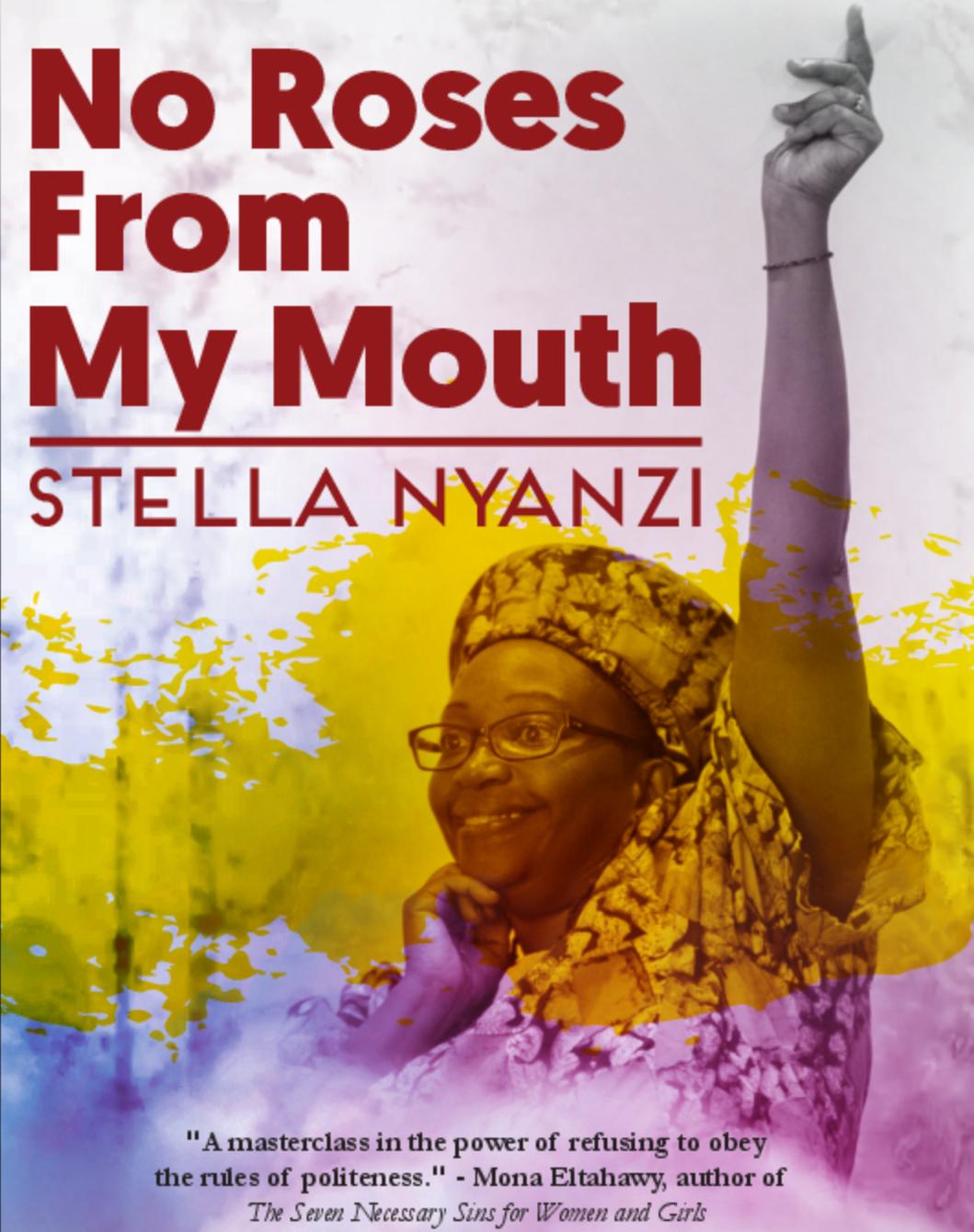


STELLA NYANZI

No Roses From My Mouth

STELLA NYANZI

No Roses From My Mouth



"A masterclass in the power of refusing to obey
the rules of politeness." - Mona Eltahawy, author of
The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls

Winner, 2020 Oxfam Novib / PEN
International Award for Freedom of Expression

"The formidable feminist foe Museveni has failed to silence."

- ***Mail and Guardian***

"She was born before her time, but this rotten world needs more Stellas to make it humane again."

- **Sabatho Nyamsenda, *Tanzania Socialist Forum***

"If Nyanzi's imprisonment was to blunt her writing, then *No Roses from My Mouth* is evidence that it only emboldened it."

- **Harriet Anena, author of *A Nation in Labour***

"Stella has a strong heart, and whatever she says, whatever she writes, whatever she fights for, it's not about her -- it's about the country and people she loves and supports."

- **Alice McCool, *CNN***

"Stella reminds us of the importance of pleasure, creativity, laughter, love and friendship in our freedom fighting. Much of this is made possible by feminist comradeship – from wherever we stand, we must show up for each other with what we have."

- **Wairimũ Mũrĩithi, *GenderIT.org***

"A trained journalist turned researcher, Nyanzi is a lyricist, poetess, creative writer and analyst on a quest for good governance. She has been unflinching in her criticism of the Ugandan government and is unafraid to tackle taboos around sex and gender and stand up for LGBT rights."

- ***The Guardian***

"Stella Nyanzi is a voice of conscience in Uganda and a symbol of resistance to the oppression of women and intellectuals. ... [Her] poems and speeches and social media postings demonstrate that the pen can still contest for power with the gun."

- **Dr. Tom Odhiambo (PhD), senior Lecturer, *University of Nairobi***

"Through her actions, Nyanzi has shown that fighting for a free, democratic and equal Uganda does not come free. [...] Her story is one that reminds Ugandans that the struggle for freedom has never been achieved by playing to the standards of civility set by those in power."

- Rosebell Kagumire, Editor, *African Feminism*

"Nyanzi is a hero. Her insistence on violating patriarchy's rules by talking explicitly about taboo subjects—be they the president's buttocks, sex, sexuality, queerness—should be studied everywhere as a masterclass in the power of refusing to obey the rules of "politeness."

- Mona Eltahawy, author of *The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls*

"Grounding her politic in a global, Black thirst for liberation (*The Power Fist*) Nyanzi aligns herself with leaders who have risen in opposition to imperialism and the institutions born from colonial conquest. [...] Nyanzi's *No Roses from My Mouth* offers an appropriately unrefined look into imprisonment. Her words are raw, vulgar, and always political."

- S.M. Rodriguez, affiliate with *the Audre Lorde Project*

"*No Roses from My Mouth* is a deliberately provocative – and apt – response to a dictatorial regime that fails to see the folly of imprisoning writers. [...] We have not had a book like this in this region. It is hard to think of another writer doing what Nyanzi is doing. [...] Nyanzi's poetry is textual stripping, textual ritual shaming for an old man whose heedless actions threaten to destroy society. This is how we must read this book."

- A.K. Kaiza, *The Elephant*

NO ROSES FROM MY MOUTH

NO ROSES FROM MY MOUTH

POEMS FROM PRISON BY STELLA NYANZI

Introduction by Esther Mirembe and Bwesigye Bwa Mwesigire

UBUNTU READING GROUP

Published by Ubuntu Reading Group

Copyright © 2020 Stella Nyanzi

All rights reserved under Ugandan and East African Community laws. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review. Published in 2020 by Ubuntu Reading Group, an imprint of the Centre for African Cultural Excellence, Kampala, Uganda. Distributed in Uganda and the East African Community by the Centre for African Cultural Excellence.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN: 978-9970-733-01-9

Author Photograph by Zahara Abdul/CIPESA

Printed and bound in Uganda.

CONTENT

Introduction	vii
Volume I	1
Volume II	62
Volume III	104
About the Author	179
Push for Stella Nyanzi Platform	181

INTRODUCTION

In Carole Boyce Davies' study of the political activism of the Black Communist, Claudia Jones, Davies writes that "[Jones'] was a poetry written by an activist who uses the space of incarceration and the time of detention to reflect on the conditions of being incarcerated itself, the political conditions of the state, and on the nature of the human condition." Stella Nyanzi's *No Roses From My Mouth* includes 159 poems written in 2019 and 2020 from Luzira Women's Prison in Kampala, Uganda during a trial and serving time for cyber-harassing and offending the President of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni in a poem where she uses his dead mother's vagina as an image to comment on her son's "oppression, suppression and repression" of Ugandans. This poetry collection like Claudia Jones' poetry, includes poems "written by an activist who uses the space of incarceration and the time of detention to reflect on the conditions of being incarcerated itself", the position of the woman in society, and the political conditions of the Ugandan state.

Within academic and LGBTIQAP+ activist circles, Stella Nyanzi is more renowned for her stellar scholarship on sexualities as a medical anthropologist and is a leading authority in African Queer Studies, or Queer African Studies. In April 2016, when she staged a naked protest against the director of the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), Nyanzi located herself within a tradition of radical African protest that utilises the body and custom to condemn injustice and oppression. Her naked protest at MISR premises was live-streamed on her Facebook page, showing the centrality of the social media platform to Nyanzi's activism.

In 2017, Nyanzi criticised Museveni, his wife and their family rule for renegeing on a campaign promise to provide sanitary pads to menstruating girls so that they could remain in school. When she was summoned to the Police to answer questions about her Facebook criticism of the government, she launched a campaign: [#Pads4GirlsUg](#). She was banned from traveling while under investigation, but no one can stop Nyanzi.

She went to schools and taught girls about menstruation. She sang them educational songs about menstruation. She talked to various people and raised money and pads to distribute. She went to many parts of the country with the campaign. Then the Kampala Metropolitan Rotary Club invited her to speak to them about the campaign. She went. And she was arrested that Friday night. She was betrayed. Her comrades online and offline started the [#FreeStellaNyanzi](#) campaign right away.

When she was presented in court, the prosecution didn't charge her for hurting the President's wife's feelings as was expected. They picked another Facebook post in which she described Museveni's speech celebrating so many years of staying in power, in which he said that he is not anybody's servant, as Lutako. Lutako as the language of matakoko. Lutako as the jiggling of buttocks. Nyanzi called Museveni a pair of buttocks. It made for punny headlines worldwide. Online and other activists agitated for her release. It came after 33 days. She received bail, as the trial couldn't continue because the prosecution had wanted to subject her to a compulsory mental health examination and she petitioned the constitutional court to challenge the law under which they were proceeding.

Once free, Nyanzi picked up the struggle from where she had left it, when she recovered after the 33 day jail stint. Nyanzi's Facebook timeline brims with commentary and language that brings meaning for many lives. Nyanzi is the voice of many. Her Facebook is the voice of many. She speaks for so many, and eloquently. She shows up for many causes. Her work in the period she has spent on suspension from Makerere University, imposed over her naked protest and subsequent criticism of Museveni's wife has been unsalaried activism online and offline. Nyanzi became a fulltime liberation worker since 2016, applying her creativity, her training, her knowledge and connections to the cause of freedom in Uganda. Mr. Museveni, his wife, and their handlers fear Nyanzi's Facebook timeline. They don't want her Facebooking.

In 2018, the spate of killings and kidnappings of women in Uganda didn't escape Nyanzi's eye and heart for freedom and justice. She convened a Women's Protest Working Group purposely to address the involvement or mishandling of the

killings and kidnappings of women by Museveni's military government. She carried empty coffins to protest. She was arrested, with her comrades too many times, her car vandalized as she protested. She called for a one million march to protest the killings and kidnappings. The police shockingly cooperated at the last minute despite suggesting that they would foil the planned march. Over 300 people, some from outside countries, including ambassadors of foreign countries, sex workers, relatives of deceased women, professional activists from NGOs, political activists, journalists, LGBTIQAP+ activists and private individuals, students, etc showed up for the march. Nyanzi is a force. She is the embodiment of a political resistance movement in a social media era.

When the musician turned opposition politician Robert Kyagulanyi alias Bobi Wine was brutally arrested in Arua, with fellow Members of Parliament Zaake Francis, Karuhanga Gerald, and others, the parliamentary candidate who eventually won the bi-election, Kassiano Wadri, the local woman politician Night Asaro and others, Nyanzi was there to mobilize support for them. That was around mid September of 2018, the time Museveni chose for his birthday whose exact date he says, nobody knows. Nyanzi had an idea. She wrote a poem to celebrate Museveni's birthday. Life continued. Hell didn't break loose. The heavens didn't fall. But Museveni and his handlers' feelings were hurt. Nyanzi continued with her life, her commentary, with her online and offline activism.

On November 2, 2018, she went to the police to get security to accompany her as she peacefully marched to her office at Makerere since the university staff tribunal had cleared her of all charges and ordered her reinstatement. It was not to be. The police arrested her. The second round of the #FreeStellaNyanzi campaign started. When they presented her in court, they charged her with cyber harassing and offending Museveni and his dead mother in the birthday poem for referring to the vagina from which Museveni was born. She has been in jail since November 2, 2018 to the date of publishing this collection.

The first batch of the poems was released on her 45th birthday on June 16, 2019 celebrated while she was in jail. Various comrades living in various countries shared the poems

on their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram timelines and pages among other social media platforms under the hashtag #45Poems4Freedom. Some of them already appear on some blogs. These poems appear as Volume I in this collection. The poems in Volume II were written after the birthday. The poems in Volume III were first written in the last days of 2019 and first days of 2020 but were confiscated in the process of their being sneaked out of jail. Nyanzi rewrote them from memory and using some haphazard notes. They were later successfully sneaked out of jail. The three volumes categorise the poems according to a surface level reading of their thematic concerns. The poems we read as dealing with prison life come first, followed by those which present feminist concerns, and the last category, poems broadly about Uganda.

In presenting these poems, we remind readers of the conditions of their writing, and publishing. To borrow Frantz Fanon's formulation, Nyanzi is resolutely a poet of her time. The context in which these poems were written, the context in which these poems are being published must be brought front and centre in reading and discussing them. We recognise that Nyanzi is not the first writer to produce work under prison conditions. Next door in Kenya, Ngugi Wa Thiongó wrote the novel *Caitani Mutharaba-ini* (English translation: *Devil on the Cross*) on toilet paper in his prison cell. He was jailed for the play he had co-written with Ngugi wa Miiri about the continued exploitation and oppression of native peasants by Western monopoly capital in cohorts with native elites. His memoir of the prison experience, *Detained* (new edition *Wrestling with the Devil*) was written and published once he was released. The Black Communist activist and organiser, Claudia Jones wrote poetry while in jail. Some of it appears in the posthumously published collection titled *Beyond Containment*, bringing together various essays, speeches, and poems by the activist.

Other writers who have been imprisoned for their writing and activism and indeed continued to write while in jail include the Ogoni writer and environmental rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Nobel Prize for Literature Winner Wole Soyinka, and the Egyptian writer Nawal El-Saadawi. The Malawian Jack

Mapanje was jailed for writing critically about the Kamuzu Banda regime in Malawi. The South African, Caesarina Kona Makhoere writes about her experience in jail during the apartheid era. Nyanzi is not only one of the many writers jailed for the political nature of their work, but she also belongs to the class of prison-writers who despite the fact of imprisonment continue to write behind bars, and with the publication of this collection makes a mark as having successfully published prison-writing while still behind bars.

The conditions of the prison affect one's writing while in prison. Some of Nyanzi's poetry was confiscated and has not made it to this collection. The prison censorious eye that forced Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci to omit the name of Marx and the word "class" in his famous prison notebooks is still a reality for prison literature in the social media era. To publish prison literature while the political prisoner is still in jail is to hide in plain sight. It is to pose a risk of "disciplinary" sanction against the prisoner. It is to raise a big middle finger to the system of repression, oppression and suppression. It is to declare that our minds are free, our imaginations are free from the prison warden, the prison walls, and the judges' sentence.

Nyanzi's work on her Facebook timeline alternates between prose commentary and poetry. Her prison-writing however is predominantly in the poetry form because as Audre Lorde reminds us:

Yet even the form our creativity takes is a class issue. Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper.

As a prisoner, Nyanzi is no longer just the "ivory tower" researcher, with several high impact publications. She has no time for bourgeois literary aesthetic standards. She writes that she "penned [her] pieces on the prison floors." That [her]

"sounding boards were suspected vagabonds ... Druggies and junkies offered some rhymes ... Idle and disorderly suspects approved the rhythm." Her comrades, her intellectual community is no longer that of the PhD-holding, Professor title-bearing, jet-setting from conference to symposium type. Her aesthetic standards are created and approved by the lumpenproletariat with whom she shares space in jail. She adds:

Convicts of common nuisance passed the meter
Sex workers and fraudsters approved lines.
Impersonators and thieves approved lines.
Suspects of murder and assault gave symbols
Suspects of manslaughter advised on ideas
Political prisoners cried at some stanzas.
Prison wardresses confiscated some poems.
Prisoners hid and protected my writings.

Emphasising the purpose of her writing, the activist *raison d'etre* of her poetry and activism, she asks: "Would beautiful poems dethrone a tyrant?" Hacking back to the class character of her community, creative and intellectual process, she asks a doctor of English whether prisoners would sit and listen to them. In a way, Nyanzi's spending fourteen months and counting in jail (including spending time in jail on remand by choice) was an act of the class suicide the Guinean revolutionary, Amilcar Cabral encouraged the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie to commit, "in order to be reborn as revolutionary workers, completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which they belong."

Museveni's regime sycophants and their allies like the PhD in English holding bourgeois aestheticians would like to discredit Nyanzi's poetry, they criminalise it, and would like it erased. In her judgement convicting Nyanzi of cyber-harassing Museveni and his dead mother, the magistrate, Ms. Kamasanyu Gladys Musenze states that:

An average person applying contemporary standards would find that the whole post (sic) lacks literally (sic) artistic, political, educational or scientific value. It does

not in any way communicate any message. The post cannot be discussed openly in any contemporary community in this country. No parent can share it with their children or youth in the manner in which it is packaged. It is so shameful. To the young generation, it corrupts their minds. The post goes against morality. It is vulgar. It did not matter who the post referred to. It was offensive. It would offend any reasonable person. It is not acceptable in any form of society. The post is so disgusting. It is obscene, indecent, lewd and lascivious. The suggestions or proposals in the post could only be made by an immoral person hence one that was not properly brought up.

The stern punishment of Nyanzi's poetry only proves its radical edge, its effect on power and those who wield it. Like Toni Morrison reminds us in her 1993 Nobel Prize Lecture, "who does not know of literature banned because it is interrogative; discredited because it is critical; erased because alternate?"

It gives us great pleasure to introduce *No Roses From My Mouth*, given the contemporary moment that Nyanzi continues to shape with her activism, through her poetry, prose and actions. We are proud to associate with the freedom vision that Nyanzi's poetry and activism represent. Like other members of the Push for Stella Nyanzi campaign whose 11-point platform appears after the poems in this collection, and like Nyanzi herself, we stand for Fairness, Feminism and Freedom.

Esther Mirembe and Bwesigye Bwa Mwesigire (Editors)

Author's Note on Volume I

The exercise book in which these poems were written was one of three given to me as gifts in prison - from BBM. To honour his gifts, I resumed writing against all odds! Fuck the dictatorship.

VOLUME I

Part 1:1: In Prison

A PLEA FOR DECONGESTION

On the floors of the wards of Luzira Women Prison,
Women sleep as congested as firewood neatly stacked.

Petty crime and debt – none is here for treason.

The injustices of our justice system leave us fucked.

Some sleep on dirty thin slices of prison mattresses.

Some sleep on one half of their prison blankets.

Some sleep on the hard concrete floor buttresses.

There's no distinction between convicts and suspects.

On the hard cold floor of Ward Two

My thighs press hard onto one's arse.

My arse presses hard into another's thighs.

This sequence of adult thighs pressing adult arse

Is repeated in two rows of 30 women each.

Adult thighs pressing adult arse.

Adult arse pressing adult thighs.

Adult thighs pressing adult arse.

Adult arse pressing adult thighs...

If fighters of sodomy in Uganda cared at all

They would start by decongesting the prison

Starting with Luzira Women Prison!

VICTIMS OF INJUSTICE

The prison is flooding with inmates;
Packed to the brim with prisoners,
Festering with victims of injustice.
Remands for months without judgment,
Committals for years without High Court trial,
Guarantors of debtors who disappeared,
Convicts serving months, decades or life,
Appeals waiting years for a response,
Lodgers transferred from other prisons,
Forgotten lunatics on Minister's Orders,
Yet the prison-bus is always full of new prisoners.
Prison congestion is a man-made catastrophe.

FOR MY CHILDREN

Tell my daughter
That I love her!
The world has told her,
“Your mother is a monster.”

Tell my twin sons
That they are the ones
For whom my fire burns.
I love them in tonnes.

In the depths of this dungeon,
In this maximum security prison,
I’m inspired by my children.
They’re my hope beyond reason.

BABIES IN PRISON

Babies torn out of uteruses
By the sharp black talons of injustice.
Your mothers denied the luxuries
Or formalities of burial; such sacrifice.

Babies born on the floors of prison wards
Your crowning heads first seen by prisoners.
Your mothers lacked new scissors to cut the cords
Those who washed your mothers' blood-soaked uniform are
prisoners.

Babies carried on the backs of prisoners.
Babies fed from the breasts of prisoners
Babies *ooohed* and *aaahed* by prisoners
Babies named fondly by prisoners.
Babies dressed by prisoners.
Babies lullabied by prisoners.
Babies loved and bathed by prisoners.
Babies sent home by prisoners.
Babies given up by prisoners.
Babies in the dreams of prisoners.
Babies in the prayers of prisoners.

Babies miscarried from wombs of prisoners
As wardresses mock and stare and jeer.
Babies miscarried too young to send home to the lovers of
prisoners...
My baby – our sacrifice – RIP my dear.

MISSED BIRTHDAYS

10/11/2018

My daughter turned fourteen years
Three days into my imprisonment.
I failed to fulfil a promise I made her –
Her first cappuccino in life!
I had planned to go to Endiro Café in Kisementi,
To sit and chat with her for hours.
Instead I spent that Saturday on the floor of prison
Surrounded by sixty-three other prisoners.

22/04/2019

My twin sons turned twelve years
One hundred and sixty seven days into my imprisonment.
I failed to meet my responsibility over them.
I missed taking them to the cinema at Acacia Mall,
Followed by lunch and birthday cake at Café Javas.
Instead I spent that Easter Monday on the floor of prison
Surrounded by seventy-one other prisoners.

16/06/2019

I am turning forty-five years
Two hundred and twenty two days into my imprisonment.
I fail to be governable by the dictatorship.
I refuse to be gagged and silenced.
I deny them power to crush my voice box.
Instead I am spending this Sunday releasing my poems from prison.
I send out my forty-five poems to mark my forty-fifth birthday.

POVERTY IS A CRIME IN KAMPALA CITY

The prisons are full unnecessarily
Hardworking citizens arrested and charged for poverty:
Women selling baskets of mangoes and bananas by the roadside,
Girls hawking roasted groundnuts, steamed maize and sweetened
simsim balls,
More girl-hawkers of *mukonzikonzi* brooms, mingling spoons and
papyrus mats,
Retailers of hankies, sweets and pens spread on pavements,
Queens selling pussy, blow jobs, kisses and a night of ecstasy,
Men selling bar soap, detergent powder and insecticide packed in
boxes,
Youths selling steering-wheel covers and mobile phone chargers in
the traffic jam,
Boys hawking bottles of soda, water and fruit juice hidden in buckets,
Retailers of boiled eggs, fried grass-hoppers and hard corn along the
streets,
Earnest citizens making an honest living from informal trade,
The entire stock of their capital confiscated as exhibits of crime,
Earnest citizens striving hard to make ends meet,
Arrested violently by Kampala Capital City Authority agents,
Detained for weeks in dirty cells at scattered police posts,
Charged for being idle and disorderly at the Kampala City Hall Court,
Charged alternatively for being rogue and vagabond,
Remanded for months at one of Luzira's prisons,
Sentenced to six meaningless months in prison,
Poverty is a crime in Kampala City!

NO CHAIRS FOR PRISONERS

Prisoners of all ranks sit on the floor.
It's meant to rob them of all status,
To break the spine from their backs,
To unclench their fists of fury,
To knock out their brains,
To chop off their balls,
To shut up their mouths,
To break their souls like horses.
On arrival at the prison gates
Prisoners learn fast to hit the ground.
During roll-call in the wards,
Those with beds drop onto the floors.
During fall-in in the fields,
Prisoners crouch, squat or sit on the earth.
When talking to any prison staff,
Prisoners drop onto their knees as slaves.
When talking with prisoners of leadership,
Prisoners still kneel like servants.
Even in prison offices,
Prisoners sit on the floor like snakes.
When receiving personal visitors,
Prisoners sit on the floor like mourners.
Alas, colonised Uganda!
There are no chairs for prisoners.

THE MANGO SELLER

She stands big, tall and very black.
Her wide eyes are alert and scary.
Her kinky hair is knotted into *bitutwa* heaps.
Her big strong hands wipe snot from her nose.
Her mouth falls ajar every now and then.
It shuts again wordlessly.
The new prison uniform refuses to fit her.
“Next!” The bored receptionist calls out.
The big black woman remains silent.
“What’s your name?” The receptionist barks.
The scary woman silently wipes tears from her eyes.
“What’s your problem?” A wardress shouts.
“Are you deaf and dumb?” Another asks.
“Did the cat eat your tongue?”
“Stop wasting our time,” the receptionist said.
With teary eyes, the new prisoner spoke clearly.
“Yesterday, I left my 8 months old baby at the neighbour’s.
I went to sell mangoes at the roadside.
I was arrested by KCCA, tried and sentenced.
“Either pay a fine of One Hundred Thousand Shillings
OR serve a prison term of thirty days.”
I had only twelve thousand shillings in my bra.
They packed me into the bus heading to prison.
And I am here in prison crying for my baby.”
The receptionist got wet eyes.
The wardresses got wet eyes too!

JUSTICE DELAYED

I wake up with vigour at 04:00AM
To race for space in the crowded bathroom.
After sitting in twos for the Fall-In count,
I enthusiastically rush for search at the gate.
I strip to be searched in the bra and knickers...
I hand back my prison uniform,
And sit on the bus heading to court.
After hours of waiting in the holding cell,
I stand with hope in the suspect's dock.
"Your trial magistrate is indisposed.
Court adjourned to a month away.
You are further remanded to prison."
What a disappointment!
What an anti-climax!
After a month of rotting in prison,
I step again into the suspects' dock.
"The State Prosecutors are on strike.
Adjourned to a month away.
Further remanded to prison."
The following month was a repeat.
"Your trial magistrate is abroad.
Case adjourned to a date next month."
The next month, the court is closed for renovation.
Thereafter, the complainant is absent.
And thereafter, the case file is lost.
Adjournment after adjournment perpetual
With no case business in between.
This is how justice is delayed.

TEACH THE NATION POETRY

Teach the nation poetry.
Deployments of anti-riot police
Cannot shoot tear-gas at rhymes
Nor disperse the rhythm of our poems.

Teach the nation poetry.
Forgotten masses will pack our pain in stanzas
That will pierce the core of the tyranny.
Raw poems hit harder than your platitudes.

Teach the nation poetry.
Handcuffs cannot contain the potency of poems.
Arrest warrants cannot disappear memorised verse.
Poetry can never be detained in gaol.

Teach the nation poetry.
Investigating detectives and crime solvers
Cannot decipher metaphors, similes or symbols
Their charge sheets will never make sense.

Teach the nation poetry.
To write, recite and interpret it.
Poems of the oppressed will oppress the oppressor.
Poems will transport us to freedom.

BEDBUGS AND LICE

Female prisoners at Luzira cry about bedbugs and lice.
These lice are in the folds of our uniforms.
They are buried in the stitches of our hems.
They snooze in the gathers of our waistlines.
These parasites sip sweat in our hollow armpits.
They harbour in the thicket of our body hair.
Fumigation never ends their terror!

Female prisoners at Luzira cry about bedbugs and lice.
The bedbugs are comfortable in our meagre beddings.
They burrow in the thin threads of our blankets.
They mate on our one-centimetre mattresses.
These parasites feast on the blood in our bodies.
They crawl upon our skin and in our clothes.
Fumigation never ends their terror!

Codetta: Corrupt NRM sycophants are as ferocious as the bedbugs
and lice thriving at Luzira Women Prison! Selah.

MY TAKE ON MY WRITING

My writing may be cheap,
But it is rather effective.
My poetry may be tasteless,
But it is shaking the nation.
My Facebook posts may be tacky,
But they grab the balls of the tyranny.
My paragraphs may be repulsive,
But they sting the Queen Bee.
My stanzas may be irreverent,
But they poked the leopard's anus.
My language may be dirty,
But it exposed the dictatorship.
My pen never stops writing;
I will write myself to freedom!

A HAIKU OF REBIRTH

Just as grass grows again after *oluyiira* wildfire,
So will my dreadlocks grow after prison,
And so will Uganda arise after Dictator M7.

POLITICAL PRISONER

Today, I am Remand Prisoner LWP 984/2018.

I am in the eighth month of incarceration.

I refused to apply for bail.

I am charged with cyber harassment
and offensive communication against the president.
I penned and posted a birthday poem on Facebook.

My metaphorical critique of the dictator
Brought charges from pedestrian investigators.

I am a political prisoner.

I am a prisoner of conscience.

Last year, I was Remand Prisoner LWP 313/2017.

I got bail after 33 days of incarceration.

This case still gets mentioned monthly in court.

I was charged with cyber harassment
and offensive communication against the president.

I penned and posted a rant on Facebook.

My “Yoweri Museveni *matako butako...*”

Was muddled up in translation to:

“The president is a pair of buttocks!”

I am a political prisoner.

I am a prisoner of conscience.

Next year, I will return as a Remand prisoner.

No amount of trumped up charges deter me.

If my poetry offends the dictator, fine!

If my written truth chokes the tyrant, fine.

YOUR EXCELLENCY, SIR!

Your Excellency, Sir,
You sewed my lips together
With a needle and thread.
Bitter truth tore the stitches apart.
I shot another poem at your head.

Your Excellency Sir,
You knocked out my teeth
With a big fat hammer.
Ice-cold truths opened my toothless mouth.
I lisped a bloody stanza exposing you.

Your Excellency Sir,
You cut out my tongue
With a brand new razor blade.
Sad truths slid out of me.
I croaked out a verse that hit you.

Your Excellency Sir,
You pounded my voice box
With a wooden mortar and pestle.
Uncomfortable truths burst out of my pen.
I wrote new prose that offended you.

Your Excellency Sir,
You arrested and handcuffed me,
Framed charges that keep me in prison.
New truths keep me awake as prisoners snore.
I am writing fresh poems from prison.

JANET AND JOEL

Two dogs guard my house.

The bitch is called Janet.

She barks and snarls always.

The dog is called Joel.

He eats and eats and eats.

Joel shafts all the village bitches.

He has sown many wild oats.

Joel shags stray bitches

right under Janet's nose.

Janet ran mad from jealousy.

Janet eats up her puppies.

I will spay her one day.

GANJA GIRL

She sneaked a stick of *ganja*
into the prison *boma*.

My word, what courage!

How did she beat the body search?

How did she find this contraband?

The prison guards think their search is thorough.

She smoked her stick of *ganja*

Inside the prison toilets.

Sweet heaven, what folly!

Did she think the prisoners wouldn't smell it?

Did she forget fellow addicts in her ward?

The prisoners snitched on her to the guards.

WOMEN IN BROWN UNIFORMS

Women in brown uniforms keep in safe custody
The lives and bodies of women in yellow uniforms.

The incarceration of women as remands,
commitals, condemned and convicts thrives in Uganda.

Women in brown uniforms search inside the bras
and inside the knickers of women in yellow uniforms.

This humiliation of women prisoners relies
on body shaming and intruding upon bodily privacy.

Women in brown uniforms pick up sticks to
cane the buttocks of women in yellow uniforms.

The violence of corporal punishment thrives
inside the walls of Luzira Women Prison.

Women in brown uniforms steal the male lovers
and husbands who visit women in yellow uniforms.

Unprofessional conduct of prison staff cannot
sink any lower than adultery with spouses of prisoners.

Women in brown uniforms take bribe money
from the tiny pockets of women in yellow uniforms.

At court, prisoners pay for lunch, telephone calls,
visitors and carrying back contraband substances.

Women in brown uniforms bang, shut and
lock the prison doors of women in yellow uniforms.

Deprivation of liberty and curtailing freedom
does not rehabilitate criminal offenders.

MUST ONE FIRST FALL MAD?

In this god-forsaken country
The mouths of men are silent.
Fear keeps them immobile.
The courage of women is dimmed.
Their children are dead or in prisons.

They say that I am insane
Because I publicly speak truths
That angels dare not whisper.
They say that I am deranged
Because I fight murderous gunmen
With Facebook posts and poems.

They look at me and shake their heads.

They wonder who bewitched me.

I look at them and sigh.

Have we all been reduced to this?

Must one first fall mad

To speak truth to power
in this god-forsaken country?

THE CELL

Isolation is an age-old punishment.
Exiles banished to far-off solo islands,
Recluses tucked away beyond reach,
The prisoner locked up in solitary confinement.
"The cell" or "the shell" strikes terror.
It tears the hearts of female prisoners.
There are two cells at Luzira Women Prison.
One in the Condemned section.
One in the Boma section.
Solitary confinement is abused at LWP.
Cold water is poured on the ugly hard floor.
No bed, no chair, no stool - nothing!
No mattress, no blanket, no shield.
No toilet, no bucket, no sanitation.
No water, no food, no heating.
No friends or callers come to visit.
No glass in the high raised windows.
Mosquitoes fly high, roaches roam free.
Some women are carried in by prisoners.
Some women are handcuffed within.
Some women are totally naked within.
Some women spend a few days in the cell.
Some women spend weeks upon weeks inside.
Janet spent 21 days in the cell.
Her crime was paying for TV in prison.
Lillian N. spent 28 days in the cell.
Her crime was reclaiming her phones.
Rose Kawuga was sent three times to the cell.
Mayi was in the cell for attempting suicide.

VOLUME I

Part 1:2: **On Feminism**

WHO PINCHED MY BUTTOCKS?

Let me do my bit to the best of my ability.

Do your bit, too, as well as you can.

Those who speak the language of diplomacy
Should not seal the mouths of singers of ragga.

Those who fast and pray and intercede
Should not drive demons out of nude protestors.

Those who mend legislations and policies
Should not tax those who tweet and Facebook.

Oil the cotter pins of your big and small guns

But let me grow my fingernails that pinch.

Develop your petitions and propaganda

But let me sharpen my finger nails for duty.

When my time comes I want to be effective.

The dictator will say, "Who pinched my buttocks?"

SHAMELESS MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

In the corridors of our sacred parliament,
Women shield their arses and breasts.
Horny men dressed in expensive suits
Pinch the buttocks of their female colleagues.
When the lights in the lift went off,
The shrill cries of women echoed far.
“Who pinched my arse?”
“Who groped my breast?”
“Who manhandled my pussy?”
“Who rubbed his groin against my back?”
Shameless male Members of Parliament
Violate the bodies of female parliamentarians.
If they cannot defend honourable women MPs
How will they defend the constitution?
Why do we trust them with legislation?

THE POWER FIST

When I raise the timeless symbol of the power fist

I tap into histories of bold resistance.

I embrace Bobi Wine roaring, "People Power!"

And opposition Ugandans responding, "Our Power!"

Nelson Madiba Mandela shouting "*Amandla!*"

And anti-apartheid South Africans replying, "*Nga wethu!*"

Winnie Madikizela Mandela mobilising millions.

Black, brown and white suffragists

Advocating for women to vote as equal citizens.

Martin Luther King protesting against racism.

Abolitionists fighting against slavery.

Feminists fighting for gender equality.

Fallists advancing equity in higher education.

Sportsmen standing in solidarity with the powerless.

DRENCHED SANITARY PAD

Have you ever worn a fresh sanitary pad,
Bled your menstrual flow onto it,
Failed to change the now soiled sanitary pad
Until it got drenched and burnt you between the thighs?

Eow! You are right.

It is disgustingly revolting.

Now, hearken!

That's how desperately we need to change regimes.
33 years of Dictator Museveni lording it over Ugandans

Is akin to a dirty drenched sanitary pad

Remaining stuck between a woman's legs.

When the dictator asks for more time as president

It is akin to the dirty drenched sanitary pad

asking for more time between my legs.

When the dictator clings onto power with his iron fist

It is akin to the dirty drenched sanitary pad

sticking stubbornly between my thighs.

Just as women remove their sanitary pads,

So shall we dispose of this dictator!

WOMEN SHALL NO LONGER WAIT

Women shall no longer wait for absent men
To drive these poisonous snakes out of our houses.
We pick up your machetes rusting away
And chop the venomous snakes into many pieces.

Women shall no longer wait for castrated men
To carry the coffins of kin killed by the state.
We wear your trousers and your *kanzus*
And lift the caskets to graves dug by ourselves.

Women shall no longer wait for timid men
To fight for the liberation of Uganda.
We pack missiles in our pens and grenades in our mouths
And shoot our truths at the dictatorship.

Women shall no longer wait for blinded men
To drive us to the beautiful promised land.
We thicken the muscles of our legs
And ride ourselves to freedom on bicycles and cars.

Women shall no longer wait for faceless men
To woo, love or pleasure us.
We wear dildos dipped in oil
And inseminate ourselves with stronger sperm.

FEMINIST FREEDOM FIGHTER

I am that woman with a raised Power Fist
Sending terror into the heart of every misogynist,
Chanting slogans of liberation,
Pasting campaign posters onto walls as decoration,
Holding a handmade protest banner,
Protest secretary, mobiliser and planner,
Marching in the demonstration,
Composing poems for the revolution,
Banging pots and pans at the frontline,
Standing straight in the picket-line,
Signing petitions to power brokers,
Cajoling and coaxing neutral onlookers,
Fundraising for this or that peaceful protest,
Enduring the action even with the sun at its hottest,
Singing bad-arse songs of freedom,
Threatened with pending charges of treason,
Painting masks for the masquerade,
Wearing black in the coffin parade,
Throwing my breasts at oppressors,
Distributing water to protesters,
Provoking tyrants with sanitary pads,
Teaching my children to make placards,
Reciting emotive protest ballads.
In this struggle to make our burden lighter,
I am a dedicated feminist freedom fighter.

LET'S HIJACK THE PRESIDENT'S CONVOY

Let's hijack the president's convoy!
We'll convene at 07:00AM at the Clock Tower.
Our brazen naked bodies will be the decoy.
Tell your daughters, nieces, sisters, aunts and mother.
Our aim is to capture not to destroy.
At his siren, block the roads and undress.
Our womanly bodies will capture the president's convoy.
The philandering ogre will surrender power.

Let's derail the life-presidency agenda.
We'll converge to amend the Constitution.
Our patriotism will be the fuel
Driving our reclamation of real democracy.
Our aim is to reinstall presidential term limits
And to return the safeguard of age limits.
Our love for Uganda will derail the life presidency.
The megalomaniac septuagenarian will retire.

FREE SANITARY PADS

In the twilight of the dictatorship,
The dictator went really berserk.
He dipped the tight fingers of his iron fist
Into the menstrual blood of poor Ugandan girls.
In a frenzy of cheap popularity
He made another empty promise.
“Vote for me and I will give your daughters free sanitary pads to keep
them in school!”
The dictator is a delinquent lying swine.

Gullible peasants with bleeding daughters
Switched their votes to the promise giver.
As they voted they remembered how
His tight fist was covered in fresh menses.
They recalled the belligerent sneer he wore
As he exposed the plight of their bleeding daughters.
“Vote for me and I will give your daughters free sanitary pads to keep
them in school!”
The dictator is an exploitative thief of votes.

After swearing back into power
The dictator proved himself a liar.
He publicly washed the menstrual blood
Off his blood-stained thieving hands.
He delegated his drunk wife to lie about
The lack of funds for free sanitary pads.
Does he think we forgot his fake promise?
“Vote for me and I will give your daughters free sanitary pads to keep
them in school!”
The dictator’s biography is stained with menstrual blood.

JOYOUSLY DANCE AGAIN

When is our liberation coming
So that we can joyously dance gain?
Our backs are now stiffened with oppression.
Our hearts are frozen by the dictatorship.
Alas! Three decades without *larakaraka*.
No *dingding*, *runyege* or *ekitaguriro*!
No *bakisimba*, *nankasa* or *amazina*!
Our raffia skirts are coated with dust.
Our ankle bells rust away.
Our reed pipes and *jembe* horns have cobwebs.
The *adungu* and bow lyre loosened their strings.
The xylophone and thumb piano are mute.
Heavens! Return our dances of freedom!
Let us joyously dance again.

IS BINYA REALLY DEAD?

Bwesigye do not lie to me!
Don't make me grieve on this prison floor.
Is Binyavanga really dead?
Ask Neo for details to report to me.
With whom shall I grieve our departed hero?
With whom shall I recall the high heels?
Oh, and the bold facial make-up and hair-do?
With whom shall I recall the "eljeebitique"?

You say Binya was cremated?
How typical to do the "un-African" again!
Didn't Africans cry foul at the idea?
Didn't they claim we do not burn our departed?
Trust Binya to push boundaries even in death.

Wasn't Binya working on another book?
Will there be no more great queer works?
No more scintillating de-colonial productions?
A fabulous queering mind went to rest.

Binya broke hard ground at a difficult time!
Binya took the bull by the horns
And inspired me with boldness.
Binya inseminated my mind
And liberated my tongue and pen.
Binya taught me to be comfortable in my flamboyant queer clothes.
Rest well brave comrade! Rest well.

FEMINISTS IN HIGH HEELS

Feminists in high heels
Stick their noses in the air
And sniff at my dust-covered sneakers.
They point their tight breasts at patriarchy
And smirk at my saggy bust.
They push their bottoms outwards
As if they never shit.
They deem my activism too grounded...
“She’s too dirty to be one of us!”

Feminists in power suits
Shake their ponytails
And ridicule my three-piece *kitenge*
They cling onto their briefcases
And shun my papyrus *kikapu*.
They stretch forward their manicured hands
And sneer at my short-trimmed fingernails.
They deem my advocacy too radical...
“She’s too hot to be one of us!”

Feminists drunk with religion
Roll their judgmental eyes heavenward
And *shandaramana* at my brazenness.
They finger their leather-bound scriptures
And distance themselves from my activism.
They pray and praise and tithe
But keep away from the trenches.
They deem my praxis too immoral...
“She’s too worldly to be one of us!”

BEAUTIFUL NANA

The police got batons and clubs.
They beat hard the body of beautiful Nana.
She was seven months pregnant.
Her crime was parking her car near their premises
And waiting to see the Inspector General of Police
To ask him about a detained Member of Parliament.

The police drove fast to Iranian Hospital.
They transported the unconscious body of beautiful Nana.
They dumped her in a hospital bed.
They deserted her car in the hospital parking.
They left her unborn baby for dead.
These police are public enemies.
They come to kill, steal and destroy.

VOLUME I

Part 1:3: About Uganda

ENEMA

The dictator is a big fat old poop
Enlarged in the bowels of Uganda.
In pain the masses live and stoop.
Thirty-three years of constipation!
We shall no longer use a tender scoop
For we are the enema.

The dictator is a big malignant tumor
Spreading his cancer all over Uganda.
The elite lay besieged and in a stupor.
The masses yield, too weakened by hunger.
But we refuse to surrender
For we are the surgeon's blade.

FREE CAPTIVES

Seriously, the joke is on us.
We no longer quiz our everyday contradictions!
In Uganda there are no fountains.
But alas, more shockingly;
The fountain of honour is dry.
For this crisis, the masses cry.

A thin bush-war soldier and his ragtag army
Came shooting loud guns and draining blood.
He stormed Kampala with his coup d'état.
He grabbed the bloody throne of power.
He flung a bible at the sky.
His take-over speech was lie after lie.

Our bellies are full of the illusion of freedom.
We are free captives in a military democracy
Our liberation was always a still-birth.
Our constitution was his to defile.
When he jokes, the masses sigh.
With each breath we take with him, we die.

PRESS FREEDOM IN UGANDA

A soulless ape-like monster
Sits at the helm of power in our state house.
Just like a limelight intoxicated superstar,
He saturates our public media with vows.
Although the masses know he's a lying fraudster,
They clap their hands and gasp with "Wows!"
The news is flooded with the smooth lying gangster
He's wiped out all truths – sucked them as a louse.
Against loud lies of the presidential broadcaster,
Truth is only given in the squeaks of a mouse.

Press freedom in Uganda is a quack.
Speaking truth is punished at large.
Journalists shot dead during work,
Newsmen arrested without charge,
Media houses raided in the dark,
News cameras destroyed with guns,
Press house licences taken back,
Critical journalists gagged,
News anchors whipped on the back,
Truth tellers detained en masse.

PEELING ONIONS

Writing honestly about Uganda's politics

Is as pleasant as peeling fresh onions.

Contemporary transfer of power comprises monkey tricks.

Regime change from NRM is a pack of illusions.

Tears flow abundantly as one moves through related topics.

Autocratically clinging onto power yields delusions.

Writing honestly about Uganda's economics

Is as delightful as peeling onions.

Inflated performance and doctored figures are hyped.

Economic indicators depart from realities on ground.

Such gaps between rich and poor are seldom found.

Majestically swindling from Uganda goes around.

BROWN ENVELOPES

R001 transmits the scourge of corruption
As a dirty dick spreading syphilis to prostitutes.
His brown envelopes are a seal of pollution.
His bribes convert recipients into praise-singing destitutes.
Don't you hear them praising the immoral dictator?
Don't you see them prostrating before the autocratic liberator?

Fish begins rotting from the head.
Bosses in the NRM learnt to distribute brown envelopes.
They follow their head to the world of the dead.
Their conscience torn like a lion devouring antelope.
Don't you smell the stench of their dead conscience?
Don't you pity the emptiness of their hollow conscience?

MISSING JEWELS

The jaws of Joel crashed the jewels
Planted between the legs of men in the pearl.

The expensive jewels of manhood
Are missing from our governed men.
They lack the guts to defend the land.
They lack the stamina to reclaim the flag.

The proboscis of Joel sucked out the jewels
Between the ears of thinkers in the pearl.

The cherished jewels of critical thinking
Are absent from the politicians of the day.
They lack the will to mend the state.
They lack the power to right the wrongs.

DEFENSELESS UGANDA

Oh Uganda, my homeland!
Who defanged the viper you once were?
Who destroyed your protective shell?
Who castrated your men?
Who sterilized your juicy women?
Who pounded flat your fighting hands?
Who made blunt your knives and spears?
Who knocked out your full set of teeth?
Who scraped out your spinal cord?
Who gouged out your eyes?
Who ate up the brains of your thinkers?
Who sucked up the energy of your youth?
Alas, you are defenseless and besieged!
You lay flat on your face before the dictatorship.

QUESTIONS AT THE MASS GRAVE

Do you rest in peace in that mass grave?
Do you wish we kept up the search for your corpse?
Are you waiting in limbo in your mass grave?
Does each passing season dampen your hopes?
Thoughts of your final resting place haunt me daily.
There is no honour in any mass grave!

How many others were heaped into your mass grave?
How many bullets are lodged in your bodies?
How many black bags still cover heads in your mass grave?
How many bayonet wounds decorate your bodies?
Thoughts of your execution disturb my nights.
There's no peace in any execution.

Did you see the faces of your murderers?
Did they wear uniforms of the police or army?
Did you hear the order from above to kill you?
Did they murder you with guns issued by the state?
Thoughts of your murder disturb my freedom.
There's no life amidst extra-judicial killings.

Who poured the earth onto your mass grave?
Who prayed for your souls to rest in peace?
Who digs the weeds on your mass grave?
Who pours libation to quench your thirst in death?
Thoughts of your disappearance mock our history.
There's no death certificate for disappeared persons.

BODY BAGS

The dictator placed an order.

“Send us two million more body bags!”

He wired payment outside our border.

Murdering citizens intoxicates sweeter than all drugs.

Why does he need to conceal the corpses?

For whom does he dress up his corpses?

The first lady praised her creator.

“Appoint me to a bigger ministry!”

Abuse of power is no longer a reserve for the traitor.

Her sorcery is akin to a witch’s chemistry.

Why doesn’t she conceal this mockery?

For whom does she masquerade her sorcery?

AFTER SUPPER

After supper of rolex in the ghetto,
We pull out the deck of tattered cards.
We watch or play *matatu* for cash.
We chat about our shared poverty.
We discuss the balances of our loans.
We strategize about hustling for more money.
We moan about our shameful employment.
We curse wealthy men in the middle class.
We wonder how we'll convince the girls
That a man with balls but no cash is still a man.

After supper of *katogo* in the village,
We sit around the dying embers of the firestone.
We share stories about our day and our dreams.
We analyse the long drought and dry earth.
We wonder who stole the rain from the sky.
We compare the prices of pesticides.
We quiz where next we'll graze our herds.
We discuss the lowering water levels.
We puzzle about how the witchdoctor failed
To coax the boreholes to cough up water.

After a delicious meal for supper in the city,
We set our alarm clocks and sleep.
We sleep, and sleep and sleep.

JUST FIBROIDS, MYOMAS AND CYSTS

In 1986, we were badly short-changed.
We misconceived the coup d'état for a fundamental change.
We believed the lie that this was not a mere change of guard.

We fell for the illusion of freedom.

We mistook new bondage for liberation.

We started sipping poison mistaken for medicine.

We embraced a porcupine for a lover.

We received the kiss of life from a cobra.

Innocent lambs welcomed a wolf as their shepherd.

A hungry hyena was entrusted with beef.

A rapist assumed watch over the Constitution's hymen.

Our pot of ghee sat atop his fire.

A thief possessed the granaries of Uganda.

Monkeys took charge of our ripe bananas.

After three decades of heightening oppression,

The scanner of time has exposed the fallacy.

We now know there was never a pregnancy.

It was just fibroids, myomas and cysts!

IN THE YELLOW BUS

In the yellow bus,
Passengers eat chips, chicken and the constitution.
They drink beer, bribes and human blood.
They scream that their driver needs no substitution
The hysteria of sycophancy has made them mad.

In the yellow bus,
All judges and magistrates sold their brains.
Their courts uphold lawlessness and injustice.
Others succumbed to the massive brain drain.
They chose to hustle abroad than stay home to dispense injustice.

In the yellow bus,
Legislators own fuel-guzzling four-wheel-drive cars.
They regurgitate the tyrant's will at the expense of voters.
After selling their will, they drown their guilt in bars.
They are devouring Uganda like vultures.

In the yellow bus,
The public media is either tainted or mute.
The police metes out torture with force of a brute.
Truth, freedom, justice and liberty are all
Trampled underfoot.

SENSELESS DEATHS

My beloved father died mercilessly like a dog.

A medical doctor of four decades,
Heaving and groaning in the backseat of his car.
Driven that dark night by his youngest brother,
Searching in vain from one health unit to another
For a single vial of absent medicine.

His death is on the hands of the dictatorship
Which prizes bullets and guns over medicines.
“Give us bullets and guns, not medicine!”

My sweet mother died senselessly like a frog.

A social worker and patriotic NRM cadre,
Lying under the tree where she collapsed.
Conscious but unable to lift her elderly body,
Waiting in vain from one hour to another hour,
For an absent ambulance with neither driver nor fuel.

Her death is on the hands of the dictatorship
Which prefers huge armoured vehicles over ambulances.
“Give us Black Mambas and *Kabangalis* not ambulances!”

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Stuffed ballot boxes,
Pre-ticked ballot papers,
Padded voter registers,
Ghost voters resurrected,
“Who voted in my names?”
Double voting,
Triple voting,
Even quadruple voting,
Voters deleted from the register,
Buses of foreigners ferried in to vote,
Dubious Returning Officers,
Erroneous tallying,
Fabricated tallying centers,
“Has he facilitated the doctoring of tallies?”
Congested mobile phone networks,
Aborted internet countrywide,
Computers programmed to cheat,
Voter intimidation,
Voter buying,
Parade the guns in single-file formation,
Dirty Electoral Commission,
Impotent elections observers,
“Were the elections free and fair?”
The dictator wins again!

GOOD MEN DIE, BAD MEN LIVE ON

If old age leads to the grave,
Why doesn't it take the president?
If bullets in war shoot the brave,
Why didn't they take R001?
Good men die, bad men live on.

If disease kills those it infects,
Why doesn't it take the dictator?
If reckless driving kills through road accidents,
Why doesn't it finish off our oppressors?
Good men die, bad men live on.

A PSYCHOSIS CALLED MUSEVENISM

A psychosis called Musevenism
Infects millions of gullible Ugandans.
Its diagnosis needs no intellectualism;
Just listen to the babbling from their mouths.
Praising the dictator dilutes patriotism.
The deception distorts reality.
He rewards sycophants through cronyism.
And stifles advancement of opponents.
Musevenists fulfil sabotage of constitutionalism,
And removal of statutory safeguards.
They steal from public coffers and jobs got through nepotism.
They shut their eyes to Museveni's pilfering.
He infiltrated civil space with militarism
And intimidates the masses with violence.

ODE TO TRUTH

Truth is like a big *Mutuba* tree;
Even after chopping it down with an axe,
A strong shoot from the trunk we'll see.
Truth remains, although it wane or wax.
Although the dictatorship may frighten me,
Yet from the truth, I'll never go lax.

Freedom of speech, internet that's free!
Truth pervades in spite of the OTT tax.
Truth is like the stain of Matooke sap.
Once it enters the fabric of one's clothes,
No amount of strong stain-remover
Can remove it from the stained clothes.

Truth is like a bone of the Tilapia fish
If accidentally eaten as one feared
One must spit it out or choke to death
Truth can never be swallowed or disappeared.

Truth is like a rocket sitting in the chest
If forced down the trachea to avoid shame
It bursts out in the loudest of coughs.
Truth cannot be choked or hidden.

PARAGON OF DEFIANCE

Dark and energetic is my mentor;
My role model in our struggle of liberation.
He bears the tenacity of a retired soldier.
His dreams of curing Uganda are a doctor's resolution.
When yesterday's liberator turned traitor,
My exemplar deserted to become a rebel politician.
He endured intense state-instigated torture,
Yet resolutely leads the remnant opposition.
When his comrades were compromised by the dictator,
He remained true to his singular mission.
Betrayed and cheated, he does not falter.
His love for Uganda has no moderation.
He sacrificed the comforts of exile at the altar.
This paragon of defiance is my inspiration.

IDI AMIN SMILES IN HIS GRAVE

Idi Amin Dada smiles in his grave;
He is not Uganda's vilest dictator.
Today's tyrant surpassed him wave after wave.
How low has sank the expired liberator!

Apollo Milton Obote smiles in his grave;
He is not Uganda's most cunning demagogue.
Today's tyrant shamelessly lies – no one can save.
Deceit is perfected by the shameless rogue.

Tito Okello smiles in his grave;
He is not Uganda's most tactless leader.
Today's autocrat issues wordless orders from above.
Everything of value is swindled by the leader.

HE HAS NO MIRROR

He surrounds himself with Yes Men.

He consults only sycophants.

He listens to those who coat the truth.

He lost touch with realities on the ground.

He lives inside a thick bubble.

He lies to himself that he is the beloved leader.

He has spineless bootlickers for advisors.

He has clinging arse-wipes for aides.

He has cold calculating snakes for ministers.

He jailed all who criticised his actions.

He killed all who debated his ideas.

He disappeared all who spoke truth to power.

He has no mirror and walks about naked.

NOW THAT HE IS PRESIDENT

When he was a guerrilla,
We fed his troops with cassava, maize and millet.
Now that he is president,
He feeds us with pain, tear gas and bullets.

When he was a rebel leader,
We hid him in our grass-thatched huts.
Now that he is president,
He defends those who steal our land with guts.

When he was a freedom fighter,
We raised our hopes of freedom inside his struggle.
Now that he is president,
We are locked up in prisons – our life, a haggles.

When he was a liberator,
We dreamt Uganda on the road to development.
Now that he is president,
We are dying of corruption, poverty and unemployment.

When he was fighting in the bush,
We gave him our sons to boost his troops.
Now that he is president,
Our children sleep in graves – buried with our hope.

NEPOTISM

The first husband heads our country.

The first lady heads a ministry.

The first son heads our army.

The first daughter heads a church.

This is nepotism!

The first uncle heads our bank.

The first aunt heads a board.

The first niece heads a parastatal.

The first nephew heads the police.

This is nepotism!

SOILED OPPOSITION

The opposition turns on itself.

One party bites chunks out of another.

Another party fragments into impotent parts.

Yet another party whores itself to the incumbent.

Soiled opposition parties entrench dictatorship.

Some opposition elites feed from the tyrant's palms.

Others are buckets for the dictator's stool.

Some are mines planted in the pariah.

Others are moles selling opposition secrets.

Soiled opposition elites serve the dictatorship.

WHY I LOVE HIM

I fell in love with him at marches,
As we chanted protest slogans
And carried handmade placards.
He restored my lost trust in Ugandan men.

I opened myself to him in bits.
As we distributed protest tee-shirts
And paid police bond for arrested comrades.
He renewed my faith in opposition activism.

I felt my heart aching for him,
As the anti-riot police handcuffed him
And he continued singing freedom songs.
He revived my belief in non-violent defiance.

I gave my life to him forever
As we dreamt of liberating Uganda
And planned to rewrite the failings of the dictatorship.
He rebuilt my hope in Uganda's re-awakening.

I yielded my future to him
As he prepared his elections campaign
And offered himself as a new leader.
He opened my eyes to new beginnings.

DO NOT PULL ME DOWN

Do not pull the logs out of my fire on a hot day.

You need it to cook food for the soldiers.

Do not dismiss the cartoons that I draw.

You need them to make traitors laugh at themselves.

Do not ban the songs that I compose.

You need them to inspire the revolution.

Do not tear the effigies I build.

You need them to absorb the rioters' anger.

Do not disperse the crowds gathering on streets.

You need them to shake autocracy and tyranny.

Do not denigrate and despise my efforts.

You need them to go where you will never dare.

Do not undermine the opposition.

You need us to oust shameless pariahs.

Author's Note on Volume II

After successfully smuggling a notebook full of poems from prison, I am now encouraged to write a second volume of poems. There are a lot of untold stories boiling here in Luzira Women Prison. I will fashion them into poems that can be smuggled out of here even though I remain. I dedicate these poems to all women locked up in prisons in Uganda and the world over.

16th June 2019

VOLUME II

Part 2:1: **Prison Life**

PRISON'S LABOUR PARTIES

Prisoners give labour to the prison.
On admission, each is allocated a party.
The elderly and ill get less taxing parties.
Youths and the strong go to laborious parties.
Light duty party sweeps the prison paths,
Gathers and transfers rubbish to the pits.
Victims of accidents and survivors of operations,
Pregnant women, mothers of infants and the elderly,
Bean-sorting party takes most of the older adults.
They sit on the floor of the veranda besides the store.
They bend their backs to sort beans from weevils.
They gossip about all prison news as they work.
Bed shamba party has youthful prisoners
Who dig the earth and sow seeds.
They water seedlings and weed the beds
They might share some yields from the gardens.
Cabbages, tomatoes, onions and carrots,
Green peppers, bamia, egg plants and greens.
Main shamba party has strong youths
Who daily bend their backs over hand-held hoes
And dig the main gardens of the prison.
Tailoring party has a few skillful prisoners
Who cut and sew uniforms for all prisoners
Sometimes they sew commercial orders
brought in by the O.C. Prison.
Beautification party maintains the vast compound.

ESCAPEE

Fiercely wild-eyed,
She reminds me of a wounded buffalo.
She climbed over the prison wall
And ran home to freedom.
Her prison uniform reads ESCAPEE!

Husky and soft-voiced,
She's like a mother singing lullabies.
She lay low-hidden in the elephant grass.
She hired a *bodaboda* to freedom.
Her prison uniform reads ESCAPEE!

Skin rashes cover her body.
She converses captivatingly to the ward.
She tricked her prison escort to hospital
And hid inside the pharmacy.
Her prison uniform reads ESCAPEE!

MONTHLY DONATIONS

She weaves mats from her prison bed.

Papyrus bought monthly from the outside market,

Dyed purple, orange, red, green, yellow

She bends her imprisoned back.

Weaving in and weaving out,

She pulls the papyrus strips,

Adds fresh ones to the long edge.

Her blinding eyes tear,

As daylight fades inside the prison ward.

She hums tunes as she weaves...

Stretches her aching back.

She sews the border hems of each mat.

And rolls the mat for display.

Each mat bought by a prisoner

Brings money to send home monthly to her children.

TWO MANDAZIS ONLY

The currency in this prison

Is *mandazi* bought at the canteen.

Washing a prison blanket

Costs two *mandazis* only.

Chopping or ferrying firewood

Costs two *mandazis* only.

Digging for a fellow prisoner

Costs two *mandazis* only.

Cleaning the bathroom floor

Costs two *mandazis* only.

Carrying the ward tray heaped with bowls

Costs two *mandazis* only.

Emptying the bucket of soiled pads

Costs two *mandazis* only.

THE OC HAS COWS

The prison OC has cows
Tended by female prisoners.
Cleaning the cow shelters,
Scooping up cow dung,
Brushing the cows' big teeth,
Soaping and rinsing their hides,
Smearing wounds with ointments,
Spraying with insecticide to kill ticks,
Cutting elephant grass for feeding,
Carrying bales of grass on their heads,
Refilling water barrels for drinking,
Milking the udders of the cows,
Delivering milk to buyers each day,
Yet the prisoners never drink this milk.

MURDER CONVICTS LEAD US

Murder convicts lead our prison wards.
Serving some of the longest sentences,
Their homes are now the prison grounds.
Their loyalties are to the prison authorities.
They snitch about all manner of pettiness.
They lie about prisoners who do not bribe them.
They punish prisoners who refuse to worship them.
They transfer prisoners who cannot conform.
They cut off the hair of prisoners who are loud.
I have seen ward leaders beating up prisoners,
Punching and kicking them for something small.
I have watched ward leaders plotting mob justice,
Compelling a group of in-mates to beat a prisoner.
Murder convicts with a murderous streak,
These ward leaders can murder one's name.
I have heard them gossiping about prisoners,
Discussing the assumed crimes of suspects,
Spreading lies about matters they know not,
Killing the reputation of an innocent one.
Ward leaders forget they are mere prisoners.
They assume the authority of state punishers.
They terrorise in-mates in their wards.
Murder convicts lead us in prison.
Are prisons breeding more murderers?

FRESHLY SENTENCED

Handcuffed,

He sat beside me in the prison bus.

Freshly sentenced,

He confided he was upset.

I offered my ears.

Glistening eyes,

He wondered who would take his wife.

Voice breaking,

He feared his sons may run down his business.

I offered my silence.

Resurrecting,

He plans to study finance during his sentence.

Hopeful,

He asked me for my phone number.

I give him this poem.

HANDCUFFS

Handcuffs...

Cold metals,

Circular and hollow,

A hinge joint in the middle.

Shackles...

Powerful marks of captivity,

Depriving us of our liberty,

Binding the outstretched hands of one.

Binding two prisoners by a hand each.

No handcuffs for most women!

Handcuffs clinking in embrace,

Contracting with each twist of resistance.

Your handcuffs slide off my tongue.

I shoot you down with words.

PRISON IS A FUCK

In and out,
In and out,
Prison is just like a fuck!
Thicker the thrusts,
And then thinner.
Crying gently,
Moaning softly,
Wailing loudly,
Frantic and frenzied,
Faster, faster, faster,
And then slow...
Gasp!
In and out,
In and out,
Deep, deeper, deepest,
Sometimes shallow,
Earth-moving,
Life-changing,
Or just a passage of wasted time.
Prison is really a fuck.
Convicts come in,
Convicts go out.
Suspects come in,
Suspects go out.
Wardresses come in,
Wardresses go out.
Prison is a fuck.
No fuck lasts forever...

FUTILE TO CONFISCATE MY NOTES

Why do prison wardresses confiscate
my notebooks of handwritten poetry?
Does a mango tree stop bearing
fruit because we eat its mangoes?
Do white ants stop flying from
anthills because our children feast on them?
Does one stop breathing out
because one has farted?

Why do prison wardresses interrogate
fellow prisoners who talk with me?
Does a bird ever stop singing
when among other birds of a feather?
Does the wind stop whispering
because a scarecrow is moving?
Does the thunder stop rumbling
because scared children cry?

Why do prison wardresses censor
and deny my books entering prison?
Does a reader need written texts
when one can read faces and bodies?
Does a singer need a hymn book
To sing songs memorised as a child?
Do I need my children's letters
yet I remember their tight hugs?

GREY HAIRD PRISONERS

Bent backs in prison uniforms,
Wrinkled shiny black skins,
Black vessels crisscrossing under skins,
Thin wiry legs slowed down with age,
Toothless gums eating mashed prison food,
The remains of cracked teeth,
Incoherent lisp whispered,
A single coiled grey hair of a moustache,
Failing eyesight enhanced by spectacles,
Big ears-hard of hearing,
Diabetes, high blood pressure, aches.
Dysfunctional kidneys,
Frequent urination smelling in uniforms,
Grey haired prisoners with fading memories.

ENDURING MEMORIES OF MURDERERS

When she chops up an onion,

She remembers chopping her husband,

When she mops the prison floor,

She smells the blood she mopped years ago.

When she holds a hoe in the prison *shamba*,

She recalls hitting her stepdaughter's head with a hoe.

When she stirs sugar into her porridge,

She remembers stirring poison in her lover's soup.

When smoke floats from the prison kitchen,

She remembers roasting her co-wife in a hut.

When a baby cries maddeningly non-stop,

She recalls her baby's cries inside the septic tank.

When a prisoner sprays her body with perfume,

She smells the cheap perfume in her co-wife's coffin.

MENSTRUAL PADS ARE CURRENCY

Once a month at Luzira Women Prison,

Women prisoners get menstrual pads.

One packet each prisoner!

Heavy flow? One packet each.

Light flow? One packet each.

Early pregnancy? One packet each.

Elderly prisoners receive none.

Menstrual pads are currency here;

In-mates exchange pads for good food.

Pads exchanged for plaiting hair,

Pads exchanged for washing a blanket,

Pads exchanged for chopping firewood.

Some in-mates steal menstrual pads.

Some in-mates with pads have no panties.

KITINTALE FILLS UP AGAIN

The pit latrine is called Kitintale.

Two tiny holes at the bottom of LWP

Serve over six hundred women prisoners.

Every three months or less,

Kitintale fills up again.

Its contents overflow onto the floor.

The prisoners cleaning Kitintale

Blockade the doors with heavy logs.

They bolster these logs with huge rocks.

Women prisoners shit in the open *shamba*.

Others shit on papers tossed behind wards.

Others shit in menstrual hygiene pails.

Others shit in prison rags for mopping.

When Kitintale fills up again,

I loathe being a woman prisoner at Luzira.

PRISONERS' RECORDS

Prison receptionists record

Scars on our bodies,

Tattoos etched on our skins,

Body marks and stretch marks,

Discolouration and beauty spots,

The number of our teeth,

The gaps in our teeth.

They measure our height,

Photograph our up-close bust,

Capture our thumbprints.

Prison nurses collect a blood sample,

Take a urine sample,

Harvest our sputum,

They measure our weight.

THE POSSESSIONS OF A PRISONER

Political prisoners are elevated.

We sit way above all other prisoners.

As a female political prisoner

I got two new prison uniforms,

Two used ugly prison blankets,

One used plastic bowl for food,

And a space on the floor to sleep.

With time I gained from barter trade.

I got two prison shorts from long timers

And two prison skirts from tailors.

I inherited a blanket from a discharge

and her old pink bath-towel.

By all standards in this prison,

I am a very wealthy political prisoner.

YOUR AESTHETIC STANDARDS!

My writing fails to meet your aesthetic standards!
Pooh to your bourgeois snobbery!
Your aesthetic what-what again?
Bitch, I penned my pieces on the prison floors.
My sounding boards were suspected vagabonds.
Yes, they still charge Ugandans as rogue and vagabond.
Druggies and junkies offered some rhymes.
Prison rehabilitates them with methadone.
Idle and disorderly suspects approved the rhythm.
I sleep in a prison ward renown for ideas.
Convicts of common nuisance passed the meter.
Sex workers and fraudsters approved lines.
Impersonators and thieves approved lines.
Suspects of murder and assault gave symbols.
Suspects of manslaughter advised on ideas.
Political prisoners cried at some stanzas.
Prison wardresses confiscated some poems.
Prisoners hid and protected my writings.
Who said I was writing for a doctor of English?
Who lied to you that your standard counts?
Dictator Museveni took offence from my pieces.
His sycophants huffed and puffed in response.
Would beautiful poems dethrone a tyrant?
Would your style unseat this old fart?
Would prisoners sit and listen to you?
Bitch please, your uppity nose is freezing.
Stick your aesthetics up your sweet arse!
Aesthetic standards, my foot!

VOLUME II

Part 2:2: **Feminist Issues**

SAPPHO OPPORTUNITIES

Meet me in the bathroom
When in-mates are watching favourite soaps.
The bathroom bulb blew!
We can soap each other's bodies,
Rub our bodies together,
And finger long-forgotten pathways.
This time round,
I'll be gentle with your nipples.

Meet me in the chicken house
When in-mates are attending fellowship prayers.
The coffee-husks on the floor are fresh.
We can lie on their cushion,
Make love like two rabbits.
Our moans will be drowned by the clucks.
This time is your turn
To look out for snitches and Peeping Toms.

Meet me at the back of the classrooms
When in-mates meet for school-parade.
The guard posted there dozes off.
We can stealthily tiptoe past her.
I will kiss your imprisoned lips
And rain will fall from your fountain.
Stolen kisses between women prisoners
Make us human—not immoral!

PROFESSOR HYPOCRITE

You write tomes on this and that,
Yet you refuse to testify once in court.
You posture as an authority to be cited,
Yet you will not bring your head to the dock.
You push your turgid publications down throat,
Yet you refuse to be an expert witness.
You jet in and out to give paid lectures,
Yet you will not drive five minutes to court.
You spend years writing for obscure journals,
Yet you will not speak once to defend a suspect.
You stand in class pumping stuff into students,
Yet you are spineless as a defense witness.
You publish with a keen eye on promotion,
Yet you refuse to speak in defense of a poem.

TOO RISKY TO BE YOUR WITNESS

Too risky to be your defense witness!
There is a lot, a lot, a lot to lose.
Too much at stake...
Starting with my respectability!
Too dangerous to be associated with you!
It signals outright opposition to the government.
My businesses will be targeted and overtaxed.
The intelligence will be ordered to investigate me.
I will be waylaid, hijacked and disappeared.
The safehouses are not yet full of detainees.
I will be kidnapped if I testify for you.
My children are too young to be orphaned.
My job—I fear unemployment or demotion.
My landlord will raise the rent or evict me.
The dictatorship isolated and alienated you.
Nobody wants to be seen in your camp.
You dared to criticize and spite the tyrants.
A leper, a reproach, an outcast—scarlet woman!
You are a fire too hot to warm oneself with.
You are water too turbulent to swim in.
I will be buried in an unmarked mass grave.
My ghost will roam perpetually.
Too unsafe and insecure to ally with you!
My bourgeois credentials will crash.
There's a conflict of interest right there.
You are the voice of my conscience.
You are the voice that I silence daily.

THE MAGISTRATE

Blood-red lipstick,
War paint smeared over biting lips,
Pumpkin-orange skin,
Camouflage to project feminine delicateness,
Fierce black spectacles,
Telltale signs of ruthlessness,
Cross-eyed vulnerably,
She banned camera flashes in the court.
Protruding forehead,
Brain crammed with bible verses,
Long black Brazilian weave,
Stylish vanity hides kinky *kaweke*.
Elfish ears sticking out,
Her instructions are "Orders from Above!"

THE AWARD (IN PRISON)

A delegation from North, Central, East and West
Came to prison bearing my award:
A golden fist boldly facing heaven.
“Human Rights Activist-2018” it read.
Community organisers from all over Uganda,
Community activists working on different causes,
Honoured me with their captive audience.
I sat on the prison floor before them.
I received them dressed in my prison uniform.
They introduced themselves and their work.
I had no special speech prepared for them.
I had no tea or coffee to offer them.
They brought me a heavy Easter package:
Rice, Sugar, Spaghetti, potatoes, onions,
cooking oil, soap, toothpaste, toilet paper and a sponge.
A prison guard sat through my award ceremony.
I was deeply honoured by this visit.
Their solidarity greatly encouraged me.
It re-immersed me into the community.
It tore apart the illusion of isolation.
The award brought re-affirmation.
It strengthened my resolve and commitment.
This recognition negated all condemnation.
It greatly re-energised me.
I was denied permission to keep my award in prison.
I held onto it and pressed it to my bosom.
I sent the award home for my daughter to keep.
I hope my children draw courage from it.
I pray it encourages my children to persevere.
I cherish the award I received in prison.

NOT MY MUMMY!

Aargh, this national mania of paternalism!
The dictator calls citizens his grandchildren.
"Bazukulu", he patronisingly refers to us.
Sycophants call his ring wife, *"Mama Janet"*.
The madness trickles down into our prison.
Women prisoners call the head, *"Mummy OC."*
Women prisoners call staff *"Mukulu Mama"*
Even ward leaders are *"Katikiro Maama!"*
I refuse to reproduce this madness.
Just as the dictator is not my granny,
His ring wife is not my mummy,
The prison OC is not my mummy,
Prison staff are not my mummy,
And prison ward leaders are not my mummy!

OUR SAFETY IS HER SAFETY TOO

Aida missed the Women's Protest March.

She lay in bed as we marched against insecurity.

We protested against kidnaps of women in Uganda.

She watched a movie on her LCD flat screen.

She should have marched for women's security.

But no, not Aida the Minister!

She was not interested in opposition gimmicks.

She enjoyed the illusion of her party's security.

She is the dictator's side dish.

And then

A motorbike rider tried to kill her.

It dawned on her that our plight is hers too.

The murder of Ugandans is now her project.

She is a broken record on the topic.

Our safety is her safety too.

SHE GOT TWENTY YEARS

Beautiful sad eyes

Inviting pouting lips,

Etched with kisses from her murder victim.

Fragile long neck,

Succulent millet brown breasts,

Long nipples suckled by two infant sons.

Wasp-like waist,

Wide hips akin to a Coca Cola bottle,

Tempting jiggling buttocks,

Tough back,

Supporting strong idle eggs,

A lonely wasted womanhood.

Punished for a crime she denies...

She got twenty years for killing her husband.

VOLUME II

Part 2:3: For Uganda

NO ROSES FROM MY MOUTH

There will be no roses
Falling out of my mouth.
Who brings fleeting beauty to war?
Instead there are razor blades and axes,
Chainsaws, knives and machetes,
Daggers, swords and bayonets.
My words cut up our enemies.

There will be no honey
Dripping out of my mouth.
Who brings sweetness to war?
Instead there are punches and slaps,
Hammers, pickaxes and chisels,
Bulldozers, tankers and under-cuts.
My words knock out our oppressors.

There will be no perfume
Spreading from my mouth.
Who cares for aesthetics during war?
Instead there are *bazookas* and bullets,
Grenades, torpedoes and missiles,
Machine guns, AK47s and Kalashnikovs.
My words blow up the tyrants.

There will be no orgasm
Coming from my mouth.
Who cares about pleasure during war?
Instead there is venom and acid,
Bombs, landmines and nukes,
Poisonous gas and bioweapons.
My words destroy our haters.

REDEEMING THE UGANDA FLAG

Thread me a needle
And I will mend the Uganda flag.
The bullet wounds in the fabric—
Far too many to go unsewn.
Armed violence tears the heart of our flag.
Don't the tyrants see the holes in our flag?

Beat me soap bubbles
And I will soak the Uganda flag.
The blood stains in the cloth
Run too deep and too dark.
British torture pours blood on our flag.
Don't the tyrants smell the blood in our flag?

Put charcoal in the iron-box
And I will iron the Uganda flag.
Ugly creases in the material,
Highlight the shame of those hiding it.
Farting at patriotism mocks our flag,
Don't the tyrants know the pride of Uganda?

Raise up a flag post
And I will fly at full mast the Uganda flag.
The values and honour of this symbol
Represent my patriotic commitment.
Histories of betrayal cannot negate our flag.
Don't the tyrants know Uganda will outlive them?

KILOMETRES OF ROADS

Will our children eat kilometres of new roads?
Shall mothers peel and cook these kilometres of fresh tarmac?
Shall we slice off the kilometres of new roads to feed dependents?
What spices go well with new kilometres of roads?
Do we steam, bake, roast or fry these kilos of new roads?

Will we treat our ill relatives with kilometres of new roads?
Does malaria cure with kilometres of new roads?
Do children defecate tapeworms when they sit on the new roads?
Do coughs and colds disappear when walking on these roads?
Are these kilometres of new roads the magic bullet to our social ills?

Will children wear clothes cut from these new roads?
Shall we pay rent in the currency of kilometres of roads?
Will the kilometres of new roads buy us schoolbooks?
Do new roads hug our sons and daughters?
Shall the new roads stop fathers from beating mothers?

What of the kickbacks from these new roads?
How many billions were siphoned off?
How many billions went to foreign engineers?
How many homes were torn down for the roads?
There's no medicine in your kilometres of roads!

HE CRIES AT MERE POETRY

Yes, I am the Bitch Boss!
I will grab the tyrant by his balls,
Fling him onto the floor,
Pull off his camouflage pants,
Sniff at his chunky foreskin,
And bitch-slap him with my long labia.
He cries at mere poetry...
What a cry-baby, oh-oh!
He ran to the CID headquarters
Crying, "Her poem is foul!"
Surely he was never circumcised.
A true initiate does not cry about poems.
He stands tall and screams, "*Ngumire!*"
As the knife slices off his childhood.

THEY MUST BE SCHIZOPHRENIC

They want me to upbraid the dictator with sweet apples,
To rebuke him with sweetened milk and honey,
To reproach him with a thick slice of red velvet cake,
To revile him with spicy kebabs seasoned with mild chillies,
To punish him with a single tot of Baileys,
To condemn him with strawberry jam spread on fresh bread,
To ridicule him with a mug of hot chocolate,
To cane him with skewers of *muchomo* interspersed with vegetables,
To condemn him with chocolate chip cookies,
To criticise him with beautiful love songs,
To oust him from power with praise poetry...
Who does that?
They must be schizophrenic!

PISS AND SHIT AT MAKERERE UNI

Yoweri pisses all over Makerere University.
The ivory tower fellates his mighty phallus.
His wife cleans her arse meticulously.
Her soiled arse-wipes are education policy reforms.
The presidential piss paralyzes the heads at the university.
Professors with big heads full of
Yowerian piss!!!
Scared students and stifled scholars
silently studying!
The Presidential dung clogs our educational systems.
University structures and organs smeared with shit!!!
Tell Barnabas to man up and stop
The piss and shit at Makerere Uni.

NOT MY GRANDFATHER

No, you are not my grandfather!
I refuse to yield my ancestry over to you.
I reject your efforts at familiarising me.
My grandfather's hugs transfer safety.
Your iron fist hugs guns, gold and our government.
My grandfather speaks wisdom in his toilet.
Your billion-shillings toilet is driven to you.
My grandfather protects our inheritance.
You rape, molest and murder Uganda's legacy
My grandfather tells jokes, riddles and legends
You threaten, intimidate and condemn.
Idiots, cowards, users and jesters call you grandfather.
But I call you a treacherous traitor.

INSIDE THE DICTATOR'S DEEP FREEZER

Inside the dictator's deep freezer:
Frozen brains of Uganda's critical thinkers,
Fresh Adam's apples and voice boxes of critics,
Slices of pink tongues covered with black dots,
Long spinal columns removed whole,
Pumping hearts of fearless citizens,
Patellas and knee joints of protesters,
Raised fists chopped off from defiant bodies,
Tonnes of guts mixed with balls of the brave,
Eyeballs gouged out of opposition visionaries,
Dashed hopes of freedom and liberation,
Dreams of revolution and regime change.
Inside the dictator's deep freezer...

THEY EAT OUR TAX MONEY!

Eh Mama rest!
Do not witness this bad upbringing.
How they eat our tax money!
The way they bite into it,
It must be delicious!
Chunk after chunk after chunk...
They bite and chew—
Mostly on their own.
Some close their eyes in concentration.
Some dim the eyes to focus on the task at hand.
Many keep their eyes wide and alert.
Their hearts loudly thud.
Cold sweat runs down their backs.
How noisy the chomping of their teeth!
The thick chunks dance *dombolo* in their throats.
Fat tongues slither to lick stray bits.
And when they swallow, Mama,
It is big!
How their Adam's apples bob up and down!
Their eyes moisten with pure satisfaction.
Their belching is deep and thunderous.
Their flatulence is loud and skunk-like.
Their wobbly bellies testify to this.
They salivate in between chunky bites.
Addicted,
They get erections at the thought of tax.
These gluttonous rapists of our public purse!

JUSTICE IS A MOCKERY IN UGANDA

Justice is a fuck in Uganda
When it is not an outright violation.
The dictator overrides the workings of justice
Just like a virus infecting, modifying, killing its host.
Courtrooms are his winnowing sieves.
Suspects come in already condemned.
Magistrates are his choice phallus
for violently raping suspects' rights.
Don't you smell our bleeding arses in the courts?
The quest for justice sodomised our civil liberties.
State prosecutors are callously lawless.
Court orderlies pluck bribes for magistrates.
The guilty buy themselves out of due punishment.
The poor cannot survive injustices of the court.

AINEBYONA DRINKS BRIBES

Ainebyona, the court orderly
Carefully reads the bodies of suspects.
He picks out those willing to buy freedom.
Ainebyona, the uniformed policeman
Smells the desperate a mile away.
He pounces onto them, tears and draws blood.
Ainebyona, the *Afande*
Collects their crocodile tears inside his head.
Plight stories will be used against them in future.
Ainebyona, the con man
Draws out their confidences and confessions.
They spill their insides and admit guilt.
Ainebyona, the businessman
Calculates the highest possible bribe money.
He drinks their cash and disappears their case files.

MINISTER'S ORDERS, MY ARSE!

She hears voices in her head,
Voices others do not hear,
Voices telling her to kill,
Sometimes they tell her great jokes,
And she breaks out laughing loudly;
The frenzied laughter of the insane.
She is in prison on Minister's Orders.

The voices say it is okay to skip bathing.
They say she need not comb her hair.
They say she can fly from a rooftop.
They told her to climb over a rooftop.
They told her to climb over the prison wall.
She kicked a prison guard in obedience to the voices.
She is in prison on Minister's Orders.
The voices say, "Minister's Orders, my arse!"

I CAME TO YOUR COURT FOR POLITICS

I did not come to your court for justice.
I came to continue poking the leopard's anus.
I did not enter your court for a legal battle.
I was already condemned before I came in.
I did not come seeking a fair trial.
I came to this court for politics.
Looking to David with his sling and two stones,
This underdog came to fight and win.
I refused your offer of a seat in the suspect's dock.
I never asked you for bail.
I boycotted court when you denied me a
court order for my medical records in jail.
I maintained my silence when you refused
to translate the amended charges into Luganda.
I asked you to recuse yourself from my case
I asked you to summon the president to court
I asked you to issue an arrest warrant for the director of CID
My presence in your court as a suspect and prisoner
highlights multiple facets of dictatorship
I exposed the entrenchment of autocracy
I confirmed the curtailing of free expression
I demonstrated state punishment for regime critics
I showcased the tyrants abuse of the judiciary
I witnessed myriads of injustices of the justice system
I never came to your court seeking for justice
I came to your court to play the game of politics
I refuse to be a mere spectator
in the struggle to oust the worst dictator.

Author's Note on Volume III

The first copy of these poems was confiscated by prison staff on 19th December 2019. Luckily, I had a draft version of the notes. I have recreated these poems from the rough drafts. Hopefully, I will manage to beat their surveillance and confiscation. WORD UP!

Stella Nyanzi.

VOLUME III

Part 3:1: **Prison Life**

HONOUR INSTEAD OF SHAME

I wear this maximum security prison
As one wears a medallion of honour.

You see; for me –

There's no shame in being in jail.

I show off this prison sentence
as an American officer boasts his medal of honor.

I celebrate this punishment in prison
as Virgin Mary endured her pregnancy of Jesus.

I persevere through this detention
as Joseph braved the cellars in Potiphar's house.

I fortify myself with Daniel in the lion's den.

I look up to Paul and Silas in jail.

Their testimonies were born in the womb of prison

I am here as neither petty offender

Nor as a hardened hardcore criminal.

I am here as a prisoner of conscience.

I am here as a political prisoner.

I am here as an example to other regime critics.

My incarceration serves to deter other truth tellers.

I am here supposedly as a fallen dissident.

I am a mirror to those who silence truth.

I am here as a writer punished for a poem.

My heartfelt poem offended the dictator.

And so I stand tall in this prison.

I am a prisoner with honour not shame.

NO MEDICINE AGAIN

We scratch our detained dark vulvas.
Vulvas itching sweeter than anuses with pin worms.
They not only itch persistently,
But they also leak profusely.
Alas, no medicine again at the prison sickbay!

We cough deep from our captive congested chests.
Wretched coughs echoing through the prison wards.
Dry coughs that burn like new fires.
Wet coughs drawing smelly yellow catarrh.
Alas, no medicine again at the prison sickbay.

We support our protruding worm-filled bellies.
Bellies compressing urinary tract infections.
Bellies running with stools too fluid to be true.
Bellies that emit loud smelly gases.
Alas, no medicine again at the prison sickbay.

We painfully hunch our imprisoned backs.
Backs bent low with fevers or fatigue,
Backs supporting diabetes, high blood pressure or arthritis,
Backs injured in accidents or during torture.
Alas, no medicine again at the prison sickbay!

NO BAIL

Let's clear the air.
Settle this absurd matter.
Lay it to rest once and for all.
When I refused to ask for bail,
I was well within my constitutional rights.
Period. No buts, no ifs, no whatnots.
Contrary to public demand,
Going against the grain,
Acting in my best interest,
I instructed my defense lawyers:
Not to apply for bail,
Not to apply for "bail pending appeal".
This was effective defiance par excellence.
It burst the dictator's bubble.
It took the wind out of the regime's sails.
It left the prosecution scratching its clueless heads.
It sent the dictatorship searching for its deflated penis.
The magistrate cannot give what I never asked.
I denied her the power to deny me bail.
Refusing bail was a gem of our legal strategy.
Knowing I was convicted before I was arrested,
I started serving my sentence before my judgement.
Refusing bail was a highlight of our publicity.
How journalists' tongues wagged about it!
How political analysts dissected and debated it!
How it challenged lazy lawyers' thinking.
Legal defense is much more than getting bail!

ASIO DIED IN PRISON

Asio died in prison today.
We watched her thinning day by day.
Thin, thinner, thinnest – dead.
Convicted for many long years,
Asio stopped taking her ARVs.
She stopped hoping about tomorrow.
She stopped believing in God.
She stopped all the illusions.
She stopped even the delusions.
Her heart stopped beating.
Her brain shut down.
Her big brown eyes shut one last time.
Two prisoners washed her dead body.
Yes – Nankya and Namata washed her.
She was wrapped in a prison blanket.
Her prison uniform will go to a new prisoner.
Her prison bowl will go to a new prisoner.
Her prison duties will go to a new prisoner.
Her space on the floor will go to another.
Her remaining ARVs will be kept for emergency.
Asio's friends in prison will not bury her.
There will be no funeral service.
There will be no night vigil held for her.
Asio will only remain in whispers.
Her prison number stays on the record.
There are many other Asios—
Prisoners who die in Uganda's prisons.
Asio died in prison today.

PRISONS' BATHROOMS

Bathrooms without showers,
No bathtubs or sinks,
No tablets of soap,
No detergent powder,
No cleaning liquid,
Instead of taps,
Rusting metal contraptions.
Instead of faucets,
gaping black holes.
Toilets without cisterns,
Flash toilets with only broken pipes,
White ceramic squat toilets,
Deeply infested with candida and UTIs,
Washed knickers piled onto rusting nails
The broken bathroom door moulds on a veranda.
Old paint peeling off damp walls,
Filthy walls harbouring fattened germs,
Damp stained ceilings dripping dirt
Onto hurriedly bathing prisoners.
Soiled menstrual pads damped in a corner bucket
The only water storage device-
One insufficient plastic drum
that once carried petrol or diesel.
Just as the broken public systems
These filthy holes are somehow used for hygiene.
Women prisoners perform daily miracles.
They bathe in dirty contaminated spaces.

GROUP PUNISHMENT

Seventy-three women prisoners
Locked inside their prison ward
For three days on end.
Nobody getting outside for fresh air.
Nobody getting a little sunshine.
No spreading of clothes on the grass.
No emptying the full plastic menstrual bucket.
No emptying the plastic garbage bucket.

Seventy-three women prisoners
Sweating inside their prison ward
For three long days on end.
Nobody going to sickbay for medicines.
Nobody going to the offices for management.
No sending flasks outside for refreshments.
No receiving foodstuff from outside.
No taking crockery outside for washing.

Seventy-three women prisoners
Enduring group punishment,
Locked up in their congested prison ward
For three miserable days on end.

BORN AGAIN CHAOS

At the close of day,
After the prison ward is locked,
And the prisoners squeeze onto the congested floor,
They start to sing choruses.
They shake empty tins filled with pebbles.
They beat plastic jerry cans as drums.
They rhythmically clap their hands
And dance fiendishly as if possessed.
Some clearly miss the discos and nightclubs.
A stripper does a strip tease (on the side).
Bored inmates cheer her on.
The Born Again tempo picks up.
When their holy ghost strikes them,
Many scream in strange tongues.
The demoniac springs up
She jumps up from the prison floor.
Sometimes she calls on pussy cats.
Sometimes she sees tall men squeezing her neck.
Sometimes she chats with her dead granny.
Always she punches and kicks violently.
The Born Again inmates lay their hands on her.
"Shabarabadabasheba," they pray in strange tongues.
The demoniac scratches at them.
"Fire!" they scream at her demons.
She runs fast all over watching prisoners.
Stampede...
Born Again inmates chase after her.
They bump into buckets, pouring water all over.
They knock into flasks that break as loud as bombs.
They step on idle ward mates who insult them.
Insults swapped with bible verses.
This holy ghost is cantankerous.
The Born Again ruckus ensues.
The demoniac somersaults.
She lands on staring prisoners.
The rhythmic handclaps continue.

The thumping of jerry cans heightens.
The hysteria does not dissipate.
The rhythm of shakers does not stop.
This is fellowship gone crazy.
This is routine Born Again chaos.

EPILEPTIC IN PRISON

Nakato – with the midnight black skin
And the long straight-permed hair
Wears her prison uniform like a robe.
A village beauty hailing from Mukono,
She cracks jokes that break the ribs.
She springs up to dance when the TV shows music.
She washes blankets for rich prisoners
And braids the hair of inmates for pay.
But on some bad nights in this prison,
Nakato gets epilepsy attacks.
She drops onto the prison floor.
She kicks her feet frenziedly.
Her body spasms with violent fits.
Foam and blood pour from her mouth.
She grunts like an animal in pain.
She stretches painfully.
And then she collapses in a still heap.
Her urine trickles between her legs.
She sleeps in the congested corridor.
Many prisoners move as far away as possible.
Many prisoners do not share anything with her.
They fear the waters from an epileptic.
They whisper about the curse of epilepsy.
Only sister Gloria cleans away the refuse
And Janet helps Nakato to bathe.

I CUT OFF MY DREADLOCKS

The morning after my miscarriage,
I shaved my head bare.
I cut off my thick long dreadlocks.
I laid down my kinky crown,
To pay my last respects
And bid my dead child farewell.
I instructed Joweria my prison maid
To bring her green scissors
And chop, chop, chop off the ropes.
As each dreadlock fell to the floor
I got some relief from the mass of pain;
Pain sitting grandly in my heart.
With the loss of my hair grown with dedication,
I laid to rest my child I would never grieve
Because I was locked up in prison.
There was no funeral service.
There was no mourners' gathering.
There was no requiem mass.
My dead child received no decent burial.
Instead, the prison cleaners
Dumped my miscarried fetus
And its accompanying placenta
Into the hospital's garbage pit.
My dead child was roughly disposed of
along with biohazardous medical refuse-
Interspersed with used syringes, gloves and cotton wool.
How disrespectfully my dead child was sent off!
I was given no corpse for my partner.
He never dug a grave in his family graveyard.
My children had no sibling to bury.
My relations had no body to grieve.
The clan leaders held no funeral rites.
There was no obituary in the news.
Nobody called out your name.
A prisoner's dead are not respected.
And so I cut off my dear dreadlocks

To pay my last respects
To the baby I miscarried in prison.

(R.I.P Justice Freedom Musiri – Died 3rd January 2019)

CLOSURE

To help you find closure,
 We buried Eric
In the wet earth of Luzira Women Prison.
 We exorcised Eric-
 The husband you loved dearly,
The man you are convicted of murdering,
 The father of your two sons,
 The victim you never buried,
For you were dragged off to the police,
 Still dressed in your nighty.
 They drove you away,
 When your screams pierced the night,
After you found him dead in your bedroom:
 His head in a pool of his own blood,
 A metallic bar lying close by.
You were charged with manslaughter,
 That was changed to pure murder.
 Tried, convicted and sentenced!
 Twenty-two years they gave you
 And the nightmares intensified.
 The cold sweats at night heightened.

To help you find closure,
 I drew a picture of Eric
 on a piece of white paper.
You described him in full detail.
 We spent time on his face.
 I dressed him in a suit.
And then we gathered your close friends;
Three women prisoners carrying food knives.
 Just after the rain subsided,
 We walked to the prison's pit latrine.
 We found some fallow ground
 Between the incinerator and pit latrine.
 I looked out for prying eyes.
As the others dug a hole in the soft earth.

And then we buried Eric.
We laid his soul to rest.
You told his ghost to rest,
To never come back to your bed,
To stop disturbing your peace.
You washed yourself with herbs
And the nightmares ceased.
That chapter of your life is done.
That phase is closed.

LICE IN PRISON

We sit packed on prison floors.
We pick lice from each other's bodies.
 We check behind ears
 And probe in the rings of the neck.
 We split the hair at the roots
Search each other's dandruff covered scalps,
 Pick and kill the lice from each other.
 We place each louse on one thumb nail
And squeeze it to death with another thumb nail.
We examine the hemlines of our prison uniforms.
 We probe the seams of these yellow dresses.
 We pick the lice from our meagre clothes.
 Prisoners congested in Luzira's wards.
 Big fat thick-skinned lice
Fattened on the blood of anaemic prisoners.
 Black lice, brown lice, white lice;
 Cross breed lice of indefinite colour.
 Baby lice freshly hatched from shiny eggs,
 Children lice playing in the hair of prisoners,
Youthful lice living large on the blood of prisoners,
 Adult lice making a living out of prisoners,
Elderly lice peacefully retired at Luzira Women's Prison.
 And the O.C. Prison thinks highly of her work!

SLEEK SNEAKER

I perfected the art.
I worked out the formula.
I am as slippery as an eel.
I can guarantee the deal.
I am a skilled mule.
How admirably I sneak out secrets.
How miraculously I transfer contraband.
I am the sleekest sneaker.
Ferrier of poems past prison guards,
I return banned stuff into the prison.
I move around exhibits from ward to ward.
After they confiscated my notebooks,
After they captured my children's letters,
After they withheld my mint and pepper,
After they withdrew my reading books,
I decided to beat them at this game.
I hide letters in menstrual pads
Stuck onto panties I wear to court.
I hide cigarettes in my butt crack.
I conceal whole peppers in cereals.
I disappear money in the leaves of toilet roll.
I stick lighters into toothpaste tubes.
Into prison I smuggle stuff.
I am the sleek sneaker.

BARE HEAD

To punish her
For fighting another prisoner,
The prison guards
Shaved her head bare.
They pulled out their scissors
And shaved her head bare.
The scalp shines
like a Shaolin warrior's.
Her skull is angular,
Scars from older fights exposed!
She cries softly
As her cornrows land on the ground.
Her forehead protrudes like a rock.
Her ears jut out like wings.
Her neck bends low with shame.
Another prisoner punished
Shaved like a recent widow.

WEAVER OF MATS

Between my first *Kalanami* mat –
The red and white one with black squares,
And my last *Kaguudo ka reyilwe* mat;
The complicated crisscross of pink and green,
I became a skilful weaver of mats
Inside the dark walls
of Luzira Women’s Prison.
I wove many mats in the last few months.
I gained skills in the prison’s workshop.
Afande Amulen taught me to dye the *ensansa*.
Dyes of red, purple, green and yellow
Stirred in a big pan filled with water,
Boiling over makeshift cooking stones,
Firewood smoke choking the nostrils,
Bringing tears to the eyes.
Women prisoners singing as we dyed *ensansa*,
Immersing *ensansa* into the boiling dyes,
Changing *ensansa* with sticks and bare hands,
Scooping hot *ensansa* out of the boilers.
Sun drying *ensansa* spread on the grasses,
Women prisoners taught me exquisite designs:
*Kalanami, Kisakatte, Jjiri, Kaguudo ka
reyilwe, Kamunyenyene, Kapeesa, Kagumba
ka ngege, Lutindo, Kyakyi* – you name it!
Katikiro Nakato and inmate Barbara
shared their wisdom on how to weave.
I learnt *okuluka, okusona, okusandaga*.
One day, I will weave you a mat!

AFANDE REGINA TRATTEH

Afande Regina Tratteh,
A beauty by all standards,
Stands tall and upright
On days that she is sober.
Some days she is staggering,
Drunk on duty at the prison.
Red unblinking eyes staring,
She shouts at disobedient prisoners.
She slaps the backs of prisoners
Whenever her temper flares.
Sometimes she canes their buttocks.
One time she kicked a prisoner.
Afande Regina Tratteh
Drily asked me for money
On days she escorted me to court.
I always gave her money
Whenever I could.
Afande Regina Tratteh
Crossed the line of professional standards.
She pulled me out of my prison ward
And asked me for two kilos of rice.
A prison wardress begging a prisoner
for two kilograms of dry rice!
I reported her to her superiors.

BEAUTIFUL *ENDIRO* BASKETS

How beautiful and firm
The *endiro* millet baskets
Crafted from scratch
By Luzira's women prisoners.
The fineness of the designs,
The tight fit of the stitches,
The intricateness of the patterns,
Needles digging in swiftly,
Needles digging out skilfully,
Prisoners' hands pulling *kadeeya* string,
Thumbs guiding the spiral of *bitoogo* reeds.
The patience of crafting takes discipline.
Prisoners learning to practice a virtue.
How artistic and skilful!
The routine hones in our skill.
Afande Anecho taught me
To curve and craft an *endiro*.
I even learnt
to shape its curvaceous cover.
Sky blue and white with black dots,
I made a simple pattern.
I endured cuts from *bitoogo* reeds.
Women prisoners helped me learn
From their vast years of experience.

BIG PLASTIC BUCKETS

With this silver hook,
I crocheted 3 blue and red covers.
They cover the tops of my storage buckets.
Prisoners keep their possessions
In big plastic buckets
Bought exorbitantly
at the prison canteen.
I have nine plastic buckets
stacked behind the door of Ward Two.
I sit them in threes atop each other.
Many prisoners have no single bucket.
We assess each other's wealth
By the number of buckets one has.
Although unemployed and indigent,
I thrived in prison
Because of the kindness of others.
Thank you for filling my buckets.
By looking at my plastic buckets
One knows I am loved outside.

NO TIME FOR PRISON STAFF

I did not come to this prison
To lick the boots of prison staff,
To kiss the arses of guards and wardresses,
To be tossed about by prison escorts.
Although they are desperate for my attention,
I have no time to indulge wardresses.
I am not interested in their opinions.
I refuse their definitions of my status.
They cannot see beyond their noses.
They are lowlife public servants.
They are brainwashed purveyors of propaganda.
They are semi-literate and shallow.
They are narrow-minded robots.
I came to rest my fighting muscles.
I came to rebuild my inner will.
I came to refire and refine.
Fighting prison bots does not appeal to me.
If anything, I feel sorry for prison staff.
Their miserable lives depend on government plans.
I admire nothing about prison staff.
They have liberty but lack freedom.
They merely follow orders.
They must keep in line – 24/7.
They must never act out of step.
Ordinarily, I do not talk with furniture.
Why would I engage with prison's furniture?
I have no time for prison staff.

THE SMELL OF MORNING GLORY

Before brushing their teeth,
They open their mouths
And sing loudly from their hearts.
Bad breath mixed with deep faith!
The prison ward stinks like offals.

Before bathing their bodies,
They raise their arms heavenward
And surrender their hearts to God.
Armpit odour mixed with intercession!
The prison ward stinks like skunks.

Believing women prisoners praise God
Early in the morning.
Beautiful verses raised melodiously,
Improvised harmonies fill the air,
As ward after ward of prisoners
Worships God for a brief moment.

NO REMAND, NO REMISSION!

After the day of one's sentence
A prisoner is given the date of departure.
This confirms the length of the detention.
The countdown to release begins.
When the magistrate pronounces the sentence,
The duration of imprisonment is spelt out.
From this specified prison term,
A prisoner deducts their remand time.
And prison deducts from the balance of the sentence
Remission for good behaviour.
Most prisoners look very forward
To the deductions of Remand and Remission.
But for inmate Janet Lekuru
The prison deducted NO REMAND!
The prison deducted NO REMISSION!
After remand of nine months and two weeks,
She was sentenced to one full year.
Expecting to go home within the month,
She was shocked by the declaration,
"No Remand, No Remission!"
Janet Lekuru is still serving time.

WILL YOU WAIT FOR ME?

Given the long time I have been locked away,
I worry immensely about us.
Our partnership, our marriage,
Our relationship, our affair.
Who else is sharing our bed with you?
Whom do you unwind with at the day's end?
Who covers you when the bedsheets fall aside?
Who calms you down after the nightmares?
Who folds your boxer-shorts these days?
Whose body odour mingles with yours on our pillows?
Who stares at your sleeping form?
Who reminds you to charge your phone battery?
Who turns off the music when you fall asleep?
Whom do you text when you can't fall asleep?
Who do you call when you can't find your key?
Who reminds you to renew the condom stash?
Who cleans away the stubble after you shave?
Prison has preserved my love for you.
Are you preserving your love for me?
Are you still mine after this extended separation?
Will I find you in the arms of another?
Or will you in fact wait for me?
Will you wait for me?

FOR MY CHILDREN

“When are you coming home, Mama?”
The prison guard overhears you whisper.
I hold your hand and stammer:
“Soon, my children, very soon!”
You speak to me in fluent grammar.
Your hushed tones reveal new maturity.
I notice you’ve dropped the childish drama.
You’re developing too rapidly to catch up.
In my absence, your bodies have grown firmer.
The twins started showing moustaches.
My daughter is still as fresh as the summer.
She laughs through her tears with humour.
You’re all demur – sort of calmer.
Deserting you in political sacrifice is my dearest regret.
May you grow as strong as Thor with his hammer.
The three of you are my most exquisite gems!

MONETARY FINES PUNISH THE POOR

There are those of us in prison
Only because of poverty.
Failure to pay minimal fines
Leads to serving lengthy sentences
Given after months of remand custody.
The monetary fine declared in court
Punishes only the poor.
Guilty of stealing a mobile phone,
Avako was fined sixty thousand shillings only
Or six months locked up in prison.
She has served four months so far.
Guilty of being idle and disorderly,
Musiime was fined one hundred thousand
or eight months locked up in prison.
She is in her third month today.
Arrested while hawking mangoes in the city,
Nakityo was found guilty of being a public nuisance.
Fined one hundred and fifty thousand shillings
or six months locked up in prison,
She is about to complete her prison sentence.
On and on the stories go...
Petty offenders caught in the act,
Pronounced guilty in courts run by the rich,
Given options that make no sense:
“Pay a monetary fine or rot in prison!”
Many fill space in congested prisons.
They are guilty of lacking finances.
They are guilty of lacking monetary capital.

WALLET

At noon, they yawn,
Scratch their bellies,
Clean their blue bowls,
And daydream of good food.
They wait for the three prison gongs
Announcing the day's big meal.
Clumpy *dongo* maize bread
And unspiced boiled beans with salt.
They will queue for their *dongo*.
You wait for your domestic help
To come carrying buckets of hot food
Cooked in the prison's *jokoni* kitchen
By your well-trained cook.
Deep-fried irish potatoes,
White steamed Basmati rice,
Amaranthus brought fresh from a prisoner's garden,
Fried chunks of roast beef,
Slices of avocado,
And a flask of that *mujaaja* tea.
It's the wallet that makes the difference.
One's wallet shapes one's prison life.
The difference between hunger and a full belly
is really the size of your wallet.
All prisoners are equal – given,
but some prisoners are more prisoners
than others!

DEAF AND DUMB IN PRISON

She lost her hearing in prison.
Injections made her deaf.
Hers is now a silent world.
Her existence challenges the system.
Prisoners rely on hearing ears –
To function in all ways.
Take the make-shift bell for example;
A gong compromising an old tyre rim
Hanging from a big tree,
A metal bar for hitting the rim,
And hearing ears leading to response.
One gong announces the fall-in count.
Hit at least thrice a day,
It compels prisoners to drop all and fall-in.
How does she know the fall-in count?
Two gongs declare the fall-in count successful.
How does she know the count is successful?
Should the fall-in count fail,
One other gong calls for a fall-in recount.
How does she know the fall-in recount?
One gong also calls for compulsory lock up
This mainly happens in the rain.
How does she know the compulsory lock up?
Three gongs call prisoners for a meal.
How does she know the times for meals?
How does she survive in this prison?
Prison staff punish her disobediences.
In truth, she is deaf and dumb in prison.

THE DEBTOR

She never knew she would end up in prison
Simply because of failing to refund
Monies she borrowed in desperation
From the money lender –
Three million eight hundred thousand shillings
That is the principal plus interest.
She was shocked by her shameful arrest:
Picked from her shop in the busy mall,
Manhandled by plain-cloth policemen,
Handcuffed unceremoniously,
Dragged down the three storeys of the mall,
Shoved roughly into the waiting double-cabin,
Sirens blared as the vehicle sped off.
Shoppers watched the free circus.
The business community wagged their tongues.
She was even broadcast in the prime news.
She was shocked at how fast she was processed,
Produced in the commercial court at Crusader House.
The unsmiling bailiffs rejected her pleas.
The bored magistrate read her the charges.
She admitted failure to pay by the timelines.
The magistrate sentenced her immediately.
“Six months in prison and repayment!”
No discussion! No debate!
She was ferried to Luzira Women Prison.
The sirens of the double-cabin mocking her loudly.
She wears the yellow uniform like any other prisoner.
She sleeps on the floor like all of us.
She never knew she could end up here as a debtor.

HOW TO VISIT A PRISONER

If you are mature in any way,
Don't cry when you visit a prisoner.
Detention is hard enough on its own.
Stop making prisoners guilty of your tears.
You are visiting us from liberty.
What pain is worse than prison?
Hush, hold your tears.
Shame on you for falling apart
While the troubled prisoner comforts you.
Shame on you for crying your tears
While the wondering prisoner looks on.
Be like my thirteen-year-old twin sons
When they visit me in prison.
Sometimes we debate about justice.
They give me good news from the outside.
Sometimes we discuss current affairs.
We gossip about this and that.
And then they say goodbye.
After we part, as they leave the prison,
They cry, and wail, and wait, and fall apart.
They cry on the long drive home from prison.
They never cry in my presence.
They never fall apart in my presence.
This is the bible on how to visit a prisoner.

NO PADLOCK ON YOUR LOINS

At the court's holding cells,
Separated by thick bars.
I bit my tongue when I saw you.
I hid my bitter truth.
I asked you to get another,
To find yourself a lover,
To stop waiting for my release,
To end your sexual faithfulness.
I begged you to find a woman –
A juicy wench to quench your thirst.
I want no part in your starvation
Simply because I am a political prisoner.
I am not insisting on your celibacy,
For I am a generous lover.
Go find yourself a lover.
Settle down with your new partner.
You are a free adult man –
I am putting no padlock on your loins.
On the outside of the holding cells,
You looked at me in silence.
Looked at me like I was insane.
You adjusted the fly of your trousers,
Turned your strong back
And walked away from me.
I cried myself to sleep that night.

AFANDE AYEBARE

Afande Ayebare
With the big dreamy eyes
And the slightly pouting lips
is gentle but firm with prisoners.
She does not yell.
She does not bark.
She does not scream.
She does not beat the buttocks.
Although calm and composed in stature,
Afande Ayebare has my respect.
She forces me to trust the Uganda Prison Services.

Afande Ayebare
Wears her prison wardress' uniform
so smartly with such poise.
Her maroon beret and maroon belt
Could be a model's costume.
She does not insult.
She does not tease.
She does not intimidate.
She does not harass prisoners.
Although soft-spoken and polite,
Afande Ayebare is effective.
She makes me want to serve
The Uganda Prison Services.

CHRISTMAS 2019

Christmas 2019 almost tops my list
of this year's unexpected special treats.
Five nations gathered to feast
Inside the walls of this prison.
I was the special invited guest
Who did not assist with the cooking.
The Vietnamese made her favorite chicken
And added a peppery dip loved back home.
She cooked matooke *katogo* learnt in Uganda
And iced Christmas cake to boot.
The Bolivian cooked egg-fried-rice
And macaroni fried with chopped gizzards.
She carried her little baby
Who added specialness to our feast.
The Venezuelan fried tasty chapatis,
Deep fried potato chips, and fried chicken.
She added a cabbage and carrot salad
That went down well with mayonnaise.
She, too, brought her baby
Who preferred the neighboring party's food.
The Nigerian came late to the party.
She joked and made us all laugh.
We were three Ugandans at this Christmas feast
Spread on the grass of Luzira Women Prison.
As we celebrated, I could not help but wonder
About the other foreigners in this prison.
Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Malawi,
South Africa, Somalia, Italy, Tanzania –
All had representatives here this Christmas.

DEATH NEWS IN PRISON

Nancy lies down on the prison floor,
Her grieving heart heavy,
Her dreamy eyes swollen,
Her head pounding like a pestle at work,
Her mind working overdrive.

The visiting nuns brought sad news.
Nancy's mother died two months ago –
when Nancy was nine months in prison,
Her hearing dragged in the lower court,
Blamed for murdering her mother-in-law
Because the brother-in-law wanted her land.

Nancy's husband died in Somalia
Where he was posted as a peacekeeper.
Widowed at only twenty-eight years,
Nancy farmed simsim for cross-border trade
And paid school fees for her three daughters.

The day she was dragged to the police,
Nancy's children moved to her mother's hut.
But now their grandmother is dead.

Nancy grieves and wails in Acholi.
The other prisoners wonder what is wrong.
None of them know Nancy's mother tongue.
There should be a ban on obituaries in prison.
Don't bring the incarcerated news of their dead.

DECEMBER 19TH, 2019

December 19th 2019 stands out.
I not only went to the ICD in Kololo,
But I was also caught in the act,
Pants down,
Hands in the sugar jar,
Lipstick on my collar,
Bloody murder weapon in my hand.
The pregnant Afande Kakai
Confiscated my third instalment –
50 poems handwritten in the belly of prison.
I had successfully hidden the notebook,
Tucked it under my mat.
After my search was completed,
I returned to the mat to pack.
As I removed the book of poems,
She caught me red-handed!
Argggh, she caught me!
Mmmschew, she caught me.
And then the drama unfolded...
I let it be.
Now the uphill task
Of recompiling those poems.
And the more daunting task
Of smuggling the next version out of here.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH MY NOTES?

Do you really think you can stop me?
Confiscating my poems is vain.
There are plenty more poems
Where the first ones came from.
Creating poetry is hard labour.
You do the world a disservice
When you take my poems away.
Does your JD include confiscating prisoners' notes?
So, what do you do with my notes
after you confiscate them?
Do you destroy them?
Do you keep them as souvenirs?
Do you declare them?
Do you keep them in your office desk?
Do you burn them as prisoners' rubbish?
Do you take them home to your lover?
Do you light your *sigiri* with them?
Do you use them as toilet paper in the staff toilets?
Do you get some money for them?
Do you get a bonus for each confiscated poem?
Do you know you enthuse me?
Fire me up, to write more?
Whom do you serve when you confiscate
my notebooks filled with poems?

YOUR BIG FEET!

As I lay in pain on the prison floor,
In the torture chamber – a.k.a the Deputy's office,
You kicked me in the ribs.
I collapsed from the impact.
Your big feet,
Raised in the hills of Kabale,
Climbing mountains daily.
Your big feet,
Strengthened from childhood,
By walking barefoot for miles.
Soles cracked deeply,
Toes freely spread wide apart,
Missing toenails knocked out by stones –
You first wore shoes in your youth.
Your big feet,
Supporting your massive black body,
Standing wide apart like two canoes.
Your big feet,
Toughened through marching at parade,
Muscles toned with military drills,
Drills learnt at the Prison Academy and Training School.
Your big feet,
Encased these days in maroon socks,
Protected that day by tony-red shoes –
Leather shoes with a hard thick sole,
Big shoes that bruised my torso.
Did your big feet leave Kabale
To come and kick prisoners in Kampala?
Did your big feet go through all that training
To kick prisoners left in your safe custody?

VOLUME III

Part 3:2: **Feminist Issues**

MASITULA WITH FISTULA

She is one of fate's cruel jokes
Her family named her Masitula,
Which sadly rhymes with fistula-
A condition excluding her from curricular.
Inmates backbite her in vernacular.
Masitula with fistula,
Is one of prison's laughing stocks.

She was barely aged seventeen,
When she conceived a child with Steven.
Hers was the biggest baby the midwife had seen.
He ripped her birth canal – how mean!
The medical teams messed up this queen.
Masitula with fistula
stinks before she is seen.

We shared time in prison for a season.
She was accused as a public nuisance – not treason.
She was fined one hundred thousand or time in prison.
Her troubles in life had neither rhyme nor reason.
Her resilience challenges common wisdom.
Masitula with fistula
remains a beacon!

BLEACHING THEIR SKINS

Prison women bleach their skin.
They're desperate to capture their husbands afar.
They need to hook their boyfriends back home.
They plan to catch a new lover on release.
And so they rub in the bleaching creams.
They sit on prison floors rubbing away their skins.
They have no trust in too much melanin.
Nobody taught them that Black is beautiful.

Prison women bleach their skin.
They urgently need to boost their self-confidence.
They must outcompete the new co wife.
They plan to impress their in-laws back home.
And so they pile on the poisonous mixtures.
Concoctions with mercury eat out the darkness.
And their beauty is defiled.
Nobody taught them that Black is beautiful.

Prison women bleach their skin.
They hide inferiority complexes behind fairness.
They wash away their badness with skin lighteners.
They plan to convince the world they've changed.
And so they scrub away their natural protection.
Smelly hydroquinone burns their skin cells.
And their vanity grows by leaps and bounds.
Nobody taught them that Black is beautiful.

CONTROVERSIAL

When they don't understand you,
When they can't agree about you,
When you spark a lively debate,
When you're different from the drudgery,
They call you controversial.

When you do extraordinary stuff,
When your ideas are off the mark,
When you colour outside the line,
When you stand out from the crowd,
They call you controversial.

When you think outside the box,
When you question the status quo,
When you embrace their taboos,
When you shine where they rust,
They call you controversial.

When you do what their mothers don't,
When you excel where they fail,
When you are a bad arse like I am,
When you are off tangent to them,
They call you controversial.

MY TWITTER COMMANDO

Ah, Rosebell, my Twitter Commando,
How fast you must type your tweets!
“One tweet per minute,” they said.
Text, sounds, videos, commentary – the works...
And the battalion of tweeps retweeted your tweets.
They tagged troops who also retweeted.
Haters, trolls, bots and moles joined in.
What a colourful explosion of Twitterati!
And the hashtag #FreeStellaNyanzi trended.
Your solidarity updated the world about me.
Your head was totally in the game.
Your attention was undivided.
You treaded where others dreaded.
You kept me on the agenda during media blackouts.
You stubbornly refused to be gagged.
You came to the courts whenever you could.
You braved the menace of my armed escorts.
You beat down their blockades to reach me.
You came to prison many times.
Your stories updated me about the world.
Your energy enthused me...
We all need a Rosebell in our lives!

DARK KISS

I saw you kissing desperately
When the electricity blacked out.
Two lonely prisoners
Locked up for years in Ward Two.
Seated close to each other,
Sitting on the cold prison floor,
Chatting about this and that.
Yearning.
Desiring.
Longing.
Missing a lover's touch,
Missing tenderness.
Heterosexual on the outside,
Lesbian on the inside.
Lesbian tonight.
When the blackness struck,
You reached out for each other.
Hands searching desperately,
Heads quickly drawing close,
Lips finding lips,
Tongues touching,
Licking, sucking, suckling, fucking,
No moans, no groans!
Just one fulfilling kiss.
You orgasmed in duet.
You parted.
And then the lights came on.

I MISCARRIED JUSTICE

(For David)

Sorry, my love,
I miscarried Justice.
On the prison floor
As the prison wardresses screamed at me.
Blood gushing out of my womb,
The storm outside crazier than Lucifer,
Musisi rocking the trembling earth,
The wind tearing branches off trees,
A portion of the roof jumping off,
Electricity cut off – first black out.
The night blacker than hell,
My blood pressure rising dangerously,
P.O. Leah screaming that I am a liar,
P.O. Kakai denying the blood on my shorts,
Chief Aponye staring between my thighs,
Prisoners forced outside the roofless ward,
I objected to being moved.
The wind howling like a bloodhound,
Did Luzira’s hyenas smell my blood?
P.O. Leah screaming that I am post-menopausal,
Me screaming for my human rights,
Baby Justice sliding out painfully,
I lose consciousness – second blackout.
Unconsciously conscious,
Floating somewhere subliminal,
Prison staff shouting orders,
Shifting of feet seemingly afar,
Prisoners lifting my limp body.
Floating beyond the reach of justice
Shifting under fearful orders,
Dumped into Ward One from Ward Two,
Bloodied blankets heaped onto me,
Time standing still.
No clear recollection, I suppose

I gained consciousness in a foreign space.
I gained consciousness amidst strangers.
Strange faces crowding above mine
“She’s awake!” one screams.
“Water,” I croak – giddy.
“Drinking water,” I try again.
Water is life, they say
But Lake Victoria will not
bring back my baby.
Drinking the long River Nile will not
revive our dead Justice.
Empty on the inside,
Dirty on the outside,
I call out again for water.
One prisoner lifting my head,
Plastic mug held at mouth,
I silently wonder if it’s boiled water.
Drinking slowly, slowly, slowly...
“I am having a miscarriage,” I whisper.
New contacts, strangers, foreigners,
Unknown neighbours becoming my friends,
Sisterhood is forged on that prison floor.
One prisoner gives me a sanitary pad.
Another prisoner gives me her panties,
Yet another gives me toilet tissue,
Prisoners protect my privacy.
Prisoners hold up blankets as shields around me.
Too weak to stand, I kneel,
Legs parted on the prison floor.
My prison shorts drenched with blood,
My panties soiled with clots of blood,
Baby Justice lies dead between my thighs.
Our Baby Justice – two months’ old fetus!
Just a big head with a thick long tail,
Almost like a white lizard.
Two big brown eyes stare at me.
Baby eyes that will haunt me years to come.
Even when dead,

The sad eyes of justice do not close.
Our baby Justice murdered by the
misplaced torture of prison staff.
P.Os and wardresses embroiled in war.
Fighting prisoners too beaten to care.
Justice lies dead within prison gates.
Our baby Justice died in that storm;
Too much anticipated to thrive.
An asthmatic prisoner flashes a torch light.
“Yesu Kulisito,” she screams.
“*Avudde mu olubuto,*” she continues.
Many prisoners make the sign of the cross.
No amount of Jesus will bring back Justice.
No superstitions will halt this departure.
An elderly prisoner gives me some hot tea.
Searing pain – the after birth arrives.
Pain much worse than any I’ve had
in all my forty-four years on earth.
Pain subsides with the storm.
An owl remembers to hoot outside.
I wrap our dead Justice in toilet tissue
I wrap the placenta in more toilet tissue.
Prisoners settle to catch some sleep.
I bleed through my sleep – third blackout.
I miscarried our baby Justice.
A child conceived in love for freedom.
A child conceived while I’ve dreamt of liberation.
A child conceived as we plotted
our political protests.
A child conceived for the revolution.
I am sorry I miscarried Justice.

INTERSEX IN PRISON

You, my friend, confuse their brains.
You walk like a man with swagger,
But reside in a women's prison.
You look like a girl,
But attract women prisoners like a magnet.
You squat and sit like a man,
But you are as tender as a mother.
You climb up trees to chop off branches
And swing that panga like a man.
You chop firewood with an axe
And dig up anthills like a tractor.
You bathe as often as a young woman,
Bleach your facial skin like a co-wife
But your moustache belies your gender.
You wear a bra or bind your chest
And balance your prison shorts like a show-off.
You lead the women prisoners' football team,
And score goals with your bare feet.
You rear goats won by the football team,
Pulling the ropes in their necks
all over the prison grounds.
You climb up ladders to change bulbs
And change the batteries in the wall clocks.
You open up dead TVs and dead radios
To repair their electrical circuits.
You burn plastic patches onto broken jerrycans
And mend the sandals of inmates
You trim hair into fashionable styles
and pay for new hairstyles for your lovers.
You pay for the TV credit of your ward
and buy groceries for your lovers.
You pack toilet paper into your crotch
And stand slouched like a gentleman.
You flirt harder than most men I know,
But bear your shame like a first wife.
You cut your hair like a man,

But groom your fingernails like a woman.
Your family wronged you with that surgery.
You smile when I call you, "My Son!"
A child with both a penis and a vulva,
Your intersexuality mesmerises me.
A man, a woman, a fabulous person.
How you confuse gender rigidities!
Your intersexuality confounds certainties,
Ends up confusing the gender lines in prison.
This institution cannot understand you,
You are intersex in prison!

LESSON FROM MENSTRUAL CRAMPS

I have learnt
That for me
To be the most effective,
I must be
As disruptive
I must be as disruptive
as menstruation cramps.
To be as disruptive
And as equally effective
As menstrual cramps
I must be.
I must be organic,
Organically me.
When that cramp seizes me,
It holds tight and holds fast.
It tears me up and rips me apart.
It leaves me throwing up.
It leaves me drenched.
It forces the warm clots out of my being.
I gasp aloud in pain.
I bow in honour of this lesson.
Menstrual cramps can be ferocious.
They make me know my fallopian.
I can trace their passage.
Menstrual cramps cannot be ignored.
Sometimes they stain my clothes.
Menstrual cramps grab attention.
My life stops for that while.
Oh, the impact: I am paralysed for a season.

WEAR YOUR LIPSTICK POWERFULLY

Warrior of free speech and truth,
Wear your lipstick shamelessly.
Defender of voice and free expression,
Wear your lipstick as war-paint.
Take time with your lip enhancer.
Top it up with lip gloss.
Shine those lips with petroleum jelly.
Colour is my signifier.
Different shades meaning different things:
Scarlet for passionate commitment,
Crimson for boldness amidst fear,
Maroon for courage on bad days,
Purple to bring home my royalty,
Black to enhance my fierceness,
Bright blue to astound my haters,
Nude when being vulnerable,
Even orange for sex appeal!
Pout, baby pout!
Your lips are carriers of sharp words.
Your lips convey hot messages.
Your lips change history.
Your lips make things happen.
Your lips bend the hearts of rulers.
Your words burn like acid.
So colour your mouth brightly.
Let your lips be conspicuous.
Let them stand out from the crowd.
Wear your lipstick artistically-
For your lips bear dangerous potent truths.

NO CLONES JUST LIKE ME

I never asked you
To put me on that pedestal.
I was busy living my life.
You saw me breathing in and out.
Just breathing in and out,
And you were awestruck.
Open-mouthed with wonder!
Gobsmacked!
Eyes wide with wondrous admiration.
You made me the exemplar to emulate.
You lifted me bodily,
And flung me up like a star.
“Be like her,” you ordered your daughters.
“Copy her!” You told your women.
“If only we had ten just like her
This land would long be liberated!”
Huh! Ten clones just like me...
Any volunteers?
Silence? No wonder!
You see?
People like me end up in prison.
That star is brilliant until it melts you.
My load seems light until it breaks you.
My glory mesmerises only from afar.
And so there will be no clones just like me.

BREASTS BLAZING LIKE *BAZOOKAS*

Not one to give in
Without a fight,
I launched my stealth operation
When they least expected me
For they thought they had me cornered.
They thought they had beaten me down.
They thought I was a horse broken in.
They undermined my resilience.
They underestimated my tenacity.
I bounce back harder than a tennis ball.
Abusing my constitutional right
To be produced in court for my sentence,
They forced me into a video-audio recording room
With teleconferencing computers
Feeding into and out of the courtroom.
Rather than take me to Buganda Road
Chief Magistrate's Court,
They drove me to the all-male maximum
security prison.
They took me to Upper Luzira Prison
With neither my consent nor my willingness.
Isolated from those who love and defend me,
They hoped to intimidate me into compliance.
Escorted by four powerful female prison staff,
And surrounded by twelve male prison staff,
I could have caved in and collapsed,
Given up in defeat,
Surrendered the struggle with both hands up.
I could have withered like a flower,
Cowered in shameful cowardice,
But I refused defeat.
I thought of my ancestors and refused defeat.
I thought of my children and refused defeat.
I raised both my middle fingers
And shot rapid slurs at the justice system.
I improvised an impromptu oration

exposing the fucked up judicial system.
After poetically fucking the failed court system,
I pulled up my *kitenge* blouse.
I hoisted up my power bra,
Let loose my big brown breasts
And shot down my enemies
With rapid bullets from my nipples.
Pwah pwah pwah pwah!
My breasts were blazing *bazookas* –
Shooting down the injustices of justice.

THE BABY'S HEAD IS PEEPING

No new razor blade.
No scissors.
No gloves.
No clean polythene sheet.
No bedsheets.
No towels.
We delivered a big baby
In the dead of the night,
Inside our prison ward.
What do you do
When the baby's head is peeping?

No medical degree.
No midwifery expertise.
No anaesthetic.
No painkillers.
No hot water.
No soap.
Just a bunch of women prisoners
Working hard to save both lives.
What do you do
When the baby's head is peeping?

No flowers.
No cards.
No phone calls.
No stethoscopes.
No thermometer.
No BP machine.
Even the prison wardresses refused to respond
To our loud calls for help.
You make do – as we did –
When the baby's head is peeping.

WHY DO ABSENT MEN LIE?

Why do absent men lie to their children?
What's to gain from this untrue crap?
Why pollute innocence with deception?
Where's the good in all the misleading?
Telling lies about coming home...
Misrepresenting the absence...
Making promises to be broken...
Raising false hopes to be dashed...
Teaching his offspring deceit...
Child, please forgive me:
Nobody forced me to marry your father.
Today, I admit to myself:
I married a liar.
Child, please don't be
like your father-
Lying unnecessarily to your children.
Why do absent men lie to their children?

You sashay into the prison grounds,
 Seriously swaying your lean hips.
This way, that way, this way, that way.
 Delicately stepping your agile feet,
 Swinging your buttocks that comply.
One limp warm exposing French manicure.
 The other carries a bag of fresh fruit.
You hold your shoulders up and straight.
 Your neck erect for full effect.
 The prison guards make fun of you.
 You smile sweetly at them,
 Flash your white pearls at them,
 Roll your shrewd eyes heavenward,
 Fling back your dreadlocks cut in style,
 Snap your fingers with the French manicure,
And announce, "I've come to visit a prisoner!"
 "Are you a man or a woman?" they ask.
 "Mind your own business," you retort.
"It's our business to search your body," they say.
 "Then bring your hands here," you command.
 A man with an AK47 watches keenly.
Another man runs his hands all over your body.
 You shiver with frustration.
You wonder when the ignorance will end.
You wonder about transgenders in prison.
 You open your mouth in teaching mode
 And teach these prison guards
 About the fluidity of genders.
You never stopped visiting me in prison.
 In spite of this unwarranted intrusion.

VOLUME III

Part 3:3: For Uganda

THIRSTY VULTURE

The thirsty vulture scratches its bald head.
Its haughty eyes stretch upon miles of desolation.
Its plunder left the land bereft of all value.
Heaps of dry bones remain instead of carcasses.
The scorched earth bears no single shoot.
Even the leaves of the thorn trees are no more.
The source of the River Nile is now a dust path.
The fresh waters gulped by the vulture and its cronies
The fat fish caught young and exported for dollars.
Lake Kyoga remains a deep dry hole in the ground.
The salt mined by tonnes at the vulture's command.
Its small fish caught for retail trade to peasants.
Lake Albert is now an ugly armoury –
twenty-two stories high.
The vulture needed a base from which to decimate its enemies:
ADF rebels,
Banyarwenzururu from Kasese,
soldiers from the Congo.
From the twentieth storey of this ugly armoury,
Spies monitor Rukungiri – home of the vulture's nemesis.
Lake Victoria was barter traded to Kenya and Tanzania.
Both promised silence and non-interference,
As well as unlimited access to their ocean ports.
The vulture raises its tired eyes towards heaven.
There have been no clouds for three decades.
After a while, the thirst burns even the powerful.

YELLOW

The masses all wear yellow these days.
All other colours were banned.
Parliament enacted an act for colour control
And the dictator signed his assent to it.
Suspects are arrested and detained for other colours.
Convicts face heavy monetary fines or years in jail.
The masses comply out of fear and helplessness.
Market women wear yellow *bitengi*.
Bus drivers and conductors wear yellow uniforms.
All religious clerics wear yellow tunics.
Diviners and healers wear yellow bark cloth.
Slay queens and kings wear yellow jeans.
They match these up with yellow tops.
Pupils and students wear yellow school uniforms.
University graduands don yellow gowns and hoods.
Brides and their maids wear yellow lace gowns.
Their grooms wear yellow suits and ties.
Bedsheets and blankets only come in yellow.
Farmers wear dirty yellow *kanzus*.
Their wives wear yellow *gomesis*.
Petticoats, bras, panties and boxer shorts are only yellow.
Handbags, shoes and belts are all yellow.
Protestors wear yellow overalls.
Rioters wear yellow t-shirts with slogans.
Regime sycophants wear yellow garb.
Police, military and prison staff wear yellow.
Doctors and nurses wear yellow.
But blood can never be yellow.

WHO WILL DELIVER MOTHER UGANDA?

Her legs remain ajar.
The dry blood clings onto her flaccid thighs.
Mother Uganda does not stir.
She's motionless in the face of her abusers.
Plundered.
Vandalised.
Gang raped.
Brutalised.
Left for dead.
Sodomised-
Milking pipes thrust into her.
Her vital organs sucked out.
Mother Uganda no longer cries.
She's normalised the violence.
Her captors lost all shame.
They thrive on her abuse.
They depend on sucking her dry.
Her sad dim eyes stare afar.
She peers at the equator.
Her bitter heart hides one hope.
Hope in her young sons and daughters.
Perhaps they will liberate her.
She's counting on them – only them.
Perhaps they will redeem her.
Who will rescue Mother Uganda?
Will you deliver my Mother Uganda?

SNAKES' MARCH

The snakes marched in protest.
Their slithery bodies filled our streets.
The snakes marched about corruption.
They poisoned our city's fresh air.

The snakes marched in protest.
Their split tongues chanted slogans.
The snakes marched for corruption.
They flaunted their wealth at our plight.

The snakes marched in protest.
Their cold hearts made new commitments.
The snakes marched in corruption.
They signed for more per diems.

The snakes marched in protest.
The Uganda Police Force protected them.
The snakes are the founders of corruption.
They rule us with an iron hand.

The snakes marched in protest.
Were they fooling themselves or fooling us?
The snakes are the heart of corruption.
They can only shed their skins.

HOMAGE TO THE BOTTLE THROWER

With this poem
Written in the depths of prison,
I pay homage
To the bottle thrower.
I salute the truth told by your bottle.
I bow down to your bold justice.
I celebrate the pushback you gave.
How you iconised resistance!
Instead of projecting humiliation at you,
I name you among my heroes of the year.
News of your perfect aim
Gladdened my sentenced heart.
Your courageous action
Refashioned the history of our courts.
Hurling that plastic bottle in court
Reversed the balance of power.
The scales were tipped in our favour.
Targeting the magistrate's face,
While all cameras focussed on her,
Rewrote the record of (in)justice.
The script for courtroom drama
Was edited impactfully with your bottle.
The gallery melted out justice.
The bench received our justice.
And the bar will defend you.
I hail your quick wit and boldness.
You fought back with what you had.
You cleansed our rotten court system.
That bottle-throwing in court
Was divinely blessed by the gods
And celebrated by our ancestors.
Even gravity cooperated with you.
How majestically you hit that face!
How beautifully you timed the event!
How perfectly you expressed our ire!
Even Chief Justice Katureebe got it:

We are enraged by their injustices of justice.
We are sick to the core by the rot in court.
And I give you heartfelt accolades.
I salute you bold bottle-thrower!

NO REVOLUTIONARY

Say whatever you may.
Call yourself a million power labels.
Blow your trumpet all day.
In my book, you are no revolutionary!
You're just a crook, a thief, and a rebel.
You're a mass murderer, a liar, and a rapist.
You committed treason to come to power
You shot out a sitting president
And shamelessly made yourself president.
You desecrated our house of parliament,
Brought in your armed brutes
To whip the arses of our legislators,
To break their bones beyond repair.
You violently raped our constitution,
Twice tearing out key safeguards against autocracy.
You butchered our judiciary,
Poisoned the courts with corruption and sectarianism.
You murdered entire villages in your wars,
Piles of human skulls testify against you.
Heaps of human skeletons tell your tales.
Pools of human blood attest to your skill.
You ignored millions dying of malaria,
Turned a blind eye to dead mothers and babies,
Turned a blinder eye to dying institutions.
You variously lied about leaving power,
Killing all semblance of democracy here.
You refined dictatorship
And perfected corrupt militarism.
In my book you are no Revolutionary.

COWARD!

Coward – I call you by name!
You lacked the nerve to come to court,
Yet you filed charges against me.
You had no balls to publicly accuse me,
Yet you ordered for my arrest.
You brought no evidence of your grievance,
Yet you paid mightily for my incarceration.
You dragged my arse to the scales of justice,
Yet you hid behind presidential immunity.
You never defended your mother’s honour,
Yet you claim that I insulted her.
You murdered my father and mother,
Yet you want me to sing your praise.
You are plundering my children’s heritage,
Yet you want me to stay silent.
Coward – I spit out your name.
The president of Uganda is a coward.
Coward – I call you by name.
My complainant in court is a coward.

PARACHUTE LAWYERS

Be very weary of parachute lawyers.
They land uninvited to your trial.
Breeze in with their stuffy dictums
And throw about meaningless ultimatums.
Avoid their childish tantrums!
Wearing neckties suffocating them,
They thrust nitwit solutions down your throat.
Be suspicious of parachute lawyers-
Question their half-baked no brainers.
Assess the produce of their basket mouths.
Remind them you are the boss here!
Shun lawyers wearing second-hand suits
bought cheap from flea markets.
Their ideas are as flawed as a mistake.
Don't fall for lawyers spewing big English words.
Seek out the core of their legal strategy.
Tear apart their arguments.
Make them read the holdings of their authorities.
Avoid bail lawyers as much as you can.
They will bleed you dry
as you apply for bail.
And then they reject you,
Once your bail has been granted.
They drop you midway your trial.
Flee from lawyers loitering in court corridors.
No matter how impressive they look,
Repel them like the plague.

NO FLY LIST

I was pulled out of the line
To Departures at the airport.
Terrifying anti-terrorism police officers
Dressed menacingly in deep black,
Fully armed to the teeth,
Barred me from boarding the plane-
KLM flight bound for Amsterdam-
flying from Entebbe through Nairobi.
My passport was confiscated.
My boarding pass was torn apart.
The stupid questions and allegations
Flying madly out of their ugly mouths.
Their dogs sniffing at my hand luggage.
Dogs working for an abusive dictatorship!
Other passengers staring suspiciously at me.
Some WhatsApping about my plight.
My checked-in luggage returned by porters.
A giant anti-terrorism police woman
Whispers into her big walkie talkie.
“We’ve got her, Afande. Over!”
Alarm bells going off in my head,
My heartbeat racing – palms sweating,
My mind recalling KGB movies.
My names were put on the No Fly list.
Barred from travel, I am a captive in Uganda.
Who adds names to the No Fly list?
Who takes off names from the No Fly list?
Who keeps this punitive No Fly list?
My name sits on the No Fly list.
And the aeroplane took off – my seat empty.

SOLD OUT TO THE FDC

If you cut my body
With your razor-sharp bayonet
You will see sky blue blood.
True story!
My political party is my life support.
I am totally immersed in the opposition.
I am sold out to the FDC.
Let's clear the air on this one.
Dr. Kizza Besigye is my president.
Yes, you heard me right.
Retired Colonel Kizza Besigye is my people's president.
I am a die-hard defiance practitioner.
I refuse to be a mole.
I am among the remnants.
I carry the big sky-blue key.
I wave the two-finger party symbol.
I loudly sing "Toka kwa barabara!"
I proudly wear sky-blue clothes.
In the true unifying spirit of my party,
I shout our party slogan:
"One Uganda – One People!
One People – One Uganda!"
I assemble at the party headquarters in Najjanankumbi
And I consult on strategy at Katonga Road.
I am hoping in Uganda's liberation
– a dear fruit of our die-hard opposition.
And so, in case you are wondering:
I AM SOLD OUT TO THE FDC;
TOTALLY SOLD OUT TO THE FDC.

FISCAL SPONSOR

Do the funders really know you well?
Do they know how vindictive you are?
Do they know how manipulative you are?
Do they know that you hoard monies
belonging to suffering recipients with dire need?
Do they know how you first rinse out
the funds intended for others?
Do they know about the deep cut you take
out of the lump sum of money sent for others?
Do they know how you buffer your own
books with their funds when approaching new investors?
Do they know how many times you bounce
the final beneficiaries of this money?
How your guards deny entry
into your lofty swanky offices?
How your receptionist bars these
miserable beggars from your finance manager?
How one has to chase after signatures
before getting money from you?
Don't these funders know the pain
you inflicted in my heart because of money?
Don't they know that it took you eight
months to remit money I needed to save my world?
Don't they know how you first bled
me out before you handed over my money?
Don't these funders know you well enough?

OH, WHAT A COWARD!

Idi Amin kept the heads of his enemies
frozen with ice in his refrigerator.
This one keeps his opponents
frozen with fear in maximum security prisons.
Oh, what a coward!
Real threats go to Luzira Remand Prison.

Idi Amin kept the heads of his enemies
Dead in his refrigerator.
This one keeps his opponents
Rotting away in maximum security prison.
Oh, what a coward!
Although I am a die-hard opponent,
A tough critique of the government,
During this time of political punishment-
As I serve many months of imprisonment,
I refuse to fear!
I refuse to freeze!
I refuse to rot away!
I refuse to yield!
I will not be a coward.

WHY DOES THE TRUTH MAKE THE NEWS?

I did not serve prison time for fame.
I was merely standing by my truths.
Bitter truths genuinely flowing from my heart
Truths pouring forth as words now outlawed.
Mine was not an invitation to journalists.
I was shamelessly owning up to my writing.
I was not looking for paparazzi's cameras.
I was just honouring my creative productions.
I don't understand why you bring your recorders.
I have no prepared notes for your news bytes.
I did not expect to make these news headlines.
Surely, I can't be this hot!
I never planned to clog the internet.
I only lived my truth as usual.
I did not anticipate to be trending.
My poems only spoke truth to power.
I have never intended to make the news.
What was newsworthy about my detention?
What is catchy in a woman writing poetry?
Where's the zing in telling off a dictator?
We should all be putting the dictator in his place.
We should all be punished for our truths.
Why does the truth make news?
Is truth telling such a rarity these days?

WE CANNOT MUTE OURSELVES OUT

We cannot bring ourselves
To this place of dishonour –
Where our tongues sit still,
Folded like iron trousers.
Where voice boxes rust
For want of use.
Where sharp words are buried
In the depths of bitter hearts.
Where negative criticism is stayed.
And only praise singing abounds.
Where oppressors go unnamed
And fear grips each heartbeat.
We cannot mute ourselves out,
Silenced like radios without power.
Silence is safe and sorry.
Silence is complicity.
We speak out boldly.
Although our voices shake.
We continue to speak with honour.
Although they call us lunatics,
We string words that sting like bees.
We scream ferocious words
And wound our enemies hard.
Our honour is in our words.
Our fight is in our mouths.
Our honour is bought with truth.

ANTICIPATE EVERYTHING

Anticipate everything;
Both the expected
And the seemingly unforeseen.
Plan for their every move.
Second-guess them.
Predict wisely...
What would you do if you were them?
Take no chances.
Go over every move.
Consider all possibilities.
Plan for multiple alternatives.
Strategize at least two steps ahead of them.
Listen for unspoken messages.
Study the telltale signs.
Smell the clouds swollen with rain.
Catch the cues.
The twitching of the eye,
The sheepish smiles,
The hushed voices,
The wicked snarl,
Read between the lines.
Decode the sneers.
Hear their hooves from afar.
The advance warnings are always there.
Make it your way of life
To anticipate all things.
You will thrive against all odds.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Stella Nyanzi was arrested on November 2, 2018 at a police station where she had gone to pick security detail for a planned peaceful protest against Makerere University's failure to enforce a judicial decision reinstating her to her job as a Research Fellow at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR). On November 9, 2018, she was presented to court, and charged with cyber harassment and offensive communication under the Computer Misuse Act. She addressed the court thus: "I don't want to waste the court's time. I deny the charges. I want Museveni to come to court, face me into my eyes and tell me how my posts on Facebook have offended him." She opted against applying for bail, insisting on a speedy trial of her case. On August 2, 2019, she was sentenced to 18 months in jail on the charge of cyber-harassment having been acquitted of offensive communication. In protest of the sentence and appearance for the sentencing hearing by video-link, she exposed her breasts. Her conviction and sentence were quashed on February 20, 2020 and she was released.

Dr. Nyanzi is a renowned medical anthropologist who has published widely on sexuality, family planning and public health. She is also a queer rights activist and has become one of the prominent women organisers against the 34 year and counting dictatorship of Yoweri Museveni in Uganda. In 2016, she staged a naked protest against the director of MISR who had effectively dismissed her from her job. In 2017, she was detained for 33 days for a Facebook post in which she referred to Yoweri Museveni as a "pair of buttocks". The case is still in court pending a constitutional court reference challenging the state's attempt to subject her to a compulsory mental health examination against her will. In the lead-up to the "pair of buttocks" charge, she started a #Pads4GirlsUg campaign under which she collected sanitary pads and donated them to needy menstruating teenagers, as a protest action of Museveni's failure to fulfil his campaign promise to supply the same. In 2018, she convened a Women's Protest Working Group that organised a Women's March in Kampala, against femicidal kidnappings and killings of women in the country.

Dr. Nyanzi was awarded for her human rights activism by Solidarity Uganda. She holds degrees from Makerere University, University College London and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She was in prison, serving her jail sentence pending the appeal against her conviction and sentence when these poems were originally published.

11-POINT PLATFORM

THE PUSH FOR DR. STELLA NYANZI CAMPAIGN

We are supporters, friends, allies, and compatriots of Dr. Stella Nyanzi, who was incarcerated at Luzira Women's Prison between November 2, 2018 and February 20, 2020. We stood in solidarity with Dr. Nyanzi, and we support the values that landed her in jail, and work towards the realisation of what she believes in, i.e. the struggle for fairness, freedom and feminism. Dr. Nyanzi's continued unjust incarceration moved like-minded individuals and organisations to create a progressive platform that pushes the various points that underpin what Dr. Nyanzi advocates. The coalition worked under an umbrella #PushForStellaNyanzi campaign.

Learning from the Combahee River Collective, our politics as a campaign is committed to speaking up against dictatorship, class, cisheterosexual, ethnic oppression, repression and exploitation. The Push for Stella Nyanzi campaign is part of a longer and wider political, cultural and social struggle for fairness, freedom and feminism not only in our individual lives but in our various societies and countries.

Below are the 11 major points of action, which we discussed with Dr. Nyanzi herself under the watchful eyes of prison warders. All these points are inspired by Dr. Nyanzi's activism and research as a basis for what brings us together. The 11 points are: (1) Activism (2) Democracy (3) Dignity (4) Equality (5) Ideas (6) Justice (7) Labour (8) Liberty (9) Peace (10) Power (11) Solidarity.

(1) Activism: Dr. Stella Nyanzi according to Charles Onyango-Obbo is a model activist, who has dethroned the many anonymous anti-Museveni Facebook pages and Twitter handles, in following and influence because she

doesn't hide behind a pseudonym.¹ Dr. Nyanzi has shown that online activism matters, she has shown the rest of us, the political power of not just words, but words posted online. Even when Museveni imposed a Social Media tax to hinder the masses' easy access of the internet. However, he still has failed to contain the activist power of Dr. Nyanzi's Facebook. Dr. Nyanzi went on to publish critical posts against Museveni. She is serving a sentence for the Birthday poem while another cyber harassment charge arising from a post in which she called Museveni a "pair of buttocks", is still pending. Dr. Nyanzi is being charged under laws designed to suppress online dissent. We stand for online political activism. We oppose the crackdown on online political activists by Museveni's and other dictatorships.

(2) Democracy: Dr. Stella Nyanzi supports a system of government, of the people, for the people and by the people as expressed through regular free and fair elections. Under Museveni, elections are a violent affair. There is a constant deployment of the military that employs brutish force against all who are critical of the regime.. During the August 2018 bye-election for the Arua Municipality parliamentary seat, hundreds of opposition supporters were arrested, scores beaten, and at least one person was shot dead by Museveni's security forces. The injured included Night Asara, Saudah Madada, and Atiku Shaban who sustained irreversible injuries. The detained included Hons. Robert Kyagulanyi (Bobi Wine), Kassiano Wadri, Francis Zaake among others. Yasin Kawuma (Bobi Wine's driver) was killed.² Dr. Nyanzi mobilised non-partisan public support for the detained, the injured and the deceased, whether belonging to Bobi Wine's People Power pressure group or

¹ <https://mobile.nation.co.ke/blogs/If--State-wants-control-social-media--here-is-advice/1949942-3912714-item-1-xhuwx/index.html>

² <https://www.monitor.co.ug/SpecialReports/Arua-violence-human-cost-Kassiano-Wadri-NRM-Bobi-Wine/688342-4749276-n82ghf/index.html>

the Forum for Democratic Change, of which she is a member. We stand for free and fair democratic electoral processes. We oppose the militarisation of the electoral process and the suppression of the people's free will.

(3) Dignity: When Dr. Stella Nyanzi criticised Janet Museveni's announcement that her husband's government did not have money to fulfil a campaign pledge, to supply free sanitary towels for school-going girls, she reiterated the connection between the dignity of girls who can't afford pads during their menstruation and access to education. Research conducted in 2016 shows that absenteeism among girls who do not have sanitary pads is 17 percent higher than for those who have access.³ The Uganda police summoned Dr. Nyanzi for questioning following her Facebook criticism of Museveni's wife, who also doubles as Minister of Education and Sports. Dr. Nyanzi called on her followers and readers to support her cause by launching a #PadsforGirlsUG campaign, asking for sanitary towels and money to buy more to distribute to needy girls.⁴ We believe that the right to access to education is meaningless without dignity, and so the state should provide free sanitary towels and the relevant education on menstrual health for girls. We oppose the austerity measures Museveni's free-market capitalist government implements, thereby denying school-going girls of dignity.

(4) Equality: Dr. Stella Nyanzi stands for the right to equality and freedom from discrimination for everybody irrespective of their gender, sexuality, sex, age, ability, nationality, citizenship status, etc. When in 2009, Hon.

³ https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/d33z3m/kids-in-uganda-are-making-pads-so-girls-can-stop-missing-school

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/22/activist-uganda-president-buttocks-jail-stella-nyanzi>

David Bahati, a Member of Parliament proposed legislation criminalizing homosexuality and pro-gay rights activism in Uganda, Dr. Nyanzi was one of the researcher-activists who fought for the rights and freedom of sexual minorities. The immediate media persecution of queer Ugandans in the wake of the "Kill the Gays" Bill was the publication of "200 top" homosexuals in a tabloid founded by a rogue journalist, Giles Muhame⁵. David Kato, an activist and Dr. Nyanzi's friend, whose face was among those outed by the tabloid was later on bludgeoned to death⁶. In addition to Dr. Nyanzi publishing extensive research on Queer life in Uganda, she remains an ardent proponent for the rights and freedom of Queer people, participates in Gay Pride activities and even defines herself as a "queer laughist" on her Twitter profile. We too stand for the right to equality and freedom from discrimination for minority groups.

(5) Ideas: Dr. Stella Nyanzi's primary occupation is academic research, the study and creation of ideas. Academic research plays an important role in seeking the truth and creating new knowledge that can shape policy, influence society, and imagine freedom. Dr. Nyanzi's research is widely cited and has been recognised in the areas of sexuality studies, public health, culture, gender and religion among others⁷. Beyond the walls of the Ivory Tower, Dr. Nyanzi has become a public intellectual, by using her Facebook and other platforms to put her research to public use⁸. We support the ethos of public intellectualism that Dr. Nyanzi brings to her work and condemn the violation of her and others' academic freedom in universities like Makerere which, under the

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/21/ugandan-paper-gay-people-hanged>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/28/world/africa/28uganda.html>

⁷ <https://africanstudies.org/news/presidential-fellows-2/>

⁸ <https://thisisafrika.me/politics-and-society/stella-nyanzi-can-public-intellectuals-work-musevenis-uganda/>

pressure of Yoweri Museveni illegally suspends and expels academics who are critical of government.

(6) Justice: When Dr. Nyanzi was arrested again on November 2, 2018, after being presented in court, she was granted the right to apply for bail but she opted not to exercise the right. This was because Uganda's justice system arrests and charges people with trumped up charges but never sets out to timeously prosecute the accused. Rather, they get caught up in a cycle that leaves them at the mercy of the state that can re-arrest them at any one point to disrupt their lives. As Dr. Nyanzi later put it, for her, "life in prison is better than partial freedom."⁹ We believe in the right to a speedy trial and a fair hearing. We believe in substantial justice and condemn the abuse of the judicial system for the persecution of political opponents.

(7) Labour: In a labour dispute with her supervisor, Prof. Mahmood Mamdani at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), Dr. Nyanzi used the tried and tested mode of protest for the weak, the naked protest by chaining herself to the burglar proofing at her office and undressing to her knickers while filming her protest and broadcasting it live on her Facebook timeline. While traditionally workers rights have been realised through the intervention of labour and trade unions, Mr. Museveni's ultra-capitalist regime has greatly reduced the power and efficacy of workers' organisations thus individual workers like Dr. Nyanzi are left literally with their bodies as their last line of defence for their labour rights. For protesting naked, Dr. Nyanzi was suspended by the university, further violating her right to free expression. Although the suspension was eventually

⁹ <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/59981-life-in-prison-better-than-partial-freedom-stella-nyanzi>

lifted, she was suspended again for criticising the minister of education, another violation of her rights as a worker and citizen. This second suspension was also lifted by the Staff Appeals Tribunal and the university ordered to reinstate Dr. Nyanzi and pay her all her salary arrears. In December 2018, the university purported to expel Dr. Nyanzi among other staff claiming that she had been defectively appointed.¹⁰ Dr. Nyanzi is challenging the university's violation of her rights as a worker in the High court. We stand for the freedom to work, and workers' rights to free expression and to ply their trade. We condemn the abuse of the university's employment policies to curtail the freedoms of academic workers at Makerere University and elsewhere.

(8) Liberty: When Dr. Nyanzi criticised Mrs. Janet Museveni, the minister of education and wife to President Yoweri Museveni over her announcement that there was no money in the national budget to buy sanitary pads for school-going girls, she found herself placed on a travel ban.¹¹ She was prevented from travelling to an academic conference at the airport where she was informed by the immigration officials that she was not allowed to leave the country. She subsequently sued the state for violating her right and was granted UGX 50 million in damages. We stand with the right to liberty, the freedom to travel. We condemn the use of the judicial process to curtail the liberty and free travel of citizens.

(9) Peace: By November 2017, at least twenty-three women had been raped, murdered and their bodies dumped by

¹⁰ <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Stella-Nyanzi-fired-from-Makerere-University-/688334-4906626-yo9om9/index.html>

¹¹ <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/54139-banned-from-travel-nyanzi-now-sues-state>

various roadsides in and around Kampala¹². This continued with little assurance neither from security agencies nor the state about the insecurity and looming femicide in the country. Dr. Nyanzi organized a peaceful Women's March to demand action from the authorities through the Uganda Women Protest Working Group. Over 300 people showed up for the protest, including students, sex workers, politicians, LGBTIQAP+ individuals and activists, diplomats, journalists, NGO workers, police personnel, among others¹³. We stand for the right to life for everybody, and the right to peaceful nonviolent protest. We condemn the militarist approach Yoweri Museveni's government always applies to resolving crises in the country.

(10) Power: While the repressive system centered around the Computer Misuse Act has focussed on various online critics of the regime, in prosecuting Dr. Nyanzi for a poem in which she used Yoweri Museveni's mother's vagina as an image to express dissatisfaction against her son's repression, suppression and oppression of Ugandans, they described the vagina as lewd, indecent, and obscene¹⁴. In using metaphors that center around the vagina, Dr. Nyanzi reclaims the power of the vagina from sexist notions that depict the vagina as a dirty word¹⁵. We stand for the use of the erotic as power, the reclaiming of the agency of the marginalised using the same grounds on which they are marginalised. We condemn the

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/sep/29/grisly-murders-uganda-serial-killer>

¹³ <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Women-march-Activists-call-action-kidnaps-murders/688334-4639632-54jjqyz/index.html>

¹⁴ <https://advox.globalvoices.org/2019/05/09/is-stella-nyanzi-weaponizing-the-vagina-ugandan-feminist-goes-to-court-in-free-speech-case/>

¹⁵ <https://globalvoices.org/2019/06/21/is-vagina-a-dirty-word-ugandan-feminist-stella-nyanzis-court-battle-continues/>

phallocratic systems that deem womanhood and femaleness as inferior.

(11) Solidarity: In April 2018, Rachel Njoroge, a student at Makerere was molested by a university official when she went to an office in the registry to pick a copy of her transcript and a recommendation letter¹⁶. Although previously unknown to Dr. Nyanzi, she extended solidarity and support to the student by encouraging and supporting her, showing up to stand in solidarity during the court hearings and via her Facebook timeline. We believe in the safety of women from sexual harassment and other forms of sexual exploitation and oppression. We condemn all sexual harassers, abusers, rapists and other violators of women.

As members and supporters of the #PushForStellaNyanzi campaign, we know that the revolution of the twenty first century will not come on the backs of tanks and in the barrels of guns, we recognise that our ideas, our very bodies are the revolutionary tools we shall employ in the lifetime of work and struggle before us, until we achieve a world, society, country where fairness, freedom and feminism reign.

Fuck Oppression. Fuck Exploitation. Fuck Repression. Stella Nyanzi Oyeee. Hurray Freedom. We want Fairness. Feminism Juuu! Aluta Continua.

¹⁶ <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Makerere-senior-staff-remanded-again-over-sexual-harassment/688334-4555782-m65fkvz/index.html>

"Whatever she writes, whatever she fights for – it's about the country and people she loves and supports." - CNN

"Her story reminds Ugandans that the struggle for freedom has never been achieved by playing to the standards of civility."

- **Rosebell Kagumire, Editor, African Feminism**

"The formidable feminist foe Museveni has failed to silence."

- **Mail and Guardian**

"She was born before her time, but this rotten world needs more Stellas to make it humane again."

- **Sabatho Nyansenda, Tanzania Socialist Forum**

"A trained journalist turned researcher, Nyanzi is a lyricist, poetess, creative writer and analyst on a quest for good governance. She has been unflinching in her criticism of the Ugandan government and is unafraid to tackle taboos around sex and gender and stand up for LGBT rights."

- **The Guardian**

ISBN 978-9970-733-01-9



9 789970 733019

Published by Ubuona Reading Group
Copyright © 2020 Stella Nyanzi
Issued in print and electronic formats.
ISBN: 978-9970-733-01-9