



# African literature, metonymic gaps, and the *Gandasation* of metropolitan language in Jennifer Makumbi's *Kintu*

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## African literature, metonymic gaps, and the *Gandasation* of metropolitan language in Jennifer Makumbi's *Kintu*

African literature has its roots in the continent's oral traditions, while its written mode started as an offshoot of European colonialism. The literature is characterised by paradoxes, one of which is linguistic dissonance. The linguistic incongruity draws attention to the illogicality of African literature ventilating indigenous episteme through exogenous tongues. Though the question of linguistic discordance in African literature is not new, it still generates ripples, and currently attracts tremendous interest of the present crop of African women writers who produce texts that conflate both indigenous and exogenous languages to possibly strengthen the conviction that one language is no longer the sole organiser of worldview. Jennifer Makumbi is one such writer. The Ugandan has succeeded in writing herself into global reckoning by telling a completely absorbing, canon-worthy epic. In her narration of a riveting multi-layered historiography of Buganda/Ugandan nation in *Kintu* (2014), the novelist bridges metonymic gaps between Luganda and English. She attenuates the expressive strength of English and projects Luganda as another veritable source of knowledge generation. In this article I examine how Makumbi bridges cultural and linguistic gaps in the novel. I employ *metonymic gaps* as a conceptual model to expound the deployment of indigenous *knowledges* in a Europhone African text. I mine the overall implications of this practice in African literature, and argue that Makumbi aggrandises Luganda epistemology to resist European heteronomy of African literary expression. Consequently, her text becomes a site of postcolonial disputations where *marginal* and *minor* literatures/cultures jostle for supremacy. **Keywords:** Jennifer Makumbi, world and African literatures, Buganda/Ugandan historiography, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari.


### Introduction

Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi is, without doubt, one of the finest literary writers to have come out of (East) Africa. With an enthralling creativity reflecting in her crisp and punchy writing style, the Uganda-born novelist has continued to deploy her prolific imagination in the publication of gripping narratives that are simply unputdownable. She started off as a short story writer with the publication of "The Accidental Seaman" in the 2012 Moss Side Stories project of Manchester Academy.<sup>1</sup> The writer followed suit with the publication of another short story, "Let's Tell this Story Properly" in 2014, which won the 2014 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. She also published *Manchester Happened* in 2019, *The First Woman*, and *A Girl is a Body of Water* in 2020. With a touch of historical realism and intelligent use of analepsis and prolepsis, Makumbi gives the reader *Kintu*, an evocative historical text that (re)constructs spatial and temporal settings of a people's history.

The writer succeeds in publishing one of the Africa's most delectable, expressive, and evocative historical texts and the text reads much like Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967, 1998). *Kintu* enters into an inter-textual dialogue with Márquez's opus by presenting a multi-generational narrative of the Kintus, almost the same way Márquez tells the multi-generational story of the Buendías. In her epic, Makumba uses her traditional Luganda oral literature and language to reflect her background as an African writer who imprints on the colonial language (Ilo 13). The appropriation of Ganda verbal arts provides her ample opportunities to narrate the aetiological myth of her people and (re)present Uganda as a nation bedevilled by growing inequality and sundry post-independence decadence. The brilliant use of Buganda oral traditions in her literary productions

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further limns the novelist as an enormously resourceful creative writer emulating prominent African novelists, such as Mphahlele, Achebe, and Ngugi. Much like what she demonstrates in *Kintu* and *The First Woman*, Makumbi's proclivity for situating African postcolonial crises in their historical contexts and her deliberate minorisation of the English language makes her stand out from the latest generation of African women writers. These women writers often deploy linguistic strategies to "reconnect with [their] 'mother tongue', and develop some sort of 'voice-print'" (Zabus xviii), enabling them to organise their thoughts accurately as they meander the interstices of indigenous and endogenous languages for the representation of realities in their minds.

With regard to her poetics, Makumbi is a writer whose artistic vision is constrained by a number of tropes. Her poetics draws on gender issues, postcolonial disillusionment bedevilling Africa, and regressive cultural practices that possibly validate European humanoid conception of Africans. Interestingly, there is an apparent inter-textual thread connecting her poetics to literary works produced by the third generation of African women writers. This generation of writers explores collective wisdom or conscience and believes in the deployment of indigenous cultural values in fictional narratives written in European languages. This is done to assert their Africanity, subvert or transgress European literary canonicity, deflate the Western vaunted ego, and, most importantly, rescue African literature from the abjected status to which it is confined. The writers have equally shown how to subtly turn African literature to a site of transgressivity by supporting vivification of the waning zeitgeist of early African critics who advocate severance of ties between African literature and hegemonic European languages.

To this generation of women writers, African literature has come of age, and should begin to assert its independence from undue Western Universalist influence. The writers, including Aminatta Forna, Lola Shoneyin, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Taiye Selasi, Helen Oyeyemi, NoViolet Bulawayo, Sefi Atta, Petina Gappah, Maaza Mengiste, Kopano Matlwa, and many others, distinguish themselves by raising social consciousness about intersectionality and identity politics in African literature.<sup>2</sup> They also direct their curiosity towards interrogating European linguistic heteronomy of the literature. These writers may not have imbibed the *bolekajaist* fervidness or nationalist ideology of some of the early African writers; they, however, share some of the convictions of these critics and writers. This they indicate by de-Europeanising and, at the same time, Africanising the language, style, symbols, and the entire narrative landscape of their stories. They demonstrate how African writers can privilege indigenous languages or cultural values in texts written in exogenous tongues. The writers also escape being labelled "protest writers" due to the systematic and non-combative style of their subversive politics. The politics is operationalised through their deployment of metonymic and linguistic strategies surreptitiously to taper or transgress dominant European languages in their works. This approach enables them to challenge the alterity of African literature and reverse the major-minor asymmetry that has dogged world literature for decades.

Apart from advocating the inclusion of indigenous themes in Europhone African literature, Makumbi and, by extension, the coterie of third generation African women writers, believe in the use of exogenous languages in African literature. However, they seem to say that the languages must be Africanised and be made to carry the weight of their indigenous, cultural, and epistemological codes. Just like these writers Makumbi intersperses her writings with Ganda cultural terms, even though she writes in English. The deployment of local words and cultural terms in Europhone African texts enables Makumbi to carve out African identity and push indigenous episteme into the purview of mainstream literature, which reinforces Universalist tendencies and relegates other literatures to the margins. She asserts African Self, and this assertion is part of the Africanist project that seeks to privilege African cosmology, ontology, and epistemology in order to halt the gradual fragmentation or loss of African cultural values believed to be under the attack of European cultural hegemony. Aside from the noticeable Africanist agenda often set by Makumbi and other contemporary African women writers, they equally explore their indigenous *knowledges* to attenuate or abrade the assertive and exacting imperial languages, and force languages to pay homage to home-grown African episteme. The practice of de-Europeanising the language of African literature is not in any way new, as many of Makumbi's predecessors also wove their indigenous epistemologies into their narratives; the practice, however, may not be as pronounced as it is now among the third generation of African women writers. Besides, situating the practice in the present may further validate the past-present inter-textual dialogue, since the present always involves the past in fictional interrogation of human conditions (Dalley 18; Eze 311).

In this article I study *Kintu* with a view to examining Makumbi's transgressive thought and the binary politics underlining the deployment of indigenous Ganda epistemological perspectives in her text. I seek to interro-

gate the social and cultural meanings that the Ganda episteme inserts into the body of Europhone African text. I argue that Makumbi, like other third generation African (women) writers, pushes for the recognition of African knowledge production. I submit that the necessity of this recognition is contingent on exploring abundant indigenous epistemology in African culture. Drawing on the raging polemics in postcolonial discourse about the interchanges between the centre and periphery and how the periphery desires a reordering of imbalances between the powerful and weak nations/literatures, I specifically address linguistic or metonymic agencies used by the periphery to restructure the asymmetric relationship it maintains with the centre in African literature. Though not new in African literary criticism, since this postcolonial conflict has often dominated debates in African literature right from its inception, I bring Makumbi into this discussion to validate the emergence of African female subjectivity that lends its voice to the debate and consequently challenges patriarchal domination of African narratives. Her involvement similarly broaches the gender question in African knowledge production. The novelist thus becomes a postcolonial (feminine) voice that evinces how African women writers consolidate, broaden, or subvert the age-long quest for the indigenisation of African literature.

Specifically, my interests are on the subsisting paradoxes that shape African literature written in European languages, especially the English language. Bearing in mind the question of femininity, the article interrogates the ambivalent condition of Makumbi as a Europhone African woman writer and how she bridges metonymic gaps or linguistic paradoxes in her novel, as well as how she reconciles the noticeable ambivalences. These ambivalences seem to have atomised her writings into unequal fragments engendered by her ingenious way of conveying her socio-cultural, economic, and political thoughts through the ethos of languages or cultures that are not hers. Rather than applauding the fulmination of some African critics and joining them to condemn the deployment of African cultural terms, philosophies, and episteme in literary texts expressed in English, French, or Portuguese, I appraise and commend this linguistic/literary syncretism. This is justified by the need to draw attention to the postmodern fad commonplace among recent African women writers who have carved a niche for their writings by deliberately (or otherwise) resorting to their indigenous languages to borrow, translate, or copy wholesale linguistic, philosophical, and literary images. While they do this for many reasons, one of the factors aiding the trend is the desire to assert the individuality, originality, or authenticity of African literature. The trend is also aided by their conviction that the literary tradition can compete favourably with other global literatures and partake in the global inter-literary communication as co-equals (Ljuckanov 219). It also emphasises what Isaiah Ilo calls “indiginist hybridism” (13), enabling modern African writing to express African content in Europhonism.

Using *metonymic gap* as a conceptual model, I examine linguistic strategies employed by Makumbi to bridge cultural gaps between indigenous and exogenous languages in her novel. I discuss the use of metropolitan language(s) in African literature and the attendant consequences for readers in Africa or elsewhere. I critically discuss the deployment of metonymic gaps as a postcolonial construct employed by African writers to challenge the alterity of African literature among the melange of global literatures. Apart from using the model to assert the relevance of African literature, African writers—who are increasingly disquieted by the subaltern status of their mother tongues—seem to have hatched a plan to address the linguistic dissonance by carefully inserting their local *knowledges* and philosophies into their works written either in English, French, or Portuguese. The writers use metonymy as a literary tool to assert or challenge established hierarchies, conventions, and worldviews (Cooper 10), or “disrupt[s] imperial language as [a] unique cultural capital and reposition[s] the language in a myriad of cultural, anthropological, philosophical and ideological contexts” (Teke 72). This subversive agency enables post-colonial writers to project their cultural identities, syncretise indigenous African philosophies with a Western thought system, and covertly whittle down the strength of European linguistic force believed to have wreaked epistemic violence on indigenous epistemology.

To this end, I discuss the deployment of metonymic gap as a dominant practice in African literary productions. The practice, though challenging European linguistic imperialism in African literature, charts a new course for world literature—the hybridity of both major and minor languages in literary productions, especially in cultural spaces that were once colonial territories of European superpowers. This is the specific perception of African poetics on world literature, and it offers a robust insight into the re-definition or re-conceptualisation of minor literature beyond Deleuzian and Guattarian theorisation on major-minor literature. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari conceive minor literature as the literature which does not come from a minor language, but a literary mode that a minority constructs within a major language (16). Using *Kintu* as a template, I argue that the text contains effusive display of indigenous Ganda cultural terms that help to taper the strength of the superstrate lan-

guage used in the text. Makumbi employs substitution, deletion, amplification, trans-linguaging (code-switching), textual heterolingualism (code-mixing), and contextualisation as transgressive discursive models to subvert normativity, gainsay Universalist tendencies, and break boundaries of orthodoxy in African literature. This is indicated through her deliberate use of a number of Ganda cultural expressions in *Kintu*. Effusive use of Ganda words and phrases, such as “*kanga*”, “*lukiiko*”, “*namasole*”, “*ssenke*”, “*migguggu*”, and many others, enables her to transgress the canonicity of the metropolitan language by domesticating and subjecting the structures, grammar, logic, and beauty of the language to her indigenous epistemological groundings.

### **Buganda cosmological myth and *Gandasation* of the English language**

*Kintu* provides an intellectual platform to debate Euro-western historical distortions of African realities and civilisation. The text is a counter-narrative that seeks to clear the air or subvert these disabling, conflicting myths about Uganda and the entire Black world in general. In fact, this explains the Afro-positivist, pan-African, or negrophilic appeal of the novel. Apart from Ganda historiography, other equally important themes in the novel include gender politics, the need to reconstruct the Ugandan story to accord women a primal place of importance, postcolonial crises bedeviling Uganda, HIV/AIDS, poverty, and other important motifs that postcolonial texts always fixate on. Of importance to the present article is that, irrespective of the tropes and their interpretations, Makumbi ingeniously adheres to the *credo* of the third generation of African writing by interspersing her narrative, though written in English, with Ganda cultural terms. This helps her to create a text where two warring languages contest for space and recognition. As will be proven later, she must have done this either for the sake of cultural identity or to help free African literature from undue influence of a foreign language, or possibly to save African literature from the *precipice of oblivion* to which it has been pushed by the metropolitan literatures. Makumbi uses various linguistic tools to signify the *Gandasation* of the language of her novel. Inserting Ganda words, phrases, cultural terms, folksongs, and oral traditions into the body of a text written in English helps to position the writer as a postcolonial voice who has succeeded in tapering the strength of the Europhone tongue used in African literature. Her major objective can, therefore, be surmised as a calculated attempt to privilege the indigenous over the exogenous. This is conceived as her contribution to the campaign for the de-colonisation of African literature that resonates convincingly with the latest breed of African writers.

The novelist reconstructs the image of postcolonial Uganda and situates it within the Buganda aetiological myth to interrogate certain tales, beliefs, and perceptions of the nation regarding its pre-colonial histories and post-colonial realities. The realities need to be rejigged to reveal immanent contradictions in the Western distorted myths of Africa fostered on the African imagination. One of the imposed myths is the Judeo-Christian *untruth* tracing the genealogy of Black Africans to Ham. Ham is one of the three sons of Noah who was cursed by his father for seeing his nakedness, and subsequently became a slave to his brothers (Shem and Japheth). Racist European theorists often leverage this *untruth* to hoodwink Africans and make them accept their subjugated position as a corollary of the Hamitic ancestral curse without interrogating it to verify its truism (Amolo 48–9). A myth like this needs to be touselled and reconstructed, so as to rewrite African history or the pre-colonial Ugandan history that the imperial powers garbled to suit their own selfish ends. Just like Achebe, Ngugi, and other postcolonial African writers, Makumbi uses her epic to tell her native Buganda/Ugandan story; after all, self-narration affords writers the opportunity to dispel insinuations and negative stereotypes.

*Kintu* is an eponymous multi-layered story of Kintu Kidda, the *Ppookino* of Buddu Province, and his scions who inherit a curse from their progenitor (Kintu Kidda). On one of his journeys to pay obeisance to Kyabaggu—the new *Kabaka* and paramount ruler of Buganda kingdom at Lubyia in 1750—he inadvertently kills his foster child, Kalema. Kalema is the biological son of Ntwire, a Tutsi and herdsman who lives on the outskirts of Kintu’s village looking after Kintu’s cattle. Kalema is on an errand to get drinking water for Kintu at a spring in o Lwera where Kintu and his entourage have sat down to eat at a campsite before reaching Lubyia. Kalema breaks a taboo by drinking from Kintu’s gourd. He is oblivious that Kintu is at his back, having arrived at the spring from the undergrowth nearby where he has gone to relieve himself. Kintu slaps Kalema’s jaw, and the boy falls to the ground. He dies in the process and is buried shabbily by the roadside. Ntwire places a curse on Kintu and his descendants when told about the death of his son. On receiving the news, he simply replies: “I am going to look for my child. If he’s alive, I’ll bring him home and apologise. But if I don’t find him—to you, to your house and to those that will be born out of it—to live will be to suffer. You will endure so much that you’ll wish you were never born. [...] And for you Kintu, even death will not bring relief” (56). With Ntwire’s curse, many generations of Kintu Kidda suffer a



lot of misfortunes, one of which is the lynching in 2004 of Kamu Kintu at Bwaise market. He is arrested by the Local Councillors for Bwaise Central out of envy for owning a “gleaming 5-CD *Sonny* stereo (a fake Sony model, made in Taiwan)” (xv, emphasis in original), and a “tiny *Panasonic* TV (also made in Taiwan)” (xv, emphasis in original). To break the curse, a meeting that brings together all the Kintus scattered all over Uganda and beyond is called.

As Amolo observes, the Kintu myth bears intertextuality with the Judeo-Christian Noahic curse on Ham, as both myths relate to the inter-generational woes that befall a people as a result of the supposed misdeed of their ancestor, and the traceability of the myth to the dystopian image of Africa by the West (48–9; 340). Just as the misadventure that befalls Kintu’s scions is traced and reinforced by the belief in Ntwire’s curse on Kintu, Africans are made to believe in their underdevelopment and the fatalist conditions that reinforce it. The West misinterprets the Noahic myth and (re)-constructs it to perpetuate or justify the dolour of Africa. To them, Africans are scions of Noah; they inherit their black skin colour from Noah’s curse (Amolo 48; Makumbi 340). The significance of the myth in contemporary African scholarship is affirmed by Birgitta Farelius who argues that the Hamitic hypothesis belongs to a Euro-centric historiography about Africa (107), noting that the Hamitic myth still lingers on in African historical writings. He maintains that unless Africans make an attempt to liberate themselves from “the projection of European dominant mentality as expressed in the creation of the Hamite, it is difficult to break ground and gain new knowledge [or] deeper understanding” (107) of the African Self, which, according to Augustine Nwoye, needs to be remapped in order to engender a better understanding of the continent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (119).

By even re-methifying Buganda myth (Amolo vii), Makumbi has indicated her interest early in *Kintu* to nativise her narrative which may be best told in *Gandaglish* (*Gandaised* English), because myth is best narrated from the point of view of the culture that owns it. Prominent among the linguistic tools she uses to bridge the gaps between English and Luganda is translation. Since the English language is “steeped in imperialist and patriarchal tropes and symbols” (Cooper 1), Makumbi is “challenged to find an English into which to translate [her] [...] culture, language and knowledge base without being sucked into some of those older tropes and imperial metaphors” (Cooper 1). She adopts Brenda Cooper’s approach, advocating the need for African writers to be concrete, literal, and focused on the shape and rhythm of words themselves as objects, or incorporate words and wisdoms from their indigenous languages and rely quite heavily on the enabling potential of the rhetoric of metonymy (1).

Makumbi, for instance, substitutes the Ganda/Bantu word, *kanga*, for a “woman’s wrapper” in the sentence: “She picked a *kanga* off the floor and wrapped it around her naked body” (xiii, emphasis in original). While the primary function of clothes is to cover body nakedness, the semantic and cultural implication of the Bantu word (*kanga*) may have been lost on non-Ganda or non-African readers. Its use suggests monolithic hermeneutics (as a mere covering cloth), whereas the clothing is equally used for other purposes and worn in many other ways apart from being wrapped around a woman’s body. While the term refers to a fabric or covering cloth often worn by women, it can be worn “as a skirt, a shawl, an apron, or a head wrap. They are used as a towel, pot holder, tablecloth, curtain or blanket. Mothers often use a *kanga* to carry a baby on their back” (Kathy in Kenya). Interestingly, the clothing is also used as a site for recording and passing across important messages, proverbs, and information. Drawing from the foregoing explanation, to translate *kanga* as merely a “woman’s wrapper” is to limit its cultural meaning and epistemological grounding, yet this is the interpretation that most non-Ganda readers are likely going to give the cloth. As a syntagmatic element within the sentence, the implicit understanding of the sentence rests on the word (*kanga*), and the sentence may lose sense should it be removed completely. As a way of interrogating the postcolonial, transgressive politics that the Ganda cultural term is used for in the expression, one may ask: why did Makumbi use her local term rather than expressing her thought simply in a metropolitan language? The inferable response is possibly to taper the strength of a hegemonic tongue and project the beauty of her indigenous language. Her intention is probably to prove that Ganda culture is not inferior to any other around the world, and that it is a veritable source of knowledge production. The foregoing is buttressed by the Ganda proverbs: “*Omuggo oguli ewa mulirwano, tegutta musota guli mu nju yo, [...] [meaning] ‘A stick in your neighbor’s house can never kill a snake in your house’ [and] Ama gezi muliro, bwe guzikira ewuwo ogunona ewa munno, [meaning] ‘Wisdom is like fire, when it is extinguished in your home, you get it from the neighbor’*” (Gichure 115, emphasis in original). The former implies no culture is so poor that it cannot teach anything positive to other cultures, and the latter implies no culture is so perfect that it cannot learn from other cultures (Gichure 115).

Makumbi uses Ganda epistemology to teach Western culture, believed to often display a hubristic attitude towards others, certain truths. One of these truths is to point world literature to the path it should tread in the

21<sup>st</sup> century—the path of multiculturalism. She advocates the belief that the source of knowledge production is not monolithic and does not begin or end with the Western academe or culture. To her, there are other sources of knowledge production outside Europhone sources. Other sources of knowledge need to be acknowledged, since they are veritable platforms for knowledge distillation.<sup>3</sup> Besides, they enrich human knowledge and contribute immensely to global literary studies. Makumbi seems to claim that global knowledge production should be inclusive, rather than exclusive. She spurns the chauvinist ideology deepening superiority and/or inferiority of cultures/literatures because of her conviction that no knowledge is minor or major. To Makumbi all *knowledges* are useful for the advancement of humanity, irrespective of sources. The structuring of the sentence, “She picked a kanga off the floor and wrapped it around her naked body”, arguably lends credence to the foregoing, as it appears that Makumbi deliberately privileges her indigenous tongue to compel non-Ganda, non-African readers to familiarise themselves with the episteme. The implication of this is that she amplifies the postcolonial voice speaking to the centre that: “I am using your language so that you will understand my world, but you will also know by the differences in the way I use it that you cannot share my experience” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 123). She interrogates the subalternity of African literature and constructs a different image for it as a corpus that has migrated from the margins to the centre of world literature. This is a transgressive thinking, a postcolonial agenda to reverse the marginal-core ordering and advocate for a systematic projection of indigenous thoughts in African literature. Makumbi’s poetics is characterised by this postcolonial agenda, and it reverberates convincingly in *Kintu* and *The First Woman*.

To demonstrate the zeitgeist of her generation and its undercurrents, Makumbi explores the vast repertoire of her Ganda cultural terms which undergird her people’s epistemology, ontology, and cosmology to taper imperial English in her fictional narrative. Most importantly, she evinces the practicability of mixing indigenous language (its lexis, grammar, syntax) with that of an exogenous language, so as to create ambivalent texts without compromising standard. Consequently, she employs linguistic (metonymic) strategies to achieve her goals. I conceive the linguistic strategies as metonymic when positioned by the writer to represent a whole, or used as a substitute for someone, groups, concept, or things. Makumbi decidedly translates many Ganda words, cultural terms, and belief systems into English to possibly weaken the strength of the English language. She uses various translation techniques, including literal translation, replacement, or substitution to achieve this aim. When certain words or statements are translated from one language to another, the idea is to make the translated text reach non-speakers. More often than not, when the translation is done the target language bears the brunt of translation politics. Though the language still looks like its original self, if checked properly its strength may have been weakened as it is compelled to carry the weight of the source language. In the realpolitik of world literatures, this practice often affects the metropolitan language(s).

The novelist indicates her transgression of the orthodoxy by employing substitution and trans-linguaging as a linguistic strategy to *deliberately* undermine the strength of the English language in her text. She italicises some of the indigenous terms and, in many other instances, leaves them un-italicised. Code-switching or translanguaging in *Kintu* is functional and deliberate; it is not done unconsciously. As a matter of fact, it is used as a linguistic tool to “leave the Western reader fragilised and at times incapacitated to discern full textual meaning without trying to engage with the strategically infringing language” (Teke 77). One of the functions Makumbi uses this linguistic strategy for is to make it serve as a vehicle for cultural signification and identity. She similarly employs the strategy to indicate the otherness of African language, culture, and literature in a Europhone African text, and expose how the indigenous and exogenous tongues conflict with each other, leaving the former triumphing over the latter (Zabus 2). She creates a scenario in which an imperial language suppresses an indigenous one, and, by so doing, exposes the hypocrisy of Europhonism to confine indigenous tongue to the periphery. Makumbi, however, challenges this injustice by interspersing Europhonism with indigenous expressions. To this end, she ingeniously subverts the English language to portray her disavowal of Europeanisation or *English-ation* of African literature, since the literature of any people often constructs a definitive image for them or defines the language of the people (Ukam 46).

Some of the cultural terms in the text are italicised and translated, while quite a few are translated but not italicised. It can be argued that italicised cultural terms are used to foreground the *marginal* status of language/culture inserted in the body of a metropolitan language/culture. Some of the terms are expressed in the following sentences: “enkejje [small fish that look like tilapia] fish powder for children” (38); “If she plays her *mpiki* [black seeds used in a local board game known as *manchala*] well” (44); “Kyabaggu climbed the podium and walked to

the *namulondo* [the throne]" (45); "in front of them, Ssentalo the Ssabatabazi's [a super warrior's] freshly severed head glared at them like a ghoulish trophy" (45). These terms, therefore, become metonymies standing for an *othered* language, culture, and literature within the body of an imperial literature, language, or culture. Considering the structure and mode of use of these terms, their intra-sentential usage suggests alterity, difference, asymmetry, and marginalisation of African language, culture, and literature in a cultural space to which it is autochthonous. It reads like the terms are caged and handicapped by a powerful hegemonic Western force, just as it suggests metaphorically that African culture, language, and literature are under the oppression of the West. However, the reverse seems to be the case, because the writer uses an indigenous language to covertly abrade an imperial tongue.

She also uses the translation strategy of amplification to provide additional information about some Ganda terms in the text. By so doing, she gives literal translations of the terms, phrases, and expressions to possibly make their meanings accessible to non-Ganda speakers. Examples include: "lukiiko, the parliament sessions" (5); "king's mother, *namasole*" (6); "Reeds had given way to *ssenke*, a sturdy grass accustomed to stingy weather" (14), "*e Jikiriti*, the burial shrub for dogs" (33); "*ssabasajja*, man above men" (35); "kisaakaate, the fencing" (38). While some of the amplified terms are nouns in apposition, though each of the two nouns belongs to the languages of the centre and margin, respectively, they jointly refer to the same concept or idea. This narrative style enables Makumbi to create correlates of ideas or transfer these ideas from an indigenous language to an exogenous tongue. The practice has two implications: one, it has a political undertone, as the writer may have adopted this approach to indicate the intrinsic symmetry between English and Luganda. Two, she may have adopted this style to reveal the depth of inadequacy that the English language possesses to express with exactitude certain indigenous episteme and cosmology.

To further corroborate this view, there are some Ganda cultural expressions that unsettle the expressive strength of the English language. If English is forced to convey them, they may lose their philosophical exactitude and succinctness. Epistemic terms like "Gatonya", "*ekyogero*", "*mwana akaaba*", "*musenene* rains", and many others are deeply steeped in Ganda philosophy. Besides, they are carriers of the Ganda epistemology. So, literal translations of such words are difficult to come by, because doing so may lead to misrepresentation and devaluation of a people's worldview. *Gatonya*, for instance, is a Luganda name for the month of January. It is always a month that is hot with a lot of bananas/plantains (*matooke*) ripening in the plantation. *Gatonya* literally means "they are dripping". This is probably inferred from the fact that there are always bountiful harvests of *matooke* in January, just as many are left un-harvested to rot away in the plantation. When bananas rot, they turn black and drip water, hence the term "dripping" or *gatonya*. *Ekyogero* refers to the herbal bath prepared for newborn babies, but the import of the word goes beyond that, because among the Ganda many people always attribute the success of a person to the herbal bath prepared for him or her. *Mwana akaaba* literally means "the child is crying" in Luganda. *Mwana akaaba* buns are often given to crying children to pacify them, hence the name. *Musenene* is derived from the word *nsenene* (grasshoppers). *Musenene* is also the name given to the month of November in Buganda, because grasshoppers often invade Buganda in large numbers. This month is also characterised by heavy rainfall, and the more it rains, the more grasshoppers invade the land.

Noticeable in Makumbi's novel is the peculiar usage of the English language to carry the weight of Luganda's socio-cultural realities. While conscious of the domineering character of metropolitan language in (East) African literature and the need to preserve Ganda culture and language, Makumbi can be said to have consciously *Gandaised* the English language in order to, first of all, reach her Buganda/Ugandan audience, and also promote the Luganda language in the process. The English used in *Kintu* is *Gandaised* English. It may not reflect in the volume of lexis, structure, syntax, and possibly the disruption of grammar; however, the tone, rhythms, and flavour of the English reflect the spirit of Luganda. This is possible through her re-mythification of Kintu myth and the reprocessing of Buganda verbal arts, enabling her to add local flavour to her narrative and undermine "the authority of English, which is here minorized" (Zabus xvi). Consequently, the believability of her narrative is enhanced, as her (Buganda) African audience feels drawn to their local myths expressed in a domesticated European language. Makumbi succeeds in creating a postcolonial paradigm reversing the centre-margin, major-minor structuration in Europhone African literature, leaving the major *minorised* and the minor *majorised*. In Emily Apter's words, Makumbi "participate[s] in the politics of damaging standard English [...] [and] the spirit of a lost African language gene runs amok in the syntactic corridors of Standard English" (qtd in Cooper 14). As a matter of fact, the novelist's literary sensibility appears to have been compelled by a telepathic consciousness that seeks an African-centred

literature, rather than Euro-centred African literature. This consciousness is nurtured by her desire to bail out African literature from its subaltern and minor status.

### **Bridging cultural and metonymic gaps in *Kintu***

The literary tool deployed to domesticate the English language in *Kintu* is metonymic gap. Apart from demonstrating how language is metonymic of cultural difference (Ashcroft 52) in the novel, the postcolonial model also provides the theoretical standpoint for Makumbi to designedly interrogate, subvert, subdue, and lower the intellectual and epistemological strengths of the metropolitan language used for the expression of her peculiar African experiences and thoughts. The model enables the novelist to use an imperial language, with all its cosmopolitan character, metonymically without undoing her indigenous cultural heritage (Teke 71). Anthony Chennells explains the moral justification for this trend and condition of reversality intended to turn up the heat on the Supremacist and Universalist literary model by rebelling against Western canons that often pigeonhole African literature and push it to the margins of global politics and literature. Chantal Zabus corroborates Chennells' observation, stating that "When 'the Empire writes back to the centre,' it does this not so much with a vengeance as 'with an accent', by using a language that topples discourse conventions of the so-called 'centre' and by inscribing postcolonial language variants from 'the margin' or 'the periphery' in the text" (xv). While affirming that this may not be a new trend, as the practice has been on for a long time in African literature, Chennells maintains that:

Within my discipline of the study of literature, I note that in the past both British and African critics have seen Anglophone-African texts as inherently inferior to the canonical texts of the British metropole. I also note the multiple ways in which that subordination became insubordinate in African literature and how the normative authority of the metropolitan model was subverted: literatures developed which refused to mimic the productions of the metropole and combined native narrative and poetical traditions with metropolitan models. (III)

Babatunde Ayeleru defines metonymic gap as "the injection of African words into Europhone African literary works [...] to inscribe the cultural identity of both the author and his/her work" (19). Aduke Adebayo reveals that "The new generation of [African] writers, male and female, has become more daring [as] they go beyond a mere sprinkling of the local expressions into the French language to create new forms of adopting several strategies" (qtd in Ayeleru 23). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin describe the postcolonial model as a "subtle form of abrogation. [...] and cultural gap formed when appropriations of a colonial language insert un glossed words, phrases or passages from a first language, or concepts, allusions or references that may be unknown to the reader" (123). Quoting Ashcroft, Cooper describes metonymic gap as a tool of resistance that allows postcolonial writers to "introduce a different language and knowledge system in the undertow of [the imperial tongues]. This occurs when 'texture, sound, rhythm and words are carried over from the mother tongue to the adopted literary form'" (10). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain how the model works:

Such words become synecdochic of the writer's culture—the part that stands for the whole—rather than representations of the world, as the colonial language might. Thus the inserted language 'stands for' the colonized culture in a metonymic way, and its very resistance to interpretation constructs a 'gap' between the writer's culture and the colonial culture. The local writer is thus able to represent his or her world to the colonizer (and others) in the metropolitan language, and at the same time to signal and emphasize a difference from it. (123)

Makumbi, just like other postcolonial (African) writers, achieves certain aims through the hybridity of Luganda with English in *Kintu*. One, there is an interplay or a (re)enactment of the Manichean dualism in which the binary politics is (re)constructed within the text as various cultural terms or *knowledges* couched in indigenous language(s) struggle with the hegemonic European language. Consequently, the text becomes the locus of linguistic, cultural, and epistemological contentions, as the local jostles with the foreign for space and attention. The second achievement is the creation of texts that trade their monolithic cultural identity for a hybrid or syncretised configuration. Rather than having a completely English-African text, the reader is left with an amalgam or a potpourri of languages, episteme, philosophies, techniques, and multicultural identities. A perfect example of this textual potpourri is Irete Lazo's *The Accidental Santera* (2008) and many other texts produced in Latin America. In Lazo's novel, the protagonist narrates her eventual acceptance of Santeria, her ancestral religion, and the factuality shaping her poly-cultural identity. While the text is dappled with English, Spanish, and Yorùbá, the protagonist reveals that the three languages define her personality, because "I learn in English/I love in Spanish/I



pray in Yoruba” (xi). Africa, just like other colonised spaces, has a number of literary works that may serve as a vitrine displaying confluences of languages or foreign/indigenous *knowledges* in a given literary text. Three, the linguistic strategies employed in Makumbi’s novel help to “install and bridge a cultural gap between African subject and English-speaking reader by replicating the rhythms of oral language in literary English” (Ashcroft 63). Consequently, the novel becomes a transcultural text and a site of negotiation in which the space between Self and Other is blurred (see Ashcroft 53).

### **Locating African literature in Fanon’s zone of occult instability**

With reference to the subversion of Europhonism in *Kintu*, I have resorted to the aforementioned sub-topic to reflect on *English-ation* of African literature and what Obi Wali calls “a clear contradiction, and false proposition” (284) regarding the aptness of having Italian literature in Hausa (284), or possibly having French literature expressed in Yorùbá or Kikuyu. The paradox raises fundamental issues that impugn the originality, creativity, and accuracy of realities or experiences portrayed by Europhone African writers in their texts. By *English-ation* I mean the *English-initiation* or the *initiation* of African literature into the *cultic* corpus of the metropolitan English literary tradition. I construct *English-initiation* as a hypothesis, a cultural domain or location of cultural conquests that signals and ingeminates Franz Fanon’s “zone of occult instability” (183) within the context of us/them, centre/margin, orient/occident binaries. The zone of occult instability, according to Joan Gordon, is “an area of potential for change created by processes of decolonization” (209). It is a spot where “meanings are indeterminate, flexible though still meaningful, sometimes paradoxical. [...] [which] the colonizer can exploit [...] in order to retain control through neocolonial institutions, but this zone is also the site of rebellion against the colonizer” (209). If the concept of initiation reifies admittance of someone into an esoteric group with the accompaniment of rituals and a displacement from one state of awareness to another, I claim metaphorically that African literature ever since its contact with European civilisation has been thrown into this zone. It has progressively undergone paradigm shifts—a sort of metamorphosis from Africanised literary tradition to a foreign literary experience, style, or methods.

The shift is captured by the insertion or absorption of an African literature into the capacious chassis of a major, hegemonic literature with a view to emplacing the binarist schema of master-servant, big-small, North-South, centre-margin dialectics. Doing this ensures the conformity of African literature to the canon of imperial literature. In other words, foreign literary methodology and experience pre-empts African accumulative process of narratology, dramaturgy, poeticisation, and orality. The *initiation* of African literature comes with rites of passage, abnegation, and a mental re-conditioning that inferiorises indigenous African languages and cultural practices, but forces fetishisation of the English language and culture on Anglophone African writers. It similarly projects English literary tradition as normative. English, just like the dominant romance tongues (French and Portuguese), is a “killer language” (Ashcroft 46) that has sounded the death knell for several languages which it attrites insidiously. The killer tendency of English and, by extension, Europhonism probably informs Wali’s assertion that “the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture” (282). Most Anglophone African literary writers, especially early writers, have been observed to fetishise anything English to the detriment of their indigenous cultural practices. They are accused of being copycats of foreign literary and cultural traditions due to their excessive valorisation of European credo and failure to provide a counterpoise in their indigenous African cultural traditions. Their “shamanist obscurantism” (Ede 18; Ramakrishnan 67) and Westernism reeks of uppityness, therefore making them complicit in projecting the false image of Africa to the West in their writings.

Though Dubem Okafor considers the emphasis placed on the language of African literature as diversionary, it is imperative to note that the centrality of language to any humanistic discipline helps to provide direction and determines or structures the perception and interpretation of meanings in these fields. It similarly helps in determining how the generated meanings, through a given language, contribute to knowledge; after all, one of the aims of humanities revolves around meaning generation and negotiation. Okafor’s belief that the primary duties of both writers and critics are often side-lined when they exert energy interrogating the appropriateness of language used in realising African literature is problematic. According to him, critics of the literature whom he disparagingly refers to as “comprador elite, the new-fangled bourgeoisie, the counterfeit, opportunistic, and self-serving intellectuals” (3) waste time in calling for the “recuperation, development, and creative deployment of indigenous languages” (4) in African cultural articulation. He believes they should rather create a lingua franca of harmoni-

ous coexistence and inter-ethnic communication that can address Africa's cacophonous linguistic situations, its numerous ethnic clashes, and cultural variability (3). Okafor posits that critics that advance the course of indigenous languages in African literature are doing so hypocritically, "because no serious-minded person really believes that that would facilitate interethnic communication among the many language and dialect groups" (4). While not condemning his position, the views of those who clamour for the indigenisation of the language of African literature cannot be dismissed in view of their Africanist agenda and desire to produce literature that reflects local peculiarities through the use of indigenous tongues and epistemologies.

It is a given that the vacuous usage of English and deliberate mimicking of English literary tradition by some African writers have robbed African literature of the opportunity to assert its individuality, particularity, and authenticity (Tsaaior 3) amidst the pantheon of world literatures. Among African writers and critics, the fetishisation or *English-ation* of African literature has even minorised literatures written in African languages, as Western critics look down on them, regarding them as fringe literatures.<sup>4</sup> Worse still, this condition has exacerbated the major-minor dichotomy between imperial and African literatures, underplaying the importance, contributions, and voices of writers or critics from elsewhere other than the Global North. Language is a carrier of cultural architectures. When a people decide to embrace foreign tongues to represent local realities or convey their feelings, experiences, and thoughts, they are unconsciously inferiorising their language/literature and possibly calling for its *glottophagy* or *linguicide*. Ngugi wa Thiong'o comments on the foregoing by decrying the mortification of African literature and self-abasement of African writers who, rather than devising ingenious ways of solving the menacing linguistic conundrum that entraps their literary sensibilities, "define themselves in terms of the languages of imperialist imposition" (286). He submits that these Afro-Europhone writers end up with a warped perception of reality, because their tool of self-definition and worldview is under the fetters of Euro-Western linguistic suzerainty. Ngugi's solution to the *glottophagy* of African languages is that African writers "should reconnect themselves to the revolutionary traditions of an organised peasantry and working class in Africa in their struggle to defeat imperialism and [...] communicate the message of revolutionary unity and hope in the languages of the people" (303). Though his solution revalidates his Marxist convictions, Makumbi seems to have adhered to his instruction by challenging and undoing the epistemic violence done to African languages in African literature, hence her creative deployment of Ganda cultural terms and episteme in her Europhone African text.

## Conclusion

In this article I have explored the creative imagination of Jennifer Makumbi, submitting that she has become a dominant force in the (East) African literary landscape. It specifically discusses her penchant for tapering the expressive strength of the English language by inserting her native Ganda epistemology into the body of her narration in *Kintu*. She employs translation techniques to indicate the inability of the English language to adequately represent her indigenous philosophy and epistemology in African literature. Makumbi's novel bears conspicuous touchstones of the third generation of African writers whose poetics largely advocates literary decolonisation of African literature, and favours domesticated European languages to express African socio-cultural peculiarities. As a postcolonial writer, she succeeds in setting in motion enabling machineries needed for careful manipulation of the English language so as to depict the realities of multiple worlds and languages (Cooper 1). The approach helps to syncretise indigenous and exogenous languages in a rainbow African cultural space. It also advocates major-minor symmetry in world literature and rejects or reverses the marginal status of minor literatures. Consequently, she has re-echoed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century those agitations of early African critics who clamoured for the independence of African literature from the literary heteronomy of Western literature and languages. The critics' advocacy is against the Universalist praxis of Western literature and its predilection to dominate literary activities all over the world.

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## Notes

1. This edition was edited by Martin De Mello and was published by Crocus in Manchester.
2. For the purpose of this article, I limit my identification of writers belonging to this generation to women. That is not to say that there are no male writers belonging to the tradition or that gender is a factor in determining writers that belong to the generation.
3. Professor Fallou N'Gom of Boston University, USA, disclosed this in his 30 June 2017 public lecture, "Beyond Europhone Sources: African Sources of Knowledge in *Ajami* and Indigenous Scripts", organised by the Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
4. Per Wästberg even believes that "books written in African language have less literary importance than those written in a European language" (137). Wästberg's submission is a misapprehension shared by many critics, and this is possibly responsible for the *erroneous* description of Chinua Achebe as the "father of African literature" (Okafor 3). Though Achebe definitely had a great influence on the literature, the fact remains that some Africans wrote before him. The list includes: Thomas Mofolo who wrote in Sesotho and published *Chaka* in 1925 (1931); the Senegalese Bakari Diallo who published *Force Bonte* in 1926; Ousmane Soce who published *Karim* in 1935; the Beninese Paul Hazoume who published *Doguiçimi* in 1938; Daniel Orowole Fagunwa who wrote in Yorùbá and published *Ògbójú Oḍe nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ́* in 1938, which was later republished as *Ògbójú Oḍe nínú Igbó Olódumarè* in 1949, and, in the same year, published *Ìrèké Onibúdó*; Amos Tutuola, who wrote in what could be described as *Yorubaised English*, published his first book, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Dead's Town* in 1952. Achebe's canonical text, *Things Fall Apart*, came out much later in 1958. As a matter of fact, Cyprian Ekwensi wrote in English and published before Achebe. His first novel, *When Love Whispers*, was published in 1948. He also published *An African Night's Entertainment* in the same year and the *Leopard's Claw* in 1950. If fatherhood is determined by age or year of publication, Achebe, with due respect, cannot father African literature, because other Africans whose texts equally discuss and validate African cultural ethos published before him, irrespective of the language(s) they chose to express their fictive imagination. Besides, Achebe's description in *Magill's Survey of World Literature* as "The first African writer to win broad critical acclaim in Europe and America, [who] [...] has shaped world understanding of Africa and its literature" (Kellman 7) further validates Ngugi's asseveration that Africa's fate may have often been decided by the Western world (285). Achebe's acceptance in Europe and America in the 1950s and 60s belies the existence of other African writers whose contributions to African literature cannot be neglected, but did not catch the fancy of the West possibly due to the writers' use of indigenous languages to express their thoughts, or because the thrust of their narratives was/is uninteresting to Western readers.

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