**FOOTPRINTS OF THE OUTSIDER by JULIUS ACWINYO**

**Plot Overview**

Footprints of the Outsider is set in Teboke, a Village in Apac district of Uganda. The only standout structure in the village is the cotton ginnery at Teboke trading Centre, set up by two Indians, Hippen and Ramchand. They recruit workers from among far-off tribes of Uganda, Sudan and the Congo to operate the ginnery. Alicinora sleeps with the workers of the ginnery, and so Abudu Olwit is born. As he grows, Abdul suffers ridicule not only from his peers but also from his mother.

Despite odds being against him, he graduates from Makerere University with a B.A Economics. But jobs being as scarce as hen’s teeth, he decides to join the teacher’s profession though he is not satisfied with this, because in his village, teaching is synonymous with failure.

As drama unfolds, we are introduced to new characters like Adoli-Awal, the Teboke Member of Parliament. Abdul, seeking to work in government, goes to Adoli-Awal, the Teboke Member of Parliament, for help. But because Odwong, Abdul’s uncle is Adoli’s political enemy, the latter refuses.

Abdul eventually joins the Prison Service and is appointed OC of Alaro Prison Farm. He marries Saida Acola, who though she loves someone else, becomes Abdul’s wife because her mother always told her that: “…you do not marry a man because you love him. You marry a man because he can take care of your needs...it does not matter if he already has a wife. …you can be the second or third wife and still dominate your husband.”

Abdul is later arrested when Adoli-Awal thinks Abdul-Olwit has plans on his parliamentary seat. Although Abdul had no political ambitions, he decides to contest after his release to show Adoli who the real man is. The clashes that break out on one of the campaign rallies leaves some people hurt and others dead. The book seeks to find the candidate who will become Teboke’s next MP, this is left for the reader to decide.

**Characters**

**• Abudu Olwit:** Whose mother, Alicinora is a prostitute to the ginnery workers suffers ridicule not only from his peers but from his mother as well. He wonders why his mother didn’t kill him at birth if he’s such an embarrassment. He also has no idea who his father is. Through his persistence and determined nature, Olwit battles against all odds to gain a University education, largely aided by his maternal uncle, Odwong. At University, he studies economics but jobs are not forthcoming. After a frustrating stint as a teacher, he decides to seek help of his area MP, Mike Adoli-Awal. The MP, who holds Olwit’s family in disdain, literally embarrasses him, advising that he seeks help from his drunkard uncle, Odwong.

**• Alicinora:** She is the mother of Abudu Olwit, she is well known in the village of Teboke as a cheap prostitute, the author says that when Abudu Olwit was conceived, Alicinora had just had her eleventh infection of syphilis treated. Her shamelessness leads her into having sexual relations with men at midday with a barely closed hut door. She has no idea who the father of her son is. She constantly nags her teenage son to marry a wife in order to help her out with domestic work. She is a perpetual drunk alcoholic who has lost self-respect from her peers and society. The author uses her a master work piece to reveal societal characters, who are disillusioned and frustrated with not only the way they look, but also frustrated with life itself.

**• Mike Adoli-Awal:** Adoli-Awal is the MP, who holds Olwit’s family in disdain because of Odwong’s (Olwit’s maternal uncle) political affiliation. Adoli embarrasses Olwit, advising that he seeks help from his drunkard uncle, Odwong. His greed and obsession with power, leads him into framing Olwit as a rebel sympathiser and gets him jailed in Luzira. His moral decadence is portrayed in his attempt to have sexual relations with Miss Housekeeping in Zambia. He is malicious, he not only frames Olwit into imprisonment, but also embarrasses him by making reference to his unusual conception during the campaign rally.

**• Pascolina:** She is Adoli-Awal’s wife, at the time of their marriage, she is a nurse who is very surprised that an affluent Adoli-Awal had developed interest to marry her. This interest not only astounded her but her mother too. She is loyal and submissive towards her husband in spite of his mischief with Miss Housekeeping, a cleaner in Zambia. She informs her husband about a potential opponent in the parliamentary race, she tells her husband, “If you do not watch out you might not have a seat in parliament next time.”

**• Odwong:** Abudu Olwit’s maternal uncle who stood in as father to Olwit and educated him, Olwit owes his education and success to him (Odwong), he paid Olwit’s school fees and helped counsel him in the right path in life. He is the only parental figure that Abudu Olwit would identify with. He becomes an arch enemy of Adoli-Awal because of his affiliation with another party.

• Saida Acola

• Bitoroci

• Fr Varasco

**Setting**

The story of the novel is set in **post-colonial period** to capture the social-political situations of the time. The period is characterized by political instabilities as seen through the numerous coups, insurgencies and wars. Post-independence Uganda generally and Teboke in particular has to contend with abject poverty, famine, drought, disease, corruption, sexual immorality and scarcity of basic commodities. The prisoners also face injustice.

The socio-political setting in the book exposes insecurity and social strife that make the people of not only Teboke village, but also the vast Uganda to suffer the pangs of poverty, due to war and constant government violent changes or coups.

**The physical setting** is Teboke, a village in Apac District. Other areas include; Loro market, Okole Swamp, Cerege, Alemi, Alee, Aduku (Te-Bung), Alaro Prison Farm, Lake Kyoga (the floating islands), Lira Town (Adoli-Awal’s Home) and Luzira Prison.

The physical setting in the book (for example the forsaken ginnery, Teboke market, the swamp and the campaign ground) portray the terrible consequences of the political turmoil in the country. When the ginnery closes, people become poorer with nothing to eat, and the Teboke community sees a high rate of school dropouts because of lack of school fees. The swamp is a place where slain political enemies are dumped. The campaign ground shows political violence. In Teboke market, people spend most of their time drinking and getting drunk in order to relieve themselves of their problems and frustrations.

**Themes and ideas**

**• Political turmoil/instability:** the story is a recount of Uganda’s political crisis and turmoil since Independence in 1962. We see the rise and fall of a number of political leaders, together with their political parties. We witness the double rise and fall of President Bwete of the Party of the Palm. The writer also recounts the exploits of President Idi who overthrows Bwete. Uchebi fights a Bush war and overthrows General Ragamoi in 1986. Etc. Adoli-Awal gets Abudu-Olwit arrested on false premises. For some reason, Adoli is scared that Abudu has designs on his parliamentary seat. Although Abudu had no political ambitions, he decides to contest after his release to show Adoli who the real man is.

**• Relatedly, Insurgencies/insecurity/war:** Adoli-Awal survives the insurgencies when he flees the country into exile in Kenya. Political turmoil in the country sees political enemies in rival parties being arrested, mimed and killed. Extra judicial killings. Revenge and betrayal are the order of the day.

• **Poverty and suffering:** The novel recounts seasons of famine and drought (intense hunger) due to lack, the writer says, ‘It was a year of hunger, of tying a cloth around your stomach so that you did not feel the hunger too much, it was a year of putting off marriages because you did wish to feed your new bride on mangoes and wild green.’ (Ocwinyo pg 89). The novel is marred by the aftermath of political turmoil. Lack of money.

**• Disillusionment and frustration:** The folks in Teboke village abandon education, and drown themselves in alcohol, in order to shelve their hunger and problems, drinking becomes the escape route from the challenges and forces that work against them.

**• Moral decadence:** Abudu's mother sleeps with the workers of the ginnery, and so Abudu is born. Adoli-Awal’s embarrassing feat with Miss Housekeeping in Zambia.

• Injustice

• Hypocrisy

• Corruption

• Unemployment

• Education