

Postcolonial Migrant Anti-*Bildung* and Narrative Form in Dinaw Mengestu's *All Our Names*

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[Abstract]

Postcolonial migration is a defining feature of youth in Dinaw Mengestu's novel, *All Our Names* (2014), shaping not only the protagonist's coming-of-age but also the novel's narrative form. The unnamed Ethiopian protagonist's migratory path, which spans Uganda and the U.S., leads to a life of multiple displacements that challenge the developmental logic of the conventional bildungsroman. Far from leading to integration and settlement, the protagonist repeatedly feels compelled to leave the places he arrives in. The novel's two alternating first-person narratives – one narrated by the protagonist himself during his time in Uganda and the other by an American social worker observing the protagonist's life in the U.S. – foreground the pivotal role of two border crossings in the protagonist's anti-*Bildung*. By focusing on how the protagonist's repeated displacement is shaped by the political turmoil of Uganda's civil war, this essay argues that Mengestu reimagines the bildungsroman as a transnational narrative of thwarted development. Through its dual narrative structure,

All Our Names reveals how forced migration under postcolonial violence produces a highly precarious, isolated life of refuge.

Key Words: Dinaw Mengestu, *All Our Names*, postcolonial bildungsroman, anti-Bildung, migration

I. Introduction

In Dinaw Mengestu's *All Our Names* (2014), postcolonial migration not only informs the protagonist's coming-of-age but also shapes the novel's depiction of that journey. The narrative form foregrounds two pivotal border-crossings that transform the protagonist's youth. *All Our Names* consists of two alternating first-person narratives, each narrated by a different figure. At first, the link between these two narratives is not clear, as each offers an account of a migrant's arrival in Uganda and the U.S. Over the course of the novel, the reader gradually recognizes the connection between the two seemingly disparate storylines. The first narrative strand, titled "Isaac," is narrated by the novel's unnamed Ethiopian protagonist and reflects on his arrival in Uganda's capital, Kampala, in the early 1970s. The "Isaac" chapters detail the protagonist's adventures in the capital and his growing friendship with Isaac during Uganda's civil war. The growing violence of the civil unrest surrounding newly independent Uganda, however, makes it unsafe for the migrant protagonist to stay in the capital. The "Isaac" section concludes with the protagonist's escape from Uganda to the U.S. to seek refuge.

While the first narrative strand focuses on the protagonist's migration to Uganda, the novel's "Helen" chapters trace the U.S. part of the protagonist's migratory

journey. The protagonist arrives with a borrowed name and a temporary visa in a fictional Midwestern town called “Laurel.” During his stay, the protagonist develops a romantic relationship with Helen, a white social worker assigned to help him settle in the town. Unlike the “Isaac” chapters, which are told from the protagonist’s perspective, the “Helen” chapters reveal what Helen observes about the protagonist’s time in the U.S. Together, the novel’s dual narrative structure gives form to the protagonist’s youth.

By tracing the protagonist’s journey across Africa and the U.S., *All Our Names* is a bildungsroman that explores problems of growth and belonging within the context of postcolonial migration. Historically, the bildungsroman has been understood as a “narrative of formation” that centers on a young protagonist’s passage from childhood to early adulthood (Hirsch 298). In the bildungsroman, an individual’s growth is closely linked to problems of socialization. As Franco Moretti points out, in the conventional bildungsroman, “One’s formation as an individual in and for oneself coincides without rifts with one’s social integration as a simple part of a whole” (16). If problems of social integration have been a key feature of the genre, the youth’s formation in *All Our Names* takes an anti-developmental form, as the coming-of-age process results in an unsettling form of life marked by multiple displacements. Far from leading to social integration and settlement, the novel’s protagonist repeatedly feels compelled to leave the places he arrives in. By focusing on how the protagonist’s repeated displacement is shaped by the political instability and turmoil of Africa’s post-independence period, this essay examines how Mengestu borrows and reimagines the bildungsroman to explore the challenges of growth, migration, and belonging in late-twentieth-century postcolonial Africa. I argue that the novel’s double narrative structure foregrounds the deepening of a transnational process of thwarted growth, resulting in a highly precarious, isolated life of refuge.

II. *Bildung* in the Postcolonial Context

During the last decade, scholars have brought attention to the postcolonial turn in the bildungsroman. The bildungsroman, a literary genre once popular in Europe in the nineteenth century, began to gain interest in postcolonial contexts in the twentieth century. As Arnab Dutta Roy and Paul Ugor have recently noted, “With many European colonies attaining political independence in the mid-twentieth century, there was a revival of interest in this genre in the Global South” (xvi). According to Roy and Ugor, this renewed interest in the bildungsroman is closely linked to the rapid sociopolitical changes that accompanied decolonization. “Writers and thinkers from postcolonies across Asia, Europe, Africa, the Americas, and New Zealand,” observe Roy and Ugor, “turned to the Bildungsroman to explore new stories about childhood growth, belonging, identity, self-determinacy, cultural authenticity, and spiritual awakening” (xiv). If the traditional bildungsroman arose as a critical response to Europe’s modernization in the late eighteenth century, the genre emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a productive medium for reflecting on problems of growth and socialization in postcolonial contexts.

In an early study of the postcolonial condition and the novel, Pheng Cheah highlights the bildungsroman’s affinity with the postcolonial nation-state in the wake of post-independence. Cheah states that “the imperativity of national *Bildung* was invariably personified in the novel’s protagonist whose formation or *Bildung* parallels and symbolizes that of the emergent nation because he is its first patriot and ideal citizen” (239). Drawing attention to the close ties between the nation and the novel, Cheah argues that, in postcoloniality, “the political vocation of culture finds its exemplary performance in and as the novelistic genre of the bildungsroman” (240). While Cheah discusses the bildungsroman in relation to the newly independent

postcolonial state's imperative of national *Bildung*, scholars in more recent years have shown how contemporary writers have modified and reimagined the genre to address postcolonial social conditions. For instance, Joseph Slaughter, in his discussion of the genre and its history, points out that "bildungsromane from colonial and postcolonial situations often mock the dominant generic conventions to show how the promises of liberal humanism remain unfulfilled, and are unfulfillable, under exploitative systems" (75). Similarly, Ericka Hoagland discusses how postcolonial versions of the genre depart from the traditional European bildungsroman by noting that the conflicts of socialization are intensified "by the shadow of colonialism, the brutality of civil war, widespread disenfranchisement, and fractured family politics" (218-19).

The postcolonial African context significantly shapes the unnamed protagonist's coming-of-age story in Mengestu's *All Our Names*. Set in early 1970s Africa, *All Our Names* centers on the protagonist's transition into early adulthood during Uganda's post-independence period. A notable feature of Mengestu's portrayal of postcolonial youth in *All Our Names* is its close connection to the experience of migration. The "Issac" chapters open with the protagonist's recollection of his arrival in Uganda's capital, Kampala. Decolonial aspirations are revealed to have shaped the city's atmosphere. He states that the city was booming "with people, money, new cars, and new buildings" (3). The capital's rapid growth had been fueled by the "socialist, Pan-African dream" accompanying the nation's independence (3). The protagonist notes that by the time he and Isaac arrived in the capital, many of the buildings had already begun to show signs of wear. For the protagonist, however, "there was still hope in the brighter future to come" (3). The choice to call the city just "the capital" reflects his strong desire to claim belonging to the city. "Kampala was too small for what I imagined," states the protagonist, "That city belonged to Uganda, but the capital, as long as it was nameless, had no such allegiances. Like

me, it belonged to no one, and anyone could claim it” (4). The protagonist’s early dream of belonging is shaped by the ideals of pan-Africanism. He desired to come to Kampala because of “a gathering of African writers and scholars” that had taken place at the city’s university (4). “That conference gave shape to my adolescent ambitions,” states the protagonist, “which until then consisted solely of leaving. I knew afterward where to go and what I wanted to be: a famous writer, surrounded by like-minded men in the heart of what had to be the continent’s greatest city” (4).¹⁾ In the protagonist’s account, Kampala emerges as a city that holds the promises of a pan-African vision of belonging.

It is not only the protagonist who has been drawn to the capital. Many other youths from different parts of the African continent are revealed to have come to Kampala. The university campus, where the gathering of African writers and scholars took place, is where African migrant youth are shown to gather. As the protagonist observes, “Every aspiring militant, radical, and would-be revolutionary in Eastern and Central Africa was drawn to the university back then” (23). According to the protagonist, they “started coming shortly after the president took power and claimed the country was the first African socialist republic -- ‘a beacon of freedom and equality where all men are brothers’” (23). Although not a student, he spends much of his time on campus. More importantly, it is at the university where he meets and develops his friendship with Isaac, whose name he later assumes. “When I saw him, I knew he was at the university not because he was supposed to be, but because, like me, he felt that was where he belonged, among the bright, future generation” (7). Like the protagonist, Isaac is a young migrant from northern Uganda who has left his rural village to come to the nation’s capital and become a revolutionary. He had arrived in the capital only a few weeks before the protagonist. The fact that they are strangers in the city unites them. Both are newcomers to the city and seek out the

university campus as a place that will help them pursue their dreams and find their place in society.²⁾

The “Isaac” chapters do not reveal the protagonist’s former life in his home country. He does not comment on his childhood in Ethiopia. It is in the “Helen” chapters, when Helen asks about his past, that he reveals what led him to consider leaving his family. “When I was born, I had thirteen names. Each name was from a different generation, beginning with my father and going back from him. I was the first one in our village to have thirteen names. Our family was considered blessed to have such a history” (177). The family’s past is revealed to be deeply rooted in the village and its land. As the protagonist explains, “Everyone in my family had been born and died on that land. We fed it with our bodies longer than any other, and it was assumed I would do the same, and so would my children,” (177). For the young protagonist, however, being bound to the village and its land represents a life doomed to poverty. The protagonist tells Helen that he began planning to leave when he was in his early teens. The family initially disapproves of his plan. It is when political unrest rises in the country that the father asks the protagonist to leave the village.

For the protagonist, departure from the homeland becomes a process of breaking free from the bonds of family and community. In *All Our Names*, renouncing one’s belonging to family and community takes the form of giving up one’s former names. The protagonist describes his journey to Uganda’s capital as a process of shedding his former familial and communal ties. “On the bus ride to the capital, I gave up all the names my parents had given me. I was almost twenty-five but, by any measure, much younger. I shed those names just as our bus crossed the border into Uganda” (3). He arrives in Kampala with no names. As he states, “I was no one when I arrived in Kampala; it was exactly what I wanted” (179). For the protagonist, being nameless comes to symbolize the opportunity to form new bonds of belonging.

III. Migrant Youth's Anti-*Bildung*

In *All Our Names*, the protagonist's dream of belonging is thwarted by the outbreak of civil war. Under the oppressive rule of the new president who took power following the nation's independence, Kampala descends into stark political turmoil. An increasing number of opposition forces begin challenging the regime's authoritarian rule. Conflict and violence infiltrate the city's everyday life. This sudden shift in the political climate profoundly unsettles the protagonist's place in the capital. The fact that the protagonist is a stranger with no ties to family or local tribe makes him particularly vulnerable during Uganda's internal war. At first, the protagonist senses that he might no longer be welcome in the neighborhood where he has been renting a room. It is when Isaac disappears for two weeks, leaving him alone, that the protagonist realizes the dangers of being a young migrant in the city.

Before Isaac, I had always been content to cast myself as the outsider, because only by such measures, I thought, could you break from the grips of the family and tribe around which you were supposed to order your life. I had ventured far away from home to live up to that idea without understanding that, inevitably, something had to be paid for it. (45)

Being a stranger initially gives the protagonist a sense of freedom. With the onset of Uganda's internal war, however, his foreignness puts him into a highly vulnerable place: "I was a foreigner. I had no ties to any of the local or even distant tribes ... Although I never shared any of my fears with Isaac, I was terrified someone would realize that if I was killed or injured, if I abruptly disappeared, there would be no one to answer to" (60). The university campus becomes the protagonist's last resort, where he feels relatively safe. But, with the heightened tensions of the nation's

internal divide, the university campus, which once represented the possibilities of pan-African belonging, turns into a site of surveillance and state violence where the protagonist no longer feels safe.

The protagonist's vulnerability during Uganda's intensifying civil war culminates in a near-death encounter. He recalls the day he came across a newspaper headline: "Government Warns Against Growing Foreign Terrorist Threat to Our Nation" (88). When he sees the headline, the protagonist immediately perceives the dangers of being "the only obvious foreigner" on the streets (88). "I had been at the intersection dozens of times before, but only now did I notice the pair of traffic officers standing in the middle of the road; they were watching the traffic more than guiding it" (88). To avoid suspicion, he purchases a government-published newspaper that features "at the top of every issue a portrait of the president in full military dress" (89). Yet, a growing sense of paranoia begins to overwhelm him. He feels being watched and becomes highly conscious of his presence in the city. No longer feeling safe, the protagonist hides his body from public view by joining a group of students. "I felt safe following them," confesses the protagonist, "– not because I believed nothing bad could happen in their presence, but because I felt invisible in their midst" (89).

Contrary to the protagonist's early aspirations of becoming a famous writer and claiming his place in the capital, Uganda's civil unrest increasingly compels him to suppress his presence from public view. At a moment when he thinks he is safe, he faces near-death. By blindly following the students, the protagonist ends up entering a neighborhood he is not familiar with. It is in this neighborhood that the newspaper, an object that initially protects him from suspicion, however, puts him in danger:

I had never been in the neighborhood before; I didn't know its rules or recent history. Many young men from there had recently disappeared and there was nothing but hatred for the government and anyone who favored it. The paper

you read was more than enough to determine which side you fell on; in my case, I was never given the chance to explain why I was carrying it, and even if I had, who would have believed me. (90)

His unfamiliarity with the neighborhood and its recent history makes him particularly vulnerable to the attack's violence. The attack nearly kills him and leaves a lasting mark on his body. He is later told that "at least an hour passed" before anyone sought help for him (90).

The novel's staging of the protagonist's near-death strongly resonates with Jed Esty's notion of "stunted youth" (3). In his discussion of the bildungsroman, Esty notes that early twentieth-century narratives of development feature characters who do not grow up. He states that youthful protagonists are shown to fail to attain mature social roles through "plots of colonial migration and displacement" (2). According to Esty, early twentieth-century narratives of formation "cast doubt on the ideology of progress through the figure of stunted youth" (3). In those stories, we meet youthful protagonists "who die young, remain suspended in time, eschew vocational and sexual closure, refuse social adjustment, or establish themselves as evergreen souls via the tender offices of the *Kunstlerroman*" (3).

The figure of stunted youth is not limited to colonial narratives of formation. In scholarship on the postcolonial bildungsroman, scholars like Ericka Hoagland have highlighted how anti-*Bildung* has shaped novelistic accounts of postcolonial youth. In her discussion of Nuruddin Farah's 1986 novel, *Maps*, Hoagland notes that liminality deeply informs the novel's portrayal of the protagonist's childhood and adulthood (217). For Hoagland, the protagonist's condition speaks to "the predicament of many postcolonial Bildungsroman protagonists, who are perhaps fated never to stop searching, to never stop wondering who they are and where they belong" (218). Unlike the classical bildungsroman, the process of coming-of-age in the postcolonial

bildungsroman often does not lead to reconciliation with society. "Closure at least as we understand it in the European bildungsroman," states Hoagland, "is neither forthcoming nor assured" (219). The postcolonial bildungsroman often depicts "a broken, or even impossible, maturation process, and an ethical critique of the society into which the protagonist seeks entrance" (219).

In *All Our Names*, the protagonist's violated body abandoned on the streets highlights his non-place in war-torn Uganda. While Isaac, an internal migrant from Uganda's rural region, becomes deeply involved in the war and takes on an active role in Joseph's army, the protagonist increasingly recognizes his non-belonging. This realization culminates when he witnesses the violent death of other migrants. With Isaac's help, the protagonist joins the army Joseph has been organizing to wage war against the government. The massacre happens while the protagonist takes temporary refuge in a remote rural village during one of Joseph's wars. First, the village appears idyllic, untouched by the nation's war. For the protagonist, it is the first time since arriving in Uganda that he feels accepted by a local community. The protagonist comes to see the remote rural village as an alternative realm where he can belong.

The protagonist's renewed hopes for belonging are, however, short-lived. Soon after his arrival, a large group of refugees reaches the village's border. "A slow, winding parade of tired and wounded refugees," he recalls, "invaded the village on the fourth day. They emerged into the clearing shortly after dawn from a footpath on the eastern edge of the village" (219). Among the refugees, he notices young children. Unlike the protagonist, who has been accepted as a "curious stranger" whose presence is "not totally welcome but easily tolerated," the refugees' arrival invokes fear (220). Zygmunt Bauman, in his discussion of mass migration, notes that refugees have historically been seen as "strangers" (8). "Strangers tend to cause

anxiety,” states Bauman, “precisely because of being ‘strange’ – and so, fearsomely unpredictable, unlike the people with whom we interact daily and from whom we believe we know what to expect” (8). For the villagers, the fact that the newly arrived refugees are “both foreign and desperate” makes them “twice as dangerous” (220). On the day of their arrival, the community decides to kill all of them. The massacre becomes a violent, collective act that includes the village’s women and children. Everyone in the village, except the protagonist, participates in the killing.

While watching the horrors of the massacre, the protagonist is reminded of his own highly precarious place in the village. Although he has been welcomed, he realizes that the hostility and violence towards the refugees can easily be directed at him. He states that the following question must have occurred to the villagers when they saw the refugees: “Why have we let this man stay with us for so long?” (220). Like his own near-death experience, the refugees’ violent death reminds the protagonist of his highly liminal place in war-torn Uganda. He realizes that all parts of the nation, including this small, remote village, are no longer safe. It is when this realization dawns on him that Isaac suggests that he leave the country. Before the war, Joseph had arranged for Isaac to stay temporarily in the U.S. until the political unrest was resolved. Isaac, determined to stay in the country and continue fighting, offers his passport to the protagonist. Desperate to seek refuge, the protagonist abandons his former identity and assumes the name “Isaac Mabira” (254).

IV. Forced Migration and Anti-*Bildung*'s Transnational Form

If the "Isaac" chapters recount the protagonist's migration to Uganda, the "Helen" chapters trace the protagonist's second migration to the U.S. They begin with Helen's recollection of her first encounter with the protagonist in Laurel. As a social worker at a Lutheran organization, Helen is put in charge of helping the protagonist settle into the U.S. The early chapters of the "Helen" section detail what she observes as he begins his year-long stay in the U.S. as an exchange student from Africa. A key observation Helen makes about the protagonist is the absence of any dreams or hopes regarding his stay in the U.S. In a conversation with Helen, the protagonist confesses that he no longer looks for a place where he can belong. As Helen states, "He told me once that he'd accepted the fact that there was no place in the world where he felt fully at ease" (99). Helen further quotes the words the protagonist tells her:

'I thought eventually I would find a house or a street that seemed to have been made just for me. I think I have walked more miles than just about any man I know, and I have learned that if I were to walk every day for the rest of my life, I would never find such a place. That is nothing to be sad about. Many people have it worse. They dream of belonging to a place that will never have them. I made that mistake once.' (100)

The statement marks a stark departure from the protagonist's former dream of belonging to Uganda's capital, Kampala. His words confirm that he is not interested in finding a home in the U.S.³

Within scholarship on the novel, this striking lack of interest in settlement has drawn considerable critical attention. As Glenda Caprio notes, the protagonist's

arrival in the U.S. deviates from familiar accounts of the US immigrant story (37). Mengestu's portrayal of migration in *All Our Names* "rejects the immigrant narrative's conventional acculturation plot" (37). Similarly, Grace Musila claims that Mengestu's novels feature Ethiopian migrant characters who do not pursue the American dream. She comments that "Mengestu's characters physically arrive, but never fully arrive, acclimatize, or assimilate" (196). Both scholars note that the absence of the American dream in *All Our Names* is noteworthy because it opens new ways of thinking about immigrant identity and life in the U.S. For Musila, the refusal of the American dream in Mengestu's immigration stories is particularly significant because it not only challenges the developmental logic of the American dream but also offers an alternative mode of subjecthood beyond conventional notions of belonging.

In addition to departing from conventional U.S. immigration narratives, the absence of the American dream in *All Our Names*, I argue, takes on further significance in light of the novel's African postcolonial context. In the scene above, when the protagonist dismisses his former dream of belonging as a mistake, the comment situates the absence of the American dream within a longer history of migration that includes his African past. As earlier parts of this essay have shown, the protagonist's migratory history begins with his first migration from his homeland, Ethiopia, to Uganda. The novel's dual narrative structure, with alternating strands, highlights the transnational dimension of the protagonist's migratory life. The novel's form gives equal weight to the protagonist's migrant experience in both Uganda and the U.S. Considering that his disillusionment about belonging first occurs while seeking settlement in Uganda, the absence of the American dream in the U.S. deepens his anti-*Bildung*.

In *All Our Names*, the deepening of anti-*Bildung* is further reflected in the novel's

shift in narrative perspective. In the “Helen” chapters, the protagonist not only experiences physical displacement but also a displacement of his narrative voice. While the “Isaac” chapters are narrated by the protagonist himself, Helen’s viewpoint dominates the “Helen” chapters. Unlike in the “Isaac” chapters, the reader has limited insight into the protagonist’s thoughts and feelings in the American part of his story. The suppressed presence of his voice in the “Helen” chapters emphasizes his growing social invisibility as a refugee-like migrant arriving in the U.S. with a borrowed identity. Upon arrival, the protagonist is advised to “live as quietly as possible” (177).⁴ As if reflecting his determination to do so, the protagonist’s voice, except for the moments when Helen quotes his words, remains absent from the “Helen” chapters. Instead, it is through Helen’s perspective that we learn about the protagonist’s time in the U.S. If the protagonist’s inner desires and struggles during his stay in Kampala held significance in the “Isaac” chapters, the U.S. story centers on what Helen thinks, feels, and desires. More specifically, the “Helen” chapters closely follow her growing desire to build an intimate relationship with the protagonist.

Throughout their time together, however, the distance between the two remains. Although initially confident in their relationship, Helen realizes she knows very little about the man she is dating. Not long after their first date, she recognizes the impossibility of knowing him closely. Unlike the reader, who develops a close understanding of the protagonist through the “Isaac” chapters, Helen’s varied attempts to know him and his African past are unsuccessful. At the beginning of their relationship, his obscurity is a source of attraction. She is drawn to the fact that she knows little about him and his life. “The more mystery I could attach to him,” confesses Helen, “the more exceptional he became” (71). Yet, as time passes, the fact that she has no close knowledge of the protagonist and his African past begins to

trouble her. As she observes during the early stages of their relationship, “Isaac was made of almost nothing, not a ghost but a sketch of a man I was trying hard to fill in” (21). “Isaac’s single-page life story” from Helen’s office, which contains all the information about the protagonist, reveals almost nothing about him (98).

I read his file two more times, and each time came up with a part of his past that appeared to be deliberately missing. There was no month or date of birth, only a year. His place of birth was listed only as Africa, with no country or city. The only solid fact was his name, Isaac Mabira, but even that was no longer substantial; any name could have filled that slot, and nothing would have changed. (98)

Until they part in Chicago, a city they visit together to escape small-town Laurel in the final pages of the “Helen” chapters, the protagonist remains an enigma to Helen.

By presenting the protagonist as someone Helen cannot know in depth, *All Our Names* reveals how the challenges of belonging become more complicated in the context of forced migration amid civil war. The U.S. provides temporary refuge at a moment when the protagonist realizes it is no longer possible to stay in Uganda. During his time in the U.S., the protagonist’s life is no longer threatened by the war. As a migrant, he no longer faces the dangers of brutal violence and death. In the U.S., however, the protagonist’s stunted growth manifests as a heightened sense of social invisibility. After assuming the identity of “Issac Mabira,” the protagonist is no longer able to build close ties with the people he meets. In the U.S. context, building intimacy with others becomes a risky act. As a migrant fleeing the civil war, revealing his true name and African past could endanger not only the protagonist but also anyone affiliated with him.

Precarity deeply informs the novel’s ending. Defying closure, the “Helen”

chapters' concluding pages repeatedly evoke feelings of uncertainty about both the relationship between the two figures and the protagonist's stay in the U.S. In the final chapters, Helen proposes a trip to Chicago to help the protagonist escape the constrained life in small-town Laurel. Considering movement from the countryside to the city has figured as a common theme of mobility and freedom in the traditional bildungsroman, the trip the protagonist embarks on with Helen at first seems to suggest the possibility of a new beginning.⁵⁾ When they arrive in Chicago, Helen suggests that the protagonist stay and settle there. While spending time with the protagonist, Helen also considers a shared future in Chicago: "I saw myself driving back to Laurel, alone, in a couple of days, and returning to Chicago with suitcases and one or two of those boxes I had hidden away in the basement" (243). Because the chapters are told from Helen's perspective, however, we never learn what the protagonist thinks about the trip and his future. It is unclear whether the protagonist hopes to stay in the U.S. From Helen's narration, we only know that his visa will soon expire, but what he hopes to do after that remains untold. Instead, the "Helen" chapters end with what Helen dreams and hopes for the protagonist's life and future.

V. Conclusion

The bildungsroman, once closely tied to nineteenth-century Europe's experience of modernization, has been adopted by twentieth-century postcolonial writers to explore the challenges of growth and belonging in postcolonial societies. As earlier parts of the essay have shown, the mid-twentieth century saw the rise of the postcolonial bildungsroman. In this essay, I have situated my discussion of Mengestu's *All Our Names* within the burgeoning discourse of the postcolonial bildungsroman. *All Our*

Names, although published in the twenty-first century, revisits the mid-twentieth century by exploring problems of growth and belonging in the context of Uganda's civil war. More specifically, Mengestu constructs a narrative of formation that traces the anti-developmental dimension of the protagonist's growth in relation to a transnational history of migration that spans Africa and the U.S. In Mengestu's reimagining of the genre, the protagonist's anti-*Bildung* takes on a formal dimension. By interweaving two narrative threads that highlight the young protagonist's life as a migrant in Africa and the U.S., the novel's dual narrative structure gives form to the deepening of a transnational process of thwarted growth that culminates in the protagonist's highly isolated, invisible life in the U.S.

Notes

- 1) The conference the protagonist refers to speaks to a real historical event informing Uganda's capital. As Anne Gulick notes, a large group of African writers gathered at the university of Makerere University in 1962 (39).
- 2) See Gulick, for a close discussion of the university's role as a place of revolutionary promise in postcolonial Africa.
- 3) Helen's observations about the protagonist's apartment in Laurel further confirm this. She notices that the protagonist's apartment lacks a sense of home. "Each time I came over, the place was immaculate, as if nothing had been touched since I was last there," states Helen. The protagonist's presence is not fully felt in the place. Helen concludes that "Life! That's what was missing" (72).
- 4) This is an advice Henry, the person who issued the visa for Isaac, gives to the protagonist when he learns that the protagonist is not Isaac Mabira.
- 5) For a close discussion of mobility and the urban as a key feature of youth's experience in the classical European bildungsroman, see Buckley and Moretti.

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국문초록

디나우 멩게스투의 『우리의 이름들』에서의 포스트식민 이주민의 반성장과 서사 형식

신 나 미

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디나우 멩게스투의 소설 『우리의 이름들』(*All Our Names*, 2014)에서 포스트식민 이주(postcolonial migration)는 청년기의 중요한 특징으로, 주인공의 성장 과정뿐만 아니라 소설의 구조를 결정짓는 중요한 요소이다. 작품 속 이름이 없는 에티오피아 출신의 주인공은 우간다와 미국을 아우르는 다수의 이산 경험을 겪으며, 이러한 성장 과정은 전통적인 성장소설(bildungsroman)의 발전 논리에 대해 의문을 제기한다. 작품에서 이주의 경험은 동화와 정착으로 귀결되지 않고, 주인공은 계속해서 도착한 곳을 떠나야 하는 상황에 직면한다. 소설은 두 개의 교차하는 일인칭 서사로 이루어져 있으며, 각 서사는 주인공의 우간다와 미국에서의 시간을 서로 다른 화자를 통해서 들려준다. 소설의 이러한 독특한 서술 방식은 주인공의 국경을 넘는 반성장(anti-Bildung) 과정을 잘 드러낸다. 본 논문은 우간다 내전이라는 탈식민주의적 정치적 불안이 주인공의 이산 경험에 미치는 영향에 주목하며, 멩게스투 작가가 이주 청년이 겪는 반성장 경험을 성장소설 장르에 대한 재해석을 통해 보여주고 있음을 주장한다. 『우리의 이름들』은 이중 서사 방식을 통해 주인공이 이주민으로서 겪는 극도로 불안정하고 고립된 삶을 효과적으로 전달한다.

주제어: 디나우 멩게스투, 『우리의 이름들』, 탈식민주의 성장소설, 반성장, 이주

논문접수일: 2026.1.15

심사완료일: 2026.1.30

게재확정일: 2026.2.08

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