexes. Feminist poststructuralism mainly focuses attention on the task of undoing inherited stereotypic gendering of roles in literary texts. It probes the conception of subjectivity as well as the centrality of an author to a text. It is used as a diagnostic tool for analysing the connection between gendered role change and the language dynamism of characters in literature.

Maggie Humm (1995) asserts that poststructuralism breaks apart systems of representation rather than celebrating them. Hence, it seeks to dissuade readers from concentrating much on the author of creative works. Rather, it encourages the reader to do an independent study of the work as a cultural or historic testament and this affords the development of the reader's own critical opinions.

### **Invocation of shifts in gendered role presentation through strategic replications in Moses Isegawa's *SnakePit* and *Abyssinian Chronicles***

The polarised classification of gendered roles has left its imprint mainly on literary imaginative expressions. This empowers the indisputableness of the affirmation of sexual politics in the fictional portrayal of gendered duties. The most obvious gap in literary representations is to affirm one and discredit the other. Women, as a result of their 'nurtural' abilities, are automatically recruited by most societies to fulfil the position of otherness. Meanwhile, men usually represent the capable dictatorial selves; thus, fictional works essentially duplicate this dual pattern of visualisation. Promoters of patriarchy capitalise on the popularity of these shallow designations of difference to reinstate the inferior status of women through the defeatist attitude attached to the personality of figured female personas. As depicted in the novels selected for the

study, some of these traits that foreground the ideology of difference which causes disparities in the description of roles are already becoming neutralised. One such perception is the believed ability of all men to perpetrate crimes which is portrayed as lacking in women generally.

Isegawa's *Snakepit* narrates the ferociousness of power seekers and exposes their zeal to achieve invincibility as existing on the same parallel without deference to anatomical distinctions. Victoria's summation of herself as a "monster" (*Snakepit*, 24) and General Bazooka's confession to Victoria's possession of a lethal attitude: "When I first met you, I noticed that you had an assassin's intuition" (*Snakepit*, 29), reveal her insatiable flair for perpetrating violence like her initiator, General Bazooka. She realises that is the reason for her endearment towards Bazooka which makes her equate: "Perhaps I had simply been in romance by the General's ability to make people live or die" (*Snakepit*, 61). Since she knows that she possesses the same indomitability that has granted the General the splendour his personality extrudes during their initial meeting, Victoria visualises herself as capable of perpetrating violent overtures like the General. Hence, she envisages Bat, as the other, despite his enviable intellectual accomplishment: "Bat does not have that ability, so I am the one with the finger on the trigger: I can very easily destroy him, and this woman, and both their families" (*Snakepit*, 61).

The identified equilibrium between Victoria's destructive capacity and the General's brutality establishes the authenticity of power transference during situations of oppression. Victoria's encounter with oppressive and dehumanising experiences from General Bazooka rather than demotivate her to settling into a perpetual fate of the victimised, reforms her decision to become a perpetrator herself. This transformation foregrounds the complexity of representing binaries as having existential continuance in the description of gendered duties. On the other hand, the portrayal of the character's determination towards constant valorisation propels the dissolution of difference, culminating in the fluid presentation of all human activities. At this point, the other is the exact replication of the self. Hence, Victoria's vehemence resonates with that of her victimiser. The narrator's description of her swift response to Bat's arrogance attests to Victoria's attainment of the same invincible status as General Bazooka. The narrator's testimony confirms Victoria's expression of venom:

Blind with rage, she slapped him on the temple. It did not hurt very much, his eyes did not water... But Bat saw it as a revelation of Victoria's true colours. A wave of

fear coursed through his chest. What did I get myself into? He thought, remembering the toast he made to risk, to adventure, the evening they met (Snakepit, 63).

Victoria, on many occasions, reveals her capacity to unleash violent mishaps but Bat neglects the warning signs. His displayed carelessness stems from the ideology of sexual politics which reinstates women as inferior and mostly unfit to perpetrate violence. This observation explains the reason women are still presented as weak, inferior and predictable in most fictional narratives. It confirms such a view as popular among men. Despite being warned and advised by his wife that Bat should have a background check on Victoria, Mr Kalanda dismisses her worries as trivial, howbeit with a secret longing for a sexual escapade of his own:

How exactly does someone tell Bat anything like that? Kalanda pondered, his thoughts drifting to Victoria's physique. He preferred wild-spirited ladies; he hadn't had any in a while. To occupy the monotony associated with being married and having an ensured pussy, he hoped he had found one. He prayed Bat had been enjoying himself (*Snakepit*, 39).

However, this narrative faults the accuracy of this myopic description of gendered roles which grants continuance to the ideological stance of difference in imaginative work. It deconstructs the perpetual significance of visage affixed to the figuration of dichotomy, reinforcing the fact that aggression is an inherent feature of all humans and not specifically gendered. Thus, the writer through his revelation of the empowering abilities of dissembling circumstances rights the habitual erroneous extension of revivifying the strength of sexual politics in literary works. Instead, he shows that the ability of the victimised to replicate the pattern of their oppressors results in a fluid demonstration of powers which discredits the ingrained notion of distinction in the adoption of gendered roles. According to Victor Turner (1982: 57), violence creates a merging of all experiences. He authenticates that "The self which is normally "the broker" between one person's action and another's simply becomes irrelevant...All men, even all things are felt to be one".

In short, Victoria's attitude reiterates the rupture in the conventional depiction of otherness. The unfortunate experiences of being victims of oppression influence the decision of the oppressed to attain the control of their victimisers, turning them into perpetrators in the process. Converting

the pain of her sexual abuse into growth, Victoria emerges as a victimiser in absolute control of not just her sexuality but in charge of her victims' sexualities and their lives. A notorious dictator, she combines three destructive weapons that denote her versatility and expertise as a perpetrator: "Sex had only ever served as a tool, liken to a gun or a knife, for her work. (*Snakepit*, 24). The figuration of this woman who delves deep into crime through her determination to surmount the psychological hurdles of her victimisation demonstrates that oppression does not automatically result in the expansion of bodily dichotomies. It oftentimes influences disintegrations in behavioural patterns, resulting in the fluid presentation of gendered roles.

Victoria's decision to murder Babit, Bat's lover and soon-to-be wife, in the most gruesome manner further portrays the degeneration of sexual hierarchies and the diffusing effect of violence on gendered roles. To surmount the obstruction that stands between her and her marital goal, Victoria's threats to exterminate her rival fall on deaf ears. Babit stubbornly retains her position without giving much attention to Victoria's threats. The narrator observes the strong determination of the latter to remain:

Is that the housegirl speaking?

It is the lady of the house speaking, Babit replied curtly.

I am the lady of the house child.

I am not your child, woman. Stop bothering us. Get yourself a man. Bat is my man. You are the intruder... Save yourself the humiliation and... Leave before something happens to you.

Nothing is going to happen to me. You are going to remain where you are. (*Snakepit*, 78).

Having hinted Babit about her intention to forcefully regain her position as the first wife and the mother of Bat's daughter, Victoria expects her to comply with the instruction she has given to her. However, she stays and disregards her rival's threats. Her careless rebuff of Victoria's warning evokes in the latter a menacing determination to kill her. The narrator reveals her determination to resort to violent means of achieving her goals: "The General's problem didn't interest her in the least. She had hers and it was called Babit. She had to go (*Snakepit*, 199).

Meanwhile, Babit's neglect of Victoria's threats stems from the supposed belief that Victoria is merely being harsh. Although aware of the increase in the record of perpetrated crimes and murder in the country as a result of political agitations, Babit's personality resonates with that of a good woman. Thus, her main duty represents traditional expectations of ensuring men are supported. She confesses her allegiance to Bat when she says: "A trustworthy woman inspects the fasteners" (*Snakepit*, 79). Hence, to fulfil her role as a good woman, she watches out for Bat's safety always without taking cognisance of her protection. She understands that her lover works amidst ferocious politicians who get easily paranoid. Therefore, she commits herself to keeping tabs on him and the activities that might affect him. Afraid that he might get caught again in the uncontrolled occurrences of manic car explosions, she states her concern: "Often I wonder if you ought to give up driving that vehicle" (*Snakepit*, 200). A very shielded woman, Babit believes that to be safe from trouble, one has to avoid it and live a very conservative life. This belief makes her accept minor insignificant roles: "Regarding his sibling and the funds, Bat remained silent. Babit was assigned the duty of listening to the radio during the entire day and night" (*Snakepit*, 199).

Her inability to conceptualise performing beyond the mundane chores she executes daily makes her undermine the capacity of women to perpetrate violence. Hence, her ideology that Bat is exposed to danger is grounded on the fact that he works within the wider circle of society while she considers herself safe from turbulence because she lives a conservative life. With that perception, she feels comfortable despite Victoria's threat. However, to underscore the unorthodoxy of her belief, Victoria decides to carry out her threats. The narrator describes the hideousness of the act as he captures Bat's neurotic reaction when he returns home:

He exhaled deeply a few times before leaving the sleeping area. He noticed big, blurry, pinkish footprints. As he flung open the restroom door, he yelled out. He came close to crushing her head. The wedding band was sparkling shatteringly in the light, and the torso lay in the bathtub with its arms falling loosely at its sides. He wasn't sure if he sobbed or just stood there. He wasn't sure if he passed out or puked. He managed to go to the police station somehow. That he didn't kill anyone en route was a miracle. He appeared suddenly from the windy realm of insanity, and at first, they believed he was insane (*Snakepit*, 210).

Victoria's determination to exterminate Babit to have her way with Bat explicates the involvement of dangerously deviant attitudes in women towards conforming to traditional roles. The vivid description of the scene and Bat's neurotic response to the onslaught shows the fierceness of the attack. Although Victoria does not appear physically at the scene of the crime makes it seem as though she is incapable of committing the crime by herself, her precision in masterminding the attack and the choice of the ferocious method of dismembering her rival shows her notoriety. Before the events, the men who murder Babit discuss the devilry details of their expertise with Victoria: "with style. They had jokingly said that people were animals, that when you got used to slitting the throats of cows as they did daily, you could easily do a person. Although she required proof, people asked. A hand or finger or something more intimate...." (*Snakepit* 218). She commits this felony against another human and sanctions the act. This establishes a non-gendered biased boundary in the perpetration and figuration of violence.

Therefore, the fact that Victoria loves to subject people to suffering makes her capable of overlooking the gravity of the pain her victims might suffer. The independent understanding of her dominance explains the mostly rebellious attitude she displays towards Bazooka's orders: "She understood that for that to occur, she was going to defy Commander Bazooka" (*Snakepit*, 24). Constantly expressing the superiority of her own will and independence, she suppresses the significance of Bazooka's personality: "She was left with two choices: either to fabricate information or to let the General fuck himself" (*Snakepit*, 40).

Essentially, the reflection of this twenty-first-century Ugandan writer on the shift in gendered roles reveals an exposure of strategic closures to the persistent challenge of duality. The depiction of the monstrous killing of Babit as masterminded by Victoria is the writer's conscientious forewarning of the main implications of the shift in gendered roles.

The writer's volatile eradication of Babit, the good woman in this novel, again metaphorises the speed at which the domesticated position of women is diminishing. The creation of awareness in the occurrences of a shift in gendered roles in the narrative, specifically in the perpetrations of violence poses a main challenge to the security of the continent in general and Uganda in particular. Since both male and female characters now demonstrate the capacity to initiate volatilities, it is difficult to apportion judgement of crimes based on gender differences. It also increases the incidence of crime rate within the community.

However, the effort of the writer in depicting these evolving nuances is not only to create awareness of the dissolution of definite gendered culture and roles but also to redress the imbalanced visualisation of the victimised in literary representations. This redress in the imagination of adopted roles aligns with the description of the complemented strength African male and female sexes exhibited before the infiltration of the adverse marginalisation of women during the colonial era. The reduction of women to merely domesticated beings in representations is a falsification that belies the complementary adoptions of gendered roles. In other words, the visualisation of duties goes beyond what has been by envisioning the “becoming” of what would be. This makes it a didactic African literature that not only reinstates the reflection of society but also refracts it.

Moreover, in Isegawa’s *Abyssinian Chronicles*, Padlock’s continuance of vehement assertion of authority culminates in the decline of duality in presentations of gendered duties. She again exemplifies the budding determination in visualised subjugated characters that not only explicates their confrontational resilience towards oppressors but adopt the instincts of the oppressors to perpetrate more severe barbarous acts on their victims.

Having established the dominance of her presence within her home and surroundings, Padlock demonstrates the similitude of how power operates. She reenacts her childhood traumatic experiences but reinterprets her role in it as the dictatorial authority. The testimony of the narrator’s rebirth as Padlock’s first son affirms the re-incarnation of her severity as the re-hashing of her parents’ oppressiveness. She treats her sons especially her first son with so much disdain that re-echoes her parents’ descent attitude towards her while growing up for being a girl. The arrival of Mugezi on a fiercely stormy day makes the birth process more complicated for Padlock. This forces Padlock to depend on the mascot delivery expertise of her aunty-in-law who is reputable for her apt prediction of destinies. Her eventual prediction of Mugezi’s future career as an assistant mascot aggravates Padlock’s hatred towards a child who chooses to arrive on an unfortunate day. Departing to the city with her husband in a bid to start a new life, she violently registers her disdain with humiliations. Mugezi narrates:

...It dawned on me that we were leaving. The house now echoed when one called. But why was I not dressed for the journey?... It was then that I was told I was staying. Serenity climbed into the cab. Padlock turned to follow him in. I touched

her, smudging her dress. She cringed and, with blind speed, drove her palm full into my face. I fell back in the mud and, in protest, rolled once or twice (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, 68).

Abandoned in the village with his mascot's grand aunt, Mugezi feels the same detachment his mother feels while growing up. Although a legitimate part of the family, his dehumanisation and alienation make him a victim of abandonment. The fact that the narrator suffers traumatic violations perpetrated by his parents just like his mother confirms the flexible replications of the tyranny and shift in the imagination of gendered roles. The foregoing reiterates these duplications as influencing the initiation of shifts that dismantle stringent politicisation of duties into dichotomous linearity of victims/perpetrators. Hence, this presentation affirms the possible shift in the position of a victim to that of a perpetrator as exemplified by Padlock.

Establishing the convertibility of servitude experiences into autocrat models, the author deconstructs the habitual figuration of dehumanisation as reducing the totality of the victims to nothingness. Annihilation in its representation here fortifies victims to be perpetrators of violence in the future. Compelled to join his parents in the city after the death of his grand-aunt, Mugezi's servitude gets harnessed: "My coming was a blessing for her, and she made no secret of it. In one stroke, I had become the family shitman" (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, 93). It is, therefore, clear that Mugezi is a victim of retributive exploitation and oppression. As a matter of fact, from his ruinations, Padlock restores the autonomy of power denied her for being a girl-child during her formative years. Unable to recoup her distorted worth mainly through the assertion of her significance over her husband and other male archetypes of her depreciation, Padlock reconstitutes the precedence of the pain she experiences by altering the sexual object of her oppression in the presence to truly explore the sovereignty of the dominant dictator. The narrator's reflection lends credibility to the assertion: "... the torture rack was grinding and spinning, slowly doing its jobs of breaking body and will" (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, 114).

This skilful retaliation of suppression grants her access to recast the past, thus enabling her to function in the capacity of the autocrats' selves of the past. Recognising this synergy, her son states that: "In a dictatorship, the past and the present were Siamese twins, I learned, better left unseparated for good of public order and family harmony" (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, 106). Thus, Padlock's determination to regenerate as a dictator is foregrounded in her previous encounter

with savagery. This implies that ferocious experiences produce counter-intuitive responses from sufferers. Therefore, it neutralises the elongated static dualism in the presentations of gendered duties, especially in fictional narratives. It also engenders dynamic exchanges of selves which further influence transformational shifts in literary works. The family conflict the narrator describes gradually evolves into a bloody battle for superiority. After listening to his mother's summation of his character, he visualises the eruption of a vast conflict: "A war had just been declared. I had no illusions of winning this trench warfare, but I was determined to become a very costly, very destructive victim" (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, 113).

This makes the experience of dehumanisation too burdensome for Mugezi. Hence, he perceives the violent attack of his mother to be elevated beyond the level of conflict, "a trench warfare" (113). It means that an unmanaged family crisis can culminate in a full-fledged war because of its destructive aftermath. Nevertheless, Padlock always wins despite the preparedness of her victims, in this case, her son. This expounds her formidability as a dictator. It again clearly deregulates the persistent claims of difference between the activities of perpetrator/victim through its demonstration of Padlock's role shift, from that of the victimised to victimiser. This shift, therefore, permits an androgynous representation of violence which reflects its non-polarised implication on gendered duties. The narrator observes a resonating pattern in most dictators' operations:

...Finally, Fr. Mindi told us officially. He dressed his anger in curse-laden threats, ultimately announcing that if the culprit did not give himself up within three days, something was going to happen to him. I was in familiar territory, hardly able to believe how similar dictatorial thought patterns were. I had heard all this in my former life, it left me cold (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, 216-217).

Observing consistencies in the dictatorial modes of oppression, the narrator expounds the fluidness of all violent overtures. The erasure of dichotomies in the representation of hostilities disassembles foregrounded politics that ascribes the valour of superiority in actualising dictatorial obligations to men. Tamale's (2011:94) submission reiterates this assertion when she says that "identifying perpetrators solely by their gender is an inadequate route to a full explanation of the myriad behaviours that can be called gender". This erasure of difference culminates in mostly all

the characters' featured desires to either perpetrate violence or avenge former injustices as a result of their encounter with traumatic situations.

Furthermore, the transformation of Milkjar from a fearful timid girl to a fearless staunch perpetrator indicates the consequences of violence as provoking slips that shift the consistency in the adoption of gendered roles. Initially fearful about Mugezi's prediction of a blank future without hope, she refrains from accepting the justice the headmaster provides: "Milkjar was pathetic: she could not stop crying. The headmaster thrusts a stick in her hand and ordered her to beat me. She dropped the stick as though it were a hairy caterpillar" (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, 82). However, after leaving primary school, Milkjar metamorphoses into an affirmative autocrat who subjugates. The narrator identifies: "What I saw next made my lower lip fall: I thought I recognised the large girl as one from Ndere Primary School whom I had told that she would birth a limbless creature..." (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, 362). To reinforce her now powerful position, Milkjar decides to sexually assault Mugezi alongside her colleagues. This act communicates experience to the narrator which makes him conclude thus: "I kept thinking that these women had raped other men before. I was sure the men had kept quiet about it. I was also going to keep my mouth shut" (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, 363).

This portrayal of characters' decentralised reaction to violence debunks the depiction of differentials as compulsory authentication of the dynamics of gendered role classification. Rather, the loss of stereotypes in characters' vehement responses to oppressive overtures shows the dynamic reversal of symbolic order. Victims of callousness in these narratives are reformed through the oppression to be expressive instead of being reclusive. According to Mamdani (2001: 7), the reoccurring eruption of violence can result in "the production of not only individual criminals but populations of criminals". Through this re-figuration of human capacities to overcome suppressions, it can be deduced not only that the adoptions of roles are becoming fluid and ungendered, but also that the notion of difference used to earmark features which distinguish the activities of the self from the other are gradually being erased. For instance, the fact that Kasawo, the narrator's aunty, is gang raped by male soldiers shortly before Mugezi is also gang raped by female soldiers reveals a non-dichotomous order in the operation of power. The foregoing implies that the trauma of sexual abuse is an unfavourable condition which happens to both sexes; however, this is not aptly represented in fictional narratives. The reason, according to the narrator, is because most males tend to keep quiet about it. Hence,

Milkjar's resort to rape Mugezi alongside other women is a revolutionary reaction against sexual political categorisation of women as mainly the receptor of violence and never the initiators.

Assuredly, the lethal effect of trauma is an ontological challenge which reverses the dichotomous mode in the imagination of gendered duties. It construes gendered roles from a dynamic intersexual perspective where adoption of roles or the happenstance of pain constantly oscillates between characters mutually without establishing physiological dualities. This enables occurrences of dynamic interchange in the description of roles where sexual opposition is not considered a factor to oppress or tolerate incessant victimisations. The unfolding of events in these narratives buttresses the fact that "each of us has a "peace" face and a "war" face, we are programmed for co-operation, but prepared for conflict (Turner, 1982:19).

Inferably, the figuration of male oppressors in literary imaginations as mostly ferocious without obvious forms of vulnerabilities mainly reiterates the severity of the promotion of sexual politics in fictional narratives. However, the depiction of power seekers as assuming the basest form of beggary to upscale their formidability reveals as falsely the illusion of their exemption from dehumanisation.

## **Conclusion**

From all indications, the narrative texts analysed here challenge the hegemonic retention of the persistence of binaries in gendered duties. Without pretence, the writers lucidly depict the aftermath of reducing women to their sexuality as having adverse social consequences since such reduction as portrayed here energises women to be hardened criminals. The perceivable division between victims and perpetrators becomes blurred and unpredictable. Readers are hereby sensitised to recognise these nuances of shifts as building evolutions in the transformations of sexual politics.

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