

# Essentializing Ugandan Indigenous Cultures in Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's *Manchester Happened*

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**Abstract**— This paper examines *Manchester Happened* by Jennifer Nansubuga in the light of postcolonial concepts of essentialism and time. This study is motivated by the observation that relationships between the former colonialists and colonized as represented in contemporary diasporic literature are still characterized by rivalry, racism and ideologies about the backwardness of Africans, Caribbeans and Asians. The creation of the Commonwealth of Nations has not served as a platform to eradicate the inauspicious binary matrices that existed in the days of the British Empire. African migrants in England are unable to effectively integrate themselves in the socio-economic sphere since their 'Otherness' remains a consideration for rejection. Oppression and marginalization are therefore presented as traits in Western culture whereas the spirit of community, attachment to cultural values and the desire to foster the ideals of the past characterize Ugandan indigenous attitudes as presented in *Manchester Happened*. From this problematic stance, the following research questions were derived: How is home constructed in Manchester? What is the significance of making journeys back to the homeland? This study is therefore predicated upon the claim that Ugandans in Manchester exhibit trends of their indigenous culture as they seek to assert their cultural identity in the diaspora and back home in Uganda. Globalization and modernity affect some characters that are enamored by Western attitudes. However, Nansubuga presents Ugandans who embody native customs which they practice daily in Manchester, and besides, they regularly travel to Uganda for other communal rites. In these instances, value is ascribed to native customs and the heritage from their ancestral past.

**Keywords**— Essentialism, Discourse, Ideology, Home, Time, Place.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines essentialism as represented in Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's *Manchester Happened*. Set mainly in Manchester (England) and Uganda, this text highlights, in its first part, the lives of characters as they seek socio-cultural establishment in the diaspora, and in the second part of the work titled "The Return", the author describes their reunion with their customs back in Uganda. This tendency to reunite with the past, justifies the essentialist reading made on this book. Essentialism is a major mode of representation. According to Diana Fuss essentialism

*...is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity. Importantly, essentialism is typically defined in opposition to*

*difference...The opposition is a helpful one in that it reminds us that a complex system of cultural, social, psychical, and historical differences, and not a set of pre-existent human essences position and constitute the subject. However, the binary articulation of essentialism and difference can also be restrictive, even obfuscating, in that it allows us to ignore or deny the differences within essentialism. (Essentially Speaking xi-xii)*

The discourse of essentialism has grounding in 'colonialist' contexts where binaries of the 'Self' and the 'Other' are established. This convention of difference as represented in fiction is described in Abdul JanMohamed's "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" when he posits that colonialist literature

... explores and represents a world at the boundaries of 'civilization', a world that has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology. This world is therefore perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable and ultimately evil. (*The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 18)

Indigenous cultures resisted such domestication and the codes marking European presence. The colonialist's crusade for cultural imperialism has been resisted by the likes of Okonkwo and Obierika in colonial literature<sup>1</sup>, and more recently by Nnalongo and Wakhooli in *Manchester Happened*, where recourse to the roots is a zeitgeist for the Ugandan community in Manchester and those back home.

This study analyzes Jennifer Nansubuga's endeavor to valorize her Ugandan indigenous practices in Manchester and the contemporary Ugandan society presented in *Manchester Happened*. The first part of the analysis examines how Ugandan customs are practiced in the Diaspora in spite of the nature of the exotic presence in Manchester. The second part makes an appraisal of moments when these characters reunite with their ancestral past by indulging in cultural practices which require them to travel back to Uganda. This travel back into time reveals the importance of Ugandan cultures in this contemporary world.

Essentializing Uganda indigenous cultures is prioritized in *Manchester Happened* although the place of subalterns as characteristic of migration literature is predominant. Essentialism has emerged in recent years as a major concept in postcolonial literature. Many critics have pried into the definition of this concept like Ashcroft et al. who intimate that "Essentialism is the assumption that groups, categories or classes of objects have one or several defining features exclusive to all members of that category" (*Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* 73). Besides, essentialism is the perspective which considers a set of attributes for any entity which forms its identity and meaning. It involves a plethora of aspects of life ranging from the political to the cultural. From a political perspective, it seeks to defend the rights of the marginalized in society—those Gayatri Spivak refers to as "other." Ashcroft et al. highlight that its *raison d'être* in postcolonial discourse is "to expose the falsity of this mode of representing the colonial subject as an "other" to the self of dominant colonial culture"(74). From a cultural standpoint, it attributes a sense

of cultural revival and sense of being to those under pressure and oppression as seen in this excerpt:

*Cultural essentialism, which is theoretically questionable, may be adopted as a strategic political position in the struggle against imperial power. Clearly, certain kinds of practices are peculiar to one culture and not to others, and these may serve as important identities and become the means by which those cultures can resist oppression and oppose homogenization by global forces. (Ashcroft et al. 17)*

Cultural essentialism shows the potency of subaltern cultures by resisting dominant cultures, meta-narratives and the 'universalization' of cultures due to imperious totalitarian global forces.

The eminent postcolonial scholar, Gayatri Spivak describes essentialism as a plan that nationalities, cultural groups or marginal groups can use to present themselves and calls it Strategic Essentialism. Such groups use essentialism to bring forward their group identity in a simplified way to achieve definite goals, or oppose the leveling impact of global culture (Ashcroft et al. 2010,74). In postcolonial discourse, this concept is usually discussed with the notion of race and nation. Essentialist practices and modes of representation "have been applied by groups and individuals in the promotion of certain minority rights or demands as well as liberation struggles" (Eide 2010, 63). The link between essentialism and classification of the society into superior and inferior is brought to light, with the inferior group trying to define itself by its own standards. In *Manchester Happened*, the Ugandans presented in the various stories rethink their subaltern status by re-inscribing their cultural footprints in history. This gives them a sense of pride and belonging.

In essentializing Ugandan indigenous cultures, characters make recourse to the African concept of time. Essence is given to the attitudes these characters exhibit due to their ability to journey back into the past, which harbors the necropolis of African spirituality, rites and customs and its spirit of community. In this case, attention will be paid to John Mbiti's discussion of time. In his *African Religions and Philosophy*, he examines the non-linear concept of time. In the African cosmos, this entails the actual and potential time (which is basically a continuum where past and present merge).

In discussing the African concept of time, Mbiti posits that it is the key to understanding the African

<sup>1</sup> These are characters in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

ontology, their beliefs, practices, attitudes and the general way of life of the Africans. The conception of time in most Africa communities, especially in the Kikuyu and the other East African communities studied by Mbiti is non-linear and cyclical. Africans have an actual time composed of a past and present. The past is seen as very important as actual time moves backward rather than seeking future occurrences. Mbiti illustrates that:

*This time orientation, governed as it is by the two main dimensions of the present and the past, dominates African understanding of the individual, the community and universe. Time has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real. A person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the society which goes back many generations before his own birth. (17)*

The significance of actual time (past and present) shows the pragmatic and utilitarian nature of African people. “Endlessness” or “eternity” for the Africans is something that lies only in the region of the past. This means that what is eternal lies beyond the horizon of events making up human experience or history (Mbiti 21). The past in the African world is not limited to what in English is called the past. It could be referred to as “Macro-Time” or “Big Time” as it overlaps with the present and the two are not separable. The present “feeds and disappears into the past” (22). The past is “the period of myth, giving a sense of foundation or security” to the present and binding together all created things, so that all things are embraced within the Macro-Time. The ‘golden age’ lies in the past, and not in the otherwise very short or non-existent future” (22-23).

As highlighted above, there is the Zamani (Swahili for past), which Mbiti refers to as the Macro-Time. He asserts:

*Zamani is the graveyard of time, the period of termination, the dimension in which everything finds its halting point. It is the final store house of all phenomenon and events, the oceans of time in which everything becomes absorbed into a reality that is neither after nor before. (23)*

From the foregoing, if Zamani is the necropolis of time, it then means that with the Zamani, the Sasa<sup>2</sup> ends, and events move backwards from the Sasa into Zamani. A glance at African myths reveals this. The myths of African peoples say nothing about the future but much about the past.

In *Manchester Happened*, the values of native Ugandan society are essentialized and rendered popular as Nansubuga makes reference to the past of her characters and their communities. This is seen through the various native customs ‘transported’ to Manchester and the cultural rites and practices done when they make a homeward journey in order to reconcile their present with the past.

So far, a critical perspective has been outlined through the definition of the key terms that double as the conceptual framework of this paper. The concept of essentialism is being examined from a postcolonial dimension. Besides, time is discussed as from an African philosophical point of view, thereby eliminating the possibility of any Eurocentric impositions on the analysis done in this paper. This African perception of time allies with the characters’ movement to their history as they seek to redefine their identities on this contemporary world.

## II. DISCUSSION

*Manchester Happened* deals with themes such as racism, infidelity, family break-ups, the lingering effects of colonialism, resistance to dominant European cultures and the preservation of African identity. Jennifer Nansubuga presents the lives of Ugandans in Europe, mainly in Manchester as they seek to attain their dreams by acquiring certificates in order to meet their needs, provide for their families and establish themselves back home. The book is divided into two parts of 12 short stories, which symbolically denote the journey to the diaspora and the return back home. The book has a plethora of characters functioning in different social domains. Through this, the author is able to irradiate their trials, dehumanization, and how they sporadically resist repression.

Jennifer Nansubuga does not just present the plight and resilience of characters in these tales but she shows their penchant towards African customs as seen in dressing, food culture, the use of Ugandan words and phrases, the constant reflection in the politics, economic situation and cultures back home.

The above mentioned aspects are presented through narration, dialogue, details, flashbacks and stream of consciousness, as the author seeks to paint the social landscape and give insight into characters. The ultimate goal of the characters is to attain peace, economic empowerment, and the continuity of the indigenous Ugandan culture. The author continuously uses humor, invectives, transliteration in presenting these stories of despair, poverty, segregation assertion of cultural superiority and the migrants’

<sup>2</sup> Swahili for present

psychological and physical journeys back home. This makes the tales more interesting as some migrants' wishes are not attained because of their sublunary human desires and weaknesses. The author therefore shows life as a constant struggle for self-preservation, the continuous search for political freedom and economic empowerment, and the defense of one's cultural stance in this atmosphere of globalization.

### 2.1. Making Home Happen in Manchester

*Every path I/i take is edged with thorns. On the one hand, i play into the Savior's hands by concentrating on authenticity, for my attention is numbed by it and diverted from other important issues; on the other hand, i do feel the necessity to return to my so-called roots, since they are the fount of my strength, the guiding arrow to which i constantly refer before heading for a new direction. (Trinh T. Minh-Ha "Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism")<sup>3</sup>*

Most of the migrant characters in *Manchester Happened* are an embodiment of Ganda culture. In the story titled "Our Allies the Colonies" an English woman named Heather Newton has a boy with a Ugandan named Abbey. Newton is so much occupied with her academics and job, such that she cannot consecrate time for the child. She even takes the child to an orphanage for adoption, which is seen as a travesty by Abbey and his Ugandan friend Kwei. At the orphanage they are told that "In this country, it's brave and selfless to give up a child to people who will love him and meet his needs" (60) but Kwei retorts that "in my country, a parent will die first before they give up a child to strangers" (60). This argument does not only relate the clash of cultures but it shows the Africans' desire to protect their family line and their name. Ifeanyi Menkiti in "Person and Community in African Traditional thought" asserts that

*A crucial distinction thus exists between the African view of man and the view of man found in Western thought: In the African view it is the community which defines the person as person not some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory. (African Philosophy: An Introduction 172)*

This shows the attachment Africans have to offspring as opposed to the West. Newton considers parenting to be possible only when there are material provisions for offspring. This is not the same perception of Kwei and Abbey. Another character in *Manchester Happened* who essentializes Ugandan culture is Nnalongo.

Some elderly characters in this book represent their cultural values in this diasporic space as opposed to youngsters like Katassi. The author presents her as a character who lives in the past:

*Nnalongo is one of those people who bring Uganda with them to Britain. We call her house half-Luwero because it's littered with Ugandan paraphernalia—straw mats, masks with elongated faces, every ethnic basket from home, batiks, gourds and carvings. She eats Ugandan only. No speaking English in her house. But mostly it is that squeaky, monotonous kadongo kamu country music she plays. Her kadongo kamu, from the 1980s and 1990s, conjures home... (64)*

This excerpt shows Nnalongo's determination to preserve and promulgate her cultural heritage through the plethora of Ugandan paraphernalia in her home. The decorations, food, music and the speech register used in her home show how her homestead conjures home.

Another character who is so stuck to Ugandan cultural trends is Mikka. Kitone and her grandmother discuss Mikka's home and children as follows:

*"They were learning how to drum".*

*"You mean our drums?"*

*"Here they're learning kiganda dance. Here they're singing the Buganda anthem. Mikka always talks to his children in Luganda. He's very keen. Everyone in the Ugandan community knows you don't talk to Mikka's children in English". (232)*

Mikka allies with the idea that a people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture are rootless. The justifies his determination to teach Ganda customs to his children although they live in Manchester.

Another aspect of African culture that Jennifer Nansubuga seeks to venerate in *Manchester Happened* is the spirit of community. It is a binding force between Africans in the various communities where they are located. Although colonialism adversely affected the ties that hold Africans together, some authors are still trying to construct communities that could inculcate and foster this ideal. In the

<sup>3</sup> In *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft et al. (268)

text, Kwei strongly intervenes in the retrieving of Abbey's son from the orphanage until he is reminded by the attendants that Moses is not his son. In other terms, he is being asked to keep silence because he is not the father of the concerned. But he reacts in these words: "In our culture, my brother's son is my son" (59). There is a significant contrast between the African perception of family and the various other conceptions found in western thought. In Ifeanyi Menkiti's work, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought", man is described as such:

*The first contrast worth noting is that whereas most western views of man abstract this or that features of the lone individual and then proceed to make it the defining or essential characteristic which entities aspiring to the description "man" must have, the African view of man denies that persons can be characteristic of the lone individual. Rather, man is defined by reference to the environing community. (African Philosophy: An Introduction 171)*

As far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life histories. What is more, "the sense of self-identity which the individual comes to possess cannot be made sense of except by reference to these collective facts" (ibid. 171).

African solidarity is also portrayed when Nnalongo takes Katassi into her home when the latter falls out with her elder sister. Nnalongo is not ignorant of the circumstances leading to Katassi's homelessness. Shortly after arriving Manchester from Uganda, Katassi becomes unbearable as she totally rejects the Ganda ideal of the respect for elders. She totally changes her lifestyle (articulation, dressing, company), insults her sister and tells her: "Manchester, babe, Manchester happened. You're no longer you, why should I be me?" (75) This marks her estrangement from Ganda culture, making her ultimately unbearable to her sister and other Ugandans in Manchester. In spite of this, Nnalongo takes her in, albeit reluctantly. Nnalongo tells Katassi:

*Move into my house, I have a spare bedroom. Save money and when you're steady on your feet, try again. [Afterwards, Nnalongo shrugs]. Don't bother thanking me, this country is not ours, we will help each other. (65)*

This is a moment when Africans' solidarity is exemplified in Manchester. Nnalongo overlooks the fault of her compatriot because the priority is to assist her in this moment of trauma and difficulties.

This trend is also witnessed when Nnam loses her husband Kayita in Manchester. The author relates the essence of African solidarity as it soothes the bereaved and relieves them of the pain of losing a loved one. When Kayita's death is first announced in the hospital by the nurses, Nnam gets confused but there is nobody to comfort her. The author says:

*In Britain grief is private—you know how women throw themselves about, howling this, screaming that back home? None of that. You can't force your grief on other people. When Nnam was overcome, she ran to the toilet and held on to the sink. (246)*

In this grief, the Ugandans in Manchester play a consolatory role. Kayita meets a different scenario when she goes back home:

*Ugandans rallied around her during that first week of Kayita's death. The men took over the mortuary issues, the women took care of the home; Nnam floated between weeping and sleeping they arranged the funeral service in Manchester and masterminded the fundraising drive, saying, we are not burying one of us in snow.(250)*

The death of Kayita is not considered as Nnam's private issue. This shows a marked contrast with Western culture, which exhibits so much individualism. Nnam seems to share the grief with the other Ugandans who sympathize with her thereby giving essence to the African idea of family<sup>4</sup> and the value of a fellow human being. From the African perspective, man is defined by reference and kinship ties with the environing community. As John Mbiti asserts, the African view of the person can be summed up in the following statement: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (*African Religions and Philosophy* 141).

Another area that incites the discussion of the value of Ganda culture in *Manchester Happened* is medicine. Contemporary Western medicine has provided solution to a number of ailments but it still has many setbacks. African traditional medicine is part and parcel of African religion, hence some characters see the need for its sustenance and continuity. Katula has been married for some years but has not been able to bear children. During a phone call, her mother tells her that: "If doctors over there have failed, come home and see someone traditional. Sometimes, it's

<sup>4</sup>Family in this context is not limited to the Western idea of a nuclear entity but it relates to the idea of an entire clan or ethnic group constituting a family.

something small that hinders conception, Katula” (138). Elizabeth Odey in “Religion and Traditional Medicine in Africa” highlights that:

*Traditional medicine has been used by Africans for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of social, mental and physical diseases before the advent of conventional medicine. Even though traditional medicine has often been stigmatized as a backward practice during colonialism, it has continued to thrive because it is culturally accepted, it is accessible to more than 80% of the population in the African region that uses it. (African Pentecost: Journal of Theology Psychology and Social Work 30)*

In trying to relate traditional medicine to healthcare in Africa, one sees the relevance of traditional medicine, which is affordable, accessible, natural and effective in tackling spiritual ailments which cannot be handled scientifically. Odey further claims that

*practitioners of traditional African medicine claim to be able to cure a wide range of conditions, including cancers, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), psychiatric problems, infertility, venereal diseases, epilepsy, asthma, eczema, hay fever, anxiety, depression, benign prostatic hypertrophy, urinary tract infection, gout, and healing of wounds and burns (Ibid).*

This makes Katula’s mother confident of the fact that Ugandan medicine men can treat her daughter’s barrenness. This shows the need to return to their roots in moments when characters need spiritual and physical fortification.

The first section of this paper has examined how Ugandans practice their indigenous cultures in Manchester as presented in *Manchester Happened*. It can be retained from the analysis that although these characters are in a diasporic space that has attitudes and lifestyles diametrically opposed to Ganda native culture, these characters still seek to enhance the continuity of their indigenous culture by relying on the ideals of the past that gave them a sense of pride dignity and promoted the spirit of community.

## 2.2. Essentializing Culture Back Home

In *Manchester Happened*, some characters travel from Manchester to Uganda to perform certain rites. In the second part of the book titled “Returning”, two main

ceremonies take characters back to their homeland—marriage and circumcision.

According to Ruth Polk Patterson in “The Cycle of Life in the African Family”,

*The African marriage itself has been described as a “drama of life” wherein all of the elements of time and place come together. In the traditional wedding rites, there is a celebration for the ancestors (the past), a celebration for the bride and the groom (the present), and still another celebration for the children yet to be born of the union (the future). (3)*

In many important ways, African marriage and family life are much different from their conception in Western thought. However, the underlying principle that “the family constitutes the basic structure beneath all human society and is vital to human survival”, is a principle which underpins African cultures more than that of Europeans.

Nnaava and her family have been in Manchester for so many years but when she is to get married, a journey is made by the entire family to perform certain rituals. The marriage ceremony does not only show a return to the performance and acknowledgement of culture but the author through a description of the various stages, presents much about the traditions of the Gandans. There is for instance the “muko” who is a brother of the bride whose presence is indispensable. Although Nnaava’s brother is young and illegitimate, culture gives him pride of place. Aunt Muwunde presents him as such:

*“He is the muko”—she was not only acknowledging him, she was inviting him. The child who for the last ten years had been nameless and faceless, took on a new significance. Brothers give away their sisters. (196)*

His presence becomes more significant as he indulges in a long process of questions and answer with the grooms family. The grooms family is expected to publicly prove their worthiness before the bride prize is collected by the *muko*. Travelling back to Uganda in order to perform this ritual in the way of the clan shows the respect these characters have for their culture. This exchange is not however an avenue to embarrass anyone but it is aimed at making the two families develop stronger friendship ties and know each other better.

Ganda culture is also valorized through the dressing pattern of some Ugandans. In *Manchester Happened*, some characters have a great attachment to their roots through the traditional regalia they wear. Nnakazaana is a matriarch who

has flirted much with city life and many countries in the West during her youthful days. This has not however skewed her from her culture to exotic values. It is said of her that “she only wears kitenge gowns or busuuti” (221). The renaissance and continuity of African culture is made possible in this text through the value characters give to local dressing. Poonah comes back home from Manchester and immediately seeks traditional attire as she takes “Kayla shopping for bitenge gowns” (287). She also goes to a shop where “lovely shirts from Ghana” (287) are sold. This recourse to the past through dressing gives value to Ganda and other African regalia in this contemporary world.

There are certain aspects of African culture that are being essentialised in Nansubuga’s book when a clash occurs with Western cultural trends. There is a culture shock when opinions about marriages and childbearing occur. Bunjo who has been totally assimilated into Western culture rejects what gives essence to life to Gandans—marriage and children. Bunjo expresses himself thus: “They come looking for stability, with plans to marry you, have children, and while you are at it, you must act married—you have to act your age” (218). For this reason Bunjo does not date black women because he does not wish to have a woman who will impose marriage and the need for children to him. Contrary to the latter’s alienation into Western culture, Nnakazaana essentializes the Ganda’s attachment to children as seen in her words to Kitone.

*“People don’t sit down and ask themselves Do I want children? When the time is right to have children, children come. The only question is how many. Love for children is like breast milk; a child arrives, bapa, you’re overwhelmed.”*  
(218)

This value of marriage and children highlighted by Nnakazaana above is corroborated by other scholars on African cultures. Ruth Polk Patterson in “The Cycle of Life in the African Family” asserts.

*Among African cultures, the family is the most vital institution. As in all societies it is the basic social structure within which the individual establishes identity, develops a sense of belong, and learns the responsibilities to himself and his group. In return, the family provides the individual with security, protection, sustenance and love. Marriage is the structure by which family is perpetuated. The main purpose of marriage is to have children, who, to many Africans, represent the only real wealth.*

*Through marriage, children are born, kinship is established, and the group is strengthened and increased. Marriage, then, becomes a basic focus of the African ethos. Failure to get married often means that the individual has rejected the group, and the group in turn will reject the individual. (3)*

This African ideal of marriage and childbearing is a priority to custodians of culture like Nnakazaana. Children (or human beings) in Africa are seen as wealth. In *Manchester Happened* the author says that “in Britain marriage is not an honour but a lifestyle choice” (116). This is contrary to African customs, that attach to much value to this institution.

African societies give so much value to rites of passage. In *Manchester Happened*, there is a circumcision ceremony which is hailed by the Gandan community in Manchester and those back home. A teenager Wakhooli decides to travel to Uganda during the circumcision period. Circumcision is an initiation rite and it is a key moment in the rhythm of individual of life. According to John Mbiti in *African Religions and Philosophy*,

*Initiation rites have many symbolic meanings, in addition to the physical drama and impact. The youth are ritually introduced to the act of communal living. They go through a period of withdrawal from society, absence from home, during which time they receive secret instruction before they are allowed to rejoin their relatives at home. This is a symbolic experience of the process of dying, living in the spirit world and bring reborn (resurrected). The rebirth, that is the act of rejoining their families, emphasizes and dramatizes that the young people are now new, they have new personalities, they have lost their childhood, and in some societies they even receive completely new names. (118)*

Mbiti still reiterates that these rites are also significant because they introduce the candidates to adult life as they are now allowed to share in the full privileges and duties of the community. The initiation rites prepare young people in matters of sexual life, marriage, procreation and family responsibilities. The youth “learn to induce hardships, they learn to live with one another, they learn to obey and they learn the secrets and mysteries of the man-woman relationship” (ibid).

Wakhooli is half-British, half-Gandan but he decides to undertake this painful but fulfilling venture. His aunt Poonah has a message for him:

*Tell him it's done in public, the entire world watching. Tell him, you're covered in a paste of millet flour standing still, no blinking no shaking. Tell him they don't just cut the foreskin, there's a second layer: they don't like it either.* (265)

Wakhooli replies in these words, which assert his determination to make recourse to his roots: "Because it's my roots, obviously. While I am British, I am also Mumasaaba, and this is what we do... I am going to learn the dance and the songs." (283). Wakhooli's relations congratulate his mother Kayla for bringing back their son for reunion with their roots: "Thank you for holding our tradition dear... You see, some of our own people here are not encouraging it any more. But a Musungu, coming all the way from England, ah" (289). This gesture is highly acclaimed by the Gandans in the text. Ifeanyi Menkiti in "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought" asserts: "After birth the individual goes through the different rites of incorporation, including those of initiation at puberty time, before becoming a full person in the eyes of the community" (*African Philosophy* 174).

The Gandans like people of other African communities have a great attachment to the land. Colonialism was marked by seizure of the land of Africans. This greatly traumatized the natives for they saw this act as outright theft. In contemporary society many Africans living in metropolitan areas are forced to leave the land on which they have settled for long due to gentrification. Kaija discusses an old woman who no longer lives on her family land because "development swept her away" (180). However, she did not sell the part of the land that is the family graveyard. It is said that "she looked after her family graveyard" (180). A graveyard harbors the departed and the diving dead so she could not sell it to foreigners. She could not afford to cut off from her past. Even when "her children were negotiating with buyers" (181), she protected it and "kept it neat with flowers" (181). This attachment to the land links Africans to the past, thereby establishing a relationship between time and space. In *African Religions and Philosophy*, John Mbiti intimates that:

*Space and time are closely linked, and often the same word is used for both. As with time, it is the content which defines space. What matters most to African people is what is geographically near, just as the present embraces the life that people experience. For this reason, Africans are particularly tied to the land, because it is the*

*concrete expression of both their past and their present. The land provides them with the roots of existence, as well as binding them mystically to their departed. People walk on the graves of their forefathers, and it is feared that anything separating them from these ties will bring disaster to family and community life. To remove Africans by force from their land is an act of such great injustice that no foreigner can fathom it. Even when people voluntarily leave their homes in the countryside and go to live or work in the cities, there is a fundamental severing of ties which cannot be repaired and which often creates psychological problems with which urban life cannot as yet cope.* (26-27)

To Africans, a shift from the land of their parents severs the ties that they have with their homeland. In order to cope with the modern trend of life, many Africans leave their homelands to the city. However, most often, they have a strong nostalgia for their land and attitudes of the countryside such that some rites are still practiced in the cosmopolitan space.

Mbiti further explains how space is intrinsically linked to the African's dimension of time when he talks about the African's relationship with land or ground:

*The ground on which people walk is therefore the most intimate point of contact between the living-dead and their human relatives. It is the ground which "buries" them from the sight of their kinsmen, and which in effect erases their physical existence as far as human beings are concerned. Yet paradoxically, it is the same ground through which offerings, libation and even divination enable human beings to contact the living-dead [...] The land keeps together the Sasa of the living and the Zamani of the departed [...] For African peoples, the ground has a religious charge, mystically uniting past and present generations, the Zamani and the Sasa.* (*African Religions* 155-156)

The ground on which Africans walk serves as a grave for the 'dead' but it is a medium of contact between the living and the "living-dead." The land to Africans is therefore an avenue for continuity from the past and it also unites the living with the 'departed'. The psychological crises that are developed in the characters of most African writers justify these characters' physical or psychological journeys back to their motherlands.



This second section has examined the manner in which characters in *Manchester Happened* essentialize their cultural practices back home by making recourse to the past. In this contemporary setting where exotic customs are fast influencing the attitudes of Africans and destroying virtues and values copied from the past, Jennifer Nansubuga redefines a Ugandan society that unveils the beauty of this East African culture to the outside world.

### III. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the manner in which Jennifer Nansubuga essentializes Ganda culture in *Manchester Happened*. As presented in the analyses above, most of the characters in the text ignore the impact of Western cultures that have an imperious toll on “Third World” cultures in general and Ganda culture in particular. The analyses show that a true essence or *joie de vivre* is attained by postcolonial subjects when they reflect on their past. Besides, it is in the past that they rediscover their identity, reconnect with their spiritual muse and seek direction for their lives in this present world. More importantly, Africans need to express themselves through their cultural heritage, show the value and potency of their cultures, reveal the significance of these cultural practices to the world at large in order to reverse the subalternity ascribed unto them through Eurocentric hegemonic discourse. By essentializing the cultures of Ugandans in this narrative, Nansubuga shows that the subalternity of African people is a myth. They are only seen as difference in moments of contact with the West due to derogatory attributes, invectives and definitions made unto them.

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