

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE

Symbolism in Ugandan Poetry

BY

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of
Nairobi**

MAY 2012

NAIROBI-KENYA

DECLARATION

I, Sr. Lucy L. Nabukonde hereby; declare that the research work presented in this thesis is my own effort, authentic and original except where mentioned. It has never been presented to any other university for academic award.

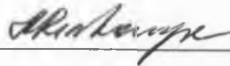
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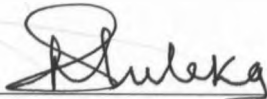


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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved late parents Mr. William Mudyadya & Mrs. Kamutali Mudyadya murdered during Amin's military regime, yet whose gift of life, hard work, encouragement, commitment and moral integrity moulded me into who I am.

“My much-loved parents, May the Almighty God reward you and bless you with the heavenly award of eternal life. Amen!”

&

To Carol Pieper and His Excellence Arend Pieper (from Holland) my other parents by adoption, mentorship and spirituality for their dedication that has added value to my growth in the global village. “Long live my ardent parents”

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I am also grateful to all my respondents for their co-operation during data collection exercise, without whom this work would have been impossible

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the nature of symbolism as the main literary technique in the expression of thought in Ugandan Poetry. The study was warranted on the assertion that since the dawn of the humankind, symbolism has been used as one of the main devices in poetic expression. In Uganda, an East African country famous for its poetry, literary criticism has so far paid insufficient attention to the use of such an important device in Ugandan rime. This is despite T.S Eliot's observation that the only way a person could express emotion in the form of art is to find an objective correlative such as, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of that particular emotion.

The objectives were: to investigate the nature of artistic choice of symbolism in Ugandan poetry; to determine the changing trends in the use of symbolism of early and contemporary poetry of Uganda; to investigate the influence of the socio-political and socio-cultural environment on the nature of symbolism used by Ugandan poets; to identify the role of symbolism as a subtle and effective technique in communicating thematic concerns in Ugandan poetry.

Similarly, there were four varied but correlated hypotheses that informed the study. The first one presupposed that symbolism features dominantly in all works of Ugandan poets. Secondly, there are significant changing trends in the use of symbolism by early and contemporary Ugandan poets; symbols change with time and from one context to another. Moreover, a symbol;is not universally applicable rather it is situational and it changes from context to context as its meaning may change with time. Thirdly, the socio-political and socio-cultural environment has a significant bearing on the nature of meaning of symbolism employed in Ugandan poetry. Fourthly, and finally symbolism plays a significant role in communicating the central concerns of Ugandan poets.

The method of collecting data allowed an intra-community interaction and dialogue where the researcher administered appropriate instruments based on an empirical qualitative method. These were mainly interviews, written reports, opinionaires, direct

observations and critical reading. It is believed that no one has the monopoly of knowledge; hence from the very onset of the study, the researcher undertook to collect views from students of poetry in A Level schools through group-focussed interviews. Secondly and mainly, the researcher concentrated on an extensive analytical reading of the selected texts by Ugandan poets. While focusing on symbolism in Ugandan poetry, the study was limited to selected poetry ranging from 1962 – 2006. For the convenience of analysis, the period covered was divided into three cycles here referred to as generations.

Proceeding from several well known theoretical conceptual tenets, which, work well together namely: sociological, psychoanalytical, stylistic, semantic, and reader-response, the researcher undertook to test whether the above hypotheses hold true. Semantic, sociological and stylistic approaches seemed to form the tightest integration as much as their combined force enabled the researcher to establish the link between an identified symbol and its meaning from the given social reality. It was assumed that a given object or an action represents “something bigger” than it self. The semantic analysis was very helpful because it revealed associative links between the identified symbols and its meaning but the way these links were established by the researcher, the concept was traced through stylistic analysis. Poets use various stylistic devices in order to express the links between the symbol and the reality it represents. The verification of the plausibility of the researcher’s identification and interpretation of symbols was done through reader-response in conducting field research to test these interpretations on ‘live’ readers. Stanley Fish and Hans-Robert Jauss’ views that a reader brings certain assumptions to a text based on the interpretive strategies he or she has learned in a particular interpretive community and that a reader's aesthetic experience is always bound by time and historical determinants, respectively, helped the researcher to establish the readers’ frame of reference, based on their past experience of literature. Sociological theory was also helpful in field research, since its nature explains relationship between literature and society. Psychoanalytical theory was of use too; especially Jacques Lacan’s concept of how a symbol functions as vent for the author’s repressed feelings, allowed the researcher

to formulate respondents' 'past experience of literature and what preconceived notions held.

The results of the critical analysis of the texts form the core of this study, whereas the field data, primary responses from literature students constitutes its integral part. The study established that the first generation presents main symbols that are prevalent in the subsequent generations; these symbols seem to put great emphasis on the African tradition on one hand and Western modernity on the other. Secondly, the study argues that second generation poets tend to preserve but considerably expand and enrich the meanings of the main symbols in their works stipulated by their growing poetic experiences and the changes in the society.

Thirdly, the findings demonstrate that in the works of the third generation poets the meaning of certain symbols has been noticeably transformed and that these changes were predetermined mainly by the changing social reality of Uganda, heavily influenced by coup defacto of the 1970s and 1980s and subsequent warfare in the northern part of the country. Fourthly and finally, the symbols mainly refer to specific social, political and historical phenomena. Upon which the study concluded that symbolism is a prominent and powerful tool of communication used by Ugandan poets to express their views. The poets across generations employ attendant symbols to illustrate, clarify, enforce, decorate, brand as well as shape intended meaning in context, and finally express the deepest concerns of Ugandan community.

In addition, this study identifies further directions of investigation in order to obtain a full and detailed picture of the usage of various types of symbols in Ugandan poetry to enable researchers in the longer perspective draw a conclusive poetic map of Uganda.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Introduction

Uganda is endowed with a rich cultural heritage, lush vegetation, fertile soils, mountains as well as rivers (the source of the Nile is at Jinja). Joachim Buwembo, a veteran journalist recalls how the natural beauty of Uganda struck Winston Churchill so much that he promptly summarised the experience of his journey in three words “concentrate on Uganda” (9) after which he named the country, “Pearl of Africa.” Seemingly, “*Pearl of Africa*” was used metaphorically to symbolise the collective beauty of Africa. Uganda is geographically, socially, politically and culturally systems of long lasting monarchs and protectoral legacies that directly determine much of its structural operations.

Political background to the study

Uganda is a sovereign secular democratic republic. Political parties represent different ideologies within the Ugandan society. The President is the formal head of state with substantial reserve powers. The President acts as a symbol of patrimony. However, the Prime Minister and other members of the cabinet make and execute the government policies. The country is divided into four regions and in terms of its administrative divisions; these regions are divided into districts and counties. Ugandan poets considered in this study come from the four regions of the country. Unlike the rest of Africa, Uganda was never a colony, but a protectorate of Britain. Despite its ‘non- colony status,’ the country has been involved in all sorts of conflicts throughout her modern history. These conflicts have taken many different forms: political and ideological wars, tribal wars, border wars including intra-and inter-state conflicts (Northern Uganda) which have occurred in the region almost every other day. Not only are socio-political factors themselves bearing on one another a sufficient source of conflict, but all of them combined have worked over the years to produce past crises of war in the country. Thus, the “Pearl of Africa” is currently, ranked among the poorest countries of the world.

Austin Bukenya in his dissertation, "Literary Pragmatics and the Theme of Terror" observes that, "since the 1964 disturbances over the lost counties, Uganda has experienced three coups d'état, in 1966, 1971 and 1985. The country has been ruled by a succession of dictators and undergone two major civil wars in 1978-79 and 1982-86," (2). It is evident that Uganda, initially considered the "Pearl of Africa," is now rated among the poorest nations of the world. What could have happened to a country that was thought to be showing the greatest promise in Africa? This is perhaps due to the socio-political upheavals the country has undergone over the years, as it has often been suggested by a number of critics.

Undeniably as many critics argue, Uganda's tumultuous socio-political environment that witnessed the series of tyrannical regimes and wars, especially during Idi Amin's military autocracy, may have had a bearing on the country's poets, who have employed symbolism, perhaps to ridicule the corrupt and oppressive leaders, as well as the threatening forces mired in the form of armed and institutionalised violence. The climax of Idi Amin's tyrannical political rule saw a marked deterioration in all sectors of development, particularly in the cultural dimension. This obviously influenced the country's literature, especially that reflecting the gruesome murders and witch-hunting of writers, intellectuals, nationalists and other innocent civilians whose plight characterised what some have termed as Uganda's years of tears and blood.

During that period, freedom of speech was curtailed. As a result, some of the talented artists who escaped death either fled the country and continued writing abroad or they stayed and let the talent die. Those who stayed and wrote often employed disguise to comment on the sad times in the country as they voiced their patriotic concerns. Seemingly, symbolism became the poets' ideal medium of communication, perhaps as their way of camouflaging what they were saying.

Eckhard Breitinger in his book, Uganda: The Cultural Landscape, analyses and highlights the socio-political situation during the time, and its influence on Ugandan writing, thus:

Writers, artists and intellectuals were, in one way, part of these 'socio-political forces;' in other ways the members of the educated elite kept their distance from political power.... But since they were definitely subjected to the same political, economic and even personal pressures that resulted from this, the cultural landscape in Uganda was overshadowed by political conditions, (1).

A situation where politics overshadows every other aspect of life cannot be said to be an ideal one. Fortunately, despite the overwhelming pressure exerted by the various socio-political forces that dominated the context of Ugandan literature, the country's cultural life was not completely ruined.

Cultural background to the study

Culture is associated with social groups. Ugandan people belong to different cultural factions. Uganda's cultural diversity, however, exhibits common traits that serve to unite its people. This culture which has served national unity developed over time through inherent sagacity and wisdom. We can, however, say that the capacity with which Uganda has been able to exhibit common values irrespective of varying cultural backgrounds, social status, literacy levels, creed or religion is through oral literature. Ugandan poets particularly, articulate elements of socio-cultural tradition characterizing indigenous values. Their poems may be a showcase that Uganda is a refined home of culture. Social and cultural factors influence all aspects of the poet's life. These factors enable the poets to draw on a foundation they understand and upon which they could extend to new experiences, since the past helps to form the present and the future.

It is debatable, but Uganda's rich cultural heritage has over time drawn the international community to the country and, in a way, helped to give exposure to the country's poets and other artists. It is known that long before Uganda passed through the "dark ages," the country served as a 'catchment' spot, or, as Margaret Macpherson termed it, "Place of Early Sunrise" for artists from all over Africa, especially those of the East African region. Breitinger captures the portrait of the times in the words of Wole Soyinka: "We were on Safari on African soil; the signs along the way showed the same slogan: Destination

Kampala, Africa's Postcolonial Renaissance," (3). Indeed, in 1962, during the period known as the "golden age of literary enrichment," Makerere University in Uganda hosted an international conference gathering African authors writing in English. The events that transpired during the meeting set a stimulating atmosphere for furthering creative writing. It was then that Makerere was constituted the international centre for cultural progress in East Africa.

These events, one could guess had profound influence on Ugandan artists and scholars. East African poetry in English was launched in Uganda, apparently witnessed by among others the poets who sprung up in the early sixties that is , those we are discussing under the first generation, or early poets of Makerere. The pioneer among all of them was Okot p' Bitek, the composer of Songs, which undisputedly stole a reputable cultural show for Uganda, giving her a "facelift" in the eyes of an international community.

Susan Kiguli who surveyed the major concerns of Ugandan poets across generations concludes that there was variation in the manner they wrote and a change in the historical events addressed. The early writers, Kiguli notes, show great interest in cultural issues but address political concerns as well. In writing his famous poem *Song of Lawino*, Bitek drew his symbols from the Acoli traditions and this enabled him to address various societal concerns. However, the 'songs' are not only concerned with culture, but also economic and political strains of the post-independence period. With wit, Okot p' Bitek talks of African culture in *Song of Lawino*, and handles the economic, social and political problems of post-independence with knowledgeable depth.

Even though Okot p'Bitek, for his written songs as others are known for their poetry, written poetry is a recent development. Instead, as Kiguli points out, Uganda is renowned for verbal art and folklore dating as far back as the pre-colonial periods. Generation after generation, this poetry has been perpetuated through singing or recitation during music festivals and in community functions such as wedding, funeral rites, initiation rites and other ritualistic events, as well as at evening fires. Kiguli notes that oral poetry exists among all the communities of Uganda and it is highly esteemed because of being readily

accessible to mass audiences and for being non-segregative of the illiterate. Again it is worth re-emphasizing that p'Bitek in his songs drew extensively from these verbal forms. Perhaps we could argue that this was part of the reason for the success and popularity of the songs. Indeed, A.D. Amateshe (1988) observes that through oral poetry, an instant combined community response is given, since oral poetry is popular. It is normally articulated through native tongues and style including symbolism which the entire community seems to appreciate.

An Introductory Insight into Symbolism

According to Wikipedia the free encyclopedia, a symbol refers to something such as an object, picture, written word, a sound, particular mark or person that represents (or stands for) something else by association, resemblance, or convention. It is an object or action that means more than its literal meaning. A symbol works two ways: It is something itself, and it also suggests something deeper. Some symbols have widespread, commonly accepted meanings that most readers should recognize. Yet none of these associations is absolute, and all of them are really determined by individual cultures and time. No symbols have absolute meanings, and, by their nature, we cannot read them at face value. Society generally uses symbols in everyday life too. A symbol may act as a kind of a short cut to an idea. When we use a simile such as someone is as Ugandan as *Ssabasajja Kabaka*, *Ssabasajja Kabaka* as a man of men, or his majesty the king) in this case becomes a symbol of family values. In addition, if we say that something is as Kenyan as *oranges and bananas*. *Oranges and bananas* are symbols of national politics representing Orange Democratic Movement (*ODM*) and Party of National Unity (*PNU*), respectively. Additionally, *oranges and bananas* point to another reality beyond even *ODM* and *PNU* to imply another philosophy as expressed in our adaptation: "Harambee! Grand Coalition!" *Oranges and bananas* have become political symbols representing unity of the party members, of each party in Kenya whereas *Ssabassajja Kabaka* remains a symbol of unity among the Baganda. This current example is not far divorced from a literary symbol.

In *A Handbook to Literature*, Harmon William asserts that literary symbols serve to illustrate the meaning of a text beyond what is explicitly and extrinsically stated, to suggest another meaning rooted in the knowledge shared by a particular culture. He further observes that symbols may contribute to an intrinsic system of meaning by allowing a writer to represent abstract ideas in personal terms consistent with the world he or she lives. Therefore, in literature the essence of symbolism is that the object or action evokes an image to suggest a different higher level of meaning.

A poetic symbol, on the other hand, has subconscious connections to the poem when well applied. Symbolism is said to enrich poetry and often add a different dimension, so that it can be appreciated at distinctive levels. Take, for example, the poems of Ugandan poets which may often sound easy and could be understood at a very simple level; however, when one comprehends the symbolism employed in them, they become even richer.

Among the techniques in poetry, symbolism has been assumed to be one of the most powerful and effective tools that writers use in general to engage and to communicate expressively and concisely. Apparently, Symbolism seems to be one of the outstanding poetic devices among others taken up by most poets in Uganda. Not only does the use of symbolism enable the poets to communicate the intended message clearly and concisely, but it also permits them to let the audience get to know a lot more about the atmosphere in which they live.

Consequently, when we look at symbolism in Ugandan poetry, we are considering linguistic units, iconic representations and their denotations that not only suggest a meaning in themselves but also a meaning beyond, what the poem itself and things they represent in the poem stand for.

J.A Cuddon in his *Pennguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory* enlightens our understanding of the meaning of symbolism:

This word, symbol, derives from the Greek verb *symballein*, 'to throw together' and its noun *symbolon*, 'mark', emblem 'token' or 'sign'. It is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or 'stands for' something else. (884-5)

Symbols associate two things. However, their meaning can be both literal and figurative. Symbols are based on widespread and commonly accepted values. Symbolism in Ugandan poetry is generally influenced by Uganda's varying cultures, norms and backgrounds. Not only are the forms of imagery in Ugandan poems symbolic in themselves, but they also become symbolic depending on their surrounding. Symbolism as a device has a great presence in Ugandan poetry; however, the effort to critique its nature, effectiveness and changing trends has been relatively low.

Therefore, a backdrop such as this necessitates a comment on symbolism employed by Ugandan poets - accomplished artists as well as social thinkers, so as to expound: First of all, on its role in changing generations and trends in Ugandan poetry and secondly, on the poets' representations of the social environment of Uganda, which seems to be one of the central themes and concerns in their writing.

The current study, therefore, is on nature and role of symbolism as a creative technique used in Ugandan poetry. The study discusses the effectiveness of symbolism employed by Ugandan poets to communicate their concerns, focusing on selected poems by several early Ugandan poets in order to assess their influence on the creativity of contemporary poets of Uganda.

Statement of the Problem

Uganda is largely known as a nation of poetry whereas Kenya takes laurels in prose. Consequently, there has been a growing concern among some readers of Ugandan Literature as to why Ugandan poets, not only employ an extensive use of symbolism in

writing their poems, but also to a great extent, its nature seems rooted in the social, political and cultural environment of the country.

Breitinger affirms this postulation that the individual life style of the artists in political milieu made the case of Ugandan poets specific, especially in the way they used language to communicate deeply felt emotions which they wished to share with readers. Literary artists, particularly poets as society's mouthpiece will be trusted to have through their writings, reacted to the circumstances of the day, commenting on what ailed the country and what solutions called. It is not just what they said that is pertinent but also the way they said it calls for awareness.

Muleka (2007) argues that a literary artist is interested, not only in what life is, but also what it ought to be. Could answers to what brought Uganda to its knees and what might heave it back to its feet be found in its history and literature?

Despite various observations, interrogations and speculations of readers and scholars, literary critics have been slow in understanding the nature of meaning of symbolism used in Ugandan poetry. To date, Critics have not been keen enough to approach the poetic material (works) with the same seriousness as expressed by these celebrated poets of the country.

Moreover, the vital role of symbolism in Ugandan poetry and its changing trends that are obvious in poetic works of both early and contemporary poets have never attracted any attention from the critics over the years, spanning from 1962 to 2006.

Therefore, the principal and the practical problem that the study addresses is the lack of systematic critical comment on the nature of meaning of symbolism employed by Ugandan poets and what this signifies in view of Ugandan society's collective consciousness socially, politically and culturally. Precisely, this study intends to address the existing lacuna by seeking answers to the following questions: What influences the general nature of symbolism used in Ugandan poetry vis-à-vis the level of interpretation

and understanding? What are the general trends in symbolism used by each of the generations in Ugandan poetry? What changes have taken place in the symbolism used by the selected poets representing the three generations of Ugandan poetry in the period specified? What is the role of symbolism used in Ugandan poetry in communicating the authors' messages to the audience?

It is also worth noting that these and other questions raised in this study are yet to receive serious, if not in-depth attention despite the fact that they may be crucial in providing answers in terms of interpretation of poetry as well as some of the problems that have over the years afflicted Uganda.

The Objectives of the Study

The study sought to achieve the following: to explain the artistic choice of symbolism in Ugandan poetry; to determine the changing trends in the use of symbolism of early and contemporary poetry of Uganda; to examine how the socio-political and socio-cultural environment has influenced the nature of symbolism used by Ugandan poets; to identify the role of symbolism as a subtle and effective technique in communicating thematic concerns in Ugandan poetry.

Justification of the study

Despite the wide use of symbolism as a poetic device by Ugandan poets to communicate their concerns and the presence of the trends of symbolism employed by early and contemporary poets, there is no attempt to bring this subject to public attention and appreciation. That is to say scholars are yet to take any in-depth analysis of symbolism in Ugandan poetry, even though such a study would guide poetry lovers on Uganda's poetic map, as well as enlighten generations on the history of Uganda as told through its literature. University scholars have held conferences to discuss Ugandan literature and have documented numerous works as reflected in our literature review, but none of these

are on symbolism in Ugandan poetry especially over the years, spanning from 1962 to 2006. This is therefore, what makes this study both a pioneering and necessary one.

In terms of literary scholarship, it is our belief that this study adds to the criticism of poetry in general and that of Ugandan writers in particular. Studying poetry by Ugandan writers is of significance because, more than any other country in East Africa, Uganda is renowned for its poetry, as opposed, for instance, to Kenya for which greater fame lies in its prose writings. In particular, our research on symbolism in Ugandan poetry is justified, because it accords this area the prominence that will enhance our understanding and interpretation of Ugandan poetic works formerly lacking systematic critical comment.

It is expected that the study will also awaken the consciousness of Ugandan peoples as it makes them sensitive and responsive to the problems or experiences of their society. Hopefully, the study will accord people the opportunity to recognise and identify with various symbols, take pride in them, apply them in different situations and pass them onto the next generations of Uganda. In so doing, the study will aid the people to preserve their literary culture.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

Geographically all the five regions of Uganda, that is to say, the North, Central, South, East and West were covered in a bid to reach the living selected poets, as well as the poetry readers who were sampled from selected Secondary Schools teaching poetry at either A- Level or School Certificate level. Practising poets, students and teachers of poetry, as well as some of the poets whose texts were used in the study were observed. The institutions of higher learning that were visited and observed were:

Makerere University in South-Central, Gulu University in the North, Kyambogo University in Central (National Teacher's Centre), Islamic University in Uganda in the East and Bishop Stuart University in the West were interviewed and their views on the subject under investigation sought.

High schools teaching poetry that were part of this study are; Makerere College School (Kampala district), Kampala Students Centre (Kampala district), Ntinda View College (Kampala district), St. Augustine College (Wakiso district) all in Central Uganda, Blessed Sacrament Kimaanya (Masaka district), Masaka SSS (Masaka district) all in Central-South, Nabumali High School (Mbale district) ,Tororo Girls School (Tororo district) all in the East, Gulu Central High School (Gulu district) in the North, and Ntare High School (Mbarara district) in the West.

While focusing attention on symbolism in Ugandan poetry, the study was limited to selected poetry ranging from 1962 – 2006. Our interest was the investigation of the nature of symbolism, trends, influences and themes in the poems selected. For the convenience of analysis, the period covered was divided into three seasons here referred to as generations. The first generation covered writing and publishing mainly during 1960s, the selected writers being Okot p'Bitek and Henry Barlow. The second generation covered writing and publishing mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, starting with Timothy Wangusa, Richard Nturu, Okello Oculi, Frank Ojera Anywar, Cliff Lubwa P'Chong and Austin Bukenya (for field data) as the writers under reference. The third generation covered writing and publishing mainly in the 1990s and 2000s). The selected writers for this period are Joseph Mugasa, Susan Kiguli, Mildred Barya Kiconco, Jotham Tusingwire (for field data), Busingye Kabumba and Christine Oryema Lalobo.

Hypotheses of the Study

The study was guided by four hypotheses: Symbolism features dominantly in all works of Ugandan poets; there are significant changing trends in the use of symbolism by early and contemporary Ugandan poets; symbols change with time and from one context to another. Moreover, a symbol is not universally applicable rather it is situational and it changes from context to context as its meaning may change with time; the socio-political and socio-cultural environment has a significant bearing on the nature of meaning of

symbolism used in Ugandan poetry; symbolism plays a significant role in communicating the central concerns of Ugandan poets.

Definition of Terms

Poetry is special kind of writing in which imagery and sound combine to create a special emotional effect. It is written in free or conventional verse form. In this study poetry refers to the imaginative response to an experience reflecting a keen awareness of language by Ugandan poets. There are many elements used in writing effective poetry. Language in poetry evokes sensory images through figures of speech.

Poem is defined as a *composition* written in verse (although verse is used equally for epic and dramatic fiction). Poems rely heavily on imagery, precise word choice, and figurative language. Poems can have many forms: strictly defined, with required line counts and rhyming patterns (closed form such as the sonnet or limerick). Some poems are written in free verse exhibiting a particular structure or at times with no apparent structure at all (open forms). Many Ugandan poems fall under this category.

Image refers to concrete representation of an experience or an object that can be known by one or more senses. Image can be described as mental picture. Imagery means any language which appeals or refers to our senses. Images invoke the reader to hear the things the poet describes (auditory images), to see them (visual images), to taste (gustatory images), to smell (olfactory images), to touch (tactile images), including kinetic imagery for motion and thermal imagery for heat, cold, and so on.

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which something (A) is identified with something else (B) in order to attribute A to a quality associated with B. For example, in the phrase "Life is but a dream" the idea of a transient illusion or unreality traditionally associated with dreams is carried over to the subject "life." A form of an extended metaphor in which objects, persons and actions are equated with meanings that lie outside the poem itself is **allegory**. It is that which represents one thing or the other. Allegorical verses use an

extended metaphor to provide the framework for the whole work. It is crucial to distinguish a symbol from a metaphor. A metaphor might read, "His life was an oak tree that had just lost its leaves"; a symbol might be the oak tree itself, which would evoke the cycle of death and rebirth through the loss and growth of leaves. Some symbols have widespread, commonly accepted meanings that most readers should recognize. Yet none of these associations is absolute, and all of them are really determined by individual cultures and time. Every user of a metaphor will have to recognize some point of identity or comparison between normally unconnected objects.

Personification is an act of giving human qualities or characteristics to animals or to non-human objects, for example; "Tears of amber fall from my soul," "The wind whispered through the trees," "The sun smiled down on the earth," "The flag waved at us," and "The statue stared at us."

Simile is a comparison using *like* or *as*, for example, "notes dance across the page like stars twinkle in the night sky" or "Like glistening sun and moon."

Symbol is the function of a concrete object to represent an abstract idea. The term, *symbol*, when applied in literature is often a figure of speech in which a person, object, or situation represent something in addition to its literal meaning. A symbol may appear in a work of literature in a number of different ways to suggest a number of different things. Most commonly, a symbol will present itself in the form of a word, a figure of speech, or an event. Conventional or traditional literary symbols work in much the same way, and because they have a previously agreed upon meaning, they can be employed to suggest ideas more universal than the physical aspect itself. Yet none of these associations is absolute, hence all of them are really determined by individual cultures and time.

Symbolism is the applied use of symbols: iconic and non-iconic representations that carry particular conventional meanings or specific meanings assigned by users. Symbolism refers to the use of a person, place, or thing or an event in order to represent

something else. Symbolism used in a poem may not always be as overt as metaphor or any other figure of speech.

Symbolism in Ugandan poetry refers to those linguistic units that suggest a meaning beyond meaning, whereas the meanings are specified by concrete social, political, cultural and historical features of Ugandan life. Symbolism in Ugandan poetry often occurs in the images drawn from the environment itself, for example "The dog of Kivulu" stands for the dwellers in worst slum conditions in Uganda.

Transference is a theory coinaging similarities between the structures of metaphors, similes, and others which both combine representational material and make something hitherto invisible visible, thereby constructing a form of experience. The aim and function of spontaneous transference is sometimes non-poetical, but when poetical it arouses or does what poetry aims for, that is, to create new meaning. This is when a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another by way of suggesting a likeness or analogy between them. The aspect of transference is significant. Indeed the word metaphor is a combination of two Greek words meaning "to carry over" or "to carry across." As Murray puts it, this term or expression was carried over from its common usage to another, whereby an uncommon one, or some qualities or attributes of one object are carried over to another, in such a way that the second object is then referred to as if it were first.

Recurrent (main) symbols encompass what the study has established as the intermittent symbolic fund of Ugandan poetry whose meanings have been critically and consistently discussed as well as repetitively analysed and traced across generations.

Non-recurrent (secondary) symbols are those symbols which constitute a vital section of irregular symbolic fund of Ugandan poetry which were identified and listed side by side main symbols but whose meaning were not consistently or even discussed at all in some cases.

Trends are patterns that a given work of art has taken over a certain period of time or it may be the general direction in which something inclines to move. In this study it means a general tendency or inclination taken up by Ugandan poets.

Ugandan Literature refers to the sum total of non-fiction and fiction texts: drama, verse (oral and written) and prose written by Ugandans or non-Ugandans raised or have lived in Uganda writing in English or any of the languages used in Uganda and beyond but about Ugandan topics. It may also refer to all writings of authors in the global village be they Ugandans or non-Ugandans, who have empirically researched or share Ugandan cultural and social experiences, course and perspective.

Literature Review

Introduction

This section is intended to bring into light a review of the literature related to the study in line with its objectives. The reviewed literature has been presented in terms of thematic concerns, meaning of symbolism, influence of the earlier writers on later writers and the effectiveness of symbolism as a communication technique. This literature review is also related to three generations of Ugandan poets, that is, the first, second and third.

Thematic Concerns

Ugandan poetry is a component of Ugandan Literature. Scholars have shown great interest in Ugandan literature, but so far much of their effort has been limited to oral discussions. In "Literary Pragmatics and the Theme of Terror", an unpublished M.A dissertation of Makerere University, written in 1994, Bukenya clearly notes the vacuum of critical comment as follows: "... scholarly criticism on most of the literary materials of Uganda as a whole is difficult to come by" (13). To date Bukenya's observation still stands because, as far as symbolism in Ugandan poetry is concerned, critics have not analytically looked at its nature, aesthetic quality and trends employed by poets of the three generations (both early and contemporary poets) in communicating their concerns. This section, therefore, adopts a thematic approach to review related works of interest to

bridge the knowledge gap on symbolism as follows: themes in Ugandan literature with due respect to poetry.

In his scholarly paper on “Ugandan Literature” (2000) Bukonya looks at a historic-literary development and scans through literary activities in Ugandan literature such as the “Oral literature research” or “Folkloric” phase of the 1930s -1950s and 1966 (golden age in Uganda’s publishing). He observes that to determine with certainty what Ugandan topics and concerns are, one has to assess carefully the characteristics exhibited in historical evolution, dominant themes and creative techniques employed in Ugandan literature. Consequently, he identifies culture, oppression, murder, disillusionment and corruption as being the outstanding themes in Ugandan literature. However, terrorising wars, which have left many painful scars on the lives of the people, comprise a major theme. Most of his writings on Ugandan literature reveal that Bukonya has lived with this theme of terrorising wars for long. In his work, Bukonya remarks and emphasises that the literary writers of Uganda were mostly preoccupied with the theme of terror. He argues that even Alex Bukonya wrote his novel *Inside Luwero Triangle* “out of the desire to immortalize the suffering which his people had gone through,” (25).

Despite his concentration on the theme of terror Bukonya does not over-dwell on the gloomy side of life, instead, he celebrates the life of some of the poets whenever possible. While commenting on Okot’s *Song of Lawino*, he remarks that the verse is probably the best-known literary work to have come out of Uganda in the dawn of the golden age because of its symbolic power that accorded a woman a literary voice. Bukonya seems to suggest that Okot was very much conscious of the situation surrounding a Ugandan woman as a victim of both sexism and culture. He says that in creating *Song of Lawino*, Okot deliberately and symbolically used Lawino, a simple village woman, to lament about Ugandans’ blind embracing of western ways of life while denying and rejecting African cultural roots. This observation by Bukonya serves as part of our basis in our study on symbolism in Ugandan poetry because it shows how Okot attaches symbolic meaning to the character of the persona to successfully get his message across to the society.

Ernesto Okello Ogwang in his article "Criticism of Okot's Poetry" looks at the issues raised in the songs and observes that Okot uses a unique idiom and poetic style to address many concerns of society, but most significantly, "binarism", the conflict between tradition and modernity preoccupies his quest. Ogwang commends the effectiveness of Okot's style of voicing the concerns about his society. He says that Okot's style is so popular that Okello Oculi, Joseph Buruga and other contemporaries of his, admire and later on personalise as experience in expressing their own views. Seemingly, this may be the reason why Ogwang argues that it is worthless for any critic to talk of Ugandan poetry without recognising Okot's original and inventive input regarded as "a legacy" of Ugandan poetry.

In the same vein as Bukenya Ogwang observes that *Song of Lawino* is the most effective of Okot's works, through which he strongly condemns "apemanship", which is blind embracing of western ways. Unlike Bukenya, who mostly appreciates *Song of Lawino* only, Ogwang sums up his synthesis of Okot's other two works by identifying major themes in each song as follows: *Song of Prisoner* concerns itself with political disenchantment and disillusionment, whereas *Song of Malaya* examines prostitution, through which a problem of the dilemma of urban migration is projected. Ogwang's study is closely linked to our study seeking to investigate how symbolism unveils themes in Ugandan poetry.

Atieno-Adhiambo in George Heron's article entitled "Okot and two Songs: a Discussion" scans through the *Song of the Prisoner* and observes that the major concerns embody political and moral dealout that were brought to light by its publication. He observes that what surprises the onlookers is the state of the prisoner characterised by a lot of frustration, hatred, and despair despite his idealism in the struggle for Uhuru. In an attempt to investigate themes in Ugandan poetry Adhiambo's study informs our study.

Margaret Marshment, in the same vein as Ogwang above, conducts an anatomy of the character of the prisoner in Okot's *Song of the Prisoner* and observes that the character of the prisoner is symbolic of the true political prisoner yet serves as a powerful symbol of

the twentieth century politics in the post-independence era. It is implied here that the prisoner symbolises a blend of national and cultural liberation given the type of language that created and sustained the effects of imprisonment. She maintains that what the character of the prisoner represents is multifaceted: Not only does it portray an individual and despotism but it portrays also "*patriotic assassination*." This means that the prisoner did not just symbolise simple individual criminals but real dignified personages fighting in the right of nationalism.

In conclusion, however, Marshment asserts that Okot's songs are not just dramatic poems sung by individual characters: Lawino, Ocol, Malaya and Prisoner for aesthetic value but that they were created to represent the ideals in his creative mind. Consequently, Okot's characters are not mere masks, but rather symbols of opinions he so desires to convey. This study agrees with her view that characters are symbolic of ideas because, as George A. Lehman in his book *Symbolism Aesthetic in France* argues, a symbol is something that represents something else, either by association or by resemblance as a material object or sign used to represent something where this kind of extension of meaning transforms the written word into a very powerful instrument.

George Heron in his article, "Okot and Two Songs, a Discussion", postulates that cultural conflict has been a major theme not only in Okot's poetry but also in the entire African literature. He says: "*The white man does not confront Okot personally in the same way, but it is his long shadow, effective through his black imitator that creates one polarity in the conflict he describes,*" (138). Heron asserts that through the choice of Lawino, Okot demonstrates that Africa's vigour is not dependent on the reflex symbols of vitality loaned from elsewhere, but rather in the renovation of its own home grown vitality. This assertion informs our study on symbolism in Ugandan literature which demonstrates that Africa has personal symbols and codes of behaviour rooted within her conventional society.

According to Heron, Okot in the *Song of Malaya* attacks the hypocrisy of those who use prostitutes during night, but do not hesitate to condemn them as immoral beings during the daytime. He observes that Okot's *Song of Prisoner* is a merged definition of the

prisoner being a vagrant, a murderer, dismissed bodyguard as well as disgraced minister. All in all Heron intends to reveal the extent to which the prisoner suffers multiplicity of hallucinations. In this song, therefore, the symbol of the prisoner is tinted as a composite of those who suffer from the ill effects of torture. Ill effects of torture hence become one of the most outstanding themes in the Song of the prisoner. Though Heron exemplifies other songs in details he does not make a mention of *Song of Ocol*. However, our study is a comprehensive one surveying Okot p' Bitek in general especially as revealed in his popular works such as *Song of Ocol* and *Song of Lawino* alongside other selected Ugandan poets.

Among other East African critics who have carried out a reading on Ugandan poetry is Monica Mweseli. In *A Study of Okot p'Bitek's Poetry*, she makes "breakthrough" for better understanding of Okot's writing. Mweseli critiques the style in general just as a means to expose themes expressed in the songs. She says:

Okot uses a variety of techniques that enhance effective communication of his ideas in the songs; each of the four songs is a dramatic monologue. The intention of each song is to support a wide range of didactic themes, (125).

It has been observed that Mweseli mainly discusses the aspects of the author and themes:

Okot also elaborately deals with the question of political ills at length in *Song of Ocol*. The post-independence status of East African countries in particular, Okot did not talk about culture only but also political situations surrounding his environment... Generally Okot's works have similar thoughts to the content of his original works, (80).

In Mweseli's study of the songs, the analysis of the political setting in East Africa is clear-cut on themes. She points out that among the songs especially in *Song of Ocol*; the Africans are portrayed as being disillusioned about the happenings in the neo-colonial era. She observes: "irrespective of their celebration the African people have had problems

even under their rulers who often do not seem to care about their problems..." (16). She also observes a similar case in *Song of the Prisoner* as she says:

The protagonist fought for uhuru and yet he is poor. A rich man who has wealth and drives a Mercedes car has seduced his wife. The poor man's children suffer from hunger and diseases; uhuru has not helped him, (80).

From Mweseli's analysis of Okot, we further note that independence (uhuru) was of no benefit for the common African who did not access seats in the parliament or any other higher ranks in the government. African leaders remained perpetually corrupt hence proved worse in leadership than their predecessors (colonial masters).

Mweseli's analysis of the songs is consistent in bringing to life the major themes found in an East African setting such as: political disturbances, cultural conflicts, corruption, poverty and disillusionment. Our study on symbolism as a creative technique employed by Ugandan poets to communicate their concerns builds on Mweseli's because it investigates how symbolism is used to communicate thematic concerns in Ugandan poetry.

Eckhard Breiting in his book *Uganda: The Cultural Landscape* also talks about the theme of culture and he says that *Song of Lawino* is depicted as a special work of art, and symbol of a cultural conflict brought to light through the persona who is an uneducated woman, but through whom Okot p' Bitek attacks the uncritical acceptance of modernization. Breiting argues that in advancing his opinions on the significance of culture in society, Okot uses a primitive character as a persona. Through her overwhelming voice the readers are compelled to contemplate and confront the conflict of cultures as a complex issue that has had to be consciously addressed. This study on symbolism in Ugandan poetry builds on this aspect as it intends to establish the role of symbolism used in Ugandan poetry.

We now embark on reviewing related literature to establishing whether or not such early poems of symbolic significance might have influenced the writing of subsequent contemporary symbolic poems.

Influence of Early Poets on the Contemporary

Concerning the writing of the early and contemporary poems, Breitingger observes that the impact of British imperialism on social organization and cultural values was the major concern of the early Ugandan poets of the period of cultural national nationalism, just before and soon after independence. After independence these poets continued to discuss different aspects of Uganda's political dilemma. Breitingger also says that the concerns of contemporary poets reflect the troubles experienced in their own land. These are customised experiences through which they are able to comment on issues world wide, or to search for a therapeutic solution to the psychological, physical and economic trauma that Uganda and Africa at large have encountered. For example, the contemporary poets concern themselves with the sensitivity that is compelling, with such topics as distraught, abandoned and orphaned children.

Our study on symbolism in Ugandan poetry, with regard to analyzing the significant relationship between earlier and contemporary poets and identifying the trends in both categories of the poems, finds Breitingger's study a useful point of departure.

Similarly, Evans Mwangi in his article "Hybridity in Emergent of East African Poetry: A Reading of Susan N. Kiguli and Her Contemporaries", concentrates on various applications of hybridity by contemporary poets. Hybridity is derived from "hybrida", a Latin term denoting an offspring of a male species of one breed and a female of another. It was a common term used in agriculture in England during the 17th century. In literary scholarship the term has been used to mean an integration of creativity of oral literature with canonical literary techniques including practices and ideologies of varied cultures and lexical items. Hybridization is a term which builds on the foundation that no society can claim monopoly of knowledge, but rather that knowledge is as a result of cross - fertilization of ideas. (Meshengyezi, 1996 p.10). This approach was proposed by scholars

such as: Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and some Afro -American as well as Carribean critics.

Mwangi applies this term to contemporary writers who seem to employ it but are critical of the styles used before and during colonial period. For instance he says:

Kiguli and her contemporaries treat cultural contacts not necessarily as alienation or conflict, but as sights of socio renewal-colonized divide. They develop the hybridity employed by earlier poets but depart from tradition by being more pointed in criticizing pre-colonial African traditions without accepting assimilation to the west, (41).

Mwangi's critical observation informs our study on symbolism in Ugandan poetry, with regard to investigating whether or not a significant relationship exists between earlier and contemporary poets. This may also give insight in identifying the trends in the poems across generations.

Mwangi's attempt to discuss categorisation of East African poetry by earlier critics is of consequence to this study because he brings out an idea of patterns and relationships of early and contemporary poets in his postulation:

Writing later, Kiguli and her contemporaries fall outside the scope of Goodwin's typology of invoking Western forms and vocabulary, as do earlier poets, such as Angira, Rubadiri, and Timothy Wangusa, Kiguli and her contemporaries are likewise critical of the west. Like Okot p' Bitek in his poetry of the 1960s and 1970s, the new poets draw from African oral traditions; but while using oral literature, Kiguli and her contemporaries deterritorialize orature to gesture at the unfairness of some traditional African practices, (46).

The poets in scope of our study are renowned writers drawn from the the East African region hence Mwangi's views are related to our study in regard to tracing the trends of symbolism in their works across generations.

We now review related literature on the notion of symbolism, its categories, nature of meaning and the concept of a poetic symbol. This is necessary because it helps our reader understand and appreciate elements in Ugandan poetry that we have considered symbolic. We are of course aware that a symbol is not universally applicable, rather, it is situational and may change from context to context and its meaning may also change with time.

Meaning, Nature of Symbolism and Categorisation

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, defines symbolism as the applied use of symbols - iconic representations that carry particular conventional meanings. Thus, symbolism transmits specific meanings and may, therefore, be a way of choosing representative symbols in line with abstract rather than literal properties.

Harmon William in his book *A Hand Book for Literature* asserts that true meaning of the symbol is the composite class and not just one specific "meaning". He believes that the symbol is not exhaustive of meaning by assigning one specific association to it. He argues that it is in this sense so frequently misunderstood that a symbol or a poem employing a symbol may be said to have different meanings for different individuals.

Apparently authors contend that like the symbols with invested meanings, which Harmon identified above, these symbols, may sometimes create meanings within a work for things that have no natural or conventional meaning outside. To develop his line of thought, he identifies two general types of symbols: a universal symbol that embodies universally recognisable meanings whenever used, - such as light to symbolise knowledge, a skull to symbolise death, - and constructed symbols that are given symbolic meaning by the way an author uses them in a literary work.

Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker and George Perkins in their book *The Harper Handbook to Literature* also classify symbols into three different consortiums: The first category is that of *natural symbols* which serve to present objects not for themselves, but for ideas people commonly associate with them; such as a 'star' to symbolise hope. The second category constitutes *conventional symbols* which represent things for the meaning people within a particular community have agreed to assign them; for example a national flag to symbolise patriotism. The third category has got to do with *literary symbols* which is the type constructed upon natural or conventional symbols that add meanings appropriate primarily with the work at hand, for example meanings in a work of art that have neither natural nor conventional associations beyond them. This taxonomy informs our study on symbolism in Ugandan poetry because it proposes that in expressing central concerns of Uganda, poets may have employed symbols consistent with various contexts proper to the nation.

Frye, Baker and Perkins further discussed the significance of symbolism in literature and they deduced that of all literary devices, it follows as the most important contraption for writers. Their conclusion was based on the fact that literary symbols extend meaning beyond the prosaic representation of mere realities afforded by literal description, or that which is extracted through analysis and exposition. These authors view symbols as a representation of ideas and themes through objects, situations or characters. These authors also argue that whereas there are many types of symbols placed on people in the society as a whole, those that are placed on women, sometimes portray them as stereotypes and that in case these symbols are literary ones, they extend the meaning of what is implied in a text beyond what is explicitly stated.

Therefore, symbols are very important in a work of art because they evoke what is extrinsic to the text by calling on the universal knowledge shared by a particular culture. The current study on symbolism in Ugandan poetry views this observation by authors as a crucial factor in investigating on symbolism as a subtle communication for thematic concerns in Ugandan poetry.

To guide us in concretising the meaning of a symbol as an object that points to reality beyond self, Daniel Abrams cites examples common to our experience (a cross, sunrise, weather seasons, scales, a dove, a rose, stars and stripes as well as the lion). Accordingly, a cross is a religious symbol. A cross points to Christianity; as a religious symbol it is not only an important aspect of many Christian denominations acting as an image of Christian faith, but largely acts as a symbol reflecting the church in particular and the existence of Christianity in general. The artistic symbolic meaning of the cross has a direct meaning varying with the context in any given poem. Thus, a cross can artistically symbolise Christianity, Jesus Christ, God, faith, love, sincerity or even duplicity and exploitation. In African history for example, we have read statements such as '*The flag followed the cross*' symbolically implying the exploitative role played by missionaries in advancing safety of foreign colonial masters who later on found it easier to conquer several parts of Africa. In that case, the cross is not a universally accepted symbol meaning Christianity or an issue to do with goodness alone.

On the wider perspective, the interpretation of abstract symbols has had an important role in religion. For example, in psychoanalysis, as envisioned by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, symbols are not the creations of the mind, but rather distinct capacities within the mind to hold a divergent piece of information. It follows, thus, that Abrams' foregoing choice of a cross as a unique image and symbol of Christianity, faith and the church is held dearly in the minds of Christians all over the world. Some other examples of symbols he exemplifies follow:

He figures that sunrise does not only stand for a new beginnings but the beginning of a new day. He observes that for example the inhabitants of Europe and the Americas seasons of a year are symbolic too. Winter is a symbol of aging, decaying and death; spring represents energy, birth, and hope; summer is symbolic of childhood, fun, and laughter, whereas autumn stands for maturity, wisdom, and fulfilment. To illustrate his point future he gives some as examples such as: the scales to symbolise justice; a dove to symbolise peace, the rose to stand for purity: the lion to represent strength and courage.

The author argues that some symbols may have meanings that are double-edged or sometimes even completely contrasting, for example the red colour is conventionally used to connote blood and, therefore, life or uniformity of humans (brotherhood), as in the case of the Uganda flag. At the same time, the same colour is used to symbolise danger. Therefore, the red colour would carry two meanings depending on the context. In poetry, therefore, the meaning of the symbols would be implied to the context of the poems. Apparently, symbols are crucial not only in (poetry) literature but in real life situation; we come across many people who use symbols in everyday life claiming that they are user-friendly and that they also act as short cuts to ideas.

Shipley Joseph Twadel in *A World Dictionary for Literary Terms* concurs with Abrams, when he refers to symbolism as the representation of a reality on one level of reference by a corresponding reality on another. Differently put, he means that an object, idea or incident used as a symbol is a reality that represents another reality. In his further understanding of the term Shipley upgrades the meaning of symbolism to denote the use of visible or palpable things as specific signs or tokens to represent things, forces, qualities, universal truth; signification through real or sensory objects or occurrence. He finally brings the reader home when he supposes that symbolism also refers to the imaginative use in art or literature of inanimate phenomena for meanings beyond the real immediate world, invested or latent meaning.

In this case, one notes that the object used as a symbol adds meaning that is beyond itself. Therefore, a symbol is used to disclose a hidden meaning. Through it, the reader's eyes of imagination sees the invisible or hidden truth. This hidden truth is disclosed through a process of association. In brief, anything that is used to represent another is called a symbol, and as a symbol it is generally visible or easily perceptible, plain, obvious, readily visible, noticeable, patent, distinct and manifest. Authors generally observe that symbolism may as well refer to a way of choosing representative symbols in line with abstracts rather than literal properties. In this way there may be an allowance for the broader interpretation of carried meaning rather than more literal concept. Our study on symbolism in Uganda poetry accepts these views by authors for its enhancement.

It is also pertinent to note that since symbols attain their meaning over time, their meaning does not remain fixed but it is rather exposed to various interpretations from the universal world. With time and space symbols evolve and attain new shades of meaning. This line of argumentation may direct our respondents in conceptualizing the changing trends of symbolism in Ugandan poetry.

Therefore, symbols, whether specific (individual) or conventional (public), may make sense only according to the context in which they have been used. Likewise, this study assumes that the meaning of symbols in Ugandan poetry would shift with the context in which they are used in three generations of Ugandan poets. Borrowing from universal understanding of symbols, Ugandan poetry attaches varying meanings to universal symbols and creates its own specific ones. Apparently it is observed that poets seem to have drawn upon a variety of forms and structures from the surrounding environment in formation of their works.

According to Zilibele Mtumane, symbolism and the use of symbols are features of quality poetry. He observes that a symbol entails the use of an object, idea or incident to stand for or represent another. This is true in respect to the nature of symbolism used in Ugandan poetry. Symbolism enriches Ugandan poetry and accords it unique dimension. For example, Okot P. Bitek's *Song of Lawino* depicts a woman who is symbolically representing a series of African cultural values. *Song of Lawino* can often be understood at a very simple level but when one understands the symbolism used, it becomes much richer than it is.

The term "symbolism" itself is probably incapable of exact definition and in the course of many varied literary studies where so many words denoting so many things seem to function symbolically; it almost departs from its original meaning. However, as a technique in poetry the researcher generally agrees that symbolism represents the effort to communicate by means of a unique personal language, ideas, feelings and sensations more faithfully than they are rendered through the conventional and universal language of

ordinary literature. The function of this language is to intimate things rather than state them plainly.

From the discussion and interpretation of authors we realize that a symbol in poetry alludes to something that sounds more powerful if approached from a different dimension rather than being stated directly. Symbols tend to move on a deeper level bringing meaning that depends on suggestion rather than statement. Indeed, scholars' understanding of a symbol is that it is an image in a poem that communicates meaning beyond its face value. This view could be strengthened by Chris Baldick who postulates that a *symbol* has come to mean generally the study of any cultural product such as a text or a formal system of signs that emphasises the use of images, signs and symbols through which meaning is created and produced.

In this statement, we note that Baldick does not only view symbolism as a study of any cultural product but as a study that emphasises the use of images, signs and symbols. In effect, apparently, these views may guide the selected readership to identify symbols from poems as images having a strong linkage to various aspects of social environment. Symbols qualify as images considering the demands of an image as perceived by Richard Bauman:

Performance of an image represents a transformation of the basic referential uses of language. In other words in artistic performance, there is something going on in the communicative inter- change which says to the listener, interpret what I say in some special sense; do not take it to mean what the words, taken literally, would convey, (292).

The method of writing in poetry is commonly more figurative than literal whereby comparison is more often stated in metaphors than in straight forward terms. Muleka's discussion on images of women in "Images of Women in Bakhayo Bweya Oral Poetry and their Social Significance for Girl Children," enlightens this sense, thus:

In effect, the choices made give rise to images that may be explained in terms of metaphors and similes but also find related expression in other aspects such as symbolism, irony, personification and other figures of speech, (56).

Critics often define poetry in relation to its form and techniques, as depicting a patterned language that dramatizes life's experiences in a strongly emotional, tightly economical and an elevated way. Andrew Amateshe his edition of an Anthology of East African Poetry postulates: Poetry is simply a form of expression either oral or written. It is a form of communication between the artist, his audience or the reader, (2). From the authors' views we infer that poetry is the content of thought where attention is directed to images and figures of speech (transference). Scholars tend to postulate that a poem is much more than written words on a page because it is part of live language, speech and human talk, so the things to be looked for in a poem should be searched alongside who is speaking; what is the subject matter which he/she utters, has he/she got an audience? How does he/she speak? What is his style and aesthetic effect of the poem? Which meaning is implied and is valid in the poem? Symbolism is therefore an aspect of style.

In his study on style of poetry Charles Chadwick observes that the word *symbol* can be used to describe any mode of expression which, instead of referring to something directly implied, it refers to it indirectly through the medium of something else. He purports that poetic symbolism can be regarded as the art of expressing ideas and emotions, not by describing them directly, nor by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images but by suggesting what these ideas and emotions are and by recreating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplained symbols.

Bauman and Chadwick in their definitions seem to agree that a symbol elicits ideas and emotions, and it is these that lend meaning to the symbol within the context, in which it occurs. In the same vein as Bauman Chadwick introduces an important dimension to symbolism as imagery that elicits the desired ideas or emotions through unexplained symbols. He argues that a symbol should not be ambiguous, but at the same time it ceases to be a symbol if its meaning is not hidden at the superficial level. This could again be

illustrated by our previously quoted example of the cross as a symbol. Indeed, the cross is not an ambiguous sign or image, yet it has rich but hidden meanings beyond its mere face value, as we elucidated earlier on.

Understanding the nature of symbolism in Ugandan poetry is crucial because having nurtured many poets, Uganda is known as a home of East African poetry. Okot p' Bitek is one of the authors credited with putting Uganda on the poetic map. His most popular piece, memorised almost by all schooled Ugandans and widely read abroad, is *Song of Lawino*. This tradition of Ugandan poetry has been successfully handed down, in that Okot Benge and Alex Bangirana have compiled an anthology of poetry which has become very popular among Uganda schools. The anthology is referred to as a representation of a whole range of Uganda's social milieu and poetic spectrum loaded with tears and cheers, aspirations and frustrations, various cultural lags and experiences that lay bare the nation's soul. The authors deem the purpose of Ugandan poetry an explication of numerous models of human responses to the problems inherit in a country that was once ruled by very hostile dictators. This is the reason why practitioners of our study were all sampled from this assertion.

Currently, Uganda boasts over 60 published poets. In fact Ugandan poetry occupies the central place within Ugandan literature and is one of the key components taught at post-graduate level in Ugandan institutions of higher learning. Uganda is a home of oral genres, which are beyond the focus of this study. It has been observed by the authors in this study that Ugandan poets present norms, beliefs and traditions held precious to the country using symbolism. In our review of related literature, we observe that authors' earlier researches may indeed inform our reading and interpretation. For instance, readers constituting the reading community may identify symbols basing on the ideas and emotions roused in them upon reading and appreciating the given poems. Besides, readers may not only explain the selected symbols using other poems or experiences but rather on relating meaning in context.

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

A theoretical framework is a model that imparts foundations for inquiries and serves to steer research. The theoretical framework employed in this study endeavoured to explain and clarify symbolism, the issue under investigation. This study assumed an eclectic approach, employing psychoanalysis, sociological, stylistics, semantics and reader-response theories, for their relevance in investigating the main thematic and stylistic trends descriptive in Ugandan poetry. In explaining, defining, discussing and describing, these theories guide us on how to analyse Ugandan poetry for the effect of using symbolism through content analysis and field study survey. These approaches are used as methods to critique and evaluate symbolism in Ugandan poetry as well as assess how subtle and aesthetic its communication of various issues is.

The Psychoanalytic Approach

Psychoanalysis was advanced by Sigmund Freud, a German psychologist; however, its relevance to literature was developed only in the twentieth century with critics such as Jacques Lacan and Jane Gallop. According to Dominic Dipio (p.129), psychoanalysis views literature as a process of psychological exploration meant to uncover repressed sentiments, verbalising what had been unacceptable and repudiated. As indicated above, psychoanalysis critics claim that the behaviour of the poet is shaped by the surrounding; hence his/her entire secrets and intimate desires find vent through art. Seemingly, this includes the idiom and overriding symbols used in poetry that may not only shade light on the poet's psyche but also on the creative process, the psychological types, principles of art as well as the effects of art on readers.

Another view point of this theory viable for our study on symbolism in Ugandan poetry is that of Carl Jung whose developments were independent of Freudian framework yet constituted the only other school of psychoanalysis that has equally maintained a significant following. The Jungian perspective emphasises myth and the presence of a collective unconsciousness on the mind of the artist. He hypothesizes that a collective

unconsciousness that preoccupies memories exists in all people; though this is different from Freudian's view in that it is engrossed in innateness inherent in human nature rather than that created by repression. In order to examine our assumption that the artistic choice of symbolism plays a significant role in communicating (themes) central concerns of Ugandan poets it is useful to draw on psychoanalysis theory pertinent to its importance of exploring the interaction between the subtle choice of symbolism and environmental factors involved in the production of poetic- thematic concerns of Ugandan poets.

This approach was useful in explaining the portrayal of the poet's psyche by answering the following questions: why did Ugandan poets employ the symbols rooted in socio-political environment? What deep-felt impulses and personal convictions were captured in the symbols used by these poets? And is it possible that the poets were reacting to the dictates of the environment they lived in?

Sociological Approach

Sociological approach of Plato's utilitarian advance to literature as propounded by Taine and Visco is not far removed from psychoanalysis as far as literature in context is concerned. Adams Hayard, editor of The Critical Theory since Plato observes that the claims of sociological approach are that literature should serve a purpose within a given context. Critics and most subscribers to the sociological approach place stress on the two terms "literature and society"; Joseph Muleka exemplifies this relationship in his Study: 'Images in Abakhayo Bweya Oral Poetry and their social significance for Girl Childrens':

Under the sociological theoretical framework, literature is interpreted from the point of view of its social function of storing, interpreting and transmitting the values of a given society. Similarly, society is viewed as the foundation upon which literature is created, (8).

Similarly, Ugandan poetry genre can be seen as a store, an aerial of knowledge and all sorts of ideals dear to the Ugandan society. When symbolism in Ugandan poetry is

interpreted from the point of view of Sociological approach that pays attention to various aspects of the social setting, we may possibly delve into this knowledge. Our justification could also be given credence by Dipio's observation on the tenet:

The sociological critics...believe that art has an important relationship with the society. The understanding of this relationship may deepen the aesthetic appreciation of a work of art ...what makes a work of art great and relevant is to mirror social realities, (155).

We, therefore, applied sociological theory because of the assumption that the nature of symbolism featuring eminently in poetic works of Uganda is rooted in various societal dimensions. To grasp the meaning of symbolism implies studying the contexts (setting) in three generations under which the poems were written. The assumption that the socio-political and socio-cultural environment has a significant bearing on the nature of symbolism used in Ugandan poetry. Moreover, the postulation that Uganda's social and cultural environment influences the nature and the aesthetic choice of symbolism used by Ugandan poets to express their concerns could be checked basing on sociological approach because of its overriding emphasis on the relationship between literature and society. This theory gives prominence to Ugandan poetry as a mirror of society that has produced it and, consequently its symbolism represents the manner in which the image behaves in the mirror: just as a word is what it is in a sentence, language is what it is in context.

The Stylistic Approach

The stylistic approach also fits evaluation of symbolism in poetry for our interpretation of Ugandan literary thematics. Roman Jakobson was the first scholar to combine the study of poetic language with the vigorous analysis of patterns of linguistics. Sebeok, A. Thomas expounds that in linguistics and poetics Jakobson is regarded as an important figure who hooks up various strands in the development of stylistics. As a theory, stylistics explores how readers interact with the language of (mainly literary) texts in order to explain the understanding and effect texts create on them. Stylistics can be seen

as a logical extension of moves within literary criticism to concentrate on studying texts rather than authors.

The extent to which stylistics concentrates on the text rather than the author is confirmed by Sebeok, who postulates that proponents of stylistics regard literary language as an important tool in any work of art because they believe that content, is communicated through form. Consequently, Sebeok stresses that stylistics theoretical framework informs the style of a work and the choice of linguistic features a poet employs to express himself/herself. Indeed, it seems obvious to us that poetry, the most culturally valued and aesthetically prestigious form of language practice is best studied using stylistics, a resource developed in the field of linguistics. The use of symbolism in Ugandan poetry is part of the poet's choice of communication. Symbolism is an aspect of poetry that falls under style, therefore ,it can be best studied through the eye of stylistics.

While reflecting on the notion of style, Roger Fowler Geoffrey N. Leech and Donald C .Freeman assert that in poetry, symbolic language is essentially presented through diction either denotatively or connotatively or through mental representation by the use of imagery, or as figures of speech. Mandating on stylistics these authors urge us to analyse the text in detail and take careful account of what we know about how people read when arguing for particular views of texts. We, therefore, subscribe to stylistic approach as a guideline for library research and content analysis of Ugandan poetry because of the assumption that symbolism features eminently in these poetic works and that there are significant changing trends in the use of symbolism by both early and contemporary poets under three generations. Moreover, the artistic choice to use symbolism plays a significant role in communicating central concerns (themes) of Ugandan poets.

This helps the study to answer pertinent questions such as: What is symbolism? What is the nature of symbols used in Ugandan poetry? Or what type of symbols appear in the poetry of the Ugandan writers? Stylistics enabled the researcher to address the issues of interpretation and understanding but specifically assessed and answered the questions: how effective is the use of symbolism as a tool for communicating the intended messages? And, how do poets choose linguistic features to communicate a given

message? In addition, what is the relationship between form and content in regard to symbolism in Ugandan poetry?

Semantic Analysis

The study also adopts tenets drawn from two approaches of meaning, namely: the semantic analysis of meaning and a foundational theory of meaning, which collectively critique semantics in a work of art. According to *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* a semantic approach is that which assigns contents to expressions in a language, while a foundational approach of meaning is one which states the facts in virtue of which expressions have the semantic contents constituted. Semantics as an approach is consistent with psychoanalysis and sociological theories; as David Lewis observes, the description of possible languages or grammars is done in terms of abstract semantic systems as well as in the psychological and sociological facts. As abstract semantic systems, symbols are associated with aspects of the world; and, as psychological and sociological facts, each particular symbol of these abstract semantic systems is the one used by a particular person or the whole population.

Therefore, semantics is an approach which tries to explain meaning in terms of the relationship between linguistic expressions and propositional attitudes of users of the relevant language. A common view in the philosophy of the mind and cognitive science is that the propositional attitudes of subjects are underscored by an internal language of thought, comprised of mental representations. According to Laurence Stephen the researcher applied semantics by explaining linguistic meaning directly in terms of the contents of mental representations, while thinking of language processing as pairing linguistic expressions with mental representations and thinking of the meaning of the relevant expression used by individual poets as being inherited from the content of the mental representation with which their language is paired. Apparently, language philosophers seem to suggest that a semantic theory should assign some value to sentences or symbols other than a truth-value.

In view of the above, semantic approach was used in this study because the study sought the description and meaning of symbols in Ugandan poetry answering the questions: What is the meaning of this or that symbol (for a particular individual poet or group or entire generation of Ugandan poets)? In virtue of what facts particular to individual poet or group or entire generation of Ugandan poets does the symbol have meaning? Thus, theory of meaning as semantic theory and a foundational theory was appropriate in the study due to its adherence to specification of the meanings of symbolic words, phrases and sentences or some symbol system used in Ugandan poetry.

The task of the study partly consisted of describing symbols identified in Ugandan poetry and its different categories. The study was interested in semantics because it was found to provide criteria for discerning different sorts of meaning expressions of given symbols in Ugandan poetry, including associative meanings the expressions have. Similarly, our study was also interested in the nature of symbols and how in general one set of symbols becomes a system governing a particular generation of Ugandan poets that is to say that, since presumably the fact that a generation chooses one system of symbols rather than another could be traceable to something about that generation. Thus, the question 'In virtue of what facts about a poet or group of poets does that symbol or group of symbols acquire meanings specific to a particular group or generation of poets?' is answered through the help of semantic approach. Moreover, semantic approach helped us to take into account not only specific symbols per se, for example, **house**, but also the symbols semantically related to them, that is to say, those whose meanings are defined by the same set of facts in the experience of a particular poet, group or generation. For instance, we found that the symbols semantically related to that of the **house** are: **home, homestead, hut, village** and even **garden**.

The Reader- Response Theory

Our field research employed reader- response theory advanced by proponents such as: Stanley Fish, Louise Rosenblatt, and Wolfgang Iser. The theory asserts that the reader rather than the author is significant in the interpretation of the work of art and that each reader assigns a poem an independent meaning. However, what is appealing to our study is that which Aaron Mushengyezi in *20th Century Theory*, comments while pondering

Wolfgang Iser's literary repertoire of the reader -response:

Our social setting, cultural experience and ideologies in general inevitably influence our perception of the world and hence our interpretation of what we read. We tend to understand the "world of the text" against the background of our own "world of reality," (39).

This implies that the reading is spatial and temporal, it is always reverential, and therefore, there is no objectivity in the reading of a poem by one reader only. The worth of any reading of a text depends on the competence of the reader, especially the well-versed reader. The proponents of this theory claim that meaning is as dependent upon the reader as it is on the poem. Furthermore, there is no universal, absolute interpretation of poems rather; there can be several seeming interpretations. An interpretive community can assign a poem varied meanings. Wolfgang Iser analyses the effect of a text on both the implied reader and the actual reader. Iser's implied reader is the hypothetical reader who appreciates the aesthetic beauty in the poem.

Critics such as David Bleich, Norman Holland and Stanley Fish, in Jane Tompkins's *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, have expanded the focus of reader-response theory to encompass the validity and significance of interpretations guided by the environments or communities in which the readers reside. This happened in the late 1970s and 1980s due to the influence of trends from other disciplines especially psychology and psychoanalytical theories. The expansion brought in the study of the reader as subject, a combination of various social practices defined and positioned socially by his or her environment. This shift from the relationship between reader and text, and their mutual impact, to a focus on self-knowledge and observation has been summarized in anthologies, including other critical studies speculated in the modern era.

On the whole, the tenets of reader-response motivated our intention to incorporate fieldwork in this research. The tenets of the theories explained above have been applied in the interpretation of symbolism in Ugandan poetry. In a discussion integrating field

data with our own comprehension, we simultaneously used psychoanalysis, sociological, stylistics and semantics to ensure concentrated reading of the text and critical analysis of symbolism in the selected poetic texts, whereas reader-response applied mainly to an interpretative community of perceived, competent and informed readers set up through the purposive sampling of literary practitioners of more or less the same educational background. These were asked to read and respond to the same texts and then be guided to reflect on their responses in a group focused interaction.

Since this study employed library and field research, the study adopted the reader-response approach because of the need to juxtapose the inter-relationship between literary symbolic language and the setting and the effectiveness of using such poetic literary language that would be judged from the researcher and the audience's view point: the audience being A-level students of poetry. This approach was relevant because the study involved the reader reading the set poems and responding to them. Given that a symbol may not be universal, the responses of the readers helped us in determining what is it that constitutes the symbol? Moreover, what interpretation could be accorded to a particular symbol and would the interpretation be universal or contextual?

Methodology

This study commenced with rigorous repetitive critical reading of the selected poetic texts. However, it is believed that no one has the monopoly of knowledge; hence from the very onset of the study the researcher undertook to collect views from varied sources especially students of poetry in A- Level Secondary Schools through group-focussed interviews. Besides, the researcher observed teachers, literary critics and poets themselves. Secondly, mainly, the researcher concentrated on extensive critical, syntopical and analytical reading of the selected material by Ugandan poets so as to comprehend the technique of symbolism, its nature and role as well as trends and meanings of the selected symbols in different generations of Ugandan poets. Appropriate instruments based on an empirical qualitative method were also administered by the researcher. These were mainly interview schedules, opinionaires, questionnaires, direct

observations and written reports, based on critical reading. This study was, therefore, based on several classes of data, both archival (library based) and fieldset, in that the researcher's own reading of Ugandan poetry, as well as the critical analysis of the poetry (comprising the archival aspect) was integrated into field data collected through interviews, observation and opinionnaires from the target sample. It is important to note also, that poets, critics and those individuals who read poetry as a passion were merely observed. This strategy of observing especially the poets allowed a poetic technique of symbolism with an inside view of the poets' own thinking indirectly on critique regarding Ugandan concerns. The researcher made use of telephone interviews and e-mail facilities to overcome the problem of distance, since some the poets were scattered all over Uganda and beyond.

The methodology of this study also provided for a consultation of another set of data informative to its nature from the critical accounts about the works of the poets, especially Okot, written by earlier researchers and biographers from Africa and afar. This is to say that the researcher carefully scrutinised both published and unpublished documents such as monographs, dissertations, manuscripts, books, articles in journals and review of commentaries and anthologies of Ugandan poetry to attain views on the subject. This was enabled by visiting libraries, archives, individuals and institutions in order to collect the requisite data.

We employed an analytical and descriptive approach, a research design under qualitative method. Paul Ogula in *Research Methods: a School Focused Approach*, says that qualitative method is the best design in analysing primary and secondary data arising from arts and humanities. Therefore, this study was by definition primarily qualitative in allowing an integration of the responses of the selected reading community including ours.

The critical reading of the selected poetry by the researcher, an analysis of this in terms of the poets' employment and treatment of symbolism and establishment of the nature and viable trends of the treatment of symbolism in the texts was done comparatively and

contrastively along side the approaches discussed in the theoretical framework. We conceptualised the poetry mostly by applying the tenets from psychoanalysis, sociological approach, stylistics, semantics and reader-response theories, the latter being the major theory for our field research.

For purposes of interview schedules, observations and questionnaires, the respondents were selected as follows: 10 practicing poets whose texts had been selected for study, 20 literary scholars (who included teachers, experts) and critics, and mainly 80 advanced level high school literature students (form five or form six finalists). These respondents purposively sampled from the five regions presented in the Scope and Limitations, gave responses that were compared and contrasted so as to find ways of interpreting symbolism before generalisations or conclusions were reached. Selections of poems from a total of 16 Ugandan poets were compiled and the selected respondents were asked to read and respond to them. Each respondent was given a minimum of two and a maximum of five poems. In this manner, all the selected poems were critically appreciated by the selected respondents. The poets, students and critics were observed and interviewed and their responses recorded either on paper (questionnaires) or their views captured on video as reflected in the appendices (see picture down load from video).

Sampling Techniques and Procedure

The researcher got an introduction letter from the University of Nairobi to enable her gain access to the key respondents. She then fixed appointments with the respondents and carried out data collection with the assistance of one research assistant. In course of this exercise, the researcher employed both purposive sampling and simple random sampling methods. Since it is not everyone who can possibly be a poet, purposive sampling procedures were used to select key informants or respondents that is, people with technical or specific information on poetry. While care was taken to strike gender balance in this sample, this was not a requirement other than simply for the purpose of ensuring that everyone from target group was included. In the case of observing experts and critics, those teaching, writing and reading poetry, as their main scholarly interests were preferred, and the student respondents were, wherever possible, selected from those

attending a course in poetry or Ugandan literature at the time of research. By involving such varied readership as our respondents, we were able to access and collate the varied views and use the same to validate our own interpretations. The interpretation of the results from the field data constitutes a whole chapter (six) in the thesis.

Participatory and observation methods were employed in the process of collecting the relevant data based on group focused interviews set up through the purposeful sampling from Ugandan setting. At the beginning of the exercise, the researcher and the research assistant paid purposive visits to schools to survey resources, observe and discern their stand on poetry (and the teaching of Literature) as well as establish a workable schedule and rapport. After determining the literary reputation in the schools sampled, we then distributed poems alongside questionnaires on our second visit. This was done so as to allow our respondents time to interact with poetic material and the instruments well in advance before date of group focused discussion. Focusing on the stylistic aspect of symbolism in these texts, the practitioners were asked to read and respond to the same texts while being guided through questioning and probing techniques. The determining factor was current active engagement in literary activity through discussion, observation and participation, critical reading and response to the texts, review of questionnaires items and critical documents, interviews, conversations and discussions with the selected student readers.

Types of Data / Instruments

The research study entailed both primary and secondary sources in the collection process. The primary source of data collection involved going to the field to collect views using several instruments of data collections, which included the following: questionnaires observations and interview guides. The study adopted a semi-structured questionnaire also known as mixed questionnaire (documented in the appendices) that has both closed and open type of questions. It is a type which, according to Gosh (2000) is the best for qualitative research for humanities and social sciences. The questionnaires were administered to all the designated individuals (A-Level students): the respondents who were willing to spare time to read and fill the questionnaires, upon which their responses

were recorded, tabulated, discussed and interpreted. Whereas an interview guide was used especially to collect information from respondents who were less willing to spare time to read and fill in the questionnaire but whose views were equally important such that they were recored and processed.

Data Analysis and Processing /Measurement of Variables.

The researcher employed qualitative analysis methods in which completed semi-structured questionnaires were edited to check for accuracy at the end of each day before being coded and finally entered by the computer. Whereas the qualitative data collected through the in-depth group focused interviews through narration, was continuously and rigorously analyzed for effectiveness of the use of symbolism by Ugandan poets. Besides qualitative record of narration, analytic table framework guided the researcher in formulating compact tabulation of the categorisation of symbols.

Data Presentation Method in Content Analysis

This entailed systematic organization and synthesis of the research data category. It also involved categorizing, ordering, manipulating and summarizing the data and describing them in meaningful terms such as generations. Thus, the researcher refocused on describing the recurrent symbols generation by generation to demonstrate that the recurrency of symbols in respective generations was deliberate and not a mere repetition. This method or technique for qualitative data presentation was preferred due to its ability to provide in-depth and comprehensive elaboration that will be used to develop a detailed understanding of the evolution of symbols across generations under the period specified for the investigation - from independence to the beginning of the new century. The findings are discussed and data presented in the corresponding chapters of the work, to facilitate better understanding and interpretation. Some of the subtitles for which analysis of symbols were subjected in content analysis included poet, poem, symbol, meaning and insights on thematic concerns; this analytic frame work proved helpful on clarity in yielding comprehensive summaries at the end.

The results of the critical analysis of the texts form the core of this study, whereas the field data primary responses documented in chapter six constitutes its integral part

CHAPTER TWO

Recurrent Symbols in Ugandan Poetry: The First Generation

Introduction

This chapter identifies the common symbols found in the poetry of a cross section of selected Ugandan poets spread over three generations as delineated in our Scope and Limitations. The chapter critically discusses the symbols recurring in the three generations. As noted previously, the study set out to investigate the nature of the subtle technique of symbolism in Ugandan poetry using the material of sixteen poetry anthologies and books by a total of twelve authors from three generations of Ugandan poets. This chapter looks at how the recurrent symbols identified are applied in the poetry of the first generation.

Symbols seem to be the subtle tools poets employ to give their work more depth and expressivity. In writing their poetry, Ugandan authors have come up with a variety of symbols, some of which recur in all three generations of Ugandan poets. Below we provide a brief outline of the methodology that we used for discerning and defining these apparently recurrent and permanent (main) symbols.

Symbols in Ugandan Poetry: Nature of Symbols, Categorisation and Interpretation

Analysing material from sixteen books by twelve authors from three generations of Ugandan poets, we discerned a total of seventy four various symbols. However, we cannot pretend to have been exhaustive as subsequent critics may find even more symbols. However, in the course of the analysis, we decided not to highlight all of the symbols we identified in the study. The main reason for this decision was the fact that some symbols are not encountered that frequent. They feature in the works of a few poets only, or even in just one generation. Such symbols we categorised as “non-recurrent symbols” as opposed to “recurrent” (also referred to as main) symbols, used by most or at least the prominent poets of all the three generations. The total of recurrent or main symbols is twenty-six, roughly one third of the total number (seventy-four) of symbols we identified. Below is a list of the symbols divided into two categories: recurrent and non-recurrent.

Categorization of symbols

recurrent (main) symbols

- ❖ homestead (home, house, hut, village)
- ❖ blood
- ❖ ancestors, dead; elders
- ❖ dance, song, drum
- ❖ politician, state official, ruler, leader
- ❖ spear, arrow, shield, sword
- ❖ tree
- ❖ guns, weapons
- ❖ mountain, hill
- ❖ westernisation
- ❖ car, automobile
- ❖ alcohol
- ❖ bones, skulls
- ❖ metal, machine
- ❖ silence
- ❖ millet, sorghum
- ❖ children
- ❖ teacher, education (modern knowledge, new ideas)
- ❖ money, money economy
- ❖ mass media
- ❖ army, police
- ❖ grave
- ❖ beggar, slum
- ❖ speech ([political), slogan
- ❖ earth, soil
- ❖ church, priest

non-recurrent symbols

- ❖ breasts
- ❖ bullet
- ❖ testicles, penis
- ❖ stone, cement, concrete
- ❖ priest
- ❖ new political language
- ❖ black(ness), dark(ness), night
- ❖ dogs, hyenas
- ❖ ash, dust
- ❖ owl
- ❖ flesh
- ❖ squad
- ❖ bodies
- ❖ politics as theatre (circus)
- ❖ granary
- ❖ city
- ❖ eyes
- ❖ fire
- ❖ emancipation, gender equality
- ❖ pot, gourd
- ❖ lips
- ❖ question
- ❖ fat(ness)
- ❖ plane, aircraft
- ❖ (crested) crane
- ❖ vulture
- ❖ ghost
- ❖ rhino, elephant
- ❖ smile
- ❖ water
- ❖ rain
- ❖ river
- ❖ wizard, sorcerer
- ❖ pumpkin
- ❖ umbilical cord
- ❖ official functions
- ❖ lice (worms, jiggers)
- ❖ fate
- ❖ wall, fence, border
- ❖ prostitute
- ❖ soul (spirit)
- ❖ train
- ❖ war
- ❖ times of Amin and Obote
- ❖ nationalism
- ❖ pearl
- ❖ bull
- ❖ teeth

Source: Computed from Primary, Secondary Data and Content Analysis

We are quite aware of the fact that it would be at least desirable to shed some light on the non-recurrent symbols some of which could ideally be called "private" symbols (those immanent only in the works of a particular poet). However, we realise that even a brief analysis of these symbols (since they are also many), would considerably increase the volume of the study, making it insurmountable. We, thus, decided to concentrate here on the main or recurrent ones, reserving the others for future studies.

The discussion below aims to point out the nature of specific recurrent symbols; their categorization and interpretation in the context of literary works. However, before the analysis of the symbols, it would be prudent to briefly introduce the poets (two in total) discussed under the first generation and their selected works which we utilized in our analysis. We take note that the introduction does not necessarily concentrate on biographical data of the poets; but focuses rather on the nature of their works that host the symbols we are analysing. We chose to limit biographical information because earlier researchers have been so concerned about such inform so much so that these poets have become well known by now. It also may be noticed that the chapter analyses only one collection by Henry Barlow and the whole of the four texts by Okot P'Bitek. Such an 'imbalance' is caused by the simple fact that, as a writer, Okot P'Bitek was simply more prolific, and also his genre of choice were long poems, whereas Barlow was more inclined towards shorter poems, and thus his collected works were published recently in one book. Nevertheless, both poets produced major influence on their successors, and in fact two of them may be deemed as 'sages of the first generation' in Ugandan poetry.

Song of Lawino

Many consider Okot P'Bitek a cultural nationalist. This consideration is based on his concentration on cultural symbolism especially in the *Song of Lawino*, where he draws on symbols taken from traditional African (namely, Acoli) culture. Indeed, Okot went round the problem of bilingualism by first writing his "songs" (as he called his long poems, actually establishing the "song school" in Ugandan poetry) in Acholi and then translating them into English. In *Song of Lawino*, published in English in 1966, Okot's main concern was to show Western influences on African culture. Commenting on Okot's work, Monica Mweseli writes:

Okot is unique because instead of emulating Western usage of such elements as imagery or figurative language, he utilizes Acoli images successfully. Okot has a thorough knowledge of his African oral literary tradition. This makes it even easier and more comfortable for him to use African images. Okot's use of African images in his poems helps him to retain the meaning of the African ideas he is presenting. In his poetry, one can see clear links to traditional songs, proverbs, and other forms of oral literature, (20).

As an example illustrating the use of such symbols in Okot's poetry, Mweseli discusses the symbol of the pumpkin (in our study it was identified and categorised as a private symbol) which is one of the most known in the poem:

Pumpkins either grow wildly around the house or they are cultivated in African communities. The leaves of pumpkins are eaten as green vegetables. The fruit from the pumpkin is also cooked and eaten. Being a luxury food, pumpkins are eaten only once in a while. However, when the owner of the homestead is migrating or moving to another place, he does not uproot the pumpkin in the homestead, similarly, Okot says the Africans who receive Western education should not destroy and abandon their customs. Okot here makes an appropriate comparison between Ocol's rejection of his African values and the fact that the pumpkin in the old homestead should not be uprooted, (22).

Mweseli actually gives an accurate interpretation of Okot's message contained in this symbol which pleads with the reader that in considering moving to other places he/she should not abandon completely the old fond one. She observes that by using such a symbol, Okot ushered in the hybridisation of cultures in the end. In other words, Okot is discouraging the total abandoning of one's culture in favour of foreign cultures and encouraging the retention of what one has. Critics have sometimes accused Okot of advocating for adamant holding onto the past. On the contrary, it seems that Okot actually encourages a synthesis of cultures: (one could move to a new homestead, but the pumpkin in the old homestead must not be uprooted). However, the seriousness with which he employs this symbol illustrates its recurrent appearance on the first and last page of the poem where it becomes a showcase that Okot is totally attached to his roots:

Become barren of insults and

Stupidity,

Who has ever uprooted the

pumkin?..., (12).

The wealth in your house,

Ocol my husband,

Son of the Bull,

Let no one uproot the

Pumkin?, (98).

This verse may have compelled Mweseli to come to conclusion that:

Song of Lawino is based on a real social problem, experienced in many rural places in East Africa. Initially, in East Africa, men received education up to higher levels than women. Some even went abroad for further studies, leaving their wives in rural villages. The result was that there was often trouble when a husband with all his Western ideals returned to live with his wife who remained entrenched in her African values. Such marriages sometimes dissolved, especially if the husband behaved like Ocol and had contempt for all the African ways of life held by his wife and family... (31).

Song of Ocol

In the Foreword to Monica Mweseli's book entitled; 'A study of Okot p'Bitek's Poetry', Chris Lukorito Wanjala writes:

Okot wrote his books when the clamour for decolonization was at its zenith. He worried about the appearance of the African youth wearing Western hair styles, rings in their noses and chains on their ankles, irrespective of their gender. Although his books were written in the 1960's, 1970s and 1980s, they still ring with relevance to the present day African culture which is being engulfed by Western life style in the face of what is glibly referred to as "globalization", (xv).

Ocol is at logger-heads with the critical black race. Lawino establishes that Ocol's reason for this is his consuming self-hate. Their quarrel ceases to be a normal domestic one and becomes a symbolic struggle between the cultural nationalists (or apologists) and the cultural critics, in Ocol's case, those who are victims of western cultural imperialism. We note, therefore, that Lawino is largely a symbol representing the victims of westernization, the betrayed Africans, the subordinated women and conservative traditionalists, who view western culture as leading to moral decay. On the other hand, Ocol symbolises the slaves of westernization; he is a case of the mis-educated Africans, who see nothing good in preserving their cultural norms and values. Through Ocol, Okot attacks the western type of formal education that has increased vanity among the educated.

In this long narrative poem, Ocol considers Lawino primitive and backward and this explains why he is in love with a mistress, Clementine who behaves like a white woman. Clementine is portrayed as a lady who uses lipstick, puts powder on her face, bleaches her skin, pads her breasts and generally behaves in Western ways. In the poem, Lawino says that her husband has rejected her because she does not adore Western standards. Lawino is a symbol of individuals who are determined to preserve and defend African cultural values that are being diluted by "modernization".

Song of Prisoner

In *Song of Prisoner* Okot p' Bitek portrays the political ills that have destroyed the hopes most Africans had on the eve of independence. Uganda has continued to witness the politics of the elite against the poor, one tribe against another and leaders who only favour their tribesmen and concentrate more on amassing wealth than delivering services to the people. The prisoner symbolizes all individuals anywhere in the world who are politically in chains. The prisoner's cry is a symbol of the cry for political justice:

Why do they call me
A vagrant
A loiterer?
Your honour
Why do they beat me
With their clubs
And tie my hands
And feet
With this rope? ,(15-16)

Okot's major concern in the poem is apparently to expose the political ills in post-independent African countries. The prisoner is a symbol of a people betrayed by a leadership that was thought to have come to free the masses from the suffering they went through during the colonial times. However, these leaders have proved worse than their predecessors, the poem thus shows that the masses have remained a frustrated lot:

Brother,
How could I
So poor
Cold...
Inspire you
To such heights
Of brutality... (.15)

The prisoner is a composite character, containing in fact two prisoners; the first one is a vagrant and a loiterer, and the other is a former minister. The vagrant was imprisoned

because he assassinated a political leader while the former minister was arrested as a result of a political quarrel within the cabinet.

Song of Malaya

This is the shortest and the latest, of the four songs written by Okot P'Bitek, in terms of the time of its writing. This poem, like the three previous ones, is also a long soliloquy, this time delivered by an unnamed Kampala prostitute (sex workers are commonly called all over East Africa by the Swahili word "malaya", thus the title of the poem). The Malaya of the poem with biting irony describes the present-day Ugandan society as the one immersed in immorality: all the males, regardless of their background, social status to mention but a few, literally, from a schoolboy to a minister, receive the services of the prostitutes. This is perhaps to justify the existence of the prostitute. According to the poet's argument, it looks like becoming one is a natural choice for an ordinary desperate Ugandan woman.

Surprisingly, the poet through his main character gives a lot of descriptions of immoral behaviour of both the clients and the "ladies of the twilight" (prostitutes) definitely through; his irony condemning prostitution and its encouragement. The poet's attitude, does not almost speak a single word about the social causes and origins of such ill practice. The poet does not depict prostitution as a social vice caused by the injustices and drawbacks in the society, but as a kind of choice made because of the immoral nature of women. Nevertheless, the poem also contains many recurrent symbols, which are used in accordance with the 'specificity' of the topic and the main character, and are later developed in the Ugandan poetry of subsequent generations.

Henry Barlow

Henry Barlow and Okot p'Bitek are the two selected figures of the first generation of Ugandan poetry. Unlike Okot, Barlow did not write long narrative poems, rather, he wrote short, but expressive poetic pieces, dealing with topics varying from politics to love and environment. For this study we have used *Building the Nation and other Poems*, published in 1998, which in fact is a kind of complete "collected works" of Barlow as it

contains poems written from 1950s to 1990s. However, for this study we were only analysing the poems written in the period from 1950s to 1960s (and those written in 1970s), because these exactly constitute the times of the “first generation” in Ugandan poetic writing. Despite Barlow having only one anthology to his credit, his poetry has as many chances of selection as that of p’Bitek because it exhibits the prevalent recurrent symbols to the effect of this study.

Main and Recurrent symbols in Ugandan Poetry of the First Generation

The period is generally centred around the events happening at the time of the beginning of African independent rule. Ugandan poetry is written in a style rich in symbolism. In this poetry we find that poets of the first generation have incorporated several recurrent symbols to relay their message in a way that seems sensibly most appealing to the readers. Below are the identified main symbolic units used frequently throughout their poetry:

1
Homestead, house, (deserted) hut (with) thatched roof and village collectively
symbolise (traditional) Africa

This symbol is one of the more obvious symbols used in Ugandan poetry cross-culturally. In the works of the first generation poets, it appears largely to represent traditional Africa, and the home of their ancestors as well as parents. However, it could also stand for unity given its occurrences in the poetry. This argument is given credence because it is extremely common in Africa for huts to represent a sense of home gathering. In *Song of Lawino* it symbolizes the persona's (and assumingly the author's) loyalty to the values represented and concern about their preservation in future. For instance, in chapter 11 Okot says "I am concerned about the well-being of our homestead." He also mentions his late father's homestead and the roof of his mother's house, stressing its traditionality; while in chapter 2, he exhorts the grass thatched house. Apparently, these represent the persona's sense of belonging and the threat posed to its continued existence. Actually he also expresses worries about the current development in Africa, which appears to endanger its unity and its very essence. Indeed, while the concern in chapter 1 was about the **deserted homestead**, the worry in chapter 11 is that **parties have split the homestead**. Notably both deserting and splitting of the homestead pose a threat.

In *Song of Ocol* the content of the symbol is not different, but its emotional colour is quite opposite, for the persona (Ocol), homestead symbolizes the backwardness of traditional Africa, actually the traditions that he hates and seeks to destroy. He derogatorily speaks of **disused hut, toy household, mud hut, dark hut, hut with a leaking thatch** (thatch symbolises tradition and by effect the uselessness of it). Ocol speaks longingly of the passing (**death, demolished, burnt, deserted**) of the old homestead and **his echo of old homestead in ruins** is perhaps a prediction or a prayer for the end of the African tradition that he hates.

In *Song of Prisoner* the content of the symbol is also not different, but its emotional colour is somehow dissimilar. The persona (prisoner) mourns the home place and

traditions already ruined by aggressive and oppressive modernity; he also speaks about an **old hut with leaking thatch**, but in a lamenting tone, mourning about it; blaming the destruction on the woes of wars, which have destroyed the lives of the people. We are informed of steel **rhinos** (tanks) that **sneeze molten lead into the huts**. These destructive trappings acknowledge the fact that no one will ever be able to survive without home, he stresses that even a **bird carries a leaf to erect a hut for her children**; he expresses his hope of returning to his home, and, in a wider sense, regaining the power of traditional, "people's" Africa: The prisoner surmon that, **let the elders gather at the clan shrine, spear a black goat and pour its blood as I enter my homestead**.

In Henry Barlow's poem a similar meaning of the cradle of traditional collective life is also delegated to the village. The persona **swore before gathered village** in lamenting the **poverty of the villages** in modern Africa. The **village well** in Barlow's works has also the same meaning as homestead or hut as a symbol of tradition, repository of traditional wisdom, still trying to pass it to the villagers (**whispering well, well that whispers**). At the same time, Barlow fondly uses the images established in the poems of Bitek: however he gives them wider meaning: **homestead** means not only traditional Africa, but Africa as such, when he speaks about the necessity to develop the continent - **we should improve our homestead so that it can compare with others**. In Barlow's poetry, thatched roof of the homestead is no longer a symbol of decaying tradition; it is a symbol of everything virtuous and dear to his heart: **real people thatched their houses and cried for their dead**.

However, at some point, as if to acknowledge the decay that what is African has suffered, he compares the **old thatched roof** of the African hut to the **cold executive chair** which symbolizes modern westernised life. This is perhaps to signal the dilution the traditional virtues have undergone to the extent that there is now no noticeable difference. Indeed, in one of the poems (*The horse*) he uses the symbol the horse to refer to Uganda and Africa which is led past the **deserted hut** (gone traditional Africa) to the old water wheel (neo-colonialism).

Blood

In the poetry of the first generation, the symbol of blood conveys mostly negative meanings. Moreover, it appears to be closely associated with modern ways that seem to perpetuate destructive alien cultures. Symbolism of blood also portrays backwardness of traditional culture and victimisation of people. However, to a large extent this symbol is linked with home and ancestors symbolising hope for liberation.

In African tradition, spilling or using of human blood was a strict taboo, so when in *Song of Lawino* the persona speaks about the **bloody lips of men at the ballroom** (3), referring to lipstick, **human blood in the cup** (8), referring to communion in the church, **tears of blood** cried by white nuns, or **books red as blood** in reference to the frightening colour of their covers (12), **blood clotted on the eyeballs** through reading (13), it becomes obvious that the very image of blood (spilt and used) is largely associated with alien culture. However, this symbol is also used positively in traditional African ways to mean life. Speaking about blood as a symbol of life, for example the persona doubts: **if any blood is left in the veins of Ocol**, (13), who is deprived of it by western culture any way, then for the same reason, he is being urged to pour some **blood as sacrifice that he should give to ancestors** (13).

Used in *Song of Ocol* the symbol refers to the traditional African culture negatively mostly meaning its backwardness. The persona speaks of **bloodied sour milk in the stinking gourd** (traditional food), **toe weeping blood** (lost power of the tradition), **boiling blood**, **chicken blood** (backwardness of traditional medicine), **blood on the shafts of your spears** or **sacrifices to cool the blood of the murdered man** (murderous traditional practices: human sacrifices, tribal wars and cattle raids).

In *Song of a Prisoner* the main meaning of the symbol of blood is different. It is the blood of the victims. When the persona speaks about **elephants and rhinos (who) scream for blood**, it symbolises a certain brutal force longing for victims; however, several pages later he reveals who the brutal force is, when he speaks about the **Lake**

water covered with blood of dying... fishermen, then it becomes clear that he speaks of State (Amin's) forces shooting innocent people. In using this symbol the poet perhaps recalls the people who were drowned by state forces in 1976, following Amin's order. The same meaning is borne in the line about **bashing the heads of blood brothers with battle axes** (soldiers killing fellow Ugandans), but here the symbol of blood is used to describe the fratricide committed by Amin's soldiers.

Victimisation of the people by state is also implied when the persona speaks of **the wives of the killed cut their necks to let their sorrows flow with their blood**. Here blood symbolises the last that these poor women possess, their lives, which they want to give up because they have nothing to live for. All these examples are unified with the same general meaning – innocent people victimised by the regime, which is reflected more generally in the line **fountain of red water (blood) cools the parched earth**. On the wider scale, the persona refers to similar situations in other African countries, speaking about the state of Congo as the **river of pain, rape, bloodshed and death**. The persona also uses the symbol of blood to describe his own state of desperation: **beads of blood on my legs** appearing after being tortured (beaten) by prisoners (the accomplices of the regime). This is a description of the dehumanising conditions of prison which make him hate the people and this turning him into a kind of a monster as he vows: **I want to drink human blood and eat human live**, or at one point even into an evil spirit that wishes to **mix chime with goat blood** and drink it shamelessly. In this context symbol refers to the traditional practice of evil sorcerers because the prisoner in a prison practising revengeful acts is no more than a witch.

Only on very few occasions is the symbol used in the poem to connote a positive meaning. For example, to express the prisoner's hope for returning to his home place. In such cases the libations to the ancestors are to be made presumably for saving him and for cleansing purposes as in the lines **spear a black goat and pour its blood as I enter my homestead**. Similarly, **goat blood** (103) could be referring to the libations for the assembled ghosts of the dead to feed his hopes for the liberation of his land. He expresses

this hope implicitly, alluding to the custom adopted during the liberation struggle in Kenya when **njohi was mixed with blood and given to gallant forest fighters.**

In *Song of Malaya*, the symbol bears fairly neutral meaning. The persona addresses the woman with whom he is quarrelling, mentioning **veins of their neck bursting with boiling blood.** However, the symbol of **mechanic handling metals bleeding black oil** seems to refer to the destructive nature of modern technology.

In the poems of Henry Barlow, the symbol of blood like in the *Song of a Prisoner* bears mostly negative meaning. The poet, for example, speaks about Uganda where now **Nuba (Amin) rules in blood,**(12) while, on the other hand, referring to the regime's accomplices as **lords of darkness** whose "**deadly claws leave dripping blood on the barks and the smell of blood in fetid air**" (14). He also talks about the **slaughter and bloodshed those power-drunk... army officers and their lackeys have caused** leaving people **bleeding to death.** Besides, there is an old man "**with a bleeding shattered leg**" (14), referring to the soldiers' victim. We also learn of Fulani's dying breath frothing in the windpipe through "**the red warm blood** (41) when a bullet was fired in his next.

Even when blood is used as a symbol of life, it is also cited in a negative context – the persona speaks about the **leader** whose **blood** was sucked by **fear, suspicion and hatred**, and a person with **darkness in the heart that bleeds** after parting with his love (The village well). The symbol of blood, as we will see, is abundantly used in the works of other Ugandan poets.

3

Ancestors, dead and elders

Ancestors and the dead appear to be associated with the living dead who are part of the mortals' world, protective power; people killed, victims of political cataclysms people dehumanised by modern ways of life however, a dead girl symbolises Uganda.

In *Song of Lawino* the symbol of **ancestors** is persistent; and here the **dead** are also portrayed in the meaning of *ancestors*. The reader gauges the strength of this symbol in

different echoes: **ways of ancestors** (2) is one where Lawino reminds her husband of the good ways of his forefathers which must never be disposed of. The resonance of ancestors continues in **sacrifices to the ancestors** (7) to emphasise the homage accorded ancestors in African culture. In Chapter 10, Lawino laments that **Ocol does not go to the shrine of the ancestors**"; instead he worships **Joseph and Petero and Luka and the other ancestors of the white man**; the ancestors are hungry because they are neglected. In an ideal situation, the **elders gather at the clan shrine and blood, meat and beer are offered to the ancestors...and the living pray to the dead**. In Chapter 13 Lawino impels her husband to go to the ancestral shrine and give them the same sacrifice. An Okango tree that grows on the **ancestral shrine** is seemingly a symbol representing wisdom and knowledge. By repetitively employing this symbol, Okot apparently posits that an **ancestor(s)** remains a sacred symbol that Western culture dare not touch.

All these incidences of the symbol as enumerated depict a strong link with the tradition, as well as some protective power. There is no doubt that Okot adopts the symbol of ancestors when he wants to emphasize the high regard in which ancestors are held in the traditional African community. Ancestors stand between gods and the people so that daily activities can run normally. In Chapter 10, Lawino laments her husband's condemnation of the diviner priest, highly regarded in the community because of his ability to diagnose the appropriate sacrifices to be offered to **ancestors** in shrines in appeasement following a transgression by the community. Spirits are also made "visible" by the images of the diviner and his tools of trade that permit communication between the natural and supernatural worlds. In addition, African ancestral spirits sharply contrast with the **ancestors of the white men** –the foreign Christian saints, here symbolising Western culture.

In traditional Uganda, **dead** members of the lineage are implored in times of crisis such as a serious sickness or a series of misfortune, and more regularly, on such occasions as when the marriages of women from one lineage to another takes place, or when there is the breaking of sexual taboos affecting the same women. Similarly, during the "coming-out" ceremony for infants and before the large communal hunts of the dry season **dead**

members (ancestors) used to be invoked. When Okot refers to the death of children, he seems to suggest that the future of African values is diminishing (dead children do not qualify to be ancestors). Children are supposed to live on and bury their parents, and in the case where they die before their parents, the situation is seen as disastrous, provoking certain symbolic names to be given to disguise identity hence deceive death. The persona says: "Some names are names of sorrow: Alobo (That Fate has thrown), Abur (A large basket), Ayiko (To be filled), or Woko (With dead children). The effect is in combining the fragment in brackets into a complete sentence. The symbol of **dead children** becomes much more widespread in Ugandan poetry of the next two generations in connection with disaster, calamity and atrocities.

In *Song of Ocol* the symbol of **ancestors** changes its meaning: **ancestral shrine**; **ancestral spirits** (gone with the wind) is a sarcastic tone by ocol who sees these symbols as obstacles that should have already vanished. The two, **ancestral shrine** and **ancestral spirits**, therefore become symbols of the backward past. Here, the ancestors are apparently not seen as retaining their role in the affairs of their kinship-group. They are no longer propitiated with sacrifices. The attitude of the persona is that of rejection, hence, on their part ancestors are seen as dispensing misfortune instead of favours. In some cases in traditional Africa, ancestors are often accused of being capricious and of failing in their responsibilities of protecting people; yet in this case, their actions are related to possible lapses on the part of the living who reject them and fail to appease them causing them to become legitimately punitive. The attitude of rejection is a clear indication that the persona considers the phenomenon of ancestors as mere superstition which keeps people backward. This appears to contradict the role of ancestors as seen in *Song of Lawino* where clan gods are implored, but it is to be expected as long as it is Ocol's view in consideration.

In *Song of Prisoner* the symbol of the **dead** refers to victims: people killed murdered by fellow civilians and victims of political cataclysms in Uganda. The persona speaks about the wives of the dead who still **play with dead men's voices**, perhaps refusing to believe that their husbands are no more. He uses the symbol of the dead to represent victimisation

as a phenomenon typical of the whole of modern Africa. For example, in Congo he shows **black corpses strewn along the streets, dead to free Africans so they may suffer in Freedom**. These are innocent victims of political regimes.

It is notable that the symbol of the **dead** seems to change meaning even while still in Okot's hands. In the earlier songs the symbols of the **dead** and the **ancestors** have almost the same meaning, almost benevolent; however, in *Song of Prisoner* the poet uses this symbol to express his contempt for the murderous politicians.

In Henry Barlow's poetry the symbol of the dead conveys meaning similar to that in Bitek's *Song of Prisoner*. In the poem *Chichicastenango Revisited* (stanza 2), Barlow speaks of **real people (who) thatched their houses and cried for their dead** those innocent civilians killed in Guatemala's struggle for power (17). Again the symbol of the **dead and lonely soldier**, although physically alive, has been used to represent political victimation by of his ambitious bosses. Barlow's use of the symbol of **death** seemingly conjures in the mind of the reader an ever-growing memorial to the many innocent murder victims of violent crime which prevailed not only in Uganda, but in many other countries in Africa and the rest of the world. The symbol of **dead crowd, listening only to traffic noise and the rain** appears to represent victims as well, possibly victims of modern ways of life. Perhaps Barlow's most striking use of this symbolism here is that of the **dead girl at the village well**, to symbolize Uganda, which here has become synonymous with loss of lives including those of children.

On the other hand, the symbol of **elders** could be said to stand for traditional wisdom, authority and a link with the past. In *Song of Lawino* the recurrent symbols of **grandfathers, parents, elders** and **clansmen** represent a sense of belonging, ownership and traditional ancient wisdom. Lawino who is rooted in the customs of her people but has been abandoned for a modern woman, presents her case in the presence of the elders: **my clansmen, I cry/ listen to my voice** (13). Her tone suggests that Ocol's insults are not directed to her alone but also to the elders: her parents, her grandfathers, clansmen and generally to the black people. Ocol is therefore at war with the whole black race. In

this case Lawino tactfully involves the whole audience as victims of Ocol's blander. Consequently, the quarrel ceases to be a domestic one and becomes a symbolic struggle between the cultural nationalists (elders) and the cultural opponents.

In *Song of Ocol* the meaning of the symbol does not alter, except that **elders** degenerate in Ocol's view from guardians of ancient wisdom to defective warriors; the persona refers to them as **elders with marks of spear**. In this sense elders are seen as symbols of traditional murderous practices. In *Song of Ocol*, therefore, elders represent backwardness.

In *Song of Prisoner*, however, eldership is implied as **old** to represent traditional wisdom and power desecrated by modern ways. The persona speaks of **my old man rotting in the earth**, apparently referring to his father's grave, neglected because his son himself is rotting in prison. He continues: **let the elders gather at the clan shrine**; this is uttered symbolically to conjure the prisoner's hopes of returning home one day. He also believes that the elders have cleansing power to free him from his guilt of murdering a politician at the request of other politicians.

In Henry Barlow's poems the symbol **old man** retains the wording; however, its meaning is different from what it was implied in Okot's *Song of Ocol*. For Barlow an **old man with bleeding shattered leg** refers to soldier's victim mentioned in his poem *the Jungle of Biafra* and it has been used to represent victimization of elders by dictatorial regimes.

The eyewitness in the poem narrates:

An old white-bearded man crawled

Dragging his shattered leg. (45)

This emphasises the desecration of traditional wisdom and power which has already been curtailed by murderous regimes. The old man/ elder here appears not better than a torn piece of rag.

4 Dance, drum and song

Dance is used in various ways: mainly positive when associated with African traditional ways such as possessing healing powers, life, joy and dedication, but it is used negatively when associated with modernity and immoral practices which have come as a result of alien cultures.

In the *Song of Lawino*, one of the meanings of **dance** is the traditional healing practices. **Jok dances** (72), symbolise healing; for example, Lawino speaks of **dance under the sausage fruit tree**, after which the sick **girl's hair begins to grow again** (29). **Orak dance** (20) is a dance for youths which symbolises inspired love, joy and dedication, because in its performance dancers relay and share in a relationship that can become as close as a love affair leading to marriage. Among the Acholi **orak dance** is seen as a living, breathing art; in many parts of Uganda it is performed during music and drama festivals. The **dancing arena** just like the **dance** itself symbolises openness of relations and openness to life and joy.

While considering **dance** as an important symbol of expression of life in Africa, Okot sharply contrasts this with **rumba** and **samba**, both which are symbols of foreign cultures. **Rumba** and **samba** do not compare with Acholi traditional dances praised by Lawino. The persona's (poet's) tone becomes scornful when mentioning **ballroom dance** as this symbolises immoral practices of alien cultures. The persona despises these boogies completely: **their (assimilated Africans') stupid dance at the ball room**, (4).

While **dances** offer a sense of pride and joy in *Song of Lawino*, the reader gets a totally different meaning in *Song of Ocol*, where dance now symbolises backwardness. For Lawino, performance of traditional dances is the sacred ritual combined with emotional commitment that reveals her deeply felt sense of pride for the culture of the community.

On the other, Ocol contradicts Lawino, thus:

We will arrest
All the village poets
Musicians and tribal dancers
Who are sustainers of backwardness, (29).

Ocol contrasts the new life with old tradition which he considers backward: **all the time I was reading economy at Makerere... you were busy performing the get-stuck dance** (6). The only occasion when he encourages his people to perform their traditional dances is the symbolic funeral of the **old homestead** (traditional African culture). Ocol encourages people to dance these dances because he is sure it is their last time, they will never dance them any more:

Say goodbye ;
For you will never
Hunt together again
Nor **dance the war dance**
Or the **bwola dance**....(76).

And earlier:

Let the **drummers**
Play the **rhythms**
Of the **funeral dance**,
And let the people sing and **dance**
And celebrate the passing of
The Old Homestead!,(76).

All the above lines are used in context to symbolise the triumph of modernity over tradition which is fading already as a result of education.

In *Song of Prisoner* the poet employs the symbol of the **dancing** arena where the first meeting of the lovers (the prisoner and his future wife) took place to let the reader know that for the prisoner, this is the only sense of contact with the past, the community and world outside jail. Symbolism of **dancing** arena becomes one of greatest importance to the persona because it wakes him up to the reality out there closed in on him. Thinking about the songs and dance of the children brings him not only pleasure, but deeper meaning in life. This meaning is the only hope for living and it arises at the intersection of the temporal enslavement and the hope of being free one day. Therefore, his mention of **children sing and dance for me** (102), is evoked to represent his community and his homeland, for which he disparately longs, as well as his hopes for the future.

The symbol of **drum/drums**, in *Song of Ocol*, is closely related to **dance**. Among the Badadiri and Baganda people of Uganda dance is impossible without drums which are a

foundation of its accompaniment. Therefore in *Song of Lawino* we encounter several incidences of these symbols: **dance drums** (7), "**get-stuck**" **dance drums** (8). Drum is Africa's most significant piece of artwork, icon of its culture, and music; used to communicate, to celebrate, and to mourn. Moreover, drums are strongly associated with healing abilities; the persona says: **the ghost-dance drum must sound, the ghost be laid and my peace restored** (15). In some cultures of Africa the drum is said to possess triune spirits: the spirit of the tree, the spirit of the animal of which the drum head is made, and the spirit of the instrument maker. These spirits are capable of driving evil spirits away - and when the persona longs for the drum to sound so that she might be healed, she hopes that the ghosts of alien world in her head; ghosts that were provoked "by the smell of carbolic soap", will leave. However, later in the poem the symbol of drum emerges with a different meaning all together: **drums at a political rally** (10, 11) are employed to symbolize the dangers that politics bring to the people. Compared to the sweet sound naturally made at rituals, these **drums at a political rally** thunder to terrify.

In *Song of Ocol*, the symbol of **drum** assumes a new meaning which is negative. In Chapter 8, Ocol talks of **war-drums** which will announce the funeral of the Old Homestead; **drummers** who will play the rhythm of the funeral dance; **drum-post** usually used as a rostrum for the village chief to gather his people to announce a funeral; all will be used for the last time at the burial of The Old Homestead: as old Africa's village world is swept away by the fierce fires of progress and civilization.

In *Song of Prisoner* too, the symbol of **drums** has been used differently compared to its earlier use in *Song of Lawino*. Rather than bringing a soothing rhythm, as Lawino and her people know them to do, they rumble. Here, they are signalled to symbolize different times of great change positively and negatively are becoming suspiciously judgemental. The prisoner talks of **drums of the drizzle**. Drizzle is a symbol of rain, as we will see below and frequently it carries a negative meaning in Ugandan poetry; it is a symbol of negative changes. The persona also says that **war drums rumble over the Lake**, showing his apprehension of post-colonial development. Generally, the meaning is close to **drums at political rally** in *Song of Lawino* - drums heralding forthcoming danger.

The symbol of **song** in the poetry of the first generation (and in Ugandan poetry in general) is also closely related to the symbols of dance and drum. In the *Song of Lawino*, **song** generally stands for African traditional practices. Songs that **the youth have sung** (5) after the healing dance symbolise spiritual healing; **song of the stones and grains** (6) symbolises cooking where everything is done in perfect coordination as if it were all **sung**. The symbol is also used to counter-poise traditional and alien cultures; Lawino confesses: **I despise the songs they play at the ball room dance, and I do not follow the steps of foreign songs played on gramophone record** (4). Further, in the same sense, she counter-poses **meaningful songs we understood** (traditional songs of the Acoli) and **meaningless songs that no one believes in** (Christian hymns). In fact, from the text of the poem the reader understands that Christianity was never properly presented to the people of Lawino's village; therefore, no one understands these songs properly.

In *Song of Ocol*, again, the symbol of **song** is repetitively evoked. Ocol mentions **song of a woman, song of the dead, beggar's song, song of a cripple in sunset, song of a blind (village) poet and wild song of a herdsman** (1). As it can be seen, these songs are sung by people of lower social standing, the retarded, or even the dead, this is because in Ocol's representative songs of Africans by and large are a symbols of poverty and backwardness. For example, a **song of a woman** is sung in a smoky kitchen, a dirty hut or some other uncomfortable confinement to lament her numerous tribulations that range from lack of salt to unsatisfied marital rights. **Song of the dead, beggars song, song of a cripple in sunset, a song of a blind poet and wild song of a herdsman** are all voices from another incarceration symbolizing total disillusionment of Ocol in traditional practices, behind which he sees only poverty, stubbornness, superstitions and backward thinking.

In *Song of Prisoner*, the symbol of the **song** increases its association with disillusionment. There are symbols of **fiery lips of my sister's song, mocking songs of the drizzles, song of the flies feasting on the eyesores of the blind beggar**; these are already not related to African tradition, they stand for the dark side of modern life. Even when the prisoner

evokes the triumphant **song of a hero of Uhuru**, it is ironical because the prisoner shot down this hero who was actually a corrupt politician, and he was incarcerated for the crime.

5

Chief, politician, state official, people of rank and modern state institutions

Chief as a symbol appears to carry varied representations ranging from traditional power, valour, will and wisdom, to obsolete and backward forms of governance, to misused and oppressive power, corruption and nepotism, depending on who is speaking or being spoken to.

In *Song of Lawino* the title of **chief** is mentioned recurrently in chapters 1, 2, and 13, notably to symbolise traditional power, valour, will and wisdom. For example, when Ocol is told, "your father was a great chief" (12), the symbol is used to represent ancient institutions of power which the persona highly reveres. However, in Chapter 11, the symbol applies in contrast with its previous meaning. **Chief** now changes from being a revered traditional leader to a political chief, that is one who represents corrupt personalities in society that wield their illegally acquired power.

In *Song of Ocol* the symbol alters its representation altogether: **chiefdom**, **son of Chief** or **village chief** no longer mean traditional power, valour and virtue, but rather symbols of obsolete and backward forms of governance. This is the view Ocol holds. However, in the context of **opposition chiefs**, the symbol seems to refer to the political system working to bring change; it signifies modern politicians and their structures as pillars of the new order in post-colonial Africa.

In *Song of Prisoner* the meaning of the symbol is totally contrary to what it symbolises in *Song of Lawino* and even in *Song of Ocol*. The reader is informed of a **big chief** talked of as one who **hides face between large breasts of his woman**. In the context where, **red wall between you (chief) and me** is used as well as **Chief's dog barking; chief (who) throws sacks of dust into my eyes; (chief) wipes his arse on my head and plucks off**

my feathers; chief nestles on the bosom of my young wife symbolise oppressive structures in the new order. Through a rhyme (Thief and chief) the poet emphasises this idea. The reader here is tempted to come up with the portrait of a chief - a politician - most probably a local MP (or maybe really a village chief), who used his post to get rid of the Prisoner (with whom he possibly had personal differences), whose family or home the chief tries to destroy. On a larger scale and from the mouth of another prisoner - former minister - the poet uses the symbols to represent corruption and nepotism in the state. The minister speaks of my friend and clansman - chief of the army; he also recalls the chiefs gathered at the Embassy. Apparently, when he talks of the diplomatic mission of a certain mighty foreign country is meant to symbolise foreign involvement and foreign custody of the shady deals of the local "chiefs", politicians and their accomplices.

Closely related with the reference to Chief are the titles linked to **people of rank, state institutions** and **neo-colonial officials**. To Lawino in *Song of Lawino*, these positions represent hypocrisy, oppressive power and quick enrichment. Lawino in chapter 11 speaks of all the innovations that were brought to Africa by new political systems introduced by the colonisers: political parties, positions, jobs, places in conferences in Kampala and abroad. Such positions as party **leader** and **minister** are portrayed as symbols of quick enrichment and hunger for power: "Is it the money? Is it the competition for position?" (85). The positions are sheer hypocrisy: "they say... all the tribes should become one people... but Ocol treats his brothers as if they are not his relatives," (82). Lawino also observes that "the stomach seems to be / a powerful force / for joining political parties," (86).

On the other hand, to Ocol these symbols represent progress and unity. In *Song of Ocol* the persona provides a long list of institutions and political posts introduced by the western system of government. There are posts, institutions and terms such as magistrate, honourable minister, Makerere, barristers' guild, Bwana President, opposition chiefs, Lordship robed mayors, aldermen, councillors, town clerks in wigs, trade unionism, bank manager, Permanent Secretary, party leader, African Ambassador, United Nations

among many others. Unlike his wife who remains cynical about these posts, Ocol sees all these positions as symbols of progress, worthy of admiration. They stand for the pillars of "the African foundation /on which we are/ building the new nations/ of Africa," (150).

To the prostitute in *Song of Malaya* these positions symbolize lies. When the persona mentions titles such as chieftain, leader of the people, big chief, boss, presidents, ministers, parliamentarians, politicians, calling them fighters, heroes and liberators of Africa, one will think she is praising them; until she gives what she thinks is their real labels; Robbers. None seems to escape; whether in administrative positions of **magistrate, mayor, town clerks, Chief's messenger** or in commercial entrepreneurship. The latter she describes as **pot-bellied rich opportunist get-rich-quick**). Foreign aid functionaries, **advisors, experts and mercenaries**. People who to her have one thing in common while all of them, propagate at their offices public morality and family values, they lustily use her services after work. They are thus, the incarnation of hypocrisy, sham and lies. She particularly loathes the **police Sergeant** who arrested the Malaya after using her services.

The interpretation of these positions by Henry Barlow, tallies with that of the prostitute. Those in these positions are all guilty of hypocrisy, unlawful acquired riches and betrayal of the nation. Barlow in his poems establishes a firm link between colonisers whom he calls "Farmer Bullock", "hunter", "lords of darkness", "blundering whip-bearers" and neo-colonial foreign exploiters whom he refers to as "rich greedy neighbours" and "negotiators". In his poem *Building the Nation*, he ironically calls them all "**nation builders**" represented by the collective image of Permanent Secretary, who here symbolise the top civil servant who does his "share of building the nation." Ironically, the action of building the nation is in fact a "luncheon at the Vic" where he had "cold Bell beer with small talk / then fried chicken with niceties / wine to fill the hollowness of the laughs / ice-cream to cover the stereotype jokes / and coffee to keep him awake on the return journey", (7). This is contrasted with the duties of the driver. Here the driver is the collective image of the common man, who, unlike his boss, did not have any lunch that

day. For Barlow, all the political posts in modern Uganda and, on a wider scale, Africa which were inherited from the colonisers by their 'yes-men' and nourished by neo-colonialists, are symbols of hypocrisy, unlawfully acquired riches and betrayal in building the nation as earlier stated.

6 Spear, arrow, shield and sword

These are symbols in the first generation poetry generally representing values of life on which an Acholi traditional male must cuddle in the society and life situations in the village. In *Song of Lawino*, each of these symbols have a distinct symbolic meaning. Apparently, Okot stresses courage and bravery through extensive use of the symbol of spear. In the traditional setting the spear takes on a prestigious connotation, namely: power charged with valour and value:

My father was not brought
home
By the spear
My mother was not exchanged
For a basket of millet, (5).

Likewise the echo in **alwiri spear** works in all manner of worth to symbolise power whereas **spear** or **sword** and occasionally the traditional **gun** symbolise bravery. Their use also suggests that if a warrior is lucky enough to discover a treasure of any kind for his community, he must fight until death to retain it, but if, he is unlucky to discover any evil threatening his family or community, he must fight it bravely and nobly all the same to earn recognition. Okot brings this out in the following lines:

Ocol's grandfather's title
Is lutany-moi
You can earn the moi
With your spear
Or gun or sword ... (61),

The poet mentions the three symbols consecutively and coordinates them as if to accord them equal and alternate powers. However, the reader is tempted to conclude that amongst the three, the **sword** is the noblest because it is assumed to be a symbol of military honor and virtue. Compared to the symbols of **spear** and **gun**, therefore, **sword**

might have been employed to symbolise liberty and strength. All in all the symbols of **spear, arrow, shield, sword** as employed by the poet are distinct from the heraldic tilting-spear, in that they are always drawn with sharp points for warfare, instead of blunt points as they would have been for entertainment. There is particularly a sharp contrast between a heraldic tilting-spear of a western poet such as William Shakespeare and what the Ugandan African poet posits: On African weapons and bravely warriors Okot describes thus:

In battle
The hottest youth fight at the
front...
It is the old ones
Who die in bed!
The spears of the foe
And their arrows
Rain like the hailstones...
All misfortunes have a root cause
The snake bite the spear of
the enemy... (76)

In addition, **the spear of the Lango** and **arrows of the foe** symbolise the bravery on side of the enemy warriors. Sometimes in traditional Uganda, a **spear** is said to represent agility or nimbleness of wit, especially when someone is able to discover and understand matters of the highest consequence. The poet, therefore, switches meaning of symbol of spear from time to time ranging from higher levels of understanding to lower levels of understanding. For example, in chapters 8, 9 and 13, the **spear** in all its applications can be interpreted as simply euphemism symbolising male genitalia:

And an old woman
Will bless the young men,
She will spit blessing in their
hands
So that their spears may be
Sharp
Sharp and hard... (79)

The reader spots that the poet makes the persona repeat these lines almost word for word on p. 97 for emphasis. Considering the context of the poems, the reader easily deduces that **spear, arrow, shield** and **sword** are in fact used by Okot to symbolise vitality, bravery, valour, power and other attendant traits of an Acholi traditional male.

In *Song of Ocol* these symbols of **spear** drastically lose their positive connotation. Instead of seeing the **spear** as verve of African living, the symbol changes to be seen as "wooden **arrow** striking the concrete" perhaps to symbolise the lost power of tradition. The weak wooden arrow pitted against the hard concrete symbolises the weak tradition being defeated by modernity. The tone of the persona appears to mock his fellow Africans by saying that he "speared the elephant but could not kill". This futile effort symbolises further the might of the "new ways" vis-a-vis the impotence of the African traditions.

The meaning of the symbol continues to get diminished when the reader hears of "blood on the shafts of your **spears**", "elder with scars of **spear**", "colourful **shields**", "**spears** on the horizon", "bows, poisoned **arrows**" with ostrich feathers added to represent traditional murderous raids over the neighbouring communities. Later, the meaning shifts from bloodshed to adulterous beds: "brother's **spear** planted at the door" is evoked to symbolise immorality which, according to Ocol, was part and parcel of the traditional way of life. Traditionally among the Maasai of Kenya if a man encountered a spear sunk in the ground at the door of his house, he would make a ritual retreat to allow hospitable sharing of his wife with a kindred or tribesmen inside his house. The poet here could mean that any man whose spear is planted in the compound would as well get it right that a ritual is going on in house, however, the reader is possibly meant to understand that whether the owner of the spear is a brother or not immorality, wears the same skin.

It is notable that the perception of many symbols in *Song of Lawino* closely tallies with that of *Song of Prisoner*. The reason for this we presume is that the personae in both songs appear to be victims of the new social-political dispensation: the former losing to "modernity," while the latter to neo-colonial imperialism. However, the meaning of the symbols of the spear, sword and arrow in the two songs appears to contradict itself. While the symbols protect in *Song of Lawino*, as they represent traditional valour, in *Song of Prisoner*, they seem to represent the life and anger that the prisoner experiences. He says:

My heart is riddled
with the arrows
of despair (13).

The implication here is torment of the mind. It is bitterness on the side of the persona. On the other hand, the reference to **spear** in *Song of Malaya* is almost blunt. The persona speaks of “men wiping **blood** from their **spears** and knives” in our view symbolising adultery and violence, while “**spears** vomiting butter” represent male sperm. The poet’s euphemistic employment of the symbol of **spear** in this song paints a picture of a different type of lifestyle, based on urban material wealth and status, that may tempt all who are exposed to it to live in decadence and squalor. For the poet, therefore, the real tragedy lies not in the fact that once one has forsaken all reason in order to reach a life of useless opulence and excess, but rather in the fact that his innocence is lost to the prostitute. The latter on her part complains about the **poisoned arrows**, perhaps referring to her male clients who infect her with venereal diseases. The arrow, therefore, is a cause of suffering.

The sense attributed to **arrows** and **spears** in Henry Barlow’s *Building the Nation* assumes the role of liberation. The reader comes across “sharpened **arrows** and **spears**” used to defend Uhuru and “Biafran **spear**” employed in the liberation struggle. All these work together to symbolise liberation struggle and defence of hard-earned independence and freedom. The symbol of **spear** is employed by the poet in this context as the most recognisable object to represent the protection of independence on the African continent as a whole. Likewise, **arrows** and **spears** are used by the poet to lend the appeal of the ancient African warriors minding the security of mother Africa to the present-day defenders of her freedom.

In another case, the spear is being used in a simile to refer to homesickness. “Like a **spear**ed bull I still walk on”, says the poet referring to his life in Britain in the poem *Uganda from Oxford*. The poet’s catch is that once one has attained a goal of visiting and becoming a guest at some place that he/she always wanted to visit, s/he may find her self or himself dissatisfied and even lamenting for the regular life being discarded at home. To

portray this, the poet uses the symbol tightly related to his native African culture – the mighty animal speared by a mighty weapon represents himself, whose natural strength of an African is undermined by the cold sharp steel of Western life.

7

Tree

This symbol in the first generation poetry is both positively and negatively projected, to stand for healing, strength, perseverance, might, life and sanctity. At times it symbolises backwardness, neglect, immorality and oppression

In *Song of Lawino* the symbol of **tree** represents many facets, but generally it stands for healing, strength, perseverance, might, life and sanctity. The persona for instance, celebrates life as she watches the dance under the *sausage tree* (5), which leads to the healing of the performer; hence, *sausage tree* is portrayed as being medicinal, symbolising traditional healing practices. According to Lawino, this tree is different from other *local trees* used as firewood, which are so cheap that she has committed all their names to memory. These local **trees** for firewood, however, symbolise the warmth of traditional village life common in the rural setting in which Lawino is a resident:

If you ask me
About firewood
I can describe them to you in
detail
I know their names
And their leaves
And seeds and barks. (38).

The poet seems to suggest that there is a difference between the names of the “fuelwood” trees that Lawino has mastered very well and the revered name of *Okango tree* (10 and 13), designated to symbolise sacred antiquity and strength. Like the deities themselves, the revered names are varied. There is the *giant tido tree* (10 and 12), employed by the poet to symbolise power and strength. This tree is like the *kituba tree* (12), another tree revered for its might. However, the latter tree bears some negative connotation for the reader, because it is said to “squeeze other trees to death.” Though apparently negatively

portrayed, this tree represents might nevertheless. Additionally, by way of direct comparison, the poet lets the reader realise that there is another tree famous for its hardness: "poi tree." Thus, the books are presented negatively by Lawino who does not know what they are for, and Ocol, as she laments constantly, does not want to explain their value to her. The books, therefore, are compared to the hard *poi tree*, since they are as stubborn to reveal their secrets to Lawino as the *poi tree* is to the lumber man. He writes that some books are as hard as rocky stem of the poetry.

Incidentally, the **tree** in *Song of Ocol* appears to symbolise the backwardness and immorality of the traditional society. The *byeyo tree* is such a tree though evergreen, it is not sacred, for it disgraces the ancestors whenever it shelters the youth as they practise secret love; illicit love affairs kept out of the eyes of grown-ups.

That shady evergreen byeyo tree
Under which I first met you
And told you
I wanted you...
In the nearby trees? (77)

In the same song the poet continues to play with the symbolism of the **tree**. When he talks of a *banana tree*, which is very instrumental to the survival of many Uganda communities, the reader expects him to uphold its dignity, but the persona does just the opposite. He sounds ironic and dissatisfied:

We manured
The land
Frustrations sprouted
Bursting the soil
Like young banana trees
Fat frustrations, (66).

Here, implicitly, the *banana tree*, a symbol of tradition is representing the determination of the African culture to live on. However, Ocol is presumably dissatisfied with these people's traditional ways of life which are not completely diminishing.

The negative use of *tree* to symbolise frustration, is pursued in *Song of Malaya*. For example, the "wild thorn trees in school compounds," seem to symbolise neglected

children left by their teacher who enjoys himself with prostitutes. Due to this neglect, some of these children growing up on their own later get to engage in prostitution. Similarly, the “foresters falling” his “mvuli tree in his” “own garden,” symbolises adultery. Both these references sound negative, but one finds the comparisons clear. The poet allows the reader to apply the sense of sight cleverly when he equates unattended and unloved children growing by themselves to wild thorn trees and the stability and morality of the family to a giant iroko tree which in East Africa is called the *mvuli* tree, sacred in many African traditions; thus, the sacredness of the family is undermined by the “foresters”- adulterers - due to the growing immorality in society.

In *Building the Nation* the symbolism of trees is strengthened and restored to the initial usage as in Okot's *Song of Lawino*. Barlow speaks of the *beautiful fig tree* to symbolise spontaneous might, and *branches of sheltering trees* to describe the village well, where through the images of grass, trees and bushes the poet expresses his admiration for rural serenity. The poet postulates that green is symbolic of peace. Across cultures in Uganda anybody sighted carrying green branches in his hands would not carry a spear. Besides, trees and their leaves, roots, bark, fruits and wood form the ingredients of all of the traditional medicines of Ugandans. However, having written in troubled Uganda he is aware that the pearl of Africa (Uganda) has experienced ravages of war, therefore, he uses the image of *gnarled tree*, to symbolise a land burdened with the yoke of war and oppression.

8

Gun

As a symbol gun bears the twin meanings of bravery, but also a threat to human life; violence, oppression, war and death.

In *Song of Lawino* the poet evokes the symbol of *gun or sword* (61), to invoke courage. The reader's interpretation of this symbol might greatly differ from that of some other readers who might feel uncomfortable with the life-and-death power of guns due to different attitudes they hold about a gun. In Uganda when Idi Amin was ruling, for example, the *rifle*, pronounced as *rife*, became a symbol of terror. To date many still

shudder at its mention. However, since the poet did not write in Amin's times, he was most likely referring to a traditional context, where the gun, hand-made or trophied from the enemies in a battle, was in the possession of the most distinguished warriors of the community. Hence it was a symbol of valour.

The **gun** as a threat is exemplified in *Song of Ocol*. Here the meaning changes from that of bravery to that of threat and war. The reader comes across a reference to a "*starting gun*" employed to symbolise the threat to the old culture by the alien influences. On the other hand, "Anthem of United Africa drowned by the sound of **guns**" is used probably to symbolise perpetual wars on the continent. Indeed, in *Song of Ocol* the gun is a symbol of power and violence. Therefore, the poet is warning the reader that guns are dangerous because they are vested with the power to take life away instantly, even in the hands of an unskilled user, unlike to the traditional weapons, which were lethal only in the hands of the warriors of high valour and had battle skills.

The view of the **gun** as a threat to human life rather than protection is extended in *Song of a Prisoner*. The persona sees the gun here as a tool for oppressive and unlawful power: a symbol of the war that is sweeping across the country:

They ram my feet with the butts of their rifles...
stone wall of **guns** surrounded the village
Steel rhinoceroses/ Ruin the crops. (32)

The poet succeeds in convincing his reader to believe that the power of guns runs fiercely through the tribal veins of the prisoner's village mates and hence bears great hostility toward them.

Henry Barlow's *Building the Nation* too, appears to concur with the interpretations of the **gun** as an abuser of protection, righteousness, and justice. In this poem he speaks of violence in many places of the modern world: "greener **guns** fought with stones" and "gun-brandishing gangs roaming beautiful mountains," referring to the war in Uganda and "Viet Kong **guns**" in Vietnam. Apparently, in the fore mentioned case we argue that

it does not matter to whom the guns belong, guns all in all destroy human life. Particularly illustrative is the use of the symbol in the poem *The Jungles of Biafra*, a poem composed on the civil war in Nigeria. In the poem he contrasts a soldier among the federal troops, "clutching his **gun** till hands grew numb," the child soldier from Biafran village carrying a gun that he made out of a twig to protect his home. The soldier kills the child, mistaking him for the enemy and hides him in the bushes, and the "twig **gun** falls down." Of interest here is the force with which the soldier responds to a mere twig gun: perhaps simply a toy for the child to play with. But maybe death is even better than the boy soldier's life of solitude in the jungle. He is in effect dead himself despite the iron gun he is carrying for protection. The reader here is able to appreciate the frequency of gun symbolism because the poet is writing in Idi Amin's Uganda where guns were considered an extension of soldiers' being. To relinquish regrets for such an intensely prevalent object during that time is indeed a concern for the poet to re-build the nation.

9

Mountain and hill

These symbols carry several references. On one hand the symbol of mountain signifies constancy, permanence, border belonging to the culture among others. Protection, ancient beauty and grandeur of Africa is implied when used positively. On the other hand, mountain may represent the gap between the rich and the poor, social inequality, or backwardness when negatively used.

In *Song of Lawino* the poet adopts the symbol of mountain at a low tone but not without nobility. Indeed he does not even call it a mountain yet but rather a **hill**; nevertheless, the symbol is important since it stands not only for the beauty of the landscape of Lawino's native land, but also gives her people a sense of belonging to it, at the same time outlining its border ("our hills - Hills in the East"). The reader encounters the persona praising the hills spontaneously:

You loved my giraffe-tail bangles,
My father bought them for me
From the Hills in the East. (26)...
If he likes let him build for her

An iron roofed house on the hill! (19)
 ... And moonlight dance drums
 Thundered in the dance
 And the songs came floating
 From beyond his hills ... (56)

In the above quote the reader encounters hills as symbols of prominence and romance. The alliteration his - hills at the end, is presumably employed to enhance the intensity of symbolic harmonious value contained in the hills for the inhabitants of Lawino's village. The reader may be lured by the actual beautiful hills in Uganda especially at Sipi in the East :- allegedly where Lawino's father bought her "giraffe-tail bangles". In Uganda hills and mountains are traditionally symbolic of the nearness of God living with his people while extending power towards the heavens. In *Song of Lawino*, therefore, **hill** symbolises constancy, prominence, permanence and it denotes the sense of belonging to the culture.

In *Song of Prisoner* the poet retains the wording of the symbol (**hills, hillsides**) as in *Song of Lawino*, through its meaning degenerates from good to bad. The persona warningly satirises what she says:

Listen to the Chief's dog
 Barking like a volcano
 Listen to the echoes
 Playing on the hillsides, (22).

In this case **hillsides** could be seen to symbolise the gap between the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed. The Chief lives on the hill, where the houses of the rich were built before and after independence, and whose tops are as unreachable for the poor as the top of the highest mountain. The hills create echoes, repeating the master's orders to the prisoner. Therefore this becomes an extended metaphor representative of the master's power. The Chief's dog's barking is equated with echoes of a volcano - noise from a mountain of the molten in formation causing fear and destruction just like the Chief's dog and its master. Here the hill and the mountain are turned into symbols of violence social inequality, dividing the haves from have-nots.

In *Song of Ocol* the audience ceases to hear of hills instead **Mount (ain) and Mounts** are used. However, despite the height of a mountain, the weight of the symbol does not increase ironically, the person says:

We will uproot
Each tree
From Ituri forest
And blow up
Mount Kilimanjaro,
The rubble from Ruwenzori
Will fill the valleys... (73).

Mounts Kilimanjaro and Ruwenzori, which Ocol wants to see blown up, become symbols of old Africa, which; to him they are as loathsome as everything related to the past practices of his continent and his people. In this case the mountain's permanence is questioned and its prominence satirised.

In Barlow's *Building the Nation* the symbolism of the **mounts** renews its positive meaning and colourful nature just like it had earlier on been in *Song of Lawino*. When the poet presents these symbols to the reader, the meaning is affirmative. One of the principle meanings of the symbol in Barlow's works is that of protection; he speaks of peasants in a South American country, in whose native "strife-torn Guatemala in the **mountains** life went on," because these "simple **mountain** people" were protected by their mountains and "inviting **hills**." The strength of the symbol tends to increase when the reader is introduced to "cloud-wrapped **mountains**," their height, reaching the clouds, symbolising grandeur, whereas "roads like thin brown ribbons" seen along the mountains represent western influence, which sharply contrasts with great **mount** Masaaba, the symbol of Uganda. This meaning of the symbol also contrasts with the symbol of "naked **mount** Meru" which is compared to a "sleeping lazy man," The two symbolise "sleeping" Africa. "Sleeping" Africa could be understood in the case of underdevelopment in some parts of the continent.

Unfortunately symbols of priests and bishops represent several attributes (mixed) rather than that which we know of them, Godliness! These mixed attributes range from greed, hypocrisy and immorality, to religious martyrs. Lawino in *Song of Lawino*, openly abhors the new religion; she appears to have no kind word for the “bushy faced and fat bellied padre” and “white nuns,” who allegedly tortured her at the “catechism class” in the “cold hall with stone floor” with “meaningless songs that no one believes in; “meaningless shouting,” “meaningless phrases” and “meaningless words.” The brother to her husband uses the word “padres” in a derogatory sense (84). Lawino herself later refers to the robe worn by politicians (82), implicitly comparing it to the one worn by priests as the symbol of lies. Apparently, the new religion, as well as other new things, has not been explained to her in spite of her being an intelligent young woman. Lawino herself laments about that in chapter 9 (68) therefore, the “meaningless” things told by “padres” and “nuns,” and especially the sham and hypocritical behaviour of the catechist teacher, (58) make her resist the new religion and stick to the traditional one. On the contrary, for Ocol, the black Bishop at the altar blessing people in Latin, wearing “golden crown and scarlet robe”, (83). is the symbol of the definitive victory of the new way of life, new mentality over tradition.

Interestingly, the persona of the poem looks at this symbol in a positive sense - he pleads with his guards: “free my hands and feet / I want to go to church ... Our black nationalistic bishop / will bless me / with the holy water”,(76). Indeed this is unexpected given the way the prisoner has been negative on the majority of issues. It is, however, unclear, whether the persona is genuinely devoted to the newly-established African church, or simply mockingly praising it, for immediately after this he confesses: “I want to go to the village / to perform the cleansing ceremony”. Perhaps the poet wants to highlight the duality of the mindset of a modern African, who practices both “western” and traditional African religion equally.

In *Song of Malaya*, the meaning of the symbol is definite - apparently agreeing with Lawino rather than the prisoner. The Malaya presents “priests and their kind,”(155)

“black Bishops and priests” and the “black Bishop preaching morality”(161) as the clients of the prostitutes. They are said to be hypocritically preaching values of faithfulness and devotion and violating them in real sense; thus, symbolising hypocrisy.

11

Signs of Westernisation

These include destructive modern influences: oppression of the common people through riches and privileges brought by it; exploitation and hypocrisy; or foreign control of Africa. For instance, in *Song of Lawino*, Lawino expresses her misgivings about the innovations brought by the western culture. She condemns them because, according to her, they have destroyed the integrity and manhood of her husband. She also mocks her co-wife, complaining about the powder she applies, which she calls “ash-dirt”, “smell of carbolic soap,” and the “cotton nests” that are supporting her “fallen breasts” (2).

In chapter 3, she derogatorily speaks of the “ballroom house,” “ballroom dance,” “dances of the foreigners such as rumba and samba,” contrasting them with traditional Acholi dances. She equally condemns western education, saying that “my husband’s house is a dark forest of books;” and that “books smashed my husband’s testicles,” perhaps to mean that education has made Ocol a sycophant to people in authority, which is something abhorrent for a true Acholi man. Indeed, the “dark glasses” worn by Ocol could symbolise blind adherence to Western ways. Incidentally, Lawino appears to appreciate certain Western novelties even though. For example, she sounds as if she does not mind Ocol building an “iron roof house” for his second wife. She even concedes the power of the new medicines:

It is true
White man’s medicines are
strong... (10).

She even appreciates how water comes to the house from the pipes (12) and even likes the way the wall clock looks although she does not understand its function:

To me the clock
Is a great source of pride
It is beautiful to see. (7).

We could argue then that Lawino has the capacity to appreciate what is positive in the Western culture if the intentions of its proponents were genuine. Lack of proper explanation of these novelties is apparently the problem; indeed Lawino laments about it in chapter 9. This could serve as criticism of the European colonialists and missionaries who came to Africa and introduced their ways without any consideration for the existing African practices. Lawino's ability to appreciate some Western practices such as technological inventions as she continues to hold onto the Acholi lifestyle is an important statement about cultural synthesis, suggesting that Western novelties and African traditions can co-exist.

Ocol in *Song of Ocol* (chapter 6), gives a list of symbols, in his view, are indispensable for a "modernised" and "civilised" African. These include things such as a car, houseboy, ayah, red thick carpet, red slippers, waiter on his knees, rose bud, nice **house in Town**, spacious **gardens**, (foreign-grown) **flowers**, property in town, soap and towel, a dark suit, English and French and **banknotes**. He also praises foreign cultures (142), and rejoices in "flames of civilization" that can not be quenched by "tears of a woman" (symbolising traditional life). For Ocol, all these imports are the pledges of victory of the new way of life over the old one. In the poem, he also frequently portrays this victory in a metaphoric way by use of contrasting symbols: "flower **garden** contrasted to maize **shamba**," Ocol dreams seeing the "village world swept away by the fires of progress and civilization." He fantasizes that "**traditional medicine men** will be put in a **lake steamer** and drowned," speaking of the "wooden **arrow** striking the **concrete**" and the "**tractor** snorting on **hunting grounds**." In essence Ocol would like to see the traditional African way of life completely destroyed; replaced by Western ways.

The imprisoned ex-minister in *Song of a prisoner* appears to belong to Ocol's school of thought. He too adores Western ways and admires the luxurious westernised way of life that he was leading and that he is now missing terribly: he longs for his "gold pen" and "writing pad." He bitterly laments being "shoeless." These things reveal the former status

of this prisoner as compared to his colleague. It is however, ironic that the prisoner admires and praises the very systems that have incarcerated him.

For the prostitute in *Song of Malaya*, the signs of Western life such as "Hilton suites," "Hotel Apolo," "Acholi Inn," "carpets, sofas, car seats, park benches" are symbols of wildlife style. They are places and interiors where she and her kind are brought by client's- politicians, officials; these places are inseparably associated with (them) prostitutes and clients, therefore, they are inseparable attributes of exploitation and hypocrisy.

In contrast, however, Henry Barlow openly condemns the so-called foreign aid in his eponymous poem, showing how foreign goods are used for the foreign control of African states "whether suitable or not / you must buy our goods", "then they proceed to prescribe... / what and what not to eat / and how to conduct your affairs".(5) In *Building the nation*, it is shown how the politicians are bought off by the state leaders and their foreign masters with "cold bell beer, fried chicken, wine, ice-cream, and coffee."(7)

The exploitative boss in the eponymous poem "Small cocky man" features the so called "indispensable" attributes of modernity as "stupid prestigious moustache and yellow false teeth" and the employees in the offices are "licking (the master's) fancy shoes." Westernisation with its "premed hair, exotic perfumes, shapely attire, publicity flashlights, and stiff-necked protocol" brings spiritual dumbness and death; the poet speaks of a "dead crowd huddled under the Supermarket verandah," and compares a new westernised African with a chameleon who "watches television lights ... nodding small angular head, licking always dry lips." It seems that in the most generalized way the results of western influence, as the poet perceives them, are expressed in the allegorical in the poem *The bull*, the impotence inflicted on Africa by westernization is vividly captured in the symbol of the mighty animal the bull that it is given such "novelties" as "cutting whip, metal ring, harness, and yoke," (88) thereby taming the "bull."

The Car (automobile)

Apparently, car symbolises corruption, exploitation, unlawfully acquired wealth **riches** and oppressive power. Unfortunately, a car is portrayed as a mark of success and not what it really is: a symbol of social stratification. In *Song of Ocol* Ocol is persuading his fellow Ugandan: “beat the dust off your feet / and jump into my **Merc**,” (60) presumably calling upon them to forget the ways of his fathers and give in to the ways of the city, which by definition are corrupt though comfortable. How does one, for example, explain the ability of Ocol (a common mwananchi) to own a Merc?

The **merc**, referred to as **Benz** in *Song of a Prisoner*, comes out as a symbol of ill-will. The Benz here is a threat and danger in the city: “black **Benz** slithers through black night, purring like a hopeful **leopard**; its inhabitant, a state official, on a hunt.” (43) The implication here is that the state official is hunting for prostitutes or his political opponents, who will be arrested in their homes in the same way like the ex-minister in prison was picked.

The car continues to bear negative connotation in *Song of Malaya* in which the persona in the song calls the government officials looking for prostitutes “hunting **car-men**,” (142) and mentions a “bumping **Land Rover** heading for the City” (129), in which a rural “get-rich-quick” hurries to get her services in the city. Apparently, these abhorrent activities are encouraged by the car.

In his collection, Henry Barlow also introduces the symbol of *Benz*, in the poem *Mosquito and I* (104), where **Benz 280**, as a symbol of wealth, sharply contrasting the image of a poor beggar child (referred to as “Mosquito”) following the car in hope of alms. In “Foreign” aid, Barlow also speaks of “chauffer driven **limousines**” (4), served for foreign “negotiators” (4), in exchange for anticipated riches. In other poems, he introduces the image of a car as a symbol of danger, a deadly threat to human life: used during the times of military regimes. He also speaks of “police **motorcyclist**,” (15) “pick-up full of disguised armed soldiers” (15) and “**armoured troop-carriers**” (24).

Apparently, the car generally, and its advance in modern life elicits negative emotions. In the poem "The singer," for instance, the persona speaks of the "dead crowd (listening only to) **traffic noise**," (60) ignoring the prophetic song of a blind singer. There are also "**wheeled streams, petrol fumes, diesel fumes**" (61). Which are negative traits of western life and are deliberately associated with vehicles.

13

Army, soldiers and police

These are used as symbols of modern (oppressive) society. They seem to represent oppressive power, a threat to life, instruments of blind exterminating power, or simply tools used by the rulers to slaughter defenceless civilians.

In the poem *Song of Ocol*, written just on the eve of the breakout of military dictatorship (1971) in Uganda the persona speaks of "**military men, police chiefs**" as the pillars of the new society built in Africa; a society oppressive in its nature. The "**soldier**," according to Ocol, is to defend the "sacred boundary" established during the colonial period; This is a comment on new post-colonial demarcation of Africa and the new phase of "divide and rule," which is defended and preserved by these institutions.

In *Song of a prisoner*, the ex-minister, hoping that he will be released from prison, refers to "my friend and clansman – chief of the **army**" (15), "my Brothers in the **army and police**"(30). Ironically, these are the people who helped him rise and later put him in prison. It shows that he himself is a product of this oppressive system; hence becomes a "prisoner of conscience" only through opposing a stronger political rival. Consequently, the poet once again establishes the link between the institutions of armed defence and the structures of the oppressive power.

On the other hand, Henry Barlow whose majority poems were written after the first Ugandan coup, also depicts armed forces as the instrument and, frequently as the very symbol of oppress and even murder. The reader is informed of "**police motorcyclist**," (5) "pick-up full of disguised **armed soldiers**," (5) "slaughter and bloodshed those power-

drunk former colleagues, **army officers** and their lackeys have caused.” (5) Apparently, Barlow is being sarcastic when he refers to “second-hand **army boots**.” His implication here is possibly the point that the forces serving those oppressive regimes are equipped with used army gear from abroad. He extends the symbol from Ugandan reality to that of other places in Africa. There is striking image of a **soldier** as a symbol of blind exterminating power, actually used by the rulers to slaughter defenceless civilians, given in the poem *The jungles of Biafra*, where a “**soldier** sprayed the bush with bullets,” (42) instead of the enemy, killing a boy armed with a twig gun. This actually marks the height of cowardly heroism.

14

Alcohol

Alcohol appears to be both a symbol of destitution and affluence. On the one hand, it stands for destructive foreign influence: foreign staff putting minds into oblivion; people indulging in it out of desperation, using as the only consolation in their miserable lives. On the other hand, it depicts riches, power and status in society; the gap between the rich and the poor. The basis of the argument here is that only the rich and the powerful can afford such indulgence (all brands of alcohol).

For Lawino in *Song of Lawino*, alcoholic drinks are among the most destructive influences brought by the Europeans. Condemning the ballroom parties (3), she also cynically refers to “white men’s drinks;” and to “drunkenness.” She even denounces abuse of the traditional beer: *waragi*, (8).

To Ocol in *Song of Ocol*, however, alcohol represents prestige and a high standard of living. For Ocol who is totally absorbed in the Western way of life, the terms “red **wine**” (12) and “the Scotch” are symbols of riches and elevated status, unreachable for his “savage” and “backward” tribesmen.

For the persona in the *Song of a prisoner*, **alcohol** is meant to offer solace; a kind of refuge for the poor prisoner, who wants to go into oblivion to escape physical, moral and

emotional torture. Apparently, the only remedy available is the “**alcohol** of black silence” (42). The prisoner, an ex-minister, promises to drink himself to oblivion when released: “I want to forget / that I am a lightless star / a proud eagle / shot down / by the arrow / of uhuru” (94). But he wants to do it in the fashion that he is used to: consuming **alcoholic** drinks from all over the world (92-94). The reader notes that in this poem even the drinking habits of the two prisoners are used to show the gap between the rich and the poor. Indeed the persona in *Song of Malaya* makes a comparison between champagne and the traditional millet beer which the poor drink “to drown their distress and mark their small victories.” Alcohol, therefore, signals class differences.

Henry Barlow, however, like Bitek seems to criticise the very foreign alcohol apparently brought in to confuse and ruin Africans: “strong **liquor**” coming as a “foreign aid” to confuse the minds of consumers (“in real strong liquor you must / drown your pent-up humiliation” (6) (“Foreign aid”), and a petty employee, harassed by his boss, indulging in “four double waragis and triple **waragi** with Fanta Ginger Ale to drown his stress at work” (18) (“My boss”).

15

Bones, skulls and skeletons

These symbols stand for different things ranging from protective force and the link between generations (shrines as described by Lawino); devastation and backwardness (as seen by Ocol); modern oppressive society inducing the people to defile things that are traditionally sacred and people terrorised by political power.

In *Song of Lawino* the wording and understanding of these symbols is rather different. The reader notes that the symbols that can be named among the most frequent in Ugandan poetry, do not feature in Bitek’s verse, *Song of Lawino*; instead the poet uses the semantically related symbol of “ancestral **shrines**” (both bones and shrine in traditional context imply **ancestral grave**) to stand for protection and link between generations: the dead and the living. The poet repeatedly speaks of “clan **shrine** (2), **shrine** of the ancestors,” “father’s **shrine**” (10), “grandfather’s **shrine**” (12), “**shrine** of

your fathers," "Okango tree that grows on the ancestral **shrine**" (13). It is understandable that Bitek's poem is written before the political murders of the seventies that came to make bones, skulls and skeletons a common vocabulary. However, the three symbols feature on many occasions in *Song of Ocol*, conveying a negative meaning, portraying traditional Africa as the land of "dry **bones, skulls;**"(10) where there are "hyenas **snarling over bones**" and "land (16) strewn with human **skeletons,**" (16) thus, creating an image of a land of devastation and backwardness.

In *Song of a Prisoner*, the symbol assumes a more complicated meaning. Apart from constituting a link between generations, the use of these literary devices connote a negative meaning. The reader meets the persona, addressing his dead father: "(I will) exhume your **bones**, kick your stupid **skull;** (I want to) tread the earth with vengeance and shake the **bones** of my father in the grave" (38). The prisoner seems to utter these words out of sheer frustration with life, expressed in hatred for his father for bearing him in the wrong clan not the clan of leaders. The poet thus shows how the inequalities and atrocities of life in a modern oppressive society induce the people to defile things that traditionally are sacred. But the persona also uses the symbols in the modern context, referring to "pieces of **human bones** in the war-torn Nigeria" (114), and the police smashing people's "**skulls**" (117). Here the symbols are those of the harsh realities of modern society in which we meet people terrorised by political power. These symbols therefore represent violence and death.

Barlow in his works attaches to the symbols different meanings. In the poem "My newest bride" (speaking about Uhuru) the persona says: "I swore on the **bones** of my **forefathers** that I would neither sleep nor rest until she was my wife"(1). It echoes the meaning used in *Song of Lawino* where it was evoked to establish the link between the past and the present generations of fighters for freedom. Similar meaning is found in the poem "When I am dead and gone" (82) the persona prays: "let my **bones** feel the warmth of the sun" (82). However, in other poems he speaks of "smashed **skulls**, broken **ribs** and gash **wounds**" which are all presumably consequences of the first coup de'tat in Uganda. The poet also goes on to reassure the people: "**broken bones** shall mend and festering **wounds** shall

heal," meaning that Ugandan's political woes will one time end. Whatever has a beginning has an end.

16 Metal (tin, steel, iron and lead...)

The metallic tools here appear to stand for destructive (oppressive) artificial modernity; modernity misused by those in power but also victory of modern artificial civilisation over the traditional conventional ways; oppression and exploitation.

In *Song of Lawino* the meaning of metal as a symbol is used as something unnatural and alien resurfaces. This first occurs when Lawino is heard lamenting over her husband's neglect of traditional Acoli food in favour of "tinned beef, tinned fish / tinned frogs, tinned snakes / tinned peas, tinned beans" (36). The repetitive use of the word "tinned" in combination with sometimes inedible stuff, like frogs and snakes, shows Lawino's apprehensions about the unnaturalness and artificiality of many aspects of the alien culture.

However, Ocol on his part, as one would expect celebrates the advent of this metallic age. Metallic age in his view refers to the might of the new way of life as opposed to tradition; he extols them as the ways that will build the "New City on the hill overlooking the Lake a city of concrete, steel, stone." (84). Here the artificial materials are desecrating the hill, a place which initially is regarded as holy; thus, once again, in a symbolic way, Ocol appears to celebrate the victory of modern artificial civilisation over the traditional conventional ways.

Incidentally, for the prisoner in *Song of Prisoner*, the symbols of **steel** and **lead** bear a negative meaning, as the persona speaks of "steel gate" and "steel door," presumably referring to the gates of prison that separate him from freedom. He laments: "steel rhinos ruin the crops and sneeze molten lead into the huts" (32), referring to the government tanks killing people. The reader easily sees that this symbolism is most likely referring to the civil war in the Uganda of coups d'etats.

Similarly, Barlow in *Building the Nation* also employs this symbolism with negative connotations. Figuratively, he speaks of “heavy cast **iron** bottom of the boss” (63) to symbolise oppression then he literally speaks of “**armoured** troop-carriers” (7) which symbolise the menace of oppressive military power. Allegorically the poet also speaks of “**metal** nooses” tearing the nose of the bull” (7) perhaps to symbolise the African implied in the eponymous poem.

17

Millet and sorghum

Perhaps these are some of the most important things in Uganda’s traditional life. When in plenty they symbolise value, abundance, life, prosperity, protection, healing, strength and link with the ancestors

In *Song of Lawino*, the poet mentions **millet** in different contexts; for example, as an item of value (chapter 5). While speaking about the noble origin of her family, Lawino says: “I am not a slave girl... my mother was not exchanged for a basket of millet” (29), thus, the poet is implying that millet is really a valuable thing as one basket could be exchanged for a slave girl, a human being. Meanwhile, millet in Chapter 6 means many things such as a source of resilience (“do you know / why the knees / of the millet-eaters are tough?” (37) and abundance as “**millet** mixed with cassava and sorghum” (37) are used for food). Indeed millet in chapter 10 is referred to as a source of life. So if “the hail stones have rained and ruined all the **millet**” (78), this spells great disaster as people will go without food.

In chapter 11, **millet** is evoked as a symbol of prosperity together with cotton and simsim (81). When, therefore, in the same chapter Lawino compares her husband to a man who “has no **millet** field,” it indicates how base and empty he is as it means that “he lives on borrowed foods” (94.) In effect Lawino could be implying how her husband has no foothold, having abandoned his people’s ways in favour of the alien. However, millet also has medicinal properties: (“**millet** porridge” and “raw eggs mixed in **millet**” are

therapeutic and known for their divine qualities. Millet also forms part of the sacrifice given to ancestors: blood, beer, meat and **millet** bread,” (97). The value of millet is further reinforced in *Song of prisoner* when the prisoner plans that when (and if) he will ever be released, “(He) wants to plough the land and plant **millet**,” (76) which will provide for his family . It will also raise his status as a millet farmer. He also reminisces on traditional foods that apparently symbolise social cohesion and prosperity..

Men drink kwete beer,
Women cook goat meat
And **millet** bread,
But I am not there
To distribute dishes
Among the elders, (103).

18

Earth

Earth symbolises life and tradition. In *Song of Lawino*, the persona mainly refers to the significant traditional kitchenware made of earth (and clay), despising the foreign crockery. The reader is introduced to “**earthen** vegetable **pot**” (6), “pots and **earthen** dishes” (7), “**clay** pots and dishes”(9); even the ways of sitting at the traditional meal are sharply contrasted with the modern ones. He says: “in my mother’s house / we eat sitting on the **earth** / and not on the trees, like monkeys” (39), (referring to European kitchen stools and chairs, (39). Through the persona the poet seems to caution that man should be as close to the earth as possible, because earth gives life and sustains it.

Apparently the earth as a source of life should be fed too. In *Song of Ocol* the poet uses the symbol to highlight the need to improve the earth for better yield, criticising the “**thirsty earth**” (6) in a village, apparently impoverished by incompetent traditional **farming** methods that yield unmatched fruit.

The paradox of the earth, however, is that being the source of life, it is again the recipient of the **same** life: it is where one is buried at the end of life. In *Building the Nation* the persona in the poem “When I am dead and gone,” (82) consoles himself with the thought

that after his death he will be “laid in brown **earth**,” (82) and thus the cycle of life will not be interrupted as crops will grow on the brown soil.

19

Silence

The symbol of silence seems to carry a negative meaning: unnatural, menacing, omen of bad things to come; weakness, bad luck. In chapter 3 of *Song of Lawino*, Lawino speaks of “**silence** in the ballroom” (22) which she contrast with the joyous music, voices and general multiplicity of sounds at traditional dances in chapter 7. She also laments about a change in her husband’s character: “Ocol is **silent**, does not want to hear noises.” (25) Similarly in chapter 11, a negative meaning is implied when she makes a parallel comment – “you are silent / like a woman who has broken a taboo!” (85). In Chapter 10, silence is also attributed to weakness and failure: “If in a hunt / the spears of the men / strike tree trunks and earth / they return home **silent**” (78).

In *Song of prisoner* **silence** is likewise regarded negatively when the persona speaks of the “alcohol of dark **silence**” (42) that intoxicates him in prison. Pessimism is further implied when he speaks of his nights in the cell, where he mentions that they are so dreadful that even the “owls keep **silence**” (24). The prisoner further refers to the dark **silence** that urinates fire” (16) into his skin ulcers (16). In all the instances silence is depicted as something negative, perhaps contradicting the nature of African socialism characterised by collectivity and sharing.

20

Speech and slogans

These are seen as symbols of hypocritical and oppressive politics with the gullibility of the common people on the receiving end. They are a mark of artificiality. However, the monologues by the four characters in the song school symbolise values held by the singers.

In one of Lawino's vitriolic attacks on political innovations brought to Africa, she refers to "speech, talking endlessly as senseless words, too much talking" (77) and "the lies of the speakers" (87) which she perceives as the main occupation of newly-emerged African political leaders, who are unable to do anything constructive other than engage in empty talk all day. Even the persona in *Song of Ocol* makes similar comments: "(you shouted) slogans you did not understand" (56) after paying "two shillings for the party membership." He makes these cynical comments criticising the common country people of being naive and gullible to political lies.

Barlow reinforces the symbols with a similar meaning. In the poem "Paper napkin" he pleads with the conscience of the common mwananchi:

Rather, celebrate and **shout with joy**
For humbler tasks like growing broilers
Or looking after your hogs in a pigsty
Will reward you with more joy and peace
Than helplessly listening to the **speech**
That will cost you a sleepless night
Researching drafting and polishing,
Falsified and murdered by a fool
To cover his indolence and stupidity! (22).

In context the poet apparently suggests that a (*politician*) fool makes long speeches at political rallies only to incite severe fatigue on the listeners who at the end gain nothing and are even misrepresented in parliament. Therefore, we conclude that the poet employs this symbolism to connote hypocritical and oppressive politics in Uganda. The poet paints a picture of how the masses in political rallies have nothing to take home that will put food on their tables.

In other poems Barlow also speaks of "herds of sheep (*wananchi*) screaming **slogans** for years" (22) and accuses a politician of having colleagues who are sycophant who give the impression that "whenever they open their mouths / they switch on the recorded tapes of your **speeches**," (22) thereby hinting at the artificiality of modern politics. He depicts politicians as parrots benefit of original thoughts and ideas. This he further emphasises in

the poem *Vietnam* in which he refers to the “**artificially** impassionate voices” of the politicians as being null and void.

21 Newspapers, radio and television

Introductory remarks, Mass media appear to stand for brainwashing; voice of the State (lies, bad news, intimidation, danger) and propaganda. In *Song of Lawino* the person recognises the colonial mass media as well as colonial education as instruments of brainwashing. Speaking about herself, she confesses thus, “I cannot tune the **radio** / because I do not hear / Swahili or Luganda” (4 and 27). In contrast, Ocol fully succumbs to colonial propaganda, making Lawino lament: “my husband’s face is covered up completely with a big **newspaper**” (7, 45). Later, she implores Ocol to let his relatives help him to reform his life. She says “let your relatives scoop out the gum that have filled your ears... from the books / and the useless things from the **magazines and newspapers, and the radio and television**” (96).

Similarly, the persona in *Song of prisoner* deplores the **television** for mostly showing murderous politicians, while the relatives of their victims shed tears over their dead. Perhaps the role of mass media as a propaganda tool is hinged on the fact that reporting is a selective exercise in which the listeners can only hear what the reporter chooses to report.

22 Teachers

Ironically teachers too are associated with negatives attributes such as lying, hypocrisy, lust and immorality. In *Song of Lawino* the persona lashes at church teachers, who are not only telling lies and speaking meaningless things (56), but are also lustfully running after young girls (58). This image is confirmed in the reference to bush **teachers** in *Song of Malaya* where the persona exposes them, thus: “welcome you teachers / teaching in bush schools .../ coming into the city / your trouser pockets / bulging with wallets.” (130). Apparently, these “good shepherds” (130), preaching morality to their students, are

in fact some of the most regular clients of the Malaya, possibly spending school money: (their pockets are “bulging with wallets” in spite of their meagre salaries). *Teacher* has been negatively portrayed to symbolise ill manners ironic of what is expected of the title.

23

Children

Reference to children appears not only to symbolise abundance, blessing, continuity, future, and innocence; but also backwardness (sickly children), symbolise the pain of war and poverty. In *Song of Lawino* where traditional context of children is highly reserved, a large number of **children** symbolise abundance of blessing in the homestead, blessing of the individual family and continuity of a given community. Conversational in the poem *Lawino* interrogates the audience, thus: “what music is sweeter than the cries of **children**?” (7 and 45). Later on she speaks of dead **children** as being a sign of the utmost disaster on land (61).

In *Song of Ocol* the word **children** evokes sympathy. The persona is expressing his concerns for the condition of children in his community. *Ocol* captures the environment for children in an African village, thus: a “hut with a leaking thatch, sickly **children**, filthy floor.” In his view, traditional societies did not handle their children properly. He justifies this by referring to a traditional healing ceremony for children when a sick child is treated with saliva, beer and chicken blood. He accuses the rural communities of killing their future with backward ways. *Ocol*’s views on the treatment of children make much sense here. Indeed in traditional Uganda children were served last with chicken intestines, necks and legs after adults had had their fill of chicken breasts and thighs. At night they humbly accept the floor as their sleeping beds as grown ups including strong parents mount their sleeping beds, (researcher’s experiences).

In *Song of Malaya* the persona mocks the teachers charged with moulding children. They leave the children to scatter about like “wild thorn trees in school compounds,” implying that they are neglected, while their teachers are “coming into the city” with “trouser pockets / bulging with wallets” (130) to look for her services. This is worrying as it

concerns children who are seen as the symbol of any society's future. Indeed, the picture evokes sympathy for the children in Africa who are neglected, abandoned and abused.

In Henry Barlow's *Building the Nation*, **children** appear to symbolise innocence. The poet presents the readers with an interesting use of this symbol in "The jungles of Biafra", where it is used differently in relation to two characters. Barlow presents a "child, a boy of five" who could be said to symbolise innocence and future life, rashly killed, supposedly by mistake. After the incident the soldier is haunted, for his affront on such innocence. Of course, the question one feels like asking is the very necessity of the war. Who was the enemy that the soldier was supposed to be fighting? The answer is that the enemy comprises fellow country men opposing the ruling dictatorship. The clash is cause of the presence of "naked **children**" referred to in "Uganda 1978." The naked children symbolise the future of a nation threatened with the poverty conditions inflicted upon the country by the military rule.

24

Grave

Incidentally grave symbolises continuity and link with the ancestors. It is like a family shrine? In *Song of Lawino*, the poet uses the semantically close symbol of **shrine** to stand for continuity and link with the ancestors the past. This symbolism is invested in family grave yards because the graves are sacred symbols themselves. The engravings on the family cemeteries and shrines explain the symbolism of the grave itself. In Uganda, for example, plots with graves are jealously guarded by the clan because they represent significant aspects of their tradition. Reverence for the **grave** it seems is universal. In Christian practice, for example, during Good Friday or All Saints Day Christians make processions with lit candles, which they place on the graves of their departed loved ones.

In *Song of Prisoner* the poet uses a feeling not a symbol of the grave with the same meaning as in the first poem, (song of Lawino) but with a negative shade. He speak of the "wizard dancing on my father's **grave**" meaning family shrine is desecrated because the son is in prison. Then the persona says, "I want to... shake the bones of my father in

the **grave**" (104) for bearing him in the wrong clan and not the Clan of leaders. This seems to confirm the belief in some societies of Africa that the dead always remain alive among their people. It is confirmed in Barlow's poem "When I am dead and gone" when he speaks about the grave as a place where the soul is finally appeased, but from which the deceased will maintain the link with his descendants. As such the persona cautions his contemporaries: "do not put cold stones on my grave" but allow "my bones [to] feel the warmth of the sun after rain" (82) and the flowers to "smile over me as I have smiled on this world" (82).

25

Beggar and slum

The two are symbols of enslavement by misplaced western culture, poverty, ignorance and suffering. In *Song of Lawino*, the symbol is used metaphorically, to deplore those Africans who, like Ocol, blindly follow westernisation. They are compared to "beggars, war-captives and **slaves**." (27) This emphasizes their weakness and inferiority complex, caused by the absence of their own self, which they are trying to disguise claiming that they are civilised; in real sense, they have begged/borrowed their current "culture," in fact a caricature to the western one by which they have been captured and enslaved.

In *Song of Prisoner* the persona talks to his mother, calling himself "the blind **beggar**," (52) reproaching her for bearing him "in the wrong clan." (50) He appears aware of his pitiful state, but he is unable to realise that it was the oppressive system, and not his parents' fault, that brought him to it. Thus, here the symbol of beggar stands for the pitiful state of ignorance.

In *Building the Nation*, Barlow employs this symbol in the poem "Mosquito and I," (103) where he speaks of a child street **beggar** whom he calls Mosquito; he is using this to highlight the unfair attitude of the society to the downtrodden, innocent people who are suffering through no fault of their own. The symbol represents undeserved suffering. In the poem "Uganda 1978," he speaks of the "cruelty of **kondos**" (25), slum burglars in Kampala, and he blame this on the cruelty of the regime which compels common people

to be cruel to one another; and hoping that it will change with time, he concludes: when
"Uganda will smile again"

26

Money

Money symbolises greed and destruction by greed and alien power, which is not founded on true human values. In several poems it is presented as an instrument of profit, exploitation; destruction of humaneness and human personality.

The persona in *Song of Lawino* is quite aware of the destructive power of money. She hypothesizes on why people like her husband and his brother join the political parties, when she asks: "Is it the money? Is it the competition for position?" (85). When Ocol's brother says that "the Democratic Party /will sell the land /to poor white men," (84) Lawino once again demonstrates her wisdom by asking: "If the white men are poor/ where will they get the money/ with which to buy the land?" (84) She is without doubt aware that money is powerful; that it can be used to buy, build or destroy anything, but to her it is an alien power, not always used according to the foundation of true human merits.

In the *Song of Ocol* the meaning of the symbol of money contradicts the one found in *Song of Lawino*. Here, the reader encounters the persona who puts "banknotes" into the list of modern necessities. The persona is aware of only the power and prestige associated with having money, and may want to exploit other people to a mass it.

In the poem "Mosquito and I" (103) Barlow is rather apologetic for his attitude acquired through the mere fact of belonging to the modern "money" society. This is noticed when he engages a self searching activity and remembers his past encounter with a "beggar child." (103) Recalling the scenario, he regrets having failed to give a few coins to a poor child beggar. He realises that even a small amount of money can over-shadow true relations between humans, destroying humaneness and human personality.

Conclusion

Over and above, we note that all poems cited in this chapter confirm that Ugandan poetry is largely rich in symbolism. However, in this chapter we only analysed the dominant symbols that were introduced into modern Ugandan poetry by the poets of the first generation. In our opinion, the importance of this analysis lies in the fact that these poets have provided Ugandan verse with a set of symbols expressing certain basic concepts relevant to Ugandan poetry. These concepts actually allow the poets to describe in a poetic way their main, 'collective' subject matter of Ugandan reality of the corresponding periods; its various aspects and different facets, from traits of social system to trends in public thought and consciousness. These symbols are significant because of their recurrent nature. Introduced by the poets whose works we analysed in this chapter, they were later used by subsequent generations of Ugandan poets, confirming the fact that they are really representing the set of concepts that could be said draw a 'poetic map' of the country's poetry. Besides, this is the fact that each generation, as we will demonstrate, uses the symbols in unique ways, relevant to the circumstances of the day, is the key factor. In this way the poetic map is evolving and reshaping itself.

We have also appreciated the fact that symbolism has been widely interpreted at varying levels and with different approaches, but in all cases a symbol represents a meaning beyond the immediate one, hence symbols cannot be taken at face value. Furthermore, we have also appreciated the fact that poetic symbols are not necessarily universally applicable, but rather are directly interpreted and understood as referring to ideas, themes or a given subject matter dependent on the context of the poem as well as the setting or the general environment in which the reader is set at the time of making a critical appreciation of a given poem. However, from our analysis we can conclude that each of the analysed symbols has the basic or main or principal meaning, more or less tallying in many of the analysed works, with each symbol carrying other "shades of meaning," that enrich it and expand its expressive qualities. This observation will be important for us when we begin comparing both basic and secondary meanings in order to discern the evolution of symbols in the works of Ugandan poets.

CHAPTER THREE

Recurrent Symbols Used in Ugandan Poetry: The Second Generation

Introduction

In this chapter, we analyse the same set of recurrent symbols that we identified in the previous chapter to determine their use by the poets of the second generation. It is to be noted that these authors were creating in the times which can be deemed as the saddest period of post-colonial Ugandan history. These were the times of the military rule of Idi Amin Dada, renowned for the victimisation of hundreds of thousands of Ugandans. Definitely these difficult times had their impact on the whole of Ugandan culture, especially poetry as an artistic vehicle of expression. This impact will be further contemplated in chapters 4 and 5 of the study. However, in this chapter we will mainly analyse the basic meanings of the recurrent symbols as used by the poets of the second generation. But before we do this, it again appears prudent to introduce the poets and their works.

Joseph Buruga – *The abandoned hut*

The abandoned hut by Joseph Buruga, first published in 1969, is a long poem belonging to the “song school” of Ugandan poetry, established in the 1950s by Okot p’Bitek, and can in fact be called the “male version” of *Song of Lawino*. The poem is actually a long monologue of the persona, a traditional Ugandan male named Mediye, addressing his sweetheart Basia, accusing her of falling prey to the moral decadence occasioned by Western influences. Mediye wants to marry Basia and have her as his traditional wife following the ways of his people: the Kakwa. However, Basia’s inclination towards modern ways impedes the marriage. The use of many symbols in Buruga’s work is similar to that in Okot p’ Bitek’s poem, *Song of Lawino* which apparently was his main source of inspiration. In fact Buruga’s work is a kind of reverse situation where the man is accusing the woman as opposed to the latter accusing the former as is the case in *Black’s* work. It is for this reason, that we decided not to include in this generation analysis of another work belonging to the song school - a long poem: *Tired* by Joseph Kagimu, written in 1970s and published in 1995, nearly two hundred pages of the poem have the same set of the recurrent symbols as Buruga’s work and, of course, their

predecessor and mentor Okot's. The use of these symbols in Kagimu's poem, in our opinion, is close to that found in the poems of Okot and Buruga and that why we intentionally excluded his work from our study for the purpose of brevity.

Richard Ntiru –Tensions

Richard Ntiru, a prominent figure in Ugandan literature of 1970s, had his only collection of poems published in 1971. This collection consists of poems dealing with a variety of subjects on the situation in Uganda and the rest of Africa, ranging from cultural to matters social and philosophical in nature, and love. A specific trait of Ntiru's poetic style is his highly expressive, sometimes almost piercing tone, combined with strong and frequently unusual images, and as we will try to show below, apt use of symbolism.

Lubwa P'Chong – Words of my groaning

Words of my Groaning, is the collection of poems published in 1976 by Cliff Lubwa P'Chong, one of the leading Ugandan poets and especially playwrights of the 1970s. Having authored seven plays, P'Chong became famous. His poems deal with various themes, but, the main one is the social situation in Uganda and the suffering of Ugandans under dictatorship, featured with especial expressivity in the major works of the collection mentioned. These include long poems "The Rain," which in a highly symbolic manner tells us about the descent of the military rule, and "Lament of Alunya the voter," where the persona, a poor peasant named Alunya, tells about the plight of people in a corrupt and oppressive society.

Okello Oculi - Malak

Okello Oculi, who gained fame as a prose writer after the publication of the novel *Prostitute* in 1972 and a few other prose works in the later period, has also strengthened his literary reputation as a poet, having published a long poem: *Malak* (1976) is analysed in this chapter while his other collection of poems *Song for the sun in us*, has been excluded from the range of our study because Oculi has considerably, if not drastically, changed the whole set of symbols and the concept of their use in compariso to other poets of his and even the next generation. Thus, he seems to have established a new tendency in

symbolism of Ugandan poetry, which tendency we plan to investigate in our further studies.

Frank Ojera Anywar - *Wars no more*

Frank Ojera Anywar is one of the most prolific poets of the second generation; he is the author of four poetic collections. Unfortunately, many of his works have become almost collectors' items and for this study we managed to get hold of only one of his collections, published in 1991, but containing many poems written in previous decades, especially in 1970s and early 1980s. The poet's main focus modern Ugandan history, its politics pregnant with wars and their effect on the lives of his compatriots.

Timothy Wangusa - *A pattern of Dust and other poems* and *Anthem for Africa*

Timothy Wangusa, in our view, can be marked as the leading poet of the second generation. His first collection of poems titled *Salutations* was published in 1977, and also became a rarity; however, most of its poems were included the later collection *A pattern of dust and other poems*, published in 1992. This collection is divided into six parts, each having its own title outlining the main theme of its poems. "Nativity soil" contains mainly the memories of childhood and the region where the poet was born; "Sovereign flags" deals with politics; "Flesh and metal" discourses on the relationships between human beings and human-made technology; "Femalekind" speaks about women's problems and the gender agenda; "The masqueraders" gives several portraits, embodying different aspects of Ugandan society, and "Intimations" contains mainly philosophical poems.

Wangusa's latest collection *Anthem for Africa*, published in 1995 in Italy with a parallel text in Italian, is a poetic interpretation of the distant and recent history of Africa and, specifically, Uganda. It also contains several titled parts: "After the end" refers to post-Amin times and it is a philosophical contemplation of the role of a poet in an African society; "The end" describes Amin's coup d'tat against Milton Obote; "Flashback" is a historical examination of the colonial period; "Before the end" refers to the period before Amin and the beginning of his time; "Flashback II" tells about the pre-colonial times;

“Between the end and the beginning” is about the last years of Amin’s rule, and “Before the beginning” tells about its end (Amin’s rule); “Flashback III” speaks about the early colonial period, and “The beginning” is about the first days after the end of Amin’s reign. Although the countries and the politicians in the book are under pseudonyms, Uganda is called Afolandia, Kampala - Afroville, Amin - Masaya, Obote - Ojozi, and so on. The parts of the book give a general outline of pre-colonial times, colonial invasion, independence and meticulously reproduce many iconic events of modern Ugandan history - the coups, military terror, Kagera war and others. This poetic account of history is unique in Ugandan poetry, although the reader may trace the influence of such metres to Okot p’Bitek, as well as frequent allusions to other well-known names and works of African literature such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o, David Fagunwa and others.

Unfortunately, until now as generally noted in our justification there has not been a special critical study to appreciate the richness of Wangusa’s poetry - his brilliant use of language, sonic devices, inventive and striking imagery, and beauty of expression. This chapter tries to fill this gap to some extent. However in this chapter we attempt to show that the use of symbols in Wangusa’s works being one of the strongest traits of his poetry. The richness and multiplicity of meanings that he attaches even to “conventional” and recurrent symbols surpass many of his peer poets and those of other generations.

The symbols

Blood

Blood symbolises life and survival of Africa, ancestral sacrifice, unity of mankind. It is also employed to symbolise negative aspects of westernised culture such as; immorality and inhumanness of modern society; as well as parasitism in its primary meaning. In addition, blood symbolises pain, suffering and war. In its secondary meaning; moreover it implies oppression and dictatorship as prominent features of the world, African history and recent Ugandan past.

In *The abandoned hut*, the author refers to blood as a symbol of life, figuratively talking about an unfaithful sweetheart; he reminds her that “you stabbed me with the knife of love, you left me wounded, bleeding, helpless, **blood** gushed out, my fingers were all red and then I felt life ebbing out of me” (10-11). Apparently, one who denies you love denies you life. This is what the poet is positing to those who are socialised in a world of infidelity. However, the symbol is also used to describe the negative attitude to some practices of the people who have embraced Western culture said to drink liquid which looks like **blood**. The liquid in context refers to red wine.

In Nturu's poems the symbol of blood acquires a multiple meaning. For instance, it symbolises life generally, but in this context – we have words like “father angles for young **blood** in my life” (17), perhaps referring to youth under the pressure of tradition; whereas those torn between modernity and tradition become “innocent spectators with scattered brain and diverted **blood**,” (37). The car, regarded as a negative symbol of modern civilization, is called “powdered mixture of metal, **bone and blood**” (105), where the blood and bone, as human elements, are the most vulnerable. However, in his poetry the symbol of blood also has the permanent meaning of pain and suffering: “green growth of **blood sap**” is the fruit of the civil war that killed Christopher Okigbo (99); “drop of **blood** from bleeding heart” stands for the suffering of mankind (102), which is caused by the “**bloody** bondage” between man and the devil (99).

In P'Chong's *Words of my groaning* blood becomes a symbol of immorality in the modern society. P'Chong writes: "**blood** upsurges in men's veins and their spears begin to nod" (13) as they engage the services of prostitutes; "men disembark women their bellies smeared with **blood**" (14) refer to men using the services of prostitutes even when they have periods; and prostitutes "suck life-**blood** of marriage" (40) causing marriages to break due to infidelity.

Another meaning of the symbol of blood in P'Chong's poetry is that of sacrifice to the ancestors: "a ram is slaughtered and the **blood** sprinkled on the spears the ancestors are hungry, a ram is fetched and the **blood** offered to those underground" (36 & 37) In this case **blood** has acquired a positive meaning as compared to its earlier use by the same given that sacrifice in an African setting unites the living with their ancestors in a way that can only be explained by blood links. It would be interesting if one tried to compare the death of innocent rams for sacrifice and that of innocent human beings satiating the desire by political dictators to destroy life.

Niru, on his part uses the symbols to denote war and oppression: in the war-torn village, "at night agoga death-bird flies over all homesteads, wailing its sad news: **blood! blood! blood!** The gods are drunk with chicken **blood**" Here chicken has been used to symbolize men), and even the earth is groaning "**Blood! Blood!**" An "insensitive driver," a soldier at the wheel of a car that brings a political prisoner to the execution, also has "**blood-red** eyes." In this context blood has been employed to symbolize the bloody-thirsty military regimes.

In Oculi's *Malak* the symbol in its positive meaning is found on two occasions. First, it symbolises life. In the words "hold banana," the poet is telling readers about a fruit - banana that symbolises ever-resurrecting life on the continent. He exhorts and you have the drumbeat of the **blood** of Africa." In the second case, blood is employed to symbolise the unity of mankind. The poet tells his readers: "the sunshine knows only one **blood**" that of all humans. Otherwise, in all the other contexts in which blood is mentioned in *Malak* symbolises exploitation and bloodshed in old and modern Africa as the readers are

...rained, "we shall have tongue of Padmore for wiping the windows of **blood** and
...erty." The poet continues thus: "they who thirst for the **blood** of the world know only
...power: of the sounds of teeth melting under their feet; of staccatos of guns banging
...cross nightmares; of rats and condors, constipating the down trodden with tears;" "rust
...is creeping towards spilled **blood**;" "there is no tome enough to measure the length
...**blood**" shed in African history; "millet in Uganda, groundnuts of Gambia, **blood** of
...igeria and Nigeria and Rwanda and Burundi and Angola;" Referring to African history,
...asks: "who knows the fields of **blood** we sowed, the rows of bones we planted" "a
...wearing wrinkles tells his shadow: they (colonizers) have cut my **blood** and in its
...vines they have ploughed underdevelopmentery."

In Ojera Anywar's *Wars no More*, we encounter only one case when the symbol assumes
positive meaning referring to life. This is when the poet boasts of having "blackish red
black **blood**" (2) thereby symbolising the involvement in life and admiration of it. In
addition blood has been used to symbolise social parasitism. For instance, having been
led by a politician, the persona confesses: "I sucked your sweet-sweat-**blood**" (3) ; The
dehumaness of the modern society is presented in "wind from Rolls-Royce engine drew
out my **blood** (3) "; all the other meanings of the symbol refer to blood spilled in wars in
modern Africa and the world. We read: "now we've trigger-happy tribes, we've war-
monger races, we've **blood-thirsty** clans"; "my piteous eye flows tears when it hears a
gun-shot and sees **blood**"; "any slight sound of a gun, any small drop of **blood** flows
out:" (61) ; "should I laugh when innocent **blood** flows?"(61)

In Wangusa's poetry, blood symbolises death of humanity in the society. He speaks
of "blood hidden under metal" (31) referring to humans and humanness subjected to
technology; "frenzy in human **blood**" (33) that compels the Kilembe miners to go
underground. In this context blood symbolises greed caused by civilization that has
drained the blood. He also speaks of "**blood** spilled during the colonisation of Africa"
of "screaming **blood**" (77) of humans tortured in Hell, rendering the life-line object
of blood, the already well-known meaning of oppression and suffering. In *Anthem for*

Africa the symbol of oppression and suffering meaning is the most wide-spread. The poet speaks of bloodshed as the common, however macabre, practice of human history especially colonisation where the poet says “attackers down the centuries shock-absorbed by the **blood** of empire,” (116) and newcomers who “routed their spirits from the **bleeding soil**” apparently referring to colonisers.

The poet speaks about “the world in a **bleeding cave**,” in the sense that the whole world history has been a never-ending scenario of bloodshed. However, the blood in his poems is the blood spilt in past and modern Ugandan history. He depicts Uganda’s landscape as being filled with blood: “**bleeding valleys**”, “streams of **blood** on the hillside”, “**blood** faith sown in our soil” and “rivers of native **blood**.” These images could be said to accurately capture the Ugandan situation, for apparently the country’s independence turned out to be only a succession of butchering dictators. He refers to “**bloodshed** that exchanged one monster for another;” “liquidation squad struck down by a yet **bloodier** squad;” and nightmarish history repeats itself. “Every **bloody deed** enacts its ancient origin.” The poet calls the Ugandan military rulers “feeders on **blood**”, “mercenary **blood-drinkers**” “drinkers of **Africa’s blood**” surrounded by “sorcerers and wizards with cut-throat deeds (who) fattened like dogs on **blood** of the defenceless poor.” The military rulers are said to be a “crowd wanting no answer but the **blood**.” They turned the country into what the poet bitterly terms a “victorious **bloodbath**”.(Compare blood bath in Wangusa’s poetry and Barya kincoco’s poetry).

In *Anthem for Africa* **blood** appears as a key symbol. The poet speaks about the faith of Ugandan people: – “we are watered in **blood!**” Wangusa exclaims with bitterness, and laments about “**blood** of the defenceless poor,” “innocent **blood** of massacred countrymen” and “kindred **blood** of butchered Afrolandians”

The collection features only three cases of positive references to the symbol – “throbbing **blood** of Africa” meaning life and survival of the continent and its people; “sacrifice in sweat and **blood** by flaming pioneers now dead”, referring to fighting for independence

and "those **blood-bound** to the **soil** and swore by this **blood** to re-possess the land" suggesting apparently freedom fighters in Kenya who fought in the "MauMau" war.

2
Hut, homestead and house symbolise African view: lost traditional wisdom and values, cultural roots, past, Western view: poverty (leaking house), wealth (mabati house), backwardness of Africa, native land torn by military regimes.

In Buruga's, *The abandoned hut* the word "hut" obviously is one of the prominent symbols in the text - the symbol of abandoned African tradition. In the text the symbol of the hut is encountered where the persona speaks of the "safety of your **hut**," as "we played in the afternoons under the verandah of your father's **hut**." This is when he is talking to his sweetheart about the past which she has abandoned preferring the new ways. Other references to the symbol of **house** by Buruga appear to point at westernization. We encountered "**houses** called Cinema Halls, also described as "**houses** where spirits of distant people move and talk **spirits** of dead people;" "**houses** where big boxes sing **houses** where people gather to drink beers. Mediye accuses Basia, thus: "you roam from man to man...from **house** to house," adding, "I have been abandoned like a **house** to its ghosts." The man complains of having been left because he still holds onto his people's traditions. House here, therefore, represents the Western way of life.

Richard Nturu in *Tensions* uses the homestead and house to symbolise abandoned traditional life. He refers to it as an old **homestead**, the **house** he should not return to or small **house** with low **roof**. In his work the poet also speaks of **deserted hearthstones**, **maternal mortar**, **hearth** and **triplets** as symbols of the past abandoned by his generation. All these symbols have a close association with a traditional homestead. Apparently, Nturu realises that he cannot go back to the old ways and can only be nostalgic about it.

In *Words of my groaning* P'Chong uses the symbols of **hut** and **homestead** but giving them a different meaning - that of chaps in the motherland torn by military terror. He

draws the picture of "rampant herds of elephants uprooting crops, **huts**, trees." Appealing to the people in the North, who are known for supporting the military regime, he says: "you yonder people, leave dark-heartedness, for it sows death in the **homestead**;" "from **homestead** to homestead chickens continue dying after the fall of rain (rain symbolizes war);" and "at night agoga death-bird flies over all **homesteads**", choosing those who will fall victims in tomorrow's military raids. The *agoga* bird is usually associated with bad news and death. Its appearance at night here, therefore, signals death.

The symbol of **house** also seems to represent the division between the rich and the poor, for instance. a **leaking house** symbolizes poverty as seen in "people with **leaking houses**" that inhabit the slums, including a poor man, Alunya the voter in the eponymous poem who too confesses: "I continue to linger in the shade of my **leaking hut**." One cannot help noticing the disparity: while Alunya lingers in the shade of his leaking hut, the Councillor, an immediate neighbour wears a suit and sleeps comfortably in a mabati house. Incidentally, the councillor who does not really earn enough money to afford mabati house, how could he have built it? In the end the disparity symbolises corruption.

Okelo Oculi in *Malak* uses the symbol of a **hut** in almost the same way as Bitek in *Song of Ocol* where the hut symbolises the backwardness of Africa. The poet says that they (Africans) "have yet to swing the phlegm from the **huts**." He speaks of the "trees rotting with hernia from carrying **huts**." This is at the backwardness of tradition which is still to be overcome. The image of house is also promptly used in the poem and depicted as the house or hut **on fire**, perhaps symbolising the pitiful state of modern Africa. He writes "one of our **houses** is on fire... a sleep-walker (*the modern African*), urinating in his dreams, has lit the **grass hut** with corruption and greed." Africa is then compared to a starving widow, and "when a widow's **house** is on fire, no testicle remains on a stool." Africa's state of being on fire has many faces to it: it is literally burning from gun-powder and arson caused by the marauding military bands. On the other hand its proud culture is up in smoke having been lit up by the likes of Ocol and Basia.

The meaning attached to the symbol of **hut** and **house** in Anywar's collection is similar to that in the poems of Ntiru: both symbolise Uganda in agony. In the poem titled "It's my House" the persona is a disappointed man complaining about his current life: "(in my house) I'm the cockroach, I'm the laromo-ot lizard." Newcomers ousted him from his abode, but he warns: "in the cracks on the wall I keep watch on you; it's my **house**, dead or alive". The newcomers could be the powerful military leaders. He utters these solemn words: "it's my house," hoping that some day he will manage to return to it. The question here, however, is whether it will still have remained the same house as before or not.

In *A Pattern of Dust* Wangusa uses the symbol of a **house** in the meanings characteristic for both the older Ugandan poets and their followers, such as Joseph Buruga where the house stands for roots, nativity, family, and life. However, this meaning has been affected by the troubles of his generation. The reader realises that in Wangusa's poems the **house** is undermined by colonisers, crashed by dictators and abandoned by modernist Africans. He says: "colonizers defiling **houses**, graves and shrines;" a crested crane, which for Wangusa symbolises ill-fated independent Uganda, is "abominating the house", ruining the old cosy life; the victims of the dictators deserve an "epitaph proclaimed on the **housetop**." Here therefore, the house is signalled to represent traditional values that will probably survive. Similarly, in "Once in a Life-time" the persona speaks of the **house** of his ancestors which he leaves for illusory new life in order not to return. In "Anthem for Africa" the meaning of destruction is enhanced. It is the motherland from which the persona is ousted; Uganda is described as the "**house** of a hundred **corpses**," "**house** of the ogre's brood" – perhaps meaning the land taken by the evil forces of the military regimes.

Car, vehicle and automobile in all the poems are symbols of unlawful riches (corruption, exploitation), power (misused power, oppression), social inequality; also deadly threat (military vehicles); generally it is a symbol of oppressive and misused modernity.

For Mediye in Joseph Buruga's *The abandoned hut*, a car is as hateful as Clementine's straightened hair and fake breasts for Lawino in Bitek's *Song of Lawino*. Apparently, the car for him stands for all the vices brought in by Westernisation. Hence, he reproaches Basia, thus: "you want to ride in their **houses that move on four legs**; you are lazy in walking,... that's why you are mad for **moving houses**; you follow rich men for their money, you follow them for their **cars**; you reject me because I do not have a **car**," this becomes a symbol of economic disparity. The poet continues to remark that when the machine that tells time orders them (*Basia and her friends*) out of the office, they enter the large **moving houses** where men with big bellies wait for them

In *Tensions* Nturu goes as far as naming the prestigious brands of European and Japanese cars owned by the rich and stresses that these cars are killing the poor because the car owners do not have a slice of care. He writes: "**Mercedes Benz** ..killing a louse" (38) (*a street boy*), "**Toyota (or Gamma?)** crushing a beggar." (39) The reader is informed of the big man who drives a prostitute in a **Volvo**, and the "beautiful **cars**" being contrasted sharply with the life of the pauper. Therefore, the persona in the eponymous poem documents the screaming gap between the rich and the poor thereby exposing exploitation. However, the status symbols of the oppressive system cars are reproduced even in the minds of the poor and reader encounters the children in slums "playing wooden **cars**" and in this way; nursing an unrealizable dream of owning the true ones one day. The reader is also informed that the low-waged "secretaries (are) discussing **cars** that their future husbands will drive." As if that is not enough: "in a village the shopkeeper saves for a fourth-hand **Morris Minor**." () We, thus, see that owning a car becomes a crave. It becomes a symbol of success for the wealthy and the poor. But it also becomes a mark of the unattainable.

In *Words of my groaning* Lubwa P'Chong also visualises the car symbolism. He portrays it as an object standing for moral decline in modern society. He laments that prostitutes "are driven in rich men's **cars**" (39). The moral decadence is brought closer to the car, thus "the wheels of a hurrying **taxi** squealed with orgasm" (6) when a driver saw a young girl. An automobile is also signalled to represent social inequality. The rich

drive to work in “drones of **motor cars**” (12). Alunya, the voter, is left behind lamenting: “you see Councillor scattering **dust** and **mud** on me with his moving **house.**” (42).

Another context for this recurrent symbol in the poems of P’Chong is that of a **military vehicle** employed to represent threat, real danger and death for the ordinary Ugandans. In the poem “A Memory” “heavy **trucks** (are) hurrying away fish and crocodile feeds.”(10) The feeds here, we presume, stand for the corpses of victims of the military raids; on the other hand referring to the practice of throwing the bodies of the innocently executed people into rivers, common during Idi Amin’s rule. In another poem with a self-speaking title “To Golgotha” the persona talks of “heavy sounds of waiting **trucks** to carry the mounds of fish feeds” (57). The picture of a truck becomes scary.

In Wangusa’s *A Pattern of Dust*, automobile symbolism has been worded as *taxi*. Apart from the famous employment of the symbol of taxi as an embodiment of hostile and oppressive modernity (but also of the potentially rebellious masses), there are features of brilliant irony in the poet’s use of the symbol *mukokoteni* literally a hand-driven two wheeled cart, a source of humble income to many poor Africans, and a symbol of crying poverty. *Mukokoteni* in the poem is ironically juxtaposed with names of prestigious vehicles by the poet. The reader learns of this when the persona, the mukokoteni driver says that for him the mukokoteni is a “perennial **Mercedes-Benz,**” (63) and it is just a pity that “mukokoteni is too greasy for the blameless boot of the **family limousine.**” The irony in the words of the persona does not go without signifying the dignity and the will to live among the poor people. The persona “dares” to compare his humble cart to the luxurious cars of the rich. Nevertheless, however, even here the car (Mercedes or limousine) this symbol reflects the meaning common for Ugandan poetry as unlawfully acquired riches and oppression of the humble.

In *Anthem for Africa*, a poetic rendition of Ugandan colonial and post-colonial history, the poet mainly uses the symbol of **car** or **vehicle** to refer to the atrocities of the military regimes in Uganda. Here it stands, first of all, for the oppressive and murderous dictatorial power being called, “open **jeep**” driven by the dictator along the capital’s

streets and secondly as the “**vehicles driven by**” the members of the dictator’s killing squad known as AVS (Afrolandia Vile Squad) or “swift up-to-date models of all makes,” that the regime buys out of plundering the people, and in whose “gaping boots” the AVS members transport “horror.” This horror is the bodies of the regime’s opponents killed (“Horror in a Boot”). Two political opponents of the dictator were killed by a “drunken speeding **automobile**” and the faked photos of the accident in the press showed superimposed **car skeletons**.” Military vehicles are, thus, generally associated with death and devastation, for example, “**tanks** and infantry **motors**” used in Kagera war and “**motorcades**” looting the capital city after the defeat of Afrolandian (Ugandan) army.

4
Alcohol, **drink** and **drinking in** all the poems stand for negative foreign (modern) influences, immorality; at the same time symbolise consolation for poor people who drink out of desperation.

We note that the similarity exists in the meaning of this symbol between Okot’s songs and Buruga’s. This may be the result of the latter having to get inspiration from the former. **Alcohol** and related symbols for Buruga denote the destructive influence of the foreign or alien western culture. The poet views *alcohol* as the influence behind the decline in morality and social health. Africans who have embraced it are led to the “houses where people gather to **drink**”, and the poet says: “they drink the whiteman’s **drinks**,” “sometimes they **drink** liquid which looks like blood,” “men and women who should be working in the field **drink** all the time;” “when the men and the women are **drunk** they begin to dance to the magic box that sings.” Moreover, these westernized African parents “give children money to go and **drink in the bars** and dance in the **night clubs**.” The persona accuses his sweetheart, thus: “you reject me because I do not provide you with **beer**.”(5). Unlike these westernized Africans, “the Kakwa **drink** in the open, large fires are made until the whole site is brightly lit;” (8) and, the persona concludes, “to **drink** in the houses you call **bars** – I cannot do.”

In *Tensions* Nturu pursues similar meaning of the symbol to represent immorality. The girl who was seduced and then rejected by her seducer (a trait modern African society) is likened to “stale beer that lost its spear.” “Wife’s lips with taste of stale beer” implies that a man has lost interest in his marriage and is prone to unfaithfulness. Likewise, a bottle of **waragi**, Ugandan gin, is the price for love of a cheap prostitute. On one occasion, however, the symbol acquires a wider and deeper meaning in the poem “Morning Arrows,” dedicated to Okello Oculi. Here the poet speaks of “goneness of peace, brokenness of pots, staleness of yesterday’s beer” perhaps to symbolise the lost hopes of Ugandans.

Decline of morality, caused mainly by poverty and drinking, is also the message in Lubwa P’Chong’s *Words of my Groaning*. This appears to be loudly pronounced where the poet speaks of the slum life where “sex smells *changanya* with that of **pombe**”(13) and according to him the Friday night is that of “**beer**, kisses sex and curses.”(15) Drinking is the only consolation for the poor and that is why it is so easy to buy their consent and votes for a mere drink: “our councillor buys us **beer** - how we **drink!**” the persona confesses in “Buying votes of the villagers.” (14).

In *Anthem to Africa* Wangusa speaks of “mugfuls of **waragi**” which are drunk at the dictator’s suite, presumably to drown the memories of murders committed by them. Alcohol, thus, becomes a kind of refuge; a temporary hiding for artificial consolation.

5 Dance, drum and song

These are symbols of Africa, its past, traditions going into oblivion; but at the same time act as symbols of its future creation, joy and hope. They also symbolise people’s link to the culture, origins, past, tradition. While song symbolises the voice of the continent and its people well as their plight and hope, the song of a poet represents the voice of history, truth and prophetic seeing of the future. Drum and dance are symbols used to raise people’s spirit.

Traditional dance symbolizes all that is dear to Joseph Buruga in *The abandoned hut*; his culture manifested through the persona's condemnation of western dances. For example, "the dancers are all alone dancing silently, as if they are mourning;" "I cannot **dance** in the darkness like a wizard, I cannot dance quietly, I cannot dance in the houses," he declares. The persona seems to nurse bitterness against the new dances which embody the wrongs that were done to his sweetheart's mind and soul by foreign influence. On the other hand, traditional dances, music and songs of his people bring him only joy. They are evoked by their soloists to symbolize happiness, life and freedom of expression. He says "the Kakwa dance in the open, and they **dance** around the **drummers**, and the dancers **sing**;" "(Kakwa girls) will go **singing** and jiggling their ornaments;" moreover, "the wife-giving ceremonies (of the Kakwa, which Basia deems as "savage") are accompanied by **dancing** and general gaiety" (11)

In *Malak* the drum and drumbeat stand for the very essence of Africa: Africanness. He, therefore, speaks of "the **drumbeat** of the blood of Africa," (6) and he expresses his "hopes of a cripple slapping the ground to tell earth to awake him from his drunkenness and listen to the cry of **drums** at the **dance** carnival." This implies that the continent in its present state is so pathetic that it could be defined as a "cripple", which will be awoken by the echo of its glorious past. In *Malak*, song is an important symbol to the voice of the continent and its people. Expressing first of all their plight, the persona says, "**song** of a woman is a knife peeling the clouds, a **music** that picks feathers of the wind;" "**singing** and laughing separates the pebbles from simsim seeds through the sieves of our teeth" (poverty); "**sing** the sorrows of the wananchi in haggard shades." Later the meaning of the symbol of song signifies hope: "I will **sing songs** of footsteps - footsteps we hear being called Ujamaa". This is in reference to the many African intellectuals who were laying their hopes with Nyerere's social reforms known as *ujamaa in Tanzania*.

In Anywar's *Wars no more* dance, drum and song evoked to stand first of all for the past tradition cherished by the poet but forgotten by the younger generation, which is misguided by modernity. Recalling the times of the forefathers, the poet confesses: "I **sing** of their tune, I **dance** of their steps", and laments about "the regalia **drum** they

(modern youth) have forgotten." Secondly, a song especially sung by a poet symbolises hopes for the future in the poem we hear that the poet **sings** today and the **song** is heard tomorrow to symbolise hope and future for Uganda.

In Wangusa's *A Pattern of Dust* the symbolism of song has a wider meaning: creation of joy and future: "fire (of creation) burn into **song**;" whereas "**song**" out of light and sunshine from "**song**;" as well as the future of man's "**songs**" and tears about which the persona wants to ask the holy mountain in the poem *Margeritta* represent the poet's longing for a new restored order of African culture. In *Pattern of Dus*, drums have also been evoked to symbolise life we hear of ecstatic rhythm of beaten **drums which** is being equated to the rhythm of life by the poet.

In *Anthem for Africa* the symbols acquire more varied meanings. Song, at one point, represents Africa's past as in ("the griots of Mali in the former times **sang** the fate of nations") and at another, liberation struggle "**song** of the maji maji freedom fighters". At the same time, however, the symbol of song in this collection frequently accompanies another semantically related symbol that of the song of a poet. Poets are presented as the wisdom and conscience of the nation and, in a wider sense, that of the whole of Africa. They are portrayed as singers like griots of the past. They are also seen as today's conservers of history. Apart from that they are truth-tellers and prophets as well as foreseers of the future. The author refers to himself as "I who sings this imperative **song**" (song inherited from elders, mothers and clansmen and sung for children), calling the poets "truth-tellers in **song**." The prophetic nature of a poet's song is expressed in such lines as "bird that **sings** in me the prophet and the truth" (bird's song is presented as a symbol of truth and freedom, demanding that the poet should continue to **sing** prophetically).

A special place in the collection is given to the image of a poet under totalitarian rule. A poet and the persona of many poems, who represent many literary figures suffered under dictatorial regimes (for instance Wangusa himself), does not live in his native country. He is favoured by the dictator Masaya, - but he remains the only voice of truth in the

oppressed land. Thus "Mwenya the **song-maker**, Mwenya the **singer**" is contrasted to the "praise-**singer**" – a poet who glorifies the dictator, thereby betraying his vocation as the singer of truth. On the same lines, Wangusa speaks of "**poets** who perished for **bitter** **poetics** as politic men for diabolic policies" this comparison of poets and politicians symbolises the struggle between *truth and lies*. It is one of the recurrent motifs in the collection. For example, the need of "Cinna the **poet** vis-a-vis. Sinner the **politician**". In this collection, the symbols of **drum** and **dance** are used in the meaning of accompaniments for the poet's song to raise his spirit: "I beg you young men shake the **rattles**. strike wooden gong, **drum, clay pot**; I beg you **dancers** to sing and clap in chorus" so that the tuning voice may soothe the soul.

6

Ancestors, dead, elders and parents

These are symbols of protection, pride, link between generations, wisdom and also - obsolete traditions; past going into oblivion; traditional wisdom; victims of slavery, dictatorship and poverty.

In Buruga's *Abandoned hut* these symbols stand for wisdom and protection coming from the past and "everyone is happy as they sing the songs of their **ancestors**." These people (ancestors) remain in the life of a human being from childhood to adulthood; the persona recalls that at the name-giving ceremony "the **elders** said gods had their eyes on me.". He reflects that even later in life "when locusts of hunger invade your millet field or your sorghum crops...your **parents** will not throw you out". He is conscious of the necessity of preserving the family name inherited from the ancestor and reproaches any fellow tribesman who has had their "child named after some ancestor of the Whiteman as if they had no **ancestors** and great men. He urges: "think of the **old man** who was proud of you". In this sense the poet is sounding like Okot p'Bitek in *Song of Lawino*.

In P'Chong's *Words of my Groaning*, the **old man** symbolises traditional wisdom and its being the only remaining voice of reason in a country suffering from military dictatorship. Even though this wisdom is unable to comprehend fully the horrible present

state it is present for all to see who wish to be silently consoled. Therefore, heard or not heard, the role of the old man remains important. In a true African sense an upright old person is an intermediary between people and their ancestors and ancestors are intermediaries between the people, *elders* and God.

Apparently, Oculi seems to hold a related view: ancestors symbolise the past of the continent. We hear of banana (*symbol of life*) being unveiled to the tears of the **ancestors** (crying with joy over new life); "I have a mind to ferment **ancestors** and newly found oil to brew Africa into tomorrow's palm wine" The poet says. This is in reference to blending the past with the present for the sake of producing a better tomorrow, whereas the image of **grandfathers** have been used symbolically to refer to slavery. The reader encounters Africans who are "waiting for History to come back for its unwanted children, crying for adoption by **departed grandfathers** that never knew them.". **Old man** becomes a poly-semantic and, notably, mostly negative symbol: it stands for obsolete traditions – "(we need) mountain of rain to wash out the footsteps of trachoma from the stubborn windows of **old man**;" In addition, the uses the name of the "old men" ironically, alluding to the traditional authority of elders, the poet uses the name of "old men" in reference to unscrupulous and promiscuous modern African politicians – "**old men** in Kenya begging the sun not to see with whom they sleep on the verandahs of banks". It is ironical given the authority of the symbol in its context where the poet to seems suggest that change is inevitable. Only once in the text the symbol of an **elder** is used to represent poverty. Otherwise all elsewhere it carries a positive meaning "thirsty veins across the forehead of the Zande **elder**."

In *Wars no more* by Frank Ojera Anywar, **forefathers** and **elders** are used as symbols for inspiration of the young by old Africa. He writes, "the habits of my **forefathers** make me what I am, being me is being them;" however, this inspiration apparently does not benefit all the youth as we read "**elders** of the village only moan and say: we send them (the young) to school, what did they learn? Even the totemic elephant they don't know! The 'pidginised' form, "**Grandaa**" (Granddad) mentioned by the persona in the anonymous poem, represents obsolete, unbeneficial tradition: "**Grandaa** used to tell us

tales by the fireside – tales of famines, of disasters, of wars; told us folk-lore – danger in knowledge too much, wisdom too much, too much light deemed gloom and doom on earth.” (31) This creates the impression that the past is filled with horrors, yet modern knowledge too, though bringing light is also destructive.

However, in *A Pattern of Dust*, Timothy Wangusa uses the symbol of the **dead** to stand for the link between the past and the present of the continent: “flaming **dead**” (the brave of the past); “sacrifice in sweat and blood by flaming pioneers now **dead**.” Similar meaning is given to the image of the **ancestors**: “(libation on) **graves** of the ancestors” (is symbolising the continuity of the generations); the reader is informed of “**ancestral** burial ground,” “**ancestral** mud” (*soil*) – link to the origins to represent the past that held pride and protection for its people.

Unfortunately, however, elders are appearing to lose the ability to inspire. Perhaps this is because the trend of life today is too complex for their comprehension. Indeed, even their wisdom does not save them from being victimized by villainous rulers as in the poem “War plot” in which the dictator summons all the “district and town **elders**” to the Palace to turn them into the silent witnesses of political murders. This implies that even with their wisdom, they can not help their people. After the dictator’s coup people beg the elders as the last resort: “Can it be true **O old** and wise one,” but the elders are apparently helpless and unable to answer to this interrogation.

Silence

Silence as symbol carries mostly negative meaning such as negative influence of alien culture, death and suffering inflicted by military terror and war. It also represents grief of historical slavery and oppression by modern leaders as well as lifelessness, emptiness and terror.

Silence for the persona in Buruga’s *The abandoned hut* is mainly associated with negative influence of Western culture – “(modern) dancers are all alone dancing **silently**,

as if they are mourning;" "(Kakwa dancers) are not **silent** as the people in the night clubs." The poet draws a contrast between the two because he is well aware of how rigorous drums and African traditional dancers vibrate. Richard Nturu in *Tensions*, however, apparently attaches to the symbol another meaning namely; death and suffering inflicted by military terror and war. He speaks about "grave **silence** of those who never spoke – the unborn, children who died in dead mother's wombs" and "men with wounded pride stand in mute and scornful **silence**" after their village was plundered by the soldiers.

P'Chong in *Words of my groaning* seems to see the same meaning: during the raid (in the eponymous poem) "people are **silent** in their houses," afraid of giving a voice so as not to be noticed lest they are killed by the soldiers. The reader notices that perhaps the poet here is referring to that time in Uganda when the people actually conversed in whispers for fear of the special branch whom Idi Amin had employed as a silencing machine all over the land.

In Oculi's poem *Malak*, we come across the silence of lifelessness, suffering and grief. The persona falls silent remembering those who were brought over the Ocean in chains as slaves and says "the Ocean is family hood in range or calm, working in my **silence**, raging in my sleep, loving in my isolation." Modern governors inflict Africans with the silence of intimidation and death – "they (*those in power*) know the brittle whispers of grasses in their final despairs before the **silence** of gentle ashes - that **silence** that a penis of a bull knows as it boils in a cooking pot." Worse still is that even the positive message in the prologue of the poem features silence negatively: "**silence** breaks at the birth of banana". This seems to signalling the apprehension of the parents about the safety of their new-born and the family as a whole.

In Timothy Wangusa's *A Pattern of Dust* the symbol does not occur frequently, but when it does, it also surfaces with negative meaning. In the poem *Kololo* after Monster split humankind into two genders, it was followed by "words that killed and **silence** that returned", (63) meaning that emptiness in human relations may be even more killing

than harsh words or actions. Silence of terror was reigning in a village haunted by a monster (in the poem *Kisumu* based on a Luo legend), and “subterranean silence” (57) of lifelessness was ruling before the birth of the humankind by heavenly order (*Heaven*).

8

Mountain

Mountain could symbolise hardships of life but with a reward in the end (snowy peak); landmarks in African history: as in the case with Mount Rwenzori which is used as a symbol of Uganda; distance between the common people and the elite; symbol of Africa and its sacredness, origins, home; grandeur, strength, perseverance and eternity: **Mount Elgon** (Masaba) is a symbol of Uganda, bridge between humankind and cosmos as well as a sacred place defiled by evil forces.

In *The abandoned hut*, Buruga uses the symbol solely in figurative meaning - that of “mountain of life” denoting human life being full of hardships but with a reward in the end. The persona (Mediye) reproaches his girlfriend Basia, who procured an abortion which he considers a mortal sin that is the result of the alien culture. He tells her that “you denied (the unborn child) the right to walk the path up the **mountain** of life, up to the top of the rugged snowy **peak**” (the latter meaning old age). He further tells her that “many a man has tried to get up this **mountain** but perished – though some reached the rugged snowy **peak**, the cold **peak**, from where they saw the beautiful countryside.” (8). It is a reference to those who have overcome the hardships of life and have been rewarded in the end by seeing the fruits of what they had sown which Basia, has denied and deprived herself through abortion.

In Oculi's *Malak*, the symbol appears to carry several meanings. Indeed even the poem's chapters are titled using the names of the great mountains of Africa. In the first chapter the title “**Mount Cameroon**” stands for slavery, which hit West Africa. This symbolises Africa's not-so-distant history of oppression and grief. The meaning of the symbol is confirmed in the text of the chapter, where the poet says that “the sea's sleep wears **mountains** woven from sacks (*which were carried by slaves transported over the sea*).”

The title of the second chapter "**Mount Kilimanjaro**" stands for Tanzania as the cradle of Ujamaa, which the poet praises as the hope for the future of Africa. Chapter three's title "**Mount Rwenzori**" symbolises the poet's native Uganda – for, after all, all the historical and political issues that are discussed in the poem are presented first of all from the author's perspective as a Ugandan.

Anywar's collection, *Wars no more* seems to be the only one where the symbol of mountain has a negative meaning. In the poem *Comrado Compatrioto* he speaks of the eponymous "famous people's school located on top of **Mount Agoro**,"(74) where the students learn "Military economy part 1 for beginners" (74) – "how many bags of beans go into a pistol? How many tons of maize go into an AK 47?" (74) Of course one is bound to question the contribution of such a school to world peace. Is it not simply a venue for training future oppressors and killers of the common people! "**Mount Agoro**," therefore, could be seen to symbolise imminent danger – elitist tyranny.

In Wangusa's poetry **mountain** (also **hill**) can be considered as one of the main symbols. In *A Pattern of Dust* he uses the symbol **Mount Elgon**, which he calls Masaba, to stand for Uganda. It also symbolises Africa and its glorious past, its sacredness for Africans as a symbol of their origin and home. The poet speaks about colonisers "raping sacred **mountain** ;"(63) of "ragged **mountain-side**" (63) where the mystic herb in eponymous poem, also symbolising origin and ties to the native land, grows at homeplace. The poet's native home of Butiru is eternally blessed by "the **hill-tops** of Nambaale, **mountain** (Elgon) on the horizon."

Mountain also comes up in the collection as the symbol of eternity (mainly that of Africa), grandeur, strength, perseverance. He notes that "sun dropping behind the **mountain**" and times change, but the mountain remains. As part of ancient creation the **mountains** "in the dark under the wing of a plane" stand and will outlive the feeble inventions of man the plane. In the poem *Margeritta* the entire scene depicts the persona talking to a beautiful woman. This takes place in a hotel at the bottom of the mountain, whose image permeates the poem the persona talks to the lady about worldly things. Yet

the mountain will remain forever. In his poem "O to be in England" the poet speaks about "elusive something under concrete that spouts on the **mountain** and sings in the **sea**," (24) This portrays the human soul as being elusive and breaking from the shatters of the modern world "concrete" to join the nature and thus to eternity as symbolised by (mountain and sea).

In the poem *Heaven* the symbol acquires a wider and more abstract meaning; it depicts the creation of life. The poet speaks of "crying **mountain** (under fire of life)" (76) and a "mountain burning with silent fire: the fire of creation lighted by God is so strong that even the mountains cannot withstand it. If the mountain is to be considered as the bridge between mankind and cosmos (and perhaps the gods – since mountains are often their dwelling in many parts of Africa), what happens if it is lighted with a strong fire? Perhaps this would spell the end. In any case the end is already here, having been brought by the killer regimes.

In the collection *Anthem for Africa*, Timothy Wangusa uses the symbol to represent the grandeur and glory of Africa. Referring to it, the poet speaks of "rising **sun** over **mountain**;" "warrior **mountains** and plains" He depicts the mountain as the centre of the land around which the plains are gathered and highlights the "rain **mountains**" of Uganda and treats "Kirinyaga and Kilimanjaro" (8) as symbols of East African beautiful landscape. "**Mountain** of Muntu, of Masaba" (60) symbolises Uganda; while Ethiopia is referred to as "land of lofty **mountains** and sharp **ridges**" (114) in the poem "Ethiopian riddle," and "Sacred **mountain**" (180) stands for Kenya in the poem *Land of Uhuru*.

Wangusa also uses mountain as symbol of eternity – "Mountain of posterity, shooting perpendicular to the sky, of rocks older than the oldest river, of soils black." (60) In one of the poems he likens the great Egyptian pyramid to "observatory **mountain** for the study of solar and **cosmic** bodies. Here mountain a pyramid which is a man-made mountain stands as a "bridge" between humankind and God. Mountain as the symbol of sacredness of Uganda and Africa is also used by the poet as he decries the land's desecration by dictators. He speaks of the "beast who dwells upon the mountain thereby

sallying (sacred place and, in similar but more concrete terms he talked of, "hill-top command post," referring to the military using the sacred place for vile purposes "streams of blood on the hillside" referring to the defilling of sacred hills by killings of the innocent "scorched hilltops" that have been burnt by the fire of war unleashed by the tyrant. This is a capacious symbol of both oppression and desecration which is being invented by the poet when he speaks of a punishment that the tyrant meted out to the belligerent youth, the poet refers to the young men who were forced to grind "granite rocks to useless sand". This represents both the senselessness of the labour and the meek punitive transformation of the granite rocks (symbol of founding values, eternity, ancestry) into a useless and feeble substance.

9

Millet

Millet symbolises staple traditional food, therefore it can be regarded as source of livelihood and a measure of society's stability. Incidentally, it also refers to the drawbacks of modern way of life, depicting the destruction of millet fields as a great disaster. Millet is also, a symbol of Uganda; ironical symbol of Ugandan politics - (sour millet brew).

The millet as a symbol in *The abandoned hut* bears a similar meaning to the interpretation that Okot p'Bitek gives it: a staple traditional product in all Uganda and source of life. "Kakwa girls... carry their loads of millet and beans and peas to the market place." Thus, the persona speaks about the damage to the millet fields as the greatest disaster: he proposes that when locusts of hunger invade one's millet field or your sorghum crops, nothing is left to feed on. Millet is so revered traditionally, that one's knowledge about it is a measure of good upbringing. This is depicted, when the persona reproaches his "westernised" girlfriend, on her lack of knowledge to grind millet, sorghum, or to make sauce from beans or peas. This is a serious positing about a serious African woman. In another incident he remarks that in the former days no girls walked about with boys instead of grinding millet. In this way he regrets modern haphazard living; hence he comments that previously boys and girls occasionally met at the place

where girls ground **millet** or sorghum. This suggests that the **millet** grinding venue is almost a sacred place, proper for well arranged and polite meetings.

Nturu in the poem "East African safari," complains of how the economy of Uganda has been destroyed by greedy and incompetent rulers. He speaks of "coffee beans wrongly ripened, **millet** outnumbered by green weeds" (106) symbolising the greatest damage on the land. In the poem "The prophecy," speaking about the cause of the plight of his people, he refrains: "The cause as big as a grain of **millet**" (102) - using actually a kind of inverted oxymoron: a grain of millet is in fact small, but in the poet's eyes it is bigger than anything, since millet is the source of the livelihood of Ugandans, thus, in real sense he speaks of a really big and grave cause.

The same subject is pursued by Lubwa P'Chong in *Words of my Groaning*. drawing the picture of devastation brought by dictatorship and war, he speaks of "fields of cassava" and "**millet**" that "lie cropless." (18) Indeed the kind of degradation and unproductivity a prolonged state of insecurity and consistent destruction - as was the case of Idi Amin's Uganda, could be understood. The link between Uganda and millet is such that failure of the crop would mean failure of the country. Millet in fact seems to symbolise Uganda: Oculi in *Malak* speaks of "**millet** of Uganda, groundnuts of Gambia," and other staple crops of African nations posing as symbols representing those nations.

On the other hand, in Wangusa's *A Pattern of Dust* the symbol acquires political meaning. He refers to the bad politics in Uganda then as "sour **millet** brew;" (63) but even of greater interest is: "the conquest of **matooke** by **millet**" (63) symbolically representing the conflict between northern and southern Ugandan communities (while millet is the main meal in the north, matooke is staple food in the south). Incidentally, the ruling tribe was Kakwa from the north.

Westernisation symbolises negative foreign influence (to stand for the westernization and its effects on Africa and Africans). The poets of the second generation mostly used this symbol to refer to the innovations brought by westernisation, especially those related to city life.

In order to symbolise the effects of Western culture on Africa and Africans, Buruga mostly refers to the innovations brought by westernisation. Through the persona of the poem *The abandoned hut* Buruga talks about his "westernised" sweetheart who adores city life: "Basia likes the ways of a whiteman." In themselves, the innovations are simply ridiculous: "you want to ape the white man and to have long hair; earrings, shoes, stockings (bags which look like the moult of a snake), gloves (bags on your hands)." Apparently the innovations promote laziness as he says "you refuse to collect firewood – you want to use the fire that comes through the wires, that cooks without firewood;" "you want the Whiteman's bread" she is not willing to bake the traditional one; "you refuse to carry water from the well – you want the water that comes through pipes;" "you sit all day long to smear your lips with gory paste."

It appears like the innovations alienate people from one another: "each time I want to see you, you want me to make an appointment;" "you want me to talk to you through the wires that carry voice from one place to another." Besides, some of the innovations are merely killing; for example, **family planning and primacy of career** lead to abortions. Buruga refers to "an innocent life you threw into a rubbish pit like waste paper," "you argued that (a child) would spoil your chances for the future;" "(you think) three children are enough." Even of greater concern is the fact that the innovations undermine morality causing "teen-agers roam about hand in hand like white ants;" "(the girls wear) very short dresses, the boys wear **tight trousers**;" "(mother and daughter chasing one and the same man) met in his apartment, in his bedroom." The innovations symbolise a corrupt culture, especially the ways of women "she talks of the expensive **wedding dress**, of quotation fair bridesmaids" The persona even laments that Basia prefers the names of the Whiteman of which she considers modern. She is said to work at

an office together with other women. All these expectations of Westernization are an affront to corruption of the African ways. However, even though the persona is justified in defending his people's culture, one often has the feeling that he is being absurdly conservative.

Richard Nturu in *Tensions* seems to summarise what he considers westernization as a "synthetic world," as opposed to the natural world of traditional Africa and Lubwa P'Chong in *Words of my Groaning* as if agreeing with Nturu on the synthetic nature of the western world points at the expensive hotels in Kampala, where people pay to sleep and it is a common symbol of modernity and westernisation. He portrays them as dens of prostitution and lechery, sponsored by unlawful riches: "blessed are you prostitutes for you eat and sleep in Hilton and Interna hotels." (40)

Timothy Wangusa in *A Pattern of Dust* also seems to hint at the lush but oppressive modernity. Its oppressive nature is seen in the way it contrasts with and even dwarfs its hosts: "metropolitan verandahs" (63) of "sumptuous hotels" in Nairobi. New Stanley Hotel contrasted with Mathare slum, and this highlights extravagant and arrogant rich contrasted with humble but righteous poverty.

Of significance too is the way the western life tends to discriminate against Africans. Okello Oculi in *Malak* states that "Wolof children die in grammatical French to be mourned in pidgin Wolof," which demeans their status. This is perhaps because they are considered as "second-class citizens" belonging to "third-class compartment." Oculi also decries the mimicry the "westernised" Africans serving in neo-colonialism "they mumble words like Democracy and know only its spelling from the colonial classes for good natives", which lures African people taught westernised education to become its supporters ("Fanti colonialcrats sweeping Accra with degrees".)

Oyam Anywar's *Wars no more* would not have put across more bluntly the alienation brought by Westernization: "my neighbour seeks remote control mechanism to share my seat". Moreover, Anywar argues that city life produces orphaned and abandoned

children. a thing unknown in traditional Africa. In the poem, "The hermitage" he speaks about an orphaned city girl, saying that "she hadn't a living dad, knew no mom with foster system". (22) Westernization, therefore, appears to represent everything that is retrogressive and immoral, at least as far as support for the African culture goes, which raises the question of whether Africa can do without the West, and whether everything African is positive.

11
Church, priests and Christianity are symbols that imply negative incidences like lies, hypocrisy and suffering. In Joseph Buruga's *The abandoned hut*, Mediye sees religion as one of the worst novelties introduced by the white man: an instrument of brainwashing and destroying traditional thinking: Basia wants to be married in **church**, yet Mediye complains that she wants to have the blessings of **a man who preaches "one man, one wife."** Talking to Basia, he tries to expose the real reason for her love for church, saying "you prefer **church** marriage because you want to invite many friends who would assemble like vultures on a dead buffalo," – apparently meaning that church blessings are vainglory and parasitism. In this case the persona sounds retrogressive because the symbols named above especially the church actually bless. However, the persona is critical that even the African names are replaced in the new religion. Basia is said to prefer the way the **Whiteman who preaches the Whiteman's god** gives names to people. Replacing one's African name with a Christian one according to the persona is tantamount to changing one's name and one's very nature, thus, symbolising the swallowing of Africa by the West.

On the other hand, Richard Nturu in *Tensions* simply presents the "white man's faith" as hypocrisy, and this is a view typical with many Ugandan poets. The "plump **nun**" (55) in the poem "Formula Two" states that the starving children of Biafra, "like foreign relief food) better than their own garri." (55) Knowing that the starvation of the children and the need for "foreign aid" were caused by the civil war backed by the West, the nun's remark could be seen as repugnant. A similar view is advanced by Okello Oculi who in *Malak* uses **missionary** to symbolise hypocrisy in what he portrays as the attitude of the good-

hearted missionary announcing that all the wonders and riches of Africa were gotten as a foreign aid.

The hypocrisy of the church further comes to the fore in another reference by Frank Ojera Anywar in the poem "The hermitage," when he speaks about the hardships of an African orphan "attached to the tentacles of the church." (22) The view of poets is that if the church was always firm, then the cause of orphans would have been taken seriously; since it is the same church that preaches generosity. We note that Ugandan poets are too critical of the church which in fact shows some care for the three categories of weak people: widows, orphans and strangers as opposed to the poets' advancement.

Timothy Wangusa's use of the symbols in *A Pattern of Dust*, however, relates so much to the "white man's faith that apparently interrogating parts of the Bible, he quotes well known sections of the Holy Book to make a point on certain situations in real life. For example, he parodies the Biblical style in the well-known poem "Psalm 23 part II," alluding to slums using the "paraphrased" quotes from Psalm 23 "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Kivulu, I will fear no kundos" (18). One would want to think of this as blasphemous, yet again unlike many of his contemporaries, the poet more often than not alludes to the Holy Bible in a positive way. For instance, in the poem "The Unreturning," he compares an intellectual – persona's friend murdered by the dictator – to Christ. He says "he ate with the passer-by, spoke with the simple and the arrogant." (21) In "Uncle Tom's Cabin," while speaking about slavery in America; he compares the victimised black children to "infants dashed to the ground" (27).

In "Anthem for Africa" Wangusa continues to allude to the Bible, speaking of the resurrection of Masaya (Amin) against Ojozi (Obote), as he refers to "insect man against mighty giant," which is a comparison between David and Goliath as recorded in 1 Sam, in the Old Testament. Later he ironically speaks of Masaya as "servant born to be our saviour". However, a choosing that in the the course of the regime, he calls Masaya a "serpent". Alluding to both the images from the Old Testament and Apocalypse, Wangusa then goes on to speak about "the innocent cut down." Here he is referring to

Ugandans massacred by the dictator. At this point the reader gets rather confused about these comparisons. However, knowledge of how Amin came to power, and how Ugandans celebrated this perceived saviour, makes it clear, the saviour soon turned into a serpent and overseer over some of the most horrendous massacres in history. In fact the analogy of the church as saviour, to some extent too, mirrors the role of a saviour that has not lived up to expectations, thus, the possible branding of hypocrisy.

12

Children symbolise the future ruined by the past and present slavery, colonialism, disasters of modern history. Africa's innocence being destroyed by misused modernity; Africans as unwanted children of the world; hope for the future.

Buruga in his poem *The abandoned hut* speaks of **children** in the traditional sense as symbols of wealth, blessings and a source of pride. However, this meaning has transformed a great deal; consequently, he grieves over Basia's negative attitude towards children revealed as she talks of how the white man's medicine-man can block the passage for more children to come out. This refers to the practice of family planning, popular in seventies and eighties. However, Mediye constantly tries to remind her that in the days past no man would want to come last hence every man would try as many children as the gods allowed him. It was understood that the more the children, the more the respect. The persona says, "Who could stop the gods from giving their blessings?" (43).

Lubwa P'Chong in the long poem "Rain" (rain here is the symbol of Amin's rule - symbol of destruction and disaster) says: "fierce hunger gnaws the inside of the children," (28) presumably referring to the future of the country being undermined by its current oppressive rulers. Of course in normal circumstances rain would remove hunger, but rain often comes with hailstones, lightning and thunder, and numerous insects that cause innumerable diseases. In the case of Amin's rule, rain would fall in form of bullets and bombs, killing in their wake.

Frank Ojera Anywar in *Wars no more* also uses the symbol of children as a symbol of a threatened future. A schoolgirl is raped by a teacher in the poem "The lame damsel,"(67) however, the girl does not only symbolise oppression and destruction of the future by the present, but also, on a wider scale Africa's innocence being destroyed by misguided modernity.

Okello Oculi in his *Malak* enumerates several references to children which signify the suffering of children. The poet reports that common people are tired of mourning the death of **children** and because of their diminished nature he compares the legs of **children** to those of pelicans. The reader is informed of brown teeth of twig-legged **children**. He also says that children have been neglected so much so that birds pecks smallpox seeds from the naked back of a sleeping **child**. **Children** are said to go without milk and hope. The persona laments that they feed **children** with soil and soil with **children**. She reports that there are all sorts "screams...of historic bones of the aborted **children** from Timbuktu to Manila." Indeed, if the children of Africa symbolise the future of the continent, their victimisation by extension is victimisation of Africa. The state of the children here points to the disastrous state of modern Africa.

Oculi furthers his fear for the children of Africa in this symbol (children). He portrays Africans as unwanted (orphaned) children of history (and the world). He talks about the abundance of unqualified labour in today's Africa referring to Africans who are employed abroad in low-paid jobs – "idiocy of waiters and maids waiting for History to come back for its unwanted **children** crying for adoption by departed grandfathers that never knew them." Nevertheless, he also sees children of Africa as the symbol of hope – speaking about Masai **children** chant the song of socialism. Here the children of one of the most neglected communities of Africa are featured singing about Africa's future, which the poet sees not only in Ujamaa, but in socialism in the wider meaning – unity of the people of Africa; perhaps what one would want to call - Africanism.

Education (modern knowledge and new ideas). These feature mostly in a negative sense: namely talking about education turned into an instrument of exploitation of the poor by the elite with modern (westernised) education destroying African culture.

In *The abandoned hut*, Buruga's cynicism about the modern (Western) education, is heard in Mediye's address to his sweetheart, Basia: "from the Whiteman's customs, the Whiteman's **education** the crops are overgrown by weeds". This probably means productive traditional thinking that is being defeated by destructive modernity. "You say you can not marry a man below your **educational** standard, let alone an **uneducated man**;" "you reject me because I do not know how to **read**, I do not know how to speak the Whiteman's tongue" (white man's education severing the ties between people); "then you went far in search of the white man's **knowledge**;" "Whiteman's **knowledge** would eat your brains like the termites that invade abandoned huts;" "**venomous ideas** of the Whiteman's customs have **poisoned** your thinking;" the persona also accuses Basia of being pregnant with strange ideas she got from other countries and this he warns: "you may one day fall into the abyss of despair;". Her brains seem to have been eaten away by the **termites** of **education** and the maggots of the Whiteman's **knowledge** giving her newly acquired pride. What one sees here is the persona's view of western education, as another powerful instrument of brainwashing. In the wrong run said to be negatively changing one's nature and essence.

In *Malak*, Oculi views western education from an even more abstract angle, compared to his contemporaries. He speaks of "glass windows of **education** in which he portrays education as something hidden behind a glass, perhaps visible but not accessible for the poor people; moreover, because of this it deepens the divisions between social - economic groups, thereby intensifying oppression and alienation.

In Anywar's *Wars no more*, **teacher** and **school**, like religion discussed earlier, symbolise hypocrisy, mental and even physical oppression. The teacher uses his post for **seducing** and **raping** a girl in "The lame damsel," and even after that she is supposed to

behave as if nothing ever happened to her: so she is "hiding away the **school**-face of innocence during the revision week." (67) The reader here learns about the loopholes in the school rules that promote hypocrisy and impunity. What is more disturbing, moreover, is the fact that the young and innocent schoolgirl is inadvertently being trained to be hypocritical. Schools are training the military elite known to later become licensed killers ("Comrado-Compatrioto is a famous people's **school** located on top of Mount Agoro".(74) It is as if schools are telling the pupils that misery is their natural life. This is well illustrated in "The hermitage," in which speaking about the life of an orphan girl, the persona says: "after she rose to a being she **schooled**," (22) thus soaking the foster system and agreeing with it.

14

Money and money economy as symbols represent greed, destruction by greed; misused power, riches gained through exploitation; oppression, exploitation and unfair distribution of wealth.

Among other misdeeds, the persona in Buruga's poem *The abandoned hut*, accuses his sweetheart Basia, of chasing men merely out of greed: "you want their **money**, you love money;" "you call each one "honey" (honey and money- a rhyme to intensify ills of money) the persona says: "just because you want their **money**;" "you follow rich men for their **money**; you follow them for their cars;" "you reject me because I do not give you **money**." Thus, as a symbol, money is promoting greed and also separating people as well as severing natural ties between them. Apparently, Basia like many girls of today who out of desperation are prepared to do anything for money. She will sidestep human values and personal dignity to get money. We would interpret this as enslavement of the conscience.

In Richard Nturu's *Tensions* money is portrayed as a symbol of power, misused power and wealth gained through exploitation. It is clear to the reader that everything from loaf to love, including sexual relationships, can be purchased with money. The poet repetitively speaks about the "**fat purses of the rich**" and "**cheques as passport to sex.**"

(*Cheques and sex* – approximate rhyme is copied to enhance the symbol). Moreover, as implicitly as does Buruga in his work, Nturu points at the foreign origin of money as a phenomenon, stressing that money, coming from abroad, is deepening the neo-colonial enslavement: “high state papers and contracts for economic development;” “foreign shares.” Lubwa P’Chong in *Words of my groaning*, on the other hand goes even as far as comparing the pile of notes to a holy book. The councillor opens **bank notes** like a **priest** opening the New Testament – thus implying that money, in fact, is the god of the modern world.

In *Malak*, Oculi lets **money** occupy the shape of a **Bank** - symbol of power, place where the riches of Africa stolen by its leaders are deposited: “(I can’t tell you) how many golden digits of Swiss **bank** emblems are Africa’s on holiday. The poet says this stressing the ideas of neo-colonialism, corruption and foreign dependence. He also speaks of old men referring to politicians in Kenya begging the sun not to see with whom they sleep on the verandahs of **banks**. Thus, exposing the rot and corruption that the hunt for money has occasioned.

In *A Pattern of Dust* Wangusa contrasts two symbols portraying “cowries turned into gold” – thus speaking about the advancement of modern – destructive – economy, symbolised by gold, instead of traditional African economy, based on natural relations. Gold is once again used as a symbol for exploitation and unfair distribution of riches, prevalent in the modern world; the poet speaks about money treasured as gold. Apparently money is a corrupter of ideals.

15
Spear, **shield** and **arrow** symbolise traditional embodiment of power, defence, valour, honour, critical mind, resistance, liberation, sharpness of the mind; liberation, resistance, strength. They are also said to be symbols of degradation of humankind, punishment in hell; but at the same time standing for resistance against oppression.

In *The abandoned hut* Buruga preserves the familiar rich meaning of the symbols as employed by Bitek in his poetry connoted as traditional embodiment of power, defence, valour and honour: The poet talks of the man who walked behind armed with **spears** and **bow and arrows**, ready to defend what is dear to him against wild animals and hostile tribes. During a ceremony the host clan donated three hundred **arrows** as the wedding present to be given to the young men. This action is seen as a symbol in recognition of the masculine features and social role as a warrior. Also apparently belonging to Bitek's school is Anywar in *Wars no more*, where **spear** is featured as a symbol of traditional valour: "(time was when) a gun was uninvited and a **spear** superb weapon." Spear is also used as sacred symbol of an oath. In the poem *Divorce*, the persona "swears by the blade of the **spear** never to re-unite", hence, here the sacredness of the symbol can be traced to mythology of the Nilotic peoples of Uganda, where spear was a sacred item: (the spear of Ramogi).

In Nturu's *Tensions* the symbols acquire at least two different meanings: in the poem titled "Morning arrows"(69) dedicated to Okello Oculi, the poet employs arrows as an abstract symbol of positive criticism; **morning arrows** refer to arrows from the critical mind that brings in positive change. In the same poem he speaks of **obscure corners (of life and mind) pierced by the arrows**"(69), (of the critical reason). In the poem "Hunting," which symbolically portrays a greedy politician in the figure of a "hoaxing hunter" (61) the poet's sense then shifts from depicting arrows as instruments that bend to bring change to stiff instruments of defence. He acknowledges the need to use **bow and poisoned arrows** to defend one's home and life; so, here the bow and arrows are employed to symbolise resistance.

P'Chong in *Words of my groaning* seems to give the **spear** a psychoanalytical angle in which symbols at times carry a sexual implication. For example, at one point he evokes **spear** as a euphemism for male genitals, describing the promiscuous life in slums, thus "blood upsurges in men's veins and their **spears** begin to nod" (13). However, much later **spear** becomes a symbol in a more common meaning of liberation: "he (*the liberator*) will thrust his trusted **spear** at the death-spot of the Bull Elephant (*Amin*)." In the poem

"Rain"(30) which is a symbol of Amin's rule) where the cocks (symbolizing people) lament: "I wish I had a **shield** and **spears!**" apparently to defend their chicken – women and children. Spear symbolises resistance. A closely related meaning the symbol acquires in the poem "Ram," where the poet, referring to traditional sacrifice, specifies that its blood is used to get the blessing of the ancestors for the warriors is that of strength – "a man is slaughtered and the blood sprinkled on the **spears**".(36)

In Wangusa's works, the symbols have also a variety of meanings. In *A Pattern of Dust* for example, they stand for the degradation of humanity **spears** and **arrows** that will be used in The Third World War – alluding to Karl Marx, who predicted that the humankind will be reduced to primitive life after catastrophic nuclear wars. There is also a more general, metaphysical meaning as in **spear**-brandishing demonic avengers in Hell; here the spear symbolises destruction, acts of murder, for which the humans are to be punished in the afterlife. To some extent Amin's regime nearly achieved this predicted destruction. On the other hand, in *Anthem for Africa* the symbols, which here are used abundantly, acquire additional meanings. First, they are used ironically to mockingly describe the boastful nature of the dictator Masaya (Idi Amin), who boasts of his "unbreakable **spear** and impenetrable **shield**" by calling himself "**spear**-proof" where he presents himself as "dreadful warrior, **spear** champion." The reader gets to know that his praise-singers glorify his "flaming **spear**." Referring to his former relation to Ojozi (Obote), the author calls him "Ojozi's **spear**-bearer," stressing his subordinate position to the former leader and also – his relation to the military. Here, we could assume that apart from the symbol's ironic use, it has also the meaning of traditional valour through which the dictator tried to relate himself to the legendary warriors of the past in order to win the acclaim of the populace.

It however, becomes interesting to note how Ojozi's spear-bearer became his own spear-bearer. Obviously this was through rebellion, or resistance against the oppressor. He says "**spear** (in the hand of the liberator)." Unfortunately, once the spear of rebellion got into the hands of the "liberator," it turned into a symbol of oppression as the liberator turned dictator used it to vanquish his opponents. Spear here, therefore, carries the dual

symbolism of *resistance* and *oppression*. However, when the poet speaks about “**spears and pangas**” in the hands of Kenyan patriots and “**spears of Mahenge**” used by maji-maji fighters in Tanganyika, the spear becomes the symbol of *liberation*.

16

Politician and state official are symbols that symbolise lies, hypocrisy, empty talk; illicit wealth; exploitation and indifference; oppression, terror and killing; incompetence and sin.

The image of the politician symbolising lies and hypocrisy is portrayed by Buruga, when Mediye in *The Abandoned Hut* compares his sweetheart, whose mind is ‘poisoned’ by westernisation, to a politician – “Basia would talk and talk like a **politician** campaigning for votes,” implying that in that talk politicians never really mean what they say. Since Basia seems to be talking just for the sake of talking, her being compared to politicians depicts the latter as empty talkers.

The theme of hypocrisy is also pursued by Nturu in *Tensions*. The general in which he associates politicians with privileges gained through exploitation and indifference towards the people. He adopts such figures that are related to politics as the **Inspector** who destroys the life of a girl through seduction: “The roses are withering”, (18) “goddess of status” (in “The Function” with the rich lady hypocritically opening the fundraising function for the poor while in real sense she thinking of increasing her own status); “**MP with a triple chin**” (23) (contrasted with the pauper in the eponymous poem); **Chief of Foreign Money** (state official in charge of foreign loans – symbolising corruption and dependence on foreign aid); and the expressive image of a “(politician’s) mother dying of dazzling affluence” – that is, being unable to “digest” the almost unlimited power that she acquired through her son. In the poem “Hunting” he allegorically presents the figure of a politician (state leader) as a “hoaxing hunter”(23), depriving people of everything, for which the common people should defend themselves with “bow and poisoned arrows”.

Lubwa P'Chong in the poem "The lament of Alunya the voter" also uses political figures of different levels to represent exploitation. He speaks of "**Councillor** wearing a suit and sleeping in a *mbati* house" (43) while Alunya the voter sleeps in a leaking hut. Alunya says: "we have been forced by our **clan leader** to give willingly (our possessions) to our **councillor**," depicting two local leaders of different levels joining in the exploitation of the poor. The persona refers to the councillor with such names as "**Bwana**," "**Big man**," stressing his status as a person unreachable for the common people. This is a picture reminiscent of the colonial days when Africans called their white employers Bwana meaning master. Lubwa P'Chong, like Oculi in *Malak* too employs the images of **state leaders** and **politicians** to symbolise exploitation and oppression: "**those in the first class** taking tea and drinking wine in three piece suits while the riches of the continent were being shipped out in front of their loyal foolishness." He, thus, paints the picture of leaders who use state resources for their own benefit. He also exposes the methods of governance practised by these leaders to exact terror and killing: "people fear **anything that shouts orders** and worship **they who gun them down**."

An interesting addition to the image of a state-related person is enforced by Frank Ojera Anywar in the poem titled "Fonctionnaire" where he speaks of all state officials of a lower rank that feed the politicians of the upper level, yet are despised taken by the former. Moreover, the "fonctionnaires" are aware of all the misdeeds of their bosses, but are totally too helpless disarmed to take action. He states: "In the strangulation of nationhood I, the **fonctionnaire**, carry out national duties; I drink to drown the impossibilities around me: (school fees, house rents, graduate tax) all away from us the **fonctionnaires** / who matter in sane societies, American or Russian scales;"(24) "we weigh nought now that offence is defence and weaponry tops the list of National Needs."(24) These are laments of the persona, who is fed only with the crumbs from the tables of the Big men, and yet aware that people like him are valued in other countries, where they form the backbone of the well-functioning state system. Apparently, they are only a little higher on the social ladder than the exploited masses, being almost a part of them.

However, in Anywar's other poems the meaning of the symbol is the same as that of his peer poets of the second generation. Anywar ironically speaks of "the **parliamentarian** of my village – he's patriotic, he's nationalistic", referring to politicians who disguise their own selfish aims by patriotic speeches. Portraying Ugandan rulers of his time, he uses the image of an inefficient captain, thus "the **Captain** is unable to tell the ship (state) where to go;" and "the **Captain** still insists with the mast torn, faded, non-symbolic of naval-systems." This is referring to state economy and other fields lying in ruins due to incompetent governance.

In a statement that seems to conclude the poets' perception of politicians Timothy Wangusa in "A Pattern of Dust" speaks of state leaders as "boasting prophets" with false prophecies of better future. Wangusa denounces empty promises by politicians, who come out as empty talkers.

17

Metal, machine and mechanism are semantically close symbols of oppressive influence of technological alien civilisation; submission of tradition to alien civilisation; defeat of the natural ways; historical oppression of Africans; violent and artificial nature of modern civilisation that killing itself and the people with its own devices.

Nturu, in the poem "East African Safari", speaks of safari car as a "powdered mixture of metal, bone and blood"(105). Similarly, while projecting the same meaning, he speaks of a motor vehicle as an "unholy marriage of **iron** will and human frailty"(105). In both references, we see the destructive nature of modern technology: human beings dying in motor accidents; also seen in Wangusa's "Taxi driver." He ironically uses the image of "Jok of **Mechanical Motion**," (31) in which the name of traditional magician is combined with an engineering term to symbolise the merges between tradition and modernity in Africa. In addition submission of the former to the latter is suggested.

Like wise Lubwa P'Chong in *Words of my Groaning* says: "the tensile vibrations of trees has given way to the beat of **pistons** encased in **steel**." This is indicating that the natural ways have been defeated by technocratic civilisation. It also implies the destructive nature of the latter even for its creators, but for Okello Oculi **metal** first of all symbolises oppression of the Africans throughout history and secondly, it stands for enslavement on the continent and elsewhere. In Malak he adopts symbolism of steel to compare it with the semantically related symbol of **chains**. The persona posits: "belches of **metals** (sound of the slaves' chains)" and "(people) dripped in **chains** across the Caribbean." Metal, therefore, is captivity.

The works of Wangusa are characterised by an abundance of these symbols. In "A Pattern of Dust" he employs them with varied meanings. For instance, he writes "transplant eye on the **metallic** pole" and this implies devastation. These are the only remnants of human race after the Third World War. In exposing the trait of insensitivity among the *haves* against the *have nots*, the persona speaks of himself as one "sitting on **aluminium** stool with back to Mathare screaming ghetto" to symbolise artificiality and hypocrisy of modern life. In the poem "Detachment" (55) he talks of "**metallic** logic of the ticket machine" to refer to a state where machines have replaced humans. In "Margeritta" he evokes a "**metallic** railing of sumptuous hotel" (60) that divides the character, a woman, from the mountain, that is a symbol of life, Africanness and eternity. With the use of these symbols generally, the poet speaks of the oppressive, violent and artificial nature of modern civilisation. On the contrary, in some of his poems the perspective of the use of these symbols is perceived to make an about turn when he portrays civilisation as killing itself as well as its creators.

In his well-known poem "A Tax Driver on his death" the persona speaks of his vehicle as a "**metallic monster**, docile elaborate horse, ruthless **machine**." (31) This is a dramatic monologue going on in a taxi in slums that had subjugated the driver, ruling his life and slowly leading him to death: "this metallic monster that now I dictate... shall surely revolt some tempting day... They shall say, know, who pick up my bones, "Poor chap, another victim to the ruthless machine' - concealing my blood under the metal."(31) The

metal here is employed to symbolise the human race dying from the effect of devices fabricated by humans themselves. In other poems of the collection Wangusa speaks of "machine-dislocated men" – apparently denoting the human race derailed by modern civilization. He sees the aircraft as a most 'undisputed' symbol of progress: a "metallic fish." "metallic beast of gigantic winged reptile shape... erupting skyward... to go drop volcano of molten eggs" – referring in fact to a fighter bomber, and thus posing aircraft as a symbol of destructive progress, the type that can be used to kill, therefore, perhaps dangerous.

In *Anthem for Africa*, Wangusa again produces the image of metal as a man-made, yet hostile substance inimical to human substance. Metal is closely associated with the image of a dictator Masaya whose first appearance is even greeted by "automatic music of rusty tins" and his decline by "funeral clatter of ancient cans." The persona also speaks of "metallic claws" of the state; "metallic resolve" of the dictator's soldiers; Afroville or Kampala – "reduced to a concrete and metal skeleton" while bombing and looting. Metal, therefore, is an enemy of human being because, despite its obvious benefits, the danger to human life seems to far out-weigh the very benefits.

18

Gun and other modern weapons. These are symbols of destruction, exterminating modernity; oppressive political power, destruction of national economies for the sake of foreign-made weaponry; killing power of dictatorship and to a limited degree liberation.

In Nturu's *Tensions*, the **gun** generally symbolises brutal power. This can be discerned from his use of closely related symbols such as "Gowon's **gun**" juxtaposing the symbol with the name of the Nigerian military leader to describe, the devastating civil war in Nigeria. In the context this symbolises destruction in Biafra. However, **Ilyushin shellpieces** (bombs from bombers of Soviet make) symbolise foreign involvement in African wars. A very expressive use of the symbol that Nturu achieves is in the powerful words: "poet's finger pulling a trigger" (99) is found in the poem "For Christopher Okigbo" (99) the poet forced by the state to participate in a devastating war. The poet

died fighting in the Biafran army during the civil war; hence, **trigger** as applied in this context also symbolises destruction.

Lubwa P'Chong in *Words of my groaning* uses the symbol allegorically when speaking about **gunshots** and "sound effects" and "smoke-screens" in Uhuru Theatre directed by Amin to refer to the violent nature of many regimes in Africa who were trying to disguise their selfish intentions in the slogans about independence and just rule for everyone.

In his poem *Malak*, Oculi also employs the symbol to stress the oppressive nature of many political regimes in Africa. He writes: "people worship they who **gun** them down;" again, a ruler of a modern African country confesses in Chapter 1: "(we will have to) build a fence of **guns** and breed **fire-spitting hawks**... to keep away locusts of hungry anger coming in hoes and pangas and sunken teeth." These leaders plan to defend themselves against the poor, because they will come at an appointed time to force people (the leader) to the sea "to clean the historic curses." He refers to modern African politics as "pain that started with exporting men and now imports **missiles**," which invokes the painful memory of slavery and later neo colonization in Africa. Reference is also made to modern African leaders as "they who ... know only of power, of the sounds of teeth melting under their feet, of staccatos of **guns** banging across nightmares of rats and condors, constipating the down trodden with tears," whereas the common people are "they who enter the market without **guns** and tanks." At this point one feels like sympathising with the common people who are unarmed yet have to deal with heavily armed and brutal armies.

Frank Ojera Anywar in *Wars no More* also adopts the symbols of guns and other modern weapons to represent mass destruction and political oppression especially in modern Africa. He contrasts these with traditional African weapons: "(time was when) a **gun** was unwitted and a **spear** superb weapon". Here spear symbolises valour while gun symbolises brutal destruction, but the gun won, and "now we're **trigger**-happy tribes," "indeed the **guns** are big, scatter the kill into waste" as the victims are killed in large numbers. It is not a matter of skills, like before, and the victims are humans, not animals.

Africa's riches are traded by modern regimes for foreign-made weapons and paid for from national budgets. In the school *Comrado-Compatrioto* they teach "how many bags of beans go into a **pistol**? How many tons of maize go into an **AK 47**? What dollar-deal shall we do for **armoury**?"(74) "**Military** economy part 1 for beginners" is also taught at *Comrado-Compatrioto*. The phrase: "now that offence is defence and **weaponry** tops the list of National Needs" refers to national economies of African countries destroyed by military regimes and their armoury needs.

One of the most picturesque uses of these symbols can be found in Anywar's poem "Dames brigade:" a monologue of women soldiers still serving in Ugandan army, who are saying that "we too now stand / astride **artillery gun-carriers** / fire **mortars** at targets; we're one on top of the **tanks** / at war, **jets** bombing;"(7) With bitter irony the poet shows how civil wars in Africa are bringing false equality of genders. The poet's view constitutes some of the most repetitive and inane stereotypes involving third world women. The reader notes that women, who from time immemorial have actually been considered as givers of life are now trained to handle deadly weapons which continue to destroy the lives of many people. In the poem "My piteous eye,"(61) the poet says: "(my piteous eye flows tears when it hears a **gun**-shot and sees blood; any slight sound of a **gun**, any small drop of blood flows tears!"(61) The reason for this is perhaps that any virtuous human soul hates war of any kind.

In *Anthem for Africa* the persona decries the presence of "**guns** and explosives" used by Masaya's troops around the state. He writes about a soldier "holding a **gun** next to **brains**" of the poet. He contrasts the symbols, where the latter may stand for the prophetic wisdom of the poet while the former symbolises the obtuse destructive power of the dictator. However, in some of his poems, Wangusa seems to use the gun to symbolise liberation: "Wanyamwezi **archers** and **gunmen**" fighting against the colonisers in Tanganyika and "**guns** and knives" of the freedom fighters in Afrolandia.

Beggar, the poor and slums symbolise downtrodden, common people who are exploited by the rich and the state; disillusionment, disappointments, desperation, lost hope; poverty and harsh African history.

In Nturu's collection (*Tensions*) the image of a beggar and other semantically close images have one main meaning: that of exploited masses. The poet speaks of the **chauffeur's** grin, as the chauffeur looks at the rich lady in "The function." Thus compares well with the impoverished driver in Henry Barlow's *Building the Nation*. He also speaks of the **pauper** in Kampala's streets and the **kondo** of the city's slums; of Toyota (or Gamma) crushing a **beggar**, revealing the indifference of the haves towards the have-nots. There are also images of "unwanted **orphan**", "crippled **beggar**", and "prostrating **pauper**", In Nturu's poetry all perceivably employed to refer to the pitiable state of the ordinary citizens.

With the same tone and connotation, Nturu employs the less conventional and semantically closely related symbols of **silhouette**, **form**, **frame** perhaps to sensitise the readers about scenarios such as: "a human-like disfigured **silhouette**" in the streets of the city; "shrivelled, contorted **form**" which the rich lady at a charity function sees behind the vased flowers, and faints as a result. A similar symbol of "hunched-up **form**" of a lonely woman has been employed by the poet. These images are indeed capable of provoking the readers' sympathy as they perceive in earnest the misfortunes and plight of the poor in Uganda and Africa as a whole.

In the same vein Lubwa P'Chong in *Words of myGgroaning* also speaks of "homeless **beggars** in slums," even ironically using the oxymoronic combination "slum citizens" and "Chief Pimp"(39) who came with a great multitude of prostitutes "from **Kisenyi, Majengo and other slums**" (39) These are all used to symbolise the poverty of masses in Kampala and in the country. The sad thing is that Africa's problems are long drawn and that the continent is apparently synonymous with the word suffering. In *Malak, Oculi*

talks of "lone **tooth** of a beggar three million years old," presumably to symbolise the harsh African history even in distant times.

Wangusa's *Anthem for Africa*, reference to the symbol is made in: "tattered **beggars**" and "toiling **tillers** of the land," common people of towns and villages "**pauperised** inhabitants"; "sorcerers and wizards fattened like dogs on blood of the **defenceless** poor." This could be in reference to the country's dictator about whom it was rumoured that he used to drink the blood of his victims. On the other hand, the use of the word **squatters** whose social standing is equivalent to paupers, tends to assume a historical and political meaning. For example the reference "native **squatters**" "the native people forced out of their country and homestead by colonisers and "Uhuru's **squatters**" common people of Kenya neglected after independence those who have lost their land to corrupt officials.

20

Mass **media** symbolises international lies; indifference; speculation; voice of the powerful/regime; danger; propaganda and resistance.

In the poem "Formula two" which is about the civil war in Nigeria Nturu speaks of a **cameramen** recording starving children in Biafra to stress the indifference of the world press that sells human disaster to the world in news blocks. In the same poem and in the same tone he introduces semantically similar symbol "foreign **press**" looking for sensations in the war-torn land. In *Mood of the years*, he was ironically referring to the reporter of the newspaper called *The People* whose assignment entailed eliciting from a traditional diviner a prognosis for the future. However, it was observed, that the newspaper does not dare to build these prognoses on the actual frightening realities of the painful present. These observations paint a picture of the media as sensational propagandists a view that is not too far fetched.

As if agreeing with Nturu, Okello Oculi in *Malak* writes: "the **official publications** make very short statements" about massive deaths and poverty in Africa. He deplores the lies told by foreign "historians announcing on **colour television** that all Africa's **smiles** came

as foreign aid." In *Wars no more*, Anywar too accuses modern mass media of feeding on human disasters, especially wars; they ask: "what hot news shall we broadcast if the wars are ended". This is symbolically portraying the press that is looking for sensations instead of truth and objectivity as required by the role of the media; "what headlines shall we print in the name of propaganda." The term Propaganda portrays the current press as an instrument of military regimes. Perhaps this is why they only make brief statements on massive deaths and poverty as Oculi pointed out. Presumably, they do not want to release the exact number of those who died so that the regimes may feel less guilty. The poet also states that people generally "wing their national freedom in the mass media," referring to the speculative nature of the modern press where everything can be sold.

Timothy Wangusa in *Anthem for Africa* also speaks of "international cameras and bulletins" recording massacres in Afrolandia (Uganda) for foreign press and the indifferent world, it is yet another sensation from "savage Africa." Wangusa's symbolic use of the radio to represent the voice of the state regime), in other words – danger is of significance. The poet speaks of the "bodiless voice" announcing the death by accident of opposition ministers. In fact, the death is occasioned by murder. He writes: "radio and television" - "Afrolandia External Radio, Afrolandia Voice" and has them announcing the dictator's orders. Masaya the dictator calls on the radio stations to provide "broadcasting comfort". This is to say that mass media in Afrolandia are serving tyranny. There is only one case of a different meaning - "Afroville Slum Fact Radio", a kind of "bush telegraph" which is spreading people's opinion about the regime and the news about the opposition movement, thereby standing for resistance.

21

Skeleton, horns and skull are used as symbols representing the past, historical injustice and devastation.

One unconventional meaning of the symbol *skeleton* is introduced by Nturu in the poem entitled - "The secret of the skeleton" where it is contained even in the title. This poem

generally looks like the monologue of the young arguing with the old. Here “corpses and skeletons in the cave” are symbols of the long-gone past. However, in other poems of his the symbol is used in its more usual meaning: devastation in historical and modern Africa. The poet speaks of “children in Biafra being likened to **skeletons** with frail frames,”(43) referring to famine caused by the war, and the “greenhouse of **human skulls**”(43) the real aftermath of civil war in Nigeria. On the other hand, Lubwa P’Chong in *Words of my groaning* uses the symbol with the same meaning as his contemporaries to represent the massacres in Amin’s Uganda: “bushes are strewn with **carcasses**”(37) after the Rain. Taking rain to symbolise the regime, this line is about people killed by murderous power.

The meaning attached to the symbol in Oculi’s *Malak* is slightly different – he uses it mainly to represent the historical injustice done to the African people by foreigners during slavery. He talks of “teeth and **bones** “used to grow sugar”, and those days was about African slaves increasing the riches of the slavers; “cotton planters’ **bones** spread across the brown soils” (of Americas and the Caribbean); “sea carrying more polished bones and ground teeth” (slaves transported by sea); “screams... of **historic bones** of the aborted children from Timbuktu to Manila” (children miscarried by slave women); “**skeletal** saints all cry to be dug out from the ashes” (Africans martyred by slavery); “who knows the fields of blood we sowed, the rows of **bones** we planted” (general allegory of Africa’s troubled history).

Ojera Anywar in his collection uses the symbol more like Ntiru and P’Chong, where it is used to refer to modern African, namely Ugandan, history. Old man in the eponymous poem is an official growing old in colonial service and in his old age he sees “strewn in the grassland savannah, scattered everywhere white **bones** – ribs, tibia, ulna, **skulls** with no sign of life seen”. This designates the victims of colonial and post-colonial oppression. Students at *Comrado-Compatrioto* school refer to future military officials, licensed murderers who are playing with human bones, “kicking sky high **skull** balls,” showing their indifference and disrespect for human life and humanity in general.

In *Pattern of Dust*, Wangusa speaks of “**bones, skeleton, skull**” in the hut of an ancient oracle as the symbol of tradition, long-gone past. However, his other collection *for Africa* is marked with much more varied use of the symbols, where apparently **skeleton** stands for the victims of colonisation and modern military regimes: “*allegory of the colonizer*” “*own soul with a basket of human hearts and decorated with human skeletons;*” “*forest of a thousand skeletons*” (near Kampala) – massive graves of Amin’s victims (semantically close symbol used is “house of a hundred **corpses**” in dictator’s residence); “*several thousand skeletons... heaped in geometrical patterns for international cameras and bulletins*” (dictator proud of the massacres – proud to display the bodies alleging that those killed had declared themselves enemies of Uganda); Afroville (Kampala) “*redeemed to a concrete and metal skeleton*” after looting; “*superimposed car skeletons*” - the remnants of cars of the ministers murdered by the regime. The persona also speaks of “*monument of bones*” that must be erected to the memory of millions massacred by dictators in Africa (semantically close symbol in the same poem – “Our country’s (Uganda’s) museum of death”). All the incidences of the symbol as used above depict devastation which Uganda has known over the years of pain that the country has experienced during dictatorship and terrany.

In the same meaning as that of the skeleton, the poet uses the **skull** as a symbol of devastation. Speaking about “*rows of human skulls*” in Masaya’s “private ghost room”) this is illustrated. One of the poems in the collection even bears self-speaking title – “*Political skulls,*” apparently referring to the politicians killing others and they themselves being killed when they fall out with the dictator). The poet, therefore refers to these incidences as “*tragic African epidemic*” and “*as politics of skulls.*” Exposing the utmost embodiment of tragedy, utmost devastation he uses the symbol of a “*child’s skull*” to symbolise the grim future of the country since the children who are the country’s and continent’s future are being killed by the murderous regimes.

Tree is an image used to symbolise source of life, protection, perseverance, nature, never-dying past and victimisation.

In Buruga's poem, *The abandoned hut* the persona speaks of the tree of love: "tree began to swing in the strong gale," "the tree of love you have planted has been eaten by termites." referring to a tree as a source of life and implying that the life did not come to pass because the tree of love was shattered by new influences.

Nturu in the poem "The pauper" figuratively calls the street beggar "a leafless tree"(35) who was once also full of life but had been deprived of it by the oppressive social system. However, in other poems he speaks of the "stubborn will of trees" alluding to the strength and perseverance of a tree. Then there is the "tree that every traveller embraces." This evoked to stand for protection and, in the long run, life itself. Perhaps the symbol of "the stubborn will of trees" can also be interpreted to stand for the resilience of Ugandans who survived the sweeping regime of Idi Amin.

P'Chong in *Words of my Groaning* uses the symbol allegorically: "the affairs of this earth are like a tall, big tree;" (4) "do not hurry to reach the top (of the world tree)"(5) this suggests the idea of the world affairs growing from the human root, but in the process becoming complicated and incomprehensible to an ordinary person. With a similar meaning he speaks of those who are "sitting on top of Uhuru tree," (44) also meaning that Uhuru, or freedom, grew out of human soil and was nurtured by wananchi, but now its top is occupied by political usurpers. He sadly says that in Africa "the tensile vibrations of trees has given way to the beat of pistons encased in steel," (8) suggesting the defeat of nature by western technology. However, nature still retains its protective power because the people terrorised by war "seek shelter under canopies of thick grown trees," (27& 28) that, like in ancient times, are still able to save their children from danger.

Wangusa too, in *A Pattern of Dust* primarily attaches to the tree the meaning of undying protective past whose power is analogous with: "totem tree;" "sacred tree;" "family tree;" "Tree of my mother and father." "Bird shrieking in a tree" near persona's rural home symbolises all the experience of childhood and youth that are dear to the persona's heart and which that connect him to the past of his people. However, in the poem "En route" he uses the symbol in a different sense. He writes about "thorn tree in the concrete heart of the metropolis," at the grounds of New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi. Tree and thorn seem to represent vices such as street urchins, beggars and conmen trapped in the unwelcoming splendour of the city. The question however is, who is responsible for these "thorny trees" in the middle of this fragility and sophistication? Is it not the unfriendliness of the climate caused by "modernity?" Otherwise, where were street urchins in traditional Africa?

23

Grave and funeral symbolises life and death, victimisation, continuity, link with the ancestors and the past and end of humankind.

Nturu in the poem "Funeral" philosophically unveils the cycle of life and death. Naturally life revolves from two points: the womb and the grave; unfortunately for Africa the new life is not allowed to mature. One could attribute this to what Oculi in *Malak* termes victimisation. Apparently, history over the years has victimised Africans: "graveyards of men for whom no graves were dug (like those butchered during Amin's rule and thrown into rivers and lakes;" or those in "leprous breasts of American graves," (86) referring to the dead slaves whose bodies were thrown into the ocean or buried unmarked along the plantations in the overseas lands and many others who fell victim of botched democracies across Africa..

In Anywar's *Wars No More*, the symbols are used to mean destruction and devastation. The old man in the eponymous poem, a retired government official, looking back sees the line of graves that represented his dreadful past, marked with many treacherous deeds in the name of career. Especially of interest are these symbols in the poem, "The grave-

diggers.” The poem satirically depicts Uganda under military rule, where “the cotton-diggers have lost lustre to **grave-diggers**, who gained profound ground in this country;” the **coffin-designers** too are in stiff rivalry.” Even the national pride – the country’s nature is now serving the undertakers: “mahogany, mvule, elgontek – their botany, carpentry and **funerology** now excels the rest.” Uganda has become the country where death is the most frequent and common occasion, and the relatives are ever paying the last respects to their dear ones.

Timothy Wangusa in *A Pattern of Dust* uses the symbol of grave with at least two meanings: in the first case, the meaning is a rather conventional symbol of **ancestral graves** (symbolising link to one’s people’s past - to the motherland). However, in the poem “Detachment” the symbol is used with an unconventional meaning where the persona speaks about the Boer settlers in South Africa, whose case even ancestral graves in South African soil did not make them the native people of the continent. The poet lets his reader judge this, basing on the treatment exacted on black South Africans and the attempts to create ridiculous “Effective Settlement” (55) (*apartheid system*).

In the poem “Tuning the voice” the persona speaks of “libation on **graves**” which he performs before starting his song. This is symbolising continuity and link to the past. Similarly, in the poem “The oath” the poet employs the symbol ironically where the dictator is giving an oath to the people swearing to protect “**ancestral burial ground**,” when he already has destroyed and defiled many of them. There is hypocrisy in this. In both collections, Wangusa uses grave with a philosophical meaning, to symbolise the destruction that the human race is preparing for itself by its destructive practices towards nature and human life: He talks of “**subterranean cells**” as “mankind’s **grave**” in the poem “Kilembe Mines;”(59) “intestinal pits for **burial** of the human race;” “the world in a bleeding **cave** and the life of man in a metallic **hole**,” and “**underground cells.**”(59)

24
Earth, **soil and land** are symbols employed to represent devastated Africa and on the other hand, source of life.

Using a rather conventional metaphor, Richard Nturu in *Tensions* speaks of “baked earth” and “rains coming to salvage the **earth**.” The poem, “First rain,” may be read as speaking about the real atmospheric phenomenon, but there may also be a different interpretation. For instance, the “baked **earth**” may symbolise Uganda and, even Africa, oppressed by dictatorial redgimes. The “rains coming to salvage the **earth**” equally stands for the opposition forces who against the development of Uganda. Indeed in the recent years, many regimes in Africa have been brought down by popular revolts – the rains are beginning to bring salvation in Africa.

In Oculi's poem, the earth apparently stand for source of life - something that will help Africans to awake from their long sleep; thus the persona speaks of “hopes of a cripple slapping the ground to tell earth to awake him from his **drunkenness** and listen to the cry of drums at the **dance** carnival.” The *soil* is used in the text abundantly – first, with similar meaning of the fountain of life and the origin of being: the persona speaks of “new shoot (of banana to symbolise life) out of the **black muck**, deep bottomless humus of Africa. The new shoot of banana symbolises life *then extends* a call to his people: “open your crust of your head to fertilization dance in the belly of the **soils**.” However, when he talks of the *soil* filled with graves of the Africans, the meaning becomes negative. The poet speaks of “cotton planters' bones spread across the brown **soils**,” and this transfers the meaning to victims of slavery, and he laments about the pitiful state of many African countries, saying “other people started feeding from the **soil** while we feed children with **soil** and **soil** with children.” It is indeed worrying that children in Africa succumb to malnutrition and disease while it is on Africa many developed countries have depended. This is great irony.

In his collections, Wangusa attaches the symbol to varied meanings. In the first part of his title *A Pattern of Dust*, in which he writes mostly about his childhood and the past of

people, the poem is titled "Nativity soil." In this context the symbol embarks on the "old conventional" meaning of the source of life and link with the past. However, the symbol of **earth** as used in the collection has a different shade of meaning in "En Route" in which the persona exclaims: "we have overcome the **earth**" with unknown consequences. In the poem "Detachment" he speaks of South African Boers who tried to establish in the conquered country "ridiculous Effective Settlement (*referring to apartheid*) in the absence of **earth**," this means that all their efforts are not really rooted in the soil of the continent and the souls of its people. In the poem "Flashback" the poet compares colonialism with a catastrophe: "molten core of pulsing globe and mellowing of the **earth's** crust," meaning that the natural order of things was destroyed. In the poem titled *Earth* itself wangusa advocates for the necessity to save the planet from the destructive enterprises of its inhabitants, again implying the earth as the course of human existence.

Soil, as well as the semantically related symbol of **land**, is also used by Wangusa in reference to the devastation of his own country and the entire Africa by the oppressors, from colonisers to the dictators of the day. The persona speaks of: "Scared **land**," "tortured **land**," "butchered sons of the **soil**;" and colonisers who "routed their spirits from the **bleeding soil**." In the poem "The exodus" he uses the symbol of soil ironically when Masaya (Amin) is expelling the Asians, in disguise that he is doing the needful for "purifying the **soil**" and protecting "correctly born sons of the soil." The poet shows how the dictatorial regimes use the symbols which are almost sacred to the people in order to cover their criminal intentions.

Army and police

These symbols are used in combination with that of **military vehicle**, representing threat to the life of ordinary Ugandans and death. In the poem the reader hears of "heavy **trucks** (one) hurrying away fish and crocodile feeds" where corpses of the military raids victims. In P'Chong's *Words of my Groaning*, the reader is informed of *A Memory* or the

vehicles driven by” the members of the dictator’s killing squad AVS (Afrolandia Vile Squad) and “tanks and infantry motors” used in Kagera war in the works of Wangusa.

26

Political speech and slogan

These symbols are used in combination with that of a politician, whose indispensable attributes are empty or hypocritical speeches and slogans (Buruga).

In Joseph Buruga’s, *The Abandoned hut* the reader meets the persona accusing his sweet heart: “Basia would talk and talk like a **politician** campaigning for votes,” implying that politicians in their talk never really mean what they say.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we will note just a few aspects of the above analysis that we tend to see as important. First, it becomes clear that the second generation poets in their works have considerably expanded and enriched the meanings of the recurrent symbols, which was stipulated by their growing poetic experiences and the changes in the society which they reflected and projected in their works. Second, in spite of all these growing variations in meanings, the second generation poets preserved in their works those basic meanings of the main symbols, as established by the previous generation. Third, certain symbols have formed combinations, having become undetectable from one another – for example, **politician** necessarily presumes **slogans** and **speeches**, symbol of a **car** drags along the symbols of **politicians** and **army** and **police**. Fourthly, the symbols mainly refer to specific social, political and historical phenomena. There is a tendency of symbols presenting both abstract and concrete meanings. Apparently all these observations are of paramount importance for our study, especially for comparative purposes, where we intend to critique the correlation of the meanings of the main symbols as used by the three generations of Ugandan poets.

CHAPTER FOUR

Recurrent Symbols Used in Ugandan Poetry: The Third Generation

In this chapter we analyse the recurrent symbols in the poems of the latest generation of Ugandan poets that is, those who were born after independence, and whose works were published in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These poets considerably differ from the precedent generations, as scholars will realise about the trends in their use of the above main symbols. The meanings that the third generation poets attach to symbols in many cases tend to vary from those adopted by their predecessors, which, in our opinion, is largely occasioned by the difference in experiences over generations, which arouses our interest in this chapter, compelling us to want to critique in detail.

Susan Kiguli: *The African Saga*

Susan Kiguli is one of the most established figures in the new poetic generation, who in 1998, came up with her first collection of poems, titled *The African Saga*. The anthology consists of four parts – *Poems of protest*, mostly concerned with social and political aspects of life in Uganda and, on a wider scale, the whole of Africa; *Relational poems*, speaking about love and other human relations; *Poems of nature* glorifying whose beauty is important in the life of the human race; and *Existential poems*, highlighting human life from the philosophical viewpoint.

Christine Lalobo: *No hearts at home*

Christine Lalobo, the poetess was born and raised in Gulu. Though a contemporary of a latter generation continues the tradition of “Song school” of the Ugandan poetry. Her long poem *No hearts at home* (1999), was most likely inspired by the armed conflicts, for she appears most preoccupied with the fighting in her native northern Uganda. The poem has three parts – *Plea to God: arms in Gitum* (Gitum refers to northern Uganda); *The Gitum child* which is about the tragedy of the children who become the first and the most frequent victims of war and *The trial of the war*, where the author ponders over the seasons of war, its interpretation in political circles of Uganda which the author calls

Laloyo and the general impact of that very *Laloyo* on her people. “*Gitum*,” the name of the place where she locates the predator of her dialogue, is possibly an acronym combining “Gulu” and “Kitgum,” two neighbouring towns in Northern Uganda most affected by war.

Joseph Mugasa: *The Pulse of the Pearl and Other poems*

Joseph Mugasa entered the page of Ugandan poetry in 2000 positing a collection titled *The Pulse of the Pearl and Other poems*. The anthology comprises twelve parts, in which some of the titles tend to match with those of the other Ugandan poets of his generations and even earlier. Accordingly, the main subject matter of the poems include: the contemplations on Uganda of different times and viewpoints; the problems of childhood; love; motherhood; patriotic and philosophical speculations. (The poet’s style is so simple that some poems would even be deemed too simplistic for a literarily scholar yet this is perhaps his strength as it allows the poet to convey his message to his readers in convincing simplicity and ingenuity).

Busingye Kabumba: *Whispers of my Soul*

Busingye Kabumba’s collection *Whispers of my Soul*, was published in 2001 enlisting him as one of the youngest poets of his generation whose works are also analysed in this chapter. Nevertheless, he demonstrates commendable poetic maturity both in terms of form and content. His short collection includes forty poems, dealing with a great variety of subjects ranging from philosophical and religious themes, to problems of love and relationships, state-inflicted violence against the youth, neo-colonialism, corruption and ethnic strife. Precisely all of them relate to the state of matters in his native country, Uganda. The foreword to the collection declares: “the writer... was only 17 years old when he came up with this volume.” However, we tend to think that this sounds more or less like a publicity trick as we earlier on noted that the level of artistic maturity in his poems makes the reader think of a person with more profound life experience.

Mildred Kiconco Barya: *Men love chocolates but they don't say*

Mildred Kiconco Barya could be deemed the most lyrical of all the five poets who have had their works analysed in this chapter. Her collection, *Men love chocolates but they don't say*, published in 2002, has a part titled *Poems of sunshine and loveliness* that contains several love lyrics. However, in her poems she also treats other concerns. A part titled *Poems of loss and contradiction*, contains poems about political turmoil in Uganda and Africa in its various manifestations; *Poems of challenge* cast a philosophical glance at the problems of human life; and *Poems of release* express the author's hope for a better future for her gender, her people, her country and her continent. Barya's poetry is characterised by considerable poetic variety, therefore, she could as well be named one of the most inventive and innovative young poets of Uganda.

Before getting down to the analysis itself, we would like to point out that some of the symbols analysed in this chapter could hardly deserve the name main or even recurrent, since they are used by only two or three poets. Despite the lack of spread of some of the symbols to all the poets of this generation analysed, we included them all the same as part of the "symbolic fund" of Ugandan poetry. Indeed, in comparison with the previous generations, some of the symbols identified could almost qualify as private symbols since they do not spread to all the poets. For example, alcohol, which was predominantly recurrent in the poetry of the previous generations, happens to be used by only two poets in this generation. Despite this, however, we have still analysed it for the gap of knowledge being sought.

The symbols

Tree is an image used to symbolise fertility, strength, resilience, perseverance, protection, native land (nation, motherland) and the place of birth. Tree also represents green planet of Earth and the place of birth lying in neglect, with no hands to maintain it. In a wider meaning, tree is used to stand for Uganda neglected by her children who fled the devastated land in search of greener pastures and while cross turned into the tree of life.

In Kiguli's collection, *The African Saga*, the tree is used almost solely with a metaphorical meaning related to an African woman. For example, it symbolises her strength, her resilience and perseverance in all conditions under the sun, especially in the most unfavourable situations. The poet tells the reader: "a black woman is a tree that will stand rain in all its shades;" "a tree that will look into the face of the furious sun;" "a tree that would bend under the weight of leaves." (12) At this point in the poem the tree has been used to symbolise the woman's fertility. This meaning is enhanced by the following words: "grandmother, my mother's teacher taught her that a black woman is a fruit-bearing tree that will nurture fruits to its full bloom." (12) He also writes "a woman is a silent tree that will watch her fruits drop". Here the tree has been employed as a symbol of fertility and life-giving force. The grandmother further says; "a black woman is a bottlebrush (tree) whose attraction lie in her tears, whose grace is in her bending, whose red flowers are source of strength to all." The symbolism of a tree is so stressed by Kiguli that even the poem dedicated to the black woman itself is titled "The resilient tree." (1) The only occasion when she uses the symbol in a different context is when she speaks of "mango trees carrying ripe fruit with a myriad of caterpillars crawling on the stems" Here contrasting pairs of images are featured. Despite the seemingly negative connotation of caterpillars curtailing the stems of trees, the symbol is appropriately evoked to stand for abundance and fertility ruined by destructive forces.

Destine Lalobo relates the horrors of war in northern Uganda in *No hearts at home*, and she uses the tree in a manner symbolising a sense of protection. Speaking about the

gunmen raiding a northern Ugandan (Gitum) village and the action of the main character who is an unnamed child trying to escape the menace, she clearly explains what happens to the frightened victim after the soldiers have had their share of terrorising the territory: "father found you soon hidden in the tree."(46) The reader is relieved to discover that the only place where the poor child secedes to find protection is the thick foliage of the tree that had continued to give protection in the same way to generations of his ancestors during enemy raids in the past. The symbol here could be interpreted to mean the native land thereby demonstrating that whatever happens, ones' native land will always protect him/her.

Mugasa introduces the use of tree to symbolise the beauty of his native land in the poem "The glory plains," where, as the title indicates, he extols the beauty of Uganda which he describes through an imaginary journey on a "glory train." He says: "then our glory train approaches the plain, behold the hills rolling away, the trees growing."(5) In another poem titled "A look lust leaves on land" he expands the meaning of the symbol to represent the whole green planet of Earth, gradually destroyed by its ungrateful and greedy children: "seems the sun (*sun of humankind*) has passed the summit, the Earth is changing and may yet fail, water dries away, blown by the wind to far off lands, the trees are cut and roasted in flame, the earth is shaved and left nude." (7) This is the reason why the persona expresses feelings of regret, it appears that the once green forests are fading fast due to packs of rubbish progressively piled in its beautiful corners. This has been used to symbolize mixed views to the city of Kampala.

Kabumba in *Whispers of my soul*, employs the tree to symbolise motherland, the place of birth even though he is not an Acholi as such. In his poem, "Scholarship," where a Ugandan youth leaves the country for overseas to study, "fading trees"(13) are the last thing that he sees on his land below the plain upon which he swore that they would forever remain in his memory as the symbolic image of his native land. In related meaning that tallies with Kiguli, Kabumba stretches the symbol on a wider scale in his poem "The story of the tree" where the tree represents resilience and perseverance. In that narrative of the tree the reader learns how the tree perseveres throughout the long and

troubled history of the nation especially from the colonial times when "a small shoot brushed aside as John Speke turned into Mutesa's courtyard"(27) and "the teenage sapling swayed as plump jolly man baptized 'the pearl of Africa;'(27) then "sprouting his first beads was he when the bullets grazed him, ignored by the soldiers that burst 'Prime Minister's orders' during the first coup of 1966; and in the dark time of Amin: "a man was strapped to him, head in black hood, torn by bullets – orders of the life president of Uganda."(27) Therefore, here the symbol acquires the meaning of national history, fate of the country, and, implicitly, of the country itself more than ever resilience and perseverance of the land and its people.

The first meaning in which Mildred Barya uses the symbol in her collection resembles that of Kabumba where the **tree** connotes the native land in the poem "Go tell my sister." The reader encounters the persona, a woman, requesting a travelling stranger to go and tell her sister, "the one who lives beyond the Lake" or the one who crossed lake Victoria and left Uganda, that "the big mvule **tree** in the backyard has fallen" (51). This means that the place of their birth was suffering from neglect, with no hands to maintain it; and in a wider sense, this stands for Uganda which has been neglected by her children who have fled the devastated land in search of security and greener pastures. In another poem with a self-speaking title "On the tree" the author uses the symbol with more philosophical connotations: here the persona speaks of someone and we tend to think, of Christ, who "took the foulest / and made it sublime." "The base, transformed into good, / darkness consumed, / light streaming in on the **tree**."(47) We interpret the symbol in context as that representing both the cross where Christ was tortured and at the same time that tree of life upon which the cross turned as He turned death into life.

as a symbol mostly carrying negative meaning: reign of darkness, terror, oppression and dictatorship. It also represents helplessness caused by the horrors of war. is a symbol of cover for nightlife and it also represents something secretive sometime hypocritical, reticence and insincere.

Susan Kiguli uses silence as a symbol in several poems, for example, in "Because I love this land," one could possibly think that it is the poet's passionate confession of love for her native Uganda while, on the contrary, the poet is actually registering solemn acknowledgement of bitter trials that have befallen her native land. According to her, all these trials, in one way or another are related to or associated with darkness: in which "the owls have the cock by the beak, (and] **silence** reigns" (14). Here it is silence caused by the victory of darkness, that is symbolised by owls' victory over light, symbolised by the cock, which is the herald of the sun. "No wonder we are **silent**," (14) concludes the persona, referring to Ugandans. Silence also accompanies helplessness caused by terror as the persona in the poem "The old guards' circus" asks: "must it always be in hushed **silence** that we stare at stallions mount our daughters?" (23) This does not only refer to soldiers raping innocent girls, but, in a wider sense it refers to the whole of Uganda being plundered by its rulers. The poet also employs the symbol specifically to address one of the dictators, Idi Amin when he writes: "the children around you, **silent** sapless saplings, groveling in the desert of your regime."

In *No hearts at home* **silence** also becomes one of the main symbols that Christine Lalobo adopts to paint the horrors of war in her native land. She laments: "the Lutum people have no gardens, granaries, eat from charity handed out by white men in deep **silence**;" "Gitum is dripping with tears of Lutum people weeping in **silence**;"(32) "your **silence** (addressing the child of Gitum) speaks louder than words;" "O child of Gitum, why are you quiet? – **silence** only;" "when they left, those gunmen, all went still, deep uneasy calm;" "O child of Gitum, why don't you talk, **silence** won't help for the deep troubles."

In *The pulse of the pearl*, Mugasa uses the symbol of the tree to speak about the city, which he portrays as the symbol of the dying African culture, suppressed by foreign influences; he writes: "we opened our gates to Las Vegas culture", (11) and "the city is starting to settle in **silence**,"(11) though apparently the silence here is deceiving, for it covers the city's menacing night life. In another poem dealing with the vices of the city, "The high and the low," silence is associated with oppression – "the Sheraton hotel made unique, with dazzling lights and **silent** (!) music, a sign of bulging affluence..."

...ring and rising to shine.”(12) One realises that the bulging affluence of the Sheraton is in fact one of the umbrellas of the city’s menacing night life.

Barya in *Men love chocolates*, seems to be the only poet who uses the symbol in a sense not associated with evil feelings or deeds. However, in the title poem of her: she speculates that when men intend to share a pack of sweets, “they wink at each other and there comes communicative **silence**,” meaning that they want to conceal their preference for chocolates, as they deem it to be a sign of weakness or unmanliness to eat chocolates. Therefore, silence in this context stands for something secretive and hypocritical as well as that which is reticential insincerity.

3
(Girl) **Child** is a symbol of suffering, abuse, oppression, victimisation by war and poverty. On the other hand it represents a hope for the future that (!); induced even in times of peace by the ways of the unfair society and the ill future of the world.

In Kiguli’s poems, the image of a child (especially a female) is mainly associated with abuse and suffering; in the poem “I am tired of talking in metaphors” the reader meets the persona only a young girl addressing her husband in a bitter tone, placing a complaint thus: “your ‘manly pact’ with my father – buying me for a bag of potatoes and pepper.”(4,6) In “Crazy Peter prattles,” the poet speaks of “the man with the white mane and black robes whose mouth stores the justice of the land ushered a rape case out of the court because the **7 years old** (victim) failed to testify.”(6) The girl in the poem with an illustrative title “Where am I?” seeks her identity, a definition of self image. She interrogates the adult community, “where am I, malnourished, pregnant and thirteen, located in this saga,” in “your world of –ism and –ise.” (10)

In Kiguli’s other poems, children both boys and girls are mainly associated with suffering inflicted upon them by war, as evidenced by the following lines “a **child** prostrate lies in the middle of a smoky hut, a mother’s weak hand drives an army of fatted flies from his watering eyes;” “the prestigious press full of shots of starving Madonna clinging to a

dead **child**;" "intrusive memories of **foetuses** extracted from the wombs of pleading mothers;" "dodging recollections of rusty pangas used to hack away at the world of bloated little girls to make entrances for lustful soldiers;" "scene of **daughters** made to lie with fathers before audiences of cheering bayonets and applauding guns;" "a little girl walks on four eating with monkeys, she wears a crown of roasting flesh and rotting remains;" "a mother rocks her **little girl** to sleep with daily promise – we will return home when the orchestra of gunfire ceases;" "must it always be in hushed **silence** that we stare as stallions mount our **daughters**?" "the **children** around you, silent sapless saplings, groveling in the desert of your regime."

Another meaning of girl child is that of blatant poverty? In "Because I love this land," she confesses on behalf of her country that "I host a million bloated **babies**." (14) In some other poems Kiguli speaks of "mammoth of malnutrition manacles our **children**;" and of "**babies** die unfattened, our **sons** condemned to the bowels of society" and "emaciated mothers clinging to **babies** with translucent skins faint in line." Only in one case in her collection does the poet let the symbol take on a positive meaning that of hope. In the poem with the title: "Uganda" the poet reassures the reader: "Yet the children are perched on the branches (notice again the image of a protective tree!) / And amidst the illusive shadows / shafts of light are hidden / Life will not die / Sanity will not be buried." (19)

In *No hearts at home* Christine Lalobo uses the symbol in a single meaning which is very closely related to one of the main ones in Kiguli's poems where she refers to children, especially female as the main victims of war. Lalobo regrets: "those gunmen even kill **children** without shame;" "raunchy gunmen violate and rape **girls** and women;" "O **child** of Gitum, how are you?- only two nostalgic eyes;" (31) "**children** were born, some died young, others grew up knowing little else but that war;" "the **children** of war notice the adults burning up houses, observe armed men shooting other humans, hear loud blasts;" "**children** of Gitum witness the Sura Mbaya plane, the dragon of death;" "the **children** of the war don't read books, don't write letters, but they are experts setting and saying the names of guns and their uses." She concludes: "the **children** of

Gitum (who) deserve a change from war to peace – a change of heart from all the leaders, troops, rebels, and wise people, from all of us.”

In Mugasa's poems the children are also associated with suffering - not even that brought by the war, but that which is induced even in times of peace by the ways of the unfair society. Speaking about a woman killed in a road accident, the poet primarily cares about her orphaned children – “her shopping lies destroyed, and the kids starve.” In the poem “Misplaced sympathy,” he speaks about a poor family whose daughter was struck by a disease “When (our) **child** lay dying, just a drop of good drug would banish the vermin in her blood;” “dearth of notes and coins stood between us and the life of a **girl;**” (81) no one in the neighbourhood cared about the poor child, but when she died, “blood chilling wails rent the village, followed by food and money and sympathy... with money for flowers, a shroud and meat, and other such mockeries we could not endure.”(81) An unfair social system produces unfair attitudes and relations, and the children, according to the poet, are their first victims.

Just like Kiguli and Lalobo, in *Whispers of my soul* Kabumba too employs the symbol mainly to portray children victimised by war. In his poem, “A prayer for peace,” the persona pleads with a soldier, thus: “let your bloodshot eyes look upon this copper serpent of bullets, lying in a heap, on top of the mass grave of your mother's **children.**” However, reading on further, one could easily think that the main meaning Kabumba attaches to the symbol is considerably different: “let the **children** make this (war) a thing of the past, and the little girls, at the village gates, allow them... to make mirrors of your rifle plates;” “let your **children** wear your combat boots, to fight the thorns on the path to school, on the path to progress.”(21) Kabumba seems to send the message of hope, hoping that this new generation will end the vicious circle of wars in their land.

In *Men love chocolates but they don't say*, Mildred Barya uses the symbol with multiple related meanings as does Mugasa who portrays children as victims of routine social injustice. In the poem “Just another day,” (8) the persona speaks of: “nascent **babies** thrown in dust bins” and “**children** (who) rove the streets.”(16) In “Apple boy,” she

writes: "a poor **boy**, a recluse on the railway station, dressed in rags but looking calm;" and "the aliens looked at him and cursed his class, immigrants in expensive attire spat on the ground." (16) In the context of "the boy ate an apple" this symbol acquires double meanings; that of victimisation by poverty (when a poor boy becomes oblivious of hostile reality, for eating a mere apple that is a rare treat for him), and also that of the ill future of the world, which is symbolised by the apple, in the hands of impoverished children; thus the poet calls upon the world of today to assume responsibility and the care of children.

However, Barya does not disregard the fate of children being victimised by war, on the contrary, while speaking of modern Uganda, her poems portray a situation where they die even before being born: "we inflict pain on the defenceless ones and rip open the bellies of the blameless ones pulling out the 'untimely-fortunate-**unborns**' ("The blood bath"); and apparently blaming Kony, the warlord of Northern Uganda, she accuses him of: "killing innocent **babies**, ripping wombs of **pregnant mothers**." (16).

Barya poses the question of the children's fate in the world of today even more generally, imitating Biblical style to ask "what crime have ye innocent ones that thou should'st be terminated, denied entry of this kingdom" ("What crime have ye?"); whereas in the poem "Border" she addresses all her fellow humans as the lost children, exclaiming: "Oh child of the universe, do you see how foreign you are, how fallen?".

4
Skull, bones and carcass are images that symbolise death, victimisation and devastation.

In *The African Saga* Kiguli uses the symbol with rather outright bitter irony especially in her poem, "I laugh at Amin.": "I laugh with all the **skulls** Amin holds in his hand" (11) She is referring to the laughter of death, that victims finally laugh at their killer and torturer. Speaking about Amin's crimes ("On trial"), she draws the chilling pictures of "well-carved human joints and cubed red flesh displayed on shelves bashed in **skulls** hanging from the ceiling" incidents of this kind were reported in real sense by

investigators and witnesses. Apparently, in Uganda, devastated by military regimes, only grass grows... to cover lone **bones**."

In *No hearts at Home* Lalobo uses bones to symbolise death the same way as Kiguli: "in Gitum land the space is cramped filled with **bones** of the people killed in the war;" the Gitum people are cursing their god for not helping them against the murderers, saying, "Jok pa Lukaka – you must be asleep, you are a god of worms, of **bones**, of graves."

In *The pulse of the pearl itself* Mugasa uses the symbol with matched meaning to his contemporaries expressed in the poem with the title, "The darkness of the pearl" (pearl – a common symbol of Uganda, "the pearl of Africa"). The poet paints a negative picture that is contrary to the expectations of what Uganda should be - *the Pearl of Africa*: "while in Luwero **skulls** tumble; when the sun scorched citizens in Soroti; in Mbarara rains still ran riots." Through the persona the poet echoes all these to show that political uneasiness always results in death and devastation as symbolised by skulls.

Mildred Barya presents her readers with a really strong use of these symbols, however, maintains the same meaning as her (contemporaries). As expected the symbol relates to the present day state of affairs in their land. The persona in "The Blood bath" states: "In this land we bathe in blood and delight in meals of mutilated flesh served on human skulls unfit for the museum;" (62) "we send the virtuous to their graves so early, seated on the **mounds of human carcasses** to amuse ourselves," (62). In another accusative anthem, entitled "Peeping during the stone age period," Barya likens Ugandan leaders to pre-historic cannibals, who tell "tales of **mutilated bodies** and **skulls** blasted open" while "setting up a government in realms of mass graves and pyramids of **skulls** – for die more, less shock."(67)

Guns and weapons are used as symbols of victimisation, murder and death. They are also employed to symbolise death disguised in wealth.

Like most of the poets of her generation (and the previous ones), Kiguli adopts these symbols with a meaning semantically close to that of **skulls (bones, carcasses)** and **blood**. In her poems a **gun** in the hands of a government soldier, especially in Amin's regime is a symbol of death: "I laugh with the victims of 1977 firing squad, they were dead long before the **guns** fired" ("I laugh at Amin"). But even in the present-day events in Northern Uganda, the gun is associated with "war plagued recollections of... frightened figures jumping on one leg at **gunpoint**;" "scene of daughters made to lie with fathers before audiences of cheering **bayonets** and applauding **guns**;" "a mother rocking her little girl to sleep with daily promise – we will return home when the orchestra of **gunfire** ceases." The persona concludes: "guns and bayonets have gouged out their Ugandan men's and women's eyes" and in Uganda "the **gun** is the spokesman, prison is the courtroom."

Since Lalobo's poem *No hearts at home* describes war, generally the symbol of **gun** occupies quite a prominent place in the text. However, *gun* is mainly employed with the same meaning as in the poems of Susan Kiguli. The images of various weapons are prolifically used by the author to describe the altered face of the war-torn land of Gitum: "war has turned narrow footpaths that led to homes into **minefields**;" "O those gardens once in a village, now **mine fields**, now a battlefield, now abandoned;" "the children of the war don't read books, don't write letters, but they are experts reciting and saying the names of **guns** and their uses." The people of Gitum (through the voice of the persona) are praying with the government of Uganda (Laloyo): "Laloyo I plead look at this... place strewn with **arms** and gunmen, clinics are relics, schools are closed, gardens are ruins." But apparently Laloyo has no mercy on them, she keeps stuffing the land of Gitum with more weapons of new as demonstrated: "I'll exhibit the **arms and weapons**, the full mighty strength meant for the rebels" as she calls the people of Gitum; "you are backed on the tour of **weapons** for the rebels;" "**bombs**... will move like serpents, the

things will talk, roar, thunder, speaking the language of fire, explode, destroy and kill, burn and char;" "this is a **tank** made of steel, the wires are chains... the big huge gun on the tank is for you; that **big** gun has many **barrels** in its belly, the gun you see fire and rotates big huge bullets;" "I should have shown to you heavy accurate **mortar**, the **grenades**, **launchers** – o, and the **Bazooka**." "The ailment in Gitum of **arms** and **weapons**" seems to be endless. The rulers of Laloyo, turned into iron mongers, are interested in nothing but stuffing Gitum with more arms, wasting on them the riches of their country: "people had shown by the use of **arms** and the use of might what they can do;" "rulers adorned in suits, clad in uniforms, holding **guns**, wearing hats, possessing faces of killers;" "rulers travel abroad looking for **arms**, returning to Gitum with those **weapons**;" "rulers of sorts and rulers for real try the might of the **weapons** in Gitum and those borrowed **arms** that cost a fortune."

Apparently, however, even among the Laloyo servants there are some voices raised against the continuation of war. Chapter 3 of the poem tells about "one whisked soldier called Parongo" who said "we in the army must be honest; we have failed to finish the war by using bullets and **bayonets**; we even bought **mines** and **guns**, but we are still engrossed in the midst of war; young and old, those without **guns**, the ones who suffer, knew at once that fate has come with another hurdle." In the epilogue, the author expresses her hope for "silencing the **guns**, setting all free from the woes of war."

Joseph Mugasa in *The pulse of the pearl* principally uses the symbols of *guns* in the same manner and with the same meaning as his counterparts. In the poem "The darkness of the pearl" he speaks of similar events that are described in Lalobo's poem: "big **guns** still go off in Gulu." (10) He therefore sets to plead with the leaders to talk peace in the eponymous poem "Talk peace": "we are sick to death of the smell of **guns**." (45) However, this marks the end of the only example where *gun* is negatively projected. Otherwise almost the other examples in all his works discussed in this chapter, weapons are symbols of the good, the positive. Indeed, his poem *Thanks to the fighters* is a dedication to the young soldiers of National Liberation Army who overthrew Obote's government in 1986, designated as: "brave young warriors." (44) the first stanza, in the

second line, "I heard in a distance the chaotic cough of **Kalashnikovs**,"(44)ears the name of the famous Russia-designed assault rifle popularly known as AK-47 which by itself has become a conventional symbol of conflict and war in Third World nations. In this context the symbol may well be perceived as a message of terror and destruction. However, it marks the beginning of the liberation appraisal, according to the poet, of "the youth" that "plodded on clutching steadily on the firing **guns**." (44)In a strong voice of his persona the poet concludes: "one by one their days ended, but inch by inch we won freedom - won't it be in vain for those who died if all we do is to fall apart?" (44)

The reader also learns that in Kabumba's poem "A prayer for peace," symbolism of the aforementioned image of the assault rifle is used in a meaning contrary to that suggested by Mugasa. Whereas Mugasa appears to uphold assault rifle as a symbol of defence, Kabumba condemns this and other weapons used by the army as deadly instruments of destruction. Therefore, in one of his poems he persuades a hypothetical soldier to disarm himself: "your **AK-47** can also be a pestle."(21) As a peace activist the poet goes a head to suggest to him alternative means of fighting, adopting other pieces of his military gear for peaceful purpose. He writes: "the little girls, at the village gates, allow them... to make mirrors of your **rifle plates**;"(21) "let the cows graze upon the **mine fields** you plan, your **guns** are good sticks to mount the scarecrows;"(21) "let your lovely green **uniform** adorn our village dancers, the striking pips of the major will certainly look nice on the chief drummer."(21) Kabumba's effort is, thus, to encourage war-mongers to graduate from bad to good.

Mildred Barya, perhaps deemed as the most lyrical poet of the generation, incidentally rarely uses this dreaded symbol. The only time it surfaces is in the poem "Peeping during the stone age period," where she likens Ugandan leaders to cannibals. The persona sarcastically calls them "great liberators who ruled by the force of the **gun**."(67) Apparently, this sums up the mostly negative meaning of this symbol in recent Ugandan poetry.

6
Grave, funeral and burial symbolise death inflicted by political terror; death inflicted by war, (burial as) the last honour of the people murdered by the state; usual but no less tragic outcomes of any war; political terror and mass murders.

In *The African Saga* Kiguli uses these symbols in the poem "Uganda" to stand for death of a specific kind, namely that brought by political terror, such as murdering political opponents, compatriots and other innocent people. Due to these mass murders the consequent result for the country according to the persona is to "house ten million graves" of terror victims, and today it is the country of "darkness in broad daylight, funerals a national celebration." On her part,

Christine Lalobo in *No hearts at home* seems to adopt a similar meaning in the symbolism of **grave(s)** as Susan Kiguli, only that for her, it is the deaths caused by war not assassinations or the like. The persona describes the area of fighting as: "Gitum land stubbed with **graves**, haunted by ghosts" she continues: "Gitum is laden full of **graves** scattered by war." In this way, the poet succeeds in informing her readers of the reality of life in northern Uganda where the people of Gitum persistently reproach their God for not helping them against the murderers: "Jok pa Lukaka – you must be asleep, you are a God of worms, of bones, of **graves**."

Despite the negative image painted of the symbol in the above occurrences, the semantically related symbol of *burial* bears a somewhat positive connotation in her poem. This ceremonial rite is portrayed as the last honour that is deserved by the Gitum people murdered by the gunmen, though paying the respects requires courage from the survivors, who are mostly women: "the dead ones will rot, they must be **buried**." Even though "it is taboo for women to **bury**, but the women said – in the times of crises we shall assist, we shall wrap and carry those dead bodies, we shall dig the **graves** and **bury**, don't you cry, your father is dead and gone, he is **buried** and safe, now in death he can't get hurt." Apparently, with so much suffering in life, it is better if one were dead and buried.

In the same tone as the rest of the poets discussed above, Kabumba also mentions the graves; however they are signalled mainly as those of the innocent civilians and as one of the usual but no less tragic outcomes of any war. In "Prayer for peace" he tries to stir the humaneness of a soldier by telling him "let your bloodshot eyes look upon this copper serpent of bullets, lying in a heap, on top of the mass grave of your mother's children." In the poem "Comrade" the persona, an elderly survivor of a guerrilla movement, after realising at last that he and his comrades were merely tools for politicians, admits bitterly: "I survived alone, tending their (*his comrades*') graves, their crumbling tombstones." "The only result of any war is a grave," the poet reminds, urging humanity to find a more suitable way of resolving conflicts.

To illustrate the meaning of this symbol further, we wish again to quote Barya's outstanding poem "Peeping during the stone age period," where she likens Ugandan leaders to cannibals, accusing them of political terror and mass murders – they are "setting up a government in realms of mass graves and pyramids of skulls - for die more, less shock." There is evidence that she uses this symbol rarely but strongly in a negative connotation namely that of devastating murders.

7
Politician, ruler and leader symbolise hypocrisy, greed, corruption, exploitation, devastation of African countries, pseudo war-lords killing their tribesmen; hatred and reprisal; corruption and self-enrichment; manipulation.

Apparently, negative images of politicians float through the works of all generations of Ugandan poetry, and the third generation is no exception. Susan Kiguli in her poems draws a familiar picture of African (Ugandan) politicians, who "swallow saliva attempting to swallow a stubborn past" - their past crimes still haunt them, but the greed for power holds them hostage and hides them in their own world where they commit new and fresh mistakes. In the poem "The peace lover" (which is perhaps sarcastically titled), the persona, a poor man, accuses the politician not only of greed, corruption and exploitation

of his compatriots from lower classes: ("while you build glamorous mansions, eating of anchovy toast, spoon marmalade jam, drape your wife in lace, sun stabs my bare back, you pocket my meagre wage"). But even of a more serious nature, deeds like mass murders: ("pseudo war-lord scalping your tribesmen"). Therefore, the persona concludes bitterly "our bravery abused by babbling puppets," perhaps referring to African politicians as the marionettes of their neo-colonial masters.

The poem titled "Africa's nomads," which, one would expect to talk about roaming communities of the continent, gives in fact the allegorical portrayal of politicians who are equated to nomadic tribes. After the exhaustion of all in an area, nomadic tribes move from one pasture to another. In the same way politicians move from one source of profit to another after devastating the previous one. The author ironically calls them "the elders among the herds boys" who "jabbed fingers at each other" (*accusing each other of failure*) after exhausting the land, while "the cattle (*people* – compared to 'chicken' in Ntiru's poems) watched in horror wandering who should be tearing at whose neck."

In Lalobo's poem, the rulers and leaders of present-day Uganda are portrayed as all being the same, out to change nothing: "the **rulers** of sorts and rulers for real, the rulers in Gitum and the rulers of Laloyo, past and present and those to come – they all look the same, they talk of peace and yet practice war, they talk with pride and boast of killing the people they rule, the people they hate;" "(rulers) are able to punish, correct using death;" "rulers adorned in suits, clad in uniforms, holding guns, wearing hats, possessing faces of killers;" "(rulers) smile and laugh, smile of disaster, laughter of doom." Apparently, their main job is to sell the riches of their lands abroad for weapons and testing them on their people: "**rulers** travel abroad looking for arms, returning to Gitum with those weapons;" "**rulers** of sorts and rulers for real try the might of the weapons in Gitum and those borrowed arms that cost a fortune." They are also said to indulge in luxuries unknown to a common mwananch, eating and drinking, perhaps when their subjects are languishing in starvation.

The pulse of the pearl Mugasa ironically calls the modern leaders “revolutionary giants that rose to prominence” and “fire brand politicians that breathed steam,” who succeeded in self-enrichment, hence “their mouths that once opened in emptiness are stuffed with chips, chips and chicken;” “I saw them build castles, buy cars, acquire endless land.” Therefore this symbolism in Mugasa’s collection, *The pulse of the pearl* represents greed and selfish gain.

Kabumba in *Whispers of my soul*, like the rest, paints a satirical portrait of modern African politicians in several of his poems. In “Independence day celebrations” he describes the very ceremony, giving contrasting images of the haves and the have-nots: “the multitudes stand in the hot sun, the **diplomats** sit in the shade;” “the masses sing songs of liberation, the **VIPs** listen with amused smiles in the shade;” “the **ministers** look beyond the people’s heads and think about their millions;” “the peasants prepare to walk back to their huts, the invited guests are blinded by the reflections of their shiny limousines.”

In the poem “What the minister ate today” Kabumba paints a satirical picture of a cabinet minister, as if to acquaint the readers with his routine menu (compare this symbolism with that in *Building the Nation* by Henry Barlow: “today the minister was feeling rather ill, for breakfast – only a parastatal, for break tea – a contractor’s bribe, lunch – donors funds, dessert – the workers’ salaries, drink – funds for the village well, evening tea – a simple car loan and mileage allowance of a permanent secretary, supper – development aid for his ravaged war-torn area.” No comments – only admiration with the author’s aptly found comparison, based on polysemantics: indeed, the verb “feeding” can have multiple meanings.

In the poem “Comrade” (that has the phrase - “to those who have placed their faith in liberators, only to discover they were merely men”), the poet portrays the politician as a manipulative villain who uses people’s values and convictions to make them give their lives for his shady aims. The persona, a lone survivor of a guerrilla detachment, recalls: “patriotism, democracy, freedom were the highlights of his **speech**;” “I hastened to his

call of arms, joined in the protracted bush war;" "I survived alone, tending their (my friends') graves, their crumbling tombstones;" "he now speaks with mellow complacency, his stomach filled with national cake - nepotism, corruption, inflation are the undertones of his gilded speeches."

Barya on her part gives a portrayal of political rulers in one of her most "politically charged" poems "Peeping during the stone age period" where she openly accuses modern Ugandan and African leaders of various crimes, from corruption to murder: "**leadership** that is gained at the expense of death of the millions;" "**leadership** with political history of bloodbath, committed in the name of political liberation;" "**leadership** chronology of anarchy, turbulence, coups and conspiracies;" "**leadership** that followed in the footsteps of past leaders with just a new brand of straightforward dictatorship;" "**leadership** campaigns where majestic cars pass and the poverty stricken masses rush out to cheer them, seeing the newest and fastest vehicles, raising clouds of dust to deliver honest speeches." She ironically refers to the political leaders as "great liberators who ruled by the force of the gun" and "liberation army where might is right" and openly calls them "hooded killers, plotters and political thugs."

8

Homestead, house, hut, village, and homeland are symbols of alienation, abandon, loss, deprivation, poverty, caused by war and other reasons; destruction of people's spiritual essence by war; new global village - hope; simple life; poverty but also hope.

It is rather interesting, if not symptomatic, to notice that these symbols, which we already analysed while discussing the first generation of Ugandan poets, remain among the most prominent symbols in the poetry of the third generation; however, the younger poets seem to use them in the meaning more resembling the poetry of the second generation; for them, the symbols primarily mean the lost motherland, native grounds snatched away for various reasons. For example, Susan Kiguli in her opening poem "The resilient tree" regrets that she lost her home (her native culture, her tradition) because of the foreign influences, (which brings her to share the sentiments of Okot P'Bitek). She laments: "I

am a slave of a foreign tongue, I speak about myself and my own in a language of distant lands, this tongue betrays me, it has carved out an island for me, yet I can not call this island home.”

Further, in “Flat topics” she confesses, however, that she has taken her fate of the people’s voice at her own will, and this is another reason for her homelessness – for “there is no **haven** for prattling poets.” This is echoed in her poem “Indefinitely absent,” her dialogue with great Malawian poet Jack Mapanje, whose song “caused them to wrench your neck at dawn / and then boldly inscribe on your front porch (*house*) in blood letters ‘indefinitely absent.’ Thus, as Mapanje was alienated the poet is also torn out of her home. Kiguli repetitively uses this symbol in the same meaning again and again. In her poem *Our Land*, dedicated to another great and lost son of Africa, a Nigerian poet Ken Saro-Wiwa, the reader is informed: “we are forever tied to mad caravans, there is no home for us” - here again perhaps implying that the poets will forever be chased from their lands of birth for being the voices of truth.

In some other poems also she uses the symbols in the meanings more “conventional” for her generation namely that of poverty: (“a child prostrate lies in the middle of a smoky hut”); and sufferings of poor people caused by war: (“a mother rocks her little girl to sleep with daily promise – we will return **home** when the orchestra of gunfire ceases”). In her works Kiguli establishes the basic meaning of the symbols developed later by her fellow poets namely alienation, abandonment, loss and deprivation.

The meaning of the symbols primarily used by Christine Lalobo is well articulated even in the title of her poem, *No hearts at home*, presumably meaning that the homeless and deprived people no longer owns a homestead. Indeed, throughout the poem she speaks about destroyed homesteads and homelessness caused by war, with the text of the poem literally permeated with allusions to the symbol. Several lines refer to places that once were homes for the Gitum people, but are now demolished: “war has turned narrow paths that led to **homes** into minefields;” the gunmen ravage and burn **homesteads**, “slaying and wielding a lot of weapons;” “chicks you reared, goats you herded, cows you

grazed, gardens you tendered, you had a **home**;" "O child of Gitum, where is your father, where is your mother, where are your friends, where is your **home**?" "O child of Gitum, where is your **soul**?" (here the poet equates a home to the soul – of course both taken away by war); "leaving the place that once was **home**, that home of yours, the one you knew;" "all the troubles that encircle the place you once called **home**, home sweet home, the place of return for your brothers after school, **home** precious home, the secure place for your mother, home good home for your father."

In the end, Laloyo (Ugandan government) speaks to the son of Gitum in dark mockery – "I know you assume you have some right to go to school, to sleep at **home** – but that is a dream." The Gitum child's father is a lucky one compared to many other villagers who are living as **IDPs** and are suffering. At least the child's father died in his house, on the ancestral land: "the gunmen searched all over the **home**... they found your father not far from the **hut**, they dragged him right to the middle of the **home**;" "your father died a man at his **home**." Apparently, the gunmen leave people with terrible choices – that of fleeing their ancestral homes (thus losing their souls) or of being burned alive: "the gunmen hastened – come out quickly from those **huts**;" "as you struggled out of your **huts** into the dark they hit everyone; others could not get out and later were burnt in those **huts**." In the same sense, but with a wider range, the poet uses the semantically related symbol of village: "gunmen execute plans of demise without much risk – **village** after village, **home** after home, school after school;" "gunmen went on rampage, lighting big fires, turning the **village** into an inferno;" "the **village** smouldering away;" but in the end the old soldier confesses – "we banish and displace big huge **villages**, but that has failed to work."

It is also worth noting the special way the poet collectively uses two prominent symbols in Ugandan poetry **namely grass roofed house**, symbolising the home of someone's birth, and **car**, frequently standing for an abusive and murderous state: "son of Gitum claimed that he only heard while mending the **grass on his roof top** that Laneno was murdered in a **car** crash allegedly staged." Here, two symbols are brought into a harsh juxtaposition – while mending the ancestral home (restoring and maintaining life) the Gitum child

happens to know about his co-villager's death in Kampala caused by a government car. Here, the very essence of the conflict in "Gitum land" is brought to light through the use of just two expressive and capacious symbols.

in his poem *Talk peace* Mugasa uses the symbols of **huts** and **homes** in the same meaning as Lalobo namely; that of destruction of people's spiritual essence by war: "we are tired of... the crackling sounds of **huts** in flame;" "we should no longer allow... the grip of poverty on our skeleton **homes**." However, in the poem titled "We the new people," he uses the symbol of **village** to express his hopes that lie within his younger generation, by stating that "together we'll make a new world order and as one, live in this **village**, the wonderful abode - the global **village**."

Busingye Kabumba similarly employs the symbol of **hut** with the wording as Mugasa, however, his attachment of meaning is rather different. In the first place Kabumba apparently employs the symbol in all environments to denote poverty in rural Uganda. Describing a village festivity in his poem "Kiga dance," he mentions that "invitation cards were shouted across the **grass thatched huts**, between fields of peas and beans," making an ironic counterposing of two symbols – invitation cards (being actually shouted!) standing for ceremonial courteousness characteristic of urban culture, and **grass thatched huts**, representing the simplicity of rural life. In the poem "The greying sun," describing two peasants, father and son, returning to their humble abode dead-tired after a long working day, he refers to them as "two beasts on the murram road walking into oblivion, where the sun sets on their **un-thatched hut**." And, in the poem quoted earlier, "Independence day celebrations," he uses the contrasting symbols – when the celebration is over, "the peasants prepare to walk back to their **huts**, the invited guests are blinded by the reflections of their shiny limousines." We find this an interesting comparison when the symbols are used in contrast, just as used by Christine Lalobo, only that the meanings are different – **hut** here stands for poverty, while the **limousines** denote extravagant riches.

These symbols are also prolifically used by Mildred Barya designated, as **home** and **homestead** (as by Okot p' Bitek), have at least two, moreover opposite meanings: hope and loss of hope. First, there is loss and destruction, a meaning widespread in her generations' poetry. In her "politically charged" invective, "The blood bath," she mentions (Ugandan) newspapers where "news of sweet massacres, plundered **homes** make headlines." In "A bright yellow rose," the persona, a survivor of a war conflict, returns to his land only to find that he has no home: "my country was plundered, my **homestead** destroyed." It is also notable that in several of her poems she uses the symbols of **ruins** and **desolate (forsaken) land** that are semantically close to that of destroyed homestead. In the same poem the persona explains the effects of losing a sense of belonging: "I began roaming the streets, on the pavements I trotted, but always came back to a **forsaken spot**;" "the land was **desolate**, it was **deserted** like a wrecked ship;" "I moved among the **ruins** and stared."

However, the poet gives hope when she supplies details of what the persona sensed after spotting a flower, a bright yellow rose growing out of the shambles: "hope dawned, and I could not leave the **ruins**; I would stay and rebuild." This is contradicted by the persona in the poem "I plead to go" who is less hopeful, who, after returning home and seeing that the house was destroyed and her "people are hacked to death;" and so, defeated, the persona decides: "I must go;" "good bye my desolate land, I behold the **ruins**; good bye **ruins**, I plead to go." So, home for Barya provides both hope to find an abode or the hopelessness of losing one's home.

Car and **military vehicle** are symbols of exploitation, unlawful riches, oppressive machine of state; devastation by war; oppressive society.

In Kiguli's poetry the car represents exploitation, unlawful riches and oppressive machine of state. In "Freedom fire," the persona says: "our blood bitterly shed is commemorated by numbered **majestic chariots**," apparently referring to leaders that came and turned people's liberation efforts to their own benefit: after seizing power they ended up

buying luxurious cars. About this insult hence, the persona, a common mwananchi, ironically beckons to his compatriot: "step forward, brother, living fuel for the **vehicle** of justice." Here again, it is clearly expressed how the oppressive state is symbolised by a vehicle, fuelled by lives of the common people – who offer their sweat and blood – the fuel regimes need to survive.

While analysing the symbol of a house in, Christine Lalobo's *No hearts at home*, we also demonstrated how she uses the symbol of a car to mean risks and dangers of city life in an oppressive state. It needs to be emphasized that it is also the only instance when the symbol assumes non- military context, otherwise in all cases elsewhere in her poem it is militarily projected. She speaks of military vehicles, bringing to Gitum death and devastation: "the green big **truck** – that's the Mamba, another real snake filled with bullets;" "that's a Buffalo with a green deep pot in its belly, the man-made buffalo, in the buffalo the men are safe even on a mine; there comes another big green **truck**."

In *The pulse of the pearl* Joseph Mugasa demonstrates an interesting use of this and related symbols in the poem "My sacrifice." He chooses a taxi driver's wife for his persona, (certainly Wangusa's famous poem comes to mind!) who describes her husband in the terminology of his profession (status jargon): "My man is like a rolling tyre;" "I believe he is a discharged battery, for I've lost hope in his archery;" "I lie awake like an abandoned pedal;" "sometimes his hands handle me like a wheel, his foot the only organ working at will." This seems like a mockery as in real sense it turns out to be an accusation against those "haves," the rich clients, who make her husband spend most of his life at the wheel to make an extra shilling; "he is my man though he is your taxi driver," she charges bitterly. Again, **car** in this context indirectly, serves as a symbol of exploitative social system which subjugates a life of common man turning him into a mere "human spare-part."

However, in some of his poems Mugasa employs the symbol in a more conventional way implicating politicians. The persona resents those who "build castles, buy **cars**, acquire **landless land**" (politicians). In the poem "Accident," where even the title is related to the

symbol, the persona laments the death of a common woman hit by a posh car and when he expressed his shock at the incident, he was answered: "never mind the accident, the car escaped unhurt." It is, thus, clear that in his society, a car is valued more than the life of the a woman.

In Barya's poem "Peeping during the stone age period," the reader discovers that *cars* are closely associated with hypocritical and oppressive power. The persona talks of "leadership campaigns where majestic *cars* pass and the poverty stricken masses rush out to cheer them, seeing the newest and fastest *vehicles*, raising clouds of dust to deliver honest speeches" (of course one would be intrigued by the honesty of the politicians' speeches). In a related meaning, although in a different context, Barya employs the symbol in her feministic anthem: "The knock of liberation," where the persona glorifies the fact that modern women "can inherit property and drive posh *cars*." Our reader may again note that the car is echoed as a symbol of unjust male domination. *Car* indeed was that icon that kept women in the ranks of the downtrodden just because of their gender. However, by the mere fact of driving it shows that they have now conquered that height. Consequently, by the poet's artistic tactics the car is turned from being a symbol of exploitation to that of equality.

10

Mountain and hill symbolise natural grandeur, majesty, beauty, symbol of Africa; symbol of high society.

This ever-important symbol of Ugandan poetry retains its meaning in the poetry of the third generation, standing for natural grandeur, majesty and beauty of Uganda and Africa. In *the African Saga* Kiguli, glorifies her country and calls it by pet names imported from the west: "Switzerland of **mountainous** glory." By comparing Uganda's landscape to the world-famous mountain region in Europe, a supper power, Kiguli has heightened the technique of symbolism in Ugandan poetry. That's why she speaks of "land of sky kissing mountains" and "the solemn assembly of multi-flowered hills."

In *The pulse of the pearl* Mugasa attaches a similar meaning to the symbol in his poem designated with a self-telling title: "View the hills," where he praises the beauty of his land by inviting his readers to "take a view of the giant **hills**, sparkling snowfields, delicate **mountain peak**," "gasp with me like the thousands before us at the **mountains of the rain we call Rwenzura**:" In another poem with a speaking title: "Let's climb the hills," he comes up with a similar appeal: "Let's together climb the magic **mountains**, hills harrowed for what they contain, burrowed and hollowed by copper hunters;" "these **mountains** that manage to maintain the magic of the **Mountains of the Moon**." In the poem with a corresponding title: "In love with the land" the poet makes an imaginary journey taking pride in what Uganda's landscape has to offer: "through the dramatic corners goes our train of plateaus and **hills**;" after his inspection he appeals to other Ugandans "the land is yearning for a tender touch, caress her valleys and pat her **hills**".

However, in his poem: "The high and the low" he evokes a different use of the symbol. The persona exclaims: "To say high life you mean a hill, look at Makerere." By this exclamation of the persona the poet has managed to turn the **hill** into a symbol of high social standing – really, in Kampala, "the city on seven hills," the hilltops are taken by state offices and high-society dwellings, among their occupants having many Makerere graduates (Makerere itself stands on one of the hills).

In *Whispers of my soul* in his (already quoted) poem "Kiga dance" Kabumba applies the symbol in the same meaning and even with the same wording as Susan Kiguli: "the **hills of the Switzerland of Africa**," however, the context in which it is used renders irony to the meaning. The persona narrates: "my uncle went home, to the **hills of the Switzerland of Africa**, with mission: provide music and food and the Bakiga would make the party." Therefore, in this context when we consider *Switzerland* connotation famously known as *the land of riches*, it is implicit how shapely Switzerland contrasts with Kabale one of the poverty-stricken areas of a third world Uganda. "My country can be likened to Switzerland only in terms of its landscapes and mountains," subtly tells the poet to his readers; and in this subtlety much bitterness is also felt.

Blood symbolises murder and devastation brought by war and dictatorship (main meaning); hypocrisy (leaders justifying bloodshed); oppressive social system; inherited gender traits; gender features and generation gap.

In the poems of the third generation, the symbol of **blood** mostly bears negative meanings, the first of them being murder and devastation brought by war and dictatorship. In *The African Saga* Susan Kiguli gives an illustrative example of this meaning in her poem titled : "Uganda," where the persona laments: "our **blood** bitterly shed is commemorated by numbered majestic chariots;" "rivers (of *Uganda*) froth **blood**," "(river) Nalubaale delivers mutilated bodies and sweats gallons of **blood**." In the poem "Did you mention names," dedicated to the great Malawian poet Jack Mapanje, the persona speaks of the "red waters of Shire river (*river in Blantyre, Malawi*)," coloured with the blood of innocent citizens shed by the regime of Banda. The symbol is also generally used by the poet in relation to African rulers, who shed the blood of their compatriots. In the poem "Indefinitely absent," again the persona addresses Jack Mapanje: "the music of your chant caused them to wrench your neck at dawn / and then boldly inscribe on your front porch in **blood** letters 'indefinitely absent.'"

In the poem "The peace lover," Kiguli informs Ugandan rulers, especially Idi Amin whom she describes as a "savage sawyer, carving human thighs for dinner, hosting cocktail of **blood**, immersing guests in an ocean full of crocodiles;" "**leech** (*a semantically close symbol*) stuck to the leg of the nation;" she generalises a syndrome of the leaders of today: "**blood-hungry vipers** / those are not new to us." Through the persona in her poem: "The head tie," the poet, employs the symbol to speak of state-induced repression. She informs the reader about one other function of her head tie: "houses the **blood** of my old father which was vomited by his protesting chest against a bullet."

In a different context in the poem titled: "The ogre" Kiguli employs the symbol when talking about the deadly disease of AIDS: "this **blood-eyed** Monster [that] stalks mother earth," "this man-eater sucking one's **blood** until one is empty and shrivelled, a useless

of bones, a talking skeleton with bulging eyeballs." But again, even here, blood is used as a symbol of devastation therefore retaining its negative meaning.

Still in a similar meaning signalling devastation brought by war, the symbol dominates Christine Lalobo's poem. The persona informs us that "in Gitum land the soil is wet, soaked with **blood**, deep red **blood** shed in the war;" "Gitum is pungent with stench of **blood** shed in the war," and even the persona, the Gitum child, has "the red eyeballs derived from **blood** pouring all over in your home in that war." She also relates the symbol to the figures of Ugandan context, but here it stands for their murderous hypocrisy – trying to justify the atrocities committed in Gitum land, they say that "those Gitum people, they thrive on violence, they love red **blood**," and "our troops shed their **blood** to protect liberty - to preserve dignity." It is indeed a paradox that liberty and dignity are protected by killing civilians.

In the poem "We the new people," expressing his hope for a better world for the new generation the persona says in first person plural, we "shall mop the **blood** of Rwanda, tie a pad on **bleeding** Bosnia, save democracy from dogs of war." But again, even in this message of hope the symbol itself stands for devastation brought by armed conflicts. In his other poems **blood** also symbolises oppressive social system – the persona addresses the mother in the poem: "My mother's lullaby," "the suffering is vivid in your tortured eyes where **blood** has settled in the milk white." This is evoked to symbolise suffering induced by the social injustice that caused her bleeding in toil for an extra shilling. In the poem "Accident," earlier on, quoted, the poet draws the picture of a dead woman – "obscenely mutilated, she lay stone still, her basket lay aside scattering assortments: cassava flour, mashed avocados and tomatoes, mingling with her red **blood**," here the symbol is solicited to stand for fragility of the life of a mwananchi standing in danger of termination any time following any slip of a rich compatriot's car.

The symbol is used differently in the poem "The test of man," where the given meaning is that of "blood inheritance" or sexuality, forming one's personality in terms of gender traits. "If it is a woman, put one to the test for Christ's sake, then don't bring her near a

snake – her juices will run to dilute her **blood**; and when you want to give a man a test, bringing a woman is what is best – his **blood** will surge downwards to Adam, his desert brains cannot resist”.

In the poem *A voice in the wind* Busingye Kabumba uses the symbol in a similar sense as does Mugasa in the aforementioned poem – but here it stands not only for personality or gender, but also symbolises the whole humankind: “There comes a time when soul speaks and the head listens; this is our humanity, our **blood**, the language we all can hear but fear to speak; the writings of the soul are chained and imprisoned by wall of decorum, but I know your soul speaks the same language that is taught by **blood**, until we take it, unspoken, down to the graves with us.” However, in “A prayer for peace” he uses the symbol with a more “conventional” meaning when the persona addresses a soldier: “let your **bloodshot** eyes look upon this copper serpent of bullets, lying in a heap, on top of the mass grave of your mother’s children.”

In *Men love chocolates* Mildred Barya uses the symbol in a meaning contrary to the one described above. The main meaning of the symbol is contained in her poems “The blood bath,” where the wording even spills over to the title and in: “Peeping in a stone age period.” In the former, she pictures an allegorical and symbolic picture of Uganda as the land where blood, shed by ruling regimes, has flowed everywhere, and everyone is spotted with it: “In this land we bathe in **blood** and delight in meals of mutilated flesh served on human skulls unfit for the museum;” “we quench our thirst by cutting men’s throats and drinking their **blood**;” “we drank **blood** before, we still drink **blood**;” “we carry a banner painted with **blood**, betrayal and treachery, our theme song;” “our fires are cooled in the **bloodbath** prepared for the old and the young, the good, the wicked, the innocent;” “I am not adorned with the beads of my ancestors, I have no ankles, ringlets or necklaces, yet I carry on the work of my predecessors who have taught me how to dance – I wear **blood** marks on my face;” “I have **blood** shot eyes (compare and contrast with Kabumba), I drink blood, I live in blood;” “my hands are covered with **blood**;” “I have sank deep in **blood**, my soul is drenched with blood;” “I have drank **blood**.” “Peeping in a stone age period” is filled with similar imagery: “the poor fishermen whose children are

starved cast their nets in the rivers of **blood**;" "leadership with political history of **bloodbath**, committed in the name of political liberation."

Elsewhere in her poems, however, the symbol takes on different meanings. In "A drop of **blood**," it stands for gender features and, in wider context for the entire humankind just like it was connoted in Mugasa's and Kabumba's poems: "could a drop of **blood** (*a period*) make me a woman?" "brother flinched at the feel of a sharp knife, but the elders convinced him – once we slice off the skin, you become a man" (here the circumcision knife stands as a semantically close symbol); "the Son of man was crucified, water and **blood** flowed out;" "there is something in a drop of **blood** that make us men and women."

In another poem titled: "Father and son dialogue," blood symbolises generation gap – it becomes clear when father (the poem is a dramatic dialogue) tries to pursue his offspring to retreat to family roots: "my own **blood**, son you must follow me, the world has taken you - no father I am going away," answers the son, showing that although they are tied by blood, he is already a different personality; implicitly and allegorically, different blood flows in his veins.

12

Elders (**old men**), **family and relatives** symbolise suffering and loss of the beloved ones inflicted by terror and war; source of life, love, inspiration and knowledge passed through generations; sources of wisdom, pride and identity, love, support and care, the feeling of home; power of tradition.

These symbols in the poetry of the war-born and war-raised generation bear, strangely but logically, mostly negative meanings, indicating suffering and loss of the beloved ones inflicted by terror and war. In Kiguli's collection she speaks of "**old men's** guts eaten by hunger;" "**old men's** eyes closed for fear of watching axes tear the heads off their **grandchildren**;" "haven't we borne long enough as vipers danced menacingly before our **own mothers**;" "we gaze sightlessly... as leopards treacherously tear our **wives** to

pieces.” In the last two quotes, vipers and leopards are allegories of oppressive regimes. Interestingly in the opening poem, “The resilient tree” the symbol is employed in the meaning reminiscent of that used by the first generation poets – source of life, love, inspiration and knowledge passed through generations: “my **mother** my teacher showed me – a woman in this world is a river that hosts all manner of silt / expecting to have pure water; **grandmother**, my mother’s teacher taught her that a black woman is a fruit-bearing **tree**.” In the poem “Granny’s land,” the village where the persona seeks to return from the city, “where the monstrous machines reel,” the symbol is associated with the image of grandmother as the custodian of kindness, care and natural ways of life.

In her poem, Christine Lalobo mainly uses the symbol in the meaning which may at first glance seem surprising in poetry talking about the terrors of war. Instead of speaking of loss and suffering, she refers to the elders as the sources of wisdom, pride and identity – “Son of Gitum, have you not listened to all the teachings of your **elders**, the words of wisdom;” and calls upon “Jok pa Lukaka” to “act right now to protect the land of our **forefathers**.” Similarly, the symbols of **family** and **relatives** in her poem stand for love, support and care - the feeling of home: “you were fed with good food cooked by your **mother** and your **sisters**;” “O child of Gitum, where is your **father**, where is your **mother**, where are your friends, where is your home?” “you used to be one happy **family** with your simple lives;” “the man you called **father** has no home, has no might, he is dead and buried.” However, the fact that in the last examples everything is referred to in the past tense brings the symbols closer to the meaning in Kiguli’s poems – all these good things in the life of the persona are gone, smashed by war and terror.

In the meaning implied by Joseph Mugasa in “The Accident,” the theme of loss resurfaces where the persona confesses the sorrow that struck her while looking at a poor woman, an accident victim: “in her face I saw my **family**, my **mother**, my **sister**, and **even me!**” implying that any of them is prone to the same tragic end, with no punishment for the culprit. On the other hand, in Kabumba’s poem “The appointment” (dedicated “to Barbara Mwesigye slain in 2001 at Makerere”) again appears the meaning of loss, resembling the one in Lalobo’s poem. The poet addresses a young female students saying

"You were going to **home**, sweet home, going to see your **mother**," that is, the person she loved the dearest, the source of love and inspiration. But this did not happen – the oppressive powers interfered again: "on Sunday morning, when I heard that they had shot you in the head."

13

Media symbolises indifference, hypocrisy and venality, feeding on human suffering, serving the ruling classes; importance in the consolidation of the new Ugandan nation; den of venality.

In *The African Saga* Kiguli employs the symbol mainly in the meaning of indifference, hypocrisy and venality – the mass media sell as their main product human suffering in the papers and newsreels: "set of **Polaroid photographs** of burning buses and human candles;" "**cinemas** of aborted peace and forlorn conference tables." Apparently, the media is serving the rich, neglecting the poor – "Minister's ailing son makes boiling news, but it was not even whispered when Tina's hospital bed crawled with maggots and her eyes oozed pus because the doctor lacked gloves."

In *No hearts at home* Lalobo employs the symbol in the meaning that is contrary to one used above by Kiguli. In Lalobo's poem, our reader will realise that the meaning tends more on a positive side – for exactly "the **Press** recorded evidence unfolding" at the war trial. However, the fact that the symbol appears only once in the whole poem is a clear testimony, in our view, that the author herself hardly believes in a decisive role of the media in the solution of war conflicts.

It seems to the reader that in *The pulse of the pearl* Mugasa's poem "Revival and rebirth of the pearl" are the only cases where the role of the press is assessed entirely positively. The poet through the persona, as the title tells expresses his hope for the coming revival and rebirth of Uganda, and among other things he hopes that the country's papers will "sing a new song, the day has broken / *Bukedde*, the new day is here / Let forty million *Crusade* / With the birth of a new nation, / Forty million eyes *Monitor*, / The New

Vision of a new realm.” This lengthy quote obviously conveys the importance that the poet attaches to the role of the media (newspapers) in the consolidation of the new Ugandan nation. In fact the print media accessed by the majority semi-literate is itself called *Bukedde* - a symbol of hope of openings for majority Ugandans slumbering in underdevelopment

In *Men love chocolates* the meaning with which Mildred Barya portrays modern media tends to be negative, closely conforming to that assigned by Kiguli. The press is a symbol of vanity that represents a den of venality and the selling of human suffering: “**news** of sweet massacres, plundered homes make **headlines**;” political murders sell even better – “you were just found with nine bullets shot through your chest and your head axed off – then you made **news**.” The poetry seriously ridicules the role of media; selling is sweeter when it bears horrible news.

14

School (modern education) and **teacher** are symbols of exploitation of the poor by the elite; but the main meaning is positive – a necessity, which the children of Gitum are unfortunately deprived of because of war; empowerment; progress, noble profession, dreams of a nation; instrument of woman’s empowerment.

It seems that the poets of the third generation have revised rather drastically their attitude to things related to modern education compared to their predecessors. Oddly, Susan Kiguli seems to be the only one maintaining the previous distrust towards schools – in “I laugh at Amin,” she preserves the negative image of Ugandan educationalists: “I chuckle with heads of **schools** (who) extract money from an army of tortured widows,” - instead of supporting their people in the hard times, they try to make profits even out of their misery; thus the symbol retains here the already established meaning of exploitation of the poor by the elite (although even the elite here is rather relative). Arguably, the image reflects another aspect of harsh reality of those times as experienced by her, otherwise most of the poets of her generation show a different attitude to education in their works.

In Christine Lalobo's poem, school and education appears to be a necessity, which the children of Gitum are unfortunately deprived of because of war – the schools are destroyed, the teachers murdered, the children scattered. The poet says: “gunmen execute plans of demise without much risk – village after village, home after home, school after school;” Gitum as a “place strewn with arms and gunmen, clinics are relics, schools are closed;” the plane flying over the land of Gitum “is full not with sweets, toys, pens, books, pencils, clothes, drugs, salt, soap, goodies (*positive symbols of modernity – contrary to classics*) but with arms;” “the children of the war **don't read books, don't write letters**, but they are experts reciting and saying the names of guns and their uses.” Children were educated before the war (“home sweet home, the place of return for your brothers after **school**”), but now Laloyo (the government) speaks to a son of Gitum – “I know you assume you have some right to go to **school**, to sleep at home – but that is a dream.”

In *The pulse of the pearl*, Mugasa explicitly expresses his positive attitude towards education especially in his poem “After nine moons,” where the persona narrates the story of a pregnant schoolgirl who, “after nine moons...no longer fitted the **classroom**, her belly such a wide bulge.” Thus she was deprived of education and unjustly expelled from school making her life a total misery. It is notable that the girl got pregnant after being raped. In “My mother's lullaby,” the persona, a young man, dreams of improving the life of her mother: “I have grown... to give you comfort you missed in centuries, to raise you up to the equalness of father,” from whose battering, among other things, the poor woman was suffering. But only schooling allows her son to fulfill his dream: “I've gone up in Education, I'm now a judge, and I'll banish the battering of women for ever.” Even the fact that the poet started the word here with a capital letter, in our view, sufficiently testifies his positive attitude to the matter.

Like Mugasa in his employment of the symbol in his poems, Kabumba maintains a positive view of education. Education is seen as one of the necessities dictated by time and the way of progress; the latter states openly in “A prayer for peace,” where the persona implores a soldier: “let your children wear your combat boots, to fight the thorns

on the path to **school**, on the path to progress.” The poem “Scholarship,” however, seems to demonstrate a slightly different attitude – the persona, a young Ugandan flying to the States to continue his schooling, regrets that “iron wings are roaring me away from the land where my umbilical cord was buried, away to where houses scratch the sky;” “I am going to where I will not hear the evening flute nor the whistles of the herdsman, nor eat bogoya and drink obushera.” He regards himself “a prisoner welcomed by the Statue of Liberty” (situated in Washington D.C). However, his regrets do not seem to be that deep – after all, he continues his way to further education, “the path to progress.”

The poet confirms his appreciation of schooling in another soliloquy of a young student, titled “Memoirs of a Ugandan candidate,” where the persona declares: “I read books big and small, in Physics, Chemistry, Maths and all; I lay no claim to genius, but I can say – I ran my race in a manner dedicated and serious.” Even great dedication to education is demonstrated in the poem “The greatest shame,” where the persona also expresses his views about the teaching profession. According to him, “a teacher who bullies a student is like a potter who destroys his clay;” “a cruel teacher spoils *a noble profession*,” “the greatest shame is a poor teacher, he sends a thousand fake doctors into the world, a million of other bad teachers, he kills a nation;” “the greatest shame is a teacher who has no love, killing the dreams of a nation.” Kabumba among all other poets of his generation ennobles the institution of education as a matter of fact that makes a nation’s dreams come true. Therefore, in “Whispers of my Soul” the author shares sentiments of Uganda as far as the position of Education is concerned. Education has achieved a lot in Uganda. Indeed, Makerere signalled the symbol of quality education in the Region. Those days Africans who attained a degree of Makerere were equal to none.

In her poem “Just another day,” Barya seems to issue a caution for education, portraying it as a dubious asset – “Those who brave their way to **several institutions** face unemployment when they turn back.” However, this does not seem to be her true position towards education, which becomes obvious in her feminist poem, “The knock of liberation.” Here education is presented as the main, if not the only, instrument of woman’s empowerment: “If she joined the **classroom**, she would no more be like a

mushroom;” “to school she flew, like a bird set free; she has been held by cultural glue, now she would be all over the blue;” “she was to sit on the benches with men, in her fingers also hold a pen.” Education, therefore, is apparently the symbol of liberation for women.

15

Millet and sorghum are symbols of abundance, prosperity; hope.

This symbol, which was of great significance for the poets of the first generation and a number of those of the second one, can hardly be deemed as one of the main symbols for the third generation. Nevertheless, still considering it among the recurrent symbols, we found it in the works of only two poets, who use the symbol in its “conventional” meaning of abundance. However, they too appear to have modified its use. Christine Lalobo rather uses it in the meaning of “abundance lost.” As if addressing the Gitum child, in a live conversation the persona says: “you vividly remember the groundnuts plants, the **millet** fields, swarms of birds eating the **sorghum**, eating the **millet**;” further in the text it becomes clear, that this former abundance of Gitum land is destroyed by war.

The symbol of **sorghum** is used by Busingye Kabumba also to mean abundance, however, here the shade of meaning is rather that of hope - in “Kiga dance,” fondly remembered the abundance of the days of his childhood, symbolised by “the wine... - sweet obushera, ground from **sorghum**,” in “A prayer for peace” he hopes that in modern war-free Uganda the soldiers will “flex their muscles in the **sorghum** field,” and his land will again become the land of plenty.

16

Dance, song, drum and tales symbolise the land, its past, traditions, link to the culture; symbol of the future, of creation, of joy, of hope; the drums symbolically restore the ties with the roots broken by the long years of terror; social occasion.

In the poetry of the third generation, these symbols retain importance and meaning assigned them in the two previous ones. In all generations they are employed to represent native land, its past, traditions, link to the culture; but at the same time serve as symbols of the future, of creation, joy, happiness and hope. Christine Lalobo in *No hearts at home* evokes the symbols in mention with exact meanings when recalling and describing the happy life in the land of Gitum before the war. "The youth in the village in the dry season would never ever fail to organise **dances**;" "the **drums** would throb, the drums would roll. the big huge drum with its children rhyming in harmony with sweet **songs**;" "the words of the songs and their meanings are a class of their own – **songs** of praises, elegy, heroes, disasters, natural calamity, people's reactions, mockery;" "the **songs** were many, varied, for the past, **songs** are a history of Lutum people." Given that song and dance define an African person both in season and out of season, the repetitive echo of these symbols suggests that the poet does not hesitate to celebrate life even in the midst of tragedy. The reader may as well deduce that the poet is disappointed in perpetrators of conflict who seem not to respect culture and essence of the people: "the girls and boys swung and swayed in a nice rhythm, expertly **dancing** for they were happy;" "those **dances** were so good, pleasant, enchanting;" "the **tales** which ensued after every dance were juicy like a mango fruit;" "mother sang you **songs**, songs for children, songs of praises, she recited stories and **folktales**." The poet does not even focus the attention on the fact that these activities were stopped by war – they are important to people, actually often described as constituting their soul and their life.

In *The pulse of the pearl* particularly in his poem titled "Revival and rebirth of the pearl," the poet hopes to celebrate the birth of the new Ugandan nation in a traditional manner. When that day comes, the persona swears to "let the big **drums** throb and small ones dot the gaps, harmony in syncopation, a kingdom and a district; when the last drum has sounded, let sons and daughters of Uganda stream; sing a new **song**, the day has broken." The poet is alerting his readers that drums will symbolically restore the ties with the roots, broken by the long years of terror.

In *Whispers of my soul* Kabumba portrays the importance of dances not only as a ritual or a kind of art, but also as a social occasion. In his poem "Kiga dance" (where the symbol again enters even the title) he acknowledges the delicateness of his traditional boogie. He starts with the description of the preparations – where "lavish delicacies were arranged – potatoes, rice, goat meat, karo, cooked with love, eaten with relish," and then "the cooks joined in the feast and danced the **dance**, and the **dancers** were the cooks;" even "foreign" dances were incorporated – "the rumba, tango and fox-trot in one glorious **dance** of abandon." Traditional dance and music mean a lot for the poet and his characters. In "Scholarship," the persona, a young Ugandan flying to the States to continue his schooling, regrets: "I am going to where I will not hear the **evening flute**." In "A prayer for peace" the persona proposes to a soldier: "let your lovely green uniform adorn our village **dancers**," and "the striking pips of the major will certainly look nice on the chief **drummer**."

In *Men love chocolates*, Mildred Barya employs the symbols in an even more philosophical sense, elevating them to signify general creation and even one's mission in life – in the poem "Mission" she asks: "what happens when you can't put **music** to your words, when you can't put rhyme to your **song**?" The beat of village drums and songs sung by children are symbols of life itself – thus in an abandoned homestead in the poem "Go tell my sister" "the **melodies** from children have ceased" and "the **drums** that sound to a frenzy in our village neighbourhood have burst open."

17

Army and police are symbols that symbolise destruction and murder of innocent civilians inflicted by state; the brutal force of oppression backed by the state; rule of secret police bodies and army recruitment based on tribalism.

No one can dispute the fact that in a poem with war as its main subject matter, the symbolic image of soldiers occupies one of the central places and controls its mood. Those soldiers, whom the author calls "gunmen" (probably deliberately – in order to differentiate these brutal people from respectable soldiers) commit absolutely inhuman

atrocities, causing every kind of suffering and destruction in the land of Gitum; generally, they do not even look human, they behave worse than wild beasts of prey. The lines featuring this symbol are numerous in the poem, and below we will just list a few of them, to give the idea of the main meaning of the symbol as used by the poet: cruel destruction and murder of innocent civilians inflicted by state: "Gitum land devastated by **gunmen**; **gunmen** who no longer obey the sanctity of life;" "the **gunmen** ravage and burn homesteads, carrying and wielding a lot of weapons;" "those **gunmen** even kill children without a shame;" "raunchy **gunmen** violate and rape girls and women;" "**gunmen** execute plans of demise without much risk – village after village, home after home, school after school;" "**gunmen** came, robbed and plundered, went shooting their guns..." The list is actually inexhaustible. What one needs to know, however, is that these soldiers seem to act, not of their own volition, but rather as puppets of other forces.

Apart from the soldiers in Christine Lalobo's poem, whom she calls "gunmen" there are also **police** and **army**, but who bear only one meaning – the brutal force of oppression backed by the state. In the earlier quoted poem "A head tie" by Susan Kiguli the persona, a young woman, confesses: "I wear a head tie / a legacy from my mother / she (*tie*) covers the scar on my temple where the **police** fist dashed me across the wall" – apparently this young woman participated in students' manifestations of protest in Kampala, brutally suppressed by the police. On her part, Mildred Barya openly writes about the "rule of secret **police** bodies and networks that committed atrocities in the name of national security" and the state leaders who "recruit clansmen in the **army** for the so called country's safety and proper steering."

18

Slums symbolises degradation and poverty, vicious circle of Ugandan society; salt of the earth; social ailments of modern Uganda.

Although this symbol is found in the works of only two poets in the third generation, Joseph Mugasa uses it prolifically, in several meanings, one of which is social degradation. In the poem "Kampala" he puts it rather mildly while outlining the social

layout of the Ugandan capital through the metaphor of a passenger train, in which the slums of Kivulu and Katanga fall into the "economy class of the city." Whereas in the poem: "The high and the low" he puts the accents in a very sharp manner when he uses the contrasting symbols of a hill to stand for high social status (see the analysis of the symbol in this chapter) against the symbol of a slum denoting degradation and poverty. Interestingly, it seems that the two cannot exist without each other: "To say high life you mean a hill, look at Makerere, the box of brains, there the boundaries with the **Kikoni** friends, those same simple minds as others in the land." The poet might have been a student of Makerere or else he is familiarised with the politics of two halls: Lumumba and Mary Steward coined into a grand coalition called **Lumbox**. Incidentally the two halls board **Kikoni**. Lumbox is a watch over students' interest in case of any trespasses on boarders by partners they call for a strike. Surprisingly, there are people in Lumbox who attend classes but never graduate. Whenever "need" strikes they sound loudest to the extent of alarming (**Kikoni**) but never care whether sometimes the inhabitants are disturbed or whether they have had their need of education as well as food. In a sarcastic tone the persona continues: "Mulago Hill with a large hospital where doctors abound overlooks **Katanga** where health is low;" "old Kampala, Namirembe and Rubaga, the hills of faith *with cathedrals* near faithless slums."

Apparently the poet contrasts Protestants and Catholics by the fact that he is aware of the location of their national church houses. However, he ranks them both in high status whereas not all their flock is high. Seemingly, the poet observes that while those on the hill remain high, therefore assumed to "be near God," the slum dwellers degrade day by day yet both continue to co-exist. The persona says: "from the stone throw of these holy hills the **Kisenyi** slums sell booze, drugs and flesh." Here through the use of these two symbols the poet outlines the vicious circle of Ugandan society - people of the hills are interested in slums, where they buy cheap labour and pleasures, whereas the slum people survive on meagre wages paid by those on the hills. The poet is also inviting the church to do more in evangelisation.

However, in the poem "Down to the truth," the poet shows another interpretation of the symbol. At night by his own will the persona leaves the luxurious city life, symbolised by the shining Sheraton hotel, and goes to the slum: "the dazzling lights of Sheraton hotel are left far behind me, I grope from glamour to gloom, heading for a dark patch in a star studded horizon – **Kivulu**." The persona (as we assume, the voice of the poet) has quite a reason for his action: "this darkness that has no stars has a special touch on my heart, in **Kivulu** lived people (compare and contrast meaning as used by Wangusa in second generation) – my people;" "my sorrowful soul searches for souls out of sight; I long to put on their shoes, identify their destiny with mine." The persona feels more at ease with these simple people, salt of the earth, at whose expense the hills and the shining hotels exist, and whose flesh and kin is he himself. He is one of them, although heightened by his education, and he hopes that at some point a ray of hope will glisten in their lives, since they deserve it as well. The persona again uses the symbol, this time round in the context of light: "and why not transform into stars, the glow-worm candles of Kivulu." In context the reader is brought to look slum life in the eye. The poet posits that however much one Uganda learns he or she can not avoid contact with the slum dwellers: first of all they are one's relatives and secondly they are ones' understanding friends.

Mildred Barya is another poet of the third generation in whose works the symbol is encountered. Surprisingly she uses it only once, in her poem titled: "Just another day," when she speaks of slums as "crowded ghettos" where "nascent beings thrown in dust bins / Flies buzz over carcass / Children rove the streets." Apparently she shares the basic meaning of the symbol with Mugasa who presents it as the den of degradation and poverty. **Slum**, therefore, apparently symbolises the social ailments of modern Uganda.

19
Money symbolises blood money, money gained through war; commodification; dangerous fetish; twisted morality.

As with the previous generations, the symbol has been employed in the latter generation mostly in a negative connotation, the most obvious being "blood money," signifying

profit made out of shedding human blood. Christine Lalobo shows this as being the most vivid in her song *No hearts at home*, when she describes the situation to the reader: “war is a mint for **millions of shillings**, the shillings obtained from the war front have built many mansions, war is a business;” “civilians and soldiers trade during chaos and make huge profits;” “the war is economic – start a Foundation.” Money made of and paid by human blood, anchor all aspects of war: the bets are made using money: “you all remember that bets were taken, one million shillings.” The poet is portraying leaders’ attitude towards life. Due to long term northern conflict in Uganda it had been believed that Kony the leader of Lord’s Resistance Army was too strong to be captured. Therefore, from time to time civilians and members of the movement used to bet among themselves claiming that whoever could accurately predict Kony’s death or even bring him home dead would be given a million shillings. That is perhaps why the poet talks of a bet of a million Shillings “about the demise of Lord’s Resistance Army.”

The reader is also informed that whenever, the state leaders could travel abroad they aimed to buy weapons and put their blood-earned money into foreign banks: “wise people (of Laloyo) wore their Sunday-best suites, carried their cases, they also had dollars in their pockets.” Apparently, war is just a business enterprise: “the war is simple, we only need time and some cash;” that needs funding: “give us the funds to buy new arms, to carry out operations.” The poet straightforwardly reveals the nature of modern war conflicts, used and even initiated by those in power for self-enrichment at the expense of state well-being and even (and mostly) lives of innocent people of the countries that they rule.

In *The pulse of the pearl* Joseph Mugasa uses the symbol in no less negative meaning than his predecessors, however he tends to apply it in a more general sense. Money generally changes adversely the nature of humans: “the world goes mad at the mention of cash;” “some begin to divine their wealth in **cash**, inspired by the increasing amounts of ash.” Often a human life depends on just a few coins – the village couple that lost their child to a disease only needed: “a few silver **coins** or just cheap denomination **notes**, but dearth of notes and coins stood between us and the life of a girl.” In his poem titled

"Misplaced sympathy," the poet reminds and cautions the reader that money is not the omni-potent power in itself, but it is life circumstances that give it value. The persona's observes that after the girl's death: "blood chilling wails rent the village, followed by food and **money** and sympathy." However, for the poor parents all these were "**money** for flowers, a shroud and meat" which were "mockeries they could not endure."

In the end, the poet tries to get to the very essence of the meaning of money, as if trying to dig out its origin (money trade) using the New Testament (allusion). In his poem with an ironic title: "Jesus betrayed Judas," he tries to enter deep into the psyche of Judas, who, according to the poet, thought the whole thing as a simple and harmless bargain: "Judas really loved **money**;" "so for Judas it was a big **money** deal - master was too powerful for killers to touch;" "they'd give their money but miss the kill." However, the master incidentally accepted the cross and Judas throwing away the bloody money hanged himself, for the master had failed him and his business calculation was a fiasco. Money makes humans see other humans as goods, forgetting real human relationship. This meaning permeates not only this poem but a lot more of Mugasa's poems whenever the symbol surfaces.

Mildred Barya in the poem with a symptomatic title "Is there an escape route?" seems to look for the escape route exactly from the power of money, which she sees as a sort of drug, clouding and eroding the human mind and making people dependent on it: "inflation sets in... no point in working, in saving when the value of **money** erodes so fast;" "we take refuge in the stiff drink and settle down before the TV, we dream of what we might do if we scratched for **cash** or won a **lottery**." In "Peeping in a stone age period," accusing the Ugandan leadership, she says that "when colossal sums of **money** disappear in thin air / we are reminded that cheating is also part of the game." For her, money is not only a dangerous fetish – through it, those in power are imposing onto the people their twisted morality.

Speech (political) is a symbol of hypocritical and oppressive politics (politicians, power); gullibility of the common people; empty talk.

In the African Saga Susan Kiguli uses lips as an allegory of oppressive regimes, that victimise the people while lulling them with comforting inspiring words. This is clearly portrayed in her poem, "Read these lips." The persona wonders how: "lips have remained still pausing after hailstorms of **speeches** / inside our brothers writhing and suffocating."

Another meaning of the symbol, prominent already in the works of the first generation classics portrayed as emptiness - many words with no result, is that by Christine Lalobo in the section of her poem dedicated to the "trial" at which different leaders hypocritically tried to finish the war in Gitum: "**Speaker** after speaker talked and talked;"; "**speaker** after speaker talked of the war," but they were not able to stop the suffering of the people.

The hypocritical nature of political speeches and slogans is revealed and well illustrated by Busingye Kabumba in his poem "Comrade," in which the persona, whom the heated speeches of his favourite political leader lured into the ranks of the guerrillas ("patriotism, democracy, freedom were the highlights of his **speech**") survives through the hell of the war only to discover that the politician "now **speaks** with mellow complacency, his stomach filled with national cake, nepotism, corruption, inflation are the undertones of his gilded **speeches**."

The poet makes the reader feel the pitch of empty promises and misleading talk by politicians.

In the same vein as Busingye Kabumba Mildred Barya in *Men love chocolates* also uses the symbol to reveal the cynical hypocrisy of the "**leadership** campaigns where majestic cars pass and the poverty stricken masses rush out to cheer them, seeing the newest and fastest vehicles, raising clouds of dust to deliver honest **speeches**." The reader here appreciates the sarcastic tone of the poet.

Westernisation is a symbol neo-colonial dependence; corruption of the mind; vulgarities of life; degradation of life – social decadence; human commodification.

It is notable that the poets of the third generation project different aspects of Westernisation in their works depending on the dilemma highlighted as the subject matter of the given poems. Christine Lalobo in her “War song” speaks about the tight links between the rulers of African countries (namely Uganda), where war conflicts rage, and their “partners” – in fact, masters – overseas, for whom the war is also a profitable enterprise; in fact, a sort of neo-colonial inter-dependence.

Similarly in his poem *A look around the city* (where city stands as the utter embodiment of foreign influences) Mugasa portrays Westernisation as corruption of the minds, depicting all those negative “innovations” that are part and parcel of African cities: “women of the night stand in light spots;” “a virus looms from the cover of shadows,” presumably AIDS, but, in a wider meaning, the virus that contaminates not only bodies, but also minds. The reasons of this mind contamination are obvious for the poet as his voice regrets: “we opened our gates to Las Vegas culture, and in rushed the howling storms of Hollywood, hostile, violent, obscene and vulgar, imbued in disco and video films; they blow in mean skirt fashions and blow out the mini doze of sobriety.” The poet is of the view that this foreign culture would not be so contaminating, had it not been combined with glaring gap of poverty among the people: “Angel Noir is a spot not fit to be here, while the whole of outside is poor Uganda,” where because of poverty “sacrosanct sex is sold for cash” and “the Kisenyi slums sell booze, drugs and flesh.”

In *Whispers of my soul* Busingye Kabumba presents Westernisation from a different perspective, depicting how it vulgarises even the life of its main bearers. The poet allows his reader to consider a situation where a relatively well-off urban class is devaluing human feelings and turning them into the object of trade. In his poem “Romeo and Juliet” (subtitled “a modern-day romance”), he tells the story of an urban man in search of a

woman: "he wines and dines at **five-stars**, like a pig chewing banana peels in a trench;" "he is very rich, his crib is a sprawling kingly dome with imperial furnishings – chandeliers from France, Persian rugs; his gate-men wear latest designs, Lauren suits, Gucci shoes, Rolex watches, his dog dines like a **civil servant** who has received a pay rise." All this allows him to find in due course a suitable spouse – for "the bonds of love are strong when the market bonds rise by a percentage point at the stock exchange."

In her employment of the symbol Mildred Barya is critical of foreign influences for imposing onto the people false values: "we take refuge in the stiff **drink** and settle down before the TV, we dream of what we might do if we scratched for **cash** or won a lottery;" "eventually they talk of **cars, machines** and making **money**." Similarly, talking of seeking artificial consolation in chemicals (in the poem titled "Pills") she describes a woman who "cries for **pills** / calling them dolls... for comfort, consolation / Restoration? / Deep reception? / Self-destruction?"). All this results in hearts composed of "sizzling sauce. hot spices and caffeine – cold, cold heart," in "Mending hearts."

22

Metal and machine are symbols that symbolises oppressive, violent and artificial nature of modern civilisation; dehumanisation; menace to nature and mankind.

Among the third generation poets the aforementioned symbols tend to retain their meanings established by preceding poets, the main one being that of oppressive, violent and artificial nature of modern civilisation. Susan Kiguli in the poem "Granny's land" uses the symbol exactly in this meaning, when her persona seeks to return to the grandmother's village confessing: "a stranger I always feel where monstrous machines reel." At the same time, in the poem "I am tired of talking in metaphors," speaking about the plight of a Ugandan woman, she metaphorically transfers the symbol to a human being, the persona saying: "I am not a **machine** for you to dismantle whenever you whim, I demand my human dignity." Thus the symbol acquires the meaning of dehumanisation.

In Mugasa's poem "Let's climb the hills," an anthem to the beauty of Ugandan nature, the image of "**train**, a snake of **iron** and board," also symbolises a menace to the natural beauty; moreover, the rail over which the train is rolling are depicted as "the passage way of **metal for metal**, brought in to burrow the marrow of the hills... hills harrowed for what they contain, burrowed and hollowed by **copper** hunters; the train that carries the **copper** away." People's hunt for metal using the metal machines destroys the ways of nature, which subsequently leads to the destruction of humans by humans. In his poem "Accident," the driver who hits the poor woman is presented as: "has led the assault of **metal on flesh**" – here the symbols are counter-posed expressing the menace for humankind, modern civilisation killing itself and the people with its own devices.

23

Sword and shield

These symbols were only found in Christine Lalobo's poem. However, we decided to analyse this lone case here, because we find it important for comparison in the next chapter, and secondly, we think even the almost total absence of these symbols symptomatic for the third generations poetry, signifies the vanishing of valour – for valour is exactly the meaning which was attached to these traditional weapons, in the works of the previous generations of Ugandan poets. We would also note the absence of the symbol of **spear**, which was mainly used by the preceding poets in the same meaning. In Lalobo's poem, however, the symbols are given either openly negative or implicitly, ironically negative meanings. The murderous war in the land of Gitum is the "war of men, bullets, pangas, **swords**, fame, sane, revenge, and conspiracy." Moreover, swords are now worn not by brave warriors, but by the monstrous "gunmen" – "those gunmen drew their **swords** and slew him (father) there." The **shield**, which was previously the symbol of real protection, is used by the poet with bitter irony for something else as we learn from the persona's father who is a peace-loving person: "Laloyo my country – you are my **shield**." This he says while he knows that Laloyo will not hesitate to take his life, which actually happens in the poem. In this way the poet informs the reader of the irony of the protector's of life being the ones who destroy it.

Priest is used negatively to symbolise lies and hypocrisy.

Two of the third generation poets in whose works this symbol surfaced have retained its previously established meaning namely; that of lies and hypocrisy. The persona in Joseph Mugasa's poem: "Heaven's hall and the devil's dance" states: "the best work one should do is to prepare for heaven's hall – so the **white bearded father** and the white veiled sisters told me at the pulpit;" but as it turns out, "hypocritical **priests** feel offside (not taken to hell where it is more joy)." The poet tends to be ironic not just here but in other writings as well, for example, "Jesus betrayed Judas."

This same attitude is echoed by Mildred Barya in the poem "What makes us inhuman human?" The persona says: "you don't believe in the pastor's **sermon**, it's all lies," for modern humans she notes are "rooted in cults, blooming in witchcraft, dwelling in hate, thriving on jealousies," and although the author sees a certain way out (which is not related to lying sermons), even this she puts in form of a question – "can we go back to our first love / and be made human again?" The emphasis in the poet's adaptation of the symbol is more on listeners who also fail on their part hence indulge in non-religious practices.

Soil and earth are symbols used to refer to (abused) source of life and fertility.

Poets of the third generation also preserve the main meaning of the symbol as the source of life, but in their poems it is often combined with the meaning of loss and deprivation occasioned by modern conditions.

In *The African Saga* Susan Kiguli praises her country and her birthplace where the persona says: "in the land of my origin / fingers embrace steaming black **soil**." In the previous context soil symbolised fertility whereas today: a "fat finger wags accusing

plagued people of dependence;" "meanwhile a wasted hand scratches a tired **soil**." This perhaps means that the rulers have made their countries dependent on foreign aid. Indeed, in the poem "Heart of Africa" (again implying Uganda) the persona laments: "the defeated dehydrated farmer crushes the roasted **earth**, and the ferocious sun glares sardonically at him," for the fertile land has been neglected and degraded by treacherous leaders.

In *Whispers of my soul*, Busingye Kabumba echoes the tone of this symbol in his poem: "The greying sun." While considering poverty stricken situations in rural Uganda the persona seems to be inquiring: "Will the greying sun of a wasted life reborn into the soul of **hardening soil**?" On the other hand, Joseph Mugasa in his collection expresses a similar attitude, only that he puts it on a wider scale. In the poems, "In love with the land" and "A look lust leaves on land" he condemns human abuse of the entire planet. The persona states: "The **soils** are screaming, loud and clear – I am full of milk, sugar and coffee;" but "man has sucked the **soil** and bled it dead;" although as the persona says: "the **Earth** is loving and does not fail, even though people are dreadful and disappointing;" and "man is a greedy and shameless ingrate, has stripped the **earth** to shameful nudity, has pumped the blood from the bowels;" thus warns: "the **Earth** is changing and may yet fail, water dries away, blown by the wind to far off lands, the trees are cut and roasted in flame, the **earth** is shaved and left nude."

26

Alcohol symbolises oblivion, abuse and false consolation.

Again, only two of the third generation poets use this symbol in their works, and when they do it is with the same tone as their predecessors, mostly tending towards the negative sense of the symbol. In *The African Saga* Susan Kiguli represents it as a substance that helps one to forget the horrible images of modern social reality. In her poem "These pictures," the persona says: "anyway I only remember these things when I **drink**."

In *Men love chocolates* Mildred Barya condemns the use of alcohol in both the traditional and modern environment. It is seen as a substance that distracts people from their duties and impels them to abuse others. The poet contrasts a man and woman (the woman in the poem "A woman called tradition," toils patiently whereas "the man walks to drown his **hangover**, soaking himself in booze"), and in modern days, people seek in alcohol a false consolation: "we take refuge in the stiff **drink** and settle down before the TV."

Conclusion

Having discussed the set of main symbols used in the works of the writers belonging to this latter generation of Ugandan poets, we noticed certain aspects that we deemed important both for the general conclusion of the study and the comparative study of symbols which we will do in the next chapter. First, it is obvious that the meaning of certain symbols has been considerably changed in the works of the poets of this generation. Secondly, we hypothesize that these changes were occasioned mainly by the changing social reality of Uganda, heavily influenced by coups of the 1970s and 80s, subsequent warfare in the northern part of the country, and other manifestations of political malevolence and their consequences in the life of the society. Moreover, symbolism in their poetry continues to represent modern society puzzled by deceit, corruption, carnage, disillusionment and dissent with current events of globalization.

Thirdly, all this does not, however, mean that the content of symbols in Ugandan poetry of this generation is far divorced from the symbolism representing issues tackled by earlier Ugandan poets. Indeed, all Ugandan poets across generations seem to suffer deeply and directly about the concerns of mother Uganda. This could be the reason why these artists thought that abstract language would have been mostly misleading and of no desired consequence, hence concentrated on concrete symbols as vehicles for expressing nationalist feelings about the state of affairs in their beloved land. Thus, in the use of some symbols the third generation poets demonstrate similarity and even unanimity with the poets of the previous generations, as we will also see in chapter 5.

In the third generation of Ugandan poets the meanings of the main symbols exquisitely become fashioned with radiant color, light and fine focus on the reality of life. In fact, some of the greatest bursts of creativity seem to come out of the most difficult times as we meet Christine Lalobo in *No Hearts at Home* presenting us with contrasting symbols of **grass roofed house** and **crushing noise of a car**, that has marked not only a major shifting of concentration on the peaceful village developmental tranquility to chaotic city unrests, yet in the deeper sense, the contrast between **grass roofed house** and **car** depicts conflict in northern Uganda. With the symbol of “Resilient tree” Susan Kiguli explores the depth of her feminine instinct and, on a deeper level, feministic aspirations – which she does more openly by the use of various symbols in “A knock of liberation.” Her **tree** also suggests a sense of hope and survival of third world states, who continually suffer conflicts between development and self-reliance and foreign aid. Mildred Barya too is one of the artists whose works exemplify contemporary lyric poetic trends whose artistic mission is to help change the world. Negative symbolism in “Blood bath” suggests a change of heart for a better world and primarily, for a better Uganda.

This brief commentary on the use of symbols by third generation poets paves way for the general conclusion of the study and the comparative study of symbols which we will exemplify in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Comparative Analysis of symbols used in Ugandan Poetry

In this chapter we present a comparative analysis of the main symbols used by the three generations of Ugandan poets that we discussed in the previous three chapters. By doing so, we intend to show the evolution of the meaning of each of these main symbols throughout the three generations of Ugandan poetry - with the aim of revealing what kind of evolution these main symbols have undergone over the years and by extension, what poetic map of Uganda has been established. Of significance too is the historical map that the poetry draws of the socio-political and cultural environment in Uganda. In doing this we take interest in the personal stylistic preferences and interpretations of the individual poets which have occasioned the changes/ variations in the meanings of the symbols identified.

We note that for each sign/ object/ act from the main “symbolic palette” of Ugandan poetry we include the analysis the whole range of semantically related symbols; for example, the analysis of the symbol of a **homestead** also involves such symbols as **house, (deserted) hut (with) thatched roof, village**. This has enabled us to include the analysis more varied shades of meanings introduced by the poets – bearing in mind at the same time that our analysis is mainly focused on the evolution of the main meanings of the symbols. The symbols are listed as they appear in the poems of each generation: (1) stands for first generation, (2) for second generation and (3) for third generation.

Homestead

- 1) **Homestead, house, (deserted) hut (with) thatched roof and village** are symbols of *traditional Africa*.
- 2) **Hut, homestead and house** are symbols of lost traditional wisdom and values, culture, roots, the past. House represents Western influence (Buruga); poverty (leaking house) and unlawful riches (mbati house). The hut stands for backwardness of Africa; mainly - native land torn by military regimes.
- 3) **Homestead, house, hut, village and homeland** are symbols that symbolise alienation, abandonment, loss, deprivation, poverty, caused by war and other reasons. They also stand for destruction of people's spiritual essence by war; simple life, poverty and new global village (hope).

In the works of the first generation, homestead symbolises solely traditional Africa – even in the negative meaning connotations in Song of Ocol. However, in the second generation the range of meanings expands – the previously established one transforms into that of “lost traditional wisdom and culture”, since, on the one hand, modernisation was advancing fast (thus also symbol of **house** standing for Western influence in Buruga's poem), and on the other; traditional ways of life and relations were being adversely affected by military regimes in Uganda. Both factors caused rapid social stratification; thus, new shades of meaning such as “poverty” and “unlawfully acquired riches” emerged; sometimes it even denoted the backwardness of rural Africa. At the same time, the second generation poets developed a new main meaning of the homestead - “native land torn by military regimes,” developing in a certain way the meaning established by their predecessors (traditional Africa – native land), but modifying it according to the adverse conditions of their times. This meaning was retained and developed in the works of wartime born and raised third generation poets who mostly speak of native land lying in abandon, loss, deprivation, poverty caused by war and other unfavourable social factors and destruction of people's spiritual essence by war. However, “hope dies last” – and in Mugasa's poem we come across the meaning of hope, expressed by the symbol of new global **village**.

Blood

- 1) **Blood** is a symbol meaning destructive alien culture; backwardness of traditional culture; link with home and ancestors; victimisation of Ugandans.
- 2) **Blood** is employed to symbolise life (also threatened by modern society); life and survival of Africa; ancestral sacrifice; unity of mankind; negative symbol of westernised culture; immorality and inhumanness of modern society; parasitism; primary meaning - pain, suffering, war, oppression, dictatorship as imminent features of world and African history and recent Ugandan past.
- 3) **Blood** is used to symbolise murder and devastation brought by war and dictatorship (main meaning); hypocrisy (leaders justifying bloodshed); oppressive social system; inherited gender traits; gender features and, wider, for the entire humankind; generation gap.

In the songs by Bitek this symbol has mainly negative meaning - destructive alien culture that welcomes the shedding of blood, which is taboo in traditional African culture. At the same time, blood, standing for the link with home and ancestors is a positive symbol of life. In Barlow's poems, however, we come across yet another meaning - victimisation of Ugandans, since he composed some of his works during the turbulent times of Ugandan history.

Victimisation advanced as pain, suffering, war, oppression and dictatorship stands as the main theme in the works of the second generation poets, many of whom had to leave the country in the times of military reign and terror. Moreover, Oculi in his poem shows that all these atrocities were also committed throughout the history of the continent ever since the slavery times. Modern social conditions and technological civilisation are generally regarded by the poets as threatening life, and thus the symbol acquires additional meanings such as life threatened by modern society; negative influence of misused westernised culture, that brings not only murderous technogenic civilisation that kills human beings by metal, but also enhances immorality, inhumanness and parasitism in modern society. Positive meanings of blood as a symbol, such as life and survival of

Africa, links with ancestors through sacrifice, and unity of mankind, are a rarity in this generation. We presume that the social and historical background of the times was not very favourable for the positive use of the symbol.

The poetry of the third generation, the - "war generation" of Ugandan writers-, definitely enhances the main meaning established by the previous one. For this generation, **blood** means mainly murder and devastation brought about by war and dictatorship, and also stands in related meanings such as hypocrisy of leaders justifying bloodshed, and oppressive social systems. Some poets, at the same time, use the symbol positively to show respect for inherited gender traits, the unity of humankind and for the generation gap.

3

Ancestors, the dead and the elders

1) **Ancestors and the dead.** The first generation poets portray the living dead who are part of the mortals' world, as protective power; people killed, victims of political cataclysms; people dehumanised by modern ways of life; dead girl symbolising Uganda. **Elders** - traditional wisdom, authority and a link with the past; traditional wisdom and power curtailed by murderous regimes.

2) **Ancestors, the dead, elders and parents** are symbols of protection, pride, link between generations, wisdom; also - obsolete traditions; past going into oblivion; traditional wisdom remaining the only voice of reason in the country suffering from military dictatorship, but defeated by oppressive modernity; victims of slavery (Oculi) and dictatorship (Wangusa); politicians (Oculi, Wangusa); poverty (Oculi).

3) **Elders** (old men), family, relatives - suffering and loss of the beloved ones inflicted by terror and war (main meaning); source of life, love, inspiration and knowledge passed through generations; sources of wisdom, pride and identity, love, support and care, the feeling of home (also taken away by war); oppressive power of tradition.

This symbol undergoes a certain evolution and acquires a remarkable variety of meanings already in the works of first generation poets, where its meanings ranges from elders as the symbol of traditional wisdom, authority and a link with the past as in the works of Okot p'Bitek, to the elders as the symbol of traditional wisdom and power that has been curtailed by murderous regimes in the poems of Henry Barlow. Similar evolution can be detected in symbols of ancestors and the dead. If Okot in his earlier poems, in full compliance with the notions of traditional culture which he advocates, uses them to denote the living dead who are part of the mortals' world, protective power, then in his later poems and those of Barlow the meaning of the symbol is shaped by the turbulent post-colonial history of the country. People killed, victims of political cataclysms, people dehumanised by modern ways of life, and finally, as a certain "counter-version" of the symbol, dead girl symbolising Uganda.

Further evolution of the symbol is demonstrated by the poets of the second generation. It retains the meaning, inherited from their predecessors: that of protection, pride, link between generations, wisdom (although, with further descent of modernity in its negative and positive aspects, also acquires secondary meanings of obsolete traditions and past going into oblivion). However, the main meaning of the symbol develops the one conceived in later works by Bitek and those of Barlow. The poets of the second generation have fully "tasted" the horrors of civil war and military dictatorship and thus, in their works **ancestors, the dead and elders** (and **parents** as a semantically close symbol), acquire the main meaning of suffering and victimisation. It can be argued that, it still stands for traditional wisdom, but the wisdom remaining the only voice of reason in a country suffering from military dictatorship, and defeated by oppressive modernity. **Ancestors, dead, elders** are portrayed as the victims of ancient slavery and modern poverty in Oculi's poem, and prey of dictatorship in the works of Wangusa.

The works of the third generation poets are characterised, first of all, by the disappearance of the symbol of **ancestors**. Land torn by almost four decades of terror and war, they are apparently concerned mostly with survival, the links with the past generations being largely severed. However, even in this time of distemper the **elders** are

perceived as the source of life, love, support and care, the feeling of home, inspiration, pride, wisdom and knowledge passed through generations - but all this belongs to a happier past and is now destroyed by the war; symbols of **family** and **relatives** stand for suffering and loss of the beloved ones inflicted by terror and war. This can be perceived as the main meaning of the symbols in the poetry of this generation.

4

Dance, drum and song

1) **Dance** as a symbol is used in various ways, mainly positive when associated with African traditional ways and healing powers, life, joy, dedication but negative when associated with modernity and is interpreted as immoral practices of badly practised alien culture. **Drum(s)** are Africa's most significant pieces of artwork icon of its culture, they produce music used to communicate, to celebrate, and to mourn hence perceived to play a role in healing, fighting evil spirits and dangers that politics brings to the people. Forthcoming danger (war drums over the Lake) in Okot's poem. **Song(s)** are found in various African cultural traditional practices. (Lawino); song can symbolise poverty and backwardness (Ocol); suffering caused by post-colonial developments (Prisoner).

2) **Dance, drum and song** are symbols of Africa, its past, traditions going into oblivion; but at the same time they symbolise its future; they are symbols of creation, of joy; symbol of hope, link to the culture, origins, past, tradition; song - voice of the continent and its people, their plight but also their hope; song of a poet - voice of history, truth and prophetic seeing of the future (Wangusa); drum and dance are used to raise the poet's spirit (Wangusa).

3) **Dance, song, drum and tales** symbolise the land, its past, traditions, link to the culture; but at the same time - symbol of the future, of creation, of joy, of hope; the drums will symbolically restore the ties with the roots, broken by the long years of terror; social occasion, creation and even one's mission in life; life itself.

In the poetry of the first generation, the symbols undergo the usual evolution: from absolutely positive signification of the spirit of Africa, tradition and its various practices, healing of mind and body to negative meanings brought by misuse (drums at a political

rally that politics brings to the people and war drums over the Lake). Song of a hero (Lawino) – ironically stands for suffering caused by post-colonial developments.

The poets of the second generation use the symbols in at least two contradictory meanings: on the one hand, they attach them to the main meaning established by their predecessors, a negative shade brought along by advancing modernity – and thus the symbol is transformed into that of Africa, its past and its traditions going into oblivion. At the same time it is a symbol of hope; of Africa's future, of creation, of joy, voice of the continent and its people. The symbols acquire special, and positive meaning. In the works of Wangusa, the “**Song of a poet**” stands for the voice of history, truth and prophetic seeing of the future, and **drum** and **dance** are used to raise the poet's spirit.

The poets of the third generation, strangely at first sight, use the symbols almost solely in a positive meaning. However, this seems logical bearing in mind the social context – in the war-stricken land **dances, songs, drums** and **tales**, symbolising the happy life before the war, also remain the “island of sanity” in the reality without landmarks; they will symbolically restore the ties with the roots, broken by the long years of terror. In a more general sense, the symbols, combining their initial meaning of tradition and culture (established by the first generation) with that of the voice of history, truth and prophetic seeing of the future and the poetic spirit (second generation) evolve into the symbols of creation, one's mission in life and even life itself.

5

Chief, politician, state official, people of rank and modern state institutions

1) **Chief** symbolises traditional power, valour, will and wisdom (Lawino); obsolete and backward forms of governance (Ocol); misused and oppressive power, corruption and nepotism (Prisoner). **People of rank, state institutions, neo-colonial officials** symbolise (unlawful) oppressive power; quick enrichment, hypocrisy (Lawino); progress and unity (Ocol); hypocrisy, sham and lies (Malaya); hypocrisy, unlawful riches and betrayal of the nation (Barlow).

2) **Politician and state official** symbolise lies, hypocrisy, empty talk; riches gained through exploitation, indifference towards the people; exploitation, oppression, terror and killing (*Malak*); fonctionnaire as a symbol of little man exploited by big ones (Anywar); political incompetence (Anywar); sin (Wangusa).

3) **Politician, ruler and leader** are used as symbols to portray hypocrisy, greed, corruption, exploitation, devastation of African countries, pseudo war-lords killing their tribesmen; hating the people they rule and killing them for "punishment," (for this) sell the riches of their lands abroad for weapons; self-enrichment; manipulative villains who uses people's values and convictions to make them give their lives for their shady deals; various crimes.

The symbol of chief again undergoes the same negative evolution in the poetry of the first generation from the symbol of traditional power, valour, will and wisdom (Song of Lawino) to that of misused and oppressive power, corruption and nepotism, brought by misconstrued modern influences (Song of Prisoner). However, the first generation poets are almost unanimous in their interpretation of the symbols related to modern political institutions in Africa. The meanings they attach are utterly negative, as seen above.

The negative meaning of state official and related symbols is preserved and even aggravated in the poetry of the second generation. Here the poets accuse the state rulers even of terror and killing, listing their "minor" vices, such as lies, hypocrisy, indifference towards the people, corruption, exploitation and oppression as "taken for granted." The image of a low-rank official exploited by big ones, drawn by Frank Ojera Anywar, only emphasises the ghoulish nature of his bosses.

In the poetry of the third generation, the murderous nature of the state leaders is presented as the dominant symbol killing of their compatriots is shown as the foundation of their so-called politics. It seems to be just a mirror reflection of the social condition that surrounded this generation, generation with meagre hope, generation born and raised in terror.

Spear, arrow, shield and sword

- 1) **Spear, arrow, shield and sword** symbolise values of life on which an Acholi traditionalist male must cuddle in the society: valour, decisiveness, bravery, justice.
- 2) **Spear, shield and arrow** symbolise traditional embodiment of power, defence, valour and honour (Buruga, Wangusa); critical mind, resistance (Ntiru), sharpness of mind, poetry as criticising force (Wangusa); liberation, resistance, strength (P'Chong); Wangusa - degradation of humankind, punishment in hell; but at the same time resistance against oppression, liberation.
- 3) **Sword and shield** (no **spear** - valour vanished!) are symbols found only in the poem of Christine Lalobo, in openly or implicitly negative meaning (weapon of the murderous "gunmen," state as a shield that does not protect but hurts).

These symbols in the first generation generally represent an assembly of values indispensable for a traditional African (Acoli) male - valour, decisiveness, bravery, justice. This entirely positive meaning is retained by their successors, who in turbulent post-independent decades were apparently seeking moral support in those traditional values that they deemed positive and enduring. On the contrary, in the poetry of the third generation these symbols of traditional valour are not found - the traditional system of values has been destroyed by negative external influences, of which the worst is war; because of that, **spear** is transformed into murderous bayonets killing innocent civilians while **sword** is no longer carried by brave warriors but has become the weapon of inhuman "gunmen," and the protective symbol of **shield** stands for hypocritical protection of the state (Laloyo), that in real sense does not protect, but oppresses and even kills its people in the land of Gitum.

Tree

- 1) **Tree** is a symbol used both positively and negatively projected, to stand for healing, strength, perseverance, might, life, sacredness but also backwardness, neglect, immorality and oppression.

2) **Tree** symbolises source of life, protection, perseverance, nature, never-dying past, but also victimisation.

3) **Tree** is a symbol of fertility, strength, resilience, perseverance, protection; native land; motherland, the place of birth, nation; green planet of Earth; the place of birth lying in neglect, in a wider meaning, standing for Uganda neglected by her children who fled the devastated land in search of greener pastures; national history, fate of the country, and, implicitly, of the country itself - resilience and perseverance of the land and its people; cross turned into the tree of life.

In all the three generations, when this symbol is used in a philosophical sense, the positive meaning prevails; all the poets use the symbol in semantically related meanings. For the first generation, the symbol stands for healing, strength, perseverance, might and sacredness. The second generation expands the meaning to that of the source of life, protection, nature, and never-dying past. The third generation retains the meaning of fertility, strength, resilience, perseverance, protection, but also expands it, adding to it the meanings of native land, motherland, the place of birth, nation, national history, fate of the country, and, implicitly, of the country itself. The symbol is also representative of resilience and perseverance of the land and its people; on an even wider scale – the meanings of green planet of Earth and cross turned into the tree of life. This can be accounted for by the fact that in oral traditions of Uganda's people, tree has always been one of the permanent sacred objects (sacred tree on the ancestral shrine in Okot's poems). And while the first generation poets simply "replanted" this meaning into their works, the second generation poets were looking for symbols of certain unchangeable spiritual value in the situation when many previous landmarks were brought down by negative developments. It also applies to the poets of the third generation, for whom the tree remained one of the few "unshaken" symbols in the state of chaos and turmoil – thus vesting it with even grander meanings such as nation, history and even the planet and death turned into life.

In view of this, it also can be understood why in application to Ugandan social context the meaning of the symbol changes to negative. The sacredness of home and land defiled

and destroyed by the terror and war is also projected in most of the poems of the three generations more or less directly related to the state of affairs in their land. Abandon, neglect, oppression, victimisation are evoked by the trees symbolising nation and land of birth.

8

Gun and other modern weapons

- 1) **Gun** symbolises bravery; threat to human life; violence, oppressive power and war.
- 2) **Gun (trigger) and other modern weapons** symbolise threat, destruction, exterminating modernity; oppressive political power, destruction of national economies for the sake of foreign-made weaponry; killing power of dictatorship, but also liberation.
- 3) **Guns and weapons** symbolise victimisation, murder, death; goods bringing money to government and death to people;

Again, the poets of the three generations are almost unanimous on the negative sense of this weapon. The symbol of threat to human life, violence and oppressive political power. The difference mostly lies in the shades of meaning: for the first generation the symbol on one occasion stands for traditional bravery; we presume that in this case the poet (Okot) is referring to home-made guns, which even in pre-colonial times, were found in many African communities as we find, *Things fall apart* by Chinua Achebe. Otherwise, the primary meaning for them is that of the negative influences brought by modernity. The second generation retains the same negative meaning and adds such meanings as destruction of national economies for the sake of buying foreign-made weaponry, or the killing power of dictatorship since these became the prominent aspects of the situation in the country. These meanings are fully retained by the third generation, which actually shows that there were no positive changes in their land over the last few decades. Two occasions on which the symbol is used in a positive sense – that of liberation in poems by Timothy Wangusa and Joseph Mugasa – look like exceptions that do not really change the overall negative sense of the symbol in Ugandan poetry.

Mountain and hill

1) **Mountain and hill** symbolise constancy, permanence, border of the world, belonging to the culture; protection, ancient beauty and grandeur of Africa when positively used; gap between the rich and the poor, social inequality; backwardness when negatively projected.

2) **Mountain** symbolises human life, filled with hardships but with a reward in the end - snowy peak (Buruga); landmarks in African history, mount Rwenzori as symbol of Uganda (Oculi); distance between the common people and the elite (Anywar); Wangusa - symbol of Africa and its sacredness, origins, home; also – grandeur, strength, perseverance, eternity: Mount Elgon (Masaba) – symbol of Uganda; bridge between humankind and cosmos; sacred place defiled by evil forces.

3) **Mountain and hill** can also symbolise natural grandeur, majesty, beauty, symbol of Africa; symbol of high society.

Again, in all the three generations the symbol demonstrates similar “dual” meaning depending on the context of its use. In a more philosophical, traditional or even general sense the meaning is again positive – in the poems of the first generation, it stands for constancy, permanence, border of the world, belonging to the culture, protection, ancient beauty and grandeur of Africa. The second generation retains and develops the meaning – for them it stands not only for grandeur, strength, perseverance, eternity, but also for landmarks in African history, symbol of Africa and its sacredness, origins, home; mountains such as Ruwenzori and Elgon are presented as symbols of Uganda; in a more philosophical meaning, the symbol denotes human life being full of hardships but with a reward in the end, and even the bridge between humankind and cosmos. The main meaning of the symbol that of natural grandeur, majesty, beauty and symbol of Africa – is also shared by the poets of the third generation.

Applying the symbol to the social reality of Uganda, again all the poets use a negative meaning and this meaning is also similar to most of them. Already the first generation poets introduced the gap between the rich and the poor as the one being symbolised.

Social inequality and backwardness, distance between the common people and the elite, symbol of high society. This meaning is apparently dictated by the immediate social reality of the country, and is used both in a direct sense (hilltops in Kampala occupied by the richer population) and in the metaphorical one (the distance in living standards between the rich and the poor is as large as the distance between the bottom and the top of the mountain).

10

Priests

1) **Priests and bishops** stand for cheating, greed, hypocrisy, immorality (Lawino); victory of the new way of life (Ocol); duality of the mindset of a modern African (Prisoner); utmost hypocrisy (Malaya); religions, no matter how different they are, can co-exist peacefully (Barlow).

2) **Church and priests** are used as symbols of lies, hypocrisy; however, Wangusa uses biblical allusions to describe the suffering of Ugandans.

3) **Priest** symbolise lies and hypocrisy.

As it can be seen, the poets of all the three generations are also unanimous on the negative meaning that they attach to the symbol. Only Barlow tries to use it positively, asserting that religions, no matter how different they are, can co-exist peacefully – but it is symptomatic that the poem, in which the symbol is used in this sense, speaks not about Uganda or Africa, but of Guatemala.

At the same time, in our opinion, this negative use of the symbols does not indicate the poets' equally negative attitude to Christianity – after all, most of them are Christians by faith (even Okot does not portray Christianity as an “enemy,” religion. Rather, it shows their rejection of hypocritical behaviour that is demonstrated by many people who call themselves good Christians, as some preach water and drink wine. The very fact that Timothy Wangusa uses biblical allusions to describe the suffering of Ugandans displays the high role that Christian teachings play in the life of the people – and the harsher is their disappointment with hypocritical and greedy “adepts” of the religion.

Signs of Westernisation

- 1) **Signs of Westernisation** are used to symbolise misused modernity, destructive influence; oppression of the common people through riches and privileges brought by it; things that divide the rich and the poor; exploitation and hypocrisy; outside the control of Africa.
- 2) **Westernisation** is a symbol used to symbolise negative foreign influence (to symbolise the westernization and its effects on Africa and Africans, the poets of the second generation mostly refer to the innovations brought by westernisation, especially those related to city life).
- 3) **Westernisation** can also symbolises some sort of neo-colonial dependence; corruption of the minds; vulgarises life, devaluing human feelings and turning them into the object of trade; imposing onto the people false values, artificial consolation.

In the use of this symbol the poets of all the three generations demonstrate a remarkable unanimity – its meaning is negative, and in the examples above it can be seen that the poets in their works demonstrate various aspects of negative effects of westernisation on African societies. In our opinion, however, the poets' attitude should be assessed rationally – they seem to protest not against foreign innovations as such, but against negative practices such as prostitution, drugs, alcohol, slum life and poverty, social stratification and other related vices. They also criticise the misuse of other innovations by those in power, such as cars, for, instead of making people's lives easier, become instruments of oppression and death (see below).

Car, automobile and motor military vehicle

- 1) **Car and automobile** symbolised corruption, exploitation, unlawful richness and oppressive power; threat, danger (for the people - especially army and police cars).

- 2) **Car, vehicle, automobile** symbolised unlawful riches (corruption, exploitation), power (misused power, oppression), social inequality; also deadly threat (military vehicles); carnage; generally - oppressive and misused modernity.
- 3) **Car, (military) vehicle** symbolised exploitation, unlawful riches, oppressive machine of state; devastation by war; oppressive society; gender equality.

A symbol characterised by quite a unanimous interpretation in all the three generations what listed above except for Mildred Barya who uses the symbol in a positive sense, projecting it as a sign of gender equality, she writes that now women "can inherit property and drive posh cars". By this, in our opinion, the poets of the third generation show that yet some positive changes are observable in Ugandan society. Moreover, in relation to the previously analysed symbol, many innovations brought by modernity and even westernisation can also be positive; everything depends on their proper or improper use, making them socially beneficial or detrimental.

13

Army (soldiers) and police

- 1) **Army (soldiers) and police** symbolise pillars of modern (oppressive) society; oppressive power, (life) threat, people as instruments, as blind exterminating power, actually used by the rulers to slaughter defenceless civilians.
- 2) **Army and police** are used in combination with that of a **military vehicle**, representing threat for the life of the civil Ugandans, danger and death.
- 3) **Army, gunmen, soldiers and police** are symbols of destruction and murder of innocent civilians inflicted by state; voices of reason even in the army ranks; the brutal force of oppression backed by the state; rule of secret police bodies and army recruitment based on tribalism.

These symbols are treated by most of the poets in much the same way as the previously analysed symbol of a car and other symbols standing for foreign-made innovations. Instead of ensuring protection, law and order army and police forces are used by Ugandan rulers for self-enrichment through various ways of exploitation, down to out-

right crime and mass killing of civilians. It is remarkable that this meaning runs through the poems of all the three generations of Ugandan poets ; it means that from the very beginning up to now, army and police have been a curse for Uganda instead of being a blessing. It is especially evident in the poetry of “war-born and war-raised” third generation poets, whose poems are openly speaking about such burning issues as rule of secret police bodies and army recruitment based on tribalism. On the other hand, some praise those in the army ranks who are capable of reasoning and defending their opinion. In other words, not all the army personnel is to be condemned. Indeed, in Lalobo’s poems “soldiers” are indirectly opposed to “gunmen,” meaning that there are respectable army officers but there are also rogue officers wielding guns and these are the ones who Lalobo is referring to as gunmen.

However, given the circumstances under which they poets operating during the Amin regime the view of the military by the first two generations is presented rather as a nearly-mysterious killing power. For example, in the poetry of the second generation, it is used only in combination with the symbol of a military vehicle, resulting in an image of a murderous “centaur-like” monster.

14

Alcohol, drink and drinking

1) **Alcohol** symbolises destructive foreign influence, foreign staff putting minds into oblivion; people indulging in it out of desperation (the only consolation in their miserable lives); also – attribute of riches and power, status in the society; gap between the rich and the poor.

2) **Alcohol, drink and drinking** in all poems these stand for negative foreign (modern) influence, darkness of the mind, immorality; at the same time - consolation for poor people who drink out of despair.

3) **Alcohol** symbolises oblivion, abuse, false consolation as stated by Kiguli (“anyway I only remember these things when I drink” and Barya’s “we take refuge in the stiff **drink** and settle down before the TV” – Barya).

One more symbol treated by the poets almost unanimously in the negative sense is alcohol as well as other symbols representing foreign influences. However, despite its main meaning of destructive foreign staff, putting minds into oblivion and stimulating immorality, it is also unanimously mentioned as bringing consolation, albeit short and false, to the people in their desperation. Moreover, Joseph Buruga in his poem contrasts the way foreigners and Africans drink saying that the whites “**drink** in the houses you call **bars**,” and “the Kakwa **drink** in the open;” for Africans drinking is not alien; it is much more of a social occasion than the abuse of alcohol. Furthermore, for the persona in a poem by Kabumba one of the symbols of motherland is wine – “sweet obushera, ground from sorghum.” However these examples are more of exceptions and do not change the total negative meaning of the symbol.

15

Bones, skulls and skeleton (carcass)

1) **Bones, skulls and skeletons** symbolise protection and link between generations as in song of Lawino; devastation and backwardness according Ocol; modern oppressive society inducing the people to defile things that traditionally are sacred; people terrorised by political power.

2) **Skeleton, bones and skull** symbolise the past; historical injustice; devastation.

3) **Skull, bones and carcass** symbolises victimisation, devastation and death.

The evolution of this symbol in Ugandan poetry appears to be almost fully stimulated by the changes in the country’s social reality. In the songs by Okot p’Bitek these symbols are filled with meanings provided by traditional culture – the cherished and preserved remnants of the ancestors, protection and link between generations. However, in Song of Prisoner composed new political reality characterised by oppression and imprisonment makes the persona wish to defile these sacred things: to throw his father’s bones out of the grave for bearing him “in the wrong clan” they are no longer cherished in the new environment. In Henry Barlow’s poems, many of which were composed when the first political disasters had befallen Uganda, the symbols change their meanings: they turn into the remnants of the people terrorised by political power. This later meaning is acquired as

the main one by the poets of the next generation. In addition, Oculi in his poem through the use of these symbols shows that victimisation of Africans was on-going through the last several centuries of the continent's history; the meaning of the symbol as embodiment of the cultural past turned into a secondary one due to the imperatives of time.

The main meaning of victimisation and devastation was inherited by the third generation and projected in their poems with no other shades. For these poets, the symbols are not related to the cultural past or history, but only to the painful present; they stand for remnants of innocent people, brutally killed by murderous power, the remnants that fill their tortured land.

16

Metal, machine and mechanism

1) **Metal (tin, steel, iron and lead, etc.)** symbolise destructive artificiality having its roots in modernity, modernity misused by those in power, victory of modern artificial civilisation over the traditional natural ways; oppression, exploitation.

2) **Metal, machine and mechanism** which are semantically close symbols symbolise oppressive (destructive) influence of alien technological and civilisation; submission of tradition to alien civilisation; defeat of the natural ways; historical oppression of Africans; oppressive, violent and artificial nature of modern civilisation killing itself and the people with its own devices.

3) **Metal and machine** symbolise oppressive, violent and artificial nature of modern civilisation; dehumanisation; menace to nature and humankind.

The main meaning of metal medicine and mechanism is similar in all the three generations – that of destructive and oppressive artificial modernity. It is the symbol of modernity misused by those in power, modern civilisation killing itself and the people with its own devices. These symbols are closely connected to the symbol of car and, in a wider sense, to the symbol of westernisation. The shades of meaning added by poets of different generations do not modify the main one, for example, Okello Oculi presents

metal as a symbol of exploitation of Africans from a historical perspective, standing for the chains in which slaves were shipped overseas. Generally, the symbol remains as one of the most “unanimously interpreted” by Ugandan poets.

17

Millet and sorghum

- 1) **Millet and sorghum** one of the most important things in traditional environment symbolises abundance, life, prosperity, protection, healing, strength, link with the ancestors.
- 2) **Millet** as the staple traditional product symbolises source of life, a reference point to measure up the drawbacks of modern way of life (Buruga); the degree of disaster; symbol of Uganda; irony of Ugandan politics symbol of the plight of Uganda northern peoples.
- 3) **Millet and sorghum** can also symbolise abundance, prosperity and hope.

As on many other occasions, the symbol is used in two meanings: the main one, established by the poets of the first generation, is related to the context of traditional African culture, where millet and sorghum seminally symbolised value, abundance, life, prosperity, protection, healing, strength, and even link with the ancestors (through libations). This meaning is retained by the other two generations, but they also develop another one, that is related to the context of modern Ugandan reality: drawbacks of modern way of life, ironical symbol of Ugandan, and former abundance destroyed by war. Again, as with some other symbols, modern context adds negativity to its sense - like sour millet brew that becomes unindrinkable, Uganda has become uninhabitable due to bad governance.

Earth, soil and land

- 1) **Earth** symbolises source of life.
- 2) **Earth, soil and land** symbolise devastated Africa and source of life.
- 3) **Soil and earth** symbolises abused source of life and fertility.

Again, all the three generations of the poets preserve the same main meaning – and again modern context adds negativity. All the poets use the symbol as the source of life and fertility – but modern developments add such shades of meaning to it as abuse and devastation in the poetry of the second and the third generations. Nevertheless, it remains one of the most founding and unanimous symbols in Ugandan poetry.

Silence

- 1) **Silence** symbolises unnatural, menacing, omen of bad things to come; weakness, bad luck.
- 2) **Silence** symbolises negative influence of alien culture; death and suffering inflicted by military terror and war; grief of historical slavery and oppression by modern leaders; lifelessness; emptiness; terror.
- 3) **Silence** symbolises reign of darkness, terror, dictatorship; helplessness caused by terror; the horrors of war; cover for nightlife, oppression; something secretive and hypocritical, reticence and insincerity.

With this symbol, the poets are unanimous in its negative meaning. It is associated with bad things both in the traditional and in this negative view of silence is also articulated in the two latter generations. However, even though unanimous about its negative sense, the poets of the two later generations expanded its meaning by adding various new dimensions, such as historical silence that symbolises grief of slavery in the poem by Oculi, negative influence of alien culture, death and suffering inflicted by military terror and war, cover for nightlife, symbol of social oppression and something secretive and hypocritical; reticence and insincerity.

Political speech and slogan

- 1) **Speech and slogan** have been seen as a symbol of hypocritical and oppressive politics. The state symbolising various ideas, emotions, atmosphere etc gullibility of the common people; artificiality.
- 2) **Political speech and slogan** is used in combination with the the **politician**, to symbolise hypocritical.
- 3) **Political speech** symbolises hypocritical and oppressive politics, gullibility of the common people, emptiness.

It seems that these symbols do not need lengthy comments, since they are also unanimously chosen by the poets to indicate the negative aspects of modern politics – hypocrisy, artificiality, empty promises and gullibility of the common people. Even the shades of meanings are not many and do not vary among generations – which indicates that the political atmosphere in Uganda did not change much for even during the late colonial times, when the first political parties were organised brothers, according to Lawino, started to hate each other.

Mass media

- 1) Mass media symbolises brainwashing; lies, intimidation, danger.
- 2) **Mass media**: international symbolises lies, indifference; speculative information; local media symbolises danger, lies; resistance.
- 3) **Mass media** symbolises indifference, hypocrisy and venality, human suffering, consolidation of the new Ugandan nation; den of venality.

The symbol of **mass media** (newspapers, radio and television) seems to be in a way unique in Ugandan poetry, for it is one of the very few (if not sole) symbols related to modernity which has managed to escape, so to speak, a total negativity of its meaning. At first sight, the negativity is very much there – for the poets of all the three generations stress its main meaning to be lying, indifference, venality and a parasitic nature.

International media is portrayed as feeding on human suffering. Local media is portrayed as a source of threat and danger to the people and the voice of the oppressive state.

At the same time, a few poets use this symbol with quite the opposite meaning: as an important aspect in the consolidation of the new Ugandan nation (Joseph Mugasa) and even a means of resistance under the oppressive regime (Timothy Wangusa). It actually may serve as an illustration to a more general question of proper and improper use of indigenous and imported phenomena, which generally is one of the main themes in the whole modern of African writing.

22

Teachers, school, modern education (knowledge and new ideas)

- 1) **Teachers** of church school, bush school, etc symbolise lies, hypocrisy, lust, immorality.
- 2) **Education (modern knowledge and new ideas)** bears mostly a negative sense: education turned into an instrument of exploitation of the poor by the elite; modern or westernised education is portrayed as destroying African culture.
- 3) **School** or modern education, **teacher** symbolises exploitation of the poor by the elite; but the main meaning is positive. It is portrayed as a necessity, which the children of Gitung are unfortunately deprived of because of war symbolises empowerment; progress, dreams of a nation, women's empowerment.

As a symbol education seems to be rather closely connected to the symbol of priests, since both, at least initially, represented religious education – most of the schools in Africa in colonial period were run by missionaries. Therefore, the main meaning that most of the poets attach to this symbol is similar to that associated with lies, hypocrisy, lust, immorality, education turned into an instrument of exploitation of the poor by the elite and modern (westernised) education destroying African culture. But, as in the case with the symbol of priests, the poets in fact do not attribute their negative attitude to modern education as such, but to certain people representing the profession by mistake – as priests in the above discussed example, they are also said to “teach water and drink

wine.” They misuse their positions instead of planting knowledge for the satisfaction of their noble calling. On the other hand, many authors, especially of the younger generation, held the teaching profession in high esteem and this opinion is backed by the fact that such poets as Christine Lalobo, Busingye Kabumba and Mildred Barya speak of education and teaching in modern African society as a necessity. They view education as the way to progress; noble profession; a principal means to fulfil the dreams of a nation and mainly, if not the only instrument of women’s empowerment. In that sense, the symbols of teachers and other symbols related to modern education in their nature are similar to the above-discussed symbol of mass media – the meaning changes according to proper or improper handling.

23

Children

1) **Children** symbolise abundance, blessing, continuity, future, innocence. In Ocol’s view they symbolise misfortunes as they are portrayed as being the plight of the common people its prisoner; and poverty (Barlow).

2) **Children** are a symbol of the future ruined by the past and present slavery, colonialism, disasters of modern history; Africa’s innocence destroyed by misused modernity; Africans as unwanted children of the world; hope for the future.

3) **Girl Child** symbolises suffering, abuse, oppression; victimisation by war and poverty; hope; oppression induced even in times of peace by the ways of the unfair society; the ill future of the world.

Like many symbols discussed above, this one undergoes significant evolution. From the traditionally adopted meaning of abundance, blessing, continuity, future and innocence to that of the plight of the common people in *Song of Prisoner* where the persona laments about “mosquito legs of my **children**” and reports the “cry of **children**” that “haunts like vengeful ghost” and poverty and suffering of war in the post-independence poems of Henry Barlow, one can take the development of views on children.

This last meaning is again adopted as the main one by the poet of the second generation, in whose poems, written in times of political terror, the symbol is used in various shades

of equally negative meaning. Children symbolises the future ruined by the past and present (slavery, colonialism and disasters of modern history respectively). There is also the symbol of Africa's innocence destroyed by misused modernity, and that of Africans as unwanted children of the world. However, at the same time, Oculi in his poem uses the symbol to express his hope for the future of Africa, which can not be demolished even by the harshest social catastrophes.

Similar use of the symbol is observed in the poetry of the third generation in which its main meaning becomes that of victimisation by war and poverty and oppression induced even in times of peace by the ways of the unfair society. In the more philosophical meaning, the poets even use the symbol to indicate the ill future of the world (symbolised by the apple in the hands of an impoverished child). However, even against this dark background, a message of hope is sent when Busingye Kabumba calls upon the present generations to "let the **children** make this (war) a thing of the past, and the little girls, at the village gates, allow them... to make mirrors of your rifle plates" and "let your **children** wear your combat boots, to fight the thorns on the path to school, on the path to progress."

24

Grave and funeral

- 1) **Grave** symbolises continuity and link with the ancestors; family shrine.
- 2) **Grave and funeral** symbolise cycle of life and death; (historical) victimisation; continuity, link with the ancestors and the past; end of humankind.
- 3) **Grave, funeral and burial** symbolise death inflicted by political terror; death inflicted by war, (burial as) the last honour of the people murdered by the state; usual but no less tragic outcomes of any war; political terror and mass murders.

The grave as a symbol underwent, over the three generations of Ugandan poets, a very significant evolution, which also seems to be directly connected with the recent history of the country. The poets of the first generation use the grave almost solely in its traditionally adopted meaning of continuity and link with the ancestors through the

family shrine. However, in the poetry of the second generation this meaning, although retained, co-exists with a new one – that of victimisation of people, both in history (Oculi's *Malak*) and in the present. Wangusa, on the other hand, brings in another dimension: the grave symbolises the end of humankind, thereby implicitly reflecting the sad developments in post-independent Africa.

In the poetry of the third generation these meanings are transformed. In the poetic works of this “war-born and war-raised” generation it stands solely for death inflicted by state - induced political terror and war; cultural systems of the past are largely demolished, and even the funeral, as the last honour of the people murdered by the state, are to be performed by women, even as they are traditionally forbidden to bury anyone.

25

Beggar and slum

1) **Beggar and slum** symbolise enslavement by misused western culture (Lawino); poverty in traditional communities; pitiful state of ignorance; undeserved suffering and indifferent attitude to it.

2) **Beggar (and other poors) and slums** symbolise downtrodden, common people exploited by the rich and the state; disillusionment, disappointments, desperation, lost hope; poverty; harsh African history.

3) **Slums** symbolise degradation and poverty, vicious cycle of poverty in the society; salt of the earth; social ailments of modern Uganda.

This symbol is used by all the three generations of Ugandan poets also with a significant unanimity, for from the first to the third generation its main meaning is that of poverty, suffering, oppression and exploitation of the common people by the rich, with such emotional overtones as ignorance, indifference, disillusionment, disappointment, desperation and hopelessness. The shades of meaning that the poets of different generations have added to do not deviate significantly from the main one: while in *Song of Ocol* and *Malak* the personas claim that poverty has its historical roots in Africa (each, however, from his own point of view), the persona in Joseph Mugasa's poem readily

identifies himself with the slum dwellers, acknowledging that they are the real “salt of the earth” that ensure the life in Uganda. In another poem Mugasa presents the co-existence of “slums and hills” as the vicious cycle of Ugandan society.

26

Money and money economy

- 1) **Money** is used as a symbol of greed, destruction by greed; alien power not founded on true human merits; the spirit of profittening profit, exploitation; destruction of humaneness and human personality.
- 2) **Money and money economy** are used to symbolise greed, destruction by greed; misused power, wealth gained through exploitation; oppression, exploitation and unfair distribution of riches.
- 3) **Money** can also be used to symbolise blood money, robbery, violence; changes adversely the nature of humans, makes humans see other humans as goods; dangerous fetish, instrument of imposing twisted morality onto the people.

This last one in the list of the main symbols in Ugandan poetry is also marked by the unanimous use of it by all the three generations in terms of meaning, and the meaning is again negative, signifying greed and destruction; alien, misused or unlawful power; oppression, exploitation and unfair distribution of wealth. In addition the shades of meaning added by poets of different generations, though not deviating very much from the main one, are varied – from blood money or profits gained from warfare to the biblical sense and its ethical aspects – the phenomenon that destroys human personality, makes humans see other humans as goods and imposes twisted morality onto the people.

Conclusion

The above-provided analysis allows us to conclude that the meanings (use, interpretations) of the main symbols in Ugandan poetry are constituted by two basic factors – social (historical, cultural, political, economic...) conditions and the personal orientations of the poet. Social conditions form the background against which the poem is composed, define the context of the poem and therefore – the choice of symbols and their

meanings. However, the poet frequently uses the same symbols in the meanings not so much stipulated by the current social situation - not “directly linked” to the social reality of their times, but in the meanings more motivated by their personal preferences. These meanings are more general, philosophical (metaphysical) and more “eternal”. This compels the poets, even within one generation, to use one and the same symbol sometimes with divergent interpretation. For example, **blood** in the poetry of the second and the third generations mainly signifies murder and devastation brought by war and dictatorship, but at the same time it is also used in the meanings of life, human traits and unity of humans and relationships between generations.

The above considerations allow us to generalise, particularly, about the evolution that is undergone by the symbols analysed in this study. In our view, this evolution can be broken into two basic types, which we name, conditionally, according to the types of resultant symbols:

1) Symbols with varied meanings: **house (hut), blood, ancestors (elders), dance (drum), sword (spear), tree, mountain (hill), bones (skulls), millet (sorghum), children, grave (funeral); mass media and education.**

The basic aspect of this evolution is the above-described “poetic contradiction” between meanings of one and the same symbol, in which the meaning may depend, on the social context of the poem. On the other hand personal preference (will) of the author on the other hand Generally, it may be observed that in their social aspect, many symbols undergo what can be deemed as a “negative” evolution, being transformed from the embodiments of constructive, unifying elements, related first of all to the traditional culture, to signifiers of negative innovations brought by misused modernity. At the same time, a symbol may undergo such “negative” transformation in a social context; but if it is used in a context more metaphysical, philosophical, or “timeless”, then the meaning change and even becomes the opposite. For instance **dances, drums and songs** symbolising conflict between tradition and modernity, in which modernity – a negative power – wins, but at the same time acquiring a positive meaning if it is symbolising the

immortal spirit of African people and African poetry. Therefore, such symbols feature a greater variety of meanings- (thus the name that we chose for them according to the evolution they undergo). It also may be observed that the symbols of that type, listed above, are mostly the ones related to – or, rather, rooted in - traditional African culture. We find this conformity logical, since these symbols have been from time immemorial an integral part of spiritual the heritage of Ugandan people, and through the long history of their existence, they have acquired varied meanings – from basically positive ones, as defined by the cultures they belong to (since also many of them were denoting things necessary for survival), to various other interpretations depending on varied context of their usage. Thus, these symbols have a wide variety of meanings in the works of Ugandan poets. Two symbols that do not belong to these ones provided by traditional culture are the symbols of **mass media** and **education**, but the variety of their meanings came out of the same contradiction: the social context signals about the negative use of both media and education in modern society, but generally they are already also a necessity without which the society can not thrive. Thus, the contradiction between “contextual” and “ideal” meanings of these symbols in the poems (generally, as noted above, it can serve as an illustration of a more general question of proper and improper use of indigenous and imported phenomena, which generally is one of the main themes in modern African writing.

2) Symbols with accumulated meanings: **politician (chief), gun, priest, westernisation, car (automobile), army (police), alcohol (drink), metal (machine), silence, (political) speech and slogan, slums (beggars), money; earth.**

Poetic evolution of some symbols is based on the principle that we could call “accumulation of meanings,” in the sense that the main meaning of such a symbol is largely established already in the poetry of the first generation, and the subsequent ones were only adding up different shades of this meaning without actually modifying it much. Thus, these shades are accumulated with the main meaning – hence the name that we chose for them. The above listed symbols, which we deem to belong to this type, also have one common feature – they mostly denote the things relatively alien to traditional

African culture, brought to Africa mainly through colonisation and retained in the post-colonial period. Unfortunately, the social reality in Africa featured mostly negative, socially non-beneficial use of these phenomena and hence the remarkable unanimity with which Ugandan poets of different generations attach negative meanings to these symbols. It can be stated that the use of these symbols is directly linked to (if not dictated by) immediate social reality of the times when the poems containing these symbols were written. The only symbol that has a unanimously positive meaning in Ugandan poetry is that of the earth. However, in its case of it we tend to think that it stands in fact among the deepest archetypes of verbal art as such, and we can hardly find a poetic tradition where it can bear any other meaning but positive – we will find the symbol of “mother earth” across the world poetry. In relation to this last mentioned symbol, we would also note that another fact that stands in defence of one of our main assumptions – that poetry, in the long run, is a mirror of reality – is that very few symbols among the analysed ones have entirely positive meanings, while the totally negative ones are many. We assume it to be due to the reflection of harsh Ugandan reality of the second half of the last century

We would also add in this concluding part of the chapter, that another aim of analysing the evolution of the main symbols of Ugandan poetry was, apart from finding out the nature of these symbols, to show the semantic richness of these symbols that the poets demonstrate on different levels – on the level of different meanings (as, for instance, the symbol of a **house**), and on the level of different aspects, or shades, of the same main meaning (as the symbol of **silence**). It proves, in our opinion, that symbolism remains one of the main expressive means in modern Ugandan poetry.

CHAPTER SIX

Symbolism as a Technique in Communicating Thematic Concerns in Ugandan Poetry

Introduction

This chapter analytically and critically discusses the nature of aesthetic choice of symbolism used by Ugandan poets, marrying scholarly views with the interpretation of the selected readerships as well as our own comprehension. We chose to examine the overall symbols identified by the respondents as well as refer to several works of literary scholars and relate their views with our own critical interpretation because this enhances and advances the field findings presented in the study.

Literary scholars have been unanimous on the positing that poets are part of society; they are the voice of the voiceless, indeed, the mirror of the social setting in which they live. Ugandan poets are known for writing as a means of laying bare the society they serve, and in the process, bringing out its pretty and ugly faces. Through symbols, they are answerable to the society but also caution it to behave well and pay attention to their call to order, especially when things are getting out of hand. We have observed that there are some symbols which have been generally employed by the poets under investigation; below, we analyse these symbols and bring out their social meaning as interpreted by the students of poetry from the schools and experts interviewed (see our scope and limitations).

Symbolism in African poetry has so far received insufficient attention from scholars, despite the fact that poetry uses symbols more extensively than a novel or a play. Our observation is given credence by Bamber Gascoigne (1962), whose focus though is more on drama than on poetry. He, however, claims that symbols are older than words in drama which has its “*roots in primitive rites enacting in terms of mimes and symbols, the annual cycle of birth, death and re-birth or the patterns of a hunt.*” In his study of the

20th century drama, he defined a dramatic symbol as any object that can be used in action. He further remarked that this derives the meaning from the context in which the action occurs. Whereas Gasgoine's meaning of a symbol targeted the dramatic action, he still strengthens our conviction that a symbol is better understood by considering the context or the nature of the poem in which it occurs. Thus our respondents added that in appreciating symbolism in a given poem, they also need to concentrate on the setting, tone, and diction (among other poetic devices) employed in a given poem. In view of Bauman's (quoted earlier) and Gasgoine's observations, it should perhaps be understood that words in a given poem should not be simply interpreted at their face value. We also concur that symbols cannot be taken at face value, but the reader should dig deeper for that hidden meaning.

Where images are employed it is worth finding out whether or not such an image qualifies to be treated as a symbol or not. In this case, we bear in mind that in fact, not all images are symbolic. Otherwise there would be no need to classify some poetic images as simply images and others as symbols. Our field research findings reveal that most of the symbols identified by our respondents tallied with our own identification, including the interpretation of their meanings. However, there were some students who tended to read almost all iconic images or linguistic expressions in poems as symbols. In such cases our view point differed from theirs.

For the analysis presented below we chose two groups of selected symbols, which, according to the reaction of the respondents, we conditionally named as "political" and "cultural." Political symbols appeal to the use or misuse of power, influence and authority. Cultural symbols appeal more to identity, preservation of culture, African traditions and norms.

In our discussion of the various symbols identified by the respondents, we have used the identified symbols to give our further analytical interpretation. The student respondents were given a set of poems, which they categorised into ones containing political and cultural symbols respectively. Such poems as *Song of Prisoner*, *Talk peace*, *The wizard*,

Wars no more, Because I love this land, I like it all, The ailing, wailing world, Kampala, Blood bath, Psalms 23 Part II, Naturally, The leader that hung, Building the nation, Crazy Peter prattles and Eating a Bull were classified by the respondents as largely having political symbolism. Other poems in this group were: *Craving for dawn, Uganda, I refuse to take your brotherly hand, The flight, The third world war, The bishop of cows, Mother Teresa's wish, Chorus of public men, The function, Formula two, Ojukwu's prayer, On top of Africa, The hoe way, Dames brigade, Functionaries, The sea of stupidity, Uniforms and Stop the war*. Other poems categorized as having largely political symbolism were *Oh, my beloved country, Living together, Why vultures laugh, Viewers may find these pictures disturbing, I laugh at Amin, Freedom fire, You tell me wait, The resilient tree, The Darkness of the Pearl, Thanks to the fighters, A look around the city, The exile's song, Surrounded by love, Tired and No hearts at Home*.

On the other hand, the other poems, such as *Song of Lawino, Twin ceremony, Whittitude, A taxi driver on his death, African woman, A woman called tradition, Peeping during the stone age period, Where am I and The knock of liberation* were largely classified as poems with cultural symbolism.

We realized that the student respondents based the choices of categorization of the selected poetry largely on their understanding of the meaning of political and cultural symbolism. During probing, we found out that the respondents understood political poems as those with symbols that relate not only to political power but also to the management, or mismanagement of society's affairs, influence, respect and authority. In the poems categorized as political the respondents detected such symbols as ***Benz, blood, state, shepherd***. Generally, the identified symbols, though varied in nature, commonly point out themes such as: exploitation of the poor, corruption, death, violence, terror, revenge/rebellion, conflict, hypocrisy, betrayal, poverty, inequality, war and dictatorship. We, thus, note that to most respondents, politics is not only associated with power but with terror, lies, betrayal, hypocrisy, greed and death. It is sad, but insightful to note that respondents did not associate politics with positive attributes.

The same respondents, on the other hand, indicated their understanding of cultural symbolism as those symbols that emphasize togetherness, life, identity, love, health, vitality, basic human needs and cultural norms and values. The poems placed in this category singled out symbols such as *Lawino*, *Ocol*, *Acoli dance*, *Twin ceremony*, *Negroe*, *cultural glue* and *dumb mules*, among others, with various manifestations of traditional African culture. The culturally symbolic poems were those that mainly advanced themes such as loss of identity, hypocrisy, women emancipation, equality, modernity versus tradition, peace, hope, patriotism, unity in diversity and love, among others.

We noted that the interpretation of the symbols in most cases varied from one student respondent to another, hence was not universal, but the themes they identified largely tended to a single understanding, given the fact that respondents based their responses on the context embedded in the given poems. Thus, the interpretation depended largely on the context of a particular poem as perceived by respondents.

The field research cannot assume totality of capturing all the symbolic images existing in Ugandan poetry; however, our respondents have identified images they deemed as symbolic, documented in our appendices. Ugandan poetry is about Ugandan people's experience, about things they have done and thought; and seen as well as all that surround them. The poets use symbolism in poetry perhaps as a means of expressing or commenting on general truth. We subjected the selected poems to the critical eyes of our respondents who ably identified and categorized the poems according to the nature of symbolism. We would also note that several poems in the list above (such as *The ailing wailing world*, *Eating a bull*, *Craving for dawn*, *The sea of stupidity*, *Twin ceremony*, *Whititude* and a few others were taken from anthologies and publications in periodicals and assorted anthologies, therefore, are not formally included into the corpus of 16 books analysed in this study. However, we decided to comment on these poems because of their high degree of expressivity, and indeed, as we will try to show in the conclusion, they really contributed to the respondents' understanding of the use of symbolism in Ugandan poetry for the conveyance of various thematic aspects.

Symbols identified by the student respondents

Political symbols

Looking at some of the poems identified as having political symbolism by the respondents, we sought to establish the nature of the symbols that were identified and the general themes such symbols conveyed.

In Henry Barlow's *Building the Nation*, respondents generally identified the following symbols: **Permanent Secretary** (as a symbol of exploitation) and **Mwananchi**, the Secretary's driver (generally meaning local people or peasants, but in this case implying the exploited citizens). The general themes identified by the respondents were: Betrayal, Exploitation, Deception and Greed/Selfishness. In *Building the Nation* Barlow strongly makes a political statement by exposing the characteristics of the new breed of rulers in the post independent Uganda. The Permanent Secretary (PS) symbolises the greedy, exploitative and hypocritical breed of rulers that Uganda has. The driver is a symbol of intelligent but exploited masses that work hard to maintain the luxurious life style of the leaders.

Indeed, Barlow shows that the masses through self sacrifice make their contribution in building the nation. "*Today I did my share / in building the nation. I drove a Permanent Secretary / To an important urgent function*" – comments the driver. This line was identified by the respondents as containing the symbol of Permanent Secretary in the above-indicated meaning (thus symbol in our own classification falls into wider group of semantically related symbols such as **politician, leader, statesman** etc., having the very same meaning – see the previous chapters). We must also remark that the respondents, however, failed to perceive the ironic aspect of the driver's statement – for he knows what kind of "important urgent function" was the PS attending: he, as well as other leaders, spend much of their time on such things as "a luncheon at the Vic," eating and merry making.

Indeed, “Cold Bell beer with small talk / the fried chicken with niceties / Wine to fill the hollowness of the laughs/Ice-cream to cover the stereotype joke/Coffee to keep the PS awake on return journey” are all symbolic of the leadership’s lack of responsibility. Hypocrisy of the PS was also identified in the lines where he pretends to be concerned about the driver’s state, hence he asks: ‘Did you have any lunch, friend?’ and on getting the driver’s negative response, he says: ‘Mwananchi, I too had none!’ Here the selfishness and hypocrisy of the post independence African leadership is presented symbolically in the PS’s use of the words ‘friend’ and ‘Mwananchi,’ which means fellow peasant. It shows a leadership that wants to be seen as a part of the people when in actual sense they are in different classes as one is needy (the masses) while the other (the leadership) is nursing the side effects of too much satisfaction.

The PS is a symbol of misuse of office, self-deception, hypocrisy of African leaders as a whole; the poem portrays the political situation of many African countries where the existing leadership pretends to be working for the betterment of the masses when in actual sense they are simply serving their own interests. In Uganda today, it is common to see leaders who go to power looking like ordinary people – they are very poor and promise to liberate the people;– but after a short stay in power, they change their life style and begin living in luxury, drive personalized Benzes, Prados, Range Rovers, and Hammers, while the masses (the poor voters) continue to use poor roads and cannot even afford taxi fares. So, the masses generally walk to hospitals where in most cases they do not find drugs. This is what makes Barlow’s symbolic poem, *Building the Nation* very relevant today.

In Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Prisoner*, the respondents generally identified the following as symbols bearing ‘political’ meanings: **prisoner** (victims of inequalities and injustices in society); **big chief** (individuals that exploit others); **Black Benz** (luxurious living lead by exploiters of the poor); **soiled land** (contamination of good with evil); and **rotten blood** (evil). Respondents pointed out that these symbols represented poverty, exploitation, betrayal, suffering and vengeance in society.

While interpreting Timothy Wangusa's "Psalms 23 Part II," the respondents identified the following symbols: **state** (meaning coercive power, authority and government); **bank account** (plenty/wealth/financial security); **Kondos** (thieves and agents of violence); **shepherds** (leaders) and **Kivulu** (slum area where Uganda's poor dwell). Precisely these symbols represent corruption, economic disparity, betrayal and greed in society.

In Austin Bukenya's "Naturally", the respondents identified the following symbols: **workers** (the exploited and vulnerable people); **Benz** (Luxurious living of exploiters)' **blistered hands** (poor working conditions, hard labour and exploitation); and **State house** (centre of power, authority and governance). These symbols represent exploitation, betrayal, poverty, hypocrisy and suffering.

While interpreting Richard Nturu's "Eating the Bull," the respondents identified the following symbols: **you** (People with power, influence and authority, whom the persona/poet is addressing); **him** (the subjects or the led); **bull** (the seemingly strong but oppressed people); and **horns and teeth** (the conscience of the oppressed people). These symbols represent corruption, greed, oppression and determination in society.

Furthermore, while interpreting Jotham Tusingwire's "I Like It All" the respondents identified the following symbols: **bellied fellows** (greedy, selfish politicians); **Benzes/Pajeros** (luxurious life style of the corrupt leaders); **colour sensitive fellows** (people supporting different political parties); and **waving open hands** (the symbol of Uganda's Democratic Party). Precisely these symbols represent: hypocrisy, poverty, political divisions, corruption and betrayal in society.

On the other hand, Jotham Tusingwire's "The ailing, wailing world," yielded the following images as symbols: **torrential, saline tears** (symbolizing constant, unceasing misery/crying); **demise of a century** (symbolizing destruction of a people); **aging century** (symbolizing a generation past its usefulness); **the scavenging carrion birds** (symbolizing people who benefit out of the misery or suffering of others); **mounds of human ruins** (heaps of corpses, symbolizing disastrous effects of war) and **ailing,**

wailing world (symbolizing a turbulent world, a world without peace, a world of misery and frustration). Basing on the identified symbols, the respondents further identified the following as the themes in the poem: suffering, death, greed and conflicts.

Using the six poems above, we note that indeed, poems identified as having socio-political symbolism are embedded with symbols that portray coercive power, exploitation, hypocrisy, greed, betrayal, poverty and corruption. At this point we agree with the general observation made by the respondents that socio-political symbolism reflects power, authority, influence, exploitation, as well as governance and misgovernance of society. We, however, note that there are also symbols which are cross-cutting.

Cultural symbols

Having considered poems with political symbols, we now turn to poems which the respondents categorized as having cultural symbolism. According to our field findings, several poems, drawn from the collection of sixteen poets, were categorized as constituting socio-cultural symbolism. Some of them have already been pointed out in this chapter. As we noted in the previous chapters, Okot p' Bitek employs images of nature, culture, personality, animals, insects, and body parts to create strong symbols that help in bringing out his intended message - namely, a warning against the foolish and 'wholesale' acceptance of westernization at the expense of our own traditional practices, norms and culture. We have also earlier noted that human characters in his poems such as Lawino, Clementine, Ocol; traditional practices, such as Acoli dance; and animal images such as bull, among others are symbolically used to portray the themes, namely - tradition versus modernity, betrayal, hypocrisy, and education versus mis-education.

In Richard Nturu's *Twin ceremony*, the symbols generally identified by the respondents were: **twin ceremony** (symbolizing, having two sharply contradictory functions at the same time); *Gay couples* (symbolizing absurdity - moral decay in society as men marry men and women go for women, which is unacceptable in the African culture where procreation is highly valued; **dust to dust** (with a meaning of "from bad to worse",

crowned with untimely death); **grave diggers** (symbolizing, individuals who reap benefits from the suffering or misery of others) and **one with mountains** (symbolizing a wealthy person). The themes identified by the respondents were: greed, moral degeneration, hypocrisy and death.

Austin Bukenya's *Whititude* is yet another poem identified by respondents as having cultural symbolism. The generally identified symbols were: **Negroe** (symbolizing identity of black people); **hardened face** (symbolizing a lifestyle that is used to hardship and thus such individuals having the ability to withstand several challenges that other people may not afford to withstand); **baby skin** (symbolizing smooth soft skin implying an easy lifestyle of people who have been raised in luxurious environs) and **Whititude** (symbolizing general feeling by some people that they are white and therefore they are of special breed). The themes portrayed by the identified symbols were: identity, pride, self denial/self deception.

In Timothy Wangusa's "A Taxi Driver on His Death," respondents identified the following symbols: **prophetic eye** (the ability to predict the future) symbolises conscience; **metallic monster** (symbolises the deadly oppressed masses that will soon claim their right or even the life of the politician); **docile elaborate horse** (symbolises the masses' ability to revolt one day and control the government for a temporally period of time); **tempting day** (symbolizing a day on which a revolution will occur) and **forbidden limits** (that the careless driver drives at high speed, well far beyond the set limits). The themes portrayed by the identified symbols were: fate, death, fear and conflict of interests as the driver needs to stay alive but also wants to make more money by over-speeding in an effort to make more journeys and take more passengers. In the poem, the taxi is a symbolic image of government leadership and the driver is the agent and victim of revolution. The taxi represents a dangerous governance leading to destruction:

This metallic monster that now I dictate,
This docile elaborate horse,
That in silence seems to simmer and strain
Shall surely revolt some tempting day.

The taxi driver is aware of the dangers ahead of him but is indifferent about the fate that awaits him. A "Taxi Driver on his Death" is one of Wangusa's most popular poems, because, according to the respondents, it represents the leader and the led. As we see, the respondents were not as keen to see more "shallow," immediate and conventional meanings of the symbol that represent the social situation – the plight of a poor mwananchi (the taxi driver) endangering his life to earn his daily bread.

In Mildred Barya's "Knock of liberation," respondents generally identified the following symbols: **grace** (beauty); **a world of men** (a male controlled, dominated world); **bedroom** (women were treated as objects or tools used to produce children and entertain men - sexual pleasures); **chicken** (women were taken as birds to be reared and eaten); **classroom** (source of empowerment for the vulnerable and down trodden); **cultural glue** (oppressive cultural traditions, practices and norms); **sit on benches with men** (the equality finally attained between men and women as women are treated as equals) and **dumb mules** (the inability of women to have freedom to speak out and claim their rights). Respondents identified the following themes: culture versus modernity; emancipation of women; male chauvinism; exploitation and subordination of women; oppression and hope. Going by the discrimination against women that exists in Uganda today, especially among the majority of rural and uneducated women who are considered as property; the on going female genital mutilation; denial of women and the girl child to own and inherit both father and husband's property; and continued cases of rape and defilement of the girl child. We found the symbols employed by Barya as highly effective in presenting the evils women of Uganda continuously face.

Broadly speaking, we note that poems identified as carrying cultural symbolism are concerned with, among other things, preservation of good and progressive aspects of culture, they fiercely defend traditional values, practices and norms against the invasion of westernization as presented in *Song of Lawino*. However, some of the poems condemn obsolete practices such as discrimination against women, as done by Mildred Barya in "Knock of liberation." They are poems of self identity, patriotism, as portrayed in *the Song of Lawino*, and "Whititude." Further more, we note that poems with cultural

symbolism also carry a portrayal of identity, loss, empowerment, unwavering determination.

Contrary to the above, in Henry Barlow's *Building the Nation* we find the symbols identified by the students, in terms of **Permanent Secretary** and **Mwananchi**, well qualified for political symbols. The persona is symbolic of the conscientious people in society; the *mwananchi* is a symbol of country people, who is daily exploited by the powerful people in civil service, symbolically represented by the Permanent Secretary. The main themes in the poem, namely exploitation, greed, betrayal and deception are well carried in the personality of the Permanent Secretary who enjoys the sumptuous meals but deceives the persona that he is hungry too.

Joseph Mugasa's "Kampala" and "Talk Peace" are also poems with socio-political symbolism well perceived and identified by the respondents. In "Kampala," we see corruption, poverty, division, and political betrayal. Through symbolic images such as 'seven hills,' 'seven faiths,' and 'seven views' we are reminded of the original seven hills that made Kampala city, the several religious denominations in Kampala and the several perceptions, views, practices and beliefs held by the people in Kampala. The imagery of the 'second class tiles and white-wash walls' only serve to illustrate the several categories of people – the poor who are symbolically shown as staying in 'the economy slums of Kivulu and Katanga.' Again we note that Kivulu, a famous slum of destitution is brought back, only this time with its neighbouring slum Katanga. *Kivulu* and *Katanga* symbolise destitution, poverty, crime and political neglect. Betrayal of the poor by the politicians is well brought out in the following socio-political symbolism:

Revolutionary giants that rose to prominence,
Fire brand politicians that breathed steam,
Are nursing a fire wet with feeding.
Their mouths that once opened in emptiness,
Are stuffed with fish, chips and chicken.
They hide from people in a city of the people.

Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter and its analysis pursued one basic purpose – to explore whether the symbols used by various Ugandan poets are successfully transmitting certain

themes and subjects. In order to achieve this, another task was to be completed – to find out whether certain symbols can be identified by the readers in the selection of poems by Ugandan poets, and whether these symbols invoke certain themes in the perception of the poems by these readers. To this end, the collection of data and its analysis were performed, which shows that the above mentioned symbols in the selected poems were identified by most of the respondents, which, in our opinion, proves the ability of these symbols to appeal to most of the readership, from poets and critics to teachers and students, and furthermore, to convey in the consciousness of the readers certain themes, which, in our opinion, were in fact intended to be put there by the poets themselves. Therefore, the data presented in the chapter proves the high rate of ability of the symbols used by the poets to convey to the readers intended themes and aspects.

Along with that, we would also like to note that most of the symbols identified by respondents, with very few exceptions, do belong to that set which in this study we deemed as “set of main symbols” or “main symbolic fund” of Ugandan poetry – in other words, to those twenty-six symbols that were analysed in the previous chapters of this study. The respondents have either identified the symbols included into the list (the main ones and their semantic derivations) or those closely related to them. It can be illustrated by the example of the symbols, identified by respondents, standing for exploitation and oppression induced by the state. Whereas such symbols as **Permanent Secretary** (symbol of exploitation); **big chief** (individuals that exploit others); **state** (meaning coercive power, authority and government); **shepherds** (leaders); **State house** (centre of power, authority and governance) are found in the set of the main symbols of Ugandan poetry analysed in chapters 2-4 of this study, such symbols as **bellied fellows** (greedy, selfish politicians); **you** (People in power; influence and authority; whom the persona/poet is addressing); and **the scavenging carrion birds** (symbolizing people who benefit out of the misery or suffering of others) are semantically closely related to them, representing similar meanings.

The symbols standing for politics and its consequences, such as **colour sensitive fellows** (people supporting different political parties); **waving open hands** (the symbol of

Uganda's Democratic Party); **mounds of human ruins** (heaps of corpses, symbolizing disastrous effects of war) and **ailing, wailing world** (symbolizing a turbulent world, a world without peace, a world of misery and frustration, caused by current political practices).

Similar observations can be made in relation to other symbols traced by the respondents. Among the symbols representing poverty and plight of the poor, such symbols as **mwananchi** (exploited citizens); **prisoner** (victims of inequalities and injustices in society); **kondos** (thieves and agents of violence caused by poverty); and **Kivulu** (slum area where Uganda's poor dwell) can be found in the list of the main and recurrent ones, whereas symbols such as , **him** (the subjects or the led); **blistered hands** (poor working conditions, hard labour and exploitation); **bull** (the seemingly strong but oppressed people); **horns and teeth** (the conscience of the oppressed people); **torrential, saline tears** (symbolizing constant, unceasing misery/crying); **demise of a century** (symbolizing destruction of a people); **aging century** (symbolizing a generation past its usefulness); identified by the respondents in the poems from anthologies and periodicals, are closely related to the main ones.

In addition, such symbols as **land** and **blood** (**soiled land** - contamination of good with evil, **rotten blood** - evil) are also found in the list of the main symbols, as well as those of **Black Benz** (luxurious living lead by exploiters of the poor); **Benzes/Pajeros** (luxurious life style of the corrupt leaders); and **bank account** (plenty/wealth/financial security). This, in our opinion, confirms the accuracy of our own identification of the main and recurrent symbols, as most of the symbols from "our" list were identified and selected by the respondents; as the ones which are the easy to identify and which, therefore, convey related themes and meanings most obviously.

One reservation that must be made is about the so-called cultural symbols. In fact, among the symbols that the respondents classified as cultural, such as **twin ceremony** (symbolizing, having two sharply contradictory functions at the same time), **dust to dust** (with a meaning of "from bad to worse", crowned with untimely death - as it is biblically

portrayed that from dust we come and to dust we shall go), **grave diggers** (symbolizing, individuals who reap benefits from the suffering or misery of others) and **one with mountains** (symbolizing a wealthy person), **Negroe** (symbolizing identity of black people), **hardened face** (symbolizing a lifestyle that is used to hardship and thus such individuals having the ability to withstand several challenges that other people may not afford to withstand), **baby skin** (symbolizing smooth soft skin implying an easy lifestyle of people who have been raised in luxurious environs), and **Whititude** (symbolizing egoistic attitude of racial superiority); **world of men** (a male controlled, dominated world); **bedroom** (women were treated as objects or tools used to produce children and entertain men's sexual pleasures); **chicken** (women were taken as birds to be reared and eaten); **classroom** (source of empowerment for the vulnerable and down trodden); **cultural glue** (oppressive cultural traditions, practices and norms); **sit on benches with men** (the equality finally attained between men and women as women are treated as equals) and **dumb mules** (the inability of women to have freedom to speak out and claim their rights). In our view, most of these symbols (if not all) also represent various aspects of Ugandan social reality, and "culture" (at least in the respondents' understanding of traditional culture) is one of the aspects of this reality. Therefore, it brings us to the assertion about the artificiality (or at least very high degree of conditionality) of classifying symbols according to the themes they can bring. One and the same symbol, as we tried to prove in the previous chapters, can have a variety of meanings (moreover, not always and not necessarily related semantically), shaped by many factors, which we also tried to highlight. However, the fact that the symbols and their meanings were identified by the respondents with a rather high degree of precision proves the high communicative ability of these symbols, their appeal to many categories of readers, and this again confirms one of our founding assertions about symbolism as one of the main and most important artistic methods in modern Ugandan poetry.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of the work covered in this study and the approaches to the work. In addition, the chapter gives a summary of our research findings and projections before presenting suggestions that relate to the furtherance of issues raised and addressed in this study.

We set out to investigate the nature of symbolism in Ugandan poetry, and how the social environment has influenced symbolism used by Ugandan poets. We sought to establish and identify the role of symbolism as a subtle and effective technique in communicating thematic concerns in Ugandan poetry, and to trace the evolution of symbols over three generations of Ugandan poets. Our investigation into the study of symbolism in Ugandan poetry, aesthetics and meaning was conducted against the backdrop of Breitingner's assertion that the individual experience of the artists in social milieu made the case of Ugandan poets specific; especially in the way they used language to communicate deeply felt emotions that they wished to share with readers. Furthermore, Harmon Williams has also asserted that symbols may contribute to an intrinsic system of meaning by allowing a writer to represent abstract ideas in personal terms consistent with the world he/she lives in. Thus, we were interested in finding out the nature and role of symbolism as a creative and subtle technique used in Ugandan poetry. The study, among other issues, discussed the effectiveness of symbolism employed by Ugandan poets to communicate their concerns.

We set up guiding approaches through which we would achieve our set objectives. First, we set up guiding questions. These were: What influences the general nature of symbolism used in Ugandan poetry vis-à-vis the level of interpretation and understanding? What is the role of symbolism used in Ugandan poetry? What changes have taken place in the symbolism used by the selected poets representing the three generations in Ugandan poetry in the period specified? Then, we developed hypotheses

that we wanted either to confirm or refute. We developed four hypothetical statements. First, we projected that symbolism features in most of the works of selected Ugandan poets. Secondly, we projected that social environment has a significant bearing on the nature of symbolism used in Ugandan poetry. Thirdly, we projected that the artistic choice of symbolism plays a significant role in communicating thematic concerns of Ugandan poets. Finally, we projected that there is significant changing trends in the use of symbolism by early and contemporary Ugandan poets.

Since poetry is part of the literature studied in Ugandan schools, we included students, teachers of poetry, poetry experts and poets as respondents used in the study. We mapped out major schools teaching poetry and more so, schools that were willing to allow us conduct our investigations, in the five regions of Uganda and visited them to distribute questionnaires to students and interview the poetry teachers. We also had interviews with poets and critics of poetry to get a deeper insight into the issues under investigation. We conducted poetry seminars based on the selected poems in some of the schools visited, and this helped us have direct observation, as students participated in identifying symbols, giving their roles and thematic concerns they raised. This way, we were able to gather primary data and supplement it with the data we had gathered in our literature review.

Our findings are captured in seven separate but related chapters. In chapter one, we present an introduction and background to the study. Chapters two, three and four deal with identification of and analysis of the nature of what we call main and recurrent symbols used in modern Ugandan poetry. Chapter five presents the changing trends of symbolism used by Ugandan poets by providing the comparative analysis of the main symbols and outlining the evolution that the symbols underwent over three generations of poets. Chapter six shows the influence of the social environment on the symbolism used by Ugandan poets and chapter seven presents the role of symbolism as a subtle and effective technique in communicating thematic concerns in Ugandan poetry by outlining and analysing the data obtained through field research.

In **Chapter One**, we addressed ourselves to the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, justification, scope and limitations of the study as well as the hypotheses. We reviewed literature in terms of thematic concerns, meaning of symbolism, influence of early poets on the contemporary ones and the effectiveness of symbolism. We then presented a theoretical frame work through which the basic approaches to the study were reviewed. The basic approaches used are the psychoanalysis, sociological, stylistics and reader response theories. We then pointed out the methodology used in the study.

In **Chapter Two**, we focused on the main symbols used by the first generation of Ugandan poets, having highlighted various meanings of these symbols in their works. In our opinion, these poets have provided Ugandan rime with a set of symbols expressing certain basic concepts drastic for Ugandan poetry, those main concepts that actually allow the poets to describe in the poetic way their main, 'collective' subject matter – Ugandan reality of the corresponding period, its various aspects and different facets, from traits of social system to trends in public thought and consciousness. These symbols proved to be important exactly by their recurrent nature – introduced by the poets whose works were analysed in his chapter and which were later used by the subsequent generations of Ugandan poets. This approach was crucial for identifying that set of concepts that allow the authors to draw a 'poetic map' of their native country. From the performed analysis we could also conclude, that each of the analysed symbols has the basic (main, principal) meaning, more or less coinciding in most of the analysed works, and various other meanings: secondary meanings, or "shades of meanings," that enrich the symbol and expand its expressive qualities.

In **Chapter Three** we focused on the works of Ugandan poets of the second generation. From the analysis, it became clear that the second generation of poets have considerably expanded and enriched the meanings of the main symbols, which was stipulated by their growing poetic experiences and the changes in the society which they reflected in their works. Second, in spite of all these growing varieties in meanings, the second generation poets in their works preserved the basic meanings of the main symbols, as established by the previous generation. Third, certain symbols have formed combinations, having

become undetachable from one another – for example, **politician** necessarily presumes **slogans** and **speeches**, while a **car** drags along the symbols of **politicians** and **army** and **police**. Four, the symbols mainly refer to specific social, political and historical phenomena – symbols with abstract meanings are rather rare.

In **Chapter Four** our focus lay on the set of main symbols used in the works of the writers belonging to the third generation, the latest-to-date generation of Ugandan poets. From the analysis performed, first, it became clear that the meaning of certain symbols has been considerably changed in the works of the poets of this generation. Secondly, we posit that these changes have been stipulated mainly by the changing social reality of Uganda, heavily influenced by coups d'état of the 1970s and 80s, subsequent warfare in the northern part of the country, and other manifestations of political malevolence and their consequences in the life of the country. Moreover, symbolism in their poetry continues to represent modern society puzzled by deceit, corruption, carnage, disillusionment and dissent with current events of globalization. Thirdly, all the above does not, however, mean that the content of symbols in Ugandan poetry of this generation is far divorced from the symbolism representing issues tackled by earlier Ugandan poets, since all Ugandan poets across generations seem to engage deeply and directly in the concerns of mother Uganda, and this could be the reason why these artists thought that abstract language would have been mostly misleading and of no desired consequence, hence concentrating on concrete symbols as a vehicle for expressing nationalist feelings about the state of affairs in their beloved land. Thus, in the use of many symbols the third generation poets demonstrate similarity and even unanimity with the poets of the previous generations, as it was also seen in chapter five.

Chapter Five was devoted to comparative analysis of main symbols used by three generations of Ugandan poets. This analysis allowed us to conclude that the meanings (use, interpretations) of the main symbols in Ugandan poetry are constituted by two basic factors – social (historical, cultural, political, economic, etc.) conditions and the personal orientations of the poet. Social conditions form the background against which the poem is composed, define the context of the poem and therefore – the choice of symbols and their

meanings. However, frequently the poet uses the same symbols in the meanings not so much stipulated by the current social situation (that is, not “directly linked” to the social reality of their times), but in the meanings more motivated by their personal preferences – mostly, these meanings are more general, philosophical (metaphysical) and “eternal”. This impels the poets, even within one generation, to use one and the same symbol sometimes in contrasting meanings. These considerations allowed us to generalise that the evolution undergone by the symbols analysed in this study can be broken into two basic types, resulting, accordingly, in two basic types of symbols, which we named, conditionally, symbols with varied meanings and symbols with accumulated meanings. The symbols of the first type, being deeply rooted in traditional African culture, and being interpreted also in the context of modern reality, thus acquire a considerable variety of meanings, from related to even opposed ones. The symbols of the second type, mostly denoting the phenomena borrowed from western culture and unfortunately standing for mostly negative aspects of social reality, acquire less variety and more similarity in their meanings over generations of Ugandan poets.

Another aim of analysing the evolution of the main symbols of Ugandan poetry was, apart from finding out the nature of these symbols, to show the semantic richness of these symbols, that the poets demonstrate on different levels – on the level of different meanings (as, for instance, the symbol of a **house**), and on the level of different aspects, or shades, of the same main meaning (as the symbol of **silence**). It proves, in our opinion, that symbolism remains one of the main expressive means in modern Ugandan poetry.

The data presented in **Chapter Six** and its analysis pursued one basic purpose namely to explore whether the symbols used by various Ugandan poets are successfully transmitting certain themes and subjects. In order to achieve this, another task was to be completed that is to find out whether particular symbols would obviously be identified by the readers in the selected poems, and whether these symbols invoke certain themes in the perception of these readers. To this end, the collection of data and its analysis were performed. This means that the above mentioned symbols were identified by the majority of the respondents (in this case – students of secondary schools from five regions of

Uganda), which, in our opinion, proves the ability of these symbols to appeal to wide readership and to convey (or invoke) in the consciousness of the readers certain themes, which, in our opinion, were in fact intended to be put across by the poets themselves. Therefore, the data presented in the chapter proves a high ability of the symbols used by the poets to convey to the readers intended themes and other aspects.

There are several main findings of this study, and each of these, in its own turn, provides the feedback to the questions and assumptions that we made in the hypotheses and objectives of the study. The work that was done in the above summarised seven chapters of the study allows us to make certain important conclusions.

First, we found that symbolism is featured in most of the works by Ugandan poets selected for this study. On finding this, our primary concern was to ascertain what specific symbols are used by the three generations of Ugandan poets. The performed investigations enabled us to discern a total of 74 symbols in the works selected for this study, among which we traced 26 symbols that are found in most of the selected works across the three generations of Ugandan poets. These symbols we named “main” or “recurrent,” and our further analysis was mainly concentrated on these symbols and their use in the works of Ugandan poets.

Secondly, we found, after performing the corresponding analysis in chapters 2 to 5 of the study, that each of the generations in Ugandan poets has its own specific ways of using and interpreting what we call the main symbols in Ugandan poetry. These ways are manifested in differences in meanings themselves and the shades of meanings that poets of different generations attach to one and the same symbol: in the variety of contexts in which these symbols are used, in the varied personal attitudes and in perceptions of the authors related to the use of these symbols. In other words, there do exist changing trends in the use of symbols of the three generations of poets in Uganda.

Thirdly, the comparative analysis of the main symbols used by the three generations of Ugandan poets or the investigation of changing trends, enabled us to find out that the

choice of symbols and the use of symbols in the works of Ugandan poets is to a great extent shaped and stipulated by the social environment of Uganda in the corresponding times when their poems were created (late 1950s – early 1960s - the years of late colonialism and early independence; 1966 – 1986 - the years of military rule and 1986 – 2006 - the years of political unrest in the country). As it was demonstrated in our research (chapters 5 and 6), the difference in the meanings of one and the same symbol in the poetry of different generations was largely shaped by the social background of the corresponding poet and social reality of his or her times (generation). We realized that Ugandan, poetry was largely influenced by whatever was happening at the time of writing the poems. Our interviews with the poets (see Appendix II) confirmed our earlier findings to the effect that all the poets interviewed gave testimonies on how the social setting of the day greatly influenced Ugandan poets. Therefore, we conclude that social environment has a significant, if not decisive, bearing on the nature of symbolism used in Ugandan poetry.

Finally, **chapter seven** presented the conclusion where we found that symbolism is abundantly used by Ugandan poets of the three generations perhaps because of its nature- a subtle and effective technique of communicating thematic concerns which was largely confirmed by the data acquired through field research (see chapter 7). The data was obtained with the help of specially designed questionnaires (see Appendices I, and II). The analysis of the data has shown that many of the symbols that we selected as the main and recurrent ones were easily identified by the respondents and, moreover, communicated to them the themes many of which, in our opinion, were the ones intended by the poets themselves to be communicated to the readers. We realized that symbols help give a reader another dimension of interpreting poetry, they empower the reader to dig deeper and find out what the poet intended to communicate (thematic concerns).

Therefore, the above considerations prove, in our opinion, that symbolism remains one of the main expressive means in modern Ugandan poetry.

Suggestions for further research

While this study mainly deals with the symbols that we selected as main and recurrent ones in Ugandan poetry of the three generations, we are quite aware of the fact that it would be at least desirable to shed some light on the secondary, and especially what is known as private symbols (the ones immanent to the works of a particular poet) specific for every generation, the ones that create a 'symbolic palette' particular for every generation of Ugandan poets, in order to obtain the fullest possible picture of the use of symbolism in modern Ugandan poetry. We consider this as one of the primary tasks for our further research; moreover, we intend to continue the study of Ugandan poets whose works were for various reasons excluded from the range of this study.

As far as the social aspect (the perception of and response to the poetry by its audience), our investigations so far were limited to poets, poetry experts, poetry teachers and poetry students in selected secondary schools in Uganda. This leaves room for further research as learners of poetry in primary schools and universities are possible respondents that can be included in a future study. Former students of poetry, journalists specialized in poetry, theatre actors especially individuals that earn a living through reciting poetry can also be involved. Moreover, it would be of interest and value to perform similar research among groups for whom poetry is only an occasional engagement, yet it plays a role in their lives. Indeed, as we attempted to argue earlier on, poetry part of creative writing, is also a social institution that takes a very considerable part in the shaping of a human personality. These are also possible areas worth further investigation.

We would also like to dedicate, at least partially, our further studies to the creative works of some individual poets, whom we tend to deem as cornerstone figures in modern Ugandan poetry, and whose works, unfortunately, are still waiting for serious critical appraisal. It especially applies to the poets of the second and the third generations, since, for example, the poetry of the founding figure, Okot p'Bitek, has already been researched on by such scholars as George Heron, Monica Mweseli, and others. Among the poets whose works we would like to put under special appraisal are Timothy Wangusa and Okello Oculi – two most prolific and influential authors in modern Ugandan rime, among others.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Literature Students

Dear respondent,

The researcher is conducting a study on Symbolism in Ugandan poetry. The study investigates the nature of artistic choice of symbolism in Ugandan poetry and, how the socio – political and socio – cultural environment have influenced the nature of symbolism used by Ugandan poets. This questionnaire is intended to collect data needed to complete writing this desertation that is expected to add literature on the study of symbolism and poetry in general.

The researcher would like you to assist by filling out this questionnaire. The information you give will be used strictly for research purposes. Many other participants will be answering the same questions and your answers as an individual will remain anonymous. The researcher looks forward to your cooperation.

Thank you in advance.

Sr.Loice Lucy Nabukonde
PhD student in Literature
University of Nairobi
Nairobi, Kenya.

Instructions

Place a (√) in front of the most appropriate response and where comments are required use the spaces provided.

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. State your current title in this school.....
2. Qualification of the respondent (Please state if other)

Diploma	Degree	Postgraduate	Professional course

3. Age of respondent

Personal Details

- (a) Name of the school _____
- (b) District _____
- (c) Student's class _____

(d) Year of study _____

(e) Age _____

(f) Gender; Female () Male ()

Poems to be appreciated by each group of students:

Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____	3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____	4. _____	4. _____	4. _____

1. Please identify the symbols in the given poems.

2. Basing your answer on the given poem(s), discuss the nature/type of symbolism used in the poem(s)?

3. Which ones of ten selected cases of symbolism appealed to you, as a reader, the most and why?

4. Which of the poems did you like/appreciate most? Why?

5. Using your identified symbols, give your interpretation of at least 10 of them.

- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____
- (d) _____
- (e) _____
- (f) _____
- (g) _____
- (h) _____
- (i) _____
- (j) _____
- (k) _____
- (l) _____
- (m) _____
- (n) _____

6. How relevant are the used (identified) symbols in the selected poems? Please explain the relevancy of each symbol; the way you understand it.

7. Why do you think most Ugandan poets use symbolism in their poetry?

Appendix II: Field Pictures



Researcher at Femrite



Researcher in Schools



Researcher meeting critics



Critics commenting



Researcher probing critics



Researcher clarifying tasks



Researcher with A-Level Student at Blessed Sacrament Secondary



Researcher interacting with students in focused- interview



Students analysing symbols



Field assistant probing students



Students re-reading poems



Students identifying symbols.



Students at Ntinda Edu. Centre critiquing pre-concieved symbols



Reseracher meets Joseph Mugasa



**Joseph Mugasa showing his collection
(The pulse of the Pearl)**



Researcher noting students' views



**Researcher with Literature teachers
acquainting with school library at Tororo
Girls School**



**The researcher concludes at Ntare High
School in Western Uganda**



**Researcher at BPS Grounds, preparing to present to
University of Nairobi**

9th August 2011