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Negotiating growth in turbulentscapes: Violence, secrecy and growth in Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Secrets No More*

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The traditional Western variant of the *Bildungsroman* explores the dialectic of growth and change in the developmental process of the protagonist and how he is socialized into the society. However, most of the criticism on the form hardly explores the growth process of a child who suffers partial dementia as a result of human evil and sadism. This essay therefore, examines how a partially demented child-protagonist negotiates her identity in the absence of her parents and the comfort zone of a nuclear family in Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Secrets No More*. The protagonist negotiates the growth process around the turbulent national space, a trans-ethnic community of orphans and provincial subjects and the heavily patriarchal familial base where she struggles for self-assertion through a kind of voicing which is not associated with speech. In order to understand the developmental or growth process of the child-protagonist, I organize my argument around the possible violence of varied kinds performed on the body of the girl-child and the family and how she constructs identity from the limited choices she is offered in a turbulent African space where parental agency and guidance are unavailable for the child to emulate models in order to construct her own identity. Applying some of the theoretical positions of some *Bildungsroman* scholars, I will demonstrate through close reading, how *Secrets No More* aptly articulates some of the fundamental features of the narrative of growth. **Keywords:** African child-figure, *Bildungsroman*, dementia, Goretti Kyomuhendo, identity.

Fifty years after most African countries celebrated independence, the continent still remains a violent landscape for contestations of varied kinds. Invariably, the attainment of independence appears to have ushered in new kinds of struggles which have continued to foreground how the African peoples negotiate and (re)construct identity. Post-independence struggles for political and economic reconstruction in Africa are most times negotiated through the politics of ethnicity, which has in turn resulted in violent clashes and civil wars thereby making the continent look like a "site of perennial political and humanitarian emergencies" (Adesokan 3).

Since the idea of the universality of human rights continues to be undermined by most African governments, thereby creating room for strategic violence orchestrated against the postcolonial African person, African cultural art forms continue to function as vibrant tools for countering and containing these institutional failures. This constant

interrogation of the human condition in the African novel, which possibly aligns the writer to “the cause of the people” (Emenyonu x) may make one to hastily remark that African literature is constantly backward looking (see Nnolim). But the fact remains that, African literature has continued to programmatically enunciate the duplicity of African post-independence political arrangements and interrogate the idea of human existence and progress for the African person. Quite a number of recent African narratives feature children as protagonists. Some of these new African narratives—especially the debut novels—often exhibit traits associated with the *Bildungsroman*, a form which evolved from Germany and became popular in most Western countries in the nineteenth century. Considering the narrative structure of some of these African novels, Tanure Ojaide (33) notes that: “Most of the novels of the younger African immigrant writers often deal with the themes of coming of age”. Ebele Eko equally suggests in her essay on the new generation of Nigerian novelists that “these younger writers use their *narratives* to interpret their growing up experiences [...]” (emphasis mine 43).

The preponderance of the child-figure in recent African narratives is by no means fortuitous. The child-figure has artistically become a metaphor for calibrating the development of the continent as the development of the child is structurally constructed to metaphorically parallel that of the nation.<sup>1</sup> The child-figure in African literature has become an eloquent marker that writers deploy in order to appraise pressing postcolonial concerns like violence, identity politics and migration.

The child-figure in postcolonial Africa hardly goes through the normal developmental pattern associated with the African people before the incursion of Europe into Africa. I make this assertion because the impact of global challenges on, the bureaucratic repression and the failure of postcolonial African leadership, unequivocally transform the African child into an adult during the prime of their adolescence. Since the child continues to be estranged from childhood s/he apparently becomes an adult in childhood. Madelaine Hron (29) suggests that:

The child in African literature is always intrinsically enmeshed in a cultural and social community, and thus must somehow negotiate ethnic identity or social status in the course of the narrative. [...], it becomes apparent that the child’s quest for a sociocultural identity is inextricably linked to issues arising from postcolonialism and globalization, often manifested in the context of repression, violence or exploitation.

The subject of this essay does not specifically anchor on the dialectic of violence and politics in Africa, but it provides a conceptual grid to assess the question of identity and the child-figure in African narratives. The essay therefore, examines how a partially demented child-protagonist negotiates her identity in the absence of her parents and the comfort zone of a nuclear family in Goretti Kyomuhendo’s *Secrets No More*. This

will in turn bring to the fore how *Secrets No More* falls within the latitude of the *Bildungsroman*.

Andrew Armstrong asserts that “Kyomuhendo adopts the form of the *Bildungsroman*” but does not extrapolate the distinguishing features that bequeath the narrative the nomenclature besides the fact that it begins “with the protagonist Marina as a baby and [ends] with her second marriage”. The *Bildungsroman* as a narrative form spans beyond the protagonist being a baby and eventually getting married twice. Thus, to achieve my aim in this essay, I organized my argument around the possible violence of varied kinds performed on the body of the child and the family. I equally appraise how Marina constructs identity from the limited choices she is offered in a turbulent African space where parental agency and guidance are unavailable for the child to emulate models in order to construct her own identity.

The *Bildungsroman* as a narrative form evolved in Germany; it is traditionally regarded as “the novel of the development of a young, white, European man” (Caton 126). The English variant of the *Bildungsroman* connects moral, spiritual, and psychological maturation with the individual’s economic and social advancement, and imparts the lesson that finding a proper vocation is the path to upward mobility (Feng 4). Nadal M. Al-Mousa’s definition of the form is not far from the descriptions above. However, he suggests that the *Bildungsroman* is a type of novel in which action hinges on the fortunes of an ambitious young hero who struggles to live up to his goals against the negative forces of his environment. The typical hero in the novels of development is a male who “grows up in a humble family in the provinces, but, endowed with an adventurous spirit, leaves home to seek his fortune and realizes his ambitions” (223). From these definitions, it becomes glaring that the end point of the protagonist’s journey in the traditional form of the genre is harmonious. Interestingly, therefore, emphasis is placed on the primacy of a harmonious reconciliation and integration of the protagonist to his society.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795–96) is generally acknowledged as the prototypical example and model of the form. However, Jerome Buckley’s *Season of Youth* (17–8) provides a “broad outline” of “a typical (Victorian) *Bildungsroman* plot”:

A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts [...] ambitions [...] and new ideas [...]. He therefore, sometimes at a quite early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence) to make his way independently in the city. There his real “education” begins, not only his preparation for a career but also and often more importantly—his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others

the hero reappraise his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. His initiation complete, he may then visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice.

In a perceptive essay Tobias Boes conceptually broadens the latitude of the *Bildungsroman* when he argues that the form has primarily been regarded as a phenomenon of the 19th century, but that “[t]he rise of feminist, post-colonial and minority studies during the 1980s and 90s led to an expansion of the traditional *Bildungsroman* definition” (231). Boes’ description becomes a far cry from traditional definitions which exclusively focuses on the development of the male hero. Invariably, from Boes’ suggestion the *Bildungsroman* genre has expanded to include the development of, first the white (Western) female protagonist, and then also non-white ones. Boes argues further that in the 21st century the focus of studies in the 20th century novel of development has been geared toward minority and post-colonial literatures. Given that the *Bildungsroman* continues to flourish in minority and post-colonial writing on a global scale, “critics have begun to reconceptualize the modernist era as a period of transition from metropolitan-nationalist discourses to post-colonial and post-imperial ones” (Boes 240). Nadia Avendaño (67) equally suggests that the “*Bildungsroman* itself, in recent decades, has been transformed and resuscitated, not by males of the dominant culture in the West but by subaltern groups, thus functioning as the most salient genre for the literature of social outsiders, primarily women and minority groups.”

Kyomuhendo’s *Secrets No More* therefore, constitutes part of the expansion of the *Bildungsroman* within a postcolonial African context.

*Secrets No More* is set in both Rwanda and Uganda; two turbulent spaces in Africa’s recent history, the latter still grappling with the crisis of leadership and problem of insurgency, and the former a space where one of the most barbarous acts of savagery was enacted in the last decade of the twentieth century—the Rwandan genocide. The narrative begins with a flashback released through the prologue to specifically configure a genial ambience in the Bizimana family. The first child of the family has just arrived after a couple of years of waiting. Bizimana, a Hutu and serving Minister in the administration of President Juvenal Habyarimana; a Hutu, and his wife; Mukundane, could not hide their joy over the birth of their first child, Marina. Mukundane is permanently grief stricken before the birth of Marina. She hardly talks especially as she has once experienced a brutal ethnic clash which claimed all her siblings. What is left of her entire family now lives in Uganda as refugees. To ensure that his wife is psychologically and emotionally stable, Bizimana employs Chantal to keep her company. Chantal is more of a spy than a companion—a lady who is

consumed by the rage of ethnic intolerance and greed. Chantal's character appropriately matches that of the villain as Kyomuhendo uses her not just to foreground the 'logic of the enemy within or the worm in the nut',<sup>2</sup> but to reiterate that "What happened in Rwanda was not, as the Western media repeatedly suggested, a case of ethnic conflict; it was an organized attempt to eliminate an entire group of people" (Hitchcott 54). Hitchcott's assertion becomes very relevant if one considers the pains Chantal goes through just to have access to the Bizimanas. Kyomuhendo uses the Bizimana family as a narrative vent to demonstrate the magnitude and impact of the Rwandan genocide on the familial base; the smallest and most important unit of any society. The vivid description of how the soldiers destroy the Bizimana family and the corpses littering the streets and roads as Marina struggles to avoid being captured and killed by the soldiers, eloquently enunciate the inconsequentiality of human evil and sadism and the extent of damage done to the Rwandan nation. Having closely witnessed the gruesome murder of her family, Marina's psychological balance and mental development as a child become altered by violence.

The performance of violence on the bodies of Marina's parents and siblings reverberates in her subconscious and as such, life for her becomes a permanent present.<sup>3</sup> Seeing beyond these murders becomes a daunting challenge for Marina considering her age when she experiences the psychological pains inflicted on her by the Hutu soldiers. Consequently, the only way to construct an identity for herself is to see beyond and overcome the memory of the carnage. More so, the violent assault on her mother by Hutu soldiers has conditioned or confined her psyche to the present. The rape of her mother constantly configures in her psyche each time she struggles to move on. The narrator explicitly describes the scene of the rape, thereby establishing an immediacy which unambiguously becomes a permanent mental filmic re-enactment of the incidence in her psychological networking:

Marina felt a horrible nausea sweep over her. She wanted to rush to her mother and save her but her legs were cold and felt like logs of wood. She could not move them. As she watched, the Colonel struggled out of his trousers and stood there naked, his manhood obscenely pointing in front of him. In one swift movement, he was on top of Mukundane. She put up a feeble resistance but she might as well have reserved her energy. The two soldiers holding her down were too strong for her. Marina closed her eyes. She willed herself to move but her legs let her down. She opened her mouth to scream but no sound came out. She heard the fabric of her mothers (sic) night gown ripping and her eyes involuntarily flew open. She watched as the Colonel, with a vicious thrust of his body, entered her mother. Nausea rose to her throat like bile and she knew she was going to throw up any minute. Mukundane tried to push the Colonel away but only succeeded in igniting him the more. Like a possessed man, he began pounding at her. He slowed down briefly and looked in Bizimana's direction. Once you tell us where those guns are,

I will stop doing this to your wife,' he said breathlessly. But Bizimana's eyes were swollen—shut against the horrible scene in front of him. With renewed energy, the Colonel resumed the pounding. Mukundane curled her fingers into claws and lashed out at him. Marina heard him curse under his breath but he did not slow down. Mukundane screamed out as the Colonel seemed to tear at her insides. (*Secrets* 17)

The performance of the act of rape on her mother's body becomes the only visible picture that continues to configure in her psyche.

Rape is associated with male superiority over their female victims as "it is the quintessential act by which a male demonstrates to a female that she is conquered" (Brownmiller 49). *Secrets No More* amplifies the above assertion that the rape of Tutsi women by Hutu men is an eloquent statement of the insignificance of the Tutsi. Furthermore, the act of performing the rape with the husbands of the Tutsi women as witnesses signifies the marginal position of Tutsis within the Rwandan nation.

Thus rape becomes not just a "weapon of war and suppression" (Armstrong 266), it is equally an instrument for derogation and the insistence of the unacceptability of the humanity of the Tutsi and their total rejection as humans equal to any Hutu. The act of violent rape in the presence of the helpless husband makes the violated mere object items or objects in the society.

Kyomuhendo's subversion of the traditional *Bildungsroman* amplifies Joanna Sullivan's assertion that the twentieth-century African novel differs from the "Western novel" in part because its central focus is the community rather than a "heroic individual" (182). More so, it equally amplifies the "slipperiness of identity" (Nwakanma 10) in postcolonial African society. This is so if one considers the fact that the protagonist begins as a child struggling to come to terms with the existential crises of sustaining a psychological balance and moral sanity after witnessing the brutal murder of her entire family and the mutual violence enacted on her body by a trusted friend. The traditional form of the *Bildungsroman* focuses on a sane male protagonist and his struggle for identity. The plot structure of *Secrets No More* is not far from the Western variant, but Kyomuhendo uses a female protagonist who is partially demented to explore the politics of identity. Through this subversive rhetorical strategy, the child becomes an important locus to determine how the African person accesses the facilities of rights which make him/her human. Significantly, therefore, *Secrets No More* is a quintessential narrative that embodies how injuries are (un)consciously inflicted on the self by the self and others and how literary texts "negotiate the issues of violence and of remembering as a reconciliatory process" (Eke, Kruger and Mortimer 67). Pamela Reynolds (83) suggests that "children in Southern Africa often live on the edge of dreadful things—community violence, state oppression, warfare, family disintegration and extreme poverty". Although Reynolds is particular about a specific

sub-region within the African continent, her observation captures the question of existence when one considers how the African child negotiates life in the entire continent. The issues she highlights—community violence, state oppression, warfare, family disintegration and extreme poverty—are conditions that characterize the ugly realities of not only being a child in the postcolonial African context, but they touch upon the human condition. If children as Alcinda Honwana and Filip De Boeck (1) assert in their study constitute the majority of Africa's population the politics of national growth and development can be interrogated from the eyes of the child (see Okuyade).

The traditional *Bildungsroman* emphasizes the change the protagonist experiences as he is eventually reconciled to a society whose moral and ethical standards become the barometer with which to measure the success of the growth process or *bildung*. Change therefore, becomes the measure for determining a successful *bildung*. Change in this context is a dual phenomenon—first, as a healthy developmental process which can only be realized through a balancing of both biological development (physical development) and secondly, as psychological growth. Although the *Bildungsroman* has over time, become so lithe that most narratives that feature a growing child can easily be incorporated into the tradition, there are certain definite markers one can easily deploy to gauge the form. I suggest that Kyomuhendo's *Secrets no More* is problematic not only in the sense that it incorporates forms that address the complexities of ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality in a contemporary postcolonial African society plagued by human evil and sadism (Rwanda and Uganda), but also because it equally explores the development of a character who is suffering from partial dementia as a result of human bestiality provoked by the inability of humanity to recognize the dynamics of "difference" (Chakrabarty 20). Thus, this ethnic refusal to come to terms with the humanity of the other, creates room for hate, greed, the ideology of ethnic superiority and premeditation. The narrator makes this point very explicit at the end of the first phase of Marina's, growth process: "The girl was not only sick but also deranged. "What horrors has the poor girl been subjected to?" Father Marcel wondered" (27). Consequently, one of the primary issues that make *Secrets No More* subversive and a little problematic with regard to the concepts of acculturation and socialization is: in which society would a character suffering from psychosis be incorporated? The above question becomes fundamental especially as the protagonist has lost the gift of speech as a result of the traumatic experience of the murder of her entire family, orchestrated by an individual the family trusted. More so, the traditional form of the *Bildungsroman* engenders reconciliation, integration and socialization as essential features at the end point of the developmental process.

Apollo Amoko remarks that "Like its European counterpart, the African *Bildungsroman* focuses on the formation of young protagonists in an uncertain world" (200). However, the postcolonial variants of the *Bildungsroman* differ from the

traditional Western forms—the German and the Victorian English. The African coming-of-age narrative does not emphasize self-realization and the harmonious reconciliation between the protagonist and his society, as the prototypical Western *Bildungsroman* does. Instead, it “expresses a variety of forces that inhibit or prevent the protagonist from achieving self-realization. These forces include exile or dislocation, problems of transcultural interaction, war, violence, poverty, and the difficulties of preserving personal, familial, and cultural memories” (Okuyade 12).

Compared to the protagonists of some female African *Bildungsroman* like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*, Tsitsi Dagarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* to mention a few, Marina’s chances of survival are slim, given the fact that she is only a child when she loses everything associated with home and family, coupled with her state of mental instability. Furthermore, she has an even less advantageous starting point due to her having had to struggle against a double existential crisis; not only being a girl-child, but a Tutsi child; a target group viewed as viral or cancerous, hence the label *inyenzi / inyenzikazi*.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Marina the protagonist of the narrative has an even tougher starting point, unlike the protagonists in most female *Bildungsroman*. Being an African girl-child from an unwanted ethnic minority group thus makes her subject even more disadvantageous. Her being a poor black targeted orphan is in fact the very opposite of a desirable starting point. From the very beginning, Marina becomes a victim of physical abuse as well as mental cruelty, and begins her development against all odds, as “Development is a relative concept colored by many interrelated factors, including class, history and gender” (Abel 4). Although most narratives on the Rwandan genocide rely on “documentary realism” and sociological witnessing (Applegate 76) in order to align the plot structure with the facticity or exactitude of history, *Secrets No More* does not wholly fall within such a tradition, considering the function of characterization in the narrative. The deployment of real names associated with the genocide like “Augustin Bizimana”, Minister of Defence under Habyarimana and “Tharcisse Renzaho”, Colonel in the *Forces Armées Rwandaises* adds a documentary dimension to the narrative. However, Kiyomuhendo is concerned more with the complex issue of identity construction and reconciliation in Rwanda and then Uganda through the growth process of Marina. Both issues are foregrounded in the narrative through the protagonist; a survivor of the Rwandan genocide and a victim of mutual assault in Uganda, who struggles to reconcile herself to her traumatic past by her eventual integration into the society and family.

Marina fits vibrantly into the portrait of a *Bildungsroman* protagonist if one considers Buckley’s assertion on the place of the father in the form: “[t]he growing child, as he appears in these novels, more often than not will be orphaned or at least fatherless”. Invariably, if the father is not dead, like Adichie’s Protagonist in *Purple Hibiscus* or Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, he will presumably be repelling and trying to

“thwart” the child’s “strongest drives and fondest desires” (19). She is an orphan who has been rejected and banished from the space she calls home and the need to find the self becomes urgent. The quest for self-realization usually begins with a journey, which is both psychological and physical. It is like a border crossing from childhood to adulthood. Marina’s crossing is psychophysical, especially because besides her mental development, she ends up in a camp in Uganda. Journeying therefore becomes an important motif in the narrative of growth since “[o]ne of the ways we experience the individuation process is as a hero journey” in which we may find ourselves directly or indirectly “winding our way toward maturity” (Evans Smith qtd in Doub 455). Rita Fielski amplifies the above claim when she argues that “a shift in physical space can be central to the process of self-discovery” (134). However, Marina is compelled to journey out of the comfort zone of her home to no specific destination because of ethnic intolerance and greed and the vagaries of human existence.

Consequently, *Secrets No More* explores what Franco Moretti (15) describes in *The Way of the World* as “the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*”. As noted earlier, the concepts of socialization and integration become a little problematic in this narrative as Marina has suffered partial dementia as a result of the loss of her entire family. At the camp, her mouth hardly functions, just like Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* and Zhizha in Yvonne Vera’s *Under the Tongue*.<sup>5</sup> She is equally unwilling to share the narrative of the brutal murder of her family with any one, not even Father Marcel, the kind-hearted priest who did not only bring her to the camp en-route to the orphanage, but took the responsibility of nursing her back to normalcy. The total refusal to share her traumatic experience on the Rwandan genocide complicates the possibility of a successful rehabilitation for Marina. For the greater part of the narrative, the narrator highlights the inconsistencies in Marina’s psychological networking as she struggles to disgorge her feelings. Thus, what Kyomuhendo does is to visibly make the psychological wounds incurred from the brutal murder of Marina’s family occupy a large chunk of the protagonist’s psychic networking, which explains Marina’s taciturnity. Marina evaluates everything around her through her mental crisis and as such the human world for her becomes empty. This constant return to the haunting past aptly captures Alexandre Dauge-Roth’s assertion which explains how “survivors embody a disturbing memory, which revives a chapter of Rwanda’s history that most people will like to see closed, while its aftermath still constitutes an open wound for those who have survived” (8).

Another factor that silences her is the issue of survival guilt. She wishes she died along with the rest of the family especially as she only helplessly witnessed the act and did not attempt to do anything to rescue her mother during the rape scene—as if she had the energy to take on armed soldiers. Escaping from the systematic slaughter at home gets her mired in the brutal past as she is unable to disconnect herself from

the haunting memories of the past. Invariably, Kyomuhendo's major concern is to make glaring the dire consequences of her female protagonist's bizarre experience; that is, the complexity of the way her mind, her whole being reacts to this unwholesome experience. In the exploration of her dilemma, the writer plumbs into the depths of the victim's traumatized psyche in order to expose her inner turmoil. Hence, she lays bare Marina's thought processes; this is a technique Carolyn Martin Shaw designates as "exteriorization of internal monologues" (25).

As already noted, Marina's psychic networking has been altered by the total annihilation of her family coupled with the genocide, as she equally notices that besides the murder of her family, corpses litter the streets and roads as she struggles to flee the enchanted space which was once her home but now contoured with aftermath of the carnage. Usually, the female protagonist of the female *Bildungsroman* leaves the primordial base to a temporary habitation where she learns the act of becoming a woman. While at the temporary base, the protagonist works out modalities to reconcile her experience at the primordial base and those of her encounters at the new site, with emphasis on what is learned at the familial base as the yardstick to measure every other encounter. The primordial base offers her an identity that is naturally transient. Thus the home becomes the first site where identity begins to form. This is what gives the home the representation of the site where "one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity" (Chatterjee 624), begins its formation. Since the outside world is characterized by the struggle for survival and unmitigated desperation to entrench one's position regardless of the consequences of hurting others in the bid to stay alive, the primordial base becomes the site where the facilities for growth and the formation of identity are acquired. Chatterjee further conceptualizes the dialectic between the home and the outside world and their implication for identity construction when he asserts that, "The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme" (624). For Marina the institutions of home and family are threatened because of her recent traumatic experience. One will easily notice this when she rejects the product of her rape by Matayo. Marina's daughter, Rosaria is by no means evil, but the process of her conception is for Marina, because it parallels the rape of Mukundane and the death of the Bizimanas in the hands of the Hutu soldiers

Marina's inability to live beyond the psychic wounds inflicted upon her through the brutal murder of her family becomes the most daunting challenge to her struggle to reconstruct a new identity in the new space where she lives alongside other children with similar experiences. Physically she has achieved a separation, considering the fact that she has been removed from the space or site of the violence. However, her struggle to disconnect with the psychology of the memory of the crisis itself is partially inhibited by her refusal to erase the actual violence from her bruised memory. The traumatized need not struggle to run away from the object of the trauma

since it embodies “an impossible history within them or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (Caruth 5). Total separation must be achieved for an initiatee to get incorporated into a new society. Furthermore, Marina’s biological development helps her overcome her stagnation in the in-between space—the violence of loss which cuts off Marina from the real world and the physical separation from the scene of the genocide. Both crises are articulated in her inability to move beyond the continuous present. This action of disconnection from the real world is enhanced by the regular snapshot of the trauma reconfiguring in her psyche through mares and dreams. In the novel, Marina has been brutally wounded psychologically and as a result suffers compulsion to communicate coherently or to deploy non-verbal strategies to testify to the violence she has suffered. At this point she is at the threshold, or what Stephen Bigger describes as the “*limen*, [...] the key to their passage or transition from one room [state] to another” (emphasis in the original, 2). However, her physical growth unconsciously incorporates her into her new society. Over a year after her arrival at the orphanage, Marina still keeps to herself, refusing to let anyone have access to her past, until “She woke up to find her dress marked with blood drops. When she attempted to walk, more blood oozed from her private parts and trickled down her thighs. It was warm and dark red. Marina screamed out aloud and some girls came to see what had happened to her.” (41) The ritual that accompanies Marina’s initiation from girlhood to womanhood signified by her experiencing menstrual flow becomes a powerful propeller for her transformation:

Sister Bernadette cut the metre into small pieces which she folded neatly. She placed one piece under Marina’s private parts and told her to keep the rest and change the clothes whenever she bathed. [...] When Marina took the first piece of cloth Sister Bernadette had inserted in her, she was surprised when she was told to hand it over to an older girl who was seated on a chair. “But sister, it is all soaked in blood and it ... it ... smells awful,” Marina said, shocked. “I know that Marina. Here, give it to me”. Marina unwrapped the piece of cloth from a polythene bag and gave it to Sister Bernadette. “Remove your blouse,” Sister Bernadette told the girl seated on the chair. The girl did as she was told. Sister Bernadette began rubbing the blood-soaked cloth on the girl’s back, then under her breasts. Some of the blood trickled onto her stomach. Sister Bernadette explained that the girl had ringworm and the used pad was the only medicine which could cure her (42–3).

This feminine ritual of incorporation into the community of sisterhood through the monthly flow is very significant in the growth process of Marina. The ritual essentialises the importance of a coalition of individuals who struggle to overcome similar challenges. Marina eventually realizes that it is imperative for her to share her fears and anxieties with the other girls. Through this realization, she hopes to be restored to the peace she once enjoyed with her family before the genocide. She

eventually opens up when she understands the fact that she need not hide any longer. If the waste from her body becomes a curative lotion for a fellow girl in the orphanage, it therefore means there was nothing to hide. The narrator vividly captures the above assertion when observing the dual purification ritual, where the rag which drenches Marina's blood from the menstrual flow is used to cure another girl of ringworm: "With all the rituals completed, Marina was initiated into the club of women. [...] And with that, and perhaps the strong relationship which was growing between her and Stella Maris, Marina seemed to have shed some of her inhibitions." (44)

Marina has tremendously learned about the anatomy of the female body and the process of socialization without attending a formal school system. She becomes totally involved at the orphanage with different forms of duties like reading Bible lessons during church services. Her development becomes visible, as she puts her pains behind her; everybody at the orphanage easily notices that she has transformed suddenly. As she achieves mental balance by gradually associating with the other girls, her elegance and beauty become exceptional too. Her gradual understanding of her new home coupled with some of the familial lessons she learned at home before the genocide enables Marina to perform a minor miracle by rescuing a calf from jaws of death. This is another aspect of her informal learning that she displays at the orphanage. Jerome Buckley makes emphatic the significance of the school without walls in his study and suggests that an individual can grow up and gradually discover who he or she is through experience. The informal form of education maybe acquired through experience that affords the individual the opportunity to be engaged in communal exercises like work or play, travel, nature, adolescent romance (Buckley viii, 232). Communal engagements are vital tools that facilitate bonding; hence Marina recounts the pains and injuries inflicted on her by the gruesome murder of her family:

Marina blew her nose, not knowing where and how to start. It had been a year now since she had been at the orphanage; such a long time, yet in a way it seemed just like yesterday when she had stood in their sitting room in Rwanda staring at her family lying dead. "My parents, brother and sister were all killed," she began. At first, they were inane disjointed words that just spilled from her lips, but after a few sentences, she gained confidence and spoke more firmly. She told Matayo everything she could remember and he did not once interrupt her. When she had finished, she felt like a heavy load had been lifted from her shoulder. (*Secrets* 50-1)

At this point, Marina has unconsciously released herself from the cataclysm associated with the genocide and the slaughter of her family by Hutu soldiers. The act of narrating her pains is a potent tonic for psychological restoration and cathartic release for an identity constructed from a traumatic experience. At this point she attains psychological liberation. However, her new state of internal peace is short lived, as Matayo fails to function as a trusted confidant. For the developing girl-child, her

choices are usually limited as her development is circumscribed within the grand narrative of the patriarchal order. Invariably, one will notice that when it comes to issues bordering on education and choices of occupation, the women in *Secrets No More* have no room to choose between profession and domesticity, where men do not need to make any choice at all. I make this point because it also influences the idea of sexuality. There are remarkable distinctions between the novel of development in both male and female texts. For a male, sexual experience is something positive, that is “another step toward maturity” whereas for a female “the move makes a complete change of status [...]. Losing one’s virginity unwisely seldom determines the eventual life of the male protagonist; it is the stuff of ostracism, madness, and suicide for a female, however” (Wagner 65–6). Consequently, journeys and isolation for the girl-child are frequently internal as they face the personal tragedy of being different, while the conflicts faced by young men are most often physical ones. The intimacy Marina begins to share with Matayo is betrayed almost immediately:

Her fingers felt soft on Matayo’s bare skin and they had a soothing effect on him. He did not want her to stop. He closed his eyes and something seemed to snap in his head. He felt his body go on fire and a blinding urge to make love to Marina took hold of him. The wine he had taken, coupled with the long day’s excitement had taken their toll. He was like a person in a trance and some devil seemed to have entered him and was now responsible for his feelings. His manhood began to harden. He grabbed Marina and clasped her to his chest then pressed her body to his aroused manhood [...] she tried to struggle out of his arms, but he was too strong for her. He pinned her to the ground, then with one arm, he began unzipping his trousers. In one swift movement, Matayo has removed the trousers and was trying to part Marina’s thighs using his legs [...]. Matayo was holding his elongated stiff manhood in one hand, while he used the other hand to keep Marina pinned to the ground. He began forcing himself inside her. Marina’s feeble resistance only managed to ignite Matayo the more. Marina felt an excruciating pain tear through her body as Matayo entered her. He pumped at her and probed inside her with his enormous manhood. (*Secrets* 58–9)

After the incidence of the rape she returns to the initial melancholic state of emptiness. This is because the rape invariably becomes a blockade to her new found inner peace and an inhibition for a symbiotic bonding process. The rape is a symbolization of intimate tyranny orchestrated by the patriarchy to keep women in a leash and contain their growth and freedom. This act makes her regress into silence and accelerates her relapse into psychological strain once again. This is so because all through the moment of the rape it is only the cinematographic recurrence of her mother’s rape that ironically configures in her psyche: her mother “spread-eagled on the floor and the Colonel on top of her [...] along with the agony-filled sounds her mother had made” (*Secrets* 58).

Matayo's sexual assault on Marina is a betrayal of trust, considering the fact that Marina's act of narrating the catastrophic experience of her past is geared towards freeing herself from the shattering history of the brutal loss of her family. Essentially, it is the pain or rather, the feeling of relief from pain that pushes Marina to confide such traumatic memories to Matayo. This intimate betrayal demolishes Marina's sense of self-worth which she has been constructing for herself over time in her stay at the orphanage. Consequently, the rape re-scars her memory, weakens her ego and self-esteem, and above all, it depersonalizes her. Abasi Kiyimba observes that Matayo's rape of Marina, more of a "response to a spontaneous sexual urge under the influence of alcohol", while that of her mother is more of "a tool of organised and systematic torture and humiliation," Kiyimba has moreover, suggested that the latter rape, when dialectically appraised "in the broader framework of patriarchy as a system" is "a symbolic demonstration of the extent of female vulnerability". Marina's rape by Matayo traumatises her as she becomes doubly scarred. The double scar vibrantly explains the nature of her trauma which Edgar Fred Nabutanyi describes thus: "The trauma she experiences during both the genocide and her later rape scars Marina's adult life, rendering her incapable of establishing meaningful relationships with her daughter and husband" (106).

In the female *Bildungsroman*, the girl has trouble finding a suitable mentor. Fraiman states that the "mothers are usually either dead or deficient models, and the lessons of older men are apt to have voluptuous overtones". The female protagonist "may spend the whole novel in search of a positive maternal figure" but in the end the only person that will be her mentor is the man that will become her husband (6). Fraiman's assertion clearly captures the identity of the mothers in some recent female postcolonial African narratives which fall within the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*. Examples of such narratives include: *Purple Hibiscus*, *Sky-High Flames*, *Nervous Conditions*, *Everything Good Will Come* and *Skyline*. The mother figures in these narratives are present but docile as their inertia prevents their daughters from constructing an identity from the personality of the mothers. However, the absence of a mother or mentor compounds Marina's grief as there is nobody that intimate with her to confide in.

Marina's development is disturbingly cyclical, a constant return to the starting point. Formal education for her is chaotic as she never completes schooling. She becomes a student permanently. Her education is truncated by the genocide while still in Rwanda. Her rape by Matayo diminishes her sense of self-worth and the identity she had constructed for herself with her own bricks. Her only option to survive the new injury inflicted on her by the rape is to move on. Thus when Father Marcel fulfils his promise by sending her to Hoima to continue her education, she jumps at the offer not minding the fact that she was going to start afresh. Marina's growth process especially the aspect of schooling is marked by iteration and continual journeying rather than by stable academic resident studentship. As a

student, Marina is trapped in the threshold because of her inability to cross the borderline between classes in school.

Considering the issue of sexuality, male heterosexual adventures are privileged and seen as something positive which gives them agency that enhances their growth process. Fraiman referring to Buckley (17) who opines that “at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting” are potent markers of male *Bildungsromane*. For the female, however, “sex plays a less positive role”, because if it is sometimes performed outside wedlock, it may eventually create a sense of discontent for the female if the union turns sour. Ngũgĩ’s female protagonist in *Devil on the Cross* and Abani’s in *Becoming Abigail* easily come to mind here. Marina’s rape therefore, reinforces this position.

Unaware of the dire consequences of the act of rape, she manages to settle into her new space at the community school at Hoima. By the end of the second term it becomes clear that she is pregnant—a situation which compels her to abandon school yet again. Marina becomes disenchanted after the birth of her child. Father Marcel and Sister Bernadette decide to keep news of Marina’s pregnancy and delivery secret in order not to compound her grief at the orphanage on the one hand and to shield themselves from possibility of being identified as failures on the other hand. This is because Marina’s pregnancy occurred at the orphanage. As guardians to the orphans and other children at the orphanage and Catholic representatives of the church, Father Marcel and Sister Bernadette are supposed to be responsible for the moral development of the children and the pregnancy of a teenage girl is by no means celebratory for the church. The pregnancy is without doubt a major moral-religious catastrophe capable of attracting derisive responses from the church and the village. Consequently Father Marcel intensifies his search for a guardian for Marina outside the orphanage. He successfully convinces the Magezis to take Marina with them as they prepare to return to the city. Once again Marina is on the road. The road for Marina becomes a metaphor for new beginnings and endless journeys. Although she always ends up being trapped in the in-between space, the road offers her an escape and facilitates a transient identity through which she expresses and experiences freedom from a dominant society that constantly truncates her development.

Changing base for Marina becomes therapeutic for her development. After the birth of Rosaria, Marina becomes grief stricken. However when Sister Bernadette recounts her own travails as a young woman, a little load of pain is lifted from Marina’s shoulder. Narrating her pains makes Marina realize that human suffering is a universal phenomenon. The act of narration by Sister Bernadette equally “reflects the ambiguous relationship between survivors and their memories: they need to tell their stories in order to come to terms with what has happened” (Hitchcott 82). Hence when the offer to go start afresh with the Magezis is presented to her, she takes it without questioning the rationale behind the decision. For most heroes of the *Bildungsroman*,

the city plays a double role in the protagonist's life: "it is both the agent of liberation and a source of corruption" (Morreti 20). For Marina, the city is very different from the orphanage at the country side. She is constantly indoors until she is introduced to George who eventually marries her. The secret of the existence of her child and George's philandering escapades with other women incontrovertibly magnify her silence as she becomes estranged in matrimony. Marriage fails to provide her with the security and mental stability and agency she seeks badly.

George's infidelity makes marriage disenchanting for Marina. However, Dee's sexual encounters with Marina expose her to new discoveries—her sexuality and the importance of asserting the self. Fraiman suggests that female protagonist in the narrative of growth avoids sex outside matrimony (until the twentieth century) in order to prevent "things" from happening to her. The woman's "paradoxical task is to see the world while avoiding the world's gaze" (Fraiman 6, 7). Fraiman's assertion aptly captures the liberatory quality sex outside marriage provides a completely domesticated wife. Although she refuses to elope with or marry Dee when George discovers her infidelity, Marina's sexual escapades with him liberates her from her initial sexual frigidity and introduces her to the mutual respect derivable from the man-woman relationship.

Marina's pilgrimage, however, is individually focused: she moves toward the self that continues to elude her and finally achieves individuation through autonomy and independence. As the novel reaches its denouement, Marina experiences a kind of inner love. The love for the self which is made bold by the zeal to help other individuals who may have suffered one form of trauma or the other survive their bruised identity and cushion the overbearing force of their scared memory. This new feeling is characterized by an aura of epiphany which is not borne out of pity and the agony of Magezi's impotence, or the helplessness of Rosaria who lacks normal parenting for a healthy development. Marina's choice to start all over is predicated on the importance of the family as a counter-psycho mechanism for overcoming emotional and psychological stressor. Rather than eloping with Dee, Marina settles for Mr Magezi, a far older man who needs the energy and compassion of Marina, having suffered a terrible betrayal in the hands of his late wife through her act of infidelity coupled with his inability to procreate. Although, Magezi is as vulnerable as Marina, becoming a couple will afford both characters the possibility of renegotiating their identities. Consequently, marriage offers them another opportunity for a fresh start, and enough yardage to purge themselves of their pains tucked away in their bruised memories. This is where the title of the novel is derived—laying bare the secrets tearing the mental fabric of both characters.

Learning to love again, an emotion she lost as a child with the gruesome murder of her family, becomes the most potent marker of her development as a woman. The family she once lost is now resurrected through her marriage to a father-figure, Magezi,

the head of the new family like her father Bizimana, and her acceptance of Rosaria; her daughter who she once loathed because of the mode of her conception. Rosaria offers Marina the opportunity of playing the mother-figure, a trait she exhibits while still a child when nursing her younger siblings before the genocide. Without doubt, Marina grows in the course of the story from the pitiful orphan of the opening pages to the sensible happy woman of the epilogue. Though vulnerable, she is steadfast; willing to share her love with her new family.

After leaving George shortly before he commits suicide as a result of his incapacitation from the auto-crash, Marina develops the strength to love compulsively. When the opportunity to begin a new family stares at her in the face, she seizes it completely. Her decision to marry Magezi and be responsible for Rosaria opens the floodgate for the discovery of her other self, her portrait as a woman and mother. At the end of the novel, Marina is older and wiser than she was at the beginning. Marina finally reaches the pinnacle of her development because she does not act or pretend to be stable; she has achieved stability. She has developed from a weak, vulnerable and empty girl and a voiceless submissive wife into a strong woman who controls her own life. Marina's ability to develop in spite of being subject to a double existential crisis of being an African girl-child from a target group in a society where the phallic dictates of the patriarchy determine how the female child constructs her identity, makes *Secrets No More* a bold example of the African Female *Bildungsroman*. At the end of the novel, Marina has become not only a woman, she has developed so much that she exhibits signs of all the criteria for having achieved womanhood. She has grown up tremendously (not just acting as though she has), she is in charge of a new family, she has a home, and above all, she achieves a new self and the gift of love. She loves her new family, she loves the world, she loves her daughter, Rosaria and, ultimately, she loves herself.

The thrust of this essay has been to demonstrate how *Secrets No More* falls within the tradition of the *Bildungsroman* or a novel that chronicles the process by which characters enter the adult world regardless of the problematic of the protagonist's childhood derangement occasioned by the loss of the idea of home. Although the novel offers a microcosmic examination of that point where gender, sexual experience, ethnic experience, and self-image intersect, the grand narrative centres on the transition process of the protagonist and how the process is negotiated. In sum, what makes the protagonists of the *Bildungsroman* stand out is the eventual discovery of the self, which creates room for independent decision making and the choices they make to sustain their new identity. For Buckley, the crucial task for the hero is to come to terms with himself or herself. Marina at the end achieves independence and self-knowledge. These are the basic assets that bequeath her the strength of choice and decision making and how to uphold the choices and decisions she makes—the choice to love, re-marry and settle as a wife and mother.

Usually the primary goal of the protagonist in the *Bildungsroman* is not only to reach a desired destination. The destination is most times not physical (since it straddles the sacred and the profane), but the need to come to terms with the self. The import of reaching the destination is that in the end the protagonist's initiation becomes whole; s/he achieves independence and a measure of self-knowledge and can return home to where it all began. The return to the primordial base offers the protagonist an opportunity to re-evaluate the self. For Marina, her familial or primordial base is the orphanage.

Narratives of growth essentially give expression to how the child-figure who functions as protagonist discovers the self through identity negotiations encapsulated within a broader frame work of a society where s/he engages in the process of transcending childhood or crossing the border between childhood and adolescence and adolescence and adulthood. The process of transition is not only arduous; it is sometimes negotiated outside the security of family and the airy enchantment of the primordial base. Ultimately, development is not only negotiated in phases, it is a continuous transitional process. However, Marina's development peaks at the point where she does not only rediscover herself—a discovery reinforced in her ability to decide how she hopes to assert her femininity, since her identity from birth has all along been sharpened and regulated by others. She reconciles herself to her circumstances as she assumes new responsibilities. At the end she is no longer influenced by others, but influences the identity of the people around her, more importantly, Magezi who eventually becomes her husband. At the end the reader who has accompanied the protagonist from the very beginning of her turbulent voyage eventually comes to terms with the fact that it is not reaching the destination that counts for the protagonist, but the lessons learned in the process of journeying. This is so because it is not only the education of the protagonist that is vital; that of the reader is equally crucial, because it is a novel of education. The traditional plot of the *Bildungsroman* gives expression to how a young, white, male hero achieves reconciliation and integration into the society. However, *Secrets No More* revises the genre by addressing the multiple layers of oppression and crises confronting the protagonist. Kyomuhendo creates a character that is female and suffers partial dementia from childhood, as a result of genocide and sexual assault. By doing so, she extends the frontiers of the form to reiterate the fact that the African template of the coming-of-age narrative does not emphasize self-realization and the harmonious reconciliation between the protagonist and his society as the traditional *Bildungsroman* does. Instead, it expresses a variety of forces that inhibit or prevent the protagonist from achieving self-realization.

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### Notes

1. National development and growth may not only be determined by infrastructural developments, but by human access to such infrastructures.
2. Among the Urhobo of Nigeria, misfortunes within the family or the home are usually associated with internal factors or forces within. It is believed that whenever anything goes wrong in the familial or primordial base, somebody within must have given vital information to the enemy outside which eventually facilitates the crisis within. Thus a damaged nut does not get rotten from the outside, but from the insidious parasitic worm lodged inside the nut. This equally parallels the fact that when rats invade a home, it is the rats within that cartelize the process of the invasion. This is so because the rat outside has no possible knowledge of the abundance or absence of food in a particular home, it is the rat within that provides the vital information and invitation for the one outside on when and how to strike. This dialogical metaphor aptly captures the relationship between Chantal and the Bizimanas and the eventual destruction of the family, with emphasis on the fact that the genocide was by no means a coincidence, but a well thought-out scheme geared towards destroying a perceived enemy.
3. By “permanent present” I mean the clock of her life stopped ticking as a result of the gruesome murder of her family. For Marina the future becomes inconsequential, the world ended with the elimination of her family. Thus her biggest burden is to move on with her life. Like Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, Marina becomes psychologically confined to that moment of grief.
4. During the period of the genocide, the radio programmes frequently referred to the Tutsi as *Inyenzi*, (male), *Inyenkazi* (female) a Kinyarwanda word meaning cockroach. Although the word is derogatorily used by the Hutus during the genocide, as a marker for othering or demonizing the Tutsis, A. J. Kuperman remarks that “The Inyanzi, cockroaches in Rwanda was used by the Tutsi refugees who tried to take power in 1961 when they launched attacks in Uganda and Burundi and they earned the name for their propensity to return repeatedly at night despite attempts to stamp them out. The name carried disrespect when used by the Hutu rebels in 1994. The name cockroach was adapted by the rebels themselves “as a symbol of their relentlessness” (7).
5. The pressures and the overbearing nature of the familial base regulated by the phallogocentric order of the patriarchy depersonalize and reduce the voices of the female characters (Daughters) to whispers, stutters and silence.

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