

Metatextuality in Kevin McDonald's Transcultural Cinematic Adaptation of *The Last King of Scotland* (2006)

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Abstract

Kevin McDonald's 2005 cinematic adaptation of Giles Foden's novel, *The Last King of Scotland*, critiques its progenitor text and reinterprets the story of Idi Amin through a transcultural context mediated by the acting of African American actor Forest Whitaker and the overall impact of location shooting. This paper argues that the film's adaptations both of history and of a man's life, as well as the transposition of the colonial narrative tradition in Foden's novel, engage multiple socio-cultural-economic dimensions of Ugandan society. In particular, the significance of location shooting in Uganda, the role of Ugandan actors and of the Ugandan cultural advisor to the film director as well as the Uganda Government's endorsement all helped in toning down the "monster" image of Amin and of Uganda consolidated in Foden's novel.

Introduction

Kevin McDonald's 2005 cinematic adaptation of Giles Foden's *The Last King of Scotland*, critiques its progenitor text and reinterprets the story of Idi Amin through a transcultural context mediated by the acting of African-American actor Forest Whitaker and the overall impact of location shooting. The film's adaptations both of history and of a man's life, as well as the transposition of the colonial narrative tradition in Foden's novel, engage multiple socio-cultural-economic dimensions

of Ugandan society. In particular, the significance of location shooting in Uganda, the role of Ugandan actors and of the Ugandan cultural advisor to the film director as well as the Uganda Government's endorsement all helped in toning down the "monster" image of Amin and of Uganda consolidated in Foden's novel. According to Gerard Genette's theory of *metatextuality*, this sort of adaptation "is the relation most often labeled 'commentary.' It unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing

it (without summoning it), in fact, sometimes without even naming it” (1997: 4). Robert Stam distills Genette’s meaning further by calling *metatextuality* that “which refers to “the *critical* relationship between one text and another” [My emphasis] (Stam, 2000: 123). This critical model shows how the film’s adaptation critiques and “improves” Foden’s narrative by projecting a better image of Amin and Uganda by overtly disposing of characters, paragraphs, or entire chapters in the novel that portray Amin and Uganda very negatively.

Further related to this critical approach is Kamilla Elliot’s adaptation model of “trumping.” The trumping adaptation aims at showing “what is wrong with the original” (Elliott 2003: 174). Elliot’s model is derived from the works of theorists like Neil Sinyard who argues that adaptation of books into film can be read “as an activity of literary criticism” or “a critical essay” (qtd. In Elliott, 174-175). Citing literary adaptation deconstructionist Keith Cohen, Elliot argues that “the film critiques the novel’s claim to representational prowess while asserting its own” (175). McDonald’s film is not in any way redemptive, given its own narrative pandering to the tradition of Hollywood’s “darkest Africa” trope, as well as its packaging for the Euro-American audience. However, unlike the overtly racist and colonially more self-reflexive novel, the film adaptation humanises Idi Amin and diminishes Foden’s “Dark Continent” master text. This chapter examines how the political economy of the film’s trans-continental/cultural collaboration re-images Idi Amin, Uganda’s brutal past, and black Africa at large. A detailed analysis of Foden’s novel, especially his monster construction of Idi Amin, as well as colonial nostalgia shows how

Foden invokes narrative authority in the tradition of the British adventure novels and “first contact” explorer tales. This background analysis is necessary to reveal how the film adaptation misreads, deconstructs and adjusts that representational premise through “metatextuality” and “trumping.”

In their article, “The Cited and Uncited: Toward an Emancipatory reading of Representations of Africa”, Garuba and Himmelman observe that readings of representations of Africa are mostly characterised by a discourse and a counterdiscourse of colonial and subversive anticolonial scholarship respectively. The authors challenge us to go beyond the binary discursive economies of colonialism and anticolonialism to discover new alternative archives for reading films about Africa; what they call the “unscribed space that is still outside of discursive representation.... that which is disarticulated from discourse” (Garuba and Himmelman, 2012: 16-17). In order to map out the “uncited,” we have to visit the colonial archive in Foden’s novel in order to show what the film deconstructs and to evaluate the degree to which the film adaptation tones down the authorial excesses of the novel.

The “Dark Continent” Revisited

A *Washington Post Book World* review of Foden’s novel *The Last King of Scotland* (1998) calls it an “accomplished first novel” and goes on to say, “Foden has skillfully limed *the country* that gave birth to Amin” [My emphasis] (Foden, 1998: i). One interviewer tells Garrigan, “You grew up in Africa, which partly explains the *incredible richness and authenticity* of your novel,” and he goes on to say, “British crincs [sic] have been awed by your convincing

depiction of Idi Amin" (Type, "Interview with Foden") The positive reviews and literary acclaim that greeted Foden's novel and the judgment of his "accuracy" in telling the story of Amin and his country, and interpreting the destiny of Uganda is not surprising given the novel's reiteration of the perennial adventure yarn that dominates English novels about Africa. The narrative is none other than the "Dark Continent" master text of the earlier colonial novels and all consequent novels premised on this reading of Africa in western fiction. The novel relies on what Gaurav Desai, building on V.Y. Mudimbe's (1988) now famous idea of the "colonial library refers to as "the set of representations and texts that have collectively 'invented' Africa as a locus of difference and alterity" (Desai, 2001: 4). The colonial library is an archive of cumulative "knowledge" about Africa which, as Garuba and Himmelman observe, is iterated and reiterated through circuits of citation (2012: 16). These layers of referencing like the different works isolated by this study lend authority to each other in framing and consolidating the "Dark Continent" image. Foden's novel attempts to outdo earlier colonial novels in its vivid description of "darkest" Africa. The novel's critical acclaim from the West highlights its placement in the broader cumulative narrative expectations of its target audience that date back to the nineteenth century.

The novel seeks to establish the author's narrative authority as a custodian of western representation of Africa in the footsteps of John Hanning Speke, Sir Richard Francis Burton, Sir Morton Henry Stanley, Mungo Park, V.L. Cameron, F.D. Lugard, Paul Belloni Du Chaillu, Henry Rider Haggard, and Edgar

Rice Burroughs among others. These writers, explorers and colonial officers contributed to the "invention" of Africa's primitiveness through a discourse as Mudimbe noted, that emphasises "a historicity and the promotion of a particular model of history" (20). The biographical data of *Last King* states that "Giles Foden was born in England in 1967. As a child he moved with his family to Africa, where they lived in various countries until 1993" (Foden, 1998: iii); at the time of writing, he was living in London. This statement works to establish his status as a high witness. Narrative authority is further invoked through the claim that the novel is "a historical record (and indeed otherwise)" (Foden, xi). The author consolidates the historicity of his novel by acknowledging many known living and dead interviewees, including scholars, journalists, statesmen, preachers and royalties.¹ This unusual academic catalogue of acknowledgements aims at establishing the novel as a historical document and a product of rigorous and objective scholarly research. Written in the first person, the novel emphasises the high witness account which in turn lays claim to plausibility. "As for the narrative I am presenting in these pages, it is nothing but the working-up of a journal I made at the time" (20). This journalistic metanarrative by Garrigan, the novel's protagonist reinforces Foden's real life adventures in Africa. As such, the novel he writes is supposedly a product of recordings of his thoughts, observations, research and interviews while in Africa. "Some of this material will already be familiar to readers of newspapers and to broadcast audiences around the world. But until now, only a fraction of the dictator-phone tapes . . . have been revealed to the outside world . . ."

(21). The “public knowledge” claim situates the monster narrative of Amin in the broader public domain but emphasises that the novel will make fresh revelations. This claim also establishes the narrative and historical authenticity of the novel. In the interview with Bold Type, Garrigan reiterated the authenticity of his claims of historical veracity:

... the *strangest things* in the book are *all factually true*, even if they seem to be the stuff of fiction. Yet in some ways this fact-fiction debate too is engulfed by Amin’s charismatic effect: he thought of and presented himself as mythological, and long before I got to him [he] was “already a novel,” so to speak (Type, “Interview with Foden”).

Talking of McDonald’s cinematic adaptation, Garuba and Himmelman observe that the director invokes the standard time-tested western mode of representing Africa that weaves historical fact with fiction, and that the “articulation of history with fiction within the same domain of textuality is *central to representations of Africa*” [My emphasis] (Garuba and Himmelman, 23). In spite of being a work of imagination, therefore, Foden’s fiction lays claim to being a journalistic and historical document as well within the same text, consequently appropriating once again the “based on a true story” trademark. Thomas Leitch reminds us that the invocation “based on a true story” is a claim to narrative authority that seeks to place the creative work “beyond question.” Moreover, Leitch asserts further that some of these works even attempt to improve history because, “improving history has always been an option for fictionalisation in any medium” (Leitch, 2007: 286). Not only does Foden re-inscribe the narrative tropes of the “Dark Continent” for his modern readers, but

he even attempts to improve the banally recycled tropes through the research model of citation.

Foden particularly reframes Idi Amin from the monster discursive narrative grid to fit the narrative in the context of Victorian mythology about Africans. In the novel, Idi Amin is a monster in both his physicality and maniacal manifestations. Describing his first meeting with Amin, Garrigan says, “I felt as if I were encountering a being from Greek myth” (Foden, 1998: 14). Amin’s maniac laughter caused barrages of flashbulbs to go off (200). Garrigan takes time to create the monster image of Amin from birth: that he probably spent eleven months in the womb; curses must have rained on the roof the day he was born; he must have weighed 12 pounds at birth; his mother, Pepsi was a witch who sold amulets and fetishes at the market and was “a mad old woman, possessed of a devil” (127). Through Jeffrey Cohen’s theories about the metaphoric relationship between monsters and their society, we understand that fictional monsters are always symbols and representations of a culture: “The monster’s body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read” (Cohen, 3). Constructing and reading Idi Amin as a monster reestablishes the Victorian narratives of miscegenation that associated monstrosity and its attendant rhetoric of especially ignorance, sexual deviance and cannibalism with the Ethiopians [read dark skin]. Cohen says “Through . . . these monsters, the boundaries between personal and national bodies blur” (Cohen, 10). Amin the person becomes a representation of Amin’s country Uganda and Amin’s race, and of Africa, the continent he hails from. In fact, Foden admittedly said, “as well as being a genuine

historical individual, Idi Amin was a signifier, a persona. He came to represent the “‘essence of dictator’, perhaps *even Africa itself* in its troubled rather than romantic (Out of Africa) mode” (Foden, 2007).

It is important to note that Foden's novel was at first set in a fictional country under the dictatorship of a man called Dipsenza, but the story wasn't working, and as he struggled for months, “Eventually I realised that the kind of ur-dictator I wanted, *a figure out of quasi-primeval myth* refettled [sic] for modern fiction, was a dream. Instead, I should tackle the real thing: Idi Amin himself” [My emphasis] (Foden, 2007). In essence, while Foden abandoned the fictional dictator for the “real thing – Idi Amin himself” as he put it, he also transformed Idi Amin from the real man to the “ur-dictator” and “figure from quasi-primeval myth” that he fantasised about from the start. The result is a hybridised phenomenon which Kamilla Elliot calls “De (Re) composition” (see Elliot, 2003: 157-161), a process through which Foden's historical Idi Amin and his fictional Idi Amin as well as the beast from quasi-primeval myth he conjures and ventriloquises in the historical Amin decompose. A new fictional ahistorical character is then recomposed and presented as a historical character. Ugandan history, people and culture are exoticised as backdrops to this quasi-primeval mythology of Amin and the adventures of the courageous white man who dares to tame the beast and take the familiar Conradian journey into the “heart of darkness.”

Colonial Nostalgia

The overt colonial nostalgia in the novel situates it in the tradition of the classical adventure novels of writers like Robert Louis Stevenson,

Rider Haggard and Joseph Conrad. The synopsis on the back cover says; “*The Last King of Scotland* blazes a new trail into the heart of darkness . . . As Foden awakens to his patient's baroque barbarism – and his own complicity in it – we enter a venturesome meditation on conscience, charisma, and the slow corruption of the human heart” (Foden, Back cover). The Conradian intertext cannot be missed in this synopsis. The colonial tropology of maps, the obsession with filling blank spots on the earth and the journey motif into the heart of darkness is foregrounded in Foden's novel. These tropes are also incarnated in its cinematic adaptation by Kevin McDonald (Garuba and Himmelman, 15-16). The choice of epigraph from Alexander Trocchi's book, *Cain's Book* (1960) is also very significant paratext: “Loose ends, things unrelated, shifts, nightmare journeys, cities arrived at and left, meetings, desertions, betrayals, all manner of unions, adulteries, triumphs, defeats...these are the facts” (Foden 1998: ix). The book was banned in England for its amoral celebration of life beyond laws, morality and order. The epigraph corroborates the wild, chaotic and nightmarish adventure yarn of Foden's book and the immoral indulgencies long associated with Africa and Africans. And “. . . these are the facts” (Foden, vii), the Trocchi epigraph concludes. Foden's novel cites an array of other colonial literary and cinematic classics, as well as referencing of explorers to establish its place in the tradition of western adventure narratives of exploration and conquest:

So, if I was ever wild as a young boy, I was wild in my head, which was full of wondering yearnings: I was mad for maps and stamps and adventure stories. Firths and fishing villages, hills and golf courses – Fife's rich, venerable

landscape bored me, and in my overheated imagination I played out stories of Hickok's Wild West, Tarzan's Africa, the Arctic of Peary and Nansen. And I, oddly, was always the Red Indian, the Zulu, the Eskimo" (19).

The role of master and servant is reframed in the above quotation within the context of neoliberal sympathies for subjects of colonial conquest. The Haggardesque idea of Africa as empty space waiting to be grabbed and filled up (Haggard, 1916:6) is captured in the "guide book" which Nicholas Garrigan reads stating how in 1903 Joseph Chamberlain, British Secretary of State for the Colonies, offered Uganda to the Jews as a possible Jewish state, obviously with no consideration for the presence or the opinion of the native inhabitants (Foden, 29). The book even conveys a kind of "Jamesbondishness" in the thought of killing Idi Amin through drugs (215). The Bond reference transposes the iconography of James Bond whose rough life in the service of Empire and Her Majesty was – like Garrigan's – as Jim Leach notes, "rewarded with a lifestyle of excess and overindulgence" (Leach, 220). There is also reference to the British super film production *Zulu* (1964) about the Anglo-Zulu battle of Rorke's Drift. Seeing a Tanzanian colonel with a spear, Garrigan says, "I can't help myself thinking of Michael Cane in *Zulu* – 'Don't throw those bloody spears at me!'"¹ (Garrigan, 276).

The novel is also self-reflexive in its acknowledgement of the direct role Britain, America and Israel played in the overthrow of Ugandan president, Apollo Milton Obote in 1962. Amin's anti-neocolonial posturing is given comical treatment in the novel considering the fact that he was raised and put in power by western governments to avert

Uganda's move to the left during the Cold War. Amin was part of the Kings African Rifles and was deployed by the British to fight Mau Mau guerrillas in Kenya from 1952-1956. The British also covered Amin's "Turkana massacre" on the eve of Uganda's independence, a crime for which he should have been prosecuted and that would have halted his rise in the Uganda army. The novel exposes the hypocrisy of British colonialism and the comicality of what has come to be known as Africa's "flag independence" (as opposed to real political and economic independence) which was designed by the British to sustain neocolonialism. Ugandan nationalist president, Apollo Milton Obote and the country paid the price for defying the British. As British Diplomat Nigel Stone put it in the novel, "Obote let us down. He started consorting with the Chinese..." (Foden, 42). Amin continued to butcher Ugandans by the hundreds of thousands with full knowledge of the British, but they only condemned Amin when he threatened to nationalise British economic assets. Kevin McDonald observed in an interview that, "Amin is a sort of Frankenstein's monster created by the British" (Jafaar, 35/2). A deleted intertitle in Barbet Schroeder's *General Idi Amin Dada: A Self Portrait* (1974) summarises the ironic absurdity of Amin as a deformed product of colonialism: "After a century of colonisation, let us not forget that it is partially a deformed image of ourselves Idi Amin Dada reflects back" (qtd. in Mari, 2014: 31). Although Foden's iteration of these facts can be read as irony, the book does not remotely signify an act of remorse for the evils of colonialism but rather cynically admits them as part of the representational system of the empire. Garuba and Himmelman observe of the film adaptation

– I would say even more so for the novel – that the irony does “not create counter-discourse” but is more of a caricature of colonial discourse, “its authority, or its authorising agency and institutions” (Garuba and Himmelman, 22).

The novel’s narrative description of Amin’s Uganda and its people recycles the first contact trope of earlier explorer writings that viewed Africans and wild game with the same curiosity. In Foden’s case, however, the description of people, animals, food, diseases, climate, and temperature paints the picture of a savage people and a savage land. Garrigan talks of “sausage-meat slices of Amin’s nipples . . . it aroused an intrigued disgust in me” (Foden, 176). Alongside Amin, Africa’s statesmen are ridiculously painted. For instance, this is how Foden describes the Waswa, the Health Minister: “He looked ridiculous, my boss – somehow he’d got hold of a dress suit, but the sleeves were too short, and his cuffs, fastened with twisted bits of fuse wire, stuck out like the broken wings of small birds” (Foden, 7). This is the description of Henry Kyemba who served as Amin’s Culture and Community minister in 1972 and 1973, was later appointed Health Minister, and went on to serve as minister in both the Obote II and Museveni – a highly educated and sophisticated man who also wrote the most detailed insider account of Idi Amin’s atrocities titled, *State of Blood* (1977). Kyemba’s book turned world attention on Amin’s atrocities as the author traversed the globe to rally international opinion against Amin’s murderous regime (Ssemutooke, 9 October, 2012). Art hangings in Foden’s novel are described as “Loathsome tribal masks” (8). On the menu at the presidential banquet sat among others,

“a variety platter of dudu-bee larvae, large green bush crickets, cicadas and flying ants” (Foden, 12). We are not told the rest of the menu but the narrator chose to highlight this bizarre list. The description of the kudu steak and the barbarity that must have accompanied its hunting, killing, transportation to town and cooking is a metaphor for Africa’s barbarity . . . (14). The crudity of Amin’s dinner table manners, jokes about farting and the hyena-like manner of his eating all fit into the savage trope. The narrator’s antithetical notion that the “Digestive structure of zebu (African cow) is even more complicated than that of the European cow – more like buffalo or wildebeest” (15) emphasises the wildness of African cows as opposed to European cows and by induction, the barbarity of Africa versus the civilisation of Europe. The unlikely idea that a leopard lived on the hill above the clinic repeats the trope of Africa as a dangerous place where wild animals walk on the streets even though wild animals in Uganda are located in national game parks far removed from cities and towns, except for Entebbe zoo which is properly fenced up and occasional excursions of animals into human settlements along the wild life reserves.

The savagery of Ugandans is measured against the greater savagery of Zaireans (DR Congolese). Minister Waswa says, “But in Zaire, it is too bad more . . . They are real washenzi, savages in that place . . .” (13). *Washenzi* is the Kiswahili word for *barbarians*. In this statement that emphasises African savagery in English and in Kiswahili, the Health Minister recognises the relative barbarity of Ugandans in relation to the greater barbarity of Zaireans. The conversation then turns to cannibalism with the president himself making

the revelation: “I, your president, has [sic] eaten monkey meat . . . And I have also eaten human meat . . . It is very salty . . . even more salty than leopard meat (13).” Then Amin goes on to describe how soldiers ate wounded colleagues in warfare (13). The stereotypical trope of Africans as ignorant is underscored by the ridiculous story about the girl with an unknown condition who was brought to the clinic by her mother. As Garrigan examined her, she went into labor on the examination couch. Apparently, neither the girl nor her mother knew she was pregnant! Although such cases have been recorded in real life even in the West, the narrator elaborates the inability of Africans to think. Garrigan says, the absurdity “struck me that if something as basic as pregnancy could be overlooked, then how much else?” (99). He also uses the fictional incident to comment about lack of moral standards in Africa saying, “There was no stigma attached to pregnancy in Uganda” (99). This essentialist generalised statement ignores the moral codes in Ugandan cultures and sometimes stringent punishment for pregnancy outside wedlock. Foden’s novel therefore follows its colonial predecessors closely and even perfects the derogatory (mis) representation of Africa.

Kevin McDonald’s Adaptation: Mining for Gold from *but Mitta*

The Lango people of northern Uganda have a saying, “i but mitta,” (on the edge of the meter) to mean the hazy muted sound one gets on the radio transmitter when the mechanical tuning knob moves the meter to the edge of a frequency as opposed to the rich and clear sound wave at the center. To be *i but mitta* is to beg for space, to be an unwanted entity, the “other.” It means

to be on the borderlines of the dominant discourse. By using this model of discourse, this chapter seeks a positive way of discussing the film adaptation from the fringes of the dominant colonialist representation in the cinematic realisation of Foden’s novel by looking at the intertextual discourses in the film that makes a critical commentary on the novel source through elaborations, silences and mitigating elements of transcultural production.

Kevin McDonald’s adaptation does not depart significantly from the Dark Continent mastertext of the novel’s premise; in fact, the two narratives ride on the same rails. Although McDonald was open to a more objective treatment of the Amin subject, the director admits that he wasn’t attracted to *The Last King of Scotland* because of Amin’s story and character or the history of Uganda for that matter, saying Amin’s story should interest African directors. Rather, he was attracted by, “What it is like to be a young Scott going to Africa, because I have done that myself” (Jafaar, 35/2). That is why the film is premised on the wild hedonistic adventures of Nicholas Garrigan in Africa. The director then says the film is about the relationship between Britain and Uganda, although he later says “The film is not about Uganda, it’s about a relationship between a Scott and a Ugandan” (Jafaar, 35/2). So, like all Dark Continent narratives, this film is really not about Uganda. Uganda is a backdrop canvas for the western narrative and Amin, the most notorious dictator Africa has ever had, becomes the perfect persona for the monster that Garrigan tames. Talking of horror stories concerning Amin’s “cannibalism, witchcraft and multiple partners”, McDonald says till the release of Nelson Mandela, Amin

was the most famous African for all the wrong reasons. He concludes that Amin “almost represents all that is worst and savage about the *“Dark Continent”* (qtd. In *Journeyman Pictures*, 2008).

Many scholars have discussed the way McDonald's film corresponds with colonial representations of Africa: the adventure genre, the tropes of wild animals, wanton sex, monster construction, grave danger, savagery, brutality, cannibalism, and most significantly, the classical Conradian trope of the civilised European corrupted by the dark heart of Africa (see Higgins (2012); Garuba and Himmelman (2012); Higonnet and Higonnet (2012); Guthrie (2012). Lesley Marx especially, decries the way the film at one level trumps Ugandan history and at another mixes documentary footages of Amin with fictional representation creating the impression of historical veracity (Marx, 2011: 54-59). She also abhors the over sexualised Garrigan who sleeps with the first Ugandan girl he meets and goes on to sleep with the wife of the president, and the materialistic vanity he exudes in the film (Marx, 64-65). Evans and Glenn point at the continuity of white focalisation in the film and its generally “bleak Afropessimist outlook” (14). Manthia Diawara also underscores the Afropessimism in the film saying Garrigan's journey “echoes the homoerotic association between Kurtz and Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* where Africa is merely used as the “theatre for playing out the European moral dilemma between good and evil, Christianity and modernity” (2010: 78). Diawara considers the story of Amin's genocide against his people a “deterritorialised replay of Hitler facing the Jews, or the American Frontiersmen and the Native

Americans” (79). While Garrigan is allowed to escape in order to alert the world about Amin's atrocities, the film trumps out the chapters of Foden's novel in which Ugandan exiles with the help of Tanzanian soldiers managed to get rid of Amin without any western help. The reinscription of colonial codes and stereotypes about Africa through the elaborations and silences in the film adaptation cannot be overemphasised.

Rather than plying the same obvious path of counterdiscourse by critiquing the film's “Dark Continent” representationality, I intend to take the middle road: Garuba and Himmelman's idea of disarticulation from the binary discourses of colonialism and anticolonialism. The aim is to show how the obvious “Dark Continent” mode of representation in the film is tempered or rather mitigated to a lighter “Dark Continent” rendition by the political economy of the film's transcultural production. I examine ways in which the cinematic apparatus (especially adaptation as critique), Ugandan actors' discourses and the film star and celebrity persona of African American actors Forest Whitaker and Kerry Washington and black British actor David Oyelowo managed to lighten the “Dark Continent” narrative tone of the film relative to Foden's novel. Also significant is Ugandan audiologovisual embellishments, and the endorsement and material support of the Ugandan government, as well as the live and active context of location shooting that collectively project a better image of Idi Amin, of Uganda and of Africa. The irony of this adaptation process will only become clearer as we get into the analysis of ways in which the film tones down the excesses of the progenitor novel. Here is a film that turns Amin into a

more charming individual and thus runs counter to the Dark Continent template, but in so doing, it downplays one of those moments in history where the template is true because of Idi Amin's atrocities, lack of formal education and his buffoonery. Uganda is a country that has sought in the last three decades to rebrand itself after the shame and reproach from the Idi Amin years. In the West and indeed around the world, the name Idi Amin and his atrocities are synonymous with the name Uganda. McDonald's screen production raises a number of questions: How does the screen incarnation of a man whose legacy has branded Uganda so negatively for decades subvert the same representational logic of Dark Continent tropology to project a slightly positive image of Uganda? How does the screen embodiment of Idi Amin, the most notorious despot to ever hail from Africa, win the Academy Award for its actor, Forest Whitaker? Knowing the brutality of Idi Amin, the revulsion and bestial deamination his name invokes in parts of Uganda and abroad, how could anybody possibly render Amin on screen as entertainment?

I remember watching *The Last King of Scotland* from a Multiplex theatre in Chicago in September 2006. What struck me immediately was not the hedonistic exploits of Dr. Garrigan or the implausibility of Garrigan snatching Amin's gun and shooting a cow with it, or the fate of another disposable darkie in Dr. Thomas Jung (Thomas Oyelowo) shot in order for Garrigan's sacrosanct white body to escape unbroken. It was not even the bizarre and abominable old man that ran nude and plunged into the swimming pool at Sheraton Hotel to swim stark naked, or the seminude dancers. Garrigan's cowboy exploits

in Africa were to be expected as part of the popular western adventure yarn typified by the white hunter. The disposal of black characters and the hair-raising escape of white characters is also a component of Euro-American adventure tales set in Africa. Rather, what fascinated me about this Hollywood film was seeing the familiar streets of Kampala, its modernist architecture and the Kampala skyline rendered so beautifully on the screen in a Chicago Theatre – as opposed to the familiar bush and wild animal settings of this kind of Hollywood Africa film. I saw on the screen familiar actors from Uganda – some of whom I knew personally. Familiar Ugandan pop songs filled the soundtrack as well. As the credits rolled, I could hear the solo voice of Betty Akidi singing in Acholi saying, "We pray for peace." I believe very few in that theatre, if any apart from me, could understand the song. It occurred to me that a Hollywood production that had transposed the colonial stereotypes of Africa onto a 21st century American theatre screen had at the same time just riveted me and given me a totally different way of reading a Hollywood film about Africa. The formal dictates of the film as well as these elements of transcultural mediation in McDonald's cinematic adaptation of Foden's "colonial" novel are what make the difference in the less brutal representation of Idi Amin and of Uganda.

Cinematic Trumping of Novelistic Content

The cinematic apparatus as a formal system may sustain the *fabula* (the story) of the novel to varying degrees of fidelity, but the *shyuzet* (the narration) is organised in terms of the formal narrative and stylistic structures of film. In this case, the film critiques and trumps the

novel hypertext in various ways by resizing and reordering the narrative. Thomas Leitch's chapter "Between Adaptation and Allusion" (2009) enhances and extends the models of adaptation developed by Gérard Genette (1982) and Kamilla Elliot's (2003). In particular, his idea of adaptation identifies *compression* – "systematic elision and omission" – similar to Linda Hutcheon's idea of "subtraction or contraction" (Hutcheon, 19). It involves a process of *expansion*; ("expansion of narrative hints that are especially thin"), *correction* ("improving" sources), and *updating* (transposing the setting of texts to fit more immediate concerns) (Leitch, 2009: 99).

These critical categories show how McDonald's film adaptation reorganises the novel's content, compresses, expands, ultimately trumps entire chapters of the book and transposes the 1970s' setting onto a twenty first century Kampala to comparatively reimagine Amin, Uganda and Africa in a relatively positive light. The trumping model of adaptation is used extensively in McDonald's screen rendition of Foden's novel. As earlier stated, the trumping concept of adaptation developed by Kamilla Elliot is premised on the assumption that the cinematic adaptation is like a critical essay that corrects the mistakes of the progenitor literary text (Elliot 2003: 174). While the film does tone down the excesses of the novel, it does not in any way dismantle the Dark Continent template of Foden's novel which, as mentioned earlier, is itself premised on the time-tested Dark Continent Mastertext of colonial novels in a tradition that spans over a hundred years. The analysis is intended to show how film as a formal apparatus and the mitigations of transcultural adaptation – especially local

participation as cast and crew – and the larger political economy of a film's production can to a small extent push back the boundaries of Dark Continent representation. The film trumps many initial events of the novel which include Garrigan's arrival at the airport with taxi touts fighting for him to hire their cabs until one wins. Also eliminated in the film is Garrigan's account of his visit to the Embassy and to the Ministry of Health. This trumped material contains Foden's negative establishment shot of Uganda.

The film begins in Scotland with the fresh graduates running half naked to the swimming pool to establish the carefree hedonistic tone of Garrigan's adventure. Clearly the director focuses on the immediate stimulation of the visual sense. As some film scholars have argued, "film begins with the percept and gives way to the concept, whereas the novel begins with the concept and gives way to the percept" (Boyum, 1985; Levinson, 1960; Linden, 1970; Marcus, 1977; Stam, 2005).

The film adaptation also eliminates the novel's flashback and creates a chronological flow of events thus eliminating the gory and redundant clinical material about Garrigan's encounter with revulsive sickness and conditions in order to fast forward to Garrigan's first encounter with Amin at the scene where Amin's car collides with a cow. Also compressed is the detailed narrative of the expulsion of 50,000 Asians by Idi Amin. The film's compression shows Amin making the announcement that the Asians should leave the country, followed by the portrayal of Asians packing things, being mistreated by the soldiers, and confiscation of their property as they boarded buses to leave the country. Also eliminated is Garrigan's extensive tour in

western Uganda that reads like an anthropological tour of inspection of the “Dark Continent.” The film makes a critical comment on the novel by toning down the excessive portrayal of Uganda as a very dirty country critically infested with mosquitoes, cockroaches and rats. Although the film shows Garrigan dealing with mosquitoes, it removes the exaggeration in the novel like Garrigan’s disgust at encountering mosquitoes and a very dirty mosquito net, cockroaches, and big rats the size of rabbits in Speke Hotel – a popular five-star hotel in Kampala. “I didn’t want clichés of Africa,” Macdonald says. “It’s not savanna with giraffes; it’s not the slums of Soweto. It’s a cool, prosperous and sexy world you’re being taken to” (Kit, 2006). In refusing to recycle this backward image of Uganda, the film corrects the author’s biased perception of Uganda and also challenges the misconception of Africa as a perpetually dark, dirty, diseased and dangerous continent.

The film further trumps the novel by eliminating some of the characters. It dispenses with Mrs. Perkins, the British Ambassador’s wife, Nathan the Seus Todd, Bosola, Lessing, Dias and Freddy Swanepoel. Others include William Waziri, a black doctor responsible for field trips to bring vaccinations to different inland villages in Mbarara and Billy Ssegu, a business manager who is in charge of getting medicine for Alan Merritt’s hospital in Mbarara. These and other characters who play vital roles in Foden’s narrative are eliminated in the film in order to center the narrative on Amin and Garrigan and on their relationship. In so doing, the adaptation also reduces the novel’s use both of Amin as a metaphor for Uganda’s poverty, decadence and backwardness and of Garrigan as the white explorer

observing Africa with curiosity. Additionally, Garrigan is also given more roles than those stipulated by the novel which brings him closer to Amin. He acts as the president’s adviser whom he consults on both personal and government issues. Many times Garrigan acts as the president’s assistant and against this background stands in for the president to chair the meeting with foreign ministers. Garrigan also acts as a spy for the president. His reports to Amin about Wasswa’s possible connivance with British officials to harm Amin leads Amin to kill Wasswa. By playing these roles that are largely negative, Garrigan shares the blame with Amin, showing the universality of evil. Some characters in the novel are given multiple roles in the film. Sara plays several roles; she is the wife to David, the doctor in charge of Mbarara hospital and at the same time, the woman who helps the doctor. This contraction intensifies the narrative on Idi Amin as the freak subject and Garrigan as the centre of focalisation.

Additionally, the film updates the novel by expanding the characters. Notable among the new characters is Masanga, Amin’s personal driver and hitman. Masanga becomes very instrumental as the president’s messenger, body guard and sole executioner of the president’s directives. Masanga is introduced to unify roles under one man in order again to focus the narrative on Amin and Garrigan. The film saves the viewer the boring and most annoying last chapters of Foden’s book about Garrigan’s daredevil attempt to escape from Uganda via land, his interaction with invading Tanzanian troops marching on Kampala, bloody accounts of the 1979 liberation war, and accompanying destruction. In any case, the novel’s account of the liberation war is a mockery of the combined Ugandan and

Tanzanian forces who ended Amin's murderous regime. The film further trumps accounts of his brush with death at the hand of Amin's soldiers and from a deadly bite from the black mamba, one of Africa's deadliest poisonous snakes which in the book reproduces the trope of Africa as a dangerous place. He tells of how he is saved by primitive "tribesmen" who sucked out the snake poison from his leg with their bare mouths and put some herbs on the wound (263-264). The novel describes his stay in an igloo-looking "hutment" – a clear parody of modern apartments – and was fed on "half-cooked-flesh" (265). The description of the "angels" who saved Garrigan's life situates them in the hunter-gatherer economy of pre-modern humans. They are just "tribesmen," with no name. Garrigan wonders if they were "pygmies . . . or some long-lost strand of the Bachwezi" (267) – locating them in mythology of origin and recycling the derogatory colonial term, "pygmies". No wonder he felt "like a strange animal that had been captured and was being allowed to domesticate itself" (267). The "first contact" trope of British civilisation meeting African savagery is unmistakable here. Also trumped are the last eight chapters of the book where Amin is transformed from a human being into an idea – a dream refraction. In this last sequence, Amin pulls out the heads of his victims and also explains to Garrigan how he was inducted into cannibalism by "cannibals of a mau mau tribe" and how he now eats human flesh normally (302-303). The cannibalism is then situated beyond the individual to encompass a whole Kenyan tribe.² Thus the novel reinscribes the popular trope of Africans in western literature as cannibals.

The film's treatment of the theme of cannibalism is presented ironically when Amin

asks his guest to enjoy the state dinner announcing humorously that there is no human flesh in the menu. As Garuba and Himmelman observe, this joke destabilises the popular trope of cannibalism (Garuba and Himmelman, 21-22) only to consolidate it in the film. Asked if Amin ate people, Forest Whitaker answered, "I did meet with his brothers and sisters, his ministers, his generals, his girlfriends, and all these people in Uganda who know him, met him, and had experiences with him, and I could not find that to be the case." For Whitaker, the claims about Amin's cannibalism are western propaganda (Morales, 2006). In spite of the film's adherence to what Kamilla Elliot calls the "spirit" of the text – which also equates to the spirit of Foden as the "author", the film critiques the novel's authorial excesses in transposing the "Dark Continent" mastertext into a 1970s' Ugandan setting and trumps entire chapters of the novel to represent Amin as less monstrous and Uganda and Africa as less barbaric than the novel.

Location Shooting

The Last King of Scotland as adapted in 2006 by screenwriters Peter Morgan and Jeremy Brock is billed as British drama but is in fact what I would consider a Euro-American-African production directed by Kevin McDonald. The film was a co-production between companies from Film 4 in the United Kingdom and Fox Searchlight Pictures from the United States. Although not credited, the Uganda Government played a role in lobbying for the production to come to Uganda as well as offering material support in terms of military personnel and military hardware. The participation of Ugandan theatre scholar and practitioner, Charles Mulekwa also impacted

on the production significantly. Mulekwa was especially critical in negotiating with the director to shoot the film on location in Uganda. As consultant to the director, Mulekwa was critical to the production in more ways than one: “I was hired as a Consultant, but in fact I worked as a fixer in certain situations, *as well as on the script i.e. rendering it a little bit more Afro-centric* – although that was possible because the Director was very open to that in the first place” [My emphasis] (Mulekwa, 2014). The fact that Mulekwa worked on Morgan and Brocks’ screenplay helped to tone down the colonial image of Amin from the Foden hypertext. Although the Director’s words were final, Mulekwa says, “my job included telling him things, even if he did not want to hear them [he expressly gave me this instruction]” (Mulekwa, 2014). Mulekwa’s leverage with the director certainly helped the film avoid the overt stereotypes of Foden’s novel and gave the film a Ugandan texture. Moreover, Mulekwa also helped with “translating his [the directors] intentions for the masses during crowd scenes” (Mulekwa, 2014), an opportunity which greatly shaped the representation of the masses. Mulekwa also acted in the crowd scenes projecting his own vision for the film in his role as actor.

Location shooting in Uganda enabled local realities to critique Foden’s representation in many ways. In the first place, it situated the production in Uganda as opposed to the secluded writing of Foden’s novel in England. Foden saw what he wanted to see based on his colonial cultural programming and interpreted his data from England for his English audience. McDonald on the other hand brought the film to Uganda and engaged the Ugandan audience, cast and crew at various levels. This interaction

toned down the authorial excesses of the novel. The director’s observation is very telling:

To shoot in Uganda itself was the best decision I made. The financiers assumed we would shoot in South Africa, which is easier and cheaper, but I thought it would be worth the struggle and it was. Forest Whitaker, who plays Amin, was able to draw on Ugandan culture 24 hours a day. People were telling him all the time *that they didn’t want a caricature and there were some good things about the man. It put a lot of pressure on him and made him raise his performance* [My emphasis] (McDonald, “Last King of Scotland”).

Whitaker would not have had the same pressure had the film been shot in South Africa, the favourite destination for Hollywood’s African productions because of availability of infrastructure and more seasoned actors. While Foden was free to produce his “monster” character, Whitaker had to contend with the voices of people who had a more sympathetic view of Idi Amin as well as those who disliked Amin but knew a caricature of Amin translates to a caricature of Uganda. Whitaker acknowledged the contribution of the Ugandan crew in an interview: “I don’t think the film could have been the same without them because they were able to say, ‘That’s not really real. That’s not the way it would be’” (Morales, 2006).

Producing the movie in Uganda also energised the political debate at the time about the legacy of Idi Amin whom many are beginning to see in comparison to his successors. While many agree that Amin was a murderer, some people remember him as a patriot as well given that he was never implicated in the kind of kleptocracy associated with Uganda’s post-Amin years. This school is best represented by Rtd. Brigadier Moses Ali, Uganda’s Third Deputy

Prime Minister who was Finance Minister in Amin's government. Ali has argued consistently that Amin is a grossly misrepresented nationalist leader; "Amin's rating in the country is different compared to what people think . . . outside. I think some people rate Amin very High [sic]. As a patriot, as a nationalist" (qtd. In *Journeyman Pictures*). There is the view that he built some infrastructure and vigorously promoted sports as opposed to the massive plunder and decay which came with the liberalisation of the economy through the IMF's structural adjustment programme. Chris Rugaba, a youth leader who met Amin in real life says, "For me, Amin, I think he [sic] is a hero, I look at him as a hero who tried to bring out Uganda's nationality [sic] and tried to uplift the cultural heritage of our country" (qtd. In *Journeyman Pictures*). Retired British Major Lain Grahame, Amin's Former King African Rifles Commander also gives positive testimony of Idi Amin; "I would say quite honestly this man is a good friend. He had this wonderful indefinable quality of leadership. He is a born leader of men. And he was a very successful soldier" (qtd. In *Journeyman Pictures*). Ugandan history professor Dixon Kamukama praises Amin for "ensuring the economy was in the hands of the indigenous people . . . It was crude. But it was the beginning of what we needed" (Gettleman, 2007). Others like Robie Kokongay who fled Amin's regime in 1977 saw the movie as "an important part of the healing process" (Grainger, 2007). A new generation of Ugandan artists born after the Amin years and never experienced his brutality first hand is also somewhat sympathetic to Amin. This includes the Ugandan Assistant Art Director for the film, Frederick Mpuuga, who was thrilled to experience Ugandan history through

the production (Grainger, 2007). Ugandan theatre icon, Stephen Rwangyezi, who played Amin's Health Minister, Jonah Wasswa and lived through the Amin years, was quite leery about participating if the film was going to project Amin as "just another African monster" because to him, "The clichés about African problems are annoying" (Grainger, 2007). Rwangyezi liked the way the film script examined the circumstance that brought Amin to power, which involved the recognition of Britain's own blunder in grooming and putting Amin in power. This self-reproachment mode of telling Amin's story also attracted support from the government of Uganda which encouraged the production and even provided army personnel and military hardware for the production.

In a twist of irony, the movie about Idi Amin was seen as a great opportunity for showcasing the new Uganda. John Nagenda, Senior Presidential Advisor for Media who along with Mulekwa helped bring the film production to Uganda noted that, "Uganda will get tourists, because the photography in the film is beautiful. I'm sure more films will be made here" (Grainger, 2007). The Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni met with the film crew and gave his blessing for the project and gave them full access to the army, parliament and government ministers (Levy, 2006). Uganda was fully aware of the economic advantages of shooting the film in the country. Moreover, in shooting a 70s' Ugandan Idi Amin story in a modern Kampala city, the film projects far more beautiful environmental shots of Uganda and of Kampala in particular. Kevin McDonald fell in love with Ugandan architecture; "Uganda has got a very unique feel to it, with its great modernist architecture from the 50s and the

60s, which you see in the Parliament building and the Mulago Hospital. I wanted to capture that *different, more realistic image of Africa, which I think will surprise people* [My emphasis] (Levy, 2006). Rather than project the image of Uganda as pre-modern conglomeration of primitive tribes, the film projects a modern and impressive image of Uganda.

Acting as Critique

The heavy participation of Ugandan actors in the film also mediated the retelling of Foden's story of Amin. Definitely the casting of American actor Forest Whitaker as Idi Amin has everything to do with the "celebrity" commoditisation of screen stardom in Hollywood and its impact on box office tallies. As Paul Watson observes, stars announce films, attract financial backing for film productions, and mobilise audiences. Stars are generally commodities, texts and objects of desire (Watson, 168-169). And specifically this also applies to the Ugandan cast in *The Last King of Scotland*. Although the casting of Ugandan actors in major roles might have been an economic decision given the relative cheapness of hiring Ugandan actors comparative to European and American actors, the Ugandan cast to a certain degree framed the film in Ugandan context. These actors brought into the film their own African and international networks of *intertextuality* and loci of meanings. Watching familiar Ugandan actors in a Hollywood movie film created the opportunity for double interpretation. Famous Ugandan actor Abbey Mukkibi who also starred as Michel Obeke in the Dutch production, *Silent Army* [Wit Licht] (2008), performed dreaded Colonel Theonesto Barosogora in *Sometimes in April* (2005), played

Amin's "hit man" Masanga. Stephen Rwangyezi, proprietor of Ndeere Troupe, the flagship dance company of Uganda, played Amin's Health Minister Jonah Wasswa. Other familiar actors stage actors were Sam Okello (Bonny) who also acted in *Silent Army* (2008), *Jamaa* (2011) and *The Thing that Happened* (2011). Joanitta Bewulira-Wandera (Malyamu Amin), Cleopatra Koheirwe (Joy) who also featured in a local Amin production *State Research Bureau* (2013). Watching some of my favourite Ugandan actors in the film mitigated the violence of the film and of Amin significantly. The film became no longer just a British film adaptation, but a Ugandan production as well. While casting local actors did not necessarily change the Euro-American tone of the film, it critiqued Foden's story as well as Peter Morgan and Jeremy Brock's screenplay by re-telling it through Ugandan actors who were determined not to project the dreaded "Dark Continent" image of Uganda as far as it depended on their acting. The movie could be appreciated by Ugandans for its constellation of local talent, many of whom used the film as a platform for launching themselves onto the world stage.

The incarnation of Idi Amin in the likeable and celebrity persona of Forest Steven Whitaker *Bird* (1988), *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999) significantly sanitised the monster image of the Ugandan dictator represented in the novel hypertext. Whitaker managed to subvert the brutal notoriety of Amin by cultivating the more human side of the man:

Initially I had only very dark images of this man. I saw him as a big, angry maniac. But as I did more research, I began to have a different understanding. When you look at old footage

you can see Idi was also an extremely charming man. He was often said to be unintelligent, and yet he spoke ten different languages. The challenge was to play a really complete character, *not just a stereotyped image* [My emphasis] (Singer, 2007)

The desire to deconstruct Amin the “Godzilla” and humanise him with all his foibles and charm provided the paradigm of Whitaker’s performance of Amin. Kerry Washington who acted Amin’s wife Kay likes the film because it doesn’t paint a black and white picture of Amin, but of a real human being with “weaknesses and fears and insecurities . . . and idiosyncrasies and neurosis like all of us” (Washington, 2013). Whitaker’s extraordinary performance which won him over 23 international awards³ including the Academy Award for best actor (2007) moved the focus away from the historical Amin to the character Amin (Whitaker). In fact, the casting of Forest Whitaker even moved the focus away from Nicholas Garrigan, the anointed lens and interpreter of Idi Amin’s life and of Ugandan history. Unlike in the novel where Garrigan dominates, in the film, Amin dominates and is a far more likeable character than in the novel. Casting an accomplished black Hollywood actor also challenged the dominant white screen super hero iconography making the black role dominant and appreciable. Forest Whitaker’s own acting philosophy which he articulated in his academy award winning speech – considered one of the greatest speeches of the award – summarises this philosophy:

when I first started acting, it was because of my desire to connect to everyone. To that thing inside each of us Because *acting for me is about believing in that connection* and . . . through our

combined belief, we can *create a new reality* [My emphasis] (Whitaker, 2008).

That philosophy helped create an image of Amin that was far more redemptive than the novel’s caricature. Whitaker understood that he could reaffirm the trademark “Dark Continent” image of Hollywood’s Africa, or he could mediate a new imaging that pushes the limits of the screenplay’s colonial mastertext to accommodate a new way of looking at Amin, Uganda, and Africa in general. That is why he stated, “I did a lot of research on just what it’s like to be African, in the sense of what . . . continent, to go there and – really, like I said – for it to be my job to understand what it’s like to be African” (Guillen, 2006). His intention was to “feel” and interpret the most diabolical African despot on screen. Location shooting and the presence of the Ugandan cast and crew helped immensely in shaping his acting. Thus Whitaker honoured the people of Uganda in his Oscar winning speech: “I want to thank the people of Uganda, who helped this film have a spirit.” That spirit was different from the spirit of Foden’s novel. Charles Mulekwa, the Ugandan Cultural Consultant to the director was among those who helped to ensure the film’s cultural authenticity in spite of funding dictates and the generic demands of the colonialist adventure yarn. Mulekwa says of his plea with the director, “On my part, I asked him to save us from the ‘wretched African and the redeeming white figure’ tale; I said what was fair was ‘the good, the bad and the ugly’ option” (Mulekwa, 2014). Whitaker took this approach in projecting a more well-rounded character of Idi Amin. “He refused to demonise Amin, and insisted upon more agency for the character!” Mulekwa says. “I remember him protesting, ‘I

can't hate Amin. If I do, I can't play him'" (Mulekwa, 2014). Whitaker also thanked his "ancestors" for continuous guidance and inspiration from those who have gone before him. This includes his African American ancestors and by default, his ancestors in Africa the "home continent." Whitaker's personal historical and emotional investment in acting Idi Amin differs from the usual aloof and detached western performance of African characters to fit into western stereotypes of African leaders.⁴ Whitaker's performance mode is closer to what Lindiwe Dovey has called Ardonian mimesis; a method of acting which allows for "identification with the object/Other (an embodied mode of being) rather than identification of the object/Other through the reification of abstract thought" (Dovey, 2003: 18). Through this acting model, Whitaker does not only play Amin as the film script requires but manages to identify with the character as a black man, and to undertake a more rounded representation of his character.

Music as Metanarrative

Use of Ugandan songs and musicians also gave the film a Ugandan spirit.⁵ There are songs in Luganda, Acholi and other African languages performed by Ugandan bands. The participation of Ndere Dance Troupe, Afrigo Band and the Nyonza singers greatly enhanced the local cultural ambience of the film by giving it a distinctly Kampala feel. The performance of the Otole dance, a traditional Acholi warrior dance from northern Uganda with Amin joining the dancers is reminiscent of the iconic footage of Amin on state-owned and run Uganda Television in the 1970s with a spear and feather headgear. It is also a signifier of Amin's warrior identity. The integration of the Lingala classic

"Kassongo" underscored the dominance of Zairean music in 70s Uganda and recreated the musicscape of Amin's regime and the cultural ambience of the period. The song, written by Zairean composer Kasongo Wa Kenema was one of the most famous hits by the then Nairobi based Orchestra Super Mazembe.⁶ Annabel Cohen notes that, "Unlike other types of popular or art music, much music for film has been composed with the understanding that it will not be consciously attended to" (Cohen, 249). This might not be true for all film music, but if we agree that the target audience of McDonald's film is Euro-American, this statement holds true in the sense that that audience would have little to do with songs in African languages.

What these songs do therefore is – to a certain degree – transform *Last King* into a foreign language film for McDonald's target audience. In his book, *Re-takes: Postcoloniality and Foreign Film Languages* (2005), John Mowitt raises a serious question: "Are foreign pictures things one encounters through the eyes or through the ears? Or both?" Mowitt answers his rhetorical question by saying, "a foreign picture will exhibit its foreignness not by virtue of its looks but by virtue of what it sounds like" (51). Mowitt's analysis aims at deconstructing the "foreign language film" category developed by the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), but his argument resonates in *Last King*. To understand the sub-text of the Ugandan songs in the film and how they situate the film's narrative in Ugandan context, the Euro-American audience needed subtitles *which are absent* for all local songs. At the same time, the film works partly as a local language film in the Ugandan context because of the audience's ability to understand

the message of the local songs in the context of their production and consumption, and because of the music's ability to create mood and emotional meaning beyond what the scriptwriters and the director intended.

Mowitt earlier argued that globalisation “involves the transnational corporatisation of the earth” [best illustrated by Hollywood's colonisation of the entire earth], yet ironically, globalisation also involves “the reinvigoration of national culture, precisely as a mode of resistance to transnational corporatisation” (Mowitt, xviii). Although the African songs in *Last King* hardly constitute a counterdiscourse to Foden's negative caricature of Amin, they create multilingual enunciation and challenge the monolingual English identity of the film thereby creating multiple audiences. Discussing the value addition that music brings to a film, Michel Chion discovers two categories of film music: the first is *empathetic* music, which is music that can “directly express its participation in the feeling of the scene.” The second is *anempathetic* music which is music that operates in ‘indifference’ or indirectly in that it can “reinforce the individual emotion of the character and of the spectator, even as the music pretends not to notice them” or even when the music may not be understood [My emphasis] (8). Cohen observes that “music influences the interpretation of film narrative and . . . becomes integrated in the memory with the visual information” (Cohen, 267). Whether the emotional role of the music is direct or indirect, the Ugandan songs and music, the spoken word in the film together with the movements, therefore, create a new multilingual and multicultural audiologovisual aesthetic that transforms Foden's English narrative into a multidimensional transatlantic

narrative with the ability to communicate different things to different audiences locally [in Uganda] and internationally. The use of continental African songs and artistes also broadens the African appeal of the film.

While one can argue that these songs merely serve as backdrop to Garrigan's bush adventures, I argue that the songs actually contribute to the texture and tapestry of the narrative and its perception at multiple levels. Featured are Guinean saxophonist, Momo Wandel Soumah [as Momo Wandel] and his song “Toko”, Philemon Hou's song “Grazing in the Grass” performed by iconic South African antiapartheid musician, Hugh Masekela, Ghanian song, “Bukom Mashie” performed by Oscar Sully and The Uhuru Dance Band, and Nigerian song “Love Is You” written by Ifediorama, Kamson and Shotade, performed by Ofo The Black Company. The closing credits song in the film illustrates my point. The song is “Acholi Pot Song,” played with the traditional adungu-harp and the xylophone to the tune of a popular Ugandan – in fact, East African Christian worship song with different lyrics in different languages; “Ipoore me awora [You are worthy of praise] in L, blango, Osanide Mukama [You are worthy of praise my King] in Luganda, Baaba Wa Mbinguni [Father in Heaven] [Swahili].” In the film, the lyrics in Acholi say, “Wilobo ni wamito kuc” [In this country we need peace]. The message of this song is simple. We need peace in this world, in this country and specifically in Acholiland and in Lango and we pray to Creator God for peace. The popular worship tune, a cultural icon in its own right, is loaded with a message that historicises Uganda's violent past and invokes memories of Amin's killing of the Lango middle class

because Apollo Milton Obote, the president that Amin overthrew in the 1971 military coup hailed from Lango as did many army officers. The second tribe that suffered most during Amin's murderous regime was the Acholi.⁷ But the tune is also loaded with a new message of peace transposed into the context of the post Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) search for peace and reconciliation in Acholi and Lango – again the two most affected sub-regions, with the Acholi region being the epicenter. It is interesting that these traumatic sub-texts can be read in a language McDonald and the screen writers do not understand, through a British film about a young Scottish doctor's adventures in Amin's Uganda. Going by Michel Chion's categories, for some viewers like myself who lost close relatives during Amin's anti Lango programs and others who were directly affected by the violence of Uganda's history, the song is *empathetic* because it directly participates in creating feelings; for others, it is *anempathetic* in the sense that it reinforces the emotions of the characters through creating mood but may not be understood by the (western) audience, while for some it is abstract. Even the performance of Scottish songs by Uganda and African singers are appropriated into the Ugandan and wider African production context through voicing and local context of performance. The songs are "The Bonnie Banks O' Loch Lomond" by The Nyonza Singers of Uganda, and "Me and Bobby McGee" performed by Angela Kalule, "Save Me" Written by Aretha Franklin [Queen of Soul] *et al*/performed by E.T. Mensah and The Tempos Band. Reviewer John Merriman credits the "musical *mélange*" in *Last King* saying the film "is notable for its inclusion of African songs, which would most likely

broaden anyone's musical palate." Besides, it will "offer something fresh and new to the *vast majority* of listeners" [My emphasis] (Merryman, 2006).

Will the Real Amin Please Stand Up?

The relation between novel and film with regard to the critical model of metatextuality needs careful delineation. Here is a film that turns Amin into a more charming individual and thus runs counter to Foden's overt Dark Continent templates, but in so doing it ignores or downplays one of those moments in history where the template is largely true given Amin's atrocious record. For all the movie's postcolonial representations of Amin, it does not necessarily replace old stereotype impressions of Africa with different ones but creates another problem of making Amin, Uganda's worst nightmare, likeable on screen. McDonald's film provides an example of how a transcultural production can give Africa a new stake in a Euro-American production which nevertheless follows the "Dark Continent" narrative mastertext. The film also raises interesting questions about film's relation to historiography and especially the rendering of ugly historical material on screen. Can we expect historical metafiction to provide us with historical fact? Certainly not. As Hyden White (2010) has famously observed, the act of emplotment transforms even historical fact into fiction and film fictionalises history even further. While McDonald's film reinscribes the stereotypes of Africa, at the same time it trumps some of the colonial mythology of Africa embodied in the character of Idi Amin through the *reverential* performance of Forest Whitaker, the impact of location shooting and the host of Ugandan cast and crew involved.

Transposing the 1970s Amin story in a 21st century Ugandan setting also reformats Amin's story in new context trumping the horrible aspects of his personality in order to project the jovial and human side of him. At the same time, the film was produced at a time when Amin's legacy is being reviewed a bit favourably in the context of his successors' record on democracy, human rights and especially corruption. While Foden's novel excels in demonising Amin and reducing him to pure evil imagery to fit the monster image as the ultimate Other from the "colonial library," McDonald's film on the other hand – through Whitaker's acting choices and total context of its production in Uganda – humanises Amin and projects him as a charismatic individual and an anti-imperialist champion, at least in his intentions. While it is useful to project a better image of Amin as a way of redeeming the dark image of Uganda's past, it is equally dangerous to sanitise the story of Idi Amin and his role in the brutal murder of hundreds of thousands of his countrymen. Moreover, it is the actions of Idi Amin that turned Uganda into a pariah state and destroyed Uganda's economy.

Conclusion

No film can reproduce the true story of Idi Amin because the cinematic apparatus is geared towards entertainment. Perhaps the best thing McDonald's film has done is recast the debate about Idi Amin in the context of colonialism and neocolonialism by problematising Britain's role in putting Amin in power, and stirring debate about the different positive and negative legacies of Idi Amin. Over the years Amin's name became synonymous with the name Uganda, even though the country has

moved on and become one of the world's favourite destinations for tourism and investment. One question remains: What ultimately are the consequences of humanising the historical "monster" at the expense of the representations of "Dark Continent" motifs when those motifs are largely realised in Amin's character and atrocities? The reality is that McDonald's film is not about Uganda and does not sufficiently historicise the colonial creation of Amin or even the sufferings of Uganda under Amin.

While it exposes the betrayal and indifference of the western nations that put Amin in power to strengthen their Cold War dominance in Africa, the film is not an anticolonial discourse. The west did nothing to help remove Idi Amin from power in spite of awareness of his atrocities. It was Ugandan exiles and the Tanzanian army that eventually overthrew Idi Amin. As Diawara has noted, the film is not interested in this African agency and trumps out this affirmative aspect of African history entirely in the adaptation (Diawara, 2010: 79). In any case, *Last King* is a blockbuster western entertainment film about a naïve young white adventurer, Nicholas Garrigan. Idi Amin is only important as the "Godzilla" in this partly hilarious drama. While Amin was butchering Ugandans in hundreds of thousands in the 1970s, he was the subject of media frenzy in Britain. Barbet Schroeder observed in his documentary *General Idi Amin Dada: A Self Portrait* (1974) that footages of Idi Amin were on high demand on British television for comic relief. He was satirised on British TV action John Bird (Wooding, 2013). The adaptation, although less derogatory than the novel does not depart from the colonialist template. There is the positive element of

Whitaker's stunning and culturally sensitive performance, local cultural context and ambience arising from location shooting in Uganda, the modern trappings of material progress, and the complexity of Amin's legacy in Uganda in light of post-Amin human rights abuses and corruption. There is the charming leader, heavy weight boxer and musician, and the African champion of the fight against neocolonialism – but underneath this calm and facade lurks another Dark Continent Euro-American cultural production about Africa.

Endnotes

1. Foden's interviewees include among others: photojournalist Mohamed Amin, Denis Hills (who survived Amin's firing squad for insulting Amin in his book *The White Pumpkin* (1975), Bishop Festo Kivengere (most famous evangelical preacher during Amin's and early post-Amin years), Henry Kyemba (Amin's former Minister of Health and author of *A State of Blood* (1977), who is a disguised character as Health Minister in Foden's novel and its film adaptation). There is also renowned Kenyan historian Professor Ali Mazrui, Exiled Kabaka of Buganda, Edward Muteesa, Barbet Schroeder who made the only known cinematic portrait of Idi Amin, and current Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. Finally, Foden expresses his "thanks to those personal informants currently living in Uganda who gave interviews but asked for their names to be withheld . . ." ix).
2. *Zulu* is a 1964 super British production that reenacts the historical Battle of Rorke's Drift between the British Army and the Zulus army in January 1879. Due to superior firepower, a small company of 150 British successfully defended themselves against 4,000 Zulu spear wielding warriors. A total of 23 Victoria Cross (VC), the British Empire's highest medal of valor was awarded to British soldiers who fought in this battle. The highest number of awards for a single battle.
3. It is important to point out that there is no "Mau Mau tribe" in Kenya. The Mau Mau Uprising/ Revolt/ Rebellion also called Kenya Emergency was a liberation war waged by the natives in Kenya between 1952 and 1960 under the command of Dedan Kimathi. It involved mostly the Kikuyu people groups and affiliated people groups.
4. Forest Whitaker won many awards including Best Actor at the Academy Awards, the Golden Globes, the Screen Actors' Guild and the BAFTAs. He also won many critics' awards from the Broadcast Film Critics Association, New York Film Critics' Circle, Los Angeles Film Critics' Association, the National Board of Review and many other critics' awards.
5. See examples in Eamonn Walker's Performance of Andre Baptiste Senior (a caricature of Charles Taylor) in *Lord of War* (2005), or Lennie James' performance General Zateb Kazim in *Sahara* (2005). The only African leaders portrayed respectfully are Nelson Mandela, Patrice Lumumba, Thomas Sankara and Steve Biko.
6. Songs in Luganda include, "Nakawunde" written by Mike Musoke and Herman Sewanyana and performed by Percussion Discussion Afrika; Otole Dance Music, a traditional Acholi warrior dance that Amin used to dance, arranged by Ugandan musician Stephen Rwangyezi and performed by The Ndere Dance Troupe, Uganda's famous flagship dance troupe. Situating the production in Ugandan context. "Fever" written by I. Jingo and performed by Jingo; "Butuuse No. 1" a famous hit song written by Moses Matovu performed by Uganda's highly respected Afrigo Band; "Kasongo" another classic written by Kasongo Wakenema and performed by Afrigo Band; There were also Scottish songs but performed by Ugandan singers: "The Bonnie Banks O' Loch Lomond," performed by The Nyonza Singers "Me and Bobby McGee" written by Kris Kristofferson and Fred Foster but performed by Angela Kalule; "Acholi Pot Song" Written by The Ndere Dance Troupe,

- performed by The Ndere Dance Troupe with the "Solo Voice" performance by Betty Akidi.
7. The Orchestra Super Mazembe band had roots in Super Vox, a band formed in 1967 in Zaire and led by Mutonkole Longwa Didos. The group combined the rumba style of Congolese Soukous music with the local Benga flavor of Kenyan music. Their biggest hits were "Shauri Yako", "Samba", "Bwana Nipe Pesa" and "Kassongo". The group was dissolved in 1985 (Matos 2013; "About Orchestra Super Mazembe").
 8. The Langi are Nilo Hamites while Acholi's are Nilotics, but they speak mutually intelligible languages from the Luo language family; hence, they were both dominant in the Obote I army and were the focus of Amin's massacres.

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