

Return to Roots Phenomenon and the Identity of the Youth: Reflections from Zayyan's *We Are All Birds of Uganda*

Ifeoma Cassandra **Nebeife**

Department of English and Literary Studies,
Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria.

Corresponding author: ifeoma@fuwukari.edu.ng,

Abstract

Africa remains an irreplaceable home to African migrants, and indeed the Asian migrants of Ugandan origin. This is in terms of the healing of wounds and prosperity it brings to them. Its beauty cannot be compared to the listlessness of living in the West as a black or coloured immigrant who is seen as a racial minority. The youth also suffer from identity crisis in making a choice between remaining in the West following forceful expulsion from Africa or returning to Africa, which they view as home. Hafsa Zayyan's *We Are All Birds of Uganda* (2021) has been interpreted as a tale of migration, cosmopolitanism, Ugandan history, the history of Asian presence in Uganda, British colonialism, forced expulsion, and family relationships. However, enough has not been done on the in-depth semantic reading of the text as a portrayal of the daily challenges of Black and Asian youths living in the West who have formal origins in Uganda. This paper employs the postcolonial theory alongside secondary sources of data to examine the trajectories of colonialism responsible for underdevelopment, political and economic crisis in some African countries, which reinforce migration and subsequent youth crisis. It identifies lack of good governance, basic infrastructure, insecurity, corruption, eurocentrism, and indophobia among others, as huge obstacles hindering African migrants' successful return to their roots.

Keywords: Return, Indophobia, Youth, Identity, South Asian, Uganda.

Introduction

The British colonization of Uganda between 1894 and 1962 facilitated the importation of South Asians from India, who were positioned as intermediaries between colonial administrators and Africans in both commercial and administrative activities. These South Asians also made up the labour force and mercenaries required by the British administration. The British regarded them as more effective than the Africans, whom they viewed as indolent and rebellious. Over time, these South Asians, as well as some Pakistanis, formed a small community in Uganda. After their contracts with the British expired, many remained in Uganda, investing their savings in diverse business ventures. For instance, after the end of the railway construction contract of 1902, the Asian contractors remained in East Africa. As their businesses prospered, they brought their families and relatives to join them as immigrant employees and associates.

According to James (1975, p.229):

The Asians' great liability well has been their visibility. As a mercantile class dealing with African peasants, often as the representative of foreign capital, they played an all too conspicuous role in the local economy; when

Africans were faced with falling prices for their crops or rising costs in the towns, the agents who they confronted were the Asian middlemen.

Furthermore, economic asymmetries, manifested in buyer-seller and employer (Indian)-employee (Ugandan) relations, along with cultural differences and matrimonial taboos, hindered intermarriage between the Indians and Africans. The Indians prefer to marry from their community or at most from the mixed races. Barot, (1975, p. 18), emphasizes the social confinement of the Indians, thus:

Although Bakuli is often regarded as an African area, social contact between Indians and Africans, apart from their brief encounters in shops, is non-existent. During my stay, there was no single instance of an Indian knowing an African as an equal or a friend. Separation and distance between the two sides is a marked feature of life in Bakuli.

These South Asians are known for their hard work and openness to civilisation and development. These skills gave them an edge over the African Ugandans, especially in business. Rather than emulate them,

the African Ugandans often expressed envy and resentment toward the Indian community, which at times manifests in hostility, or discrimination, especially with respect to their skin colour. This is notwithstanding how long they and their children have lived on Ugandan soil.

Hostility toward these South Asians culminated in Idi Amin's dictatorial regime (1971–1979) expelling them from Uganda, forcing them to abandon their accumulated assets, which were subsequently taken over by African Ugandans. This act is referred to as Indophobia. Indophobia is an anti-Indian sentiment by way of negative feelings and hatred towards India, its people, and its culture. Following their forced expulsion from Uganda, many South Asians sought refuge in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. This is because a lot of them no longer have ties with India. Africa has become the only home they know. They formed a community of mostly Indians in Leicester, for example. When Amin died, some of those Asians who were born in Uganda went back. Nevertheless, others who remained in the West continued to face some other kinds of racism and listlessness in places like London. Although approximately 80,000 South Asians were expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin in 1972, the less than 1% who

returned in the 1980s and 1990s came to contribute nearly 65% of the country's tax revenues.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives are pursued in this paper:

- i. to examine how the return-to-roots movement shapes the identities of Black and Asian youths as represented in the text.
- ii. to analyze the effects of identity crises on these youths upon their return home as depicted in the text.
- iii. to assess how identity crises influence the broader lives and aspirations of the affected youths as portrayed in the text.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts postcolonial theory as the basis of its analysis. This is because Zayyan's *We Are All Birds of Uganda* (2021), is situated within the postcolonial fictional writing. Furthermore, postcolonialism aims at gauging the continued impact of the colonial experience on the former colonies and their peoples, particularly in socio-economic, cultural, and political terms. This inclination is reflected in the study of the literature that has been produced in

and on the former colonies up to today. The postcolonial interest in the emigration of African and Asian peoples to Europe, America, and Canada has been strongly established in African literature. The literature on this subject not only traces experiences emanating from these dislocations and disconnections on the African continent, but also captures them in the country of the colonizer.

The concept of the 'other' is central and important to the understanding of postcolonialism as formalized by Emmanuel Levinas. According to Okoye, (2013, p.9), "Other" is used to refer to a person, group, or people other than one's self, group, or people. It is a primary tool and state of mind in the social practice of exclusion, segregation, stigmatization, demonization, and dehumanization of groups". Egudu (1978, p.2) contends that, "[T]he artist is a member of society, and the content and style of his or her work are affected by social reality". Zayyan Hafsan in her work shows a deep concern for the social realities that characterize a postcolony. For Ashcroft et al., (1989, p.9), "a major feature of postcolonial literatures is the concern with "place and displacement" which engenders both the "crises of identity" and "the concern with the development or recovery of an

effective identifying relationship between self and place". Postcolonialism is a form of race and ethnicity-bound theory, which counters the 'center' in order to give the 'margin' its own true voice and identity in the imperial order of things. This paper focuses on the dimension of colonial imposition and dispossession in postcolonialism. The British colonial powers reshaped landscapes and drew arbitrary borders while importing South Asians into Uganda as intermediaries, a process that produced generations of Ugandan-born South Asians. Consequently, at independence, the African Ugandans displaced the indigenous South Asian Indians through Indophobic violence. They were forcefully expelled, and their lands, businesses, and resources were seized. This uprooted and severed their traditional connections to Uganda until the coming of President Obote. Hence, loss of belonging and search for identity as aspects of postcolonialism are employed in the analysis of the primary text in this study. Displacement and cultural disruption as meted to the South Asian Indians led to a sense of dislocation and uncertainty in relation to who the South Asian Indians were and where they belonged. This is manifested in forms of personal struggles and national

identity crises in newly formed postcolonial states.

Conceptualization of Return, Youth and Identity

Return

Return in this context points to coming home (i.e., Uganda) by the South Asian Indians. For King (2000, p. 7), "return migration is the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration". Teo (2011, p. 806) avers on the 'myth of return' that, "no matter how settled, it is believed that migrants still dream that they will eventually return to their homeland".

Blunt and Dowling (2006, p. 11) view home as a place of comfort, stability, and security, a hearth and anchoring point.

For Gage (2004, p. 14), return ought to be a journey of therapeutic self-fulfillment, in which the returnee finds or becomes his complete self by "rejoining the pieces of his life together". To Kindinger (2009, p. 5), "return is a home coming to a home that is created through the act of return". For Stilz, (2017, p. 9), 'home' is defined as the place of one's first orientation in the world, the central node on which 'our' personal identity has been nurtured, the place to which one 'belongs' and 'returns'. However, in the words of Vasey (2011, p. 32), "there is no such thing as genuine uncomplicated return to one's home".

Youth

Youth entails a period of transition from the dependency of childhood to the independence of adulthood. Youth can also mean the time between childhood and adulthood (maturity). It could also refer to one's peak, in terms of health, or the period of life known as being a young adult. Youth is also seen as the form, bloom, and strength, typical of one who is young. It is a period of life that shapes people's levels of dependency, depending on various cultural perspectives. The United Nations defines youth as persons between the ages of roughly 15 and 24. The UN also recognizes that this varies without prejudice to other age groups listed by member states, such as 18–30. A useful distinction within the UN itself can be made between teenagers (i.e., those between the ages of 13 and 19) and young adults (those between the ages of 20 and 29).

Identity

This refers to the set of characteristics a person recognizes as uniquely their own, constituting their lifelong individual personality. Lindholm (2007, p.38) sees identity as a way an individual or group sees and defines themselves, and how other individuals or groups see and define them. He explains that "identity is formed through the socialization process and the

influence of social institutions like the family, the education system and the mass media". He establishes that the concept of identity is an important one, as it is only through establishing our own identities and learning about the identities of other individuals and groups that we come to know what makes us similar to some people and different from others, and therefore, form social connections with them (Lindholm, 2007, p.38).

Individuals are not free to adopt any identity they like, instead, factors like their social class, their ethnic groups, and their sexes are likely to influence the way others see them. The identity that an individual wants to assert and which they may wish others to see them as having may not be the one that others accept or recognize, and this is where the crisis of identity discussed by Erikson lies.

Buckingham (2008, p.3) opines that though "Identity is developed by the individual, it has to be recognized and confirmed by others such as the community one belongs to and the family such person is found". Identity as defined by race and ethnicity, is central to postcolonial discourse. Hall (2001) loosely defines the term 'race' as a form of cultural identity based on physiological

attributes. To Hall, "it indicate(s) practically any group of people who self-identify separately from others" (Hall, 2001, p. 264). Hall further opines that race refers to the "ways that physiological characteristics (such as skin tone) are combined with distinctions in social history (such as region of original habitation) to distinguish and identify groups of people" (Hall, 2001, pp. 265-266).

The South Asian and the Ugandan as postcolonial subjects have identities that are not entirely indigenous to their homeland due to the colonial experience. But then, neither of the two can be described as embodying the complete traits of the colonizer. Hence, the colonial experience begets a new breed of individuals in the post-colonies who are not exactly like their predecessors and also not like their colonisers. The term 'hybrid' was, therefore, coined to account for this condition of "unbelongingness" and "doubleness" (Bhabha, 1994, p 52). Hybridity "harbours the recognition that cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of self to other" (Habib, 2005, p.752) but rather involve an act of enunciation and continuous articulation.

Return to Roots Phenomenon and the Identity of the Youth in Hafsa Zayyan's *We Are All Birds of Uganda*

We Are All Birds of Uganda revolves around the major character, Sameer, a South Asian with Ugandan history who is born in Leicester following the forceful expulsion of his grandfather and father from Uganda by the autocratic ruler, Idi Amin. However, when Amin was overthrown, the government of Obote invites the expelled immigrants to return to Uganda if they desire. Although Sameer's grandfather returned following his love and investment in Uganda, his son, Sameer's father, has settled in Leicester hence sees no need to return.

Sameer is a trained lawyer and works in a high-profile law firm in the heart of London. At the age of twenty-six, he earns a lot and has almost anything any youth would ask for. He is the envy of his mates even at work; however, "something else niggles in the back of his mind, but he pushes it away" (p. 11).

Growing up in Leicester with Jeremiah (African) and Rahool (South Asian), Sameer moved to London alongside these two youngmen and lived together with them, before each of them moved out following promotions at work and the need for Sameer to live closer to his office.

A few years later, Sameer is offered the opportunity to move to Singapore to open another branch. He is thrilled at the promotion. While announcing this news to his friends, he includes, "And I'm going to be living in another country for the first time in my life. A hot country!" (17).

Rahool, who does not particularly like his job in London, announces that he will be moving back to Leicester to join his parents in running their family business. After all, this is what is expected of any South Asian. Sameer secretly wishes that Rahool would not make that decision because it would cause his own parents to begin to expect him to return home to Leicester to join them in the family business. He has always wanted to make it on his own.

Sameer is confronted with the task of letting his family know of his job offer to move to Singapore. He is worried that his parents may not approve of it, and he loses sleep over it. Sameer's father always makes it a point of duty to remind him of the sacrifices they have made in raising him, giving him the best education, and building an empire from nothing. Even as Sameer battles with the best time to inform his parents, his father, unwittingly, reminds him over again, "There comes a point, son, at which it is only right that

you should start to give back" (35). In other words, he expects Sameer to resign from his job and come back to join the family business, "We are not getting any younger. We need your help" (35).

However, this is not the sort of life Sameer imagines for himself. He craves to be independent of his parents. He wants to live his own life and actualize himself. This is about what the job offers him: "He wonders what it would be like, not earning an independent salary, Needing to draw on the family account and ask his father for permission every time he wants to spend money" (37). Although Sameer appreciates all that his father did for him, he however, does not share with him the pain he experienced trying to belong to the Indian society in school. He feels different because the other Indian kids came from India directly, and because he has a tint of Uganda in his outlook and culture, he does not look like them. He tries to find a place with the other Muslims from the Islamic society, "...but boys there expected him to agree with them that it was *haraam* to look a woman in the eye" (42). Still in search of friendship and belonging, he joins the football society, which is actually what he enjoys doing; however, the boys lured him into the world of alcohol.

This crisis of identity and in-betweenness is amplified because his grandfather and

father have lost touch and contact with India following their migration to Uganda at the instance of British colonialism and the importation of Indians. They can no longer look to India as home and so cannot easily fit into the Indian society, even in Leicester. Unfortunately, they cannot say they are fully Ugandans because their father still feels hurt from the forceful expulsion of his grandfather and others by Idi Amin. The white community cannot receive them as theirs because they are coloured. This sense of in-betweenness affects Sameer and his lot, but they bottle it inside them. This is what Bhabha refers to as the condition of "unbelongingness" and "doubleness" (52). However, Sameer's grandfather and his wife, Shabnam (back in the 60s/70s), are in love with Uganda because Uganda is a symbol of the better version of home for them. This is because, unlike India, where there are caste systems or class divides, in Uganda, there are only Indians; and they also have prosperity there.

Sameer continues to work with the law firm as he waits for the moment he will be going to Singapore. However, his white boss, Chris, continues to make work ostensibly difficult for him. He makes use of every opportunity to talk down on Sameer and does not even applaud him when he makes a positive contribution.

During Ramadan, Chris even intensifies his vilification of Sameer. He becomes very insensitive and makes Sameer miss the *iftar* prayers, following loads of work he has to turn in. Sameer is thus forced to break his fast at his desk with a sandwich (53). He literally mocks Sameer's attempts at fasting by asking Sameer to order Lunch for his teammates. Therefore, "For the first time in his life, Sameer starts to doubt his own abilities, and even briefly wonders if he should stop fasting to see if matters are corrected" (53).

Rahool eventually moves from London to Leicester to join his family business; however he is badly injured in a racially motivated attack. In the words of Sameer's father, who calls him to inform him of the incident, "His brain is swollen, son. He's in a coma" (55). Sameer is surprised, distraught, and disappointed that such crimes are still happening. He boards the next available train to Leicester to see his Black childhood friend, whose only offence is that he is Black and lives among the Whites. He goes straight to the hospital on arriving in Leicester and is shocked at the severity of the attack, "...and he doesn't recognize the face that lies blankly on the hospital bed. Blackened, swollen, sunken, bruised. Bandages around the head, crusted blood around the mouth"- (56). Sameer and Jeremiah are hurt by the

incident with their friend. Having known themselves from childhood, they can say that, "Rahool never got into any kind of trouble; it makes no sense that his quiet, unassuming friend would be the subject of an attack" (57). It is more hurtful when Sameer sees the lackadaisical way the media and government handle the issue. When meeting with Roy, another of their childhood friend who still lives in Leicester, Sameer laments his inability to access any information on the case, "That's because the media don't care enough to report it when it's an Asian kid, Roy says (57). Eventually, the gang of white youths who carried out the heinous crime was arrested.

On another note, Mhota Papa, Sammer's uncle, who lives with them at Leicester, continues to miss home, Uganda. For instance, while discussing the arrival of the mango season, he avers, "I have never had mangoes as delicious as those from Uganda" (59).

Back at work in London, Sameer continues to experience negative treatment from his White boss, Chris. This is despite the fact that Ramadan is over and he is better focused, more accurate, and rejuvenated, "For the first time in his life Sameer understands the feeling of being disliked for no obvious reason. The better he does,

the more he feels Chris's disdain intensify" (66). Knowing that he will still be working together with Chris when he eventually gets to Singapore, he feels apprehension and heartache when he thinks of Singapore. It sort of takes the joy out of his nomination.

Over the internet, Sameer is horrified to see that over ten thousand people believe that the attack on Rahool by the white gang is a deserving one for all Muslims. It appears that it's a xenophobic attack. Sameer feels highly disappointed and taken aback. He continues to visit Rahool at the hospital; he pities his helpless parents too, seeing that Rahool is their only child. "The doctors say that he had a bleed on the brain and that he has some permanent form of brain damage. He will be moved out of the intensive care unit and into a specialist ward for people with brain injuries. He will need to learn how to walk and talk properly again" (73). The court eventually ruled a prison sentence of two and a half years for the culprits. Meanwhile, Rahool will be disabled for the rest of his life. Sameer instantly agrees with the injustice of the entire process.

Several decades back in time, Sameer's grandfather, in his letter to his late wife, continues to reiterate the datum of their existence in Uganda even as Uganda

approaches independence. He laments their identity crisis, "We are not natives and we are not Europeans. India has disowned us; Nehru calls us 'guests' of Africa. We are not guests. We are Africans of Asian Origin" (82).

Sameer is distraught with the work situation in his office, coupled with the news of the attack on his best friend. He applies for a six-week leave because he is increasingly finding it difficult to deal with the circumstances of his life. When he is asked for the reason for his application for leave, "He thought: because the partner I work with despises me, because one of my best friends nearly died in a racially motivated attack..." (83). He gets the leave.

During his leave at home in Leicester, they receive a visitor, Mr. Shah, an Asian family friend who had gone back to Uganda when they were invited to return if they wished. Mr. Shah goes back to Uganda and revives his sugar factories. He makes it all over again. When Sameer goes into the sitting room to greet him, he notices traces of affluence on Mr. Shah, and he is impressed, "... a strong grip, black hairs covering the backs of his hands, gold rings squeezed into the gaps between fat, stubby fingers" (85).

Sameer goes into a discussion with Mr. Shah, who tries to sympathise with him over the attack on his friend, Rahool, "Terrible, terrible. This can be such a terrible country. That's part of the reason I went back, you know? (87). However, he testifies to the fact that though they encounter tough times in Uganda because the natives are angry with their success, the truth remains that, "Nowhere is really safe for us these days. Not even India. But then that's no home to any of us, is it?" (87). This is the state of some of the postcolonies even after having achieved independence from the colonial masters.

Sameer is eager to learn about Uganda. When he asks Mr. Sha, he gets this response from him: "Oh, my son, it's the most beautiful country you will ever see. You know, like you see in films? Jungle green. Smells and looks exquisite. Money grows on trees there. So rich, so prosperous. It's not a place you can forget easily...It's a paradise, *beta*" (87). Mr. Shah believes that they have no home elsewhere, which is why he knew that he would go back even after they were expelled. Mr. Shah goes as far as comparing the two countries in this manner, "...to go from there to here, with all the grey and cold...well it felt like you were going from paradise to hell" (91). However, Mr. Shah does not forget to

describe the betrayal they experienced when they were thrown out of Uganda and agrees with Sameer's father, who opines that they cannot be blamed for refusing to go back to Uganda after the pain of forceful removal, which they went through in Uganda. Before Mr. Shah leaves for Uganda, he invites Sameer for a visit in Uganda.

Sameer eventually summons up the courage to tell his parents of his firm's offer to move to Singapore. He can no longer endure seeing his parents increasingly lobby him into joining the already established family business of Kampala Night Restaurant. His father is unfortunately not open to receiving any suggestions on improving the business from Sameer. He only wants Sameer to join the *status quo* of which Sameer is too trained and intelligent for. They do not see it as an amazing opportunity for Sameer to be made a partner, considering the money spent on training him to be a lawyer. Sameer, who is disappointed at their show of disbelief that he would not come home to run the family business with them, reminds them sadly, "You know. Rahool, my friend who came back to Leicester to work in his family business and was nearly beaten to death" (100).

At this point, the relationship that Sameer has with his parents develops a crack. There is tension in the house. Zara, Sameer's younger sister, tries to make Sameer see that he owes it as his duty to his parents, as the first and only son, to return to Leicester to work in the family business. Sameer is exasperated and shoots back at her, "I don't know where they got that idea from...I've never wanted to. I've always wanted to make it on my own" (103). The tension in the house is intensified after Sameer discovers that his parents called his firm behind his back to ask for his resignation. He is consternated and wonders about the desperation and how far his father can go to destroy his happiness and investment in his firm. He confronts his parents angrily, and they do not even show any sign of remorse. His father retorts that Sameer does not have the right to abandon them and move to Singapore even if it's for a career.

At this point, Sameer is freshly hurt when he remembers that Rahool, his friend, is not mentally stable enough to listen to his venting should he go to his house. This is what they usually do when any of them is faced with a challenge. Rather, Sameer thinks in his heart that, "There was a time when he would have talked to Rahool, asked him why his family behave like this, whether it's an Asian thing, being fucked

up. And then he loathes himself momentarily for wishing he was from somewhere else" (105). Sameer's identity is being attacked by the circumstances surrounding him, which are occasioned by incidents of colonialism. His parents insist that he has no right to go to Singapore. Sameer is hurt that his parents do not want to see things from his perspective for once. Out of frustration of living in the house where neither of his parents speaks to him, he decides to travel to Uganda on remembering Mr. Shah's invitation. He informs his parents of his plan to travel briefly to Uganda, and his astounded parents could only find themselves asking him why he wants to go to Uganda. However, "He did not really know why he was going. He just knew that he needed to get away from Leicester and London. Uganda seemed as good a place as any" (117).

It was Sameer's first visit to Africa, and even from the window of the airplane he boarded, "... he can see squares of different shades of green, neatly organized like a patchwork quilt, rising into hills, scattered with red and white buildings. He was not expecting to find that it almost looks like the English countryside- this is not how he pictured Africa; he had imagined a dry, arid landscape, dusty and barren" (117-118). At the airport in

Kampala, Sameer is enthusiastically received by Mr. Shah and his driver, Paul. A signpost also reads, "WELCOME TO THE PEARL OF AFRICA" (118).

Sameer feels so relaxed and welcome in Mr. Shah's house in Uganda that, "For the first time in weeks, Sameer sleeps properly" (125). In the course of Sameer's stay in Uganda, he visits his late grandfather's old house and meets the Ugandan family in whose care his grandfather left the house. He is amazed at how they are able to maintain the house, and further takes a liking to one of the daughters, Maryam. He is taken aback because "He never knew that he was capable of thinking of black women as being this beautiful" (128). Sameer is not interested in the properties his grandfather left behind, but his history, which his parents, who were born in Uganda, sadly did not tell him. He visits his late grandfather's shop, Saeed & Sons, and sees the children and grandchildren of Abdullah, who served his grandfather at the shop. Maryam is his great-granddaughter. When Maryam ascertains from Sameer that he has not returned to claim his late grandfather's property, she relaxes and begins to show him around the city of Kampala. Sameer also visits Mr. Shah's sugar factory and is amazed at the size and impact it is making on the

environment and the Ugandan economy generally. Sameer tastes the raw sugarcane for the first time, "...marveling at the ingenuity, the resourcefulness, and thinking to himself: no wonder Asians were so successful here. They saw money in absolutely everything" (146).

Sameer goes to Maryam's house to have dinner. Despite the rowdiness and crowd of extended family members all living in the house, including dozens of children, he thinks that, "Never before has he experienced such warmth radiating from the company of strangers: it is flattering and mildly discomfiting" (148). Being in Uganda and enjoying the varieties of fruits, herbs, and vegetables in their natural state begins to drop ideas of business opportunity in Sameer's mind. He now makes his own fruit juices after tasting some new concoctions in Maryam's house. He thinks in his mind that, "There is something so simple about it: no app, no tech, just squeezing juice, blending traditional South Asian spices with local Ugandan fruits" (171).

Although Maryam is a Ugandan Muslim from a humble background, quietly going about her career as a medical doctor in a general hospital, Sameer feels attracted to her like he has never been before, even to a rich white girl. After all, he is not drawn

to Mr. Shah's daughter, who is currently his host and who has shown interest in him, even with the approval of her parents. With Maryam, he knows that "it's not so much a physical thing, but it's in the way that she carries herself. He admires her sense of self, her sense of sureness, almost to the point of envy" (175). He strangely notices that whenever he is out with Maryam by his side, "...Sameer realises he is happy. There's no tightness in his chest, no need to check emails or worry about what is happening at work." (175).

When the time comes for Sameer to go back to London, he begins to feel nostalgic. He, however, appreciates Mr. Shah for hosting and showing him that work could be stress-free and fun. Mr. Shah responds by telling him, "Well, son, this is Uganda. It's really easy to make money here—all you need is a little capital and the right idea" (187). With this, Sameer is encouraged to share his business idea with Mr. Shah. Surprisingly, he gets huge words of encouragement and even offers of capital, manpower, and business space based on Mr. Shah's connections. He feels elated. This is unlike the satisfaction he gets after putting in hours of hard work in London. At this point, Sameer is contemplating moving permanently to Uganda. He notices that

his spiritual life has also changed for good following the prayer routine he joins Maryam to do during his stay in Uganda. He feels more God-conscious. He experiences a different aspect of his religion. Something his mother has been working hard to get him to imbibe, and which a part of him accepts only half-heartedly. All these he learns from Maryam within a short time: "He did not know before he met her, that beyond a partner in mind and body, he was looking for a partner in spirit; but now that he is lying next to her it seems so obvious that anything else would leave him incomplete" (200). He is in love with Uganda and Maryam in particular. As his visit ends, he has no desire to go back to London; he begins to feel unease and even desperation like the feeling he usually has in London. However, "...instinct tells him that with her by his side, things will always be all right" (201).

Sameer now knows that he has to quit his job in the UK and move to Uganda. Although Maryam has told him that she cannot leave Uganda, because she is committed to taking care of her father and also her job at the hospital, he is "...thankful that God led him to Uganda, to Maryam, to rethink everything he thought he knew about what he wanted from his life" (204). Sameer flies back to the UK to

resign from his job and also to notify his parents of his decision to relocate to Uganda, start up a business, and then marry Maryam. It is received with shock and anger.

At his office, he is not even persuaded to remain; all they are interested in is knowing that it is not their fault that he is leaving. They do not seem to have even missed him, "...he was just another fungible resource, like the paper in the printer, or the staples in the stapler, something that was needed and , if absent, would be inconvenient, but was ultimately replaceable" (224). He didn't realize how heavily the job weighed on him until he let it go. Sameer cannot help but compare life in the UK to that in Uganda. He sees that the cost of living is less, people are more accommodating, and so on.

He looks out for his childhood friend Jeremiah and tells him of his newfound love for Uganda and Maryam. Jeremiah is pleasantly surprised, and when he probes Sameer to know if it is his usual fling with girls, Sameer tries to explain to him that what he finds in Uganda and in Maryam is, "...so much more than just physical. It's like a spiritual connection" (228). Jeremiah is genuinely happy for him. A few days after, Sameer leaves for Uganda, "Stepping

out of the airport and onto the red dust land is like coming home: familiar and comforting all at once" (238). He books into an Airbnb after he is received from the airport by Maryam. He stops by her house to inform her father and other family members of his return and interest in Maryam. He is well received as though he never even went back. Sameer goes ahead to testify that, "Uganda is a very beautiful country" (239).

With Mr. Shah's invaluable assistance, Sameer sets up his own fruit juice business. "He finds it almost therapeutic to use his hands to create something tangible- more than tangible, something edible, something sustaining"(241). To Sameer's surprise, all his retail trial supplies sell out within weeks, "Sameer is so grateful that he almost cries" (242). At this rate, he has to upgrade to a factory, employ staff, and make the process automated. Everything is moving well and so fast for him in Uganda. He feels proud that in a month's time, he will be married to Maryam and the three twelve-month contracts he is into will be yielding steady income. He has this feeling that "Nothing, not even the fact that his family are still not speaking to him, can diminish the pride he feels" (243).

Sadly, at the peak of Sameer's business success, he is confronted and verbally attacked by a Ugandan businessman who accuses him of pushing his product out of the market. He never considers what Sameer does to make his own product better and more consumer-friendly.

This act of indophobia brings pain to Sameer. He takes the man's words to heart and refuses to heed Mr. Shah's opinion that the market is about the forces of capital and which should not deter Sameer because all Asian businesses experience these attacks from the Ugandans. Sameer begins to regret his decision to move to Uganda. He loves the country and its people so much that he does not want to be the reason why any of them goes out of business. This encounter shakes Sameer's faith in doing business in Uganda.

However, his love for Maryam and her insistence that she will remain in Uganda conquer all. They get married shortly. After the wedding, "The next week, spent at a beach hotel in Zanzibar, is the happiest of Sameer's life" (254). He continues with his fruit juice business, and he continues to thrive effortlessly. However, it appears that whenever the memory of the accusation from the Ugandan begins to recede in his memory, he encounters another. One evening, on

his way home from the shop, while walking, two men, who are African Ugandans, call him from behind. He feels uneasy as they steadily approach him, insisting they want to have a talk with him. However, "Sameer breaks into a jog, and they start jogging too; he starts to run and they start running. As he is about to approach the main road, he thinks of Maryam. He is nearly home" (256).

Conclusion

The analysis done in the current paper underscores the sense of displacement and loss of identity felt by South Asian Ugandans who experience racism in the West and Indophobia in Africa, where they call home. The paper interrogated the impact of family tradition on the psyche and identity of a 21st-century South Asian who is culturally expected to remain in their family business, marry within their tribe, and so on.

The findings reveal that even though a return to the root is welcoming and brings joy and fulfillment, the conflicts motivated by indophobia, leading to name-calling, harassment, verbal and physical attacks towards South Asians give the returnees a cause to rethink their decision, especially with regard to their sense of belonging and security. This is because, even when a youth returnee finds love and prosperity at

home, his identity denies him the freedom to compete freely in the Ugandan economy without experiencing indophobia from African Ugandans. Also, lack of good infrastructure, insecurity, corruption, eurocentrism, indophobia, and other problems hamper return to roots.

Finally, indophobia generally draws two responses from the Asian youth. They

either ignore it or distance themselves from it by returning to the West out of fear. The few who insist on remaining, continue to develop and contribute positively to the nation's economy. Zayyan's *We Are All Birds of Uganda* adopts a postcolonial stance urging Africans and South Asians of African origin to reject racism, alienation, and Indophobia, even when living abroad.

ORCID

Ifeoma Cassandra Nebeife: Orcid number: <https://orcid.org/00000001-5033-9182>

References

- Ashcroft, B., Gareth, G. & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literature*. Routledge.
- Barot, R. (1975), The Hindus of Bakuli. In M. Twaddle, (Eds.) *Expulsion of a Minority: Essays on Ugandan Asians*, (pp. 70-80) The Athlone Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Blunt, A., & Robyn, D. (2006). *Home*. Routledge.
- Buckingham, D. (2008). *Introducing identity: Youth, identity, and media*. MIT.
- Egudu, R. (1978). *Modern African poetry and the African predicament*. Macmillan.
- Erik, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. Norton.
- Gage, E. N. (2004). *North of Ithaka: A granddaughter returns to Greece and discovers her roots*. St. Martin's Press.
- Habib, R. M.A. (2005). *Modern literary criticism and theory*. Blackwell.

- Hagen-Zanker, J. (2008). *Why do people migrate? A review of the theoretical literature.* Maastricht Graduate School of Governance.
file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/ssrn-1105657.pdf
- Hall, D. (2001). *Literary and cultural theory: From basic principles to advanced applications.* Houghton Mifflin.
- James, H. M. (1975). *Ideology and politics in Uganda: From Obote to Amin.* Cornell University Press.
- Kindinger, E. (2009, June 25–26). *"I can't wait to go back home!" Negotiating spaces of belonging in Greek American narratives* [Paper Presentation]. The 4th Hellenic Observatory Ph.D. Symposium on Contemporary Greece and Cyprus, London School of Economics.
- King, R. (2000). Generalizations from the history of return migration. In B. Ghosh (Eds.) *Return migration: Journey of hope or despair?* (pp. 7–55), International Organization for Migration.
- Lindholm, C. (2007). *Culture and identity: The history, theory, and practice of psychological anthropology.* One World Publications.
- Okoye, C. (2013) *Introduction to commonwealth and postcolonial Literatures.* Basing Books.
- Stilz, G. (2017). *Territorial terrors: Contested spaces in colonial and postcolonial writing.* Konigshausen and Neumann.
- Teo, S. Y. (2011). The moon back Home is brighter?: return migration and the cultural politics of belonging. *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, 37(5), May, 805-820.
- United Nations Development Programme (1997). *United Nations Development Report.* UNDP gazette.
- Vasey, K. (2011). Place-making, provisional return and well-being: Iraqi refugee women in Australia. *Refugee.* 28 (1), 25-35.

Wa Thiongo, N. (2011) *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean literature, culture and politics*. Heinemann.

Zayyan, H. (2021). *We are all birds of Uganda*. Merky Books.