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# Mixed-ish: race, class and gender in 1950s–60s Kampala through a life history of Barbara Kimenye

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## ABSTRACT

Vibrant social scene, intellectual hub and diverse glitterati: this was Kampala for its beau monde in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The city enjoyed a liberal reputation with ‘rosy’ race relations, attracting thinkers and socialites from across Africa and the world. It was in this singular space that Barbara Kimenye, a Black mixed-race woman of dual English and Caribbean heritage, self-identified Ugandan, and ‘one of East Africa’s most prolific children’s writers’, moved. An examination of her life in the Ugandan capital illuminates the nature of race and class, as brought about by British colonialism, in 1950s and 1960s Kampala. As a mixed-race woman, Kimenye occupied a unique position, living at the intersections of Black Ugandan and white expatriate communities. Her movement in Kampala’s elite circles, as an economically challenged single mother of two, was in part enabled through her proximity to whiteness. Drawing on Kimenye’s serialised memoirs and other archival sources, this article will demonstrate how her unique positionality challenged colonial taxonomies of race and class, highlighting their insubstantial and porous nature, and providing a new understanding of the nature of the post-colonial East African city.

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In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Kampala served as the intellectual and cultural capital of East Africa, as it was ‘then at the height of its reputation as [the region’s] most beautiful city, as well as the most sophisticated’.<sup>1</sup> Prominent figures from across the world were attracted to Kampala’s vibrant social and cultural scene, as well as its supposed ‘liberal’ reputation that allowed for ‘a great deal of mixing [to go on] all over the place’ between different races.<sup>2</sup> Home to arguably the best university in Africa at the time, Makerere College, Kampala enjoyed the attentions of a diversity of scholars and artists who contributed to the intellectual life of the university and city. Its cultural scene was no less significant, and there was regular diversion offered by theatre groups, music societies, and art galleries. The city also boasted a vibrant nightlife, sustained by its clubs and bars, which were popular among its residents and visitors. The best of Kampala’s intellectual and social scene was amalgamated in the glittering literary salons hosted

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by Rajat Neogy, journalist and founder of Uganda's famous *Transition* magazine, 'the most daring and important literary and political journal of the 1960s'.<sup>3</sup> These events were popular among Kampala's intellectual elite: in his memoirs, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o recalls attending these parties as a young Makerere student, writing that they 'attracted writers, artists, and singers of all races, heralds of a new, confident Uganda'.<sup>4</sup> For the city's multiracial upper classes, Kampala must have been a haven in comparison to neighbouring Nairobi, and one British expatriate living in the city at the time described the relations between Ugandans and the British community as 'sunny'.<sup>5</sup>

These accounts, however, belie a less than rosy situation on the ground: tenuous relations between Asian communities and the African majority, largely forged by a colonial racial hierarchy, were what would ultimately lead to the Asian expulsion by Idi Amin in 1972.<sup>6</sup> Inter-racial social interactions took place along class lines; therefore, Kampala's elite, consisting of expatriates and Ugandan upper classes, were more likely to interact with each other in a social context than, for instance, white expatriates and working class Ugandans. Additional testimonies also demonstrate how rife colonial racism was in Kampala, such as the infamous Tank Hill party thrown in Muyenga by a British expatriate in 1963 to mourn the ending of empire. The latter involved guests displaying offensive depictions of colonial tropes, including dressing a dog in a Kenyan flag – as the party was held on the eve of Kenyan independence – and the partygoers '[reenacting] the glorious days of natives being made to carry messages in a cleft stick'.<sup>7</sup>

It was this specific urban social context that journalist and children's book author Barbara Kimenye, a Black mixed-race single mother of two, moved in when she lived in Kampala in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As a secretary in the government of the then king of the Baganda ethnic group, Kabaka Mutesa, Kimenye regularly socialised with Ugandan and East African high society, and was a well-known figure in Kampala's social scene. It was at one of Neogy's literary salons that Ngũgĩ met Barbara Kimenye, and was immediately captivated by her charms: he remembers her as a 'tall, ... beautiful lady, ... from a mysterious background with alluring hints of sojourns in Jamaica, England, Tanganyika, and Uganda', who, at Neogy's parties, moved about 'with the ease of one who was aware of her looks and dress, indeed one who accepted the fact that all eyes, male and female, were fixed on her person and motion'.<sup>8</sup>

While many scholars have discussed Kimenye as a literary figure, analysing her writing and her contribution to the East African literary canon, her life in Kampala remains underexamined.<sup>9</sup> This article will address this, through analysing Kimenye's activities and movements as a Black mixed-race woman in a variety of social spaces in late colonial and early post-colonial Kampala. It will observe how these were enabled and hindered to varying degrees due to her proximity to whiteness, her economically challenged situation, and her gender. The unique quality of Kampala in the late 1950s and early 1960s that allowed a figure as distinctive as Kimenye to reside there will also be discussed: the city's liberal attributes stood in stark juxtaposition to apartheid Nairobi in the settler colony of Kenya, where the Emergency had made strict segregation laws even harsher. In contrast to the 1970s, when Idi Amin's Uganda discouraged cultural and intellectual diversity, the culturally vibrant capital of the Ugandan protectorate enjoyed a liberal reputation with supposedly amicable race relations in the 1950s and 1960s. It is within this exceptional social setting that Kimenye was able to live and move about in, highlighting the intersections of race, class, and gender in the city. In

this way, an examination of the figure of Barbara Kimenye will also demonstrate the unique quality of Kampala in this period as an urban space, both within Uganda and eastern Africa more broadly.

Employing the geographical space of the city as a historiographical means of analysis has been undertaken by numerous scholars of African decolonisation.<sup>10</sup> Previous historiographies, such as works by Cooper, have examined the post-colonial African city as a site for political activity, emphasising party politics, nationalist movements and mass mobilisations.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars, including White, Brennan, Burgess and Ivaska, have also analysed the city as the location for the coalescence of the worst aspects of colonial rule, and provide an examination of racial segregation and gender discrimination in public spaces, and the ways in which this was perpetuated in the post-colonial era.<sup>12</sup> More recently, frameworks for understanding the city have included the cultural, with scholars seeking to examine urban popular culture using texts or films, which is demonstrated in works by Callaci and Fair.<sup>13</sup> For many of these approaches, the city of Dar es Salaam especially is the subject of numerous African urban historical studies, as the city's Indian Ocean connections, its Indian diaspora, and print culture remain the focus. Fewer comparative historiographies that employ a cultural approach to the study of African urban histories focus on Kampala: with the exception of Taylor, who examines issues around race and racism in late colonial and early postcolonial Ugandan urban spaces, Ugandan historiography – specifically that of Kampala – remains primarily focussed on kingdoms, military rule, political structures, and religion, largely from androcentric perspectives.<sup>14</sup>

Historiographies around race in colonial East Africa have previously focussed largely on segregation and, specifically, the region's Asian diaspora.<sup>15</sup> In relation to Barbara Kimenye, there are also few works comparatively that examine mixed-race individuals in colonial East Africa. The subject of *métis* (mixed-race people) in French West Africa, as well as France's debate on 'the *métis* problem', has been treated by various scholars, including Ray and Jean-Baptiste.<sup>16</sup> While Mbogoni interrogates miscegenation and colonial legislation on the matter in eastern Africa, few historians of the region examine mixed-race individuals as actors, focussing instead on their existence as by-products of interracial relationships.<sup>17</sup> However, as Lee states, 'understanding how multiracial people negotiated a colonial world defined by racial difference ... reveals an alternative social and political outlook that challenges assumptions about ethical life during the colonial period'.<sup>18</sup>

This article builds on previous historiography, in looking beyond Indian Ocean connections and taking a biographical approach that centres a woman, with an examination of the life history of Barbara Kimenye in late colonial and early post-colonial Kampala. Literature on Ugandan women's history has largely prioritised the political, and works by Musisi, Tamale, Tripp, Ntiro or Sheldon examine different aspects around this, including activism, mobilisation, and legislation affecting women.<sup>19</sup> Adding to this rich historiography, this article will focus on the biography of a historical figure, in order to illuminate historical social dynamics in Kampala. A biographical approach – especially one of a comparatively marginalised figure in historiography – allows for, as Milford, McCann, Hunter and Branch argue, 'the recovery of lives that either fell entirely or partly outside a "linear story of modernisation and nation-building"', and enables the historian to grapple with 'stories of other ways that these same individuals perceived and engaged

with the dynamics and possibilities of the twentieth-century world'.<sup>20</sup> This is especially the case for a figure like Barbara Kimenye: while she could be considered an unusual figure through which to discuss East African urban race relations and autochthony, this article argues that it is precisely her unique 'insider-outsider' status as a mixed-race woman of Black and white parentage that illuminates the complexities and contradictions of race and class in 1950s and 1960s Kampala. Colonial constructions of race and class shaped urban segregation and social interactions in the city in this period. Anti-miscegenation laws across colonial East Africa and urban segregation across race and class lines, all worked to buttress a system of white supremacy, in which only an African elite had access to the spaces that white expatriates did. These social structures had the appearance of rigidity, as few actors crossed social boundaries around which colonial society was designed. However, the multi-racialism of elite classes in Kampala primarily existed as a form of protection against populist underclasses, whose protestations against economic inequalities ran along racial lines due to urban segregation. It is only through examining the figure of Barbara Kimenye, whose singular positionality allowed for movements in Kampala few others could enjoy, that the porous nature of these structures becomes clear, highlighting the ways race and class intersected to undermine the systems of white supremacy in the city. While other markers of social stratification, including religion and ethnicity, also played important roles in shaping urban life in Kampala, for reasons of scope, only race, class and gender will be discussed in this article. Due to the singularity of Kimenye, a mass popular culture approach to understanding Kampala in this period is difficult to employ; however, as a member of the city's *beau monde*, a focus on such a historical figure allows for novel understandings of urban social stratifications in this period.

A brief biography of Kimenye will first be provided, demonstrating the global nature of her life, as she moved as a single mother of two several times within her lifetime between Britain, Tanganyika, Uganda, and Kenya. In order to place her life history into context, this will be followed by an examination of the history of interracial relationships and mixed-race people within East Africa generally, and Uganda specifically. Finally, the article will provide a focussed analysis of Kimenye's life in Kampala, the – often elite – spaces she occupied, the social contexts she moved in, and her various occupations. An examination of her figure will emphasise the unique position that Kimenye occupied in Kampala, as well as how the city's social stratifications of race, class and gender intersected and blurred. Primary source material for this article is textual in nature, sourced from archival institutions located in Uganda, Kenya, and the United Kingdom – reflective of the global nature of Kimenye's life – and also includes Kimenye's fiction. Her memoirs of her years in Kampala in a turbulent political time, though unpublished, were serialised in the Ugandan newspaper *Daily Monitor* in 2015, and have provided invaluable insight into Kimenye's life in Uganda, in addition to Kampala's socio-economic elite. These have formed the basis for this article, and will be used to demonstrate the fallacy of colonial social taxonomies in Kampala. Simply by living and moving about in Kampala's elite spaces in the late colonial and early post-colonial period, Kimenye actively challenged these racial classifications, demonstrating both their illusory nature, as well as the city's liberalism, as Uganda and East Africa moved into its post-colonial era.

## **'One of East Africa's most prolific children's writers'<sup>21</sup>**

Barbara Clarke Holdsworth was born on 19 December 1929, in Halifax, West Yorkshire in Britain, to a white British mother and a West Indian father. She was educated at Keighley Girls' Grammar School, and later moved to London to undertake nursing training.<sup>22</sup> The British capital at the time served as a destination for students, intellectuals, and revolutionaries from across the British Empire who were attracted to the colonial metropole for educational opportunities. Many Africans were of the continent's elite and returned to their home countries to occupy distinguished positions in post-colonial governments.<sup>23</sup> It was in London that Barbara met and befriended many East African students who '[frequented] East African House behind the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch',<sup>24</sup> including Bill Kimenye, the son of a Tanganyikan chief, whom Barbara later married.

The couple moved to Bukoba, Tanganyika in the mid-1950s and soon had their first son, Christopher. Barbara and Bill Kimenye separated shortly afterwards, however, and in 1956, Barbara – pregnant with her second child – and Christopher moved to Kampala. She immediately fell in love with the capital, which, at the time of her moving had a 'reputation as East Africa's most beautiful city, as well as the most sophisticated'.<sup>25</sup> Kimenye initially worked in a hardware shop along Salisbury Road (now Nkrumah Road) in Kampala, before taking on a position with an insurance company.<sup>26</sup> A few months later, her second son, Daudi, was born, and Barbara's mother arrived from Britain to Uganda to help raise the two children.<sup>27</sup> After the birth of her son, the family lived a 'leisurely pace of life in Buganda during the late 1950s'.<sup>28</sup> Kimenye had many friends in Kampala from her student days in London, who were now part of Uganda's elite, and introduced her to their friends and family. Among them was Joseph Sengendo Zake, lawyer and member of Uganda's first political party, Uganda National Congress.<sup>29</sup> Joe Zake, as he was known, 'took [Kimenye] by the hand, made [her] face up to the fact that another baby was on the way ... and found a house at a rent [she] could afford, £5 a month ... below the Roman Catholic cathedral on Rubaga Hill'.<sup>30</sup>

Soon after her arrival in Kampala, Barbara met Edward Mutesa II, the then Kabaka of Buganda: her reputation preceded her in Kampala, and Kabaka Mutesa had already been made aware of her arrival in the city by his brother, Prince Henry Kimera, of whom it can be assumed – though sources do not directly indicate this – that he knew Kimenye through the small East African circle in London. The Kabaka sent a royal emissary to Kimenye, inviting her to his palace at Mengo for a meeting, which she attended, in spite of her 'mother's surge of misgivings concerning the Kabaka's dubious reputation where women were concerned'.<sup>31</sup> This meeting with Kabaka Mutesa catapulted her into Kampala's high society, and she began to attend the 'parties and sundowners that [constituted] Kampala's social whirl'.<sup>32</sup> Known pejoratively – due to their perceived poor influence on Kabaka Mutesa – as 'the Mengo set', the Kabaka's entourage, which Kimenye quickly became a part of, was an eclectic grouping of Ugandans and expatriates alike, consisting of doctors, politicians, diplomats, and fashion designers.<sup>33</sup> Kimenye socialised with the *crème-de-la-crème* of East African urban high society, which, in one instance, involved dancing in a nightclub with the Umwami of Urundi. After modelling in a fashion show held at the Kabaka's palace, she met a secretary in his government who was soon to return to Britain with



her husband. Encouraging Kimenye to apply for her position as her successor, the secretary introduced Kimenye to her boss, and soon after, Kimenye attained a secretarial posting in the Kabaka's government.<sup>34</sup>

Kimenye enjoyed writing, for which she had a talent, and decided to pursue a career in journalism after a chance meeting with a very encouraging Tom Mboya in a Kampala nightclub.<sup>35</sup> She became the first Black woman to work as a journalist in East Africa, and her first position was for the *Uganda Nation*, which she found especially challenging in light of the increasingly authoritarian and violent regime of then Prime Minister – and later President – Milton Obote.<sup>36</sup> Following the Nakulabye Massacre of 1964, orchestrated by Obote's government, Kimenye was responsible for covering the commission of inquiry into the killings.<sup>37</sup> Upon reading her sanitised, heavily edited words when they appeared in print, she realised that her writing was being scrutinised by Prime Minister Obote. As she refused to work in an environment where she felt compromised in her journalistic integrity, she felt compelled her to leave the *Uganda Nation* and returned to work for Kabaka Mutesa.<sup>38</sup>

Kimenye also worked as a Kampala-based correspondent for the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation*, reporting on a range of topics, from Kampala's theatre scene, to the modern Ugandan woman.<sup>39</sup> She profiled members of Kampala's cosmopolitan elite, such as Barbara Brown, former fashion model, founder of Nommo Gallery, and later wife of Rajat Neogy.<sup>40</sup> She also interviewed Mary Kiwanuka, who founded Uganda's first women co-operative society, which marketed and sold the crafts of rural women.<sup>41</sup> In 1965, Kimenye left Uganda and moved to Kenya, where she continued to work for the *Daily Nation* in Nairobi as women's feature editor, writing regular columns that were popular among readers, as well as for the *East African Standard*.<sup>42</sup>

It was around this time that Kimenye also began to write short stories and books for both adults and children. Her short story collection *Kalasanda*, published by Oxford University Press' Three Crowns Series in 1965, delighted audiences across East Africa, as Kimenye regaled them with tales from a fictional Buganda village, earning her the description 'the Miss Mitford of East Africa'.<sup>43</sup> The success of this book was followed by the publication of its sequel, *Kalasanda Revisited*, in 1966. Kimenye also began writing the *Moses* series, a schoolboy series for children which follows the adventures and misdemeanours of Moses, a student in a Ugandan boarding school. Books such as *Moses*, *Moses in Trouble* and *Moses and the Kidnappers* were published in 1968, and Kimenye penned the series for the following three decades, culminating with the final instalment, *Moses and the Movie*, in 1996. The series remains popular and much-loved among East African school children today.<sup>44</sup> Other books by Kimenye include *The Winged Adventure* (1969), *Gemstone Affair* (1978), *Beauty Queen* (1988) and *Pretty Boy, Beware* (1997).

In 1975, Kimenye moved back to Britain to join her sons, whom she had already sent there for their education. She lived in London, where she worked as a Race Relations Advisor for Brent Council. Kimenye avidly followed current affairs in Uganda, and was actively involved in helping refugees and political exiles from the Idi Amin and later second Obote regimes. In 1986, Kimenye moved back to Uganda, living there for three years, and later relocated again to Kenya, where she lived until 1998, before she returned to London. Kimenye continued writing until shortly before her death in 2012.<sup>45</sup>

As a relatively unknown historical figure outside of East Africa, piecing together Barbara Kimenye's life story was challenging. As she was not a political figure, she did not frequent formal centres of power and government, which are the records most likely to be found in national archives in East Africa. For this reason, biographical information on Kimenye was located from an eclectic collection of sources, ranging from obituaries, her memoirs, interviews, as well as her newspaper articles. Interrogating Kimenye's life and movements in elite social spaces in Kampala demonstrates the small nature of these circles, which were characterised by a liberal cosmopolitan globality that could not be observed in its counterparts in Nairobi. The uniqueness of Kampala's upper class lay in its diversity: European expatriates and native Ugandans alike mingled with each other, as well as with visitors – often famous cultural and political figures – from across Africa. The exceptional nature of this urban space, in which a bicultural figure such as Kimenye could thrive in, lends itself to understanding colonial-instituted social relations across race and class. An examination of Kimenye's tumultuous life in Kampala, therefore, aids in illuminating the nature of boundaries of class and race, augmented by her identity as a mixed-race woman.

### History and status of mixed-race people in Africa

In twentieth century British East Africa, sexual relations between Europeans and Africans were prohibited by law, through a circular issued in 1909 by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Crewe.<sup>46</sup> Section 159 of the Kenyan Penal code also made sexual relationships between African men and European women illegal, 'punishable with imprisonment of both parties and corporal punishment of the man, even though it takes place by consent'.<sup>47</sup> Consequences for relations between European men and African women are not mentioned, illustrating how, though taboo, this may have been a more socially acceptable pairing. Race relations in eastern Africa were tenuous, and a tri-partite racial hierarchy existed with Europeans at the apex, followed by Asians, and Africans at its base.<sup>48</sup> Segregation in public life was well in place, and schools, hospitals, and public services catered to individual racial 'groups', with different rights and privileges applying to each.<sup>49</sup> This three-way division of East African society signified that mixed-race individuals required 'classification', in order to determine to which racial category they would belong, which will be discussed further below.<sup>50</sup> Due to the presence of Asian communities in the region, as well as the proximity to the Indian Ocean, many mixed-race individuals in East Africa also had Goan, Indian or Arab heritage, in addition to African.<sup>51</sup>

In colonial Uganda, European men arriving in the Buganda kingdom in the late twentieth century were 'offered' Baganda women and girls between the ages of ten and twenty by Kabaka Mutesa I, the then king of Buganda, as a sign of hospitality.<sup>52</sup> Sexual relations between European men and Baganda women continued over the decades, and after World War I, the number of mixed-race children born from these relationships increased rapidly. This was partly due to the European and Indian soldiers passing through Uganda on their way to the front in German East Africa, which gave rise to prostitution and the spread of sexually transmitted infections.<sup>53</sup> The mixed-race children became a point of concern for many Baganda, especially with regard to their identity and place within the ethnic group, and Baganda chiefs debated how to put a stop to interracial



relationships.<sup>54</sup> This attitude stood in stark contrast to that of the British Colonial Office: Provincial Commissioner Cox posited that the issue and status of mixed-race individuals in Uganda was not crucial.<sup>55</sup> In spite of this, classification of people of mixed heritage – termed ‘half-castes’ in colonial documentation<sup>56</sup> – took place in Uganda, in which such an individual could be classed as non-African, should they be able to prove ‘that [they] are partly of non-African descent, that [they are] not occupying land in accordance with native custom ... and that [they are] not living among an African tribe or community in accordance with their customary mode of life’.<sup>57</sup> Based on this classification, this meant that two siblings of European-African parentage could be placed in different racial ‘groups’.<sup>58</sup>

In relation to Barbara Kimenye, it is also worth discussing the social status and perception of mixed-race women in Africa. In West Africa, they were largely perceived as immoral, engaging in prostitution like their African mothers who had partnered with European men. With their lighter skin and softer hair texture, which became markers of aesthetic attractiveness, mixed-race women were also seen as occupying the pinnacle of beauty hierarchies on the continent, and they were coveted by both European and African men alike.<sup>59</sup> The pervasiveness of colourism signified that physical features that resembled those of Europeans became set as standards of beauty, especially for women.<sup>60</sup> This is illustrated by Mbogoni’s example of colonial Tanganyika, where biracial women’s lighter skin made them desirable to African men as ‘trophy’ girlfriends or wives.<sup>61</sup>

Mixed-race communities and populations had existed in the African continent for centuries but presented a perceived problem to European colonial governments. Legislation attempting to outlaw miscegenation and to categorise mixed-race populations was undertaken by different colonial regimes, including in eastern Africa. The presence of mixed-race individuals also affected colonial-constructed social hierarchies, and the ways in which this could be observed in Kampala society in the 1950s and 60s, through the figure of Barbara Kimenye, will be discussed below.

### **Race, class and gender in 1950s and 1960s Kampala**

An interrogation of Kimenye’s positionality reveals the complexities and contradictions of colonial racial and class-based categorisations in Kampala. She is a useful figure to examine social relations in the city in the late colonial and early post-colonial period, as an economically challenged woman of colour not ethnically from the region delineated as Uganda – although she later self-identified as Ugandan – who came to the country, via Tanganyika, from Britain. Kimenye occupied an in-between status characteristic of many Black mixed-race people’s experiences, in that in Kampala she was seen as Black by white expatriates, and as white by many Africans. An examination of her movements in differing social circles in the capital city shows how she moved between these racial categories, depending on whom she was interacting with, demonstrating the fluidity of racial constructs. In her day-to-day life in Kampala, for instance, Kimenye witnessed and experienced the racism – which she must have been familiar with from growing up in Britain – of white settlers in Africa when she interacted with her white Kenyan employer at the hardware shop on Salisbury Road. Years later, Kimenye recalled that ‘it was one of my first close encounters with a Kenyan white, and suddenly the whole

Mau Mau business started to make sense. Within two minutes of [his] arrival in our [office], I could have cheerfully killed him'.<sup>62</sup>

During the writing and publishing process of Kimenye's short story collection *Kalasanda* in 1964, the publishers of Oxford University Press repeatedly referred to her as African or Ugandan, in correspondence with, or about, her. Occasionally this was done in a patronising manner, when discussing how Kimenye, as an African author, would not understand copyright or legal issues in publishing.<sup>63</sup> Three years later, in 1967, German writer Jahnheinz Jahn wrote to Oxford University Press, requesting biographical details about Kimenye, whom he wished to publish in his 'anthology of Negro humour throughout the world'.<sup>64</sup> Aside from the racism in Jahn's language and behind his publishing ambitions, this also illustrates how, by late 1967, Kimenye's reputation as an African writer, as determined by Oxford University Press, was sealed.

Conversely, due to her lighter skin and British accent, by most Ugandans Barbara Kimenye was seen white. Nowhere is this more telling than in an incident at Mulago Hospital, the African hospital in Kampala, which Kimenye later recounted in her memoirs. Shortly after her arrival in Kampala, her son, Christopher, contracted malaria. Kimenye rushed to Mulago Hospital in the middle of the night with a screaming toddler, where she was told by the Ugandan doctor on duty that she should take the child to the European Hospital – now Mengo Hospital – for treatment. It was only 'when [Kimenye] argued that [her] son was fathered by a full-bloodied African, and that he had been delivered by an African doctor ... was [Christopher] given treatment'.<sup>65</sup>

Her former Tanganyikan in-laws harboured similar views on her outsider status: in 1957, eight chiefs from Bukoba travelled to the Kabaka for a visit, among them a cousin of Kimenye's ex-husband. Kimenye later realised that they had been sent by her former father-in-law, who, when he found out that his grandsons were also being raised by Kimenye's white mother, 'was claiming that the boys were being brought up as Europeans and deliberately separated from their own culture'.<sup>66</sup> It is clear that her Tanzanian father-in-law viewed Kimenye as non-Black, if not white, and culturally British, the influence of which on his grandsons he worried about.

Of her closer Ugandan friends and acquaintances, Kimenye wrote that they 'accepted [her] without question'. This was especially evident following the birth of her second son, Daudi, when she was visited by 'about a dozen Baganda ladies', who had 'come ... in the traditional manner to see if [Kimenye] had enough milk ... if [she] hadn't, they would bring a herbal brew guaranteed to produce a plentiful supply of breast milk'.<sup>67</sup> To a single young mother worried about the financial security of her family, this visit did much to appease her anxieties: 'simply by showing an interest in what happened to me and my children, and referring to them as "abana baffe" (our children) they had indicated that we were accepted members of the community'.<sup>68</sup>

In light of this in-between position Kimenye occupied, it is helpful to examine her interactions with Kabaka Mutesa and other members of Kampala and East Africa's elite. Kimenye, as previously mentioned, had many financial anxieties, and before she worked for the Kabaka and began writing, her only income was from the insurance company, which 'allowed for no savings'. She often 'worried over how [she] would cope in the event of sickness, or if for some reason, [she] lost her job'.<sup>69</sup> Given her economic insecurity, it can be questioned how she accessed the spaces the wealthy of East Africa moved in, as a Black Ugandan woman of Kimenye's financial standing and

marital status would not have been able to do the same. This is where the porous nature of race and class boundaries can be observed: Kimenye's proximity to whiteness, accrued through her mixed-race privilege in the context of post-colonial Kampala, allowed her to mingle with Kabaka Mutesa and his entourage. Colourism certainly played a role in this, as colonial attitudes to beauty, especially for women, meant that Kimenye's lighter skin benefitted her in ways Ugandan women of darker complexion would not have experienced.<sup>70</sup>

Kimenye's gender also exerted great influence on her movements in Kampala. As a woman, she would not have had the same access to certain spaces that an elite African man would have had, with her gender providing limitations to her movements. Additionally, as she was unmarried, she had neither the connection to the patriarchy, nor the social protection and status marriage could offer to women. However, here again the contradictions of race and class become evident, as Kimenye, despite her gender, moved in social spaces that a working-class African man would not have been able to access, due to her proximity to whiteness and her educational status.

It is useful here to compare Kimenye to another 'middle' figure in Kampala in this period, Pumla Kisosonkole, the first African woman to be elected to the Ugandan Legislative Council in 1956. Though born in South Africa, Kisosonkole made a home for herself in Uganda after her marriage to Christopher Kisosonkole – the son of a Baganda chief and landowner – in 1939. Pumla Kisosonkole was a staunch advocate for non-racialism in the political sphere, and between 1957 and 1960 served as the first African president of the multi-racial Uganda Council for Women.<sup>71</sup> The Council, however, in the late colonial and early post-colonial period, was a product of class interests, as it primarily consisted of European, Asian and wealthy African women.<sup>72</sup> Kisosonkole's positionality was equally sustained through her connection to elite Baganda patriarchy, and it is doubtful whether, as a Black African woman, she would have worked in high political spaces, if she were unmarried. Kimenye, on the other hand, despite being unmarried, was able to access such elite arenas due to her white British heritage. Though legislation and social norms relegated individuals to different social groupings, their constructed nature and permeability become evident when a figure such as Kimenye, straddling a plurality of heritages, moved through and across them.

It is difficult to ascertain from the available sources how aware Kimenye was of her privilege; however, the previously discussed examples reflect some self-awareness of her status as Black mixed-race woman and the ways in which her in-between positionality was a source of confusion to others. In light of this, it is useful to examine Kimenye's journalistic writing, specifically for the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation*, and the issues and figures she chose to discuss as a columnist while she was living in Kampala. Some columns served to highlight contemporary social issues in the city, such as the lack of suitable housing for young unmarried women, and problems of safety the latter faced. For other columns, as mentioned above, Kimenye profiled notable women in Kampala, promoting their work in order to highlight social initiatives in the city: for instance, with the profile of Barbara Brown, Kimenye showcased the famous Nommo Gallery in Kampala, and the city's emerging art scene.<sup>73</sup> Through Mary Kiwanuka, founder of Uganda's first women's cooperative, Kimenye highlighted women's independent economic activities of making and selling traditional crafts.<sup>74</sup> A further striking profile by Kimenye is that of Edith Tibasaga, the first African woman bank cashier to

work at National and Grindlays Bank in Kampala: while emphasising this historical achievement, Kimenye also uses the column as an indictment of pervasive sexist attitudes at the time.<sup>75</sup> Though it can be argued that Kimenye's mixed-race-ness and her proximity to whiteness aided her in attaining the columnist position with the *Daily Nation*, with her choice of topics and figures she chose to profile, Kimenye used her platform to amplify a variety of Ugandan women's voices and experiences. This is indicative of some self-awareness of her advantageous positionality in Kampala society, and an ability on Kimenye's part to exploit to her advantage the in-between status she occupied in the context of post-colonial Kampala and the existing colonial-instated social relations. In frequently dry and amusing tones, she discussed issues that were unique to women in the city and were otherwise overlooked in a colonial-legacy newspaper.

Kimenye's fiction also provides some insight into her self-identification during her life in Kampala. For example, her short story collections *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited* centre around quotidian life in what is described as a typical Baganda village, and her characters are all Baganda peasants and proletariats.<sup>76</sup> Her famous *Moses* series, which recount the adventures and misdemeanours of Moses and his friends at Mukibi's Education Institute, similarly follows Ugandan and African characters.<sup>77</sup> In highlighting Baganda and Ugandan life in her fiction with endearing characterisation, Kimenye's fiction differs from that of her Western contemporaries writing on Africa, such as Elspeth Huxley's *Flame Trees of Thika* (Chatto and Windus, 1959), implying her affinity with the communities in which she lived in Kampala. Additionally, her willingness to be marketed as an African author by Oxford University Press demonstrates her self-identification as a Ugandan – or East African – woman.

Through Kimenye's movements in various social contexts in Kampala, the contradictions of colonial racial constructions in Uganda become evident. Unlike the apartheid system implemented in Kenya, Uganda had a reputation for being liberal, with, as Kimenye described, 'a great deal of mixing going on all over the place'.<sup>78</sup> As a white settler colony, Kenya's social structures were based on a prominent system of white supremacy, compounded by the recent Mau Mau Revolt and Emergency, which saw the policing, detainment, and torture of Kenyan Africans across the country.<sup>79</sup> The multi-racial elite society of colonial and post-colonial Kampala was based around 'rituals of sociability' that functioned as 'the foundation of the social order'.<sup>80</sup> The very social activities that Kampala's elite engaged in were designed to protect ruling interest, and to suppress populist activism in Kampala from the 1940s onwards in the form of insurrection and strikes. For this growing oppressed Africa underclass, who wished to see an improvement in wages, job opportunities, education and voting, the only feasible means of protest was along racial lines, in part due to urban segregation, explaining the resulting rigidity of racial categories in colonial Kampala.<sup>81</sup>

This reveals why legislation and bureaucracy in Kampala did not reflect the supposed racial harmony Kimenye described: British colonial rule in Uganda, based on the tripartite racial hierarchy it created, discussed above, relied on strict segregation of public life across the city, with different areas carved out for Africans, Asians and Europeans.<sup>82</sup> It was within this partition that Barbara Kimenye fell through the cracks, which she described later in her memoirs: 'Officialdom seemed to have a problem reconciling my half-tone colour with my British accent. In other words, officialdom, or the people wielding it, did not know where or to whom I belonged.'<sup>83</sup> As a non-Ugandan

Black mixed-race woman, Kimenye represented a duality that authorities and populists detested when it came to racial categorisations. She was British, which signified access to the privileges and rights that accompanied this nationality in the protectorate of Uganda, but she was also biracial, which, according to colonial reasoning, meant inferiority to the white race, and required alternative categorisation. However, colonial legislation on mixed-race individuals in eastern Africa usually pertained to the children born in the region as a result of miscegenation, not to someone like Kimenye, who later migrated to Uganda as an adult. This meant that she was unable to claim a specific racial category through demonstrating living traditionally with an African community, or occupying ancestral land, as mentioned previously. The fact that she could neither claim ethnic Ugandan African parentage, nor was born and raised there, also signified that she was removed from the stigmatisation of mixed-race people due to knowledge of their heritage, and could, instead, largely benefit from the social privileges of lighter skin.

Kimenye's movements in Uganda – especially in the elite spaces of Kampala – demonstrate the tenuous nature of colonial constructed race and class boundaries in the region. Her mixed-race heritage, combined with her British nationality, lent her an in-between positionality that allowed her to cross a variety of social spaces. She regularly traversed the proverbial 'colour line', a phenomenon which may have seen its origins in North America, but, as Ray argues, it remained a 'global [problem], even as it played out in locally specific ways'.<sup>84</sup> Kimenye's insider-outsider status lent her a creole hybridity, 'a form of nativism' that was 'based on exogenous ancestral origins'.<sup>85</sup> Such cosmopolitan identifications, however, remain 'best understood as aspects of political projects that themselves must be investigated'.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, Kimenye's ability to cross this 'colour line' was reflective of class interests in Kampala in this period: as discussed above, British colonialists and elite Baganda – and other Ugandans – formed an alliance as a form of class protection from urban populist underclasses. This form of elite multi-liberalism, therefore, permitted entry to Kampala's beau monde for those who marked themselves as distinct in other ways, such as – in the case of Kimenye – mixed-race 'otherness' or educational status. Clearly designed to privilege European expatriates – and, later on, elite Africans – at the expense of a working class and peasant African majority, the fact that Kimenye was able to navigate this 'colour line' – to the consternation of a variety of individuals, both European and African – is indicative of its insubstantial nature, yet at the same time a construction to protect elite interests.

## Conclusion

The urban space of Kampala in the late-colonial and early post-colonial period was one that – at least in its upper classes – allowed for a diversity of individuals, both African and non-African, to interact, giving it a reputation of a vibrant and liberal city. It is within such a unique cosmopolitan space that someone like Kimenye could thrive, finding acceptance there from others that she may not necessarily have had in previous places of residence. She discovered a home in Kampala and deeply identified as Ugandan; however, due to her mixed-race heritage, this self-identification remains debatable in certain discourses, given that Kimenye was neither born in Uganda, nor had a Ugandan African parent. Indeed, as was demonstrated above, her 'belonging' to

Uganda and Africa was occasionally questioned during her time in Kampala, by both Africans and Europeans. However, it is this unique insider-outsider positionality as a mixed-race woman that makes Kimenye a useful historical figure through which to examine social class and race relations in Kampala. Her 'outsider' status as a new arrival in the city, in combination with her 'insider' status, which she achieved through laying roots in Uganda as a non-white expatriate, allows for an understanding of the constructed nature of colonial-instated social relations that could collapse when someone like Kimenye crossed them. Today, Kimenye remains firmly grounded within the East African literary canon as a Ugandan author – similar to the way British-born Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye is considered a Kenyan writer – and has been described on social media networks as 'the quintessential East African'.<sup>87</sup> Though not indigenously Ugandan, she has a claim on the country, as much as it has a claim on her, and she therefore remains an appropriate and useful figure through which to examine post-colonial urban social relations in Kampala.

The legacies of colonial legislation on race and mixed-race individuals, and its intersections with class continued to be felt universally across urban spaces in East Africa during the era of decolonisation, even in a city as supposedly liberal as Kampala.

The city relied on strict categorisation and social stratification in order for the elite to retain power, and these social relations largely remained in place after Ugandan independence in 1962. The multi-racial elite in Kampala that consisted of Europeans, Asians and – primarily Baganda – Africans formed as a means of class protection against urban populism. Economic oppression went hand in hand with racial segregation amongst working classes, therefore, to protect the beau monde, those that did defy such categorisations were constructed into a separate social grouping, such as 'half-castes'. It is therefore useful to examine a figure like the children's book author Barbara Kimenye: her very existence in Kampala challenged colonial social order, augmented by her movements in the city's elite social circles, as a light-skinned, working-class, single mother of two, non-white expatriate, and caused for much confusion by both Ugandan and British colonial officials.

In the years leading up to Uganda's independence, and as more Ugandans gradually gained access to wealth previously solely the reserve of white expatriates, race and class boundaries increasingly blurred. A life history of Barbara Kimenye that specifically examines her years in Kampala and the atypicality of her figure there, illuminates the highly constructed and porous nature of these social boundaries, and how they functioned as categories in urban spaces. The East African late colonial and early post-colonial city of Kampala, as the location of politics and mainstream high cultural production, and destination for individuals from across Uganda and the world, remains a singular site to examine the legacies of colonial social relations in an era of decolonisation.

## Notes

1. Kimenye, "Arriving to a New Life in Kampala."
2. Ibid.
3. McCann, "Rajat Neogy."
4. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Birth of a Dreamweaver*, 124.



5. Interview with C. Partington, Sherborne, 4 June 2016, in Taylor, "Affective Registers of Postcolonial Crisis," 549–50; BNA DO 168/36, 'Kampala to Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) [57a]', 24 December 1963, in Taylor, "Affective Registers of Postcolonial Crisis," 550.
6. See Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964–1985*, 6.
7. Interview with J. B. Ssali, Kampala, 24 June 2016, in Taylor, "Affective Registers of Postcolonial Crisis," 552; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Birth of a Dreamweaver*, 183.
8. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Birth of a Dreamweaver*, 124–5.
9. See: Gikandi and Mwangi, *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English since 1945*; Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature*; Oldfield, *Transgressing Boundaries*; Schmidt, "The Writer as Teacher", or Kiyimba, "Male Identity and Female Space in the Fiction of Ugandan Women Writers."
10. See: Brennan, Burton, and Lawi, *Dar es Salaam*.
11. See: Cooper, *On the African Waterfront*.
12. See: White, *The Comforts of Home*; Brennan, *Taifa*; Brennan, "Between Segregation and Identification"; Burton, "Brothers by Day"; Burgess, "Cinema, Bell Bottoms and Miniskirts"; Ivaska, *Cultured States*; or Ivaska, "In the 'Age of Minis'."
13. Callaci, *Street Archives and City Life*; or Fair, *Reel Pleasures*.
14. See: Taylor, "Affective Registers of Postcolonial Crisis"; Taylor, "Claiming Kabale"; Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence*; Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*; Thompson, *Governing Uganda*; Peterson, "Violence and Political Advocacy"; Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*; Earle, *Colonial Buganda and the End of Empire*; Twagira, "The Men Have Come"; Brown, "Planning Kampala", or Meier zu Selhausen and Weisdorf, "A Colonial Legacy of African Gender Inequality?."
15. See: Doble, "Can Dogs be Racist?"; Brennan, *Taifa*; Aminzade, *Race, Nation and Citizenship in Post-Colonial Africa*; Campbell, "Nationalism, Ethnicity and Religion"; or Jones, "Merchant-Kings and Everymen."
16. See: Ray, "Interracial Sex and the Making of Empire"; Jean-Baptiste, "A Black Girl Should Not Be with a White Man"; or Jean-Baptiste, "Miss Euroafrica'."
17. Mbogoni, *Miscegenation, Identity and Status*.
18. Lee, *Unreasonable Histories*, 5.
19. See: Musisi, "Women, 'Elite Polygyny,' and Buganda State Formation"; Tamale, *When Hens Begin to Crow*; Tripp, "Women's Mobilisation in Uganda"; Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda*; Tripp, "Urban Women's Movements and Political Liberalisation in East Africa"; Tripp and Ntiro, "Women's Activism in Colonial Uganda"; or, Sheldon, *African Women*.
20. Milford et al., "Another World?". See also: Dee, "I Am a Bad Native'."
21. Schmidt, "The Writer as Teacher," 69.
22. Jonathan Hunt. "Barbara Kimenye Obituary", *The Guardian*, 18 September 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/18/barbara-kimenye>.
23. Matera, *Black London*.
24. Kimenye, "Arriving to a New Life in Uganda."
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Kimenye, "Thief Disrupts Rubaga as New Baby Arrives."
28. Kimenye, "Fun and Sleepy Side of Mengo Township."
29. See: "Interview with Martin Alier."
30. Kimenye, "Arriving to a New Life in Uganda."
31. Kimenye, "First Evening Out with Kabaka Mutesa."
32. Ibid.; Kimenye, "Putting Skills to Work."
33. Kimenye, "Mutesa, Prince Mutebi Survive"; Kimenye, "First Evening Out with Kabaka Mutesa"; Kimenye, "Boat Cruise with Mutesa"; Kimenye, "Working and Partying at Mengo."
34. Kimenye, "Boat Cruise with Mutesa"; Kimenye, "Flu Keeps Mutesa Home."
35. Oldfield, *Transgressing Boundaries*, xvi.
36. Ibid.; Kimenye, "State Killing, the Attack on Mengo."

37. See: Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964–1985*, 77–80.
38. Kimenye, “State Killing, the Attack on Mengo.”
39. Kimenye, “Kampala Group’s Panto Delights the Children”; Kimenye, “Good Luck to Grandmother.”
40. Kimenye, “The Busiest Girl in Town.”
41. Kimenye, “Putting Skills to Work.”
42. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Birth of a Dreamweaver*, 225; Oldfield, *Transgressing Boundaries*, xvi.
43. OUP archives, New Book Announcement for *Kalasanda*, Oxford University Press Overseas Editorial Department, 27 August 1964, Kalasanda – Kimenye (OP2006/15131) – 1964.
44. *Daily Monitor*, “Kimenye’s ‘Moses’ still Impacts.” 28 September 2012. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/artsculture/Reviews/Kimenye-s--Moses--still-impacts/691232-1520040-3k6h7c/index.html>.
45. Hunt, “Barbara Kimenye obituary”, op. cit.
46. Mbogoni, *Miscegenation, Identity and Status*, 9.
47. Goldthorpe, “Race Relations in East Africa,” 33.
48. Aminzade, *Race, Nation and Citizenship*, 13.
49. Ibid., 32, 36; Goldthorpe, “Race Relations in East Africa – II,” 31.
50. Goldthorpe, “Race Relations in East Africa,” 32.
51. See: Mbogoni, *Miscegenation, Identity and Status*, 136, 191–204; and Ojwang, “The Half-Caste.”
52. Mbogoni, *Miscegenation, Identity and Status*, 173.
53. Kalibala, 512, in Mbogoni, *Miscegenation, Identity and Status*, 177.
54. Ibid.
55. Mbogoni, *Miscegenation, Identity and Status*, 22, 187.
56. Southall and Gutkind, *Townsmen in the Making*, 27–8.
57. Goldthorpe, “Race Relations in East Africa,” 32.
58. Ibid.
59. Jean-Baptiste, “‘Miss Eurafrica’,” 589. See also: Dabiri, *Don’t Touch My Hair*, 146–59.
60. Mbogoni, *Miscegenation, Identity and Status*, 162.
61. Ibid., 164.
62. Kimenye, “Arriving to a New Life in Uganda.”
63. OUP Archives, “Kalasanda – Kimenye, 1964”, OP2006/1513, Neale to Milne, 4 August 1964; New Book Announcement for *Kalasanda*, Oxford University Press Overseas Editorial Department, 27 August 1964.
64. OUP Archives, “Kalasanda – Kimenye, 1964”, OP2006/1513, Jahn to OUP, 7 September 1967.
65. Kimenye, “Arriving to a New Life in Uganda.”
66. Kimenye, “Flu Keeps Mutesa Home, Dance with Burundi King.”
67. Kimenye, “Thief Disrupts Rubaga as New Baby Arrives.”
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. See Hirsch, *Brit(ish)*, 144–5.
71. Sheldon, *Historical Dictionary of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 120–1.
72. Tripp, “Women’s Mobilization in Uganda.”
73. Kimenye, “The Busiest Girl in Town.”
74. Kimenye, “Putting Skills to Work.”
75. Kimenye, “What’s This? A Lady Cashier at the Bank?”
76. Kimenye, *Kalasanda*; Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited*.
77. See, for example, Kimenye, *Moses in Trouble*.
78. Kimenye, “Arriving to a New Life in Uganda.”
79. See, for example, Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*.
80. Summers, “Radical Rudeness,” 745–6.
81. Ibid.

82. Southall and Gutkind, *Townsmen in the Making*, 26–7, 47–53; Taylor, “Affective Registers of Postcolonial Crisis,” 548.
83. Kimenye, “Arriving to a New Life in Uganda.”
84. Ray, *Crossing the Color Line*, 9.
85. Glassman, “Creole Nationalists,” 233.
86. Ibid.
87. Omanga, [https://twitter.com/dan\\_omanga/status/1258007192898281472](https://twitter.com/dan_omanga/status/1258007192898281472), 6 May 2020.

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