

In/visible Traumas: Healing, Loving, Writing

Edited by
Esther Pujolràs-Noguer
& Felicity Hand



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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Introduction. In/visible Traumas. Writing and Healing Esther Pujolràs-Noguer & Felicity Hand	6
Creative Writing for Recovery from Mental Illness Carolyn Jess-Cooke	11
Personal Reflections on working with Survivors of Sexual and Gender-based Violence and Torture in Uganda Helen Liebling	20
He Couldn't Tell Warren Abomugisha	31
Disability is not Inability Warren Abomugisha	32
Stories: the Separation Regina Asinde.....	34
Be Still and Know Regina Asinde.....	37
Truth Regina Asinde	42
Which Story Should I Tell? Regina Asinde	45

When We Raided the Teachers' Dinner Bucket	
Danson Kahyana.....	47
Why I Write	
Paul Kisakye.....	50
Names: Taboo and Powerful	
Peace T. Kyamureku	55
Blue Movies	
Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare.....	59
Pressured to Keep the Family Honour	
Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare.....	62
My Name	
Edna Namara	65
Wash Out	
Edna Namara	70
My First Time	
Edna Namara	84
Impacted to Impact	
Margaret Ntakalimaze.....	90
Back to the Source - Reconnection	
Ife Phianki	113
My Name	
Philomena Rwabukuku	115
The Lady in the Moon	
Philomena Rwabukuku	117

Poems	
Nakisanze Ssegawa	119
Poems	
Phil Wilmot	121
Master of the Universe	
Joyce Wolayo	134
Playmates	
Joyce Wolayo	140
A Saint Gave Birth to a Devil	
Joyce Wolayo	143
Self Righteousness	
Joyce Wolayo	147

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INTRODUCTION. IN/VISIBLE TRAUMAS. WRITING AND HEALING

ESTHER PUJOLRÀS-NOGUER & FELICITY HAND

AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA, CATALONIA

In her pioneering book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth captures the essence of trauma in a compelling, profoundly disturbing, trope: the crying wound of a beloved that is continuously, albeit unwittingly, attacked by her lover. In a creative strategic move, Caruth manages to bring together literature and psychoanalysis through the story of Tancred, a crusader who, unbeknownst to him, kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel. Since Clorinda is disguised as an enemy knight, Tancred does not know that the target of his fury is his beloved Clorinda. But the story continues and the tragedy takes on a further dimension: Tancred and his fellow crusaders are trapped in a magic forest and, desperate to find their way out, they fight the trees; Tancred slashes a tall tree and, rather unexpectedly, blood streams forth from the cut and a voice is heard, that of Clorinda, whose soul had been confined in the tree. Hers is a complaining voice, that of the beloved that is repeatedly wounded by the lover, but her voice irresistibly guides us to her ephemeral, pervasive, poignant presence. Recalling Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* via Freud's interpretation of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Caruth pinpoints the underlying elements that, to our mind, sustain a traumatic experience: the vulnerability of the survivor who cannot fully grasp the consequences of what s/he has experienced –Tancred's unsuspecting killing of his beloved–, the compulsive, agonizing repetition of the traumatic experience –Clorinda's unrelenting and moving voice– and the forceful return to a past that exceeds rational understanding –a lover not knowing that he is actually killing his beloved–.

Our diversion to Caruth's theory of trauma in this introduction is a calculated maneuver to unveil what we believe to be the evasive and yet strangely repetitive nature of trauma. This combination of elusiveness and pervading traumatic recurrence has nurtured the compilation of the varied stories that shape this anthology, which is itself the outcome of a creative writing workshop aimed at helping victims of gender violence to overcome their traumas. Needless to say, we are very well aware of the oversimplification of our final objective verbalized through the phrase "overcome their traumas", since traumas, as Caruth and, more insidiously Lacapra, have demonstrated cannot be easily

“overcome”. However, as *practitioners* of literature,¹ we do believe that *writing* can offer a space whereby “trauma” can be explored, if not *totally* overcome, by engaging *writing participants* to creatively delineate the contours of that tormenting voice, the unconsoling voice of Clorinda, Caruth’s redolent crying wound.

Our professional engagement with creative writing workshops started in 2013 when the FAS –the Autonomous (University) Solidarity Foundation– funded our first project, *Nalubaale Creative Writing Workshop. Healing, Loving, Writing*, which specifically aimed at using creative writing as therapy for victims of gender violence. We conducted our first creative writing workshop in Kampala, Uganda, at the Isis-WICCE premises. The Isis-WICCE is an extremely active feminist organization whose members are the recipients of harrowing stories from women who have been abused, both sexually and psychologically. As the bearers of these touching stories, personal accounts of abuse but also survival, the Isis-WICCE staff were trained to explore ways in which writing could turn into a site for healing in the hope that, in the future, their gained expertise would help these abused women to write their stories and in the writing process ameliorate their pain.

The success of this initial workshop positively motivated and influenced our further research on the therapeutic potential of creative writing. This led us to explore the existing literature on trauma studies –Cathy Caruth and Dominick Lacapra as clear exponents– in order to devise a methodology that would allow participants to come to terms with their gender violence-related traumas in our workshops. The possibility to put our methodology to the test came through our association with *Femrite. Uganda Women Writer’s Association*, with whom we organised a workshop centered on Life Writing and which took place from 24th July to 28th July, 2017 in Kampala, Uganda. This present anthology is the substantial proof that writing can be a decisive component in the disclosure of invisible traumas but, just equally important, this anthology evidences the necessity to provide the traumatised victim with an audience who is willing to listen to her/his story. The transference from traumatic experience to narrative –we use narrative in an extremely broad sense, impervious to generic constraints– and, more specifically, the ways in which this transference can be enacted, shaped the development of the various sessions around which the workshop was structured.

¹ We are both teachers of literature in the Department of English at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Our specialization is postcolonial literature with a special emphasis on Africa and India.

The first session, entitled “Me to the Others”, exposed participants to a seemingly innocent exploration of their names. Hence, they were asked to think deeply about their names and to write a short piece about how and why they were given these names. This was a gentle introduction to the more challenging part of our workshop, namely, the unmasking process of invisible traumas that would become visible at the end of the workshop. An immersion into childhood memories, recollections of events that may or may not have caused a long-lasting impression on the participants’ lives was the objective of our second session entitled “Childhood Memories”. This apparently harmless delving into oneself prepared the ground for the more demanding third session, “Unexpected Selves”, which, as one can surmise from the title, entreated participants to mould cautiously but steadily their own traumatic experiences. These three initial sessions found their culmination in the fourth session which revolved around the ambiguities and ambivalences surrounding “silences”. As the title of this session irrefutably illustrates, “Identifying Silences” aimed to uncover, confront and articulate those silences that block the trauma, encapsulate it and revive it through nonsensical repetition. In Caruth’s figurative language, these silences would be the crying wound that irrationally and recurrently assaults the lives of victims/survivors. To aesthetically verbalize this trauma, to *narrativize* the crying wound, so to speak, assisted participants to encounter their traumas and produce some of the most honest and heartbreaking pieces of this anthology. The path was set up to heal scars with words, the spirit of the last session, understandably entitled “Healing Scars with Words”.

Is it possible to write trauma, or should we rather think in terms of writing *about* trauma? This dichotomy is forcefully discussed in the conclusion of Dominick Lacapra’s *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, a dichotomy he makes visible by locating the preposition “about” in parenthesis: Writing (about) Trauma. It is not our intention to initiate a dialectical diatribe concerning the feasibility or non-feasibility of writing *that* –trauma– which “indicates a shattering break or cesura in experience which has belated effects” (Lacapra, 186) and, therefore, it is impossible to recover as it was first lived. Whether our participants wrote trauma or wrote *about* trauma is not our major concern; what matters is that they *performed* their traumas creatively and that their performance resulted in a conjoined effort to confront the trauma and emerge, out of this confrontation, as inveterate writers. To put it differently, their status as victims, which threw them into a coercive and restraining whirlpool, was transferred / transformed into an incredible creative force. That is the moment when they stopped being participants to become

writers. That is the moment when, in Caruth's words, "knowing and not knowing [...] intersect" (Caruth, 2). And this intersection is accomplished through literature. We would like to recover here Caruth's words in full in an attempt to confirm the centrality of literature in understanding and, we would add, articulating trauma:

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet. (Caruth, 2-3)

It is now the time to thank our writers - in alphabetical order - Warren Abomugisha, Regina Asinde, Danson Kahyana, Paul Kisakye, Peace T. Kyamureku, Mercy Mirembe, Edna Namara, Margaret Ntakalimaze, Ife Phianki, Philomena Rwabukuku, Nakisanze Ssegawa, Phil Wilmot and Joyce Wolayo for their enormous generosity in trusting us and letting us participate in what has been so far one of the most rewarding –far from traumatic– experiences. Although the workshop resounded with trauma, they never allowed trauma to take hold of them; what they did was take the opportunity that literature was laying in their hands and transform trauma into beauty. Their in/visible traumas have been written and, hopefully, partially –if not entirely– healed.

The creative writing pieces that configure this anthology are accompanied by two articles written by our comrades in this adventure, our dear colleagues, Carolyn Jess-Cooke and Helen Liebling. Infused with the life writing spirit of the workshop, Carolyn's honest insight into the confluence of trauma and writing in her own life offers an invigorating record of the therapeutic potential of literature. Helen's detailed recounting of her ample experience in Uganda as a clinical psychologist reveals her devotedness to explore different approaches and courses of action to alleviate the ordeals of victims of gender violence. Their writings in this anthology are genuine and conscientious testimonies of the feasibility of writing (about) trauma. Last but not least, let us thank again our dear friend Hilda Twongyeirwe of Femrite without whose enthusiasm and hard work this would not have been possible.

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CREATIVE WRITING FOR RECOVERY FROM MENTAL ILLNESS

CAROLYN JESS-COOKE

Owing to childhood trauma, I've suffered from anxiety and depression from the age of 7. Whilst I've previously had counselling and antidepressants, writing has been the primary tool I've used as therapy. I use the word 'therapy' with some hesitation, precisely because I didn't recognise it as therapy for many years. As a creative writing tutor I see this same pattern amongst young people and older people alike: creative writing serves as a tool of disclosure and safe expression, of bearing witness to trauma and mental illness. As a child my home was not a safe place, but I found that writing was my safe place. My writing was mostly fictional, but within the framework of fiction was a processing of what was going on around me, and that's still the case now. I identify completely with Kathleen Jamie, who has spoken of her writing career as an act "of self-building, or self-rescue, and the poetry is a by-product" (2012).

There are two key points I'd like to explore further here. The first is that writing doesn't always have to be directly personal to be therapeutic. Writing does not have to be confessional to be personal – our subjectivity is an inextricable part of creative expression. My first novel, *The Guardian Angel's Journal*, was pitched as fantasy, or women's fiction with a supernatural twist, and yet it is intrinsically and unconsciously autobiographical. Without being fully aware of it at the time, I drew upon the material of my own life and found huge empowerment in moulding this material and rewriting it in such a way to produce something that some might regard as a work of art. This novel was published in 2011 in 23 languages around the world, and since then I've held the view that Nietzsche was only half-right – what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, only if you rewrite it.

The second point I wish to explore is that whilst it is therapeutic in many ways to write about life experiences, what truly contributes to well-being is creating something useful, or meaningful, and occasionally beautiful out of experience for someone else to engage with and perhaps relate to. After all, as William Nicholson wrote, CS Lewis said "we read to know we are not alone" (1985). The same applies to writing. It is this act of communication and *creation* that is at the core of creative writing

for therapeutic purposes. As with all forms of creation, it takes diligence, practice, and persistence to achieve. There is a tendency for writing-as-therapy workshops to focus on (a) producing one draft and (b) not critiquing or developing the work as a piece of art, but rather focusing on the act of producing what is essentially a first draft. I'm not persuaded by this. Whilst one has to be careful when giving feedback on work that is personal, and perhaps very sensitive, I believe strongly in transforming it into literature. It is this process that enables an experience to be processed, externalised, rendered as art instead of emotional baggage.

As an example, when my first child was born I had a very traumatic birth experience, and I found it incredibly difficult to write about it in my own private journals. I couldn't make sense of my own feelings about what had happened, but poetry gradually provided a way for that to happen. I felt less like a victim and more able to make sense of the torrent of emotions – particularly fear – that continued long afterwards. The formal elements of poetry, such as rhyme, meter, metaphor, alliteration, and assonance, enabled me to process this experience and move forward. Over time, I felt empowered by it – but only because I had found the language to express it. No experience is unique. By writing about it I contributed to an ongoing dialogue about birth and women's writing, and the feedback I had back from readers was comforting – I was not alone. As a writer, I am conscious that what I write is inherently in dialogue with other works of literature, and there is that sense of exchange, of being part of a wider conversation, that makes this act of creating text so powerful.

This identification of oneself as a writer, and not just a survivor, is essential, too. Forging a new identity after trauma that is founded on creativity and artistic practice is a key component of recovery. For instance, following a pilot study using writing for therapeutic purposes, King, Neilsen and White assert that the writing workshop participant's "identity as a [*creative*] *writer* is reinforced, rather than their identity as a person with an illness" (2013: 451; their emphasis).

On closer look at some uses of writing in therapy, it is possible to identify the creative process as offering emotional and psychological resilience and enhancing cognitive development. One of James Pennebaker's earlier studies involved groups of students who were asked to write about a traumatic event that they had kept secret. Students were told to "really let go and explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts... All of your writing will be completely confidential" (2007: 436). Pennebaker's instruction to students not to stop writing once they began seems a

significant part of the process, and reflective reports showed long-term improvements in mood. One must wonder, however, whether it was the freewriting approach or the reflection on the experience that achieved the elevated mood. Either way, in 2002 Pennebaker concludes that “the essence of the writing technique is that it forces people to stop what they are doing and briefly reflect on their lives” (Pennebaker, 2002: 283).

This is clearly a positive outcome, yet from a creative writing perspective I argue that teaching participants to be creative writers, and to understand their identity less as participants in a writing program or mental health service users than as *writers*, has much more potential for long-term benefits and change. From a writer’s viewpoint, there is an element of aspiration that is occasionally missing from writing-as-therapy. No writer is born a good one. Although I started writing at the age of 7, and began writing seriously in my early 20s, I didn’t publish my creative work until my early 30s. The craft of writing – and not just the act of producing a first draft – is essential to my wellbeing, so I always emphasize the ‘creative’ element of writing as the most therapeutic aspect.

Craft vs therapy is where the distinction between therapeutic writing and creative writing is commonly made. Bolton *et al* sum it up by making the following distinction: “the focus of therapeutic writing is upon *the processes* of writing rather than the *products*” (2004: 5). I find this very interesting, not least because it’s quite a prevalent perspective: that what I teach my creative writing students at the University of Glasgow is product-oriented, whilst students undergoing a Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes course are more invested in the process. Bolton goes on to distinguish between therapeutic writing and creative writing (or what she calls “writing as an art form”) by stating that in therapeutic writing,

the initial stages of writing need to be encouraged to be personal, private, free from criticism, free from the constraints of grammar, syntax and form, free from any notion of audience other than the writer and possibly the therapist or another reader. Writing as an art form necessitates an awareness of all these at some stage. Therapeutic writing need never respond to the needs of these forces (2004:2).

I would argue that what is described as “therapeutic writing” here is actually creative writing, if one is to understand that many creative writers (both students and published professionals) engage in such “initial stages” of writing “free from criticism”, or freewriting. Furthermore, in a pilot writing project for people participating in psychosocial rehabilitation programmes in Brisbane, Robert King *et al* recount

workshops which employed a life writing ‘theme’ but which were technically instructive, and provided feedback and guidance on how to write creatively (King, 2013: 444-452). As Murphy and Neilsen put it, “life-narratives are more therapeutically effective if *guided* to be written according to fundamental ‘effective writing’ aesthetic conventions – such as having a regard to coherent structure in the narrative, the avoidance of cliché [...] and writing in one’s own voice” (2008; their emphasis).

Survivors of trauma are often silenced and voiceless. Reclaiming their voice is inseparable from reclaiming their identity. For me, finding my voice has been about redefining my own boundaries which were once violated in very insidious and violent ways.

In creative writing, we talk about ‘voice’ as that ethereal, mystical must-have, the thing that makes any piece of writing compelling and authentic. ‘Voice’ is the ‘self on the page’, to use Hunt and Sampson’s term, and it is interesting that much attention is given in literature on therapeutic writing to creating an identity and finding (or ‘recovering’) the self via writing. I would argue that the act of writing is also irrevocably intertextual, that whether for therapeutic or artistic purposes the act of writing is also the act of reading, of text-making. Whether engaged in a life writing exercise as part of a process of recovery from mental illness or writing a 900-page historical fantasy novel, the writer is always appropriating language and textuality. The writing of the self cannot exist without language and awareness of other writing. Just as a fictional novel can draw heavily upon autobiography, so too can autobiography draw upon the strategies and echoes of fiction.

I’m not the only writer to write as a form of meditation, as a subconscious way of reflecting upon my life, and as a form of self-discovery, if not self-therapy. Bestselling novelist Matt Haig took to writing after suffering from a nervous breakdown, and has stated publicly that

writing became a kind of therapy. A way of externalising things. [...] The process of writing, combined with an increase in self-esteem that being published gave me, has helped more than I can say. It was a defense mechanism. It gave me purpose. It might have even saved my life (2015).

Likewise, in her autobiography *Why Be Happy When You Can Be Normal?*, Jeanette Winterson describes how she came to know her own identity through writing. As an adopted child, she gradually came to realise that she could write her own story rather than live the story of her adopted mother:

It's why I am a writer – I don't say "decided to be", or "became". It was not an act of will or even a conscious choice. To avoid the narrow mesh of Mrs Winterson's story I had to be able to tell my own (2011: 5).

Voice and narrative are inextricably linked. Mental health patients find themselves defined almost exclusively by their mental health, "themselves reduced to symptoms and diagnoses, defined in terms of their deficits and understood primarily in terms of what they can't do and what they cost society". Taylor et al describe this as "narrative entrapment". "Engaging in creative biographical writing allows people, individually and in community, to challenge the victimhood that comes with having biographies imposed on them" (392). I argue that this dual approach, drawing upon therapeutic and creative writing practices, needs further unpacking and research for future pilot studies of writing interventions, particularly in terms of the emphasis on creating work that may be read by others to empower them and enable them to find their own identity and voice. The outcomes of the project included participants viewing recovery more as a positive social and personal journey and engagement despite the possibility of continuing mental health problems.

Turning experience of suffering into stories is a defence against suffering in silence... where comfort, reassurance and support is gained by sharing suffering stories with others (Grant et al., 2012: 847).

Further research remains to be done into the benefits of 'therapeutic' approaches within creative writing programmes and pedagogy. For me, writing is energizing. I feel like I can breathe better once I've written. It is a way of completely training the mind to focus. I strongly advocate embedding aspirations towards a continued writing practice within the writing for well-being and advocate a model which allows the writer to engage cognitively with the self on the page, which prioritizes the wellbeing and cognitive development of the writer as well as enabling them to identify as a *maker*. The long-term outcome is in the manner of what Dreyfus and Kelly describe here:

The task of the craftsman is not to *generate* the meaning, but rather to *cultivate* in himself the skill for *discerning* the meanings that are *already there* (2011: 20; their emphasis).

During my poetry residency at the Northern Poetry Library I was inspired to write a sequence in the voice of Josephine Butler, who was an 19th century social activist and

who had huge influence on the Suffragettes. She also fought successfully to overturn the 1864 Contagious Diseases Act, which was established after a report into the spread of venereal diseases in the armed forces, and in order to shield men from disease, the Act permitted any man to subject any woman over the age of 13 to what was essentially a surgical rape to check whether or not she was infected. Butler's campaigning to protect women of the lower classes against the terrible, degrading crimes perpetrated against them was lifelong, but it was galvanised by the death of her little girl at the age of five or six. I think my interest in Butler is not only in terms of her social activism and using her own social privileges to commit valiant acts of defending women without a voice, but because I recognise deeply the way that a traumatic incident can inspire fighting for a cause, and that that effort can assist working through trauma very effectively.

PICKING OAKUM

Carolyn Jess-Cooke

The matron shoves me into one of the ramshackle huts
out with the workhouse and locks me in,

her hands trembling as she rattles the keys at the heavy door.

I expect to find a pride of lions inside, or perhaps wolves,
but the hollow eyes watching
me belong to women – filthy, yes, filmed in soot and lice

and sadness, but women nonetheless, a dozen clasped
by the foul shed with only two windows,
a leaky roof, and reams of old rope coiled on the floor

like black serpents. My hands are clasped, I know not
where to sit, but at last I make do with the spot
on the floor that's haloed by thin noon-light, fanning out

my dress and sitting lower than my audience – this causes
murmurs, which I ignore. Now, I say,
as brightly as I can muster, who will show me what to do?

An old woman gestures, a loop of rope already in both
hands. You pick it, ma'am. Take all the fibres apart.
Like this, see? She pulls the strands, adds them to the cloud

by her feet. The women stir when I mimic the action,
observing that my hands were not made
for this sort of work, that I'd best not ruin my fingers or I'll

be sneered at by friends. Not friends at all if they mock me, I joke,
and gradually the mood of the room
and the strangeness of the task is lightened by laughter. This

is how they cope, I think, for there is sisterhood
in this terrible prison, palpable as the
wet brick walls and scattering rats. What brought you here, then?

a pregnant girl asks, and I say that I want to help them
in any way I can, even if only to assist
in reaching their daily four-pounds of oakum required

by the matron. But then my mind floods with Eva, each
woman's face a palimpsest of hers in reefs
of shade, and the true purpose of my visit unfolds: if born

under a different star my daughter might have found her way
into this shed, into these lives, these pathways,
these tendrils of too-used rope. I tell them about her,

and I say that I undo this rope because I cannot undo her death,
as I will undo all injustices that are within my reach.

And we are all crying and silent, and I pick the umbilical shape

in my lap

as though this black rope might lead me

back to her, as though I'll find her at the end.

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PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WORKING WITH SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND TORTURE IN UGANDA

HELEN LIEBLING

‘Akwate mpola, atuuka wala’ ‘If you walk slowly, you will reach far’

(A Lugandan proverb)

Introduction

This article focusses on my personal reflections of travelling to Uganda and my work with survivors of conflict and post-conflict survivors of gender-based violence and torture. In my work I utilise an ‘action research’ approach combining feminist, participatory and a human rights focus that highlights the voices of survivors and service providers. It ends with a summary that pulls together the main themes that have arisen from this work, as well as some thoughts regarding future directions.

Setting the Context: First Visit to Uganda

I first visited Africa and Uganda in 1992 with my partner at the time and his father, who was an ethnomusicologist from Edinburgh University. We borrowed a Land Rover and drove across from Kenya through the beautiful Great Rift Valley and saw the pink flamingos. Once we reached Kampala our land rover was not working well but was fixed by Kato, 14 years old at the time and a longstanding Ugandan friend. Following this, our time was spent riding around the villages of Busoga, Eastern Uganda, on bicycles with equipment for recording the amazing 21-key wooden embaire (Ugandan Xylophone; see Miklem, Cooke and Stone, 1999). I fell in love with Uganda, the friendly and resilient people, the fantastic and rich traditional music and the beauty of the country. For the first time in my life was a real sense of belonging. Due to my interest in psychology I visited Makerere University. As I am a qualified clinical psychologist also involved in training clinical psychologists in the United Kingdom, the staff asked if I could assist them to start a course in Uganda in clinical psychology, so I initiated a British Council academic partnership to assist with this. Four years later I took up a senior lecturer position in the Institute of Psychology at Makerere University to assist in the running of the newly established Masters in Clinical Psychology and the Masters in Counselling. Whilst working in Uganda in 1997, I was approached by Isis-Women’s International Cross-Cultural Exchange, (<http://isis.or.ug/>) an international non-government organisation based in Kampala whose mission is to document women’s and

girls' experiences of conflict and utilise this information to campaign for service and policy improvements. They asked if I would participate in an intervention project for women conflict survivors in Luwero District, which I was honoured to do.

Luwero

The population of Luwero suffered gross human rights abuses during the 'bush war' between President Milton Obote and Yoweri Kaguta Museveni between the years of 1981 to 1986. Therefore the Isis-WICCE project and then my PhD research wished to give the opportunity for survivors in the rural areas to give their perspectives of their experiences, the impact on their lives and their resulting needs. Isis-WICCE presented the findings of our intervention project at a meeting in Kampala which was attended by survivors, professionals and Ministerial representatives (Isis-WICCE, 1998a; 1998b). The resilience of women survivors was impressive, as following a two year sensitisation period in the District and our project, they spoke out at the Kampala meeting about their experiences of sexual violence and torture to those present, showed scars and demanded for much needed health services. I was very touched by the women's stories and struck by the lack of available health and justice services to respond to their needs. At the time there was no gynaecologist employed in Luwero for instance. During a bout of illness which the doctors in Kampala put down to a sensitivity to malaria tablets, I returned to the United Kingdom. Although unwell I was determined to follow up the women's concerns and visited two universities to see if they would support my idea of returning to Luwero to interview women in more depth regarding their experiences during the Luwero conflict, so I could understand the impact of their ordeals. After some enquiries, I was lucky enough to meet a lecturer in the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender at the University of Warwick who helped me to write an ESRC PhD funding proposal, and after returning to work in Uganda I received a fax at Makerere University to say I had been successful with the funding to start my PhD in 1999.

In order to conduct my interviews with conflict survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, SGBV, and torture in 5 parishes of Luwero District, I was awarded 7 months funding. To immerse myself in the culture I studied Luganda, the language of the Baganda ethnic group and of those I would be interviewing. My research involved close working with Ugandan research assistants and interpreters for assistance with transcribing verbatim the women's and men's narratives. It was a challenging time to carry out the project as it was

during elections and there were regular security problems including violence. Participants were given the choice of being interviewed in focus groups and/or individual interviews. I was well aware that women in Uganda had been encouraged to work in groups since President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni came to power in 1986 and appeared comfortable with this approach (Museveni, 1997). Focus groups were carried out, as it seemed likely women might be able to reveal more detailed information about their war experiences within this supportive network. Whilst running three separate gender focus groups with the same men and women I found as Perren-Klinger (1998) also had that focus groups offered protection and solidarity to reveal the difficult and sensitive themes of the research whilst men and women could also support and empathise with each other. For instance a woman survivor during a focus group in Kamuli parish in Luwero narrated what typically happened to women in the conflict:

We were locked up in a store and raped endlessly for three days. The first soldier tried to penetrate me but failed then his two friends held my legs apart and he cut me with a panga and they tied me up and cut my hands using broken glass and they raped me. I cried so hard! (Liebling-Kalifani, 2009: 176)

The gender of the interviewer was also extremely important in the research and women overwhelmingly preferred to speak to other women about their experiences, particularly those of violence, rape and torture. My own feelings are captured by my fieldwork diary entry on 15th February 2001 following a group in Kasana parish:

Initially during the group I was concerned as we were talking about their horrendous experiences of war and it all seemed so upsetting, one woman left the group and others cried. I almost cried it was so awful and sad but after talking the women seemed to find relief, they empathised with each other and said it helped them to know they were not alone with their suffering.

With respect to the men I interviewed, two stated a preference for a woman interviewer whereas the others said they did not mind about gender. The preference I felt was related to the gender of the person who committed atrocities against them and that it might be easier to talk to and build up trust with a woman if the abuser had been a male and vice versa. However, my research also found the men's groups were more comfortable with the male research assistant present. Women shared very personal belongings with me during the process to assist them narrate their experiences. For example one woman from Kasana parish:

...brought a photo of what things were like just after the war, she was standing by a completely broken down house, surrounded by bricks with a woman from New Vision [Ugandan newspaper] and her two sons, one born during the war who is now at Senior School. I felt really touched that she wanted to show the photo to help me to understand. (Diary entry 16th February 2001, Liebling-Kalifani, 2009)

As the focus groups progressed women were able to disclose the most painful and sensitive experiences and it appeared in the following focus groups held that they had found some relief in doing so and their depression lifted. The benefits of a long-term relationship in building up trust with such sensitive issues were a key aspect to the research. Barriers to communication were reduced, by learning Luganda, taking part in traditional music, dancing and singing, eating local meals and holding focus group discussions enlisting participants as assistants (Case, 1990). The main themes of the research were shared with participants and local community representatives through the engagement of a community drama and singing group that my Ugandan woman researcher led. During this workshop we fed back the main themes that emerged from analysis of the research interviews through enacting a drama in Luganda language in a rural church (Bowser and Sieber, 1993). Goats were also given to research participants as a result of funds raised by the Older Feminist Network in South Wales, to enable the start of an income generating scheme. A friend of mine from Wales assisted with this linking together with the women I worked with in Luwero and they also wrote to each other. In these and other ways, a collective empowerment and action-research approach was utilised in the project. At the end of the fieldwork women sang songs and a diary fieldwork entry dated 15th June 2001 (Liebling-Kalifani, 2009) related:

The women sang two songs about me 'Nalule', my Ugandan name, that they expected good things from me and I should send others from the UK to visit them and that I should always think about them in Uganda. They gave me presents and really danced Bakisimba [a traditional Ugandan dance] and we all laughed and played drums and sang whilst I danced and everyone screamed with laughter. A very touching experience I almost cried.

Northern Uganda

Following my PhD I started working at Coventry University and met Professor Bruce Baker, Director of African Studies whose expertise is in justice and policing. We combined our ideas and obtained funding from the British Academy to interview former child abductees of the

Lord's Resistance Army insurgency as well as the health and justice providers in a project entitled the *Governance of Sexual Violence* in Kitgum, northern Uganda. Those we spoke to had been abducted against their will by the Lord's Resistance Army, LRA, who had carried out serious human rights abuses against the population of northern Uganda for 23 years. Girls were forced to enter into 'marriages' with LRA rebels and commanders. During their period of abduction, both girls and boys were forced to endure and commit atrocities including killings, maiming, setting bombs and landmines, and torture of their communities. We spent a week in Kitgum town and I interviewed young women and young male former child abductees in groups and individually whilst Bruce interviewed service providers. We worked very closely with KIWEPI, Kitgum Women's Peace Initiative, who provide support for girl conflict survivors and engage them in peacebuilding (<https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/uganda/peacebuilding-organisations/9339-2/>). We then went to Orom near South Sudan and met with the community to discuss our project and seek volunteers to interview. After the discussion a young man and former child abductee asked to speak to me and questioned if 'we had been sent by Museveni to arrest them.' Luckily enough I was able to have a good conversation with him where he felt reassured and after which we were overwhelmed with numbers of survivors to interview. I can recall running a focus group with 29 young male former abductees where some of the men disclosed their experiences of sexual violence and feeling touched by how much the other men supported one another. The disclosure of sexual violence by men however, is an extremely sensitive issue and there are particular cultural influences which affect reporting as a psychologist in Kitgum I interviewed explained:

I carried out a survey and we have a quarterly report but the issue of men reporting [sexual violence]...is affected by the way this is carried out... The other factors that affect men reporting are as follows; Firstly, cultural factors in our communities; men are supposed to be resilient and not 'weak,' Secondly, they may not be aware that they can be helped and they feel there are no solutions to their problems, and finally it is an abomination within our community to be raped as a man, it is not manly and the survivor would be 'cast out'.

Young women also described horrific violations of their human rights including being requested to pick a man's shirt following abduction by the Lord's Resistance Army and then being 'forced to marry' the man whose shirt she chose. The young men and women's resilience was impressive as well as how they managed to use their survival strategies to deal with very hard situations and escape abduction with their children born from rape. However,

young women also described the trauma of not only conceiving a child born from rape but being rejected by their communities when they returned home, due to the stigma and shame that resulted. One woman survivor during a focus group in Kitgum Town explained:

On our arrival all those who had been abducted were assembled, the girls separately to the boys and we were all allocated to men whether they be ugly or old...we were given and we were not able to object. I was given to a man who instructed that I would be a soldier and secondly that I would be a wife. I was sent for military operations and had to go immediately and was also forced to sleep with him. Because he was a big man I was fearing very much and I was being beaten until I complied with having sex.

I recall feeling very touched and empathic towards the young men and women I spoke to, particularly as they were young children who had their innocence and childhood stolen from them. Our research findings went on to conclude:

Although health and justice findings have been reported separately, in fact we looked at them together because sexual violence was experienced simultaneously as a violation of the survivor's body and rights. It left the survivor in need of both a health and a justice response. As the two are connected in the experience of the survivor so they go hand in hand in terms of service responses required. We therefore argue that there is real value in promoting increased collaboration between local health and justice services. (Liebling-Kalifani & Baker, 2010a)

Following the research, I was personally asked by Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for a copy of the report based on our research so that she and two African women leaders might take it to President Museveni in Uganda. Mary Robinson later reported back to the summit meeting I presented at, that she and the president discussed the research findings. She told the attendees at the summit meeting that he had said: "This is very important and has not been mentioned to me before. I am going to act on it and debate the issues at the Security Council meeting in Kampala this October 2010". She related that Museveni also promised to take up the recommendations with the Ministry of Health and his Security Council. Mary Robinson subsequently launched the book at the gender mainstreaming meeting which was held prior to the African Union summit and read out to the conference a section of her report, stating its importance to the 1000 participants. This was a very rewarding moment and I felt an inner warmth as the research team hoped that this would bring positive progress in support structures for survivors and service providers we had worked with in northern Uganda.

Survivors and Service Providers' Experiences of Trauma Centres

Following this research project the South African Correctional Department at an opening ceremony of Gulu trauma centre in Uganda, recommended implementation of our holistic model and policy recommendations to inform the services for conflict survivors (Liebling-Kalifani et al. 2007; 2008). Together with KIWEPI in Kitgum and a barrister from London, we returned to Gulu and Kitgum and interviewed survivors who accessed services at the trauma centres as well as service providers. This project was fairly hectic as we only had 5 days in Gulu and 5 days in Kitgum. It was interesting that unlike in many of the previous projects where survivors often preferred to be interviewed in focus groups, in this project many of the survivors related a preference for individual interviews, possible due to the research asking about personal experiences of counselling. The interviews resulted in a clear indication that counselling and medication was valued by service users, and that service providers felt the treatments that were provided at the trauma centres improved depression, and increased empowerment and engagement in social activities. However, our study concluded that for trauma survivors we interviewed there was also a very clear need for the state to ensure reparation and/or justice for the atrocities witnessed by and perpetrated against survivors. We argued that this might include the provision of compensation, which would help to meet social needs and reduce feelings of shame and anger (Liebling et al. 2014). For me personally, despite the lack of resources and logistics, it was fantastic to see the efforts being made to assist survivors in this way.

Creative Approaches

I was lucky to meet Dr Felicity Hand, Senior Lecturer, Autonomous University of Barcelona at an African Studies Conference. This was really exciting for me as Felicity explained she had been involved in running creative writing workshops using literature. As discussed earlier, my first introduction to Africa was through my interest and study of traditional music and therefore this was an opportunity for us to explore more creative approaches. In 2014 together with Felicity and her colleague Dr Esther Pujolràs, we held a creative writing workshop with the staff at Isis-WICCE in Kampala (<http://blogs.uab.cat/nalubaale/>). The aims of this workshop were to enhance the knowledge and skills of the staff team in creative writing strategies for use in their ongoing work with women and girl survivors of conflict and

post-conflict sexual and gender-based violence and torture particularly in Africa, Latin America and Asia. For me personally it was really good to be involved in something less academic and more creative and to give back to Isis-WICCE who have supported me so much with my work. The workshop was well received and one participant commented:

The selection of the text for the workshop focussed closely on the work of Isis-WICCE in a creative way, which was helpful and opened up discussions about sexuality in an African context to bring this to reality.

Analysis of international writers with a particular focus on the African region, were utilised to enhance analytic skills and another participant commented:

It has been writing that has made me think deeply and it has been inspiring to read literature and good learning for me. In the context of our work we hear a lot of stories but we don't know what we can do with them and I have learnt we can do a lot more. No-one has previously given me the opportunity to express myself and write not even at school, and through this experience I will encourage my children to write.

Recently I was invited to be involved with the HIF advisory board on a project entitled, Healing in Harmony (<http://www.panzifoundation.org/blog/healing-in-harmony-journey-to-scale>) which is evaluating the impact and value of music and singing at Panzi Hospital in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Participants are survivors of sexual violence, abandoned children, vulnerable community members, as well as Panzi staff. Together, they are treated as artists, and they own their music. I look forward very much to hearing the impact of this programme as it unfolds.

South Sudanese Refugees displaced to Uganda

Following on from the previous research and clinical work and research with refugee survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and torture in the United Kingdom, we were recently awarded funding through the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust to investigate the *Experiences of South Sudanese Refugees Living in Settlements in Northern Uganda: Health and Justice Responses*. Over a million South Sudanese women, men and children have fled to northern Uganda to escape conflict, famine and human rights violations. They are living in refugee settlements where our interviews will take place. This project is being carried out in conjunction with Juliet Were-Oguttu, Isis-WICCE, Faddy Gladys Canogura, Director, KIWEPI, Professor Hazel Barrett, Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University and Professor Lilly Artz, Director, Gender, Health and Justice Research Centre, University of Cape Town. The research seeks to gain the lived experiences of women and

men refugees from South Sudan who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence and torture as well as the service providers' perspectives. We intend to carry out the interviews for this research in May to June 2018.

Concluding Comments

My initial travels to Uganda through traditional music and work inspired me and changed my life. My work continues to highlight the voices of conflict survivors and utilize this information to try to improve services and policies; as well as facilitate training to build more culturally sensitive support. The Great Lakes Region has made it a priority to tackle this issue but although they continue to be concerted to do so large gaps in funding have made it difficult to provide the required services (Kampala Declaration, 2003; ICGLR, 2011). Feminist and participatory methods have aimed to enhance the capacity of African organisations I work closely with. Focus groups are a forum where survivors can feel understood, supported and share their experiences in a way that builds agency. My research has found that a holistic feminist and culturally sensitive approach that includes reproductive health treatment, support groups, income-generation, and clean water leads to community empowerment and physical health treatment decreases stigma and increases quality of life for survivors. I argue that psychosocial support groups are helpful in tackling social rejection and promoting solidarity and that creative writing is a safe and therapeutic forum for empowering survivors, healing and breaking silences (Liebling-Kalifani, 2009; Liebling-Kalifani & Baker, 2010a; Liebling-Kalifani & Baker, 2010b; Liebling et al. 2014).

It is very important in my view to keep engaging survivors and service providers in the evaluation of sensitive and culturally relevant approaches for enhancing resilience, healing and peace-building; for instance through music, art, drama and writing. I have found good support structures, training and a model of care is important for service providers to prevent burnout. However, my research has also increased awareness of the issue of human rights activists being targeted themselves as a result of their work. Further attention regarding governance structures to ensure their proper care and safety including protection from sexual

and gender-based violence and harassment should continue to be emphasised in order to maximise the benefits for the survivors they work with (*The Guardian*, 2018).

The rewards for working with conflict survivors are immense and I feel my own life experiences serve to increase the empathy, humanity and understanding required for this work. I continue to be humbled, honoured and inspired to work with and learn from so many resilient people. Personally during the last three years I experienced the death of both my parents, which on top of further significant loss, has served only to heighten my empathy for those who share their experiences with me but has also increased my determination regarding the importance of speaking out regarding such abuses to effect positive changes. My recent involvement in creative approaches with survivors and service providers is an area I wish to focus on.

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HE COULDN'T TELL

WARREN ABOMUGISHA

From the start, I was very happy to have a name which was very rare in our community. My parents called me Wellen which sounded new into people's ears. I still continued using the bright name "Wellen" although I couldn't tell the meaning.

Not only I failed to tell the meaning behind the name Wellen but also my parents couldn't find the answer. This made me astonished.

And for that matter, change was the only solution. I decided to change the name Wellen to Warren which sounded so beautiful. Only changing the name, which means room with many corners, I also thought much about the corners in the room. I interpreted the corners to mean the positive characters in a person's way of life which I believe I hold today.

More also, I found that the name Warren is possessed by influential people in the world. Warren who improved bulb light, Warren Kiiza Besigye an influential political activist in Uganda and Warren Buffett a great economist in the world couldn't leave me in protest and of course a bad attitude towards the name Warren.

This encouraged me to call my forthcoming sons and daughters names with a direct and staunch meaning. This to save them from the humiliation my relative faced during a round table family discussion when I raised a question about the name Wellen which eventually put him completely in a great torment and this lastly helped him to capture a good lesson about child naming after a great lecture.

DISABILITY IS NOT INABILITY

WARREN ABOMUGISHA

There are numerous disabilities in human life, affecting and torturing many people in the world. In this case, I cannot be humiliated when I talk about visual impairment as one of the common disabilities in human life.

This is just because it has been part and parcel of my life since the age of four months when my mom analysed changes in my eyes which required immediate medical attention. Thank god, she saved my life although I faced the nucleation of the first and second eye at the age of eleven months and four years respectively.

My parents and doctors tried to nip the problem in the bud but they couldn't. This eventually made me one of the many people in the whole world with this disability. I joined the group of people where hands, ears and the mind explain their success and perfection in this world.

It is my parents and education that always make me happy and confident with the above disability. It is also important to note that disability is neither a curse nor a blessing but it is a concern for everyone because there is no man who wishes for that kind of life.

However, disability becomes a horrid challenge to those individuals who capitulate to the woes and plights that they face during their lives.

I so far regard blindness to be a pre-requisite to hard work so as to reach perfection. It is the matter of accepting realities and believing in yourself no matter the conditions you are facing. This is surely true because I do not know what "sight" is in my life. I do not know how a mirror explains and beautifies my face. I do not know the looks of my parents and even I cannot tell the beauty of God's creation.

This is now my call and cry to the public to come up and associate with people with disabilities because together in God's image we exist. Let us work together with unity and love being our motto and definitely our key to bliss.

I now feel vexed and perplexed when I hear that the world still holds people with a negative attitude towards people living with disabilities. This is alarming because it is only the mind that leads to success. It is so fascinating to hear that the keyboard of a typewriter was designed by a visually impaired person. More also the construction of tarmac roads was brought on board by a visually impaired man. This encourages and motivates me to work hard no matter the state of life I am in.

As I nail it down, I have grown without eyes, studied without eyes, achieved certificates in many fields and earned a degree without eyes. I can now read and write using my hands. And so disability is not inability if you accept realities in human race.

STORIES

REGINA ASINDE

They call me Regina Asinde. It is not my name. It is father's mother's name. My father chose to give me her name: Regina Asinde. Regina- the name that testified that she worshipped through the recitation of the Rosary. Before she went to Nagongera Mission, she was Asinde -the third one who comes after twins- daughter of Chok: she was Asinde nyar Chok. Then she learned the rosary and as a reward drops of water were sprinkled on her forehead and she became Regina Asinde.

I do not speak to my creator by counting beads. My mother has never borne twins. I am the daughter of Osinde. But I am called Regina Asinde. A name with more identities than one person can bear.

The ones of father's mother's clan call me Daughter of Chok, Aunt;

The ones of father's clan call me mother, grandmother, mother-of-our-children, wife-of-our-house, one-from-Kisote;

The ones of mother's clan call me mother, mother-in-law, mother-of-our-daughter's husband;

Regina Asinde.

THE SEPARATION

Mother is standing on the lower steps in front of the big house which has been our home since I can remember. The baby she is holding in her arms is crying, loud wails that always made me want to stuff something in her mouth. Mother is crying too. Of course she is not making any sound. Quiet tears flow down her dark cheeks. I have never seen her cry, so I turn and watch her in fascination. Then I turn to father and ask him, “Why is mother crying?”

He does not answer me. I am not surprised. Father never answered questions. That didn’t stop me from asking them though. I ask the question again; this time addressing it to my elder sister Nyamidang, I am sure to get an answer from her. When she does not answer, I turn and look at her. She too is crying.

“Why are you crying?” I ask, “Don’t you want to go with father?”

Their tears puzzle me. Father has been away since I was in class one in Bugonga Boys Primary school. Now I am in class two. Mother had told us that he had gone to Bulaya to go to school. At that time, two things had puzzled me; why did he have to go to school? At our school, only children went there, there weren’t fathers in the classes with us. Secondly why did he have to go away to Bulaya to go to school, weren’t there schools in Entebbe? Mother’s brother Uncle Kirumi, who was staying with us then, had laughed and said that my first question answered the second question; father had to go to Bulaya because there were no schools in Entebbe that taught fathers. He could only go to school in Bulaya because there were schools for fathers there. For a long time, two Christmases to be exact, father had been away from us. He had only come back a few days back.

“Stop asking silly questions,” Father says, his tone grim. I turn to look at him, my eyes watering with hurt. Father never used to call my questions silly though he never answered them. I was his very clever mother. Droplets fall down onto my knotted hands; I just wanted to know why mother and Nyamidang are both crying when they should be happy. We are going on a journey in

a car; Father and we the children. We are huddled together in the double cabin pick-up father had come with. After parking a few of our bags onto the double cabin pick-up, he had told us to go and get in. My sisters Nyamidang, Nyarikor and Kiteedi had scrambled into the back seats while I perched on father's lap in the front seat next to the driver. I did not know the man driving and did not understand the language he spoke so I could only smile at him.

The car starts and pulls away. Nyamidang's sobs get louder. Kiteedi, the youngest of us, joins her and starts to wail. I turn and look up to father. He is not looking at anything except the car roof. I know that look; he is angry. I turn and look at my sisters. Only Nyarikor is not crying. Nyamidang tries to shush Kiteedi, though both their cries are loud. I look out the car window, mother is still standing on the front step, holding the wailing baby, her right hand raised in goodbye. I look up at father's closed face and as the car moves away, leaving mother on the steps of the house, my tears fall harder as I struggle to cry in silence. Father still does not speak. The man drives the car in silence.

I next see mother when I am in primary seven.

BE STILL AND KNOW

REGINA ASINDE

You wrote him a letter. Of course, it was not the first letter you had written to him; whenever you got that burning sensation at the far reaches of your mouth and heard the loud voices in your head, clamouring bulls against the restraints round them, you wrote a letter.

Often in the silence of the night, when you turned pages of well-thumbed novels, and the words just swam before your eyes, the voices in your head louder than the voices of the characters in the world of the novels, you would sit upright on your bed, open the drawer of the dressing table that is right at your headstand, pick your notebook and pen and begin scratching away releasing the voices in your head and allowing them to speak to whoever they wish to speak to. This had been one of the reasons why Tina, your elder sister, demanded that she be moved out of the bedroom and why at the age of sixteen, you were the only one who had a bedroom all to yourself. All your sisters shared bedrooms. Tina, who originally was meant to share with you, now shares with Naomi and Teddy. Stella and Deborah shared another room. They were the older girls. The younger girls, Betty and Susan shared another room. You were eight girls in total. All your sisters had said that they couldn't stand your nocturnal habits; reading, writing, monologuing, humming through the watches of the night. They called you weird and you knew that they all did not know what to do with you.

At first it had been hard, when you had just joined them from the village where you had lived with grandmother and grandfather from the age of six. You never really could understand why you had been sent to the village to live with your grandparents, all you remember is moving to the village and staying away from father for almost two years. Sometimes you think you lost your voice at about this time, you are not sure about this though. After two years you had been brought back to Kampala, to join your sisters and stepsisters and stepmother and father. Your voice still did not come back to you. They spoke a language that was foreign to you, a language you had only heard the teacher speak at school. So you watched them, uncomprehending while they chattered and laughed and smirked and cried. At first, they would steal uncomfortable glances at

you when you sat in their midst, watching them. You understood that your presence unsettled them and so you learned to sit still and become just another object in the environment. You learned to listen with your mind, imagining what they were saying from the shrug of their shoulders, the squint of their eyes, the hard lines around their mouths, the angling of their bodies and so many others. You learned to listen and decipher meaning through the silences and the voice variations of tone and volumes of words spoken. Of course only father spoke to you, but you could count the number of words he ever said; the most he had said so far was about a hundred or so words since you came back home. You never answered him, either shaking or nodding your head with a smile on your dark face were your standard answers. Then father had taken you to school, the school where Teddy and Naomi and Christine were at that time and you had labored to read the foreign words on paper until you mastered them. You found your voice in primary two at the end of the school year astonishing your teachers when you said “Yes” to a question they asked you in the foreign language that you had now learned was English. You read and read and read. Your teachers always had to give you more reading material and exercises. During your school holidays, in primary three, you discovered Stella’s literature novels: *Things Fall Apart*, *The Concubine*, *Grapes of Wrath*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *God’s Bits of Wood*, *Darkness at Noon* and her secret cache of Barbara Taylor Bradford, Agatha Christie with the Victorian historical romances. You no longer had to struggle to disappear in a crowd. Your legs folded crossways under you, you would simply disappear into the worlds created in the books you read, only flitting through the house corridors to find something to eat when the occasional hunger pang bit your stomach really hard.

In primary five, the voices in your head got louder. You had always heard them before, but you had ignored them, silencing with other loud voices of characters you spent your days and nights with in the story world. Now they refused to be ignored. When you saw something or heard something, you heard them shout to be released and each time you tried to release them with speech, you got a burning sensation in the far reaches of your mouth and instead of words flowing out, tears would be what came out. So you would rush to your room, lock the door and sit still. When you were still enough, they would come out, spilling out in rushed paces, each scrambling to be out of the cage. You gave them free rein and they made their presence known, arguing and discussing and counterarguing, sometimes reporting, sometimes defensive, sometimes angered, bitter and enraged -whatever emotion you had to allow them out. Then you learned the art of letter

and journal writing. It was Ms. Nandase, your primary five teacher of the English language who had been the first recipient of your letters. You first wrote to her a letter at a time when she caned you unjustly. You had not done your homework because you had a headache and however much you tried to concentrate, you still failed to. When she checked your book and found the questions blank, she had asked you why you hadn't done the homework. You had opened your mouth to speak but the burning sensation at the far reaches of the far reaches of your mouth and the pounding headache had threatened to split your veins and made your eyes swim with tears. She had caned you five canes. Later in the night using a torch in the school dormitory, you had written her a message telling her that she had caned you unfairly. You had taken the letter to the staffroom and give it to the messenger to deliver it to her. She had apologized to you the next day. You were elated, you could actually speak.

She walked into the room, fearful to step on the tiled floor. You watched her, a face vaguely familiar though you failed to place her in your slate of memories. Teddy, who had been seated in one of the chairs, rushed to her feet and hugged the stranger. Then the puzzle fitted in for you: Mother! The one whom you last saw at the age of five. Your eleventh birthday was coming up in two months' time.

You turned and watched her watch you --- she opened her arms wide for you waiting for you to go to her. You become stiller; the voices scream in your mind: she abandoned you! What is she doing here? Before they get louder, father and his second wife walk into the room and settle in neighbouring seats. There is a tense charge in the room, an egg would hardboil in a matter of seconds.

You watched them, seeing the magnetic waves of hostility swirl round each of them. After a hasty greeting Teddy rushes out of the room. You sat stiller in the chair, molding your body to its structure. You needed to know what orchestrated the meeting.

Without preamble, father calls Teddy back into the room.

“Teddy!”

It is a voice of thunder. You cringed. Teddy rushed back into the room. From her hasty and harassed glances, you knew that she had not moved far from the room and you suspected that all your sisters were gathered in the corridor just outside the sitting room as was their tradition of eavesdropping when guests came into the house. You didn't have to do that, you always could be a piece of the furniture in the room.

"Tell Christine to come here quick", he said in a terse voice.

Teddy rushed out again. The sound of their breathing was harsh in the silence that reigned supreme amongst them. Christine shuffled into the room. From her disoriented look, you guessed that she hadn't been among the throng outside in the corridor. She had probably been woken up from her interminable bouts of sleep that she had become prone to since she came home a few weeks earlier after sitting her A-Level national examinations. You did not know what exactly was happening to her; since her return, she seemed so different. At first you had thought that maybe she was worried about her upcoming performance in the examinations, but you also knew that she was the brightest amongst all of you, the Osinde girls, as you were commonly known. Even when there seemed to be no hope of anyone coming home with a report with good results, you could always count on Christine to be the best performer in her class. It had been like this since you could remember so you had dismissed it out of hand. But you had been curious, what was the matter? You never went seeking information. You just observed and found information lurking in the shadow of the people. So you had watched her and waited. You had known that sooner or later you would know what was happening. It seemed that the shadow had finally caught up with the object.

"That's your daughter! Congratulations, she has successfully proved that she is indeed of your blood", father's voice dripped bitterness, each syllable enunciated and dipped in a generous coating of rage. He addressed his comments to her, Mother. You saw her flinch away, visible tremors rocking her body. You pressed hard into the chair, glad that you couldn't feel any of your body nerves. Suddenly, you wished you had scurried away like a cockroach at the beginning. You knew you were not going to like what you were going to hear. But you couldn't move, it was as if you were blended into the cushions of the seat indeed. Silence reigned supreme for a moment again.

“I don’t want to see her anywhere in my home so take her and don’t allow her appear before me again”.

He threw a few notes of money at Mother. She kept silent. Spasmodic tremors racked her body. You watched father’s wife’s face. She watched Mother, the right corner of her lips curled in derogation. Mother watched Christine, despair oozing from every pore of her coffee coloured skin. You watched them all, the voices in your head braying. The question they all wanted answered was: when did Christine become Mother’s daughter? As far as you know, this was the first time you were seeing Mother after you left Entebbe: when was that? Eleven? Twelve years ago? With the exception of that two year stint you had done, the rest of your sisters had never lived away from father except from the times they were in boarding school. So when did Christine become Mother’s daughter? You could feel the burning sensation in the far reaches of your mouth.

“You and your daughter are a curse to me and my family. After I have spent thousands and thousands of my hard earned money educating her, she takes after you and gets pregnant while still in school!” he hissed.

Christine keeps her head bowed, she too is like a bough caught up in a raging tornado. Mother fights to stifle the wounded sobs that seem to be choking her. The voices in your head get rowdy. You could see father talking, his lips moved, but you could not hear a word he said. The voices in your head were deafening. You needed your journal and pen. You jump off the chair and in haste don’t hear the startled voices that call out to you. You shoulder your way through your other sisters thronged at the entrance to the room you are exiting and rush down the corridor to your room. Later you heard through Silvia, the house-servant, that Mother and Christine had gone. It was just not possible for father to bear the shame of her pregnancy, only Mother, her mother, could bear it.

That is when you wrote him a letter.

TRUTH**REGINA ASINDE**

I knew what they wanted to hear,
 and I could have lied but I was weary;
 weary of the silence of death that had just robbed me of father.
 Most thought that my brokenness was because of the death silence,
 maybe they were right, but I knew it just wasn't about that silence
 so I told them what they wanted to hear,
 the five matriarchs seated behind the mud and wattle
 dilapidated iron sheets roofed house
 sniffing in the harsh foggy air
 just a day after the burial:
 yes, he is my boyfriend, I say, staring each of them in the eyes
 each turns away in shock
 I want to laugh: why did they ask if they were not ready to hear the answer?
 I hear their outrage in the sound of the preening turkey that's behind them.

When I think there will be no response to my sacrilegious confession,
 one of them, mother speaks:

Do you want me to follow your father to the grave so soon?

I hold my tongue, I know she still has more to say:

Your father died of HIV/AIDS, mother's mother says.

I wait, there's more to come:

I am sick too, mother says, her voice a purr in the wind

They wait,

I wait.

I wonder why they wait:

For the dead man, my father:

I think of my stepmother, the young women

who thronged the corridors of our house

fighting with her for the right to his bedroom.

And for her:

I look up seeking for the sun's rays through the fog

wondering whether she remembers that three of my sisters

are born of different men,

none of them father.

And for me:

I think of Kaisiromwe;

my twice older boyfriend whose lips are scarred red

with whom I have lain live countless times,

though he wasn't the one who took my maidenhead

There were others before him

and there will probably be others after him.

I wait, my breath trails mingling with theirs in the fog.

none of them father.

And for me:

I think of Kaisiromwe;

my twice older boyfriend whose lips are scarred red

with whom I have lain live countless times,

though he wasn't the one who took my maidenhead

There were others before him

and there will probably be others after him.

I wait, my breath trails mingling with theirs in the fog.

WHICH STORY SHOULD I TELL?

REGINA ASINDE

My story. I have heard the phrase over and over again: we have to tell our stories or someone else will tell them for us. It is a cliché for me; every time I am with creative minds: writers, filmmakers, musicians—that's the phrase that feels no shame rolling over their smooth tongues and falling hard against my tired ears. Telling our own stories; as Africans, as women, as Ugandans, as children.

Then I wonder which story of mine should I tell. As children, we always asked grandmother to tell us particular stories that we loved. We would demand of her to tell us of the girl who went to fetch firewood but was too lazy to lift it and place it on her head that she ended up asking the frog to help her, in exchange for her hand in marriage or of the crafty hare who got away with cheating crocodile of his hospitality rights when they visited crocodile's in-laws via the use of the title visitor. We always knew which stories we wanted her to tell us and she was always ready to oblige us long after the kerosene lamp was blown out and we lay contented on our banana fibre knitted mats, her voice lulling us to sleep two or three stories later.

Yet here I stand at the threshold of thirty-five years old with six children wondering which of my stories I should tell. Should I tell of the young girl who felt so lonely even amidst her family? Who learned to read and write in order to find a voice, who got addicted to masturbation and erotic novels at an early age of 8? Who hated her body for its peculiarities especially its sexual cravings, and was cursed as the devil's spawn? Should I tell of the teenager who craved love and acceptance -her addiction to masturbation muffling her cries and instilling in her a sense of shame and degradation? Who every time her body found fulfillment, hated it for its cravings and wickedness? The school girl who always lived in lack and want, learning to stifle the urge to beg for charity?

Which story should I really tell? Of the traumatized young girl on the threshold of womanhood who was forced to grow up after the tragic death of her father? Of the girl who felt there was no more reason for her to live because the only person who had loved her had died? Or of the girl who lost her virginity to a random stranger just to prove to herself that she was not

queer? Which story should I tell? Of the girl who got involved in a sexual relationship with a man twice her age just because her sisters needed money from him? Of her self-hatred and her desire to inflict emotional pain on the man who took pleasure from her body and her feeling of betrayal each time her body found release from him? Of her hatred of all things male because of what her father did; defiling her love for him with his promiscuity, his inability to provide and protect her when she needed him?

Which story should I tell that society will hear and not stand in judgement? Which story? Should I tell of the young girl who lived with her aunt--- who thought that finally she would find the love and acceptance she craved only to be served with more hatred and rejection than what she had ever thought possible? Of the times she was labelled slut, whore, though she held her body from the touch of men who sought to violate it, of the accusation that she was a husband snatcher, home-wrecker though the man she was supposed to having stolen was not worth a fly's glance or of her hunger pangs while at school and the acute need that drove her at times to steal from her aunt ---more shame and degradation.

Which story should I tell that you want to hear? Some say that they are tired of the woman's sob story. But that is the story my heart knows. The story of one too afraid to dream, who has been told that dreaming leaves one discontented, yearning for things that are impossible. Should I tell of the pain that suffocates one when they are termed as an unnatural woman? Of the wife who is not a woman or the mother who can't mother?

I hold a thousand stories in my heart and my body bears their visible scars and I am afraid that when they cease to be inside, afraid that when finally I know the story to tell and find the storyteller's voice, I will speak and only the ugliness inside will spew out. Isn't it written that out of the outflow of the heart, the mouth spills? I am afraid that when the stories finally tumble out, all you will hear will deafen your ears and blind you, that you will cease to see me but only the stories. I am afraid that should I choose to tell one, all that are braying for freedom and clamouring for release will tumble out and you won't have where to hold them so maybe I should just let others tell them for me—for you have heard them all before ---not so?

WHEN WE RAIDED THE TEACHERS' DINNER BUCKET

DANSON KAHYANA

St. Leo's College, Kyegobe, was a lovely school we were proud to be in. But like all places it had a bad side one had to be careful about lest he picked up some habits that the boys considered fun. Consider, for instance, the practice of raiding the teachers' bucket as it was carried to their living quarters. This was motivated by the poor food we were given – powdery posho that we were told had been cooked, and weevil-laden beans that we were told had been bought from the best food stores in town. We ate these from Monday to Monday for ten weeks a term. You can imagine what they did to our stomachs. Rather than understand our terrible situation, the teachers called us misbehaved brats who polluted the air, and they took to punishing us for “breathing” the weevils out of our system. What we were supposed to do? We asked them. It was not our choice that we “breathed” the way we did. We could have improved our meals if we had had the money like the old boys in the higher classes. But most of us hardly came with pocket money, so we were not able to buy avocados, tumbunyas or bagiyas.

One day, one of the toughest boys in our class told Kambale and me that he had dreamt of a plan that would improve our feeding. He was a very creative boy who had designed an inexpensive electric cooking system we used at school – a tin connected to an electric wire and plugged into a wall socket. We had used this for a month, preparing instant millet porridge we called magima – a word that owed its origin to the similarity between the bubbling of boiling millet porridge and that of a volcanic hill as we imagined it bursting its anger away. Aware of the risks that the electric tin posed, the school had banned its use with vehemence: a new rule had been put in place threatening expulsion to its makers and users alike. Now, this creative boy we called Engineer took Kambale and me to a place he gave a curious name – Erilhubuka (Luyiira for Resurrection). “Nobody has died here – why such a curious name?” I asked, grinning at how insolent and irreverent Engineer could be. He replied that we would marvel at the appropriateness of the name when we saw what he was going to reveal to us. It was about 6.30 pm, the time we should have been having our weevil-laden dinner. Kambale asked if we did not risk going to bed hungry, but Engineer told him not to worry as we were about to get the best meal in the school. We followed him and sat where he told us to. About five minutes later, we saw one of the workers assigned to

the staff quarters trudge towards us as he struggled with an obviously over-laden bucket. I don't know why the boys called him Mussolini for he was far from the autocratic Italian leader we read about in our history lessons. Perhaps it was because of the way he softly spoke, as the boys imagined a young Italian opera singer would. What Engineer had shown us was not new: we had always seen Mussolini carry a bucket to the teachers' quarters every evening. What was new was what we discovered: the bucket contained chicken – succulent chicken, not beans – weevil-laden beans.

Engineer whispered to Mussolini after which he gave him a bank note worth about ten pancakes. He then scooped out savory chicken pieces that we ate before retiring to our dormitory. But this soon came to an end as one troublesome teacher soon discovered what we were doing. He had noticed that the bucket missed his favorite parts which happened to be our favorites as well – chicken breasts and thighs. He had questioned Mussolini about these missing parts, accusing him of dipping his hands into the bucket. Mussolini had protested, insisting that what he had been given at the kitchen was what he had always delivered. So the teacher had decided to spy on him one evening and lo and behold, he had succeeded in catching us red-handed. Good enough for Mussolini, he had tried – without success – to block our access to the bucket that evening for he was tired of the teacher's verbal lashes. We were punished for the wrong we had done: we spent a week clearing an acre of farmland.

After we had served our sentence, we returned to class with blistered palms that hurt like hell. We knew we had done something wrong but we also believed that the punishment we had been given was brutal. Its brutality did not lie in the blisters – those we could endure for we knew they would soon heal. For didn't the Bayiira people say that the body was a bark tree since the part that peels off is soon replaced? What hurt most was the psychological torture that came with the punishment. Some of our classmates ridiculed us in several ways, including calling us names like Bucket, Delicious Thigh and Succulent breast. Of course we knew that they were not doing this because they were holier than us but because we had excluded them from the eating festivities we had enjoyed. We did not blame them for their arrow-like words: we blamed the terrible teacher. We thought we should revenge against him in some way but we did not know how. One of us said that we should deliberately perform badly in Christian Religious Education – the subject he taught –

but we thought this would cause us more problems since poor performance was punished with hot kiboko canes. Another mate suggested that we should ambush him one evening and stone sense into his big head (it was really big), but we thought this would cause us more trouble as it would be easy to tell that we were the people who had done it, since the whole school knew about the bad blood between us and him. Engineer suggested something we thought far-fetched: that we should spy on the man every Saturday evening and discover something about his private life. When we asked him why this was important since we did not want to spend an hour or two being tortured by mosquitoes, he said we would find out the day we did what he had suggested. And when we asked him why Saturday was the most suitable day for what he was suggesting, he said that it was the day the teacher's wife – who worked in a school far way – came to visit him every weekend. I don't want to go into the details of that Saturday night spying, but suffice to mention that at the end of the one hour we spent by the teacher's bedroom door, we felt rightfully avenged for we knew all the man's weaknesses – the little-boy-like pleading he did as he asked for his meal, the silly things he said during meal time, and his groaning that usually sent us scampering away to our dormitory. We felt avenged and made peace with the bully, even as we missed Mussolini's fleshpots.

WHY I WRITE

PAUL KISAKYE

I'd just joined Hope Nursery and Primary School when my brother Tonny introduced me to *Count Dracula*. It was this one book in the library that every kid dreaded. Apparently, it was so scary it would give you nightmares. It had to have the devil himself residing inside it. For a small Christian primary school, that was a big deal.

I was in Primary Five and Tonny was in Primary Seven. The section of the library that had *Count Dracula* was reserved for Primary Seven pupils only. It was the section with all the novels. I don't think my brother was trying to get me a new reading hobby when he got me that book. Like any good big brother, he wanted to scare the hell out of me and have a good laugh while at it.

I don't remember whether hell was scared out of me. I actually don't even remember what the famous vampire was up to in that ancient classic. But I remember enjoying the hell out of myself. Tonny didn't get what he wanted. Instead of a scaredy little brother, he got himself an excited little brother who couldn't wait to get his hands on another novel. That's how I ended up starting to read all the middle-grade novels in that library. I especially liked R. L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series.

I must have been on my third or fourth book when the librarian noticed something unusual. You see, Primary Seven pupils were supposed to be too busy revising their classwork to read anything that's not examinable by the Uganda National Examinations Board. So why was my brother — who had barely been a good borrower before — interested in books all of a sudden, especially those that weren't textbooks?

That's how Tonny introduced me to the librarian. She was excited to finally meet someone who was interested in the section of the library no one glanced at for even a second. It didn't matter that the books were not in the Primary Five section. I was welcome to any section of the library I so desired any time the library was open. I don't think anyone had ever been accorded such honours.

Soon, we got onto a schedule. I read two books a week. For almost two years, I read my way through the novels in that library, from R. L. Stine horrors to abridged classics like *Great*

Expectations to illustrated novels I've never seen anywhere else like *Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle* and *Pippi Longstocking*.

That was the greatest time of my childhood. Nothing else mattered but the story I was reading at that moment. I didn't miss classes, but I never copied notes. While everyone was writing notes, I was reading a novel. I memorised all the potholes in our school compound so I could walk with my nose buried in a book and not trip and fall. To this day, my wife Patience can't understand how I can walk with one eye on my phone screen texting and another eye on the road. I had enough practice when I was ten.

I don't remember how I got this idea in my head that I was demon possessed. I don't remember if a friend or teacher told me. I don't remember if it just arrived after reading dozens of scary *Goosebumps* novels. But one day, I got convinced that the reason I was addicted to reading was because I was possessed with demons.

Now, in the hyper Pentecostal school I was attending, this wasn't such a far-fetched idea. All of us kids, about 500 of us, used to wake up at 5am, and be out in the quadrangle before 5:30 so we could start singing and praising God before the Muslim muazzin started his 5:30 prayers. If we failed and the muazzin started before us, we knew that the day wouldn't go well because we'd let the devil's noise pierce the early morning quietness before our drums and singing had gotten a chance.

It was during such worship services, which lasted about thirty minutes, that demon-possessed kids would fall, flinging their limbs all over the place, screaming their lungs out. Usually, they would be carried to a room where a teacher would proceed with the exorcism while the rest of us kids went on with our day. It was such a spectacle.

My biggest worry was that one day I would end up on the floor like one of those demon-possessed kids. Instead, I preferred the ones who fell gently to the floor when touched by the Holy Spirit. They stayed quiet, but in a trance, sometimes with tears flowing down their faces. They were nothing like the screaming, limb-flinging lot. Soon, I started hoping to fall under the anointing and lose all my demons, but without the drama.

My opportunity came one Sunday when we had a visiting preacher. I walked to the front for prayer. As soon as he touched me, I fell backwards. My fall was softened by the hands of an usher standing behind me.

Finally! This was what I'd always been longing for! I'd been slain by the Spirit! I was on the ground! The demons were leaving!

But then, how was I supposed to get up?

In all my yearning to be like the kids who fell during the services, I'd never paid attention to what happened after they were done falling and now had to get up and go on with their lives.

I started panicking. Thankfully, the panic was in my heart, so I didn't fling my arms and legs all over the place. I didn't even scream. I just lay there, wondering why on earth I was on the floor. And why didn't I feel anything? Wasn't I supposed to feel something when the Holy Spirit touched me or when the demons started leaving?

Maybe this hadn't been such a good idea.

I started planning how to get up. What was the perfect time? If I got up now while the prayers were still going on, wouldn't people think that I'd gotten up too early, and hadn't given God enough time to chase out my demons?

Soon, the visiting preacher finished praying. Then he started preaching.

I felt hands touching me, trying to get me up.

"Leave that one alone," the visiting preacher said. "God is still working on him".

The hands left me.

I opened my eyes a little. Through the tiny slits in my eyelids, I saw my worst nightmare.

Every kid who had gotten slain had found a way of getting up and going back to their seats. When had they gotten up? Why hadn't someone bumped into me or tapped me on the shoulder so I would know it was now time to get up and get on with my life?

Now here I was, lying at the front of the auditorium. In front of the whole school.

And did I tell you I was the Head Boy? I was like the most important pupil in the whole school, and there I was, lying in front of all these kids who were supposed to respect me. I could literally feel their respect for me seeping out of the building.

The visiting preacher finished preaching. Then he came over to me and laid hands on me and started praying all over again.

Afterwards, Tonny and his friends carried me back to the dormitory.

Imagine the humiliation.

As they walked, two boys holding my hands and two boys holding my feet, I could feel the energy in my body. If I wanted to, I could walk. My head kept screaming, “Paul, snap out of it! You know you can walk! Stop humiliating us and get up!”

But I didn’t know how to get up. I didn’t know the right procedure for getting up off the floor after you’d been slain by the Spirit.

After everyone had left me, and there was no one in the dormitory but me, I got up. I was too hungry to keep pretending.

Though I felt humiliated, I was pretty sure I’d been delivered from my reading addiction. Not after being prayed for by the visiting preacher twice in one day.

I stayed away from the library for exactly two weeks.

When I couldn’t hold it anymore, I found myself back in the library. The librarian was like someone who had seen a long-lost friend they thought had died a long time ago.

“Paul!” she said, the excitement in her voice palpable. “Where have you been? I’ve missed you!”

How was I to explain to her my conversion experience, which was now being closely followed by my current backsliding experience?

To my credit, I at least stayed away from *Goosebumps* for a few more weeks.

Fifteen years later and I’ve still failed to get over my reading addiction.

For my eleventh birthday, my mum got me my first digital watch and a copy of Frank Peretti’s *This Present Darkness*. This started her tradition of giving me books as birthday presents.

This Present Darkness was the first adult novel I read. After that first reading, I went on to read it four more times, not counting the times I just picked it up and read a few chapters just so I could relive it.

For the first time in my life, I knew what I wanted to do when I grew up. Of course whenever people asked me what I wanted to do, I’d tell them that I wanted to be a doctor like my dad. But at the back of my mind, I knew different.

I wanted to be like Frank Peretti when I grew up. I wanted to make people feel and experience the same things that Frank Peretti had made me feel and experience. I wanted to use words to touch people’s lives. People that I’d most probably never know or meet.

Now, when a mother tells me that she had to make sure her son didn't go to bed with a torch so he could keep reading *The Tech Explorers League* even after lights out, I smile and remember my eleven-year-old self.

I've started making people feel the same way I felt when I started reading as a kid.

That's why I write.

NAMES: TABOO AND POWERFUL

PEACE T. KYAMUREKU

On a cloudy afternoon, a six-year-old girl called Busingye wished her teacher to be punished. She felt abused and disrespected.

When the teacher called out to Busingye, “*Iwe muhara wa Abisagi!*” meaning, “You daughter of Abisagi,” Busingye’s reaction unexpectedly got a number of things in motion. Not only did Busingye feel angry, her teacher’s afternoon program had to change.

Busingye for a second looked at the teacher, who was a short distance away from her, with a confused gaze before taking off, as if running for her life from a dangerous animal. The teacher could hear Busingye sobbing as she ran away towards home. The teacher, who had a message for Abisagi, a fellow teacher, was left alone confused. What did she do wrong to make Busingye run away from her? Was she not well or was it her mother who was not well? Why could she not talk to her?

The teacher decided to follow Busingye home to find out what had made her cry. She did not have to walk far as the teachers’ quarters were within the school compound. Teacher Mary was not happy about the visit she was making at Busingye’s home for a number of reasons. It was not right for one to visit late in the afternoon, moreover on a cloudy day when people would be busy preparing themselves for the rain. Women and children would be running around carrying inside, into the houses anything that would be soaked by rain water, especially beddings for children that would have been put out to dry. They would be carrying outside any container that could hold rain water from the iron corrugated roofs of the small houses.

As Teacher Mary approached the house, she saw Busingye in the arms of her mum. She realized she was still sobbing uncontrollably. She now felt happy she had come to show she was concerned about Busingye. If it was her fault she could be told, if it was another reason that got Busingye to cry, she would comfort the family.

“She is there ask her why?” Busingye sobbed, “No one ever says your name, why did she say it?”

She was the first one to see the approaching Teacher Mary. Abisagi, still holding her daughter tightly, turned to face Teacher Mary. She had a smile on her face which only Teacher Mary could see as Busingye’s head was buried in her mum’s bosom sobbing. She was also holding on to her mother and did not want to look at her tormentor, her enemy who disrespected her and her mum. She was in the process of reporting her to her mum. She was interrupted. How would she continue to tell her mum when the person she wanted punished was in her presence? She had planned to

make her report, get her mum to understand anyone who mentioned her name deserved a punishment, a scolding like she sometimes got when she disrespected elders. Teacher Mary deserved to be chased from their home, to go and never be seen again, until she learnt how to respect people and not mention mothers' names.

Teacher Mary's heart beat fast as she got worried about Busingye's accusations. What crime had she committed? She was trying to be friendly to Busingye because her mother was older than her and with more experience in teaching. She walked on nearer mother and daughter anxious to know her crime. She had mentioned only four words -*Iwe muhara wa Abisagi*? She had said so in a friendly tone, not that she had shouted at her, so what was the problem?

Teacher Mary got to where the two were and stretched her arm and touched Busingye's shoulder gently asking what was wrong. Busingye shrugged the hand off and sobbed harder. Teacher Mary took her hand off Busingye's shoulder and was able to see Abisagi's face which had a smile on it. She sighed in relief believing that whatever was making Busingye cry was either not her fault or was not serious.

"Go inside the house Busingye, let me talk to Teacher Mary alone." Abisagi said using both hands to gently push Busingye gently towards the door.

Busingye, without looking at Teacher Mary ran inside the house. She was relieved to be away from her new enemy, and enemy to her mother. She was sure her mother could deal with the issue with the seriousness it deserved. She knew her mum was a disciplinarian and had no mercy for wrong doers. In a way, Busingye's anger ended. It disappeared suddenly, one could say it evaporated. She stopped crying because she had played her role and reported wrong doing.

The two women were now left alone to deal with Busingye's problem.

"What happened? What did she say I did to her? What made her cry so much?" Teacher Mary wanted to ask all questions and expected to get answers to put her heart at rest that she had not lost Abisagi's friendship.

Instead of answering, Abisagi laughed loudly and hugged Teacher Mary.

"You know, no one should mention my name, the children are not used to it. They call me *Mukyala*." Abisagi explained amidst laughter.

"So, is that what made Busingye cry and run away from me?" Teacher Mary smiled because she was not convinced that that was what made Busingye annoyed.

Meanwhile, the clouds in the sky had become darker and heavier. It was drizzling.

"Let us go inside, it is about to rain." Abisagi led Teacher Mary by the hand as they entered the house following Busingye.

The two found no one in the living room. The children could be heard in the inner compound playing in the drizzle outside the house.

There was a long wooden table in one corner of the room. Abisagi pulled two chairs to the table where they sat close together to continue with the discussion talking in low tone but audible enough to each other as the drizzle on the roof had increased to big raindrops that made noise like drums for a wedding feast. It was a good setting for women to discuss the name saga. They talked for long and they would at intervals laugh heartily, which attracted Busingye and her siblings to peep at them and run into hiding again.

Busingye never asked her mother what she did to Teacher Mary. She continued to believe no one should say her mother's name. She was told if anyone said a parent's name, or a grandparent's, or a parent-in-law's, something bad would happen to them. Most scaring was the belief that one would lose all their teeth. It was taboo to mention elders' names. This was for the young to show respect to the elders.

However, some six years after that incident something strange happened to Busingye. When she joined secondary school, her name was changed. She was called by her father's name! She was told that it was her maiden name and it was to assist the school administration link her to her father who was responsible for her. She could not refuse, and when she took her first report home, neither her mother nor father complained. She quietly accepted the colonial way of living, having a maiden family name.

She kept her father's name through all levels of education. No one seemed to remember she had a name of her own. Why not, she accepted to be known as her father's daughter, but in all this where was the mother's name? She was still *Mukyala* to the children and everyone else in the home. Outsiders would call her *Mukyala Kalekyezi* but did this put Busingye at the level of her mother? All women were known by the name of the family head. Busingye had not complained when she changed names but that does not mean she lived happily after that.

Another twenty years down the road, Busingye was again forced to change names. Who dared change her name after many achievements at school and university? She had Certificates that bore her maiden name, why would she change her maiden name?

Just like in secondary school, Busingye followed an order from a Professor who was her employer at a University where she was a teaching assistant. They worked well together until one Monday two weeks after Busingye's wedding when the Professor called Busingye into his office. He casually congratulated her on a good wedding. Busingye thanked him for honouring her invitation and being present in church and at the wedding reception. It was an honour for Busingye to have her employer witness such a moment. Little did Busingye expect what was to come next.

"Please go and write a letter stating that your new names include the name of your husband." Professor ordered Busingye in a no nonsense tone.

“Yes, Sir”. Busingye answered sheepishly as she went out of the office to do what would change her life for ever.

It was the primary school issue about her mother’s name that made Busingye curious about women and names. Busingye’s family was one of the few that used the title of *Mukyala* compared to many others who called their mothers *maama*. *Mukyala* had implications on the status of the family, it pointed to class, the have-been-tos and the natives.

Teacher Mary did not only start off questions about female names, her title of Teacher was part and parcel of her name. What if the female Mary was not a teacher, what would be her name? Having a profession gave her a name.

Some women were and are still called *Mukyala*. Other women are called petty names or nicknames given by the men. For example *Kaishemeza* (the one that pleases) or *Bayombeka* (the one who builds). What if one is not married to be given a name? What if one has not gone to school to get a profession as teacher or nurse? No wonder some women accept to be known as *Maama Jon* or *Peter*. Other women go by titles *Senga* or aunt.

There is power in names. They were taboo but gave power to men.

BLUE MOVIES

MERCY MIREMBE NTANGAARE

We had always heard and occasionally read about them: “Blue movies”. But we never knew what they really were or meant or how blue they were. Sky blue, navy blue, purple blue, royal blue, azure, cyan, sapphire? Whatever their meaning or true shade of colour, their name lent them a good feeling of worthiness, wellbeing, and trust. This made them the sweet temptation we could not resist once JoeX, the most popular video distributors in Kampala at the time, bequeathed to us the chance to know what blue movies really were. I don’t remember the movie’s title. But that does not matter at the moment. Likewise, I don’t remember how much we paid to watch. But it must have been an equivalent of U. Shs. 5,000 (approximately one United States Dollars and Fifty Cents), which is quite a dear sacrifice we made as daughters of not-well-to-do parents.

It was a Friday evening, a perfect choice of a day that would not disrupt our usual ecstatic weekend mood with chary thoughts of the next day’s schedules that always constituted almost the same monotonous pattern of sonorous voices of lecturers forcing their perspectives of knowledge on us after which they dished out countless volumes of coursework with long lists of references. Male or female, the lecturers behaved and dressed alike. Most seemed proud of the expanding rows of white or gray hair going around their heads like decorative ribbons. Of course, there were also the overzealous teaching assistants, their buddies in crime, obviously not even half a decade older than us, but ever eager to connive with our lecturers as they assessed or kept watch over us during weekly tutorials like that’s all they cared for on Planet Earth! That was the torturous study life at Makerere University, the oldest, largest, and most coveted public university in Uganda.

For one who always had a 36-hour week of lectures, the blue movie event was a most welcome if not a God-sent disruption. That morning, I reminded Miriam, my friend and roommate, about it. We agreed to wind off our day’s most pressing work by 5.00 p.m., take our dinner by six, and trek to the Main Hall at the University’s Main Building by half past six, latest a quarter to seven. The movie was scheduled to begin at 8.00 p.m.

At exactly 6.30 p.m. we hurried out of Mary Stuart Hall and strode to the Main Building. All along, we planned to be among the very first people to pay. But when we arrived, we found a huge crowd of students at the entrance, shouting, pushing, and jostling to enter.

Will we be able to enter or, in the first place, even pay? We wondered. *Maybe, there will be a repeat,* Miriam said. *I doubt that will be,* I countered. I did not want to miss the movie or even think about the possibility. *Let's persist.*

Eventually, we paid and entered the hall. We rushed to the gallery to have a better view of the whole show. But there was one other pressing reason we wanted to watch from the gallery. We were both very committed members of the choir at St. Francis Chapel, and we did not want anyone who knew us to see us at the movie. Somehow, even if we had not watched the movie yet, in our minds, we felt it was not the sort of picture we would watch without feeling guilty about it. But again, it was now not possible to go back without getting at the least the basic firsthand account about a blue movie. Most likely, too, we now felt part of that huge crowd and would have looked and felt small or *village-ish* had we decided to abandon our venture then.

But guess who we met up in the gallery, already seated in the reclining seats at the front! One of our lecturers. What could have led him to pay to watch such a movie? Certainly, he was not doing research or any revisions for his next lecture, was he? At first, Mr. X sought to hide his face under the cap with a long front that he wore on his head. But it was too late. We went over, and greeted him. He mumbled something about a classmate he had seen in the audience. *Hmn! Was he now trying to be her keeper?*

We moved on to occupy two of the few free seats left.

Soon, the hall was draped in darkness and the movie began. The silence that engulfed us can only be equated to a well-received or mind-boggling lecture or, better still, a sinner's most sincere penitence before the Almighty God. I pinched Miriam, to test if she was still herself or also lost in the show. She, too, pinched me. I understood it to mean she was signaling me not to disturb. As I prepared to endure I don't know how many more hours we still had to subject our bodies to the agonizing sensual stimulation, Miriam whispered into my left ear: *Let's find a way we can leave.*

Together, we used our hands and groped around for the steps that led out of the gallery and down into the corridors. *Uuh!* We could finally breathe! If we failed to move out we could at least wait from the corridors for the movie's end. That way, our minds, bodies, and souls were safe from the eternal fires such movies always ignited.

PRESSURED TO KEEP THE FAMILY HONOUR

MERCY MIREMBE NTANGAARE

I passed my Primary Leaving Examinations, commonly known in Uganda as PLE, very well. I scored 288 points out of 300. At that time, in 1977, the grading system was not specific to aggregate scores as it is today. But I must have passed in Division One.

Naturally, my parents were very happy for me and for themselves, too. And they had many reasons to celebrate even though they never mentioned any of them to me or in public. Very few candidates passed well. I would be going to the secondary school of my choice, and they did not have to struggle to find a place for me like the parents whose children performed poorly. There were few secondary schools then, and most admitted pupils on merit and not the ability to pay the school dues. And as my parents were also teachers in that primary school, my exemplary performance must have humoured them in a special way. In fact, my father was the school's headmaster!

Besides the glory my excellent performance brought the school and my parents as some of its key stakeholders, they had more reasons to celebrate. I am the first born child in the family. In a way, I was obliged to motivate my siblings and most likely the family's next generation to succeed at school, like the runners in a relay race depended on one another's exerted effort and resilience. And that was not a bad beginning.

This was not simply because I was going to Bweranyangi Girls' Senior Secondary School, the first and most prestigious girls' school in Ankole. It was founded in 1912 to give education to the children of kings and chiefs. Back then, those who were important or rich were the only ones to join the school. Indeed, these words are part of the lyrics of the school's anthem written in the 1980s.

Bweranyangi Girls' takes its name from the beautiful small eaglet birds that were common in the area. As part of their diet, eaglets feed on ticks they pick from skins of animals, mostly cattle. A number of items of Ankolean folklore praise eaglets for their beauty and work.

Bweranyangi Girls' is an all girls' school with a strong Christian foundation. It leans closely to the Church of England, the Anglican Communion that is my family's religious faith. My parents were what everybody acknowledged as good Christians, and my surviving parent still is. My father passed on just last year, in September 2017. At one time, he was Head of Laity at our local Church St. Stephen's Church of Uganda, Nyakabirizi, which he died serving as one of its official 'warriors'. Church Warriors (Emanzi) are the Guards of the Faith. My mother is an active member of St. Stephen's but St. Peter's Bweranyangi, which became a Cathedral in 1977, has always been the Church of her bosom. For many years, she was a member of the Church Choir, Leader of the Mothers' Union, and a Church Warden. Later, she became a Church Pillar, then Church Elder and finally, in 2015, a Canon, the highest rank a lay Christian can attain in the Anglican Communion. At this rank, she is a member of the Diocesan Synod, the governing council of Bweranyangi Diocese, hence the Cathedral.

Our home, that is my natal home, is located about 6 kilometers from Bweranyangi. During my Primary Six and Seven, I used to trek the distance with my mother on Sundays to go and pray at St. Peters. I remember her make the brisk strides along the marram road that we used as a short-cut with me in her company half walking and half running in the morning air to be in time for the 10 o'clock service. The service was about three hours long that in a village Church could easily pass without one noticing it. What with the joyous singing and dancing to beautiful hymnals and, of course, the long and fiery sermon of the preacher, who is always threatening and warning the Congregation to kick Satan out of their lives, turn away from evil, and follow the narrow road to Heaven.

I don't remember much about our journey back home. My mother had many friends among members of the Mothers' Union and the Church leadership including the Archdeacon, the Cathedral Dean, and the Bishop's wife. After the service therefore, that must have ended about 1.00 pm, we would sometimes pass these friends by to wish one another a good afternoon and week ahead of us. I know that to my mother, the excellent academic performance I had exhibited was not an accident. God was in it all, and the fact was to be acknowledged distinctly and publicly.

My parents threw a big party for me, and many people came. My uncles on the paternal side who were regular callers at our home, my favourite maternal aunt, my maternal grandmother – the one on my father's side had long passed on – my godparents, my big cousin from Kampala,

friends, neighbours, and other relatives. My paternal and the other maternal aunts never came maybe because they lived far away and some were married and never found it easy to come. In short, it was a big feast, and we had so much to eat. We also sang praises to God and prayed for more providence.

Then came the time for speeches. Again, I don't remember the order people spoke. But what some of them said is still very vividly lodged in my mind. Uncle Yowasi, for example, had two points to make. Quoting from Deuteronomy 6:10-12, he said, '*Kumuriba mwarire, mwagomokire, mwayombekire amaju g'ezaabu n'efeeza, mutaryeebwa ahimwarugire.*' I can translate his counsel loosely thus: 'In the days to come, when providence shines on you and you get lots of what to eat and drink, and build houses of silver and gold to live in, don't forget where you came from'. Then he cautioned, '*Now you have gone as a girl. If you go out with boys and they spoil you, don't come back here. We have no place for you. Aah! Here's some pocket money.*' He gave me U. Shs. 100. Another uncle, Amos, stood up and re-echoed the family's message, '*You're the first born. Be a good example to the others. If it happens, just decide where to go. But don't come back here. I give you U. Shs. 50.*' Uncle Edward's message was not different. He also cautioned me against boys, and gave me U. Shs. 100 as pocket money. Why were the speakers all cautioning me against teenage pregnancy? Certainly, I know it was for my own good and health, but I think they were more concerned that if it happened, I would kill the family's glory. They failed to appreciate that I had a fully prospective future ahead of me and that I was going to Bweranyangi to study for it and not to look for boys.

MY NAME

EDNA NAMARA

When a baby was born, the parents would consult with immediate relatives to find a name. Depending on the circumstances, a child would be given a local name explaining the mood the parents were in at that time. With the coming in of missionaries, the aspect of another name pertaining to the faith one was attached to, become functional. Thus the growth of a two name pattern with one comprehensible to the local ear and one totally alien to the local community but very sweet to the ear. The sweet to the ear one was termed the Christian or first name and the user friendly one was termed the surname.

When I grew up to know that I had a right to a name, my mother told me I was called Edna. This was the sweet-to-the-ear name. Then she told me my surname was Namara. I do not remember asking her what Namara meant because I had grown enough to know that there is a God who dwells in the most high and he sees to all the needs of man. Lots of songs in church, prayers and sermons all alluded to the fact that God above is enough for all our needs. Even in every day chattering, my name is so commonly used. Namara among the Banyankole / Bakiga is more of a community held word than a name. Therefore, Namara or Enough was plain for me; it explained that God is sufficient. In any circumstance, if I consulted him, I was bound to break even.

Later on as I grew to attach importance to names, I dared my mother to explain the circumstances behind the naming of myself as Edna. What was it and what did it refer to? My mother braced herself for my preening curiosity. This was prompted by an incident when a teacher had scolded a pupil at school over a first name.

“What is your name?” he had asked?

“I am Joan” she had answered.

“What does it mean?” he asked

“I do not know”, Joan answered.

“JoanJoanDo you know that Joan could be a white man’s dog?”

The whole class had fallen into a feat of laughter and Joan had sworn to stop school forthwith.

True to her word, school became a closed chapter for her.

This had prompted my quizzing.

My mother, as if reading my mind, had asked for the reason why I wanted to know the meaning of my name. She suspended the subject saying Edna was just a name. Sweet to the ear and romantic to roll on the tongue. I did not understand her and scared that she might say more incomprehensible stuff, I sat convinced that it was just a name, yes, a name sweet to the ear and easy to roll on the tongue.

Years after, she called me to her bedroom to give me a literature book.

“What do you like about this poem?” she asked me.

“I like the rhyme scheme,” I pointed out.

“Now that you know what rhyme scheme is, have you ever thought about your name Edna?”

“No! Should I think about it?” I asked her, “You told me it is sweet to the ear and beautiful to roll on the tongue, and I agree,” I answered.

“No, there is more to that, another exciting fact,” she explained.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Your name and mine have a beautiful rhyme scheme.”

My mother was called Blandina and she wished to give me a name that rhymed with hers. I was so gratified at this fact. I felt favoured by her.

This rhyme scheme did not stop at name sounds. It crept to appearance and conduct. I remember when I was in my S.6, I passed by her office looking for her. Some men came towards me with an excited aura of workmates. They had seen me from afar and my Afro was styled like hers. My Afro was covering my wide head and the front was styled front wise covering my face, my eyes

peeping through its maze. The gentlemen came to me walking stylishly, their bell bottom trousers fanning the ground. Then they realized I was acting shyly, not returning the workmate confidence.

“*Tufuuddde*,” “unbelievable,” one of them said as he realized I was not my mother. *Ono muwaala wee* “this is her daughter”. They disappeared to their offices feeling duped. This attested to the fact that in addition to the name proximity, I was a replica of my mother. One time my siblings mentioned that I was haughty because I looked like our mother. It never gave me any extra privilege though for sure, I had an edge over them via resemblance.

I also recall when her workmate came to check on me from the quarters where we used to stay. The quarters were one room, and a cooking section each on a train-like building housing seven staff members. This was named block C and there were four trains...A, B, C, and D. The guy started talking smart into my ears.

“If you accept I will buy for you anything”. He assured me.

“Anything like this bangle?” I asked him.

“Yes of course even more like this dress you are wearing, the bag over there and like I said, everything else”.

I got up that instance and asked him if in the beginning he was the one who had bought those items for me.

“I can add”, he explained. Upon which I sounded in his ear that his time was up.

He took it for a joke. Before he knew it, I was out where every occupant from the seven doors of block C could hear me. I called out, “I need help”.

It had been deliberated upon by members in the quarters to look at each other as members of one family. So in times when one needed help, it should be given instantly. This in mind, every occupant heeded my call. Obbo the one next door came out bare chested, a dot of pasta sauce at the corner of his lips. He had a short club.

Wepukulu from C4 had a pick axe. Kaaka from C5 and her three children dashed out, one of the children holding carefully a can of paraffin in case there was a snake. Mugulusi of C6 came over

with a red chunk of half a brick and Rubandamayonza from C7 came blandishing a shimmering panga. He asked, “what is the problem” as he rubbed the edge of the panga on the steps of C2, sending off a claaang claaang noise. Kyambadde of C1 came with a rolled up rope and his daughter Namuyanja came with rat glue.

Inside our house, we had a clutter of falling plates. The visitor must have been looking for a hiding place.

Rubandamayonza, flew the curtain open, Tinkamanyire my visitor stood in some corner, scared of the crowd that awaited him.

“We can solve this really...It did not call for this.” he pleaded.

“Who is it?”

“Drag him out”

“That swine...We won’t tolerate rapists...”

“Undress him...”

The noise rose to the sky. We towed Tinka out of C2 with me as chief of the ousting party.

That is when Wepukulu and Kyambadde exchanged glances, “She is a no nonsense like her mother”.

This was a discovery. I do believe names, characters and genes have a fusion point.

There is this name which I tend to forget, bless me God, not because I choose to but because it was given unto me in my adulthood. It came at a time when I was content with my nomenclature. I am married to Mr.Weijahe, and this makes me a Weijahe. With no stint of spite I always forget this name because I grew up as Edna Namara. The intrinsic me did not adjust to a new me, because there was no particular change in my life. In our courtship my husband would call me Namara, I did not change, so with all the due honors I am still Namara. I did not feel the physical change in me to make me another person after my marriage vows.

Weijahe is a word throwing caution about the place one is coming to. It can be translated directly as “Beware your new home”. I feel giddy referring to myself with a name admonishing me to a - not -so-good-likelihood - future. It contradicts my maiden name of taking it all to God who is enough in all situations. In addition to the stern warning, my husband took on his father’s name and he decided to use it in all spaces. In Kiiga culture, a daughter-in-law of someone is not expected to mention her father-in-law’s name. This is termed bold and disrespectful. I have long grown to mind much about such restrictions but in my remote feelings, I feel I should give my father-in-law his due respect, most especially so now that he is no longer alive. So in circumstances where it is not necessary, I have tried to keep this name at bay.

WASH OUT

EDNA NAMARA

There was no way one would miss Sunday mass. It was a given. Even when one was sick, this was the right place to be. Here was the place where the supreme doctor dwelt, with the might to heal and kill lay people and their doctors. The church would fill and overflow. Clefts would form and expand in church walls due to the high pitched liturgy. The theme for this Sunday was how to become achievers. The priest advised his flock to work with a winner's will. "In everything you do, put self first and aim at victory. The stumbling block that looms high in your way to victory can be anything even your own relatives". Mass usually ended with announcements. A man of credible height would be given more prominence by climbing improvised stairs to a towering solitary piece of wood curved to aid his voice projection. Dwarfing the crowd, the catechist announced that there was going to be a friendly match between St Joseph's team (Catholics) and St Mark's team (Protestants)

Alluding to the theme of the day, he prophesied that St Joseph's team was sure to win. As usual he urged every member of the church to come and cheer their faith mates. In a round-about performance he cautioned those who always detach themselves from the public, saying they should not take his warning in vain.

Owing to that caution, the pitch was full to capacity. The youth, adults and interestingly the close to senile were all present. The pitch was decorated with various colours of *Niho nshirwe* - I am a brand new bride. This was a sweater with various outrageous colour patches which in the hot sun would throw exaggerated radiation beams on the face of the wearer. Then her face would glow with the colour of that sweater. This was their gimmick to look hot, so they usually bought outrageous red, orange or yellow coloured sweaters. Then they would appear conspicuous. The man whose wife did not have such a sweater was regarded lowly. In a confidential man to man talk, were testimonies in which married men who did not provide those sweaters were denied special meals especially supper.

Near a red anthill at the last end of the pitch sat a woman concluding her sixth decade.

She had a smoking pipe for company. “She is a seasoned witch. Herd your children at eye length before their nails and hair disappears over night”, one of the revelers with a baby strapped on the back commented.

“Whom are you talking about?” one of the people in her company inquired.

That old hag seated alone.

All of a sudden, their focus was directed to Hannar. She sat in solitude with a forlorn look, hardly taking in the proceeds of the match. She was sucking at a pipe.

“See the smoke bellowing from her lungs, it will carry someone along today. Why does God keep Hannar among his people?” Sophia, a fat woman with wild hair, quizzed. Sophia was honorably known in the village for her numerous fights with her husband. She boasted of her ability to beat up her husband whom she severely bruised especially after his drinking sprees. This notwithstanding, she was the highest crowd puller being blessed with the gift of the gab.

My love for the other side flew me to Hannar whom everybody seemed to have a negative interest in. I climbed a nearby anthill in an effort to get to her. One does not confront a witch directly. I sang a high pitched song to announce my proximity. She saw me, pulled hard at her pipe, spat a mouthful and wrung life out of the pipe.

“Beware of snakes. Their homes are anthills. Before you know it, one will come and strike you. Please come down”. She warned me, her index finger admonishing me. Her concern for me drew me closer to her. She had beautiful finger nails which she kept short. She was clad in a clean white dress with blue dots running horizontally from one end to the other. It stopped below her knees. She had a matching fabric on her shoulders and kept it in check under her armpits. Numerous lines creased her forehead. They reminded me of my geography lessons about terraces.

“Good afternoon mum?”

“Good afternoon my daughter. How are you?”

“I am fine. Are you enjoying the match?”

“My child, these are not things for me to appreciate. I carry too much on my plate to care for things like this”. She tossed her hands in the air resignedly.

“Then why did you come if you had no interest?” I shot at her.

“So that I can see another day my child”.

A witch wishes to see another day, so she can chop other peoples’ days. I listened to words from my heart.

I realized that when she spoke she exposed a set of even white teeth. She had a chocolate complexion and when my imagination dressed her in quality market garments she would win the village beauty pageant.

“A witch? What is a witch?” this word resonated in my mind.

“How did one become one?” What goes on in the mind of a witch? Zigzag patterns of anti human notions, weaving themselves anticlockwiseI thought.

She asked me who had sent me to her. This struck me as strange.

What insolence? I felt these words weighing heavily on my tongue like they would bruise her if I hit her with them.

I recalled the time my mother warned me about witches. They are very nosy, and sensitive, they lead their lives in superstition and suspicion, she had warned me. They interpret any situation and come to a conclusion wrong or right. Hannar here fitted too well the description.

She had a characteristic empty gaze.

I was having mixed feelings about her. She had an attraction, quite compelling. I wondered why she was detested. Despite the shock of everybody, no one would stop me from being her friend.

Admittedly my other self was scared of her. It seemed I was trudging a no-go path. Many times my mother had hummed it into my head that she had to approve of the friends I made. I never approved of her choice of friends for me though. Hannar, weird though she was, fitted my idea of a friend. I was not ready to lose her.

I gave myself the right to choose my friends in the divine statement of truth that what I was doing was right.

“Mum I would like to know why you think I want to set you up. Has this happened to you many times?” I asked with concern.

“No my girl. There is nothing you should worry about”, she reassured me. “My past always catches up with me, you know”.

“Your past, what is it about. Would you trust me enough to tell me a bit of your past?” I presented my request carefully enough not to lose a grip of the strip I had seized.

“My dear girl, you risk being ostracized if you get close to me”.

“Why?” I asked her. “Are you a plague to our people, why do they hate you?”

She smiled at the mention of the word plague. “It is strange my dear, it is indeed like I have a plague of leprosy. I have never told my story to anyone in this village, but everybody perceives me negatively”. This came as a breakthrough; may be she would open up.

“Please tell me your story”, I pushed on, scratching my itching hands. I wanted to hold the story and possess it.

“Come to my home tomorrow”.

“Please tell me now,” I pleaded.

“I said, go home”, she said, her voice on edge.

Grudgingly, I went home, disappointed, like a lover whose date plan has been messed up.

Back home, nothing meant much. Mother inquired about my crushed esteem.

“I have a headache”, I answered her.

“Go and rest it off. Your supper will be brought to you”, my mother advised. I retired to bed eagerly waiting for tomorrow.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow has come. Hannah is sweeping her courtyard. She flashes a smile at me. I don’t see images of remorse the village has of her. To me she is above the ordinary woman. Before she stops me I pick a redundant broom and begin sweeping from the other end of the courtyard. She protests and I explain the urgency of her story.

“So we must be done soon” .She smiles and lets me be. The courtyard is spotless.

“Any other chores?”

“No, this will do. Thank you my dear”.

She collects a papyrus mat from the house and a round stool.

“Choose where to sit, it is a story that will add age and reason to you. You need comfort and patience” ,She warns me.

We sit under the shade of a jacaranda tree.

“I am glad you were able to come”.

“Thank you mum”.

“You are a good girl who has a determination I love. You remind me of my youth and the reason I came to this village”.

I let her go on uninterrupted, with the keenness of a journalist.

“I am listening mum. What was your youth like and how do we connect in youth?”

I am thinking that maybe one day I will turn a witch. Has she not said that I remind her of her youth? My facial expression betrays me.

“Why the sudden mood change?” she inquires, as if reading my mind.

“Oh no, am alright”.

She clears her voice.

“Of course you have heard from our people that I came from a very far place”.

“Yes mum”. I love the way she keeps on referring to my people as our people.

“That is why you never see me in company of most of the women here. They fear me, they find me alien”.

“Are you alien? I interrogate her.

“Yes I have lived with a new people for forty seven years now.

“Why, where are your people, your mother, your sisters, brothers...?”

“My people washed me out of their village, and their system. This comes as a surprise but you are in for more surprises”, she says curtly.

At this point I throw in my judgment. She is very unfeeling. How could she live in a place for so long without her people. ‘A child with no umbilical cord’. It must be true she is a witch, I confirm my fears. Maybe she has teeth of a spider in her tool box... gizzards of a mosquito ...colon of a crocodile...ovaries of a rhinoceros ...and biceps of a dinosaur. A whoosh of fear sweeps through

me. I contemplate running back home, but she clears her voice and lets me into the doors of her past...

It was a Sunday morning when we heard the strange gong. This gong was a rare thing. We would go for years without hearing it. Whenever it sounded, it meant that there was an emergency and people had to dispense of what they were doing and run to the village meeting place. So I beckoned my sister that we go. My sister did not seem at ease. She kept mumbling words that were inaudible, but I remember her saying that it was high time the savage custom was washed out. My sister, Christiana was very principled. A negative influence, as many chose to refer to her.

Hannar gropes for the edge of a lesu wrapped around her waist and starts rubbing away the mucus on her nose. Her blow is moist from visible perspiration. It becomes more profuse and momentarily she seems to lose her composure. I can sense heaviness in her tone. Her voice keeps fluctuating, rising, falling and choking. To deal with it she coughs a little. Her story is beginning to unnerve me.

Does it hurt this much to initiate one into witchhood? My remote fears suddenly pop out.

She senses my discomfiture. My feet are shifting in turns. I am seated in a spiral wattle-stick stool. This dictated my posture. I ask for a break.

“No girl. You asked for my story now listen to the end. She answers me and this repairs her composure....

Christiana kept mumbling and she finally said “Hannar today we may have to separate for a longtime but maybe sometime we shall re-join.”

“Where are you going, can’t we go together, are you running an errand for the village?”

“Maybe yes, I am running an errand for the village but not the usual sort”. I answered her.

Another drum beat, and other incessant drum beats, put her heartbeat at 80 km per minute. She made as if to run when she heard the village trumpet sounding but lost the will power.

“The time has come my dear sister to take on forced journeys. Mine to a very far place yours into a life of a whirlwind”.

She entered the house. I followed her. She stood at the window. I did the same as if I had contracted a copy cat syndrome. Unknown to me, whenever the villagers wanted to punish someone, they would move in a single file to the victim's home and pick them. So when Christiana heard the procession approaching our home, all she could do was grip me to her thudding chest. I was lost for words.

The rising crescendo of incomprehensible chanting drew closer and closer. By and by, they got into the neighborhood. Christiana let go of me. She dashed to the kitchen, grabbed father's chair, took it to the barn and attempted to climb the barn. Her big torso did not allow her. She entered the pit latrine and started digging the hole to make it bigger. Her effort did not pay off because the opening on the floor of the pit latrine was made of two sister logs, a task to crack. She then forced her way down the pit with her feet first. Like the barn, her torso let her down. She came up, shrugging her shoulders. She slipped her beautiful copper bracelet on my wrist.

I was stunned because she loved it so much. She had acquired it from the village chief's son who had stolen it from the stock his uncle Byooma occasionally brought from his travels in Tanzania. Byooma told stories of how he had made friends including Indians. It was from such people that he had gotten such rare items. Under normal circumstances Christiana would never remove this bracelet from her arm.

Christiana was a very brave girl who always had ready explanations for her actions, her change of mood and desperate demeanor left me dumbfounded.

"Christiana, why have you given me your bracelet, don't you need it any more?" I asked her, hot tears blinding my sight amid the confusion.

The procession was steadily approaching. A dusty hue their torch bearer. I sensed danger when the marching drew closer to our home.

We could no longer stay in the house. Steadily the entourage staged at our compound. Trumpets, flutes, drums, face masks with dolphins and shark expressions and uncanny noises were the spectacle that jugged our home. Peals of blinding lightening tormented the village. Dirty papers, peels and all forms of litter, littered the sky. Mother earth was tilting its wares to the sky. The entourage was transformed by the scattering litter and each of them looked like blithering baboons.

The ground was swept bare. The impending doom was foreshadowed by thunderbolts and a dark deathly cloud. Two rainbows criss- crossed each other. The village buckled from doom's weight".

Where was she going? why had the crowd come?" I ask her, with barbed-wire-knotted imagination. She cleared her nose again and stared in the distance, a so far away distance searching for Christiana.

"Far, far away my daughter. In a couple of minutes she was to present at death's altar.

"Death?" I ask perplexed.

My brother and father were going to perform the ceremony. We were two girls in our home and one boy. Phillipo my brother and my father were to be the lead perpetrators of this cruel mission.

With a feeling of relief, I tap at her shoulder, clutching my chest simultaneously.

"Oh! you got me scared mum, Now that you mention her father and brother I know they offered her the merited protection".

Hannar bites her lip and mumbles some words. Her eyes are no longer looking at me, she prefers to face the opposite direction. She lets a moment of silence pass away and picks on her string of narration.

"My mother on seeing the elders take my brother amidst hushed voices had pleaded with them but my father had said the ways of the village had to be cherished and given their due respect".

By this time I am feeling so tense. This is aggravated by the tears issuing from Hannar's eyes. She is delirious from crying. I want to run away. She holds me close to her and the two of us start trembling. This is not what I bargained for. Death stories unnerve me but this one staggers me senseless.

The short break repairs our strength. She bites her lower lip for courage and continues.

"My mother entered the house with her arms on her head. Her eyes were sore from crying. She had done her best to avert the course of action but all in vain. She faced Christiana and advised

her to repent her sins. My mother and Christiana went through the prayers like modern day rappers. They did not include me. They wanted to fence off questions.

Christiana bid me farewell again. “This is the last one Hannar. May your days be better!” She said. Matayo extricated me from her. She pointed to the bracelet and told me never to take it off. It is the only symbol that would ever exist between me and her. Here see it. She shows me the bracelet, the only link between her and her family.

The bracelet is an old washed out copper wire eaten by age, gripping a hard wrist. The wrist is plugged onto a palm which displays a zigzag network of veins with a loose covering of transparent skin.

“Mum you haven’t told me what they did to her. “What happened to her?” I probe further.

“My dear, the procession was now home. She held me really tight. We had never hugged in that fashion. It was a parting sign, parting for good. Sisters never to share laughter, joy and sorrow together”.

Matayo rudely took her away. The crowd welcomed her with a frenzy...like a death hero she was.

I make as if to stand up and walk out amidst her story. She pulls me by my long dress. I sit again.

“Where did I break off from?” Hannar asks me, now in fresh control. “I am sorry I scampered away in my speech”.

‘She gave you a long meaningful hug.’ I re-direct.

“Oh yes. She gave me a long and meaningful hug...My child, what followed of Christiana was ...was...oh my God!,” she says amidst a thunderous heart beat”. She was killed”.

“By whom?” I stamp the ground, goggle-eyed.

“By our people”.

“I don’t understand you mum, why did they kill her”?

“She had committed what they called an abomination, but it was not her killing that drove life out of me. It was the way in which the killing was meted.

Silence! The blank stare has returned. Two people, one thought, no thought.

“Mother I realize this is also your healing process. Please tell me all” I say but trusting very little that she will carry on. She seems drained of the power to say more. Mine too is gone.

“But how can a brother and father be so wicked so as to kill their daughter/sister? What crime had she done against the entire village?” I soliloquize.

“Let me begin with what weighs heavily on my heart”, she adjusts. “The way Christina was killed”.

“I am listening mum”.

According to the gravity of her offence, she had shamed the village and stained her father and her brother’s reputation. They were never to engage freely in any village activity without cleansing and the act of cleansing was to be performed by those aggrieved.

“So my sister clang to my chest in that embrace and Matayo came over and disengaged us. He shouted with authority that it was time up. He slapped me with the side of the cutlass he was holding and told me not to miss any detail of what was to happen from then onwards”.

“You must learn a thing or two!” he cautioned.

I sheepishly followed the procession to the waterfalls. That was the venue chosen for such offences.

“And then?”

I touch Hannar’s wrist to let her finish her scary story. She jerks and cringes as if she is watching her narration on a screen...She screams...I scream ...We calm down...

She picks up from where she had stopped...

“My father and brother had been instructed by the village chief to escort my sister on her last journey and do the deed”.

“Which deed?” I ask with impatience.

“To push her down the precipice”.

“What!? Hanner, her own father and brother?” I blurt out her name absent mindedly.

“No! More than that”

“What does that mean?”

“Christiana was so scared”. She begged father to forgive her. She wailed as she rolled by the side of the waterfalls. Father I will never do this again. Trust me this was only a mistake”.

“Do you mean what you are saying?” My father, overcome by blood connection, came and bent to pick her up. He looked direct into her eyes. His eyes filled up with tears. He held her in an embrace. Phillip my brother also joined them.

My grandfather hit his walking stick on the floor and it broke into pieces. He wobbled away.

“Phillipo please help me talk to father. In God’s name I swear never to do this again”. Christiana implored.

They disengaged. My father beaten by emotions requested to talk to the village chief. I heard the village chief roaring like thunder,

“Are we going to throw the ways of our forefathers to the gutters on grounds of cowardly sentiments?” His stare scanned the gathering.

“No, we can’t”, a squeaky voice replied from the audience.

“Mwami, please,...Ishebo, remember she is your flesh and blood, my mother’s voice tore through the crowd”. She knelt down in supplication. She pleaded with father but he couldn’t, she turned to my brother but ...but my brother was also acting on instructions.

“Shall we stay here as if we have nothing else to do?” the village chief bellowed. I remember hearing a whistle. It shattered the skies.

My sister clung to her brother but it was due. My brother tried to dislodge but she was strong in death. He could not. My father and two of his brothers came to lend a hand. The grounds became slippery due to the scuffle and remember this is at the falls. The ground is naturally moist. The first pair went down the falls and in a twinkling of a minute the trio followed.

In a hasty exit, the eye was not as handy as the ear. Wild echoes of soprano teena and bass went down escorting them aboard. Raucous wailing, metaphysical protest and raging waters competed for audience. In a flash, the scene was deserted. There was one minute’s commotion and everybody vanished. The village swung in a blackout for words for days. Six people were lost in one day, washed out by the norm”.

“No mum, I managed to break through my sobbing session. They were five. Your sister, brother, father and two uncles” I perfect her arithmetic.

“That was at the falls but at home my mother after failing to dissuade my father put a noose around her neck. She was found hanging where father used to hang his bush meat. The village chief’s wife said she had heard her saying “I refuse to be party to this savage custom”. Apparently she must have died before Christiana and her kinsmen”.

“Mum, how long have you kept this secret? Why didn’t you tell some one? This is terrible. I am enraged at my mother and the entire village which had branded Hannar a witch, a madwoman. Who on earth could contain her tirade in their mind and fail to be mad or a witch of her type. I recall a line from Francis Imbuga’s play *Betrayal in the City*: when the madness of an entire nation is carried by one individual it is not enough to say the man is mad. And another one from a classic film *Titanic*, a woman’s heart is a deep ocean of secrets.

“One more question mum, what had Christiana done. What was this abomination?” I continue my probing.

“She had been impregnated by the village chief’s son”.

“How many village chiefs did you have? The only one mentioned was the one who urged your father to make haste with the ceremony. Surely he could not do that knowing that the boy responsible was his own son”.

“The abomination was discriminative my daughter, it exonerated the boy child. So the man was free”

“You mean he is still alive?”

‘Ask me no more about those savages. They managed to strip me bare of my family ties. I have never taken a step back to their village, I asked God for one favor in my entire life, to give me the courage to manage the tide. And this one wish, he granted me”.

“I understand you precisely” is all my voice can afford.

“But I tell you what my daughter, Christiana made history. After that loss everybody realized how barbaric the custom was. She was used to wash out that act of savagery. She died but a flicker of light was lit for other girls to live their lives. No one ever follows those harsh rules. My sister’s was a transformation in history. As for me I will never return to that village. I love it here alone with no friend. It is more bearable than taking a walk back to that haunted village”.

“Mum did I hear you say you have no friend? In me you have got a friend. Trust me”. I say this as I get up to stretch and dust off fatigued from an account of primitive experiences.

MY FIRST TIME

EDNA NAMARA

Every first time makes me nervous. Truth be told I lose grips of self and I lose control of my mind. Then my memory registers the episode and will retain it for a long time. Probably this is how my mind archives; a precarious procedure of terrible nerve curls and later a relaxed grip, like the nerves have been pressed on an ironing board and undergone some form of rebranding.

Kabuuya, my neighbour's maid, had given me a private lesson about it, she had even attempted a practical lesson until it was rudely interrupted by her mistress.

"We shall do it again in our own privacy, in an atmosphere free of her meddling", she promised.

"You must do this and do that...why can't she let us be!" I cursed.

"She does not know we love adventure..."

"Adventure, adventure...buddy, it is so exciting"

"It is the best teacher".

"Get to it on your own"

"The way Speke got to the Nile on his own"

"What are you saying?"

"Never mind"

Then my mind leapt back to that day when I had asked mother about this delicate question and she had blushinglly said, "You will have your time, simply wait for it".

I think she must have been an amateur in her own way. It was a sin to pose challenging questions to elders, so I did not confront my mother with questions of how much on this topic she knew. I only waited, for that time with Kabuuya when we would explore our world, discover our talents freely.

Mama Majanga kept on frustrating our plans until I abandoned making any attempt and simply waited for an opportunity to emerge. I no longer fretted for I was sure, this day would come. I returned to my tomboy life...Chips, rice, posho, lovely dining! With so little to care for. I loved it. It was hustle free.

I waited until I forgot. Till today, on a visit to my uncle's house. A huge gate, an exquisite place, a massive compound, lots of relatives, little children filling the courtyard and jumping up and down on the sitting room settee. Looking at the big and little pairs of sandals scattered at the entrance, if my uncle had not given me a rosary last Christmas, I would have taken this for a mosque.

A totally new experience.

I had lived for the last five years with my sister Jennifer and my mother, period. We three made our city family.

Our one roomed house was multipurpose; living room, sitting room, bedroom and bar to support our city life. When mother felt like eating chicken she sent me to Kabasa's, he would dress the chicken, I would bring it home and Jennifer and I would cut it to sizeable pieces for four meals; Then we would cook and enjoy. Jennifer would buy a cluster of matoke and this would be enough for lunch and supper. I wondered how many hens my uncle's home would need for only supper. And how many matoke bunches?...

My uncle ushered me into his home. He seemed happy; taking me through every room, introducing me to all the occupants. His wife Betty appeared from their bedroom with two big size buckets of wet laundry.

"We are glad to receive you", she beamed. She was a light skinned lady, impressively tall with a gap in her teeth. She wore long braids which reached for the ground when she bent to pick laundry. On her chin hid a playful dimple which showed up when she smiled and went back to hiding when she was serious.

My uncle did not call her Mukyala. He called her Betty. She too called him John.

Betty invited me to table where three giant flasks stood invitingly. They had labels; African tea, Water and Milk. Decorating the table were very little cups which I could hold in my palm. I guessed it meant that I take a cup each from the three flasks and this is what I did.

Uncle John came by and I thought I heard a chuckle from Aunt Betty.

“Betty now that Edna has come, this is a blessed relief. Show her the food for lunch, we need to go”.

“We shall join you later Edna”, my uncle said hurriedly.

“Let me show her into the kitchen”, Aunt Betty said. Everything for lunch was there.

“Your uncle is a time conscious man, if I waste a minute he will leave me”, she said, dashing out of the kitchen.

The kitchen was a big neat place. Two matoke bunches were leaning against the wall. A huge knife with a black handle lay between the clusters of the bunch that had ripening bananas. A giant saucepan leaned on one of the bunches. I took a moment to get friendly with the kitchen. I moved around.

Ensconcing in a corner was a giant turkey, securely tied with a woven rope. The rope dangled lazily in the kitchen work space ending in a tight noose around the bunch stem.

I got close to it and it saluted me by wagging its feathers. When I stared at it, it did not take it easy. It lost its temper. Its comb turned from pink to living red. Then its feathers stood on edge... It flapped and swept the ground...It painted me grey with the ash from the hearth and splashed dust in the air.

I walked out. It went back to its corner challenged by my calmness. Hither to, it was all braced for war. But it realised I was not a warrior.

I returned minutes later humming a song to show the turkey my heart was at peace. I got a knife and started peeling matoke. I peeled enough to fill the saucepan. Then came a difficult task: I had to wrap the matoke in banana leaves. The bananas seemed a slippery breed, very stubborn. They

slipped this way and that. I sorted out the stubborn ones and put them aside, ready to work with the submissive ones. This did not make things better. Each time I tried to wrap the matoke, I got stubborn ones; dust coated and annoyingly unrelenting.

The ding dong bell chimed, an hour had gone by. Work was not shifting...The fire was asleep, the kitchen at peace, oblivious of my interruption.

My heart longed for Kabuuya, but she was now married. It must be very easy for her now. She was married to a Muganda man and this alone made her an expert. Now here I was put to test before my uncle and his family.

My mind was still blurred by mystification when Tina came in and announced, “Mummy says she forgot to tell you that the sauce will be that turkey”.

“What did you say?” I asked her.

“The sauce is the turkey over there”, Tina ran back to play.

I looked at Tina flapping her sandals on the ground and wished I had stayed young. The noise from the playing children was deafening, yet I needed to concentrate and listen to my heart beat. I dashed towards Tina, almost annoyed and told her to tell someone that I needed help. That is when Loice, the domestic Administrator’s wife, came to my rescue. She complained that this was her day off, but presently burst into the kitchen.

Looking at me, lost in a vast kitchen without anything practically done apart from a few peeled matoke, she could not suppress a chuckle. The laughter in her swelling cheeks threatened to escape if she were not careful.

Presently, she took charge of the kitchen. She started by arranging matoke bunch stems neatly in a saucepan. Then she folded a banana leaf twice and placed it on top of the bunch stems. The folded leaf looked like a sheet on a canvass bed. Then she laid two green banana leaves on the bed, and put the matoke there. She fixed the edges of the banana leaves into the opposite corners, inserting against the ridge of the pan. Afterwards, she stuck all the leaves in the rim of the saucepan and a dome shaped impression was made of the matoke with yellow lines against a green

background finding destination into the rim. She added a jarful of water. She covered the dome with a clean saucepan.

Then she placed the saucepan precariously on three cooking stones. I lurked around to take in what was happening. Some activity was necessary. It could be shining the already clean courtyard, dusting the kitchen roof, as long as I kept around and missed nothing.

The banana wrappers presently changed colour to a dull brown hue, and steam started issuing from the interior. At some point, water sputtered out through the rim. Loice visited the hearth from time to time. To add water. To put more logs on the fire.

Later aunt came back apologising for leaving me with a lot of work. I was speechless, because I could see Loice itching to tell her all about me.

“If I had not been around, there was going to be no lunch. This is a good for nothing girl”, she pronounced.

Aunt Betty looked at me with a go-back-to-your-tomboy-life expression. As she looked at me with rage, the turkey chuckled.

“What! You mean you haven’t slaughtered the turkey?”

I told her boldly that I had never done such a thing. I even mentioned Kabasa although I doubt she was listening.

My pride kicked back alive when she outsourced for a boy, some Bumali and gave him 1000 shillings to slaughter the turkey. I asked her if she thought I had the money to give Bumali when she was leaving.

“AAAaahhh!” she muttered, walking away.

She thanked Loice and took over. She removed the food from the fire. Removed the covering saucepan and started slapping it and punching it from the top and sides. She did this for quite a while, despite the extreme heat from the food. She brandished punches, slaps and squashed the matoke to near a neat ball. I watched in shock how the dome crumbled and a level canvass was

left of the former beautiful dome. My eyes darted and blinked. I felt guilty for the matoke had taken my place.

I thought this was a lady's thing to deal with but later at table, my uncle and his brother-in-law consoled me, Edna worry not, you will learn slowly by slowly.

"I hope so" Aunt sardonically answered for me.

The steamed yellow matoke was yummy. I resolved I was going to do better my second time.

The matoke teased me at first, running to different directions as in hide and seek. The pan dried the wrappers too often. Although my finger nails became molten from the punches into the hot wraps, I was happy that after meal time my uncle and his brother-in-law simultaneously said "Betty WATEEKA." Without the slightest idea that the meal was not prepared by Aunt Betty.

IMPACTED TO IMPACT

MARGARET NTAKALIMAZE

Mucho came around the corner of Acacia Avenue with a small suitcase and a bag in either hand. The rain drops beat down on her and made her shiver with cold. She looked elegant as she was a tall, brown-eyed woman with beautiful black hair that fell over her back. She was a decent teacher and sometimes others said so but it seemed a shriveled life all the same. She supposed there were events that impinged upon her consciousness. She would recall that she had been married and that there had been a man with whom she had children and had developed massive wealth. She has an image, which she doesn't like being tarnished. She walked alone down Acacia Avenue and into Luwumu Street. She looked elegant in her pink dotted dress with black spots holding a brown bag matching her shoes. She came slowly walking towards a Bar, Lodge and Restaurant owned by Mzee Kezia. The most expensive bar in the area and so all eyes were on her. She quickened her steps as the weather had changed and the rain had continued steadily, until the grey sky had darkened into a wet night.

"It's bad, this might wet my clothes so, I must hurry up", she said to herself.

She moved fast while spotting a nice place for the night shelter. She quickly joined a group of men chatting about the latest type of phones who were not expecting a stranger in their place and moreover a lady. She stood nearby speaking in Kinyarwanda, a language that was difficult to be understood.

"*Mwirewe muramahoro...* Meaning good evening to you?" She greeted them in a polite manner. "Who is she and what language is she using?" one of them asked.

"I do not think she is a Ugandan, she must be a whore, a prostitute", another one said.

"How do you know as you hardly know anything about her", someone else asked.

"She looks like those women who were recently taken to prison after cheating one of the city tycoons of his money and ran out of that bar. I think that is where she is going to", he said again in disgust.

“If you say so”, another responded while lifting his shoulders slightly.

They just gazed at her and continued with their business.

“*Bonjour*”...She greeted them again and again but all in vain. She shook her head slightly and quickly bypassed them and entered Mzee Kezia’s restaurant. She made a pose that brought attention to the men who instead gazed at her with annoyance and resumed their talk about her.

“Why do such women behave like that? Does she expect us to speak her language?” One of them said in annoyance.

“*Nze abakazi abanyarwanda bantama...* Meaning I hate Rwandese women”, another one said bitterly.

“Why?” asked another shrugging his shoulders.

“I just don’t like them”, saying it in a disgusted manner.

“They are arrogant. Is it because the majority of them are rich and beautiful?” Another one jeered with a mocking laughter.

“Hey... hey...men! Stop it, can’t you see she needs our help. She seems to be nice and well behaved unlike the women of her caliber who just passed by us without a glance not even a word uttered out of their mouths”.

“*Nze akubye... rabayo akafiga. Ha...ha...ha!*” Meaning I’m attracted to her, just look at her figure, she is an angel”. Again he shrugged his shoulders.

Realizing that nobody was willing to help her, she just entered the restaurant and was helped by a *Mukiga* lady who understood the Kinyarwanda language.

“*Ushaka ikyi kandi kuyambe nte?* Meaning what do you want and how can I help you?”

She told her that she wanted a room to spend a night and a house to rent in the neighborhood.

“Hmmm...hmmm...There is only one room left and it is the most expensive of all the rooms we have here. How about if I could only direct you, to the next house that has affordable prices?” She suggested in a polite manner.

As if she did not hear what she said, she instead calculated the money in dollars and paid for two nights. She was given a credit card and when asked, wrote her signature on a piece of paper and accepted a pair of keys, one plastic and the other in a metallic form. She followed signs and arrows along a wide hushed corridor built during an era when space was not a luxury. The white paneled door of her room was heavy and opened with a soft click. She entered the room which was well kept and decorated with flower vessels laid on every table located in each corner of the

room. She picked a red rose and sat with it on the edge of the bed. It was fresh and had moisture that kept dropping on her palm of her hands. It soothed her soul and made her relaxed a bit. But then she looked at the ivory linen pillows on the massive bed and thought of the waste that it was only herself who would sleep there. She who might have been satisfied, with a narrow bed in a narrow room and who no longer thought of beds as places where love or sex was offered or received. She felt lonely and as if something pricked her body, stood up and then knelt down on her knees. She closed her eyes and tried to relax, an activity for which she had no talent. She had never meditated before, unable to escape the notion that such strategies constituted surrender, an admission that she could no longer bear to touch the skin of reality, her old lover and husband. As if she would turn her back against him when once he would beg for forgiveness. He had been so selfish and unfair to their relationship. She got up and sat on a sofa set, keeping mainly silent in depression as she collected her memories and stroked the beautiful plaited black hair on her head. Then, without taking a bath, she simply lay on her bed and was all of a sudden fast asleep.

Mucho's fate started some time back, while in courtship with her boyfriend Nkuhe, which he father was against. She was still young and had just completed her studies. She had just got a job as a teacher in a secondary school. She was the head of the literature department and as such was well known both at school and in her village. At one time when she had gone to visit her boyfriend she never informed her elder sister or her father. She kept the secret to herself and her mother. Her boyfriend was a businessman in the area. He was rich and had a car. But because the father never appreciated their relationship they would most of the times have a walk while in courtship. As they walked together holding hands on a path that was hidden in a bush known to them, darkness engulfed the earth. There was tension in the air. A blanket shrouds a sky empty of birds. It was getting darker, windy and the breeze chilled her nerves. Everything was quiet, except for the sound of footsteps gathering speed. Bidding him goodbye, she rushed home to her mother. She was too excited to share the good news to her mother first. While she was narrating the event to her, Mukunde, her cousin brother, tiptoed to the kitchen door to find Mucho happily showing her mother the engagement ring she had received from Nkuhe. Her cousin brother, dashed out to inform his uncle what he had seen and heard.

Mzee Ntabaro got hold of his walking stick and rushed home only to find his daughter was washing dishes while her mother was quietly pondering with a smile on her face steering the porridge boiling on a charcoal stove. She never expected her husband to come home early as he

was fond of drinking alcohol until midnight with friends. He resorted to drinking thinking that would be a solution to his problems. He had immersed a lot of wealth and had no son to inherit them. Without the usual greetings, he summoned them to a special meeting. Inside the sitting room, he kept on talking to himself, hitting his walking stick down and fingers pointing at every chicken passing by as if counting them. Anybody would mistake him to be a mad person. He raised his voice furiously calling them as if he had seen a ghost. Mother first, followed by daughter, entered the sitting room and sat quietly awaiting the expected explosion. They did not have to wait for long. He glanced at his wife first, followed by his daughter, and then biting his lips said, “You are both well aware that it is only me who makes decisions in this house. Anyone who disobeys me will be punished heavily and who respects me will enjoy everything I possess, the land and animals. I do not mind giving them away to your cousin brothers”. He said with great annoyance. He paused, lit his pipe, and as he was about to continue, his eldest daughter, Alinda entered. She was his beloved daughter who had so far given him a grandchild who is a boy. She realized that something unusual had taken place at home. As she waited for her father to continue, she asked her mother to tell her what the meeting was all about and whether she was part of it. Before she answered her, his father intervened.

“My daughter”, continued Mzee Ntabaro, “I want you to pay close attention to what I am saying. Your sister, Mucho, is engaged to Nkuhe. I have learnt from a reliable source that he is a rich businessman and his family are herdsman like us. She was given an engagement ring. This, I am not against, but what I don’t want is your mother making decisions for me when I am still alive. Your sister is mature enough to make her decisions and I wish her a happy marriage. What made me annoyed was that she connived with her mother and things were in progress without our knowledge. By the way, were you told about it?” he said shaking his head with wonder.

“No, father”, she said it surprisingly. “Not even mother shared the good news with me. They kept the secret to themselves. What I only got from my sister was that she promised to surprise me one of these days with good news. I just expected to get a gift from her as usual, but not this kind of news, father”. Perhaps they never wanted it to spread as fast as you well know that the villagers are malicious and of late we have become a laughing stock”. She said to her father with awe of wonder. They fear his tongue. They believe his tongue can destroy and tear them apart into pieces. When their father finished talking, he shook his head and stamped his foot on the ground and orange earth splashed up against the hem of his trousers and clung to his shoes. He was followed

by her mother in grief as if she had lost a beloved one. She felt insecure not knowing what would be the fate of her daughter's marriage.

Her mother's face had been darkened over the years by labour, and the whites of her narrow eyes had yellowed with time, but eyebrows bolding as grey flecked the hair under her neck. She was aging fast unlike her husband. She had become a laughing stock in the village and even with her in-laws for not having been able to produce an heir to the family. Irrespective of the years she had lived with her husband, her daughters and a nephew they had taken in, nothing like quarrelling had ever taken place. Thirty years later, a quarrel had come up between them due to her daughter's marriage secrets. They had lived a happy marriage with no stress. They were envied by many as the village role models. Indeed they were a happy family.

As the mother went towards the kitchen, she followed her closely without a word.

"I never know what to say to you", her mother said, startling her.

She seemed to be thinking about what to say for a while, and then, "I was happy once, you know".

"You were", she said looking up in the sky and then her mother reached out her hand and patted her on the shoulders. She suddenly, became aware of how close together they have been. She remained quiet for some time. "So anyway", she continued, "your dad's behavior of late changed when he started drinking and coming back home late. His condition became uncontrollable. We had always thought he would change, but under the influence of his friends it worsened". Her voice trailed off. She seemed lost in her thoughts, a wistful smile on her lips. She said nothing until her mother resumed speaking. "And then your marriage discussions came about and everything was good. I decided to go home and share it with my mother and relatives, but your dad did not want me to go, although I did anyway. Things changed after that, I came home to find that your dad's relatives had somehow managed to convince him that the cause of my failure to give him a son was witchcraft and my relatives were behind it". She said with fear

"Witchcraft ...! Were they serious?" asked her daughter in surprise.

"You mean you did not know? I always assumed somebody told you".

"No mother, I did not know? She said and remembered how her father always got so angry whenever she would mention the mother's relatives.

"But that explains why dad hated you so much by then". She uttered with pain.

"I hated this place and yet could not leave. I still cannot leave". She shook her head sadly.

"But you did leave, I remember you leaving a lot. Where did you always go?

She is silent a while and then exhales slowly. “But I always came back”.

“Yes mum”, she responded timidly.

“Your father was the biggest victim of it all”, she said while wringing her hands and rocking back and forth.

“That is not nice!” She said with a laugh and pinched her mother on the arm.

“Perhaps you are right to say so my dear” she said with a sad note

“I am sorry mother; I never meant to hurt you”. She said it as she came closer to her. Then without a response her mother became quiet for some time gazing up and then said, “I’m sure my daughter you will be fine and your marriage will take off and will be a blessed one”, she said, rubbing her arm and finally dropped her gaze from the sky. An awkward silence hung between them. She had heard her mother laugh and joke around before and so she knew it would be within the realm of possibility to happen again.

“I regret so much, I never expected your dad to behave the way he has done”, she said in a serious tone. And so she proceeded to the kitchen, gathered up her happy memories and left bitterness behind.

Despite the fact that Mucho had experienced all the challenges to stop her marriage to Nkuhe, she connived with her mother and it took place. She was born in a family where the majority were unmarried girls as men feared to pay the bride price of thirty cows and ten million shillings and even more. Her father Mzee Ntabaro was a herdsman and a renowned businessman in Rwanda. However, Mzee Ntabaro became a laughing stock as he had no son to manage his estate after his death. Therefore, he hiked the bride price to whoever would dare marry his beautiful daughters as sort of revenge. Little did he know that it would affect his daughters in their marriage life.

Mucho was born the luckiest child in her family as she was the only girl educated but speaking French. She was a degree holder in education and this made her famous in the whole village of Giharo in Rwanda. Because of her background the father and relatives agreed to marry her off. She got married and wedded Nkuhe, a handsome rich guy whose reputation was known not only in Rwanda but also in Kampala. He was in a transport business. He would transact business of importing vehicles from Japan via Mombasa to Rwanda and Uganda. The wedding party was a colorful ceremony where the dancers danced so amazingly that they attracted all the aunties, sisters and in-laws from both sides to participate in it. They were moving stamping their feet while raising their arms in the sky as the men shrugging their shoulders danced towards them. The women’s

dancing movements were like giraffes peacefully grazing in the fields. Their slender waistlines jolting round and round on their bodies and carrying small gourds balancing on their heads. Mucho danced a lot with her husband and she received lots of presents. These included herds and herds of cattle, goats and colorful beads and bracelets. Her cousin brother Mukunde gave her a goat while giving her hand to Nkuhe for marriage. It signified that he had fully given her off to get married in peace. They also received blessings from the elders, uncles and relatives. Thereafter, they lived happily until the husband started traveling abroad on business tours. Their happiness was short lived. Sometimes, he would not communicate to her about it. She would just see him coming home. He became a business minded person and was rarely at home. Like his father-in-law, he also could only sire girls. He wanted a boy, but never mentioned it to his wife fearing it to be known and spread in the neighborhood. He never wanted to tarnish his family name. He would call her the beautiful angel of grace whenever he was in a good mood. It made Mucho feel secure in her marriage.

Sadly, this beautiful angel had great grief. Though they had been married for eight years, she had not been able to give him a boy child. They had two beautiful girls Umwari and Kwezi. Many men of his caliber would have taken a second wife by then, but he had resisted the temptation. Friends teased him, saying he was foolish and had been bewitched by the wife and her family.

“The whole family is cursed and that is why she does not have a brother. Her father wasted his golden days clinging to one wife and now his daughters have inherited the same”, one of them laughed ironically.

“I just do not understand as to why a rich guy like you does not chase your wife away and marry another woman who will give you a son?” another added laughing loudly.

“Sure that would be wonderful; I can easily get you one. She is a daughter to our Bishop Mugisha and she has been abroad doing her Master’s degree. She is even younger and more beautiful than her”, he smiled with awe.

Nkuhe laughed and told them that one day his wife will give him a boy child. It had not been easy for him. His soul became despaired at the edge of an abyss whenever he heard such disparaged envy and whenever his close friends told him to separate from his wife. He had also paid the dowry without questioning the amount as other men usually did and failed to marry Mzee Ntabaro’s daughters. That is why he had been consumed with despair every time he thought about her.

“How can we fail to make a baby boy? Maybe my friends are right about the generational curse within my wife’s family”. Sometimes he wondered if an evil spirit closed her womb and forced her to reject his seed for a baby boy. He kept on consulting his lawyers, friends and relatives on how to go about the issue. They all welcomed the idea of chasing her away and marrying another wife to give him an heir. He resolved not to hurt her by doing it in Rwanda, but to take her elsewhere as she continued doing her business on her own. He deposited enough money in her account and prepared to take the girls to study abroad away from their mother.

While Mucho was at home busy doing house chores her husband told her to prepare for a special visit to Kampala the next day. Not even the girls were to be told of the visit. He wanted to be with her alone so that he could spill out all that was tormenting him. While they were having a talk about the progress of their business in Kampala she was told that it was no longer her business and that he was going to divorce her and had deposited money enough to help her earn a living on her own. This meant that she was not even allowed to go back to Rwanda to pick up her children. Little did he know that she was pregnant and it was three months old. She tried to save her marriage, but all in vain. He never stayed in Kampala for long and after two days of monitoring his business, without bidding her farewell, left the lodge without her knowledge and drove the car leaving her alone in Kampala. When she woke up just found a note on the table bidding her farewell. She just gazed at it while tears flowed all over her face.

Only then did it occur to her, something that she hadn’t considered before. He wouldn’t have separated from her perhaps if she had given birth to a baby boy. She was pregnant. It wasn’t fair. Their relationship owed her so much. It owed her the future for herself. She ran out of the lodge and sat in the Constitutional Square gazing at vehicles passing by. No one guessed that she was a desperate woman who needed help. They were just passing by without a glance or greeting. Some kept on nodding their heads especially the men who showed interest in befriending her and instead ignored them.

“For heaven’s sake what could a beautiful woman be up to, seated in a lonely place?” a woman said with wonder.

“Maybe she’s one of them. She is targeting for a man to pick on her”. Another responded with awe.

“I do not think so. She does not look like one of them. She is decent by her looks”.

“Perhaps not, she is looking troubled. Maybe she is stranded and needs our help”.

“But do you speak English? As for me I do not even know how to greet”.

“Even me I do not speak it. It is for those who went to school. I never got that opportunity”.

They both stood up and left her alone. Mucho sat for some time wondering what the women were talking about her. She pitied them as they were selling some bananas and no one was buying from them. “To be born a woman...aha!” It just escaped her lips.

Thereafter, went back to the lodge and slept on an empty stomach as she had no appetite. The next morning, she decided to sign out before the days of departure elapsed. The husband had paid for two months rent in a lodge they had been staying in to enable her to look around for a rented house. Instead, she decided to rent a room along Acacia Avenue in a lodge and restaurant owned by Mzee Kezia. The memory of her husband’s presence kept haunting her. She felt like an illusion and couldn’t believe that it was real and she was alone in Kampala. She missed her daughters, but could not go back home fearing to become a laughing stock of the whole village. She wouldn’t want to be like her mother and the torture she went through. She swore to herself never to be hurt again and also harm her family.

Mucho managed to rent a house and engaged herself in small scale business enterprises. She worked hard and managed to save and opened another account with Stan Bic Bank. She never wanted her husband to monitor her income and savings. She expanded her business to other districts. She became so busy which changed her lifestyle. As the days passed by, she gave birth to another baby girl. She was named Umwiza as she was the most beautiful girl compared to her sisters. She became so disappointed since she expected it would be a baby boy. She hoped that having a baby boy would be the only solution to save their marriage. It would unite them again. This made her get despaired and she resorted to engaging herself more in the business than ever before.

This beautiful girl, unfortunately, grew up but a lonely child. She was taken to one of the best and most expensive schools. She had everything every child needed to acquire, but lacked parental care and love. She was left under the care of a house helper. Like her father, the mother was rarely at home. She engaged herself in traveling from Mbale to Busia towns trying to trade in hardware commodities. She became popular since she had very good customer care. Her business blossomed and enabled her to shift into much better premises. Despite all her achievements, she became lonely and wished her husband would come back for her. She had tried to call him a number of times, but he would not pick up her phone. Life became very hard and she decided to share her grievances

with her business partner. She was known as Mama Shakila. She had a shop next to hers. At times they would go out on Sundays when they were not working to chill out an evening with their children. But she was married and her relationship with her husband was getting stronger each day. At times Mucho would be envious of them.

Mucho came around the corner of the Royal Hotel with her child in one hand while holding a bag matching her dress with the other. They had agreed to meet there for a change to make their children happy. It had a nice view and cooked delicious food. From beneath a low thorn bush with beautiful roses to the right of the perimeter fence, a cat mewing bounded towards them, pushing itself on her daughter's dress. She kicked it away and walked on. She entered the hotel. "Coffee's finished", her friend said as she entered. She was sitting in the lounge on a sofa set, drinking water in a glass and keeping silent in depression as she wondered as to why her friend's mood had deteriorated of late.

"Finished? How can it be?" She said as she and her daughter sat on the opposite side of the room. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Anyway, everything is set as usual there is a lot for us to eat and drink so feel at ease. I was just joking with you". She muttered.

The children became desperate to go out to play leaving and giving their mothers ample time to chat.

"Go!" she said in polite manner at them. "Make yourselves useful". They ran wildly, laughing while holding their hands, into the back yard.

"My friend, I want to speak to you about something very important. Let us go and sit on the backyard bench watching our children playing", she told her in a low tone.

"Mucho, can't this important secret wait? I want to first eat my food, I have already ordered it".

"You will have it. But first listen to me", she said with urgency in her voice.

"Woman what is it?" she said while putting the glass of water on the table. "You look like the ground took a shot at you. What is it my dear?"

"It is about my husband", she wheezed at her. "I felt it was not right for him to call it quits because I still love him. In spite of quitting the relationship, I cannot stop thinking about him. Sometimes I miss him so much that I have to go to the extent of giving him a call. What hurts me is that whenever I call him he does not pick up the phone. I am so confused". Her friend listened quietly.

Then she said “Sorry about it and I know how you feel. It must be frustrating to fall in love with a man who does not seem to love you anymore. Love is only fulfilling when it is mutual and not one-sided. Bear in mind you cannot force him to love you. Yes, he does not pick up your calls because you are no longer his beloved wife and perhaps might be seeing someone else”. She comforted her.

“Perhaps he is”. She grunted.

“If he were a more focused person he wouldn’t have behaved like that. Love does not need to be selfish, it requires genuine care. For marriage, I have learnt that it is prudent to consider much more than romance, sex and wealth. It is just happiness both of you are experiencing. But if he does not come back for you do not despair. Ignore him and think positively. I assure you that being alone is better than being with the wrong person for wrong reasons”. She smiled a bit.

“I wish he gave me time to bring up my daughters not to experience the way my mother and I did. Our marriage was doomed. Perhaps it was a failure on our part but...”. She was stopped by her friend saying “No marriage is problem free; some endure the difficulties while others unfortunately fall apart. Some of them do not live long enough to see the happy times ever after”.

“What hurts me most is that unlike the majority of broken marriages of unresolved arguments among couples or based on infidelity, ours never took place in that direction. It was just because I never gave birth to boys. Is it really my fault?” she said lamenting.

“Stop blaming yourself all the time and moreover you look young. Why can’t you use your beauty and hook another man?”

“There is already a man who I have been playing hide and seek with. He is in the neighborhood and he is well behaved. What amazes me is that my daughter likes him. Recently, I found them chatting happily and had bought a doll for her. You can imagine what I am going through”.

“Ha...ha... ha...!” she laughed and shrugging her body saying, “that is a step forward. Try your luck. You never know it might change positively into a serious relationship”. She said this while standing up. Her gesture indicated that she never wanted the discussion to go on and on. It was making her feel pity for her and as a counselor she never wanted it to happen. She went to the dining room followed by the children and being the last person she walked dragging herself forward. They enjoyed the dinner that had been served in a place next to the playing music which was their favorite. It was country music by Ken Rogers. They left for home satisfied of the day’s events.

Mucho had a passion for charitable works; her friend to be was supporting babies who had lost their parents. He was known by the names of Kaka Jim. He would pick abandoned or dumped children and take them to his home. But some of them were sickly and he would later send them off to the Covenant Mothers' home. At times he would request mothers who have few children to take care of them while he traced for other support services. He came to Mucho seeking for the same. This time he came alone with no child and was allowed to join them for lunch. He took the first initiative to request her to support him in rendering help to the needy children. That alone excited her and marked the beginning of their relationship. She gave him the support he needed in kind and one Million Uganda shillings. Jim left immediately after satisfying his visit's intentions.

For the first few days that the relationship had started, he insisted on taking her out for a ride. He was staying in the neighborhood, not far from her home and was single. She accepted and they went out together. The birds outside were a frantic wind ensemble on a Sunday afternoon. He rode through the dark forests of eucalyptus, between thickets of bamboo and along moors trailing mists like veils emerging into a landscape of soft green hills and broad valleys watched over by a snow-capped mountain in the distance. A goat stood in the middle of the road and he stopped the car a few feet before hitting the massive animal. He rolled the windows up and sat unmoving and then stared at her.

"You've come from Rwanda", he said.

"I was in Kigali city recently".

She was silent.

"I needed to do business with Arabs", he went on to say.

She smiled a bit.

"Besides the charitable works I do, I am a businessman dealing in children's clothes. I have a shop down town".

"Does that mean you got the interest of supporting children because of that?" she asked timidly.

"I love children so much, but unfortunately I do not have one".

"Why...?"

"Tell me about yourself first, I want to hear much about you. You are such an amazing woman. It seems you also like children, birds of the same feathers flock together". He said it trying to ignore her question.

“Thank you. But I don’t have much to say. You are right. I came from Rwanda to do business and that is all I can say”.

“Sometimes, I wonder why beautiful women like you are so reserved. Tell me more”.

She shrugs. “Not now. You can also talk about yourself. You are such a lovely, kind man”.

“Thank you for the compliment. It is nice of you to say”. He smiled at her as he ran his index finger over her left cheek.

“Sometimes I do get the impression that a lovely woman like you can care for me”, he mocked her and adds: “If I’m not fooling myself. You will have to forgive me for saying this. I just want us to be friends and perhaps much more”.

She blushed and tried to avoid his eyes. She stroked her head and then said. “I do not have an answer right now, but I will think about it. But all the same thank you and...” he couldn’t wait for her to say anymore. He just stopped the car and said “I don’t want to stress myself with something I’m hopeless at. I know that I am in no position to judge, but I hate it when you take so long to make a decision. It would hurt me forever if you turn my offer down”. He said while gazing out of the window screen of the car.

“You are talking as if we will never see each other again. I do not intend to hurt you. Time will tell. But what I know we are already friends. What more do you want?” She said it while lowering her gaze and pretending to blush.

He extended his arm and pulled her to himself, he forced a kiss on her. “You are so sweet my dear and I love you”. She simply gazed at him and without a word she rested her chin in her palm and pressed her nose against the glass, wishing she could reach through the window and touch the beautiful flowers blossoming along the roadside. Jim relaxed a bit, shaking his head with awe and looking at her face fondly; he just touched her hands and without a word he drove the car slowly towards her home. On the way he kept looking at her as if he will never see her again while Mucho massaged the words that best described her new reality over and over in her mind. She marched into the possibility of starting all over, of choosing who and what to be for the first time in her own life time. She thought if she was to choose between the two, she would always choose her former husband, despite the shame it would bring on her family and the damage it would do to her reputation. She only thought about that as she had not yet experienced Kaka Jim’s love. She hated the thought of it.

Meanwhile Jim played soft music by Enrique that was talking about love; *“I am your man, you can be a million miles away from me you can kiss another man’s lips but I am your man.....”*. The lyrics of the song touched and penetrated much into her soul and a smile escaped her lips. That forced Jim to squeeze her hand softly as the ending of the song sealed their love. He stopped the car by the roadside and they kissed again and again. Then he drove the car and stopped near her doorsteps. He helped her to get out of the car holding her arm tightly. They stood facing each other, not a foot apart. He could smell her soap or her shampoo.

“Your hands shook, he said boldly and he could see that she was taken aback by this assertion. She moved a step away from him. “Simple shock doesn’t mean much in itself, she said not willing to credit the trembling hands. They moved further into the room smiling, while a proprietary arm snaked around her slender waist and her smile slightly became less exuberant. With a serious note, he took heart on this.

“Can I get you something to drink?”

“Water would be good, he said.

Making her way to the fridge only revealed a premature decision. She would do the shopping on Fridays as other days before then the selection is usually dismal. She was lucky he opted for water and indeed there was only one bottle left in the fridge. She took the bottle to him and knelt down to serve him.

“Thank you my dear for giving me respect. That is what any African man would need from his beloved wife or friend”. He said it as he leaned forward to kiss her cheek. She smiled and then said, “When did you become such a sectarian African man?”

“I am indeed one and I’ve always been”. He laughed that deep laugh that made her fall in love with him. He sipped on his glass of water slowly while looking at her.

“Why look at me with that kind of gaze?” she said while smiling

“You are such a lovely creature that eyes can feed on without stopping”.

“Hey, you better tell them to stop gazing at me there is nothing much to feed on”

“Who told you? You have everything my eyes need to feed on. They will never get tired of you”.

“Never get tired of me. Are you sure? Time will tell”. She giggled a bit.

He laughed again and assured her that he will not disappoint her, that they will always be friends. He did not stay for long as he was going to pick up a child from a hospital to be re- allocated to another orphanage home. But after the chatting and laughter they made he did not need her to tell

him that, “I do not know yet” or “I am still deciding” as either would be bad enough for him to swallow. Thereafter, they would be seen in each other’s company a lot going to parties and very often having lunch together in different restaurants. It was too much to hide. She had little time for her child and her friend Mama Shakira. She rarely visited her shop for a chat anymore. Jim made sure she was his alone to be cared for. This made Mama Shakira concentrate more on her business and at one time met Mucho and wished her a happy relationship with her new catch. She even cautioned her to take care of herself so as not to make the same mistake as before, but all in vain. She decided never to go back to her for advice nor go out together in outings with their children. This made Umwiza lonelier than ever before. She could not understand her mother anymore. At times she would come back home drunk and with no money in her purse. Her life style changed a bit as her mother stopped buying presents and new clothes for her. She would only buy the latest clothes and bags for herself to attract Jim. More money started being spent than earned before. She had little time to monitor her other businesses in other towns. Jim hardened a padlock on her. At times she would encounter sleepless nights because of him.

At lunchtime in Mama Joy’s restaurant, she met a customer who analyzed her current relationship in a detached manner as if she had forgotten she had feelings. “Jim is really a catch”, she says, “successful and handsome. Every woman in town is trying to meet such a guy. Perhaps if we had such beauty like yours we would stand a chance”. She said in disgusted manner. She stared at her then at her plate. “You really believe the only reason Jim is attracted to me is because of my beauty?” She asked in a humble way. She looked at her again and said “Indeed the only reason to be honest with you is your beauty and nothing else. Perhaps it could be also your money. Be careful he could just want some of it”. She laughed ironically. She looked at her feeling at the same time offended and amused. She became offended as she never knew how to respond to such comments. She just got amused.

After some time, Mucho received an invitation for a show at Grand Royal. That night of the show she showed up, but once inside she realized she knew many people in attendance. She never expected to find Jim. He was seated in a corner seriously in a conversation with a dark-skinned lady. She was a beauty compared to all the women who were in the vicinity. She just crossed over and made her presence known, but avoided crushing with him. She sat next to an unknown short and chubby lady who was also lonely. Waiters were moving about serving guests with chicken skewers and drinks. As she was trying to compose herself out of sudden shock, someone next to

her said, “I have never in my life seen colorful dancers and enjoyed music in a well organized party like this”. She said in baffled amusement. Mucho was not paying attention at all. She looked at her, then turned away and walked to join another group seated opposite Jim’s table. She continued drinking her wine and after having her second glass, she texted Jim. *Who is the lady with you? How dare you do that to me?* He texted her back; *she is my workmate, and why bother me?* She sent again; *Am I not your friend?* He texted again; *so can’t you see me busy discussing business? As for who she is does not matter to you. Why we are together is none of your business.* He switched off his phone while shrugging his shoulders as an indication that he had had enough with her.

She just stood up and left for home earlier than she had anticipated. That night Jim decided to sleep outside without notifying her. She sat on her bed wondering who the woman was. What the hell had she gotten herself into with him? Jim was married. He had never lied about it. In fact on their third date he had told her that he had been separated from his wife. He told her that he had no children with her. When she asked whether they were business partners, he just laughed saying in an awkward way, “I love the way you do not fear asking me such questions. No, I do not have business investment with her. Not even property owned with her”. Too painful, she cried and sobbing loudly hoping Jim would come back to her and may be console her. But Jim was nowhere to be seen. He spent a month and another month without coming home. Indeed he was busy in love with another woman. She made a mistake to believe in him.

Later that evening, when she was about to close her shop, Mama Shankira questioned her about her new catch and how they were fairing. It was then that Mucho realized she needed her advice. She could not hide her disappointment. “This is not exactly what I want at this point in my life. You know I have always wanted to get into a serious relationship with Jim. And I thought that we were going to try it together but he does not want to live a simple life. I feed him with good food like chicken. I bought everything from slippers to neckties. He has access to my handbag. He picks any amount of money he wants. Asking him what he is going to use it for, he just silences me with a deep kiss. You know what that leads into, just making love and dumping me pretending to go to his orphanage home. He is so mean and when I used his money to buy food, he almost beat me up. When I used his phone to make calls, even when I could not afford airtime, he threatened to kill me. Our relationship improves when I am ‘loaded’ ”. She said it in anguish.

“Oh Mucho, please stop. Why won’t you open your eyes? There is nothing much for you in that kind of relationship. Then perhaps you are with the wrong man.

“Perhaps I am and indeed you are right. Recently I met him at a party seated with another woman. I asked him who the lady was, he told me it was none of my business. Later I learnt it was his former wife. You can imagine how I felt”, she lamented

“Suppose you get out of that relationship and concentrate on your child upkeep? You no longer have time for her and even us. We used to go out together for outings. Why don’t you quit the relationship?” She said with a lot of seriousness.

“I can’t, I still love him and I want to have a child with him. He does not have a child with his former wife. Every day, I pray that God keeps me working to earn a living for the family so that other people think I have a stable family. I do not want to separate from him because my child needs him as a father. Like I said before, this is where I want to be. And I will do all I can to get him back with or without your help”.

Mama Shankira had never heard Mucho sound that stern. She often wished that she would have a mind to make a decision and stop being too nice and too gentle towards her relationship with Jim. Overwhelmed with emotion, she stormed out of the shop and found herself heading straight to her car. She got into the driving seat and drove away, leaving Mucho behind. No amount of time could make Mama Shankira reconcile with Mucho’s decision to remain in a relationship with Jim. Mama Shankira, on the other hand, had had time to think about what she wanted to do with her life. After much deliberation, she had resolved that she was not going to stay in Kampala for long. She was going to Dubai with her family and was not going to waste any more time than she had already wasted doing business there. It had taken her a month to plan her departure and her time to leave had finally arrived, and she had not told Mucho anything about it.

Meanwhile Mucho decided to woo Jim back into their relationship but all in vain. He instead kept on demanding money and at times forcing her to sell some of the properties to enable him to satisfy his interests. It worsened her miseries and while sitting at a table with her daughter with whom she was having an early lunch, she felt pain in her lower abdomen, but ignored it thinking it was normal for a woman to feel like that. With time the pain increased and she was admitted in a hospital. She was examined and the results showed she was pregnant and it was a baby boy. That made her happy that at last an heir was to be born. She never minded who was the father as long as it was a baby boy. Sharing it with her daughter they both became happy and their friendship

resumed again. But it was short lived as one morning she felt a very heavy and abdominal pain inside her. She was taken and admitted into a hospital. Umwiza was stopped from going to school and instead stayed with her mother in the hospital.

While admitted in the hospital, Jim came to see her. What surprised her, he never came with anything to eat or money to support her needs in the hospital. Worse still, when he was told about the good news that she was expecting a child and moreover a baby boy, it did not excite him at all. He instead came to ask for money as usual from her to cater for his other wife's needs.

"It is good you have come, I just wanted to share with you the good news. It is about our baby and it is a baby boy. Our child is a baby boy..." she said with a smile.

"What about the child, do you think it is mine? Am not sure at all whether it is true, that the child you are talking about is mine. I have to wait until you give birth to it", Jim said mocking her.

"Why doubt it, don't you trust me anymore?" she said it while tears flowed down her face.

"Never mind about it as per now, I came for financial help. I want two million shillings to support the children's needs. They do not have food to eat. Do you want them to die of hunger?" he said it with a serious note.

"I do not have money now. As you can see I have bills to pay and the hospital bills are becoming too much on me. In fact, I needed you to help me pay for them"

"What...! Me paying for your bills, I pay as who...as your husband or a friend? For God's sake, why don't you ask your former husband instead? He might be the father of that child. That child you are claiming to be a boy. Is he a boy anyway? If it is true, that husband of yours is the one who is in need of a boy. Try your luck...Ha...Ha..." he provoked her.

"Stop it I can't hear of that nonsense anymore. Don't you see I'm sick and helpless? Just get out of here and leave me alone", She uttered bitterly.

"I need that money whether you like it or not. If you do not give it to me you will never see me again". As he stood up to go she was forced to give him the only money she had for the hospital bills. Jim left the hospital smiling thinking "what a foolish woman she is, blinded by love. Can't she see I do not intend to marry her as I'm not even in love with her? Talking of a child ...to me that is nonsense" He almost bumped into her daughter as she was coming from home to pick up her mother's clean clothes and bedsheets to use at the hospital. Jim just greeted her and rushed to enter his car. Sensing that there was something wrong, Umwiza entered the room to find her mother in a sort of a coma. She rushed to seek help from the doctor. On seeing her condition, she was

immediately rushed into an Intensive Care Unit. Later in the evening, she had a miscarriage. That made her stay in the hospital for longer than she expected. She spent much more money than she was getting from her business. She closed her Kampala business due to her sickness and was getting little profit from other sources of income. Umwiza watched her mother's health weakening each and every day. She grew up watching her going through Jim's pockets. She would watch her crying as she found numbers and love notes from his former wife and other girl friends. She promised herself at a tender age that that will never be her running around crying after men who couldn't value her as a woman. She at times witnessed when he was getting a lot of money from her mother and him not providing anything at home. He would threaten to beat her up or leave her for other women. Her mother lived in fear and threats all the time. She never wanted to tarnish her name again and Jim took advantage of it. This made her life miserable. She separated herself from all her friends and rarely went out to parties. It made her daughter's life miserable and she would miss going to school because of her mother's increasing problems.

After some time, her mother's businesses deteriorated and she could not pay the rent and so, the landlord chased them away. She together with her mother moved to Kisenyi and living there was an even harder life because of excessive alcoholism, drug abuse and prostitution which were the order of the day. In a bid to make ends meet her mother opened up a joint selling a local brew. It attracted all kinds of clients, some of whom sexually harassed Umwiza. She became desperate and felt demeaned. She promised to work hard at her studies to change the situation, not only for herself, but also for her mother. She was now in senior four and a candidate. The income became so meager that they needed other sources of livelihood. She resorted to buying and selling sugarcane in the area and neighboring community to earn an extra income. She would keep the money from the sugarcane business to help sustain herself in school. Mucho went to Jim's working place hoping to get a financial assistance and was chased away by security personnel. She tried to call him on the phone but all in vain. He became scarce at his place of work. Most of the time he would be seen in different women's company. This annoyed Mucho and she became a laughing stock in the neighborhood.

Later that night, her phone rang and she wondered who could be calling at such an awkward time of the night. "Why the hell would someone call me at this time but may be it is very important. Should I pick it up or not?" she said it with wonder. She shook her head no and then said "Whoever

is calling can call again tomorrow". It rung again and she was forced to pick it up and a tough voice hit her ears. It was Jim.

"Is that how a woman should behave to her husband or a friend? How dare you not pick up my phone call, are you with another man in bed?"

"How can I have another man in a situation like this? I had a miscarriage and you never came back to see me?"

"That was not why I called you". He responded rudely.

"Why did you call me then?"

"I want money. Can you raise three million shillings now? I'm coming at ten in the morning for it. Failure to do so..."

"How dare you threaten me like that. I'm tired of you and your threats and I have no more money to waste on you. I regretted why I came to know you..." she said with bitterness

"You rotten woman, don't you think God was kind to you not to have that child? You are stupid. Who do you think you are?"

"Shut up...!"

"How dare you say so? For god's sake where did you get the guts to shut me up! You woman I will deal with you". He barked like an angry dog.

"I will deal with you too...!" She responded while screaming and that brought Umwiza to her bedroom. She tried to ask her mother but she could not let her know that it was Jim demanding more money. Her mother walked out of the bedroom with her. Her nose was flared. She let out a loud hiss. "Have you heard what I was talking about on the phone? she asks. Umwiza shook her head, avoiding her eyes because she had heard some of the conversation taking place.

"Don't mind about Jim, he is too stupid for himself", she said with sorrow.

She looked at her mother and saw there were tears in her eyes. She watched them fall for a while. She went to her and lifted up her night dress. She wiped her tears off her cheeks with the end of it. She started to cry too. She pulled her towards her chest.

"What did he do to you?"

"It's something you do not understand. Maybe with time you will get to know. Go back to your room and stop worrying yourself about me. I will be fine", She uttered with pain.

Her mother wiped at her tears with the edge of her night gown. Then she swallowed her sobs until her chest stopped heaving.

“Stop crying my dear”, she said in a cool manner. She went back to her room.

She waited for her mother to go to her room. She heard her door slam. As she walked by her door, she heard her talking to herself about Jim and his threats. She slipped back into her room, and was fast asleep.

Jim after realizing that she had had a miscarriage and he had no more money to get from her, decided to desert her and went back to stay with his former wife. He wrote a letter indicating that their relationship had ended and she should never call him or visit him again. Umwiza encountered a lot of challenges and her mother’s health started deteriorating. At times she was admitted into hospital. She lost weight and eventually suddenly died. Umwiza was left alone in the care of the neighbors. She was left with enough money to pay for her school education and upkeep. But the money was misused and little was left on her account. She could not pay the rent dues and the landlord chased her away. She could not even pay for her examination registration fee to enable her do her final exams. She had nowhere to go, no relative she knew not even her rich father’s whereabouts in Rwanda. The only person she knew and who would help her was Mama Shakira. She went back to look for her where she used to stay and her business premises, but all in vain. She was told by the nextdoor security personnel of her whereabouts, that she had left the place for Dubai a month ago. She left in order to expand her businesses together with her husband and family. Umwiza was left so devastated and on her way back to Kisenyi she got stranded and decided to sit on a veranda next to a bank. She knew being a bank there was security. Suddenly a man came towards her. He was smiling and greeted her in English since he was a Sudanese by origin. He asked why she was alone and who she was waiting for. Instead of responding she started to cry. He felt sympathetic and asked whether she needed any kind of help. She requested a job to work as a house helper. Instead, he took her to his home and looked after her as if she were his own child. He allowed her to go to school and not to work for him. She got the same privileges as all his children. He even promised to pay her examination fees. She was treated well by the wife who was very happy to have another daughter as she had only one girl among three boys. His wife was a business person and most of the time was away on business trips. She would be left under the care of her husband. The trip took a long time as she had gone out of Kampala. She was a gold dealer. She communicated to him that it would take her a bit longer and that meant not to expect her soon. Unfortunately, this turned out to be Umwiza’s fate. When she was in her room revising her books she was summoned by the guardian father. As she was about to go out to the sitting

room where he called from, he opened her room where she was sharing with one of his children. He asked her to follow him and discuss the registration fees to enable her do her senior four exams. She willingly followed him to the sitting room only to realize he just wanted to force her into sex. She was defiled by the man she was used to and known to her as a father. She begged him to stop as it was too painful and instead he penetrated deeper into her. She was bleeding terribly, but he never minded about it. He kept on pushing inside her and yelling at her to stop making a lot of noise lest the neighbors got to know what was happening. Thereafter he pushed her back into her room and in a threatening tone said to her.

“You must not tell anyone, I will kill you if you dare”, he said authoritatively.

Her private parts were torn and she was admitted into a hospital. She became too traumatized due to the fear of being killed by the perpetrator in case she revealed the incident to the police or anybody else. She kept the torture and the threats to herself. She was hurt, fearful and engulfed with hatred and life became so difficult. Bearing it no more, she decided to reveal it to one of her classmates. She advised her to report the case to the police and when she was in the process of doing so, she was chased away. He suspected her to be doing so as he used to hear phone calls late at night. That was not her usual habit. So he made a decision there and then to chase her away. He even deceived his wife that she had decided to elope with a man. He made the wife believe in him and she said it was good of her to leave their home. But for Umwiza, it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It gave her a push to join an organization that was established to empower girls to stay strong amidst challenges of adolescence, what it meant and how to take care of themselves and also to believe in themselves as well as acquiring practical skills. It was a rehabilitation centre. While there, she noticed most of her mates had dropped out of school to get married and owing to lack of school fees, early pregnancy, gender inequality and family separation. It was a platform for girls to ask questions on issues concerning them and to seek counseling or advice. Umwiza acquired hands on skills, stress management techniques and also participated in gardening. She got impacted to help others. The organization believed that in order to create sustainable change their messages regarding women and girls’ human rights should reach a larger community. Umwiza was one of those who carried out the implementation of the organization programmes.

After some time, Umwiza became an expert and was able to start her own programme which empowered girls both out of and in schools to become peer mentors and leaders. It encourages them to save and invest as well as helping women meet their personal needs and school fees for

their children. She was impacted to impact others thus making the girls and women self-reliant. She became popular and put up a shop in memory of her mother “MUCHO DESIGNS”. She knelt before it and lifted her eyes up to God for forgiveness and protection.

BACK TO THE SOURCE – RECONNECTION

IFE PHIANKI

I've tried several times to right this.

Write this.

But my journey, like the threads of a carpet, has many colours. Where to begin? I didn't mean to come to this place. I landed in Tanzania with my three children on a repatriation mission. But somehow when I reached Uganda, my spirit told me to stay. I have travelled from Entebbe to Kampala. Fort Portal to Gulu. Mbale to Jinja Lira to Ishaka. Kabale to Pader. I've lived in villages, towns and cities. I have felt a deep connection to the land. And the Nile, the mysterious river that seems to flow up. I enjoy sharing the experience of first time visitors to Uganda, overwhelmed by her beauty. So when Babaluku invited me to accompany M1 back to the source, I knew I couldn't miss. We woke early, with the call to pray and cockerels screaming. Small children walking to school like baby chicks, all yellow. With speedway driving we reached our destination. And waited. The jam already started, the fumes rising. We moved to another urban location. Drank coffee or tea, ate kikomando (japoti and beans). We broadcasted to the Builders Lane Radio and TV, live on Whats App. Early morning messages of hope. This is how it goes. It's all about the flow. An acceptance of reality not defined by time but by energy. Eventually, we rendezvous with our visitors. Our first stop, the market to eat local food. Travelling is tiring. We're hungry. We eat until our bellies are full. Sweet food from fertile ground. We wash our hands and lift the drums. They bring the attention of the crowd. Intrigued and curious. The cypher begins slowly at first. Sypda MC waxes lyrical introducing the proceedings. We are a spectacle of kitenge and tattoos. Magical. We get back on the bus. We're going "down by the Riverside". I pick lemongrass and give it to our visitor. Ella is her name, she is an ankh wearer. Hers is tattooed on her throat. I wear mine on my finger. In silver. Like the water

"Let me smear it all over". Its pungent aromatics trigger memories. This is the reconnect, it's happening. Slowly we are opening. We board the boat, accompanied by the drums. I dip my

fingers into the water. It moves like the sea, licking the side of the boat. The drum announces our arrival. The first heart beat brings us back home. We step on to stony shores. I remove my shoes and feel the sharp cornered stones digging into my soft soles.

Souls.

I am returning through the door of no return. There is reggae playing. The African freedom fighters now called Jamaicans sing songs of redemption. Am I making sense? I feel like I've stepped into a vortex, The Nile swirls like boiling water. This thread is red like blood, but the Nile washes away my blues. Tears come. They fall into the Nile's healing waters. It's not sadness I feel but..... Euphoria. Deep gratitude and happiness, reconnection is in progress. We leave for the last location. Along the main. Dj and speakers, ready for the microphone messengers. It's loud. We form a circle and get ready to ride the beat. The people come to stand with arms folded. The children feel the vibration and gather to get a closer look. Energized, freestyle we dance around the cypher. Microphone in hand. The reconnection is complete. Everything looks different. How I see myself, the world, the movement.

MY NAME

PHILOMENA RWABUKUKU

“Wake up, wake,” a voice persistently told my father Yozefu Basiima. His head was so heavy he couldn’t lift it up. He had gone to sleep prepared to wake early and go with his wife to attend mass at Kibeedi Catholic church where the priest was scheduled to celebrate mass that Sunday morning. The parish, Bujuni was far, almost twenty kilometers away. The priest once in a while came to the smaller churches to reach out to the Christians.

“Wake up. Do you hear! I said wake up!” the voice returned. Reluctantly, my father lifted his head up and leaned against his elbows and asked, ‘But who are you who calls me so nonstop?’

“I am St. Philomena. I say wake up for your wife has had a baby girl. Wake up!” My father jumped up out of bed but couldn’t see his wife anywhere. He started searching for her and after a while, found my dear mother Maria Roza Kyakuhairu experiencing the pangs of childbirth. She was holding onto the *Musambya* tree just outside the house.

“Are you alright my dear”, he gasped. Mother paid him no heed. He rushed off to fetch his mother, Sesiriya Basigirenda, my grandmother, who was an experienced midwife. By the time these two arrived, a few minutes later, a tiny baby girl was already born, crying very loudly. Mother still held onto the *Musambya* tree where she knelt. This was to become my *Musambya* tree as I grew up. I would climb it, shelter under it – possess it, allowing no one else to share it.

Grandmother picked me up wondering whether I wasn’t a premature. But the loud pearls and agile movements left no doubt. She cut the umbilical cord, cleaned up my mother and myself and took us inside the house. It was the 10th of August 1952, at 6: 00am in the morning that Philomena came into this world. I have never doubted how God chose this name for me.

Nabweru, my surname name may have no particular meaning because I should have been named Bweru after my paternal aunt who was very light skinned. Or Heeru (outside) meaning I was born outside the house. The Na – to make Nabweru was a result of a historical era in which the rulers

of the time made an error assigning my ethnic group to Buganda and thus losing my identity as a Munyoro. The white – English - colonialists ensured that my area of origin was ruled by Baganda who had collaborated with them to defeat Omukama Kabalega Cwa 1 who had given them bloody noses for at least eight years of protracted guerrilla warfare. Long live Kabalega, Long live even in death as there is testimony of your legacy. Your resistance forced the British to use indirect rule and did not dispossess the people of their land. Actually that is why in Uganda unlike Kenya the land has remained in the hands of the indigenous people.

Baganda chiefs were imposed as the landlords, the Banyoro as squatters on their own land. Kiganda culture had to be adopted or one would perish. The clans, language, naming systems, social norms, and dances were all forced on the people of the area that came to be referred to as the *Lost Counties*. The indigenous culture was suppressed and outlawed. In order to be registered in school, get treatment at the health centers, or benefit from any other civic service, one had to have a Kiganda name. So I couldn't have been called Heeru, or Bweru, or even Kachweka as my Grandmother had suggested. Na – was affixed to my name to make it Nabweru to match with names of other Baganda girls like Nalubega, Namugga, Nalubwama, Nabbosa or Nalugwa according to the clans of Buganda.

As we read, spoke and wrote in Luganda both in school and at church, my young mind questioned and rebelled. My written and read Luganda was superb because I needed very good grades, but my spoken Luganda always earned me caning. I deliberately spoke it badly mixing it with Runyoro words; actually murdering the grammar. This was especially after I read an important book by John William Nyakatura (RIP) titled **Obukama bwa Bunyoro Kitara (The kingdom of Bunyoro Kitara)**.

This history found me my identity and no matter what they said or did thereafter would lose me again. I am a true daughter of the Kingdom of Bunyoro. My endeavors have in all situations physically, psychologically or otherwise continued to focus on helping the lost.

My name Philomena Nabweru I have retained without changing it but I have changed inside and I truly know who I am. The colonialists' purpose to lose me is defeated. I see myself as a human being without bounds.

THE LADY IN THE MOON

PHILOMELA RWABUKUKU

Kadyos tired of this world. Kadyos bring the water. Kadyos get the firewood. Kadyos, no playing as other children. Children play, shout, run and giggle. Not Kadyos. Kadyos let us peel. Kadyos carry this saucepan, wrap up this food. NO wash the sweet potatoes. Wrap them up in banana leaves. Wrap them up and quick about it. Lunch must be ready Now. Run, run. Light the fire. Carry, carry the pot to the fireplace. Lift the pot now onto the firestones. Light the fire.

Blow, blow, blow, into flames, now blow, blow, blow and blow! The smoke is in the eyes, in the nose, in the lungs. Blow again, some more...blow. Can't breathe... can't breathe... can't breathe; Blow, Blow, Bloooooow! Eyes run, nose flares, and nose runs, but you must keep blowing.

Now Kadyos, carry the sweet potatoes. Pick one. The biggest, the hardest. HIT the earthenware pot. Throw in the potatoes hard. Real hard. Very hard.

Hi, hi, hi... It is cracked. The pot is broken. Won't wash no more potatoes anymore. Won't carry pot to the fire no more. Will blow fire no more. No pot, no fire; no fire: no smoke. No smoke, no tears, no tears no mucus no sneeze, no cough.

Resounding slaps on either side of the head. Slapped twice, with, double strength. Kadyos landing on the floor weightless. No fire, no smoke. No tears; no mucus no sneeze, nor cough.

There is a staircase into heaven. Climb, climb, climb into the sky. Climbing swiftly; swiftly going high above. No one sees her, hears, or knows her. She is free. She is light. Kadyos floats to where she wishes. Nearing the huge bright circle surrounding the moon. The circle opens. The moon is bright, huge, round, and full. It beckons. Kadyos enters this space. She is the star that sits next to the moon.

The lady who sits in the moon opens wide her arms. Kadyos falls into them. Lady holds Kadyos. Her hands soft, voice soothing. She hugs Kadyos and gently leads her to sit down on smooth, soft animal skins. She sits Kadyos down.

“Rest you here,” she says. “No work no more, no chores no more, no chores ever again!”

It is warm, calm and cool. Soft skins, soft animal skins, soft bark cloths. “Lie you down” she says, her voice soft and caressing. Soooooothe ... soooooothe... soooooothe... Quiet, quietly she pats the head, the shoulders... the lady who sits in the moon is smiling. Her eyes are stars. She smiles and coos; she hums the sweetest of songs. Needn’t hear what she sings. She coos and sings in the language of the moon, Eyes shining stars, smiling and softly humming. The lady who sits in the moon is lovely beyond the mind. She sets Kadyos free. Kadyos slightly snores... softly snores... and she sleeeeeeps.

POEMS**NAKISANZE SSEGAWA****HIS NAME**

‘What was it like?’ my friend asks
I stare at her, my mind battling in thoughts
Even though I know I shouldn’t with her
Twelve years we have been close
Yet my tongue feels too heavy to lift
‘I felt something heavy on top of me
The act was brief.’
Her eyebrows lift in curiosity
As though I owed her more
I know she wants me to say his name
But how can I say it was her father?

THE CITY

Her voice was apprehensive

‘Don’t come, the city is crazy today.’

But crazy we too are, we told ourselves

Ready to hit Kampala

After years of absence,

Hundreds of miles we’d travelled

And the city was being unwelcome?

We marched down town

Where air, polluted by clouds of tear gas, choked our throats

Men in army and police uniforms swearing,

Pulling people out of buildings

People running into buildings

We ran towards an open bag shop for safety

Where a young man stood at the entrance

You enter, said the young man to my friend, your skin if fair

And to me, his tone a little stressed, he commanded,

You, don’t. Your skin is the color of the night.

POEMS
PHIL WILMOT

please call me by my false names

i was given "philip" – lover of horses.

no particular aversion to them, but certainly no love.

love is not tossed like a ball.

dad wanted to be something he could never be.

mom wanted to be somebody she once was.

i saw it a boring life.

trotting on tarmac to nowhere, u.s.a.

to an artificial lake to watch artificial people sit atop machines, fetching fish

they could not eat, nor prepare.

and so i gave myself "phil."

love.

the foundation of all meaning.

the cosmic egg, stardust that built me.

now they want to give me “okello” – the one who was brought.

i admire the gesture of open arms,

but prefer not to run into them every day,

as if still a visitor.

and how will they differentiate me from other white okellos?

all the whites are okellos.

i hope i am not like all whites.

i offer alternatives.

pilipo.

wil-mot.

something closer to the tongue, still echoing from my biology.

no one calls together an entire community to appoint a name.

except at birth or baptism.

i prefer not to be special, like the bible-book my parents love.

and then there are names that

come and go.

names that shift, sometimes to needs.

“james,” for survival.

names recalled from oblivion to dodge the ill-intentioned,

the government snake or the rebel-killer.

i want them to ask, “james who?”

“no, philip – or is it, phillips?”

“no, phil.”

“wil-mot,” and i direct them to a father watching basketball on television

in some mythic land of cars and handguns.

i never got “chapman.”

too sacred to be passed on

like the apple-boundaries he planted for the poor

to chase away land grabbers and omnivores.

too impossibly ascetic to attain.

too undefiled.

memory

a piercing scream

two black blobs against a black night

one black man in black cloth

now holding a purse

this story begins with the very time i made chase

i grab his shirt

she grabs her purse, like a lucky pull on a wishbone

it breaks in her favor

i want to make chase again, with aid of the vigilant

but i am the only one, no vehicle will stop

how suspicious

how divide we've become

“spray! spray!”

a wet blast of pepper on my face

a cloud, i'm knocked to the street

bracing for their leap upon me

but nothing

“let's cross; there is more light”

“askari, hurry, help us with water”

are you alright?

it was a mutual, rhetorical question

because i can never tell you

why we were there

premonition

while walking across our village swamp

or in a corridor

or on a murderous american street

i anticipate the attack

one man or two, usually

emerging from a bush

the mistake they make is to go for

the chest

the head

but the adolescent wrestler in me

counters with a single-leg takedown

control the legs:

against one man, you leave him wounded

against two men, you get away

keep the bag in front, no one drags you down from behind

don't express your vulnerabilities in the dark

move alone, and with confidence, not confidence -

eagerness

by day, talk to would-be thugs

tell them real men swallow their pride

their hunger

tell them to put food on the table

of woman and child

never to grip muchumo or beer

or a young lady

when the sitting room is full of vomit

when there is no sheet to cover trembles

and when they don't listen, don't give them the time of day

these are not friends, just neighbors

but try to feel their strain

if you don't, you have stolen from them first

aggressions become retributions

retributions become justice

justice becomes survival

be the muiyiye, and rise above this too

becoming

“did you see him? my son put michael

on his back.”

uncle reclines across from a syracuse football game.

“phil couldn’t escape being pinned, except to bite the guy,” says father.

how could two measley months more than me give my cousin-brother

such a leg up?

two months smarter

two months prouder

two months stronger

preparation

sometimes i leave a shred of paper in the toilet-room
 for the next guy.
 i pinch it into a broken brick
 or the folds of the door timbers
 not as an act of generosity
 but as a resistance to he who was suspicious of
 the next defecating stranger.
 more suspicious of the poopist angling for a few paper squares
 than the sudhirs looting the national treasury for a few vacations.

 when the landlord of commercial plaza 21496b,
 the su-su collector of kampala
 boarded his black prado, he just wanted to go home.
 collecting money is hard work
 and privatizing our bums is harder.
 so when he saw our bodies tossed
 on lugogo bypass, arms outstretched for assistance
 he paid them no mind.
 after all, they too may be
 devious, conniving poopists.

opportunity

the bigger the flesh-wound, the larger the bill

his drool pours over desk papers

at sights of stranded gang victims

blood oozing from knee caps

onto tiles too clean for a place that receives the injured

i can't tell them not to fix me

medical aid after an attack is just

what you do

and i can't tell them not to fix her

because men want to be revered as

heroes of all fist-fights

even those of us

who say we love peace

and other men tell me

chivalry is also heroic

but if i pay the whole bill

does it become a first date

or am i merely complying with

a greedy doctor

duty

mucus spills from every opening of the white zombie's face.

the young lady is somehow put together,

mediating, inquiring on his behalf.

What need has zombie for water?

but ogwang knows he lives and dies by this space of his.

others pass through it at his watch.

still others are barred and redirected.

but he abandons his gate

to aid the zombie;

he fetches what water he can find,

and the snotty scales fall from

his eyes,

though still some invisible fire

engulfs him.

ogwang returns to the no-armed askari chair

aside the gate,

fantasizing a full plate of rec olel,

measuring distances stars crawl

until the next thought passes

on this uneventful evening.

investment

“you and that brother have forgotten me”

nalongo removes the phone from her ear

puts it on her lips when scolding

ear, lips

scolding, listening

ear, lips

but never really listening

“you people are on a wrong path

do not make me die young of stress”

she puts off the phone for

want of airtime

the message was spoken

refusing to be men, her boys

dress themselves in black

presumption

but why were we there?

at that hour of night?

did they not have money for boda?

for taxi?

was her skirt too short?

her blouse too low?

her purse too shiny?

her body too perfectly toned?

her anatomy too female?

and even me,

do i know her?

do i expand her into someone

she is not?

do i squeeze her into one facet

of her being?

and what of nalongo, ogwang?

what of sudhir, of doctor, of thief?

MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE

JOYCE WOLAYO

When I was still in high school doing my ‘O’ levels I lived among girls. It was a single sex school for only girls. I felt lucky to be in this school because it had a high reputation. My parents made me feel lucky to be in this school. It made me feel privileged though I always wondered why. It was a Catholic founded school in the middle of Rubaga town surrounded by Christian missionary relics; a hospital and magnificent cathedral that has actually hosted Pope Francis.

When I joined the school, I often wondered why it was so much better than the former school I had come from. Why it had so much reverence attached to it yet the compound was so much smaller than my old school. I noticed that even the chairs and tables which I sat on were not unique at all. The buildings at the time actually looked drab to my eyes. They were made of the usual concrete walls and floors of cement. I remember the stairs that led to my dormitory being roughly layered as you could see the cracked stone of harsh concrete sharply erected in the air. It was the kind of stair that reminded you of an abandoned place. The building was still in renovation with the construction going on oh so slowly in spite of all the arson scares and fire hazards created by students in that period. They could have burnt it all down I guess for reasons that are still a mystery to me since the suspects were in a lower class from mine. However it survived with no lives lost but a lot of property ruined and chaffed into ashes. Some students that slept near where the fire started found only ashes. My sister was in that dormitory and was henceforth sent home with the rest of her class mates. All her things were burnt beyond recognition. I inspected her properties curiously and saw how it was all burnt. A half burnt suit case and a half burnt mattress met my eyes.

“You don’t know who started this fire? I had questioned but she shook her head unbelievably and spoilt my curiosity for the truth.

“I don’t know.” She had said.

I wished I had known somehow because the suspect was at large and among us. I wondered what kind of girl had done this. Which girl had the courage to set the school alight in flames whereas defying the godly principles that had brought about its foundation? The atmosphere was tense with the pulsating fear of the unknown. A nasty black smoke covered everything in its wake. There was a sting in your nostrils and chest from the pungent smoke that barely spared the building but destroyed properties. The sister nun announced that all who had lost property would be given new mattresses when they returned. It was the only thing that had brought relief from the day's disaster. When I left the school after my ordinary level exams, it had surprisingly become so much more beautiful with most of the building blocks reconstructed and painted in bright blue colors that matched our nun-like blue pinafore uniforms.

I didn't judge my teachers at all because I was only a student. It would have been like a baby trying to breastfeed its mother when it should have been the other way round. The teachers had a good reputation of producing well graded students. It made me look forward to excelling as well. I didn't find the food they fed us on pleasant at all. It couldn't have been better by any means because in my former school we had fried rice and beans in the middle of the week and it never had to be a special day to eat rice or meat. Breakfast always came with so much to eat in my former school but I couldn't say the same with this school since it never gave us anything. We relied on our pocket money which was really strenuous.

I think the reason I was taken from my former school was because it had become a lot more expensive for my parents. They didn't like the fact that the administration had increased the fees every term and yet I had gone through a lot in that school in my first term as a senior one student. I remember everything being stolen from me. If I left a new night dress on the hanging wire, I didn't find it. My sandals were especially stolen every term and mom had to buy new things for me every other term. I hated it too. One day they caught a girl who was suspected to be the thief. The person who found her out used the stolen camera she found in her belongings to take pictures of all the things that she had apparently stolen during the term. In her suitcase they found a load of things that didn't belong to her. She was expelled immediately and saved the embarrassment of facing all of her friends who couldn't believe her betrayal. She was one of those arrogant students who behaved like they had it all and then they surprise you with something as ugly as theft. I always thought she was a pretty girl who had no need for anything. She always had the lip balms

and trendy short skirts that mom couldn't buy for me. For a senior one, I still think she was truly hot and yet I realized sometimes people were just never satisfied with what they had. I couldn't say she stole my night dress but some of the students had the bad habit of taking things that didn't belong to them. I missed my friends very much when I left because I also had what they called a 'clique' at that time. I would miss Rachael, Irene, Joyce, and even Nalumansi the craziest girl I ever knew. She usually shocked everyone by staying naked in the room unless she was going out to class. She couldn't keep her clothes on. She opened up her vagina proudly for us to see where they had pulled her clitoris. Her 'Sengas' had done it for her. These were her paternal aunties. In their culture it was meant to make her sexually attractive though everybody knew it was genital mutilation. Her behavior sometimes went beyond embarrassing because she still peed in her bed. However she liked dressing sexy and being with boyfriends, so it wasn't so embarrassing to be her friend. We did so many things together. We walked out of the room together and had all meals together as we gossiped. We were so close I wondered how I would live without them. It was never the same in my new school. We wrote letters to each other through the school postal address though it was never enough. We were torn apart.

Somehow I learnt to love my new school for its unique religious and educational foundation. Rubaga Girls' school is a Catholic founded school that is headed by a nun chosen by the Catholic Church. They took us to the magnificent Rubaga cathedral every Sunday for mass. I truly enjoyed the spell binding cathedral and its relic art plastered at the altar and roof depicting Jesus at the cross and his birth by the Virgin Mary. When you entered such a cathedral, it made you think about a great God indeed. I enjoyed singing in the school choir which usually had parties during the term with schools that we invited or invited us.

I learnt about saying the rosary though I couldn't say I learnt how to say it. One person read the prayer for us from a prayer book. Mary held a more supreme reputation among Catholics. They upheld the woman who gave birth to Jesus so much you rarely heard Jesus' name. Mary ruled this spiritual realm especially in the week of the rosary. We said "Hail Mary mother of Jesus pray for us at the end of every prayer. It was like a mantra and an incarnation that we were made to do in those times of prayer.

I realized later in my life that I wanted to be a holy woman too. In all my years I wished to be a virgin and proud of it. So I held onto it dearly in my years as a student. It gave me an elation of superiority when my boyfriends wanted to have sex and I could say no. I said it proudly until one day I realized that I could regret it.

It happened when I met Edgar. I think Edgar fell madly and deeply in love with me. I always hoped he did because he was the kindest person I ever met until we broke up. It was love at first sight for us. I found him at a table with my friends. We started talking, and couldn't stop. We argued a lot but I think he loved my opinions while I enjoyed listening to his stories about 'kyeyo' in the USA. How one had to do anything to get money if it meant polishing shoes on the sidewalks of New York. Do you know how much you can earn polishing people's shoes everyday on the streets of New York? You would be surprised. He would say. You could become the richest person in Uganda. I felt mesmerized when he asked where I thought money came from. It certainly didn't come from trees, I found him incredulous. I didn't know if I was capable of doing anything, anything at all to get money in a foreign country but I loved everything Edgar said. He told us all to drink as much as we wanted and the bill would be on him. I was still single in my second year at campus and finding Edgar was a lot of luck. My first boyfriend to be was mega rich. I loved it. I planned to say yes to him before the end of the night. He bought things for me and my friends though I found myself doubting his honesty. When he wanted to be so extravagant I refused because he had the money to waste. After all he was a young rich man. It sometimes made me a bit jealous. Why were women not young and rich? They had to get riches from a man's leftover crumbs. A boyfriend could make you rich I realized but it was not right.

He was arrogant and proud of his accomplishments. He waited for me to say yes to his seductions but somehow I knew I would disappoint him. He sometimes sensed I was probably scared or afraid of him though I did not feel that way. For a few months together I would say we were inseparable. He saw me all the time and drove me around campus in his different Porsche cars which were owned by his father. I didn't know the cars which he actually owned himself because he had done the 'kyeyo' thing too. He had gone to the United States of America and done some odd jobs which had earned him a lot of money which was saved on his bank account. He had several disciples who followed him around to listen to the way one could earn money and get rich. It was irritating when

I couldn't have a decent date alone with my supposed boyfriend. It always felt overwhelming though excitement and the luxury of it all overshadowed my feelings. One day I shared these feelings with my friends. I told them that Edgar never gives me enough time and somehow it got to him. We were in a restaurant together and he shocked me by asking me why I felt he didn't have the time for me. It gave me another side of Edgar that people rarely saw. A genuine concern for his attention was probably a goal in the net.

My world span a bit faster when I saw him flirt with girls, which I suspected was more proof that he had strings of girls in his phone book that I did not know about. It made me powerless and a victim of his passions I guess. An invisible force had sent me a challenge too. Women had an education and rights to work and earn money too.

Edgar was a master of his universe. He called himself a god which I scoffed at as a bluff of course. When he said he knew it, the room seemed to spin with an evil glint in his eyes. I wondered whether I could be the iris in his blind eyes because I couldn't understand being the only thing he ever loved in his male world. He watched his movements and observed everything around him. One day he even suspected I was a spy sent on him perhaps. He had left his phone on charge in my room and when he had returned he asked me whether I had touched his phone.

"Did you touch this phone?" I shook my head in disbelief. I was puzzled by his odd question. I simply said no, I hadn't. He had told me earlier that some people had sent him a rude message that they wanted to kill him. I was really afraid and shocked by this revelation. Who would want to kill my dear boyfriend, though rude and arrogant? I didn't think he deserved such hate. Edgar was always the lion in the jungle for all of us. He never got killed at all to my astonishment because I realized when Edgar made me angry I was actually furious and grateful someone else had been more furious given his disposition. He always knew how to take care of himself. He had a pistol which he hid in his side trouser for protection.

Edgar changed slightly in the time he was with me. He still wanted to be lovers with me in spite of my 'weird' behavior that I couldn't have sex. I had surrounded myself with an invisible halo from the Virgin Mary. She was a beautiful, adorable woman looking down at me thinking wow Vanessa is a virgin too. She can make it; she can give birth to a Christ too. Edgar said he would no longer take beer for breakfast instead of coffee or tea. When he took me for a dinner date, he

drank the pitiful soda instead of the beer malt that he enjoyed and my eyes popped out of their sockets in shocked proprieties at my stressed boyfriend. I couldn't believe it at all. We had become close intimate friends. He sucked my tongue out with a lot of passion that I feared more than enjoyed and it didn't surprise me that he was making all efforts to please. It made me realize that I could never stand his deception or lies at all. I couldn't be the saint I wanted to be with him if I couldn't even trust his motives.

I had counted off the reasons why I should walk out of that relationship and they were quite a list. I didn't trust him and he had dared not trust me. I had seen him cooped up in a girl's room with his friends and I didn't know why. I believed he wanted to have selfish sex and yet I also wondered if he would stick around long enough to ever marry me. I always thought the guy who had sex with me would marry me as well though it wasn't the case. I felt a need to concentrate on my studies more. I needed some space. I was a book girl, and always was except with too many distractions that took me away from what I wanted. His friends filled my life at every corner and even when he came to see me. I sent a clear text to him just before I went for my final semester exam saying I couldn't trust him any more and didn't want to continue with the relationship. He surprised me with a calm reply that said he respected my feelings. However I found out later that I had made him really furious. I felt angry too because I wouldn't be better off without him. My relationship with Edgar never ended that night though it was the beginning of the end. He told his friends and my friends that he didn't understand me at all. Vanessa had betrayed him. I wanted the freedom to challenge him but in all my years I realized that Edgar had too much money. I never owned the fleet of cars that Edgar had. I wished I had given him that challenge because it was the only challenge that could ever have challenged him. He was never the sugar daddy because he was only twenty-three at the time. He was the young mysteriously rude rich boy with a unique character. I never met anyone who could say words like 'shit' or 'fuck' so extravagantly like Edgar.

PLAYMATES

JOYCE WOLAYO

When I was a child I seemed to have many friends but the closest one I remember now is a little boy I will call Steve. We were about the same age and went to the same primary school eventually though I knew him from the time I was in nursery and Sunday school. The nursery school was also the Sunday school on Sunday. It was a nursery school meant for teachers' children only. Steve's home was just next to it.

I think Enid was my first best friend in school because she was the only girl in my class. She was a tall, light brown girl in primary one though she didn't attend the same nursery school with me. She was just taller though we had the same skin complexion. We did everything together then but we were only two girls in my class of primary one since the school was a boarding school for only boys. Steve was in this school too and because he was a boy, he could sleep inside. Although now I think I was closer to this little boy Steve who will always remind me of Jack and the beanstalk or Tom Sawyer and his incredible adventures. Steve was such a boy who reminds me of childhood games and adventure.

Steve's mom and my mom were very good friends from the same village. They were both teachers in the same school where we stayed as neighbors in the fancy colonial bungalows that were staff houses in Nabumali high school. These houses had a pre-colonial taste to them because of the way they were built and furnished. I always imagined the whites who had stayed there before us because surely these houses were built so fancily with white bathtubs and modern toilets that I could tell had existed way before I was ever born. My mom told us the things in the house were not ours. We found the house fully furnished. I loved the sitting room most because it had built-in cupboards at the dining area that almost reached the ceiling. I loved to sit at the dining table and stare at the

dark brown mahogany cupboards that were so exotic and beautiful to my eyes. I longed and wished I could reach up to those mysterious cupboards and open them up. I wondered why we never used them and realized that perhaps my mom wanted them to just look beautiful too. I knew they were empty because I never saw her put anything in there. I guessed we had enough cupboards in the kitchen that she didn't need the ones in the sitting room.

Steve's mom died a few years after we shifted from the school to stay with our father in Kampala. So I know that Steve was orphaned at an early age. I was told the school gave him a scholarship to study free all his secondary life because he needed it though I never saw him after we left. I have never met an adult Steve so I always wonder how he turned out. Sometimes I see boys who could have been Steve.

Steve taught me how to play marbles. We called it "doolu". It was our favorite game every time we met. He would play this game with other little boys but I became his favorite opponent after I learnt how to play it. He gathered the small balls in his pocket which were a rare seed of a tree planted in the compound. It shed its leaves and seeds that we gathered for our games every day.

The day he taught me to play marbles, Steve held my little fingers and placed the balls in my hand to demonstrate how to let the balls roll out into the holes that looked like the holes on a golf course. The ones me and Steve used were much smaller of course. Every day we played this game with excitement. One day I realized I had learnt this game so well but somehow Steve always won. I groaned inside every time and vowed to beat him next time. He was a keen player who watched me more closely than I imagined. He would play 20 points and I would have like 18 or 19. I would even grab him from his home with the hidden intention that I was going to beat him but alas he would escape my trap every time. It made me practice more when he was not around so much that I was a champion with other kids who I would beat except Steve. I would prance on and on while Steve did the same with excitement. He would have a peculiar glee in his eyes that dared me to beat him at this game that we both truly enjoyed. It made me grit my teeth and realize he enjoyed winning especially with me.

It was also my favorite game at the time but I realized girls didn't really play such games when I changed my school and moved into another neighborhood in Kampala city. I never met any

children who played ‘doolu’ so much like Steve did. I played girls’ games with other girls when I was in primary; it was dodge ball especially in the holidays at home. At this time in my life I was still a young girl but not a child at all. You woke up to play with your sister or cousin just before breakfast and after breakfast and after lunch and just before dinner time you highlighted the evening by proving who is the champion of the day. I enjoyed being among the champions because when I played dodge ball I usually won.

We moved from Nabumali high school to stay with our father in Kampala. My mom had to get another school to teach here. However before that, for a long time he had been a visitor who came to see us and return back. During the holidays we would visit him for Christmas and travel back. It was because he intended to move us all there eventually. At the time, my mom had three little children and was pregnant with the last born. The youngest little girl was still a baby while I was the oldest.

When it wasn’t holidays and we had to go to school we played rarely because there was television to watch at home and enjoy. The holidays were a time of the fondest memories of me and my friends having fun playing games and competing with each other. Every little girl and boy I knew was a playmate. We made dolls, kites and castles in the sand.

A SAINT GAVE BIRTH TO A DEVIL

JOYCE WOLAYO

Everybody knows the story now. How he was the wolf in sheep's skin. How he did indecent acts under everybody's noses which actually amount to serial molestation of children. He was so calculating about it and we were too young to say anything except in our recent years when we wanted it to stop. We had all become a little more confident and bold about it. We did not want him to do it to our children too and perhaps to our grandchildren too thinking it was acceptable. Imagine if he could, oh, it makes me want to scream so loudly. Did he really know the difference between wrong and right? Could he ever understand that what he did was wrong? If he read this story I am sure he would be furious at everybody. He is the type of person who always knows how to justify himself. People just accuse him of bad things to bring him down. I don't think anyone ever believed this story about him at all.

None of us will go to his family house and look him in the eyes and smile and pretend nothing ever happened. I always pretended nothing ever happened. It was a dark memory stowed away in my distant childhood memories. It was something that usually came back to me with the feeling that I always adored this uncle but he took advantage of my innocence. My sister could not bear it all at one point in her life. That's when the walls started crumbling. I realized it was tearing her apart. Why did she have to remember all that because it brought back the hidden memories in my mind? I didn't think we could face it but ignoring it still didn't take it away. I had seen him once carrying her on a bicycle. He had bought her sweets and taken her around town on his new bicycle. My childish mind had known he had been up to something. I knew it was wrong.

As I watched her sob and cry in front of my parents, I realized I had watched her go through the same thing silently. Why didn't I feel rejected and abused like she did? I knew it was wrong but I hadn't broken down like she was doing right now, in front of everyone. It made me guilty and

angry for the deafening silence it had created. I think we were all angry at her. I thought she had had a bad day and a bad fight with mom which seemed to tear her apart in shreds. She felt betrayed by everybody like they didn't care, like they had watched it all and not cared, and like they had never loved their own children better than that disgusting uncle. Had they failed at giving us the protection that we needed? I realized what he had done was really bad in spite of our silence about it.

I come from a big family. My grandmother gave birth to 12 children with two of them passed on leaving behind ten. Her last born is my age mate while the rest have had several children and grandchildren that make up the Israel family. My grandfather's name was Israel. It always fascinated me because he also had huge chunks of land that were fertile with all sorts of crops that granny supervised. My family has become so big especially when my cousins started bringing in children and grandchildren. The last time we had a fully-fledged house was when we gathered to bury grandfather. He had gone. He had been our true hero. He was a dead saint now if you only looked at Uncle Craig and what he was to us. None of us were perfect. We put up with the sins of this world except grandfather who had dedicated his life to serving the church and God. The good thing was Uncle Craig never killed anybody, but perhaps he has even killed someone but no one knows it. They made him join the army which he loved so much more than we would imagine. I think he could kill somebody.

I remember that he would beat up all his girlfriends and he still does. They would be bruised and injured after a fight. Each of his children had their own mother. Uncle Craig was much loved by everybody but he was all wrong. I always wondered why girls would come back to him. The tears from my sister's face the day she broke down about it really touched my conscience and I realized she needed our understanding, love and protection. Although I wondered how I would protect her when I was a victim too. Everybody seemed to be a victim of Uncle Craig except the elders. I didn't confess my own dirty secret ever except here on paper. I watched her wash up the dirty laundry in her own closet and I still said nothing of it all. I kept my silence like it never happened to me though it is still fresh in my mind especially now; no longer a childish blur, but a tiny one moment that made me shun Uncle Craig. I feared being alone with him lest it ever happened again. I feared his smile, lest he thinks it's okay to do such things. He had caught me by surprise in his room. I did have an innocent love and liking for him. He was just going to the shower when I found

him. I think seeing me made him stop. He was half naked with only a tiny towel wrapped around his waist. He called me to come closer to him which I obeyed innocently. He stretched out my little fingers to feel his manhood. There it is, he had said. Feel it now, just touch it and don't take your hands off, he had instructed. I was really scared after the incident because my innocent mind knew it was a bad thing. I think he had a demon that made him act the way he did. Uncle Craig's demon only got tamed down when he joined the army. He was the typical rebel too. He stole money and got into heavy debts that got him into prison. He embarrassed grandfather's good name. He couldn't believe he had such a son so different from what he was. He behaved like an animal, that's why he was sent into the military. It was a natural place for him. Everybody feared him more and no one dared to annoy him and that's why he always got what he wanted. He owns a gun now, which he has threatened to use on several occasions when angered.

The night of grandfather's burial still torments us all. Uncle Craig was so furious at the world. He wanted to shoot someone as if to appease the death. He caught a poor man pass through the garden at the graveyard and accused him of being a thief. I truly believe only grandmother rescued that poor man from death that night. It was only her who could tame Uncle Craig into humility. Such humility kept us silent about his despicable manners. My grandfather had attained the highest status of religion of being a bishop for the whole Mbale diocese. They expected us all to behave well.

Grandfather had taught us morals through stories I think he made up. His favorite story was about the new bride who couldn't make a simple cup of tea. I think he would forget that he had told me this story before because every time we were parting, he would tell me this same story.

A young bride was sent to make tea for the first time in her kitchen. She was confused and baffled by it all because no one had taught her how to make the tea and she had not bothered to learn. The young bride had put tea leaves in cold water which she served to her astonished husband with his visitor. The husband was so embarrassed; he sent her back to her parents to learn how to cook. What kind of bride is this I got? The groom had cried out.

At the end of the story he would say he did not want me to ever be like that bride who couldn't even make a simple cup of tea. He urged me to study hard but to also learn the simple skills that grandmother always taught us about keeping the compound clean and cooking food well. I thanked

God for grandfather's spirit that was with us then and now. He was our saint and a far better human being than we shall ever be ourselves. It's pitiful that most of us just never cared about his religion except his being our father or grandfather.

I prefer to meet Uncle Craig after a very long time though everybody wonders why we rarely visit the large family home. My sister hates it more. People can barely recognize her sometimes. They ask my mom; how many children do you have? Sarah? Is she your daughter too? But we haven't met her before. When we meet Uncle Craig it is a feeling of a fragile glass breaking into tiny pieces but nothing ever being more important than staying together as a family. I realized that nothing is ever broken enough because we could face it even from strangers. It doesn't matter to me anymore because I have no more anger or fury towards him. I believe Uncle Craig had a demon. I still wonder whether it's dead or still inside him. I hope it is dead because none of us want it to ever kill him. After all, no man can live with a demon and be alive too.

SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS

JOYCE WOLAYO

Jesus said; let him who has no sin
 Cast the first stone at this woman
 They all paled
 They all let the stones fall away at their feet
 Because they weren't holier

Because they wore mini skirts
 Because they were female
 They became victims of their own nature
 The men who tore their clothes downtown
 Like rapists
 They justified themselves like lords
 Betrayed their own nature
 The dignity of a woman
 Also they forgot was a dignity of mankind
 They snatched the hems of their dresses and skirts
 To prove they didn't care.

Because the system gave them a right
 For a while to persecute these women
 I walked in fear
 I checked for the line that crossed my thighs
 For a while we wondered if we existed
 Like pets and possessions
 To treat as they liked?

For a while we were scolded children
Walking around in shame
We wondered if all respect was lost
So far to be told what to wear.

We didn't win even when
the police got the order not to arrest anyone
The line was drawn for us
We were something unique
Something fragile
Something easily broken but mended
At the seams of the little
that held onto our bodies