

BOMBASTIC



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FOREWORD



Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera

Greetings our dear readers,

I greet you all in your different capacities and protocol. Mbalamusizza nnyo mwenna mu biti byammwe.

I am very excited to introduce the third edition of Bombastic Magazine- mainly because it is focusing on women!! The past two editions focused on gay men and transgender persons respectively and while brainstorming about the theme for this edition, it became clear that the women have taken a backseat in Uganda's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) movement as well as the general society. We are no longer as vocal as we used to be, we have retreated to a superficial comfort zone and rarely raise our heads to make a stance on things that affect our communities and nation. Where is the boldness and courage that started movements, revolutions and policy changing conversations?

So for this edition, we focus mainly on women that have continued to, in one way or another, make a contribution to the movement and nation at large. We spoke to ladies who believe that we must rise up and make a stand for what is important; we must not let the patriarchy system overshadow our dreams and visions. Hopefully, you will be encouraged and blessed by these women as much as I have been- I hope their stories and articles will ignite a fire in you to reclaim our spaces and become vocal and visible. Women are fiery beings, let us use our power to change the nation and be the change we want to see.

Something else that stood out for me was the lack of funding for LGBTI organizations in Uganda- why that is, I wonder. With the annulment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA), most of our allies seem to think that all is well in our nation but how far from the truth they are. One of the legal experts herein,

talks about Parliament using other bills to enforce most of the clauses that were stipulated in the AHA. Our spaces are shrinking, our freedoms still hang in balance and our lives are at risk. I cannot stress enough how important it is for our allies to rally behind us now- we need to lay a stable foundation for if and when the tide changes.

Personally I can only pledge one thing to myself and to this community that I love so dearly- I will continue doing my best, because this struggle, this movement, this community that I am honoured to represent in so many ways is worthy of nothing but the best. So, be it standing against the police and unfair laws during Pride (like you will see in the pictorial) or continuing to lobby support for the movement, I will give it the best I can.

It would be unfair of me not to recognize the fact that we all try to make Uganda and whatever countries we might be in, better places for ourselves as LGBTI identifying persons. The sacrifices we all make- sharing our stories, standing at the frontline or simply choosing to be tolerant of one another, I hope are all worth it and will one day see us enjoy our liberties like any other global citizen.

The online version can be accessed from our online platform which has a television and Radio. Join the more than 2million viewers to keep updated about our work.

To all our partners, funders and people from around the world that continue to support our work, we are very grateful and please don't stop.

Enjoy your reading and we will be waiting on your comments and reactions in regard to this edition.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

Aluta Continua

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kasha".

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MY CALL TO ACTIVISM; Silence Was No Option

Clare Byarugaba- a name synonymous to courage, bravery and distinction among Uganda's LGBTI community. She is a 29 year old woman from Kabale who does not necessarily believe in labels but for political reasons identifies as a lesbian.

Growing up, Clare did not pay much attention to gender and sexuality; like many of us, she believed the gospel truth that heterosexuality was the normal and nature-assigned form of sexuality. She did not give

herself a chance to explore her sexual feelings and attraction towards other people because she had been raised in a heterosexual oriented family and societal setting.

Looking back, she does realize that she might have had lesbian tendencies that she did not pay much attention to. There was a particular teacher in Primary school that she was especially attached to; she made sure she passed English with flying colors so that the teacher could give her

gold stars, she picked flowers over the weekend and presented them to her besotted whenever the school week resumed and always endeavored to sit next to the teacher during chapel. Like most children her age, she merely thought she had a 'best teacher' and did not let her obsession take centre stage.

Even throughout secondary school, Clare did not explore her sexuality because she had no idea about alternative sexualities; and besides, she was very religious and believed in complete chastity. It was during higher education that she started to recognize her attraction to girls but even then, did nothing about it because of everything her religion taught. At the time, she was very involved in Christian fellowships and scripture unions and thought merely pursued friendships with the girls she was attracted to.. However, it was not until her university that she formed meaningful sexual relationships.

Like majority of Uganda's LGBTI identifying persons who lose the power to come out of the closet when they are ready, Clare was outed to her family and friends when The Red Pepper listed her among Kampala's top lesbians; her face and name were on the front page. Her family did not question the hows or whys of how she identified as a lesbian but retorted how much shame she had brought upon them and how she had dragged the family name through the mud, Clare was also worried about her mother back in Kabale who had to explain to everybody they knew, why her daughter was on the front page of a tabloid.



To this day, Clare has not had a two way conversation to fully come out to her family. She attributes this to her family being the kind that would rather look the other way and remain silent rather than address and issue that makes them uncomfortable. She did not make opportune of the media outing to start a conversation that addressed her family's fears, reservations and mind-boggling questions.

Prior to this outing, Clare had been talking to her mother about the different issues that are faced by LGBTI identifying persons in societies like ours. She therefore understood the pressure that society puts on gender and sexual minorities and knew that all this could lead to depression or even deeper psychological problems.

Immediately after being outed, Clare switched off her phone and went away for a couple of weeks for safety reasons. The first call she received upon return was from her mother and as can be expected, she was scared to pick up; thankfully, hers was a call of concern- all she cared about was that her only daughter was alive and well. Eventually, she did share how painful Clare's outing had been for her- explaining to church members and neighbors why her child was a lesbian and being asked why she had raised her to turn out this way. She suggested that Clare quits her line of work as well as lifestyle and consider getting married; she told her (Clare) that she would rather have a drunkard or drug addict for a child rather than one that was gay- words that clearly struck a cord with the young activist. She even went as far as threatening to report her to the authorities if she kept up with this abominable lifestyle.

While she understood where her mother and the rest of her family were coming from, Clare got to a point where she stopped

apologizing. She had not brought this upon herself, she had not gone to the tabloid at free will and this outing had damaged her as a person. She was afraid to walk in public for fear of being recognized, she had to stop using public transport, had to vacate her home and went into hiding- the damage to her life was immense and she was not going to further complicate her situation by apologizing at every turn.

Recently, Clare took her partner home, as a friend; this was meant to help her family see that there was nothing to fear about two adults loving each other. Her partner took gifts for her family and even went to Clare's childhood church- something that meant a great deal to her. Whether they had their suspicions, questions about her sexuality did not arise although she felt she was prepared enough to tackle them had they arisen.

About activism, Clare never imagined she would walk this path. While at university she had heard about LGBTI activists and wondered how they bore the shame or walked around with the knowledge that people knew they were gay. She grew into her activism role- a slow process but one that she quickly embraced. After being outed, Clare quickly realized that silence was not an option. She had witnessed several incidents of domestic violence as a child and even at a young age knew it was wrong- she simply could not comprehend why the women stayed in such marriages or even remained silent about it. This shaped her belief that to avert a problem, one had to speak up about it.

Clare was also an ardent church goer and she normally took girls that she was interested in to church; this was her way of reconciling her religion and sexuality. She remembers a

petition being passed around church in 2009 and when it eventually got to her, she realized it was in support of the anti homosexuality bill that still had the death penalty at the time. She could not believe that church, which was meant to be a safe haven for people, was now crucifying them. It was then that she made up her mind to make the world a better place for people like herself, in whatever way she could.

Speaking about her relationship Clare stresses the importance of being with someone who is a source of balance. She believes that being a leader and an activist had put her in a space where she needs and appreciates her partner's different line of thought. While her identity is political, Clare asserts that her relationship is very private and drawing a line between the two has helped both she and her girlfriend develop a strong bond. Will she ever list her girl friend as her emergency contact or even put her on her medical form as a partner- that is a question that most LGBTI identifying persons wish they could answer in the affirmative. In fact, according to Clare, this uncertainty about the future often puts pressure on relationships and is one of the reasons most couples do not last.

Clare, started Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays Ugandan Chapter (PFLAG)- a support group that helps reconcile LGBTI individuals to their families and loved ones. Her relationship with her mother and the lack of a secure space for both parties to air out their differences as well as learn about and address their fears and worries is what inspired her to start PFLAG. From her personal experience, Clare thought it was a necessity to provide a space where dialogue could be fostered as well as reconciliation between all parties involved.

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH A PROUD LESBIAN

By MS

Who's a lesbian? Is she a woman too? Is her cognitive performance above average? Is she sexually starved? Does she know God? A number of questions had always triggered my anger to shot into my own foot, until I attended a cooperate-girls' talk on the women's day.

The room was scented with beauty, aerated with elegance and conditioned with joy and laughter. I got the opportunity to rub shoulders with big company CEOs, PROs, consultants and nuns, certainly, I felt at home.

The guest speaker took the podium; a well composed young lady dressed in a full cooperate suit and suitable eye glasses. She spoke with a lot of confidence, audibly without shredding any of her confrontations.

"I am human, with Bantu ancestry! I am a courteous human with visible expressions of respect to my elders especially my mother and women. I am a human filled with laughter and a deep sense of kindness; a woman who's friendly, sociable and a communistic. I am a human with patience, peace and my soul survives on music. I am a human whose veins are triggered to an erection by fear, hatred and bad situations".

Wow, the audience was tickled to a remarkable realization of humanity and its values.

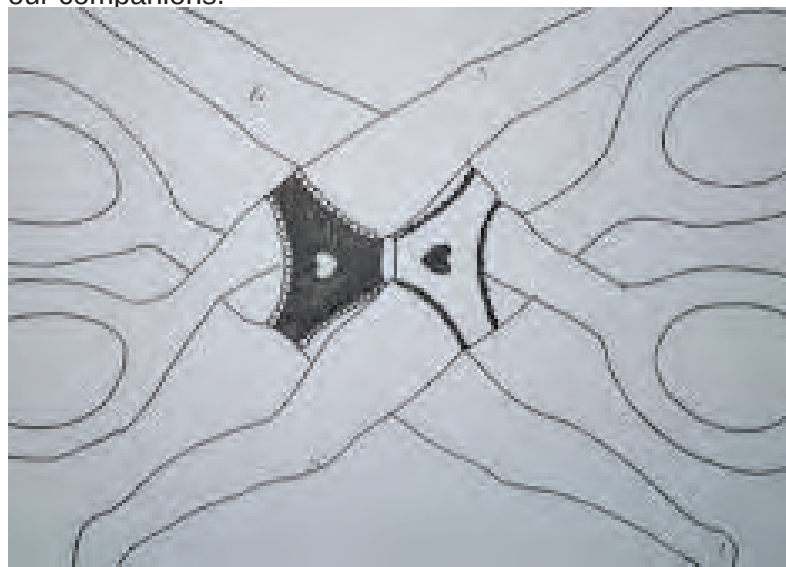
"I am a woman; not by waist/hip ratio, pitched voice or feminine body nor am I a woman because of my monthly menstrual cycles. I am a woman because I identify as a woman. My femininity and individuality is not unrecognized by patriarchy and societal expectations. I am not booted down by men's ego nor am I overrated to men; I believe in equality for all of us. I am a cis woman, born and raised as a princess".

We were indeed thrown to an earnest thought of what delineates our womanhood.

"I am a lesbian woman. I am a loving human, a proud woman, a proud lesbian woman. I not only naturally and emotionally love women but also sexually attracted to women. I know not of any rape or sexual abuse experience nor any conditioned love; I simply love from the extremity of my heart. My love isn't a divergence from God's love, of course He hasn't abandoned me; certainly him and I are at peace with each other".

"For some and most of you sending me to hell, killing me for the love that flows through my blood vessels, blaming me for recruiting your children, associating me with the occurring natural calamities, forgive yourselves! I more than my sexual orientation and expression, I have a life to live, a love to love; allow your hate to go for your enemies and let love flow".

Most of us lamented about our hatred towards our fellow humans, our fellow women and companions; it was justifiable that homophobia is ignorance. Lesbians are human, they are women too and they are proud loving women. They are God's chosen women, besides who are we to judge? I could pompously say homophobia is just an excuse to undermine humanity, to disregard love and overrate peculiar decree. However, diviner we may appear, it's not our duty to judge and use hate as a tool to tyrannize our companions.



ART HAS BECOME MY SAFE HAVEN

My name is KAB and I am a student of Psychology, currently in my final year of University. I am a passionate artiste and activist for the human rights of LGBTI persons: as my way of contributing towards this movement, I am a volunteer at one of the LGBTI organizations in Uganda.

Growing up, I did not pay much attention to anything sexual but deep down, I knew I was not the ordinary girl who got butterflies at the sight of a boy. In fact I can say I came into my own in one night; I read a lesbian novel and suddenly, I could relate and so many of the things and feelings that were puzzling me before started making sense- the puzzle that is my life was beginning to come together. Coming out for me was not a matter I had a choice about because in a way, I was outed. I remember vividly, I had had an argument with my mother that day and unfortunately I left my phone lying around the house. My brothers unfortunately got ahold of it

It did not help that everywhere I turned to for information on outing, all that seemed to come up was violations, rebuke and hate. Thankfully, I had processed what coming out meant and I retreated to my safety cave of self love.

Eventually, my mother reached out and asked if I was still interested in being a part of the family. At the time I wanted to get to campus and we struck a cordial understanding- I would 'stop' my lesbianism and see a counselor to 'straighten me out' and my family would in turn pay my tuition fees. I fully understood that my sexuality was not something I could switch on and off like a light bulb but I obliged because I needed the educational support.

I had constant sessions with the counselor for a while up until he suggested sexual relations to me as a means of curing my lesbianism. I realized then that I could no longer adhere to this part of our



One of Kab's art pieces

and in a matter of minutes, my very deeply guarded secret was out. They went straight to our mother and told her I was a lesbian. I was beaten and kicked out of home; most of my basic benefits like education were also cut off for a while.

agreement with my family and stopped attending the counseling sessions; it was very sad that I was dealing with someone who was very unethical in the very field I was trying to pursue as a career.

I have a rather strange relationship with my family; I keep my private life to myself, I don't go home unless it's official business and I reach out when it's time for my tuition fees to be paid. However, I have noticed a change in my mother in recent days; she reaches out a little more than she previously did and although she still says things like 'I know you have your problems' in reference to my sexuality, it's great to know that our relationship can be salvaged.

I have found a way to channel my energy to a positive space by pursuing art, specifically batik. This is the kind of art where you use wax and dyes to create a piece on cloth. Usually when I draw my sketches, it's all prim and proper and then when I start the process of waxing and dying, I end up with something totally different because these materials usually end up in places you hadn't really intended. That is the beauty with this kind of art, you watch your piece evolve into a wonder of beauty and it takes on its own life.

I don't think I will pursue this as a profession but I know for a fact I will continue to do it because it's therapeutic and it is an amazing way of advancing the LGBTI movement. I once created three pieces that I eventually entered into a competition and that is when it struck me that I could use my skill as an advocacy tool.

One of my greatest dreams for my art is to pass on the skill especially to LGBTI persons in Uganda; we could use the pieces for advocacy as well as channel this into an income generating project that the youths in the community are evidently very in need of. Hopefully, a space and opportunity to pass this on to my peers will come up soon.

One of the things I realize is lacking in the community is self motivation and belief in one's own capabilities. Many of our kuchu youths are extremely talented and simply need a nudge in the right direction; we must now pursue spaces where we can all exploit our talents and potential to the very best of our ability.

I AM WHO I AM

I work with you..

You work with me..

We discuss politics, education, laws
of the land and our children..

We slept over each other's houses..
we broke bread together..we were fine
until I told you..

I was gay...

I never inappropriately approached you..

"By the way..you're not my type." why
so much hatred..I am that same
person you kept company..Why must you
distant yourself from me..? look at
me..

I am still your friend..why must our
friendship end..because I spoke my
truth..?

I am whom I am..there are many of us
in the closet..I will no longer hide my
identity..

I must stand for something..

I own up to my identity..

I am still that person you trusted..

I accepted you..

"Why?" I asked..

Can't you accept..

Me...

I am who I am..

(Shanan Shalom Navaro Powerz)



I WAS BORN THIS WAY

John aka Jojo Desire is a proud transgender woman born and raised in Mbale Nawuyo village; she was raised by a single mother after the sudden death of her father. Jojo has two brothers and six sisters. While growing up, she often questioned why she had no father, like her peers- her mother preached the 'I am your father and mother' gospel and that is something Jojo has now learnt to appreciate.

What they lacked in monetary terms and material needs, Jojo's mother made up for in the abundance of love and care she showered on her children. In fact, despite the entire village shunning Jojo after she came out as a transgender woman, her mother has stood by her side and is a constant source of encouragement. She has been there even through the arrests and attempted lynching that Jojo has suffered.

"Though my mom doesn't fully understand issues to do with transgender people, she has embraced me the way I am and even at home I use many things meant for women such as shoes, dresses, make up, hair weaves and dresses and in most cases we share most of these things. I even put on her dresses and her ear rings," Jojo says of her strong bond with her mother.

However, Jojo took a long time before coming out to her mother. Growing up, she preferred to play girly games and dressed like girls- majority of her childhood friends were also girls. Like many transwomen, it was a tough round getting to accept herself let alone share her gender identity with other people. Unlike her mother, Jojo's siblings are not very comfortable with her gender identity and have on several occasions tried to take her to pastors for deliverance. According to them, Jojo is possessed by demons that can be cast out.

As a child, Jojo served as church boy and while struggling with her feelings, she turned to prayer and fasting in the hope that she would overcome 'feeling like a woman'. She was scolded by the church elders and accused of promoting homosexuality in their church – this led her to departing

from the church she had served since childhood. She however says that this decision helped her find peace as she was not being constantly reminded that she was an evil being.

Professionally, Jojo is a hair dresser and she has a mobile saloon. She has failed to find a permanent work station as most people do not want to openly associate with a societal 'misfit'. However, her ardent clients are supportive and she often makes house calls to braid their hair- this is how she earns a living.

She says most of her regular clients have accepted her for who she is although that too, took a while. When asked about social spaces for transgender persons in Mbale, Jojo said that there isn't a safe space for people to convene and socialize. The community members simply meet in local bars (which are not entirely safe) as well as community events. On health access, Jojo says transgender people still have great challenges in accessing free and friendly health services and that they have evidenced discrimination in many health facilities in Mbale.

Jojo who also took part in the Mr and Miss Pride Uganda beauty pageant that was disrupted by police testifies that this event was a big turning point in her life.

"I contested and my inspiration was all about transgenders coming out to show the world that we are born this way and that no one can change you. My other emphasis was on talents, we transgender people have talents and we can nurture them," the soft spoken Jojo explains.

Jojo calls upon all transgender people in her home district of Mbale to come out such that people know that they also exist. Jojo was relieved the first day she met other transmen and women in Mbale because she had always thought she was alone; this gave her courage to fully embrace.

Jojo's biggest dream is to transition and undergo all the necessary surgeries to become let the woman in her emerge.

ALONE AT 18 BUT STILL HOPEFUL

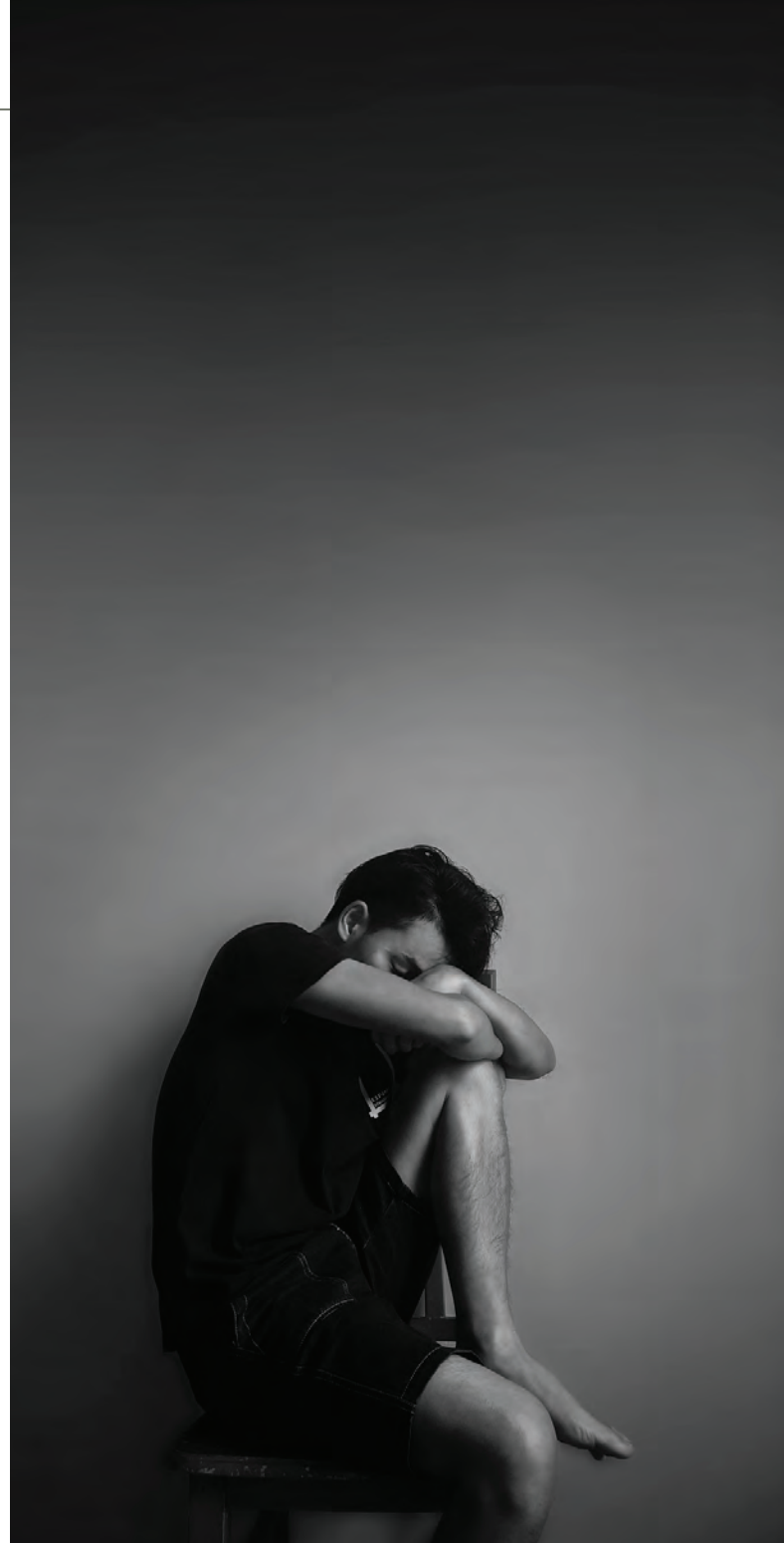
By D.S

D, grew up in a calm moderate environment but her family never embraced anything that was considered out of the norm- especially issues regarding sexuality.

At the age of 18 in her senior six vacation, her mother caught her taking alcohol and chased her from home-this marked a new phase in her life. She then realized she had to toughen up and face life whichever way it presented itself. However, her family stayed in touch with her although she was not allowed to live at the family home. Later after discovering that D was a lesbian, her family cut all ties with her and at a very young age, she started to fend for herself. Unlike most LGBT identifying persons who find solace in their siblings when their parents shun them, D is an only child and had no one to turn to.

D had always had a dream to become a renowned entertainer and when she was left with nowhere to turn, she buried herself in music. She is one of the oldest serving members of a popular band within Uganda's LGBTI community and she says this is her family. "They accepted me and gave me hope when I was at my lowest and could have very easily hit rock bottom," she says.

Through her music, D has managed to pay her tuition fees and is currently pursuing a bachelors degree in web designing. She says this is taking a while due to the constraints in finances; luckily she enrolled in an institution which recognizes the hardships in the economy and has managed to request for a few dead years to be able to stabilize financially. D's mother, in an attempt to rekindle their relationship, set conditions to quit the band as well as 'straighten herself out' for D to be able to receive



any financial help. Angered by the thought of abandoning the very people who stood by her when her own parents threw her out, D made a decision that wherever life led her, she would remain loyal to her bandmates for eternity. To further help with income, D has ventured into event organizing and held a very successful lesbian themed event last year; she says she is currently undertaking another and is thinking of turning this into an annual gathering.

D is also a very gifted swimmer and represented

Uganda's LGBTI community in the last International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics (IGLA) that were held in Edmonton Canada last year. She returned home with several gold and bronze medals – this being one of her proudest moments as a queer Ugandan. Her face lights up when she talks about this competition, D explains that most Ugandans do not regard kuchus as productive people who can go on to achieve great things or impact the world and that moment for her, demystified so many of these things that society has for so long been shoving down her throat. She now, more than ever believes she can achieve anything she puts her mind to.

D, who continues to pursue music, is now focusing on starting a solo career although she acknowledges that it will not be a simple feat if she does not have a stable source of income or a willing sponsor. She forecasts that in ten years, she will be a musical household name and is determined to do whatever it takes to make this dream a reality.

“Those who have seen me from the start can confess that I started from scratch and they now tell me that I am really progressing. I have grown as a person, an artiste and a sports person and I do not downplay my achievements,” she relays of beating self pity and rising above life's troubles. D recognizes the talents in many Ugandan kuchus and says they have failed to end their pity parties; something that keeps most of them living in poverty.

As a person who has had to fend for herself from a very early age, she advises these talented LGBTI persons to stop associating with people with no dreams. Explaining that she made the choice to walk away from friends whose only interests were alcohol and where the next party was, D reckons that if her peers took the same choice, their lives would turn around.

D has also nurtured her relationship with God and says that prayer and meditation have introduced a special 'calm' into her life and she wouldn't have made it this far had she not found solace in God.



WE ARE THE RAINBOW

We are the rainbow,
we are a bridge
of light,
an indestructible bridge
from one bank
to another
of all rivers
of all countries
of the world.

We are the bridge
that bears the weight
of all those who cross
the river of life.

We are the rainbow
made of common
stones and
precious stones:
many colours are
our pride
and our name
is Freedom.

By Robert Malini and
Patrick Leuben Mukajanga



STANDING IN THE GAP: GAGGED BY THE LAW

Joanine Nanyange, a human rights lawyer and activist that has closely worked with Uganda's Kuchu community has been at the helm of most of the legal cases handled by the the Humans Rights Awareness and Promotion and Forum (HRAPF) in recent years.

In 2009 while still in high school, Ms Nanyange picked a special interest in LGBTI issues in Uganda and was determined to make some sort of contribution to fighting for equality and justice for this marginalized group. At the time, the Anti Homosexuality Bill was in parliament; her teachers would even dish out a mouthful of spite about LGBTI persons during their lessons. Confused about why as a country we were very concerned

about the private affairs of other peace loving citizens' bedrooms, she decided to self educate about all things gender and sexual minorities.

A short while later, Ms Nanyange joined law school; this decision had nothing to do with trying to fight the injustices she was surrounded by, she was simply a young girl who at the time merely thought of pursuing a career in law because it was a 'cool' thing to do. As her course progressed, she picked a keen concern in human rights law and an even keener interest in public interest law for marginalized persons. During one of their classes, a few activists from the LGBTI community were brought in to share their experiences- this was the first time Ms Nanyange was seeing people who openly identified out of the norm for gender and sexuality.

The experience left her deeply saddened by the state of affairs in Uganda so when in her third year she had to take on an internship, it was no surprise that she was determined to work with gender ad sexual minorities; she ended up interning at HRAPF and that marked the beginning of her journey as an advocate and activist for the human rights of LGBTI persons.

Asked why she continues to work with persons who might put the advancement of her law career in jeopardy especially in Uganda, Ms Nanyange says she is long past worrying about what her future (career) holds; she is determined to use her position and knowledge to advance the rights of persons who face such dire injustices and yet have no means or knowledge that they even have rights to be who they are.

Like most heterosexual persons that have chosen to stand with LGBTI persons, Ms Nanyange has had her fair share of backlashes. She says one of her most vivid experiences happened on social media."I had posted something in defence of LGB-



Once, she also visited the police in pursuit of a case she was handling and the officers threw away her notebook and diary;

TI persons on facebook and while I expected the abuse, I did not anticipate that someone would go so far as telling me they wished my mother had aborted me," she reminisces. The comment struck a cord and invigorated a fighter spirit in her; it was then that she realized she needed to toughen up and not let anyone derail her from her mission. She has also had a few family members question if she was 'ok or not' because of her line of work and the people she associates with on a daily basis. However, this was a personal decision- one she intends to stand by until she feels she has contributed her fair share to fighting the legal injustices faced by LGBTI persons.

Once, she also visited the police in pursuit of a case she was handling and the officers threw away her notebook and diary; they questioned why a sane person would approach the state in defense of 'such' people. At that point, she wondered if she had invested five years of education into a career where she would continuously be degraded.

Ms Nanyange has also faced a few hurdles in her social life; a few people have questioned her sexual orientation and she has learnt to give them a taste of their own medicine. She simply reminds them that her sexual orientation is not up for discussion and can only be further divulged if the person asking has intentions of marrying her. This, she has learnt, quickly puts said 'intruder' in their rightful place and many will immediately push the topic to the side.

Asked to give her legal opinion on the re-tabling of the Anti Homosexuality Bill, the law practitioner stresses that she is very doubtful that the AHB will make it to parliament again and if it does, so many of its fatal clauses will be greatly adjusted. This is because Uganda received a lot of backlash from the global community when the AHB was in Parliament and explains why the courts were not hesitant to nullify it

once it was contested by some LGBTI rights activists.

However, she stresses that Parliament has now adopted the use of other laws to enforce the same impacts that AHA would have had. They are now passing into law bills that will decapitate the community and further advocacy geared towards the injustices faced by sexual and gender minorities. Ms Nanyange revealed that she was in Parliament while the NGO Act was being discussed and the conversation mainly centered on LGBTI friendly organizations; most of the contents included in the NGO Act were purposefully meant to cripple the operations of organizations that advance the rights of gender and sexual minorities.

Ms Nanyange expressed her sincere respect and admiration for LGBTI persons who have refused to take a back seat and have instead come to the forefront and said, "Here we are, we are human and we deserve to be respected like every other Ugandan citizen." She also thinks one of the ways to quicken the adjustment of Uganda laws is through directly engaging with policy makers and demystifying most of their beliefs concerning LGBTI persons.

Her wish is to see a Uganda where everyone is free to be who they are and to have equal opportunities, and equal rights irrespective of who they love, how they dress or if other people do not deem them 'normal'.



FROM HOMOPHOBIC TO ADVOCATE: Susan's Journey to Tolerance and Acceptance

Susan Atuhura, a professional monitoring and evaluation specialist working with Action Group for Health, Human Rights and HIV/AIDS (AGHA) Uganda is one whose journey from homophobia to acceptance of sexual and gender minorities is worth sharing.

Though she is now passionate about humanitarian work, it hasn't always been this way; Susan started working closely with LGBT persons in 2015 and at the time, was nothing but closed off to the idea of closely associating with LGBT persons as well as sex workers. .



stand how one can leave very beautiful women and choose to go after a fellow man or why someone would wake up one day and choose to sleep with several for money; I couldn't understand that at all. Had I been given a gun, I would have willingly pulled the trigger on one of these people," Susan recalls.

At the height of the anti-homosexuality bill, Susan was among the cluster of Ugandans who were in support for "hang them" clause but three years later, after unearthing the myths and misconceptions usually told about LGBTI people, attributes her previous attitude to lack of knowledge about sexuality and gender identity.

"When I started out at this job, like many other people who don't differentiate between promotion and advocacy, I found myself wondering why God had placed me here. I didn't even think I would handle working with LGBT people and sex workers because they were everything I stood against," says of her first impression when she got the details of her new job.

What Susan realized later was she had never met an LGBT identifying person or sex worker in person and during residential project orientation; she interacted with several MSM and AWs.

"During this first day of the training, I didn't learn anything; I was pondering where the world is heading with the 'craziness' that surrounded me. By evening I hadn't checked in and the only available room was next to a sex worker's. I didn't sleep the whole night because I was scared and thought 'these peo-

Susan has now resorted to using social media to create awareness and advocate for inclusion of LGBT persons and sex workers.



ple' would attempt to conjure me into sex but somehow day break came and my fears were put to rest.”

The following day, Susan absolved to make an effort; she sat next to a sex work activist who narrated her life experience as an out-sex worker and activist. Through the conversation, Susan discovered that the sex worker was the core pillar for her family's survival and had educated all her siblings and built a house through the earnings from sex work. “During the course of the training, I interacted with several other people including transgender persons and within a few months, my attitude started to change although deep down, I was still uncomfortable with the idea of people of the same sex being sexually attracted to each other.”

She has now resorted to using social media to create awareness and advocate for inclusion of LGBT persons and sex workers. This advocacy has however caused conflict between her friends and family, something she says she views as an opportunity to sensitize the people closest to her.

Susan has boldly explained that she doesn't need to be a lesbian to fight or demand for the human rights of LGBTI persons because even if she is not one of them, she understands them and deserve a right to live.

As an M&E specialist who works with an organisation advocating for equal access of health services, Susan has discovered that discrimination of LGBT persons is still part and parcel of the Ugandan health system. She cites the need for sensitization of health workers about the issues regarding sexuality and gender identity. Many of the health workers forget that besides one's sexual orientation or gender identity, his/her access to health services is a basic need.

Susan believes that the anti-gay agenda has been fueled by propagandists who have branded sexual and gender minorities as promoters of a western culture with many alleging that they are after financial gain and are after recruiting children.

Susan says that from personal experience, all these allegations are fallacies designed to ruin their reputation in society and make people hate them more.

“If these people allege that LGBT persons have a lot of money, why have I seen many struggling to get what to eat, or even rent. Some are very sick and can't even afford treatment. So what money is it that they are always talking about?” Susan now questions.

I AM NOT READY OR AM I?

I have lived more than twice; a sane person would assume I speak of a life busting at its seams. I am not and barely eighteen years old. My 18th birthday was a week and half ago- the first time life became more than I could handle.

I slit my wrists and bled to death beneath a bridge or so I thought. Yet I came back to the same path with the faintest of memories and the heaviest sense of déjà vu toward every major decision. I thought I was crazy until the second time I got to the point that I suspect broke me enough to want to die. I assumed it had to be. My mother died. She had cancer and had been sick for a long time. Yet she never complained. Why would I keep coming back if I couldn't make an impact?

Like having the winning numbers to the lottery or snatching that first pack of cigarettes from my mother when she was younger. I don't know and wish I had some answers. I have never seen a white light. I never saw the creator or seen even the slightest flicker of the flames of hell. So it is enough to say for me, religion has lost all meaning. I am in familiar territory. I am a high school senior and my mother's funeral was only a few weeks ago. The usual whispers of the death of my mother that followed me in the locker-room and cafeteria surprisingly didn't make me uncomfortable. I lived in a harsh world that had me repeatedly attempting to kill myself before I could get out of high school. The last time I tried to take my own life was for something I will try not to think about because of embarrassment. I was looking for a shoulder to lean on. I now live with my grandmother and have never had a strong male role model in my life.

My mother never told much about my father and the different men in her life always left. They left my mother heartbroken each time. She had a heart of gold but to be fair gold or platinum couldn't cut it. She was a diamond and most of these men maybe even my father didn't see it.

Though in my case it is mainly mental; I dip a toe at the edge of the pool but I'm too scared to take the plunge. I never had a father. I never had a brother. I taught myself most of what I know. So is it so hard to comprehend that I am 'strange'? Why lie? That is a lot of pitter patter bullshit. I am who I am. I am an adult and I want a black c**k. If that makes you uncomfortable don't sweat it because it won't be yours that I will be after. I cannot have another suicide attempt.

I slit my wrists and bled to death beneath a bridge or so I thought.

It is time to move on, my mother would have wanted that. I will roll the dice and persevere to grow old and fat. For now I set my eyes on a waitress at my favorite local restaurant. The fact that she works there makes it my favorite. She sadly has an all black uniform and never seems to stand still. Regardless I like everything I see and I bet she would make a great roll in the sack. Getting up to leave after paying the bill sneaking one more glance at the waitress' ass as she walks by my table. I hope she will be my first.

RECOGNITION



GODIVA AKULLO

Godiva Monica Akullo is a feminist lawyer and teacher of the law with a background in human rights. She is passionate about the rights of womyn and other marginalized groups and has written on Intimate Partner Violence among LGBTIQ womyn in Kampala and the use of “Naming and Shaming” as a tool to encourage states to respect their international Human Rights obligations.

Ms. Akullo holds a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree from Makerere University, a Master of Laws (LLM) degree from Harvard Law School and a Diploma in Legal Practise from the Law Development Centre.

She is also a permanent writer at AfricanFeminism.com. Godiva currently works as the Deputy Executive Director at Chapter Four Uganda and remains committed to creating an equal and just Uganda fo all women.



SOLOME NAKAWESI

She is a seasoned activist, transformative leader and change maker that has realized many dreams at personal, community and institutional levels.

Solome has served the women’s movement in many capacities; she has previously worked as Executive Director of Uganda Women’s Network (UWONET) the largest a women’s lobby and coalition that brings together Ugandan national women’s organizations to: lobby, engage on key policy and legal reform, network for collective action and be an effective voice for all women.

Se was also the ED of Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMWA) a Pan African Women’s International Development NGO for African Women running the Africa-Wide Programme in Eastern/Horn; Western; Southern; Central and Francophone Africa and the UK/Europe Programmes.

She continues to serve as a consultant and sits on several organizational boards.



DR. STELLA NYANZI

Stella Nyanzi is a medical anthropologist who has strongly and confidently supported Uganda’s LGBTI community. Dr Nyanzi is unapologetic about her beliefs that all humans are equal and deserve to be treated us thus, irrespective of what their sexuality or gender orientation is.

Dr Nyanzi is interested in understanding how the body and bodily processes are sexed, gendered, healed and diseased through every day practices. She also delights in social protest!

Dr Nyanzi ia also one of the most profound feminists in current Uganda; she has often spoken up against the inequality and social injustices suffered by Ugandan women and girls in all spheres. She is currently running a campaign aimed at providing sanitary towels for underprivileged Uganda girls who otherwise miss school during their menstruation periods.

OUR SEXUALITY IS OUR STRENGTH NOT VULNERABILITY!



The age of referring to homosexuality as an abomination is getting to being eroded; there is a growing trend of acceptance and tolerance of LGBTI persons into Ugandan communities; fair attempts of inclusion of gay people into the mainstream systems of governance and healthcare are being made and overall, the adoption of universal human rights agenda is getting understood. As a nation, Ugandans are tending to paying more attention to more reasonable and vital issues than worrying about consensual same-sex love. However, this is not an underscore to the need for more activism, education and information to the conservative homophobic individuals.

On the other hand, as the LGBTI community, there is great need to draw our amours to wearing our sexuality as strength than vulnerability. We need to define ourselves as individuals whose faces wear ability, strength and productive visions; our sexuality should just be our make-up but not our core skin. Our diversity should be jewellery added to already existing beautiful minds and hearts. Who are the LGBTI persons? We need to be identified by our

unique roles, our careers, our talents and gem; it is then that the rest of our communities will identify us as persons of great importance.

We need to define ourselves as individuals whose faces wear ability, strength and productive visions;

We ought to learn from the targets of our enemies, so as to comflouge better and thrive from the hate-environment. To the young people, education is key! Whether gay or straight, as a growing person, education is paramount to opening doors to a sustainable life, so focus and acquire that tool. Coming out is a “sacrifice”, so young people ought to weigh options; what is the cost of being myself and loosing education yet camouflage and attain education? We ought to live as martyrs of tomorrow, the sacrifices of our comfort will be the pleasures of our next generation. Let’s have an increased community of gay doctors in the health sector, lesbian CEOs, transgender persons in business and queer persons in politics. It is then that our voices will speak greater volumes towards acceptance and tolerance, consequently our generations will not suffer the “closet” life like we have. Let our foundations be of martyrdom for the future. It is worth noting that a number of young are expelled from learning institutions because of involvement in same-sex relationships. Whereas, different-sex relationships in schools are tolerable with warnings, suspensions and counseling, same-sex relationships are null and void. Expulsion of young gay people from schools and consequently from homes does not only reduce the number of potentially active martyrs of change that we intend to sweep our communities with but also increases our vulnerability. For those who can access education, be the martyrs of change our community needs.

OUTED BY MY OWN FAMILY

By Jay

My name is Joan. Close friends call me Jay. Guess the former doesn't not sound like me. I was born 26 years ago to Langi parents up north of Uganda in a small town called Lira. I have 2 handsome brothers, Joe and Joshua and unfortunately I am the only girl.

I am my dad's prize daughter. Though I have step brothers and sisters, I also think, for my parents, I'm the most disappointing of all- reason being I'm a lesbian. Despite my sexuality, I have done everything possible to please him and other family members and to make them understand me because my being lesbian doesn't make me any less human- I know I have a lot of potential within me.

My sexuality should not make me an outcast in the community. I live amongst my family members and relatives. I believe if they accept me as one of their own, others would do the same eventually.

My elder brother wants nothing to do with me because I am a lesbian. He even tried to convince my father to disown me because in his opinion, I am a disgrace. Sometimes I wonder what my mother would say if I told her I was lesbian. I strongly believe she would be mad but would eventually understand and accept me but just like they always say, good people don't live long. She died over 15 years ago when I was just 12yrs old.

You may ask wonder when I first realized I was attracted to girls. It all started when I was in boarding school where we played many games; I didn't enjoy the games other girls were obsessively involved in though I enjoyed loved watching them(to this day, I don't know whether I was watching or admiring). What was obvious though was that I was more drawn to football and other rough games.

Later everything fell into place; I started to pay keen attention to the beautiful girls whenever they walked around the compound, in the showers,

changing room and most especially when we went swimming. There was this particular girl who was four classes ahead of me, she was a prefect and liked helping us since we were in classes below her. I think my room was her favorite for reasons best known to her. Eventually, she and I became close friends and just like that, we started a relationship. I remember at some point, I was jealous of the male teachers who paid attention to my 'girl'.



At campus, I decided to take a break from dating (perhaps I thought I would outgrow my attraction to girls). I ended up having many one night stands which also created their own set of problems-drama and conflicts with boys about me trying to 'snatch' their girlfriends.

I remember during my campus days I took a break from serious dating though there were occasional pick and plays which also came with a lot of drama with gals and with guys because of their girlfriends.

I have also faced a lot of stigma and harassment from men. Imagine a situation where people stare and point at you wherever you pass. I remember one time a guy pounced on me at a bar and beat me up. I was puzzled as to why someone I had not offended would assault me without reason. I was later informed that my sexuality was my only offence!

My sexuality should not make me an out-cast in the community.

In my culture, it is expected that when a girl completes her education, she should get married. Three years after my graduation, my relatives started bombarding me with questions. By then I was in a full blown and committed relationship. As fate could have it, my father needed surgery and I, as his daughter, was tasked to take care of him as he recuperated. My girlfriend under the pretext of being my friend was very helpful and supportive and she earned the love and trust of my father and an invitation to our home in Lira.

We did arrange and went home with her. I remember we arrived in Lira at 11:30pm and there was a heavy down pour but my father braved the rain to pick us up. Three days later we started hearing rumors that I had brought my wife home. Some people even came to my father. We were then kicked out of home fuelled by my step sister who even called the local radio and our names were mentioned on air. The whole town quickly learnt the news and we left without even saying goodbye- that was the last time I visited my home.

HANDLE THE BIBLE WITH CARE!

BY MASIWA GUNDA

INTRODUCTION

Nothing demands more care and caution when handling than the Bible! Nothing is more fragile than the Bible! Nothing is harder than the Bible! Nothing is as comforting and consoling as the Bible! Nothing is as inciteful and hate-inspiring as the Bible! I could go on, in short, the Bible is a library of paradoxes one time indicating left then turning right, another time accelerating in order to stop. There are not too many writings out there that can champion violence and peace in equal measure and yet that is what we are sometimes led to believe about the Bible. When handled recklessly, as has happened before in the history of humanity, the Bible can become a weapon of mass destruction, brutal, ruthless and efficient. When handled with care and caution, the Bible can become an instrument of peace, stability, empowerment and sustainable love. The paradoxes of the Bible become more apparent when confronted with new socio-theological challenges and in our context one of such challenges revolves around the existence of ITLGB persons in our communities and churches. Sexual minorities are a reality in our communities from time immemorial, however, in the past few decades, sexual minorities have indicated their unwillingness to continue being forced to lead double lives: one for the family and another one for themselves. The church and other institutions were quick to condemn and ostracize hence the initial reaction from most ITLGB was to move out of the church or to remain in the church without disclosing one's sexual identity. A minority among the sexual minorities after serious reflections, meditation and prayers decided to "come out" as well as demanding their own space in the house of God. It is particularly because of this last group that we gather here to discuss about the violence that is visited on anyone, especially one in the minority with special focus on ITLGB persons. This presentation will try to show the manner in which the Bible has been used to entrench exclusionary and destructive attitudes towards sexual minorities while at the same time also showing how alternative readings can bring about

A SITE FOR STRUGGLE WITH THE POTENTIAL TO EXCLUDE AND DO VIOLENCE OR TO INCLUDE AND LOVE

constructive and inclusive transformation to our communities.

THE BIBLE IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY AND THEOLOGY

As theological educators on the African continent, we are aware that the Bible, the Quran and other Sacred Texts are highly regarded by their believers and sometimes even by non-believers. In fact, most African Christians understand themselves as “Bible-believing” and their churches as true reflections of “biblical Christianity” (Gunda, 2014). In understanding themselves as

Bible-believing Christians, African Christians can be termed as fundamentalist in their self-evaluation. What are the implications of this fundamentalist approach to the Bible to the identity of the Church and the relationship between the heterosexual majority and the sexual minorities in the house of God? Further, we may also want to ask; what are the consequences of such an understanding, especially on sexual minorities?

While African exposure to the Hebrew Bible happened even before

the time of Jesus Christ, it is true that this exposure occurred in North Africa and was largely limited to that region. Most of Sub-Saharan Africa was exposed first not to the Hebrew Bible but rather to the Christian Bible through the agency of Imperial Europe and Western missionaries. Our Christianity is, therefore, intrinsically connected to colonialism and all its vagaries and the quest for independence and the joys and sorrows of such aspirations. Our Christianity is essentially “Bible-based Christianity” (Gunda 2014) with the Bible being “the book; read in times of joys and in times of sorrows” (Togarasei 2008:73); in most cases the only piece of literature that one finds in many homes. The Bible was mediated to us as the Holy Book, one that saw everything that we did in our lives. Through this Book, we were informed that God spoke to us. We believed and we became “people of the Bible”, people who are quick to seek authentication from the Bible. While initially, the Bible was read to us, through the agency of missionaries and their indigenous collaborators, the Bible was translated into indigenous languages, thereby making it accessible to more people. The success of the translation project was aided by the success of the Mission schools that were set up by missionaries (Gunda 2009:79).

According to influential retired Nigerian Anglican primate Peter Akinola, ‘the primary presupposi-



tion' of 'bible-believing Christians' is a high view of Scripture as inerrant and a sufficient guide in all matters of faith and conduct, such that its ethics and injunctions are of timeless relevance... 'I didn't write the Bible. It's part of our Christian heritage. It tells us what to do' (Boesak, 2011). To put it in simple terms, many African Christians consider the Bible to be without mistakes and that it is the manual for faith and conduct of all Christians in all generations. This best sums up the fundamentalist view of the Bible by many African Christians.

However, this perspective fails to appreciate the fact that the Bible houses "contesting voices" on various issues, including gender and sexuality. While most of us fully appreciate the concept of gender, that of sexuality remains a grey area. One's sexual identity or sexuality is defined in terms of who is the object of our quest for intimacy and intimate relationship, hence heterosexuality for those who are attracted to members of the opposite sex, bisexuality for those attracted to members of both sexes, homosexuality for those attracted to members of the same sex, asexuality for those who are not attracted to any other person. These distinctions are normal and appear among human beings as well as other created animals. Understood in the way articulated by Akinola, "privileged prejudices" can easily become entrenched as "sacred", as the powerful sponsor those parts of the Bible they read in support of their own entrenched positions. Since the Church has modelled itself on heteronorma-

tive lines and has largely adopted the understanding of sexuality from mainstream society, it is no wonder that the Bible has been deployed as an instrument that confuses sex and gender (Gunda, 2011, S. 96), to the benefit of the heteronormative ideology.

THE BIBLE: A SITE OF STRUGGLE

In the steps towards challenging the prejudices (race, gender, sexuality, ethnic, spirituality etc) that are so prevalent in our churches, we must begin by acknowledging the fact that the Bible is a site for struggle, that the ancient Israelites, early Christians and ourselves must always struggle with the text in order to hear the voice of God. There "is the struggle within the Scriptures themselves to find and hear the 'voice of God'. Where, for instance, does one hear the voice of God on the question of war? In the chilling instruction from God to Israel in the herem, the 'holy war' instruction, to 'utterly destroy' Israel's enemies (Deut.7:1-2; 20:16-18) or do we hear the voice of God in the words of the prophet Isaiah who stridently denounces even the idea that security is to be found in military strength and military alliances (Isa.31:1-5)? Where is God's word: in the annihilation of one's enemies or in Jesus' injunction to love the enemy?"(Boesak, 2011).

What is observable from the fundamentalist approach is an attempt to wish away the multiple voices in the Bible by promoting only one voice without properly engaging the other voices. The Church and us, as Theological

Educators, have a responsibility to discern the voice of God from the multiple voices that are heard in the Bible. To that end, we concur with Schussler-Fiorenza that "biblical interpreters have an ethical responsibility to consider the actual consequences of their interpretations"(Fiorenza, 1988). Since most readers read with a bias, each time a single text is read by many, it leads to the development of many interpretations, some of them even con-



tradictory. "According to Patte, multiple interpretations are to be celebrated but not all of them are equally valid or plausible because some might be harmful or even dangerous to others in another context" (Kim, 2013, S. 2). Readings that will potentially incite hatred, violence and murder are against the essence of the transformation that the Church stands for, because the image of God in all human beings must be protected not threatened.

The shift from having the Bible read for them to indigenous peo-

ple reading the Bible for themselves brought to the fore the nature of the Bible as a “site of struggle” on the African continent. During the colonial-evangelization onslaught and before the colonized-converted could read the Bible for themselves, the Bible was presented as a single unified document with a single unified voice on all matters, hence all who heard the text read were obliged to obey and follow its instructions. This was the period when slavery of the blacks was considered biblical, exploitation of blacks in their own homelands was presented as doing God’s work, being a good black was being obedient to the master. During this period, one could not refer to the Bible as a site of struggle, for there was no such struggle because the Bible was being read by one for the other, from the single perspective of the one reading.

Contestation becomes a reality once those being pushed outside resolve to put their own questions to the text and to wear their own reading glasses because it is only then that it becomes apparent to them and others that it is not necessarily the text that is pushing them outside, but the prejudice of the dominant readers (Gunda 2009). Africans, upon reading the Bible for themselves started encountering a God, who did not tolerate oppression and exploitation of one by another. They found a God, who did not behave the way the white masters behaved! They started realizing that there was nothing wrong with God but there was everything wrong with those that had presented God as their own image. At no point, must we

ever resolve to engage the text in a struggle for understanding for the sake of understanding but for the sake of transforming our conduct. We should be suspicious when those in charge of empire are informing us how we should read the Bible and who we should accept in the house of God, for then the house of God will become house of Empire.

DOMINANT APPROACHES TO THE BIBLE: SHUTTING DOORS, INCITING VIOLENCE

Since the 1990s, the same scenario that characterised the colonial-evangelization context re-appeared in most communities in Southern Africa, with most Christians reading the Bible for people on the margins sexually, the ITLGB persons (As we have heard from earlier presentations, the Bible was used mainly as a tool to emasculate, dehumanise and disempower those on the margins). While these readings gained momentum in the 1990s, they remain the major voice on the subject and it was so vicious at first that those on the margins reacted in the same way that most Africans reacted towards the Western missionaries once they had fully appreciated how the Bible was being used to emasculate them: the ones emasculated reacted by disowning and removing themselves from submitting to this text! The text was labelled “empire text, developed and deployed for the benefit of only those that serve the empire while depriving those on the margins of empire!” (Rieger 2007). Sexual minorities have been labeled as “worse than dogs and pigs”, they have been

labeled “sodomites who seek to have sex in public”, they have been labeled as a “threat to the survival of the human race” and an “abomination” that has been imported from the West.

One of the dominant ways of reading the Bible in addressing sexual minorities in Africa is “Selective literalism” in African theology and biblical studies that allows the Bible to be used as an instrument serving the interests of those who consider themselves authorized interpreters. Even though, most Christians will publicly proclaim that the Bible has “one voice” this single voice is not built on a reading of the entire Bible but on a reading of selected parts of the Bible. The parts so selected are mostly read literally, punctuated by the oft used statement of justification; “The Bible says...” What is written is taken at face value! This explains why texts such as Genesis 19, Leviticus 18 and 20, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 become so popular among African Christians on the subject of sexual minorities. These texts are read literally, disregarding their own contexts. Different denominations tend to focus on particular portions of Scripture, this selectivity is what we refer to here as “selective literalism”.

The second dominant way of reading biblical texts is the “Historical reading of etiologies and folktales”, which has led to misinterpretation and misappropriation of particular texts for contexts that are fundamentally different from the historical context and function of the etiologies and folktales.

Not all biblical narratives have historical value in their context, in fact, most biblical narratives are etiologies and folktales, meaning their proper appropriation must acknowledge this fact. Appreciating that narratives are etiologies or folktales, does not in any way undermine their value because we grew up being taught fundamental lessons of life through such narratives. Reading them as history, however, create false analogies with our historical setting and experience. This is the dominant approach to the creation and fall narratives in Genesis 1-3, which have been used as the basis for rejecting the humanity of sexual minorities in our communities and churches.

Different denominations tend to focus on particular portions of Scripture, this selectivity is what we refer to here as “selective literalism”.

These approaches to the Bible have been punctuated by a hermeneutic of rehabilitation of African culture and identity, which borders on a post-colonial approach. African theologians, Christians and leaders in general have approached the Bible with a desire to rehabilitate our damaged African identity. Most prominent in driving this perspective have been our political and religious leaders who have suc-

cessfully, to a certain extent, in dividing the World into the wicked and evil West versus the holy and righteous Africa. From this perspective, sexual minorities have been labeled “a foreign import”, “gays for money”, “homosexuality is unAfrican” and so many other designations that suggests Africa is too holy to accommodate the entire range of human sexuality.

The African continent has seen also an intensive use of the blackmail and self-preservation hermeneutics against those that speak sympathetically and empathetically for and with sexual minorities. I know a lot of Bishops, theologians and prominent individuals who privately believe sexual minorities are victims of our prejudices but who do not dare to share their deepest thoughts and ideas on sexual minorities for fear of being labeled “one of them” and for fear that “their source of livelihood (congregants, customers etc) would be taken away from them”. The Bible is invoked to show how wrong people like Desmond Tutu are with the threat that those that follow him are on a highway to Hell. In short, some of us are blackmailed into silence for fear of the consequences to their own livelihoods.

These approaches have allowed most Christians to incite violence against sexual minorities and to exclude sexual minorities from the house of God. Doors have been closed for most sexual minorities, many have lost hope of ever stepping into the house of God and others have lost their lives because of a sermon! A few texts have been selectively cho-

sen and read to entrench and sustain prejudices against those on the margins.

CONCLUSION

There are women and of late, sexual minorities, whose lives have been severely threatened or cut short as a consequence of certain biblical interpretations. One life lost, is one life too many hence any approach to the Bible that threatens life must of necessity be challenged. This transformation of the Bible into a killing machine is regrettable because it can easily become the manual of peace, justice, inclusion and positive transformation of society into a society that accommodates all even celebrating the diversity that is inherent in all of us.

I am aware that this consistent strand has been threatened, challenged and over time been subordinated to empire strands that are also fairly represented in the Bible, especially, in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. The project of God towards a just society, is disrupted when, instead of the other nations coming to copy the good thing in Israel, it was Israel who opted to be co-opted into Empire (Gen.18:18-19;1 Sam.8:5). Clearly, the Bible demands that we choose either to follow the first strand, which focuses on justice and righteousness or the reading that legitimizes injustice in society.

When it comes to those on the margins, let us always consider the question posed by Gerald West (2016); “On which side would Jesus err – exclusion or inclusion?”

FIGHTING STIGMA:

PROTECTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF AFRICAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES

BY DOUGLAS MAWADRI

With many countries assenting to and domesticating an expanding regime of international human rights treaties in their respective jurisdictions, human rights advocates emerged over the last few decades to monitor these standards, and to take on governments, corporations, and some of the most powerfully entrenched systems on earth. But this type of confrontational work does not come without costs, some of which are personal and very steep.

As an advocate working in a highly controversial field in Africa—the LGBT movement—I have experienced and witnessed first-hand the effects of chronic stress and trauma in the human rights field. Many of my colleagues, for example, have experienced depression, stress and fear when tabloids run stories about them and their work. Many other human rights workers exhibit multiple effects of trauma—from both direct or indirect trauma—such as insomnia, substance abuse (addiction), paranoia, isolation and hyper-vigilance—all of which are common symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As a result of what they’ve experienced or witnessed, some human rights workers even commit suicide, losing their lives in the pursuit for justice, equality and non-discrimination. Like other professionals who regularly deal with trauma (e.g., nurses, police officers, paramedics), mental health in advocates themselves is rarely discussed; yet, the World Health Organization suggests that raising awareness about mental health could improve access to care and overall outcomes.

Shatter the Stigma

Mend the Mind

In Africa, this reluctance to seek help for emotional or psychological issues, as well as lack of awareness, is particularly acute. Many African states, such as Ghana, have been unable or unwilling to provide mental health services, opening the door for religiously-run, myth-based “prayer camps” for people with psychiatric problems. A recent estimate suggests that 75% of people in low- and middle-income countries do not get the mental health services that they need, suggesting that in sub-Saharan Africa, most people who are suffering with depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues do not have adequate access to proper care. Curable mental health problems are poorly managed or neglected even by governments.

There are many issues blocking human rights workers in Africa from accessing appropriate mental health care, but three in particular stand out: stigma, social support, and lack of knowledge. First, the stigma attached to mental health issues in many African countries is highly negative and often mythologized, and in some cases people with severe mental health issues are suspected of being witches or possessed by evil spirits. Human rights workers, who are supposed to be pillars of strength and warriors for the most vulnerable, cannot afford to appear weak or unstable in a region where many people already view human rights as foreign or opposed to traditional African culture. As Vincent Nuwagaba, a social activist formerly working with the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI), reported: “I was arrested...

tortured, detained and released without any charge. At time the police arrest me, detain me and or take me to Butabika Mental Hospital, saying that I am mad.”

Working on controversial issues—such as LGBT rights—is particularly problematic in places like Uganda, where homosexuality is a crime. Not only do these activists face the possibility of criminal prosecution, as they can be penalized for promoting “unnatural offences” by the very nature of their work as human rights defenders (which in itself can cause severe anxiety), but they also run the risk of being accused of psychiatric issues if they themselves are homosexual or suspected of being homosexual. Frank Mugisha, the Executive Director of Sexual Minorities Uganda, notes: “LGBTI activism [in Uganda] causes a lot of paranoia within people thinking that they are on the wrong side of the law, that most activists wake up and feel they might be arrested...And so, the more negative thoughts in their minds cause mental health breakdown; not all brains can handle [all] situations at the same time”.

Second, human rights workers can face a lack of social support, as they are often away from home, travelling to remote locations, or hiding because they are under threat. This is not a lifestyle that is conducive

to building a strong support network; often people in this field rely primarily on other human rights activists, who are under the same stresses. In many African countries, this is even more acute if paranoia of prosecution or violence causes activists to isolate themselves to a small group of people they can trust. Trusting an unknown therapist or psychologist with issues that might be against the law in certain countries takes a significant leap of faith. The lack of trust and social support, such as peer to peer counseling or access to psychotherapists, means that many activists keep issues to themselves that could have been resolved through reducing social deprivation and/or opening up to fellow peers or a trained therapist.

Third, a widespread lack of knowledge inhibits many human rights workers from seeking help. African human rights organizations often avoid discussing the mental health of advocates because they fear that their advice or advocacy might be ignored if their employees are unfairly labelled. Many advocates, in my experience, avoid seeking help because they are afraid of even their peers labelling them as “mad”. Overall, there seems to be a significant lack of knowledge in much of the region around the fact that seeing a psychologist is not just for the mentally ill. Self-denial and/or

refusal to seek proper therapy among human rights defenders creates vulnerability to harm and mental breakdown. Taking away the stigma of mental illness is challenging, especially in Africa. But human rights organizations should consider establishing regular programs to address issues of mental health problems, to promote seeking help as a factor of resilience rather than weakness, and to illustrate that good mental health improves the productivity and performance of their employees. Mental health for advocates needs to be discussed in the human rights field so that advocates can stay healthy in their work to achieve universal human rights goals for all. Mugisha admits: “I was paranoid and I ended up using a lot of therapists to flash out negative thoughts in [my] mind... some people don’t believe in therapists but they help. If we are to continue doing our work, we need to [see them].”

In a field where workers frequently experience trauma, burnout, and chronic stress, setting aside funds to proactively protect the mental health of workers would benefit the entire human rights movement. We must stop treating human rights workers as though they are expendable or invincible—we are all human after all, and activists who burn out are of no help to anyone.

LESBIANS ARE RELUCTANT TO SEEK HEALTH SERVICES—HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

Majorine Nakimuli is a social worker based at Most at Risk Populations Initiative (MARPI) Mulago where she serves as the outreach programs and training officer. MARPI a health facility located in the national referral hospital-Mulago provides free and friendly health services to the key populations i.e. LGBTI, sex workers, Injection Drug Users (IDUs) and uniformed personnel.

Asked about the health services seeking trends and averages for these different Key population clusters at MARPI, Majorine explains that the highest percentage of clients are sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM), IDUs, transgender persons and lesbians in that order.

She however says that MARPI has a programme where they do home and deployment visits for uniformed officers who include police officers, soldiers and private security guards. The variance in trends and reasons for the difference in turnouts to access these free services call comes down to stigmatization of KPs.

At the beginning of their operations, MARPI aggressively invested in sensitization to avert stigma and discrimination of KPs but while most of the KPs have embraced seeking health services, the same cannot be said about lesbians and other women who have sex with women (WSW).

Majorine says there is need for more advocacy to ensure that women especially the WSWs embrace



the use of the available health services. Like many people who are familiar with the history of Uganda's LGBTI movement, she now wonders why lesbians have taken a back seat in every aspect of the movement. Previously they were very active in organizing health activities and partnered with service providers to sensitize the community on how best to handle the health issues that affect them. But that is now all in the past, transgender persons and MSM are now the vocal persons of the movement but Majorine says these initiatives have died out along the way yet other clusters have instead progressed - making many believe the myth that WSWs do not have dire health issues.

"They are so quiet, I don't know what went wrong because if they keep quiet, it becomes hard for us to reach out to them. How will we know their needs when they are quiet? They need to start talking about their challenges and needs because the silence and reluctance is widening the gap between them and health service delivery," Majorine commented

Asked about why the Ministry of Health and other health sector stakeholders have turned a deaf ear towards health needs of lesbian women, Majorine says this is because the challenge lies in planning for something you are not fully aware of. The lack of statistics and evidence of the existence of the profound lesbian health issues has caused a lag in the creation of policies that actively involve and include lesbians.

“When it comes to health, you can’t progress or do anything unless you have statistics,” Marjorine noted. She further urged the vocal lesbians that now is not the time to be reluctant, there are very many diseases and other health issues that are affecting lesbians and they must front them.

She further rubbished the myths and misconceptions usually told about HIV/AIDS in relation to lesbian women (some claim that woman to woman sex has a lower risk of acquiring HIV virus); she set the record straight and clarified that anyone is prone to acquiring the HIV virus once they get into contact with an infected person with this virus. She says that so long as there is exchange of body fluids, cases of bisexual women and sharing of sexual gadgets like dildos, lesbians have as high a chance as any other sexually active person, of getting infected with HIV.

Majorine advises LGBTI women to get back to the drawing board and reorganize on how to push for recognition for their voices to heard. Unlike other key population groups, Majorine says there has been inconsistency in the peer mechanism of lesbians, she says that those trained don’t take the initiative to complete their peer education course and this has greatly affected the health service delivery to lesbians since peer leaders play a major role in bridging the gap between these communi and health service providers.

...the challenge lies in planning for something you are not fully aware of.

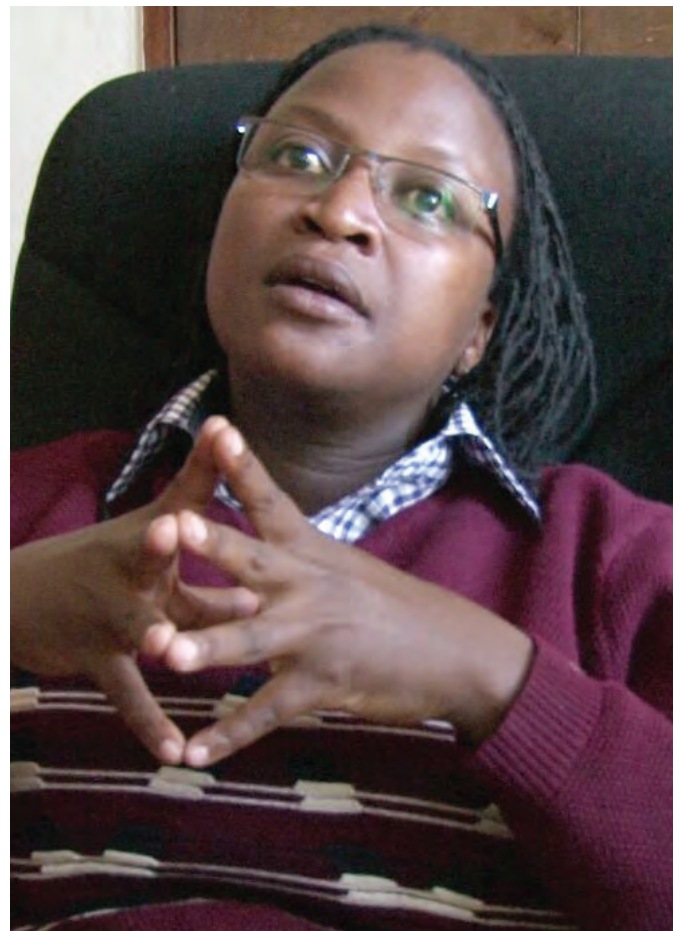
On average, in one month, Majorine says they receive cases of about twenty LGBTI women seeking health services while other groups come in hundreds. Majorine praises the peer mechanism and says this is a linkage and believes this will re-awaken the service seeking trend in the LGBTI fraternity.

SHIFTING TRENDS OF SECURITY CAUSING PANIC.

Sandra Ntebi

The national LGBTI security committee is an independent board which was formed to address the various security emergencies and threats faced by the Ugandan LGBTI community. Their mission is achieved through immediate responses to the registered cases, availing safe places for members under threats, processing funds for emergency relocation and many more.

Ntebi Sandra who is the chairperson of the national LGBTI security committee in Uganda says there are new trends of cases which they hadn’t seen previously. Currently, they handle cases where LGBTI persons have been lynched, or burnt as well as cases where people have become suicidal due



to depression.

The trend has moved from evictions and family rejections; most of the cases before them now need legal redress. Sandra worries that if this continues, they may be forced to cease operations because they can't go to court, or sue. Before, they mostly handled blackmail, mob justice and extortion but things have changed and there is no clear law about this.

Recently a member of Uganda's LGBTI community was burnt; the committee and other community representatives like Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) took the issue to court where the components of the case are still being debated. The state detracts attention from the graveness of the issue by highlighting that the incident could have occurred based on other factors not sexual orientation and homophobia. What makes this case stand out is the fact that it also involved kidnapping of the victim.

Sandra also compares the current environment to before the annulment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act. She acknowledges that the committee receives less cases and the media witch hunt of LGBTI people has lessened. On average the committee receives a total of 10 cases monthly in comparison to the past when they used to receive around 50 to 100 cases in one month.

The cases that are currently under review include intimate partner violence, those struggling to come out of the closet, and cases of arrest.

Sandra attributes the rising cases of intimate partner violence in the lesbian and queer community to cultural mannerisms that most pick from their parents as well as the patriarchal beliefs that are deep-rooted in most cultures. She also points out that some people take advantage of their partners just because they provide for them. She says that usually in such cases, they is little or no headway because a short period after the reported incidence, the partners get back together and leave the issue unresolved or refuse to follow up on the case.

Most times, the committee has tried to intervene in such cases and also arrange psychosocial sup-

port for these victims of intimate partner violence.

Sandra shares one of the 'worst' cases she has ever handled. In late March, a community member travelled to western Uganda to meet her partner only to find that they had moved in with someone else. The disappointed party then refused to leave, arguing that she had invested a lot of time and resources in the relationship. Even as the committee tried to help them come to a compromise, it was obvious neither of them was willing to make an effort to resolve the issue without becoming a security threat to one another.

Concerning the shrinking voices of LGBTI women in the Ugandan gender and sexual minority movement, Sandra attributes this to politics and the national laws that have created a lot of disorganization amongst the leaders as well as the movement itself. She says that there is no passion in the current movement and divisionism has killed the spirit of the movement.

"There is a lot of mistrust and suspicion in the movement and there is also a problem of donor syndrome, how I wish I could speak to any new donor but then I have no authority over this. Donors have their different issues of interest. We used to be a social movement but now it is all about competition for funding; for funders it is a way forward and for us we are going backwards and sadly we don't even realize this," Sandra intimated.

According to Sandra, labels in the movement have also played a big role in dividing the movement. In addition, the rumors in the mainstream community that LGBTI people have money has also been a key factor in taking the movement backwards because there are people in the community whose motive is entirely money and not the love for the movement.

To avert this hypocrisy in the movement, Sandra suggests that we should adopt the old way of a social movement and focus less on the politics which rotates around divisionism. Sandra says the political path left some people behind and she believes that rebuilding to a social one will be inclusive of everyone who identifies as LGBTI.

THE JOURNEY TO INVIGORATING UGANDA'S LGBTI COMMUNITY

BY KASHA JAQUELINE NABAGESERA

The Ugandan LGBTI movement started as a social space where people could meet up to let loose and share ideas. The vision, which still stands today, was to have a liberated LGBTI community free to move without fear of persecution, intimidation and access to health – all we wanted is to have peace.

However, what we didn't anticipate were the many hurdles that we have faced along the way- we started small as a social group until the hate became too much; there was a lot of media exposures and it became obvious the movement had to take a political turn if we wanted it to grow-social activism would not help us achieve our vision.

One of the things we knew for a fact would happen was the backlash from society especially if we became very visible and vocal- so we were not shocked when they came after us like possessed people. They attacked us physically, emotionally and verbally but we persisted nonetheless. Many of us who were actively involved in the movement were dismissed from school, evicted from our homes, rejected by family and forced to live like criminals but we were tired of covering up who we are and nothing at this point could have stopped us.

Over 18 years later, a lot has changed; many people have since joined the movement, it's no longer just a handful of us and the visibility we have garnered is massive be it national, regional, and international. We have managed to penetrate many social justice movements and we are being welcomed, many LGBTI groups have mushroomed and it's not just the traditional ones that we started decades ago.

There is more and better extensive service delivery around the country especially in the rural and upcountry districts.

The movement is no longer the same in terms of maturity; we have grown from working in internet cafes, my mother's home office and bars. There are a number of organizations, all with functional offices to boost of- all these are working hand in hand to reach every lat LGBTI identifying person in the country. It truly is an incredible feeling looking back and realizing that we have achieved a lot more than people thought we would.

However, one of the few things that disappoints me about the movement as it is today is the fact that it's the women who started this movement but to see that they are now taking a back seat after all the sacrifices they made to start- it is both unbelievable and heartbreaking.

I think we have become comfortable with the way things are and are taking the little breathing space in the movement for granted. But also honestly even shifts of leadership had attributed to that. We are all different individuals with different personalities, leadership characteristics and that our approach to activism defers- this has also caused a lot of 'laziness' within the women's spheres in the movement.

Still, I cannot dismiss the fact that the women are playing a huge role in the struggle even when they have relegated themselves to a more laid back approach and since we all can't be on the fore front, it could e a strategy – one I do not agree with but its strategy nonetheless. I believe that if we become invisible in our own struggle then we are going to disappear for good. Our voices and faces need to remain

visible. We must realize that if we are not heard or seen then we are silent.

One other thing that stands out for me is the divisionism within the movement.

This, I believe, have been brought about by the fact that we have many unregulated and unchecked organizations that claim to work with and for LGBTI persons yet in incense they are only minting money or simply focus on one specific category which has led the other categories to break away. It's time for us to focus on output rather than numbers. While it is alright for every category to cater to its own, we must still realize that we have one goal and work towards it- it is not a competition!

Lastly, as someone who has been here since the beginning of the movement, I have noticed the issue of unemployment especially among the youth in our community. It is understandable that the economy is difficult at the moment but what are we doing to make this better.

This Diva mentality must stop immediately, people who are not even openly known as Kuchu are refusing to take up jobs because they deem themselves better off 'slaying/swagging' instead of making their lives more functional. Some people forget that at the end of the day we are not a pariah community, we are part of the Ugandan community which is also suffering with unemployment and poverty. If you get an opportunity, take it up because being kuchu is not a job, it will not put food on your table or even pay your bills. For how long will we live off handouts, or continue to beg? It is up to us to make a change and we cannot claim to be making change on a national or international level yet we fail to change our own lives.

If there is one thing I had the power to change, it would be to take the annual Pride festival out of the isolation and bring it to the main street in Kampala and show Ugandans how fabulous and loving we are.

PRIDE 2016: THE SHORT-LIVED CELEBRATION

As July ended, Uganda's LGBTI community could barely contain the excitement that came with the Pride Festival week, which was scheduled for 2-7th August. Social media was ablaze with posts depicting the positive mood as people posted their anticipations, selected attire and general messages of solidarity.

On 2nd August, the long awaited Festival kicked off with a gala held in honour of the partners and allies that gave continuously extended a helping hand to the LGBTI movement. The gala held at one of the top hotels in the city centre was by invite. By 8:30pm, the pool area of the hotel was filled with about 100 people from different community organizations, several diplomats as well as guests that had flown in to be a part of the fifth edition of the annual Pride Festival.

The mood was perfect as people mingled and the band serenaded the guests. The Grand Marshal, UK based Nigerian Rev Jide Macaulay gave his key note speech sighting the importance of the Pride week as a way of strengthening the movement as well as celebrating recognizing all the achievements that have been accomplished. Speeches were kept to a minimum add emphasis was put on people discussing amongst themselves on how best to move the movement forward.

By the end of the night, all in attendance were looking forward to what was left of the festival and one thing was clear- the organizing committee for Pride 2016 had pulled its best stops and this was destined to be a great festival.

Day two of the festival saw peo-

ple gather at Queer Youth Uganda where a heated discussion on bisexual and lesbian issues ensued. Discussed were legal matters, health issues, and all things that continue to surround the two minority groups. Panelists included a bisexual man who attempted to demystify the misunderstandings that surround bisexual individuals. He noted that what is most important is not who one sleeps with but who one is attracted to, that determines ones sexuality. The panel also had a lesbian who spoke about issues that affected these female loving women. She highlighted lack of enough health strategies for lesbians as one of the biggest problems they continue to face.

The health worker on the panel addressed how best to tackle the problems within the LGBTI community as each bracket has its own set of unique health needs, Also discussed were easy to prevent infections within the LGBTI community and where to go in case a health issue arises.

The legal expert on the panel addressed what to procedures to follow 9n cases of hate crimes, how to deal with adoption and the legal processes that come with it. There was a QnA session that had participants interacting with the panel leaving everybody satisfied and even more content at how the festival was going.

The evening session dubbed Lesbian and Bisexual night was held in one of the posh clubs around town; for a change, LGBTI persons gathered in one place, let loose, danced and partied the night away. The mood was ecstatic, the partiers energized; it was a night that will live in the

memories of those in attendance for quite a while. For one night, all troubles faded away, issues of class and status were thrown out the window and Uganda's gender and sexual minorities merged as one. By the end of the night, the anticipation for the following events was clear; what more could beat this and the organizing committee assured us we hadn't even started yet.

Day three had a workshop that addressed the role of religion and its impacts on LGBTI people. The five hour gathering attempted to debunk most of the scriptures that are continuously used in the spread of hate and encouragement of homophobia.

The evening session was the Mr and Miss Pride pageant, that was well attended as hundreds came out to see the community crown a new king and queen. The transgender women looked magnificent in their heels, well done hair and polished nails. The contestants were excited as each had high hopes of taking the crown home and the community was there to cheer them on.

(As earlier published on Kuchu Times)

Suddenly, there were rushed movements as people tried to quickly exit the space. In a few minutes, it was obvious there was Police in our midst and all exits had been blocked. Activists Frank Mugisha, Shawn Mugisha and Pepe Onziema were the first to be bundled up and led out of the premises and straight to the police docks. Later it was established that close to twenty people were arrested during the chaos.

The confused, scared and upset group of about 400 people was

swiftly instructed to gather in a small space and everybody ordered to get on the ground. Unfortunately, during the disarray a few people attempted to jump off the balcony and a yet to be identified young gay man escaped death by a whisker and is currently hospitalized from the severe injuries attained from the fall.

The Police who were in the company of plain clothed officers started pin pointing at whichever two men they saw together and also picked out the transgender individuals. It was a heartbreaking sight as they searched and sexually assaulted transgender persons by touching their genitals and breasts all in an attempt to determine whether they were male or female. Many transwomen threw their wigs away and plucked out their braids to avoid being identified and harassed.

A young transgenderman walking with a white companion were singled out and questioned on whether they were gay; the policeman questioning them shamelessly pointed a gun at them and it took the intervention of a top activist to let the two rejoin the kneeling crowd.

Soon, they started confiscating people's cameras and phones claiming they did not want people to spread the news on Facebook! The Officer in Charge, a rather arrogant man in demeanor, addressed the now extremely perplexed crowd and informed us we were being held for conducting a gay wedding even though the laws of the land were very clear on homosexuality. Our faces fell! It seemed like our ordeal had just began and on bad note. Efforts to correct this information were futile as he shut down everyone who attempted to pass on the

right information of what was actually happening.

A short while later, the same officer said he was retaining us for holding an unlawful gathering under the Public Order Management Act. The organizers still tried to inform him that they had attained permission from the Police prior but all their pleas fell on deaf ears.

Clare Byarugaba, a persistent and fearless activist stood up to the intimidation and attempted to talk to the police officers on more than five occasions. Angered by her relentlessness, a female officer led her away and she was put under arrest.

The beatings then started as the officers kicked and whipped people. Media was called and pictures of the attendees taken; all this while with the police forcing them (the attendees) to look into the cameras. The officer once again addressed us and said he would not tolerate this kind of 'nonsense' in his division.

After staying in the cold bundled up like criminals for over one and a half hours, we were released with caution that next time would be fatal.

News of the incident was spread through social media as the detainees gave live updates to the world through social media especially twitter and facebook. There has since been an outpouring of solidarity messages from across the globe as partners, allies, and world leaders condemned the horrendous acts of the Uganda Police Force.

Day four started off with an extremely low mood as the rest of the festival hang in balance but

even the fear and sadness from the previous' days raid did not stop the community from going ahead with the Festival. Medical equipment was given to one of the hospitals around town and a two hour distribution of condoms ensured in the city centre. The day's activities were sponsored by Ice Breakers Uganda, an organization that has worked tirelessly to better the health of LGBTI persons in Uganda.

That very day, Chapter Four's Nicholas Opiyo had met with the Minister of Ethics and Integrity Father Simon Lokodo who banned all Pride events going forward. He threatened to organize mobs and more forces to arrest anyone who would take part in the parade that was scheduled for the following day.

"I can fault the police for beating these demonstrators in the street but if they beat you people, I will not even bother addressing this issue," the Minister shamelessly said. He further compared LGBTI persons to murderers and terrorists who do not deserve any fair treatment from the state.

Following this meeting, the organizing committee released a statement canceling the Parade. They said they had taken this decision with the safety of the people in mind. However, even with the main event cancelled, people met up in small groups and shared their 'personal Pride' pictures on social media.

Many showed their resilience as they went ahead to celebrate their differences in a country where they had been declared unwanted just the previous day.

PRIDE



UGANDA 2016 PRIDE

STANDING TOGETHER. ITEMA WAMU. SHAMBA PANGOLA. TWESE KUMBYE.



PRIDE

POLICE CUT SHORT THE MR AND MISS PRIDE EVENT CUTTING SHOT THE FESTIVITIES. THE COMMUNITY WENT AHEAD AND HELD A PRIDE PARADE A COUPLE OF WEEK'S LATER, POLICE STILL DISPERSED THE CROWD AND DECLARED THE GATHERING ILLEGAL



ANGRY AND DISAPPOINTED BUT NOT THE KIND TO BACK DOWN, THE PRIDE ATTENDEES HEADED TO AN LGBTI FRIENDLY BAR WHERE THEY CONTINUED TO CELEBRATE INSPITE OF THE HINDERANCES

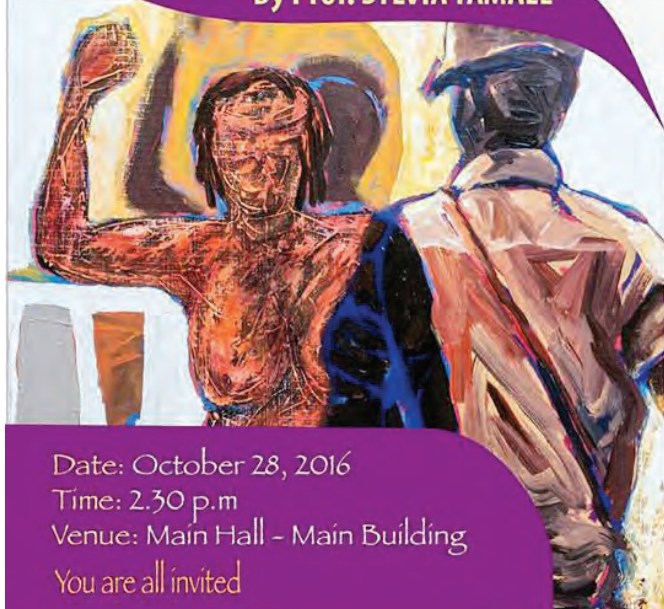




NUDITY, PROTEST AND THE LAW IN UGANDA

Inaugural Professorial Lecture

By Prof. SYLVIA TAMALE



Date: October 28, 2016

Time: 2.30 p.m

Venue: Main Hall - Main Building

You are all invited

NUDITY, PROTEST AND THE LAW

In April 2016, the nation experienced courage, defiance and a turning point in feminism when Dr Stella Nyanzi took to the use of nudity to protest against the employment abuse she was suffering at her place of work –MISR (Makerere Institute of Social Research). While many castigated her, law Don Sylvia Tamale took it upon herself to shed light on the history of nudity as a tool of protest.

Below is a partial excerpt from Dr Tamale's inaugural lecture on the subject.

ABSTRACT

The past few years in Uganda have witnessed several incidents of women stripping naked as a way

of protesting what they perceive as gross injustice. This lecture attempts to analyze this age-old strategy from the perspectives of law, gender and power. In so doing, the institution of the law is understood broadly to include written legislation, unwritten customary law and the religious principles which underlie our legal jurisprudence. I step back in history to retrace naked protests in Africa before analyzing the local phenomenon. The analysis is guided by post-structural feminist understandings of the human body as a site of both power and control. This approach uses the imagery of bodies marked by written scripts which can be read and interpreted by society. Of major concern to the analysis is the role played by the law in inscribing the scripts of power and domination on men's bodies, while simultaneously inscribing subordination, passivity and sexuality on the bodies of women. I also examine how the law responds to naked protests. My conclusion is that, through the spectacle of naked protests, women are attempting to re-write the script on their bodies by using nakedness as an instrument of power and to subvert the law in order to effect justice.

I. Introduction: "Reading" the Political Body

Naked protests may seem like the most unlikely topic imaginable for a professorial inaugural lecture in law. But as you well know, the law touches on literally every aspect of our day-to-day lives. Secondly, it is quite surprising that even though such protests have taken place at many different times and places in African history, there is very little historical, anthropological or sociological analysis of the phenomenon, especially with respect to the case of Uganda. As academics, we have left comment to the journalists, the political pundits and the radio talk-show hosts and hostesses. Finally, although approaching this topic from the perspective of the law, there is no doubt of its resonance across the intellectual landscape.

Allow me to begin with the story that inspired my choice of topic. Around 8.15 on the morning of Monday April 18, 2016, I was just leaving home to go to work when my cell phone rang. On the line was a friend whose words sounded frantic and desperate: Sylvia you're the nearest one; you've got to help... Oh my god! It's on Facebook... Stella has stripped naked at MISR! Later, she calmed down and explained that a mutual friend—Dr. Stella Nyanzi, a

research fellow at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR)—was staging a naked protest against what she considered gross maltreatment by her boss. It took me less than five minutes to get to the scene of the remonstrance.

By that time, Stella had put her clothes back on. But as soon as she saw me she stripped again: Sylvia I didn't want to burden you with my problems, but I've had enough. I've complained to the authorities, written several letters but no action has been taken. They have left me with no choice; I've had enough of my boss's tyranny at this place. I begged Stella to cover her naked body. I shouted at the reporters to put their video recorders away. She was yelling profanities, obscenities and vulgarities, waving her defiant fists in the air. But what I remember most of all were Nyanzi's eyes as she yelled and shook her naked body in vigorous protest. It is difficult to describe the look in Nyanzi's eyes at the time; they were ignited by some kind of wild emotion, bulging out of their sockets.

There have been numerous reactions to Nyanzi's actions of that day—both specific to her individually and to the wider issues that she raised. It is not my intention to engage in that debate. Instead, I want to briefly reflect on my own reactions to her stripping as a precursor to my analysis. I was shocked and horrified; embarrassed and ashamed. I thought my friend had completely lost it and must confess that I was left traumatized by the incident for several days. With hindsight, however, I now realize that my emotive response to Nyanzi's protest was in keeping with societal attitudes that associate nakedness—especially the nakedness of a grown woman—with shame, perversity and taboo.

When I rushed to MISR to try and remove Stella, I was responding to the impulse of my socialized brain and habits. Society constructs the female naked body as profane, indecent, shameful and sexual, never to be displayed in public. Women must therefore cover their bodies, particularly the areola, nipples and curves of their breasts, their butts and especially the mons pubis. Much of the discourse that attended the Nyanzi incident was both sexualized and sensationalized. It provided considerable cannon-fodder for the tabloid press and of course—in this era of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram—be-

came one of the highest trending stories on social media this year. Instead of looking at the more dramatic aspects of the incident, and indeed leaving out the reaction of the university and the wider society to what Nyanzi did, I want to use today's lecture to address a number of larger questions, viz.: Have African women's bodies always been viewed as shameful and a source of sin? Historically, what power, if any, did women's naked bodies hold? Have naked bodies been used as a tool of protest in the past? What does women's fecundity and maternal power signify in patriarchal-capitalist societies? What is the role of the law in the negative construction of women's bodies and in maintaining their subordinate status?



learn that there is absolutely no written law in Uganda that prohibits public nudity per se; there is no bar against displaying the naked body. When Nyanzi stripped to her knickers, she did not breach any written law.¹ She may have run the risk of crossing established social and religious norms, but she certainly committed no penal offence. Nevertheless, Minister of Ethics and Integrity, Father Simon Lokodo's first reaction was to order for Nyanzi's arrest. In the end, the police did not proffer any charge probably because they had no law to back it up. Nyanzi's lawyer also told Lokodo to zip [up] his mouth.² But in a legally pluralistic society like ours, where the written law operates side-by-side with customary law and where the principles of religion are deeply

embedded in our statutory laws, when does public nakedness become unacceptable and why? How do we reconcile the fact that Lokodo's own people, the men and women of Karamoja even today move around naked or semi-naked in public and without sanction, with the fact that Lokodo is the same man attempting to impose punishment for public nakedness?

I am also concerned with how that body relates to the law, particularly when it is deployed as a tool of protest. I seek to examine the ways in which women use their nakedness as an instrument of power in their everyday lives and how the intersecting narratives are interpreted by society, by the law and by the protesters. Following this introduction, I set the stage for a feminist analysis of naked protests

Hence, slowly but surely, where nakedness or half-nakedness had been part of the normal lifestyle of colonized people, they began to completely cover their bodies and to view such act as a symbol of progress or modernization.

The written law may not prohibit public nakedness but the living law of most Ugandans—including law enforcement agencies—renders it not only illegal but also immoral and unethical to exhibit our bodies in this manner. Therefore, any reference to law in this lecture should be understood broadly to include codified or written law as well as the unscripted customary and religious laws. Nyanzi's protest might have appeared to be personal; what I want to explore today is whether, and the extent to which, it was also political. To help in this exploration the lecture draws on post-structural feminist theories of gender and embodiment and their application of discourse analysis oriented to the work of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault.³ In particular, I am guided by the post-structural feminist understanding of the human body as a locus of power and control.

I find their approach to the body as an inscriptive surface marked by culture and law quite compelling. For instance, the fact that women's bodies are read through the discourse or narrative of sexuality will have significant implications for how society reacts to naked or semi-clothed protests. The post-structural feminist take on power, derived from Foucault, as both a disabling and enabling force is also useful in my exploration of the relationship between subjectivity and power relations as manifested through naked protests. This lecture focuses on the tripartite issues of nakedness, law and protest. I am mainly concerned with what we can refer to as the physical or cultural body bounded by the surface of our skins.

by looking back at the historical trajectory of naked protests globally in order to understand the context of activism in today's world. The third section discusses the theoretical underpinnings of gender, power and the human body. The conceptual tools for analyzing naked protests within the realm of the powerful institution of the law are exposed. I also briefly revisit the place of women's gendered and sexed bodies in nation-building and its implication for naked resistance. Section four then explores the intersections of the law (broadly understood to include legislation, culture and religion) and nudity, critically analyzing how relations of power shape and define our bodies, particularly naked protesting bodies. The lecture ends with some brief concluding remarks.

II. Publicly Naked Bodies and Protests: A Historical Overview

Historically, the largely consistent warm weather in Sub-Saharan Africa did not require a lot of clothing. Prior to colonization, different cultures on the continent used various simple garments made of bark cloth, animal skin, bird feathers, grass or plant fibre to make aprons for covering the genitals or to be wrapped around their bodies. While external influence has completely changed dress patterns in most of Africa, a few communities have maintained their traditional ways of dressing to-date. Examples from Uganda include the Karamojong, the Batwa and the Bambuti (Otiso 2006).

The drastic change of stance to the naked or partially-naked body in public throughout tropical Afri-

ca coincided with the civilizing mission which the colonialists from Victorian Europe employed to legitimize their subjugation of non-European people. Even partial nakedness for them was inimical to modernization and everything that the superior Western culture stood for. In Uganda, the colonialists did not waste time in imposing a new dress code: Embarrassed by what they considered to be scanty native dressing, European Christian missionaries set out to change that, starting with Buganda, where contact between Western and Ugandan culture commenced in the mid-1800s. The missionaries designed an ankle-length Victorian dress (gomesi or busuti) for women and a similarly long tunic for men.

Over time, the gomesi has become a popular national dress, made of bright multicolored cloth with padded shoulders and an equally elaborate sash for tying it around the waist.

Hence, slowly but surely, where nakedness or half-nakedness had been part of the normal lifestyle of colonized people, they began to completely cover their bodies and to view such act as a symbol of progress or modernization. To-date, those African societies that have resisted the Western dress code such as the Karamojong or the San people of the Kalahari desert in Southern Africa, are viewed as backward and primitive.

Aileen Goodson reports that naked societies persist as primitive tribes whose members do not wear clothes (Goodson 1991: 155). The value judgment implicit in describing naked societies as primitive corresponds to the trajectory of the attitudes and influence of dominant societies to nakedness. Several scholars have written about the spiritual and philosophical foundations of nudism in ancient societies including such practices among the Greek, Egyptians, Indians and Ethiopians (Goodson 1991; LeValley 2007). Space does not allow us here to go into the details of gymnosophy⁴ and religious nakedness but suffice to note that this philosophy was adopted by the nudist, naturalist movements of 20th century Europe and North America (Jirasek & Hlavinka 2010). The strict, uncompromising beliefs about public nudity have their seeds in the European Protestant Reformation Movement of the 16th century led by Martin Luther and John Calvin. After

breaking off from the Catholic Church for what they perceived as overindulgent opulence and moral laxity, they created doctrines that had a powerful impact on, inter alia, how society viewed the naked body (Goodson 1991). In particular, their efforts to purify the church reinforced the puritan ethic of covering up and associating sex and sexuality with shame and embarrassment. Puritanism associated women's bodies with sin, the devil and witchcraft much more than it did the bodies of men (Reis 1997).

The Reformation reinforced the guilt and shame associated with the naked body in religion and set the patterns of morality in Europe and North America. As Goodson noted: With the advent of Protestantism came biblical interpretations which stressed, as never before, the impurity and sin inherent in the human body. Also emphasized was devil-fear. While God was mind and spirit, the Devil represented evil and tantalizing body sensuality... Shame regarding sexual desires and activities reached such extremes that a woman in the mid-1800s minimized and hid all body parts except her face. She wore layers of petticoats and was enveloped in clothing from high-collared blouse to floor-length bustled skirt, a bonnet completely covering her head and a shawl drawn around the body. (Goodson 1991: 165) The Catholic Church later launched a counter-Reformation with new religious orders that were more rigorous and strict in their spirituality (Dickens 1968). It is this brand of Christianity that was imported to Africa as part of the project of colonisation in the 19th Century.

Prior to that, in the 7th century, Islam had spread to many parts of the northern half of Africa, particularly along the trade routes from the Arabian peninsula. Although this version of Islam was quite different from the political Islam of the veiled woman that we know today, Shari'ah laws dictated modesty and non-exposure of the aurat⁵ and gender segregation at public events (Othman 2006; Mernissi 1996). Patriarchal conceptions of gender roles and the female body filtered through the interpretations of religious teachings, further altering the discourse relating to the body. The paradoxes and contradictions created by religions that construct taboos on the natural' body created an opening for the protesting body (Tamale 2015).

‘KEEP YOUR EYES OFF MY THIGHS’: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF UGANDA’S ‘MINISKIRT LAW’

BY SYLVIA TAMALE



Introduction

On February 6, 2014, Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni signed the Anti- Pornography Act (APA) into law. This single stroke of the presidential pen signalled a redeployment of women’s bodies as a battlefield for cultural-moral struggles, and an eruption of new frontiers in sexual political tensions in the country. Plans to draft the law date back to 2005, when the Minister of Ethics and Integrity at the time, Nsaba Buturo, set off alarm bells by announcing that the “vice of miniskirts” had taken hold of society to the extent of distracting mentally-weak male drivers on Ugandan roads!

1 State moral panics over

women’s dress, thickly layered with cultural and spiritual references, are by no means new in postcolonial Africa. They usually peak during times of socio-economic crises (Decker, 2014; Jones and Jones, 1999). Reports are rife in cities across Africa of marauding vigilante groups of self-proclaimed ‘moral police’ stripping women naked in public spaces.

2 Several postcolonial dictatorships on the continent passed codes that censored women’s sartorial choices: Uganda’s Idi Amin legislated against women wearing shorts, hot pants, slacks, low-necked garments or miniskirts (defined as any dress with a hemline that rose “5.08 centimetres above the upper edge of the patella”);

3 in Kamuzu Banda’s Malawi, the Decency in Dress Act of 1973 also imposed a dress code forbidding women from wearing miniskirts and trousers. Most of these laws were uprooted by the ‘winds of change’ that swept across the continent in the 1990s and shone a constitutional spot-

light on women’s rights. In 2008, however, the Nigerian government unsuccessfully attempted to introduce a similar law, which was thwarted by feminist groups (Bakare-Yusuf, 2009).

Feminist scholarship has shown that constructions of nationhood and national identity involve specific notions of womanhood, and implicate women’s bodies (Moghadam, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997). In Uganda, through dress, and ostensibly in the national interest, women are symbolised as the nation’s honour, decency and respectability. Such imposed images of womanhood have triumphed in many postcolonial projects aimed at enhancing national identity, while shifting attention away from undemocratic governance (Decker, 2014). Yet, within the rich diversity of African traditions, public semi-nakedness was not necessarily linked to immorality. Indeed, even today, in many parts of rural Africa, women go about their daily routines with unclothed torsos, and without anyone eroticising their bodies.

The idea of objectifying women as sexual bodies and 'seeing' their nakedness as immoral was mostly introduced to Africa through the Abrahamic religions of Christianity and Islam (Bakare-Yusuf, 2009; Tamale, 2014). Morally neutral female nakedness was burdened with 'shameful sexuality' in a way that male bodies were not; a moral link between the woman's body, purity and chastity was constructed. Hence, the logic that women's 'seductive bodies' had to be covered in public to protect men from 'impure thoughts' and the corruption of their morals (Eilberg-Schwartz and Doniger, 1995).

Today, most women practice self-regulation in conforming to the prescribed bodily script, but many also transgress against it (Bordo, 1989). Uganda's 1995 Constitution declared the full advancement, protection and empowerment of women, and in the decades that followed, women enshrined a legacy of gender activism. Such developments provoked a sociocultural backlash, however. The backlash has manifested as a resurgence of various forms of fundamentalisms, including cultural and religious, and has often been expressed through political agendas. Whenever women assert their collective power and their identity as autonomous social subjects, calls for moral regeneration and the protection of 'traditional cultur-

al values' take centre stage; women have to be reined back into the sphere of male dominance and control. It is against this backdrop that the APA was added to Uganda's legislative agenda.

On the Vexed Term, 'pornography'

The link between religious fundamentalism and the APA is clearly seen in the personalities of its primary architects, Nsaba Butoro and Simon Lokodo, the two successive ministers who held the cabinet portfolio of Ethics and Integrity during the drafting and passing of the Bill. While Butoro is a self-proclaimed born-again Christian, Lokodo, his 2009 successor, is a Catholic priest. The main arguments that these men made in support of the Bill were that pornography offends public morality and fuels sexual violence against women and girls.

Despite the claim that the bill was intended to protect women, the chauvinist and misogynistic impulses that lay behind it were not difficult to unravel. Two of the glaring deficiencies of the Bill are its vague definition of the term pornography, and its failure to delineate the parameters of this offence. The original bill defined pornography thus:

...any cultural practice, radio or television programme, writing, publication, advertisement, broadcast, upload on in-

ternet, display, entertainment, music, dance, picture, audio or video recording, show, exhibition or any combination of the preceding that depicts

(a) A person engaged in explicit sexual activities or conduct;

(b) Sexual parts of a person such as breasts, thighs, buttocks or genitalia;

(c) Erotic behaviour intended to cause sexual excitement; or

(d) Any indecent act or behaviour tending to corrupt morals

[Emphasis added]

During the second reading of the Bill in parliament, MPs flagged the absurdity of including "cultural practice" in the definition of pornography, citing traditions such as dances and circumcision ceremonies that might fall into the category, and citing the example of the Karimojong people who never cover their breasts. The chair of the Committee on Legal and Parliamentary Affairs got his proverbial knickers in a twist defending the paradoxical tensions between culture and pornography, and the committee was forced to omit "cultural practices" from consideration. The new definition of pornography which was eventually passed in the APA is:

...any representation through publication, exhibition, cinematography, indecent show, information technology or by whatever means, of a person engaged in real or stimulated explicit sexual activities or any

representation of the sexual parts of a person for primarily sexual excitement. [emphasis added]

The committee chair explained that the key to interpreting what amounts to pornography lay in the intention of the offender, i.e., if the intent was “primarily to arouse sexual excitement.”⁵ Several MPs challenged him: “I would like to find out from the chairman... how they would measure sexual excitement, for example, when a lady is in a miniskirt and she is not intending to arouse the interest of anybody. I think it is very difficult to measure sexual excitement according to the behaviour or activities of someone.”

One can easily see the danger of such a subjective standard for determining pornography, in a context where women’s bodies have been eroticised and constructed as inherently provocative objects. If a society has already reduced a woman to eroticised body parts, isn’t her very being immutably doomed by this new law? A law that allows an prejudiced standard of provocation to be imposed on the subject being gazed upon, and further permits the enforcing authority to presume to know this subject’s intent, is extremely problematic.

It violates the basic constitutional rights of women. Indeed, such ambiguity and vagueness have resulted in the APA be-

ing dubbed the ‘Miniskirt Law,’ despite the fact that the term ‘miniskirt’ is not mentioned anywhere in the text. This misreading and gendering of the law is the popular interpretation of its prohibition of “any representation of the sexual parts of a person for primarily sexual excitement.”⁷ Of course, the reference to “breasts, thighs, buttocks or genitalia” in the original draft did not help with the lingering association of the law with women, not men. The misreading was also fuelled by Father Lokodo’s remarks on what his ministry (pun intended) planned to do: “Anything related to indecent dressing, exposing certain parts of the anatomy of a person, I call it pornographic and therefore condemn it... when you go indecently on the streets of Kampala you’ll become... a cinema.”⁸ Later he added: “If you are dressed in something that irritates the mind and excites other people, especially of the opposite sex, you are dressed in wrong attire [so] please hurry up and change.”⁹ In sum, the vague definition of pornography supplied by the APA lacks the certainty required of a criminal offence under the Ugandan Constitution. What, for example, amounts to ‘indecent’? Failure to provide an explicit definition of the elusive term ‘pornography,’ opens it up to the unsatisfactory ‘I know it when I see it’ standard.

The Pornography ‘Axe’ Falls

As soon as the APA was signed into law, several vigilante groups made up largely of young men started publicly undressing women around the country who they perceived to be contravening the law.¹¹ Police officers also started ordering women on the streets to return home and ‘dress decently.’ There was even a case in which a magistrate summarily sentenced two women in her courtroom to a three-hour confinement for wearing miniskirts. Ironically, the law that was passed ostensibly to protect women from violence was fuelling it. It emboldened Ugandans to abuse women’s rights. The already appropriated feminine body was turned into a site for further socio-political contestation. Infuriated women’s rights activists, most clad in miniskirts, protested against such actions, their indignation expressed in placards with messages such as: “Don’t sexualise my body,” “Give us maternal health care; don’t undress us on the street!”, “Keep your eyes off my thighs and fix the economy”, “Thou shall not touch my mini-skirt”, “My body, my closet, my money, my rules.” Enforcement of the APA spiralled into further abuses, with several cases of Internet sex tape exposures of female celebrities.

In late 2014, the jilted lover of singer Desire Luzinda was allegedly responsible for uploading nude

photographs of her and a sex

tape. The material went viral on social media platforms. Instead of invoking the APA to protect these sexual violations against Luzinda, Father Lokodo ordered the police to arrest her for having committed the offence of pornography. Although the arrest was never effected, the case vividly



demonstrated how the dragnet provisions under the APA could lead to grave injustice: Luzinda was the victim of a violent cybercrime whose rights to privacy and freedom of expression had been violated through a breach of trust, and yet was being treated as the criminal. A similar fate befell news anchor Sanyu Mweruka, who was also subjected to state interrogation and threats of prosecution under the APA. The political agenda behind these cases was to represent the female body as erotic and degenerate, an instrument threatening to pollute social morality, hence necessitating social control. Such actions fuelled moral panics and social insecurities, effectively distracting the disgruntled public from the

inefficiencies in the state's systems of governance. The double standards in enforcing the APA are on public display every day. Even as women were hounded by the law, several tabloid newspapers like Red Pepper and its sister publications, Hello Uganda, Kamunye and Entatsi, made (and continue to make) millions from publishing pictures of semi-naked women for the prurient consumption of their male readership. The silence of Father Lokodo on the tabloids points to a patriarchal modus operandi that allows the heterosexist capitalist state to commodify and pornify women's bodies while negating their agency to make sartorial choices.

What APA Portends for the Future of Women's Rights

The upsurge of sexual harassment and a de facto dress code on Ugandan women in the wake of the APA have raised several gender and human rights concerns (Oloka-Onyango, 2014). Linking the APA to a miniskirt ban and to the targeting of women was inevitable, given the gendered subtexts that had been constructed as far back as the Bill's initial formulation in 2005. The 'mob undressing' and sex tape sagas that followed the passing of the Bill must be viewed within the wider context of violence against women. Unfortunately, for the majority of Ugandan women, violence is not an isolated act but a fact of life. The 2006 Uganda De-

mographic and Health Survey (UDHS) revealed that up to 60 percent of women in the country aged and above had experienced gender-based violence (UBOS, 2007).

The objectifying language contained in the definition of the term 'pornography' in the APA, particularly the phrase, "representation of the sexual parts... for primarily sexual excitement" clearly targets women's sexualised bodies. Men's bodies do not fit the sexualised script, and that is why women invariably became the target of mob undressing. The threat of the APA continues to hang like a Damocles sword over the heads of Ugandan women. A likely future target of its discourse will be sex workers, who already face untold harassment, including being classified as "idle and disorderly" persons (Tamale, 2009).¹⁵ This is why sex work organisations have joined other human rights defenders to challenge the legality of the APA in the Constitutional Court.¹⁶ The law is a direct violation of Ugandan women's rights to bodily integrity, privacy, equality and nondiscrimination. But the petition also challenges the economic inequality and control perpetuated by the APA. When women's bodies move from the 'private' sphere of the home to the 'public' arena of the market, they are inscribed with a sexual/morality marker to be regulated and controlled by laws such as the APA.

AN OPEN LETTER OF SUPPORT TO THE ORLANDO SHOOTING VICTIMS

In 12th June 2016, at least 50 people were killed and more than 50 others wounded when a gunman opened fire and took hostages at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. The shooter, identified by several law enforcement sources as Omar Mateen, 29, was killed in a shootout with law enforcement after a three-hour siege. As the world tried to digest the unfortunate incident, Kaityln Turner, a resident of Minneapolis Minnesota,



penned a letter voicing all the questions that are running through our minds. She questioned the system, the religions that make it okay to spread such hate and the individuals that play God and cut lives short!

We now share her heartfelt missive and hope that someday, such incidents will be history as we all learn to live in peace and harmony.

Something happened in the U.S. last June; I only found out about it the morning after it had hap-

pened. As I sit here typing this email to you, I'm overwhelmed with emotions, too many emotions. I barely know where to begin. In the U.S., June is Pride month. It's hard to go outside and not see rainbows or signs of

support in my city of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

During the entire month of June, businesses are promoting lgbt events and special deals not only to try and gain extra business but to also show support and express that they welcome us; that their establishment is a safe place for us. June is my favorite month not only because it's Pride month but because it is also my birthday month. My birthday just so happens to coincide with our Pride celebration every year and every year I get exactly what I want

from my friends, family, and community. I get their love and support and their happiness. There is so much love in the air. Everyone is happy, smiling and welcoming.

For an entire weekend anyone and everyone feels like they're a part of your family, like they've been a part of your family all along. People have conversations with each other like they've known each other for years when they only met them five minutes ago. I live for those conversations. I live for those connections. Those moments are what I value above everything. Our Pride weekend is only a couple of weeks away and every day I get more and more excited for the feelings and experiences that weekend brings to my life and I know it's just around the corner.

Today I woke up feeling a little more excited than I was than yesterday and then I read the news reports following last night's events. Another, mass shooting, the largest as of yet in the U.S., has taken place in Orlando, Florida at an lgbt night club. It was deliberately directed toward lgbt individuals, in the name of reli-

gion. Fifty people within the lgbt community were killed last night. Another fifty three are in the hospital fighting for their lives right now. All of those people have names, dreams, passions, families, little idiosyncrasies that only those closest to them will ever know about.

I genuinely do not understand how one person can look at another person and not see all of that. How can they look at someone and not imagine the lives they would have touched or changed just by simply existing? How they can look at another person and decide they are wrong for loving

someone? Anyone who's ever experienced any kind of love knows how wonderfully indescribably that feeling can be. I can't fathom wanting to take that away from anyone. As I continue to sit here writing this, I feel left with only big questions. What is happening? Why are we letting them say high powered rifles more important than our lives? Why are we taking 'no' for an answer? Why is your religion more important than others? Why is it not enough to be confident in your own ideology? Why must I be forced to believe what you believe? Why can't we stand for different things AND stand together? I've never been

to Orlando and I don't know any of the people who were there last night, but I do know that to me, those people are my friends and my family.

I want to be there for them. I want to help them. I want to show them that I'll never stop fighting for them and that I'll never break. I'll keep fighting until there's nothing left of me or there's nothing left of this bigotry and only time will tell which one will break first. This is also how I feel about my family around the world and that includes you.WW

SOLIDARITY WITH ORLANDO 49

#FacesWeShouldNeverForget



Akyra Monet Murray, 18



Alejandro Barrios Martinez, 21



Amanda Alvear 25



Angel L. Candelario-Padro, 28



Anthony Luis Laureano Disla, 25



Antonio Davon Brown, 29



Brenda Lee Marquez McCool, 49



Christopher Andrew Leinonen, 32



Christopher Joseph Sanfeliz, 24,



Cory James Connell, 21



Darryl R. Burt II, 29



Deonka Deidra Drayton, 32



Eddie Jamoldroy Justice, 30



Edward Sotomayor Jr., 34,



Enrique L. Rios Jr. 25



Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera, 36



Frank Hernandez, 27



Franky Jimmy Dejesus Velazquez, 50



Geraldo A. Ortiz-Jimenez, 25



Gilberto Ramon Silva Menendez, 25



Jason Benjamin Josaphat, 19



Javier Jorge-Reyes, 40



Joan Carlos Mendez Perez, 35



Jean Carlos Nieves Rodriguez, 27



Jerald Arthur Wright, 31



Joel Rayon Paniagua, 31



Jonathan Antonio Camuy Vega, 24



Juan Chevez-Martinez, 25



Juan P. Rivera Velazquez, 37



Juan Ramon-Guerrero 22



Kimberly Morris, 37



Leroy Valentin Fernandez, 25



Luis Daniel Conde 39



Luis Daniel Wilson-Leon, 37



Luis Omar Ocasio-Capo 20



Luis Vielma, 22



Martin Benitez Torres, 33



Mercedes Marisol Flores, 26



Miguel Angel Honorato, 30



Oscar A. Aracena-Montero 26



Paul Terrell Henry, 41



Peter O. Gonzalez-Cruz, 22



Rodolfo Ayala-Ayala, 33



Shane Evan Tomlinson, 33



Simon Adrian Carrillo Fernandez, 31



Stanley-Almodovar, 23



Tevin Eugene Crosby, 25



Xavier Emmanuel Serrano Rosado, 35



Yilmery Rodriguez Solivan, 24

THIS ONE WAY ROAD THAT IS A SOUL HEALER!

By M.S

She stared deep into the depth of my eyes; her gaze penetrating my eye lids like the UV light: her gape unusual! I heard her breath underneath my pinna, the strength in her whisper hit my breaking point: her sound was unfamiliar!

She pulled me by my collar, I obliged; I panted, the force was not for the often! I was expected to keep the stud; I am, even when the walls of my strength were crumbling. I sighed; remembering, the last time I sighed- the final play, when she let me feel the warmth of her thighs, she sighed to the rhythm of my tongue; I chillingly smiled at the sight of a woman's body exude it's cum; I sighed!

"You know he is better than you", she said as she released me from her arrest. I was unable to refresh my memories but I knew she was gone; I was lucky she didn't throw it straight at my face; "it's over".

"I am not going to beg you to stay, if you leave I will replace you, if you stay, I will embrace you, but if you don't show that you care, I won't chase you," I lied as I showed her my back. Deep down in my heart, I knew I was begging; down to my knees, I was pleading but how would I have showed it? I needed not to lose my ego to a woman who found a partner better than I am.

I lost way to my tear glands; they faithfully embraced my agony and blessed my eyes with the cleansing oil. At least my glands never left me lonely. I still sighed; days passed but my heart didn't seem to get in touch with the healing effect of the 24 hours of time, it still didn't pick its pieces.

Not so far but no so near too, nature beautified the earth with a cool, green shelter. Birds didn't find trouble hosting their homes to this shelter; this large tree

near a smooth flowing stream is beautifully made into a house with its spreading branches. Its sub branches host numerous nests; birds sing charming melodies all day and night. I unconsciously led my legs to this rather lonely but beautiful scenery. The roads to this place are one way; as I came closer to the "home of the lonely", I saw a car go through the exit route. I didn't want to bother my eyes with the details of its interior since my concentration was laid straight to nursing my broken heart.



To my new home I sat and joined the birds to this melody:

*I love you princess, with all myself, I love you
Yet I can't fight for you
I wish you all the best,
That's why I let you be with him,
Who's is better than me
I know I will get there,
I will always welcome you back;
Back to my heart where your home is!*

We sang till the birds longed for refreshment, they ran to the stream to wet their throats as I wet my eyes with more lubricant. "Those are enough tears for the day," I scolded myself as I too took the exit.

The pain didn't lessen but the burden reduced a little, I had found my new companions; the melodies of the birds still echoed to my ears yet the scene of our break up still felt virgin-real to my mind. The night came to morning!

As I went back to the healing place to fix a working dose for the day, I still saw car leaving as I entered: I hastily walked towards "my home", so as to glance through the car's interior but I couldn't, I was too weak to take longer strides.

On my place, I found a note:

*Dear God, I miss her
I dropped her for him, but I am regretting already
The pregnancy, I am carrying wont result into a child
I love to see
I wish this child could have just one piece of a look
that resembles her
God, you know I was lied to, I need her more than
before
I wish she could see me cry her*

As I finished throwing my sympasies to the writer, the birds started our song. They reminded me of my own pain to nurse before nursing other people's pain. To the nursing bed I lay, to acquire enough prescription for the day. We sang beautifully to our rhythm and yes I got the strength to run ahead. My

birds, my new companions, their home, my new shelter, their melodies, my source of strength!

I felt stronger as I left but missed my new home the more. I decided to increase the dosage to twice a day. I went back to meet my companions that evening. As I slopped down, I saw the car leading through the entrance road. It briefly stopped at the place I call home. She walked out of the white car with white pieces of cloth wrapped around a newly born baby. The cries of the baby sounded louder than the melodies of my friends.

I could inhale the scent of her cologne, I knew she was the woman I was crying for but she wouldn't listen; she left me for a richer man, a man who would not only throw her body to happiness but also enable her express her genes. As I drew closer, the car exited. We didn't meet, not even eye contact.

Dear princess, congratulations upon your new born baby

I am proud of you

I know it's the most beautiful thing the world has ever had

I wish I could carry it in my arms and peck its cheeks

I know you are the happiest woman on earth

I smoothed my throat to singing this song with my companions but my strength was worn out. I just let my lubricant flow, down my cheeks, I nodded my head heavily but I didn't have a solution. Besides me, was a white piece of white cloth, she had left, I used it to drain my tears. "Do I carry this cloth, filled with her fragrance home or do I let it stay, for her to smell my tears?" I contemplated. The roads leading and leaving the place kept our faces distant but our hearts closest; the birds sang to our union and the stream refreshed our veins. She drove away as I walked in, yet she needed me much more than I could imagine.

Till I held our baby into my arms, I still missed meeting her; true love never fails. We knew we were running away from the obvious; we were meant for each other.

ENOUGH

I have had enough
 I have had enough tears on my pillow
 I have had enough broken hearts and a shattered esteems
 I have had enough insults, words that stabbed my heart
 You know why? Because I am a LESBIAN woman

Have you ever wished you were different?
 Just to enjoy a second of being "normal"
 Have you tried swallowing the pills?
 Or get yourself run by a car?
 Have you heard the voices in your head?
 The heterosexual voices that advocated for "KILL THE GAYS"

I have hated myself until I couldn't hate no more
 I have drunk myself to sleep, through work and through life
 I have smiled so many deceptive smiles, smiles that shine
 on the outside
 But hurt, mourn, cry and weep on the inside
 At what point is being LESBIAN disqualify you from being
 a WOMAN

Tonight Of individual life I shall command
 Of self-love I will proclaim,
 Of your bullying and hate I will condemn,
 Tonight I will play that part of a successful villain
 Because Queens don't quit
 We conquer

ARE STUD-TO-STUD RELATIONSHIPS POSSIBLE?

Quite often the labels we wear tend to limit our relationship possibilities; the considered superlative relationships are the femme-stud relationships, regarding the stud-stud relationships gay! Surprisingly, how heterosexual are stud-femme relationship? Stud lesbians are not men and a thick line between trans men and stud lesbians exists; studs are women too!

The gender expression of most stud lesbians is quite often understood through their dress code (cross-dressing) and are occasionally referred to as "tom -boys". Well the hasty verdict of calling them men is from time to time excusable but that doesn't essentially mean they are men. The measure of femininity isn't derived from appearance and dress code.

The behaviours of stud lesbians in stud-femme relationships tend to mimic the heterosexual women-men relationships characterised by patriarchy (femmes are submerged to submission to studs). On the contrary, modern relationships where love is the sole purpose of the bond, the labels must not be a limitation to relationships. Rich understanding of individual identity is a smoother way of dealing with labels especially for circumstances where the LGBTI community portrays resistance to accepting the kinds of relationships.

Relationships must not be built on supremacy of partners! Studs being dominant in bed, femmes being the ones to do house chores alas we risk to breed patriarchy in same-sex relationships; studs can carry pregnancy too! The ideology of stud-stud relationship being impossible is therefore a misconception of our own ideas trying to burrow ideas from patriarchal relationships that do not necessarily apply to same-sex relations.



LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE BLISSFULL

BM: When did you get into activism?

QWIN: When I accepted who I am around 2009, I was a silent person; I was the kind who observed and spoke very little. I was open about my sexuality and I tapped into my passion for speaking up about anything I disagreed with because I really don't like when someone enforces their views on others.



ing out, the reaction I got from my friends was very discouraging. In high school I was a Head Prefect so during my coming out process, most of the people I had gone to school with further complicated my life. Rumors went around, stories were forged and people had quite a mouthful to say. I could understand where they were coming from because as a leader, I often cautioned my fellow students about same sex relationships (although I must admit, at the time, I engaged in a lot of optical nutrition although I did not act on my feelings.)

People started calling me, praying for me and preaching to me to turn from my sinful ways. According to them, I was a very bad example to the people I had led. I remember going out with my girlfriend at the time and every time we met people who knew me, they would either ignore me or move to a different table. My boss found out that I was dating a girl and demanded for sexual favors if he was to keep my 'little secret'. This is when I decided I had to speak up for myself because no one was going to do it for me.

BM: How did your family react to your coming out?

QWIN: Although I was not out to my family, the first time I took my girl friend home left me in shock too. My mother, was very supportive. Here I was with a tomboy in my mother's home and we were calling each other by endearing names but not even once was she negative about the whole situation.

In a way, without saying much, I was assured of her support and for me that meant the world. She probably thought it was a phase that I would soon outgrow but then I broke up with that girlfriend and moved on to another. She has held my hand through all my relationships and with that; I know I can face the rest of the world.

She does worry, just like any parent would and constantly tells me she hopes my life is not in danger or she won't receive a phone call one day informing her that I am dead. But those are fears that I understand but she has still protected me from my greater

... CONTINUED ON PG. 52

ENGAGED, OUTED AND ON THE RUN

Becky 22 and Ferrand 25 are like any other couple with big dreams, only that they are now on the run and fearing for their lives. What is their crime- the young couple recently got engaged and news wound up in the Rwandan media- the reactions were spiteful and many accused them of trying to distract the country from the forthcoming elections as well as spreading immorality in the conservative African country.

The clearly over the moon in love girls met four years ago at a television station where they both worked- Becky is a film maker and Ferrand is a photographer. The chemistry was instant and could not be denied; the two started dating although they kept their relationship under wraps for fear of losing their jobs.



Like many couples trying to find their footing in a relationship, they broke up a few months later with the versatile Becky blocking Ferrand on all social media platforms. As fate would have it for those that are destined to be together, they bumped into each other just a month after the break up. They had a conversation and resolved to remain friends. They met up for coffee a couple of days later and that marked the beginning of their happily ever after. The two saw each other every day after that and within a month, they moved in together.

Ferrand says this was the first relationship where she felt complete and knew early on that she definitely wanted to spend the rest of her life with Becky. So, after three years together, Ferrand organized a surprise party that was well attended by their friends and some of their family members. She went all out- bought Becky a red dress to compliment the white and red décor and dress code, and there she proposed to the love of her life!

Excited and taken aback by the proposal, Becky broke down but managed to say a very firm YES amidst her tears. Pictures of the celebration circulated on social media with their friends sending in hearty congratulatory messages. Unfortunately, the newly engaged couple did not enjoy this bliss for long.

A rather famous socialite friend of theirs shared the picture on instagram and just like that, the news spread far and wide. Tabloids and online news agencies quickly got wind of the story and turned it into a breaking news feature. Becky who was on leave was suddenly informed that it ad been extended and Fehrn, who had since quit her job at the station to allow the relationship some breathing space, had most of her freelance en-





gagements cancelled.

They could no longer leave their homes without people staring or pointing at them. When they braved to go to a night club one night they ended up leaving early because everyone was zooming their pictures and staring at them like they had just walked out of a different planet.

Becky and Ferrand were now confined to their home, had no jobs and their families did not want to associate with them. Journalists were bombarding them with phone calls and text messages; they were following them everywhere they went. The worst came when their landlord asked them to leave his house by the end of the month. They then realized that they needed to make a more concrete plan as their life as they knew it had now taken a whole new twist.

Depressed and scared, Becky plunged herself into alcohol to forget all the problems that were piling, at least if only momentarily. She lived in a blur and would not let herself remain sober enough to face the issues at hand. Fehr describes this period as one of the toughest in her life- Becky was disoriented all the time. She remembers waking up one night and finding Becky in the kitchen, breaking their kitchenware.

She also resorted to cutting herself as a way of

letting out the pain. Becky still has no recollection of all the things that transpired during this time and is willing to pursue therapeutic help to move past this tough period of her life.

Scared for her fiancé's life, Ferrand contacted a doctor who would make home visits, treat Becky as well as talk to her until her sanity started to return. With the days nearing their eviction deadline, the couple decided to abandon everything they had worked so hard for and exited Rwanda.

They are now trying to start from scratch in a foreign land; Fehr promises to stand by her fiancé and do all it takes to make life better for them. One thing is for sure though, whatever happens next and wherever life takes them, this young couple is ready to take on life together.



THE BEAUTY THAT IS US

BY TT

“US” is a writing dedicated to the love of my life Banks. It is a story that we trailed from June 2012 for four years.

Introduction:

Some years back in the second week of June 2012, I hacked into a friend's facebook account where instead of going to her inbox as my intention was, I headed to her blocked list and it was from that list that I saw a very stunning cheery picture of a lady who would turn out to be the owner of my heart forever.

Kecia Banks was the name of this beautiful creature, I immediately logged out of this account and logged into mine straight away searching for this amazing star checking out more of her, Ohhh! Banange Kecia was beautiful; I had taken years without seeing such a beauty.

I sent her a friend request and ooppps! My request was accepted; I didn't waste time and poked her, within a few minutes with my eyes glued on my Nokia 6136 I got a poke notification back.

Huh! How lucky! She was online oohh my!

I thought of all those beautiful things to myself. I did not poke her back but headed for her inbox where I said “Hi, I thought

saying hi would be better than a poke”. Uuhhuu she replied just within two minutes and we kept the conversation going.

We started texting each other until the tardy hours of the night and it really felt so great although no love intention was shown anywhere in this conversation, in all the sweet nothings we talked about. But then I thought to myself: she must be enjoying my company if she can keep online like this!

The only question I remember that showed me I was headed on a right track was when she asked about my favorite colors and clothes, I answered red and I wasn't so much into fashion as my style was some sort of boyish and I had been so throughout my life.

Ohhh dude! You won't believe what she answered, she said tomboys strike her in such a way she never understood and she liked looking at them, I felt heaven on earth!

All this time none of us had dared asking for a physical meeting but we kept so in touch that her being offline would make me sick and feel so empty.

During that lofty time I fell sick but did not tell her, a friend posted on my timeline asking how I was feeling and when she read that, here is what she wrote to me; “Do you know

I hate it when people I care about hide things from me?” I was puzzled on how I had hurt this angel and asked “What I did I hide?” Ooohh I did not know that my being sick and not telling her was an issue, but of course it was according to her, I smiled so broad on reading this saying “I did not know you cared about me that much”...

After knowing she cared about me that much i knew i was headed to the right path and dared asking about her love life which she wasn't so straight with the answer, of course Uganda being a homophobic country no sane person unless met on a gay dating site can give a straight answer.

My Banks told me she had tried that she had tried dating but that was put to rest due to some personal reasons. I probed her to talk about the issues and she obliged, she told me she had tried dating a guy who broke her heart, but that wasn't all...she dated a female online!

Wasn't she daring! How can someone be so bold like that unless she read my mind and knew what I wanted?Did she know how easy she had prepared my way for me to lay my manifesto?

Of course I was more interested in the female dating part; I dared to ask who the lucky

lady was and how the relationship went. Well, i can't remember the name neither can I affirm if it was a true story but I got where i wanted, knowing if i could just walk on a sliding road to confess my desires needed to be quenched by this stunning star: the rest i didn't wana know.

The next question was how she felt about me after these amazing conversations we had, did she have some love feelings for me being a tomboy and a real lady at that?

She said she felt so good chatting with me and she missed me whenever we were not in touch but damn it! She did not mention the words I wanted to hear the most, the words "I love you", but that wasn't bad either for me, it was a deem green light.

I played it cool and remained on the road to pursuing my interests, it was so far a week and some days and I was still no where to my headed destiny. But within no time I started getting the privileges of getting wake up morning calls, Jeez! It felt so good that my brain became accustomed to waking up waiting for the call before getting out of bed.

Indeed at that time the phone was the most expensive treasure I owned at that moment because it kept me so close to the desires of my heart yet so far. Banks, where the hell did you come from? You made a "pillar" of fire within my soul which exits up to date lady.

Within these few days, a lot of imaginations happened, I wanted to hold her in my arms so badly but unfortunately I was not gona be home that weekend and she had never travelled to my resident district. Of course we had to draw the program of us physically meeting so soon and quench their desires we both had.

At this time my intention was so clear to her, I wanted to kiss her, I wanted to make love to her, I wanted her to be mine and mine alone. Not sure if she wanted me as a lover but I was sure she wanted to meet me too, she too wanted to kiss me as she said it would be her first

kiss with a lady.

That weekend I was headed for studies but I can not deceive I concentrated in the lectures, banks was the center of my everything, my phone was the only thing I needed, the rest had no meaning. I could not wait for that coming Friday, the day I would finally be able to hold this stunning angel in my arms. Someone should have seen me struggling to find a single room where we had to share rooms. My determination bore fruits and I just waited for my now my angel we share the small bed all to ourselves, that Friday was the longest I have ever waited for in my entire life.

Doesn't the long waited day come finally! I remember I was in a university meeting with eyes glued on my phone waiting for call to tell me she had reached. And Ooohh yeah! Finally heaven touches earth, she calls and says "I am at the gate, come get me", that was the end of the meeting for me; I slopped down to find this long awaited for beautiful creature that captured my eyes and my heart. Finally I get to see her, she had a shy smile when I said "nice to see you Banks, I am Lora" she was such a quiet star dazzling.

On the way to the room, she told me she thought she was short but her hommies seemed to be wrong, was that a joke? She knew better, after all I had her now and she was not about to escape my throbbing heart. I couldn't wait to get inside and kiss her or even bite her lips the moment the door locked behind us.

As if I could! We reached inside, locked the door, could I even dare grab her! We just sat on the bed and looked at each other as my heart was busy pumping like the end of the world for me. I admired her beauty, I had in reality never seen a lady as beautiful as she was, I started welcoming her as if it was in my plans. All this time my heart was getting weaker, palpitating and I was loosing sight I think, I could not wait anymore I just grabbed her lips to meet mine...

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family and people that have been negativity about my sexuality.

When I eventually gathered the courage to tell my siblings, their only concern was if I was happy. With my answer being affirmative they assured me nothing else mattered and they loved me nonetheless.

BM: How is your mother's relationship with your partner?

QWIN: When I first took my partner home, I remember being in the kitchen and my partner was sitting quite a distance from me. My mother approached her and asked if she would instead prefer to sit next to me. My partner asked if my mum was aware that I was kuchu and I was honest, and replied that thought she just had her suspicions.

Later, as were leaving my mother called her aside and told her she knew I was strong headed and argumentative but she should never hurt me. I think that was the day I knew for sure my mother was very aware of who I am. Those two have grown quite close, they call each and it is quite satisfying to see two of the most important people in my life form a strong bond independent of me.

BM: You have been married for a while now, how did you meet and what has kept your relationship strong?

QWIN: Our first meeting is one of those stories straight out of a movie, call it cliché if you like. I had crashed a birthday party but decided to leave early. As I walked down the stairs, my now partner was walking up and my heart literally stopped!! I have never felt anything like that in my whole life; however, she gave me one look and walked on. I decided to go back to the party, I had no idea what I was going to say but I was sure I had to talk to her. Unfortunately, she had come with a date that I knew. Her date and I were facebook acquaintances and on seeing me, dragged me to meet her girlfriend. I immediately knew she was out of reach for me; but when you're meant to be, I guess the universe makes sure you end up together. Suddenly I was running into her often and that only intensified the chemistry.

From the very beginning, I made it clear that if I was to get into a relationship with her, it had to be serious relationship. I did not even sleep with her until we decided we were doing this for real. She went silent for a month, I guess during that time she was thinking about what I had said and one morning, I woke up and my pictures were all over her facebook page.

One month into the relationship, we moved in together. Staying apart and spending money on renting two places that we were not really using wasn't making any financial sense to us. People cautioned us that we were moving too fast but I believe living with someone either breaks or makes the relationship. Well, five years down the road and we are still here, growing stronger.

We have definitely had our ups and downs but we are not willing to let go. We've had moments when we've been so frustrated and ready to just let go but we know what we want and just that makes us take the time to cool off and rethink things. Our families know we are dating and have played a very big role in keeping us together. My family sometimes spends holidays with hers, and through this, we have all bonded beyond just a relationship of two people.

BM: Do you see your family growing in the future?

QWIN: Yes, we definitely plan on expanding our family though not in the very near future. We both want to give birth and I think that is amazing that we are both willing to carry our children.

BM: What would you like to see different in our Ugandan LGBTI movement?

QWIN: The one thing I would love to see is more lesbian women being vocal about their rights and the issues that affect them. The men in this movement are owning their space, but we have become very reluctant like all is well with the lesbians yet it isn't. We need to change that, we need to engage the policy makers; we need to get back to being the stronghold of the movement.

love

LYRICS OF MY LOVE SONG; for you my Martha!

I needed a woman!

A woman to revoke my worthiness; a woman who would make me worthy fighting for

A woman that would never hurt nor leave me

A woman I would be able to stare in the eyes and never think about how nasty it would be when she left me

A needed that woman that would be afraid of losing the importance I hold to her!

Martha I needed a woman you are!

I needed a woman vocal enough to tell me why she's into me,

Tell me why I pissed her and how quickly to fix it

A woman that would hug me tight and ask why I am not fine

A woman who will love me because I have challenged her to grow

Martha, your efforts have reflected your interest in me and you are this woman

You are the woman indeed!

I needed a woman whose intimacy would not only be during our nude moments

But climaxed by her concentration to me despite the distractions on her mind

I needed a woman despite her big head,

Lying her head on my chest would make me feel safe from hell

Listening to her heart beats would forgive all my sins

A woman who would not appreciate me by losing me

A woman who would try her hardest to stick with despite my difficulty

I needed the woman in you Martha!

I needed a Martha that accepts my honesty because she knows I want to grow with her

Martha you the woman I wanted to have my last relationship, so am in a rush, no worries, am in slow motion because I know we are forever

Martha you are the only woman who can hurt me multiple times but still get me believing in your goodness

Martha I needed a woman you are! This love is difficult but real, it's much better than then, when I was getting fucked for other reasons other than orgasm.....



DATING MEN TO SATISFY SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS

I am called Sandra (not real name) and I'm 27 years old. I work for an engineering company as head of IT department and have been stationed here for one and a half years.

I am one of those people who thankfully rarely get questioned about my sexuality- maybe that's because I come off as straight for many but I am a proud lesbian identifying person. For those who know about my sexual orientation, there is an assumption that this is just a phase but deep down I know it is not, because I have never so much looked at a man and thought of him in a sexual way which I cannot say for women.

I have known about my sexual orientation since I was 8 years old- yes 8 years!! I was in primary school somewhere in Nagalama when I first noticed my attraction towards girls.

When I joined secondary school my feelings towards girls only intensified. When I joined campus I tried to date men to give me parents some peace of mind; I remember feeling like for the first time for as long as my memory could take me back, they

were proud and had high expectations in me. I was seeing a man they had 'got' for me because in their opinion, he would make a perfect husband. We dated for a while but I got to a point where I could not take it anymore, I was repulsed by just the thought of being in the same room with this man. It was then that I decided the relationship was not fair or even healthy for both of us.

My mom has her suspicions about my sexual orientation but I am thankful that she knows what it's like for someone to have a different sexual orientation as her younger sister came out to her a couple of years ago. She is curious because I am always in the company of girls and I guess her motherly instincts have also alerted her. I am however worried about what my father would do if he finds out that I am a lesbian- I think by trying to force me into marriage, he thought he was solving the problem of shame of having an unmarried daughter yet the issue is far different from that.

I remember finding out that my aunt is a lesbian in 2014 and asking my mum who was open about the whole issue. It gave me so much courage knowing



one day; I can actually be open about my sexuality, especially to my mother.

I have tried to keep my life very private but it is hard to live in seclusion. In 2014, my girlfriend used to travel to Mbale every weekend to check on me. Soon my neighbor noticed a pattern and pieced the puzzle together. Before I even had the time to process what was happening, my landlord had served me with an eviction notice and a stern warning that I would be taken to police if I was ever seen in the neighborhood. My property was vandalized and I lost four months worth of rent. From the experience I learnt to be more security conscious.

I have always wondered how my neighbor found out about me being a lesbian but I strongly suspect my girlfriend and I let the cat out of the bag during an argument which got intense and heated. Things were said, houseware was thrown around and broken and I guess it was at this point that the neighbor realized we were more than just friends.

This was one of the biggest fights I have ever had in my life and it brought te realization that intimate partner violence is real among lesbians. People may not address it but it is one of the biggest problems in our community. Here are two people, both with raging hormones and love in the middle of it all-unfortunately some people do not know how to step back and things normally get physical. Others have resorted to emotional and psychological torture.

I have realized, people stay in these abusive relationships because they hope the person will change- which is a complete disillusion. Others stay because the sex is great or the abusive party is the bread winner and provider. I honestly don't think any of these are valid reasons for someone to carry on in an abusive relationship but it is the reality.

Lesbians or women in general need to become hardworkers- go out and make your own money. That way no one will have anything over you! If you can easily provide for yourself, you can walk out of abusive relationships easily.

SERVING THOSE I SHARE AN IDENTITY WITH

Bridget (not real name) is a lesbian woman living in the Eastern district of Mbale. She operates a small bar that has turned into a space space for many LGBTI identifying persons. While it is not glamorous and many would refer to this bar as dingy, it equates to home for Mbale's LGBTI community.

There, they are free to be themselves without worrying about people passing judgment or even scorning them. They engage in small talk, dancing and games of pool- for them, this is the closest they come to socializing out of their gatherings they hold in their private homes.

For Bridget, this bar is her lifeline- it is a constant reminder that in her small way, she contributes to the happiness of people who identify with being labeled abnormal or insane and it also doubles as her source of income. Bridget revealed that she does not make much to live a luxurious or glamorous life but she can survive on her earnings.

"The people that come here do not have a lot of money- most kuchus here don't have that much money anyway. But there is nothing I'd rather do than serving my own people. We come here at least twice a week and these are times we all look forward to and treasure greatly," Bridget explains.

Asked why she chose to venture into bar business, Bridget says she did not have a lot of capital but needed to invest in something that would make ends meet at the very least. She does not regret this decision either.

Like most places frequented by kuchus in Uganda, Bridget says she has had a few of her patrons attacked but the people in the area in which her bar is situated are slowly coming around. They no longer pay much attention to her friends and they too have learnt to be respectful of the people that surround the bar because they realize they are very deeply rooted in their cultural and religious beliefs.

She hopes to expand the bar that can accommodate more numbers.

someone believes in you and is willing to go an extra mile for you makes a very big difference,” she says.

Looking back, Pretty says she realizes the need for mentorship programs targeting sports within the LGBTI community; it is from this realization that she is initiating a soccer academy that will help nurture talent as well as use sports as an advocacy tool. She hopes to eventually expand the academy to accommodate all sports disciplines.

Pretty lights up when she talks about her dreams; she says she hopes to become the first female to head the Federation of Uganda Football Association (FUFA). She believes she has served the football fraternity faithfully and will do whatever it takes to realise her dream. This dream realization will be a way of encouraging other LGBTI identifying persons pursuing sports that their potential can only be limited if they allow the world to downplay their ability.

Pretty has also had her fair share of troubles; she says most of the people she once regarded as friends have ceased associating with her when they got wind of rumors that she was a lesbian. She however says she channeled this into positivity and will let her success and commitment speak for itself and defend her against homophobes. She also remains hopeful that in the not so far away future, the sports fraternity will be more embracing of sexual and gender minorities.

“Things are already changing; previously, the federation never wanted to associate with people like me at all but now they will give you a chance to address the rumours they hear. The public attitude is changing too and people are paying more attention to our talents than our sexuality- just as it should be,” the hopeful Pretty says of the change in dynamic within the sports world.

She states that Ugandan journalists have exaggerated the state of LGBTI persons in the soccer fraternity by focusing on their sexuality which should be a non issue. She calls on the media to front the talent and gifts of these players other than tearing them down and taking their focus away from their zeal to conquer.

MY MUSIC IS MY WEAPON



My name is Shivan Pavin, I am an out lesbian and musician; and I'm in a committed relationship with a transman. I have struggled to get to where I am today but I have learnt one important lesson along this journey- I believe that for one to make it in life irrespective of their sexual orientation, they need to be patient and resolve not to give up on their dreams.

The only thing I have realized about music and life in general- people will still criticize you even when you have done your best. I have learnt to sieve these comments; I take a bad comment and learn from it and I use the positive critique to better myself.

I am grateful that I got a breakthrough in the music industry and I am now trying to use my music for activism. I compose songs about liberation and justice because I know, first hand, what it is like being an LGBTI identifying person in Uganda. My daily experiences inform most of my music- in fact some of my most recent music like “This is me”, and “Why” are songs advocating for equality of all citizens no matter the differences we may have.

I also sing about violence towards women, children, the disabled and all the other voiceless people in society. I believe it is my duty to make a difference in whatever way I can and for now, the only way I can impact change is through my music.

Being an out lesbian and an LGBTI activist, I have faced many challenges with my clients in the music industry especially when it came to building a brand name. Promoters and producers felt unsure of working with me and it took a very long time to find people who were not trying to change me as well as take a risk on my career.

I am one of those people who don't want to hide their sexuality because one way or another, if you keep running away from the truth, it will eventually come out and catch up with you. It is for this reason that I decided to come out and use my music to draw attention to what it is like being a sexual minority in a society that castigates the very thought of my being. Besides, I thought about being outed at a point when I have become a household name and that is a risk I was not willing to take- it was a much simpler option for me to come out now rather than be outed or forced out of the closet.

I am very proud of my decision to use my music for advocacy because I have passed on the right information to the general public-

I think I went through a tough time especially in my career because people have no knowledge or are misinformed about sexual and gender minorities. I have even taken it upon myself to sensitize my close associates and most are shocked when they realize we are not all about sex, or we are not recruited into homosexuality. They have learnt to respect my opinions even if some disagree with them- and I think this is a positive step in the struggle for equality for LGBTI persons.

I have also carried on the mantle to sensitize my large fanbase, through social media, about issues to do with LGBTI people; while some of the responses from some of my fans are bitter basing on the fact that the majority of Ugandans are homophobic, I also realize a shift in attitude and some have realized that homosexuality is not contagious or a

learned habit like they have been made to believe.

I am very proud of my decision to use my music for advocacy because I have passed on the right information to the general public- this has helped to debunk most of the myths that have been widely believed and it has also corrected the misinformation that is believed by the general population.

I have had some fans confess that some of my songs have impacted their lives, relationships and through my advocacy, I have been able to tell who my genuine friends are. Some people stopped associating with me when I started to actively use my music for activism.

On the downside, the attention I get from my fans has affected my relationship because when I perform, my mission is to impress my audience. This however normally ends up with male fans trying to fondle or touch me- something my man is very uncomfortable with. However, we are a work in progress and are learning to understand that my work does not necessarily reflect who I am as a partner.

In ten years' time, I hope I will be a household name in the entertainment business and I hope to have also set a good example and encouraged the very many talented kichus that we have to pursue careers in entertainment. I am very dedicated to crashing the fear that most people in the community harbor about having a successful career in a heterosexual dominant world.

I have fears of being attacked for my advocacy work but I also hope these fears will soon be a thing of the past; I hope I can one day soon get up on stage, sing about the issues that affect sexual and gender minorities and walk off without worrying if someone from the crowd will go to the extreme and harm me.

I am currently putting together my first album titled, 'I live my life my way' and to supplement my income, I am thinking of opening up a boutique which will prioritize female freelance dancers for employment opportunities. Besides music, I also have a diploma in cosmetology and had I not pursued music, I would have definitely been a cosmetologist.

EVENTS

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WOMEN MUST RECLAIM THEIR SPACE AT THE FRONTLINE

My name is Diane Bakuraira Sydney, I turn 37 in May; I am a human rights activist, swimmer, counselor, peer education and a trained paralegal. Last year, a friend of the community approached me and tabled an idea for the Ugandan LGBT community to take part in the International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics.

I have always been a swimmer but had given it up 18 years ago. In fact I used to be on the national team but was kicked off when rumours that I was a Kuchu made rounds. When I was approached, I thought we could use swimming as an entry point into turning sports into an advocacy tool. Together with the said friend, we rallied people who were passionate about the team, and vigorous practice sessions began- this was the birth of the Uganda Kuchu Aquatics Team (UKAT) as it is known today.

Swimming competitively has always been my passion and having life offer me a second chance at it was amazing. I remember feeling like the whole experience was surreal; it brought back a memory of being on the national team with back to back trainings for competitions that were in Nairobi. But here we were, a team of young ambitious Ugandan Kuchus headed to Canada to represent a community that is very dear to us- it is almost impossible to put into words what an honor that was.

I think using sports as an advocacy tool is very important because the movement is currently very aligned with economic and political empowerment and we are forgetting the very core of what started the movement. We used to meet up just to catch up, watch movies and spend time with one another- an aspect that has long dwindled. Sports will therefore reintroduce the importance of a social space within the movement since it's very inclusive and will enable us engage with our closeted comrades who would rather not be a part of the political activism arena.

As the team leader for UKAT, I am extremely proud of how we performed and together with Clare Byarugaba another team leader of the team, we are planning on not just participating in international tournaments but also regional and national ones. We also plan on penetrating the Ugandan league and widening our scope to mainstream tournaments.



A few months ago, I suffered a brutal homophobic attack; I was very open about it and I think this is what helped me deal with the trauma.

At only eight months, we are laying the structures, modules and terms of reference for the team. One of our core areas is organizing activities to pass on skills to our members and the one thing we intend to focus on is creating programmes that do not duplicate the work of our already existing partners. Hopefully, in about five years we will be a fully registered club with more members and a bigger funding base. Currently we rely on local organizations for funding but we are casting our net wider because our dreams for the team are very big.

We do anticipate challenges in trying to streamline ourselves into the mainstream swimming fraternity but we are ready for that; we have even already started talks with the federation and they are well aware of our intentions to be a part of them.

Away from sports, I am a versatile person, call me queer if you like. Right from childhood, I have had my siblings and school mates say I could have very easily been a boy and that created a side of me that believes in no labels- it really should not matter if I am female or male or if I wouldn't want to conform to any labels, all that should count is the fact that I am a human being. I believe that these stereotypes and labels truly limit a person's potential.

This labeling has gone so far as to affect the movement- we are starting to form clusters- something that is leaving out some people. We should go back to wanting all LGBTI folks to prosper together.

I have watched as the visibility of women within this movement dwindled – and I attribute this to low self esteem. We have let the patriarchy system of our society take control of us and gone are the days when we were at the helm of the struggle for rights of LGBTI persons. We have taken a back seat like we don't care and the men have also capitalized on that, and they should!! Why shouldn't they uti-

lize this opportunity to advocate for what matters to them if we are not fighting for what matters to us?

We have also stopped being engaged in community activities and this absence has created a big gap. We have forgotten how powerful we are and if we could rally together around pushing our femininity forward, we could turn this trend around. We should be involved in forums where issues of women are being discussed- we must stop limiting ourselves to only LGBTI issues like other issues don't concern us.

We are aware of other feminists trying to gag us and saying issues of LBT women should take a back seat as it is not yet time to openly discuss them! But when will the right time be? We must become aggressive or else we will find ourselves relegated to a non-existent stance. We understand some of them are put in difficult positions by the existing laws but we are here, we have issues and ideas that must be addressed and embraced. That is why I strongly believe we must pick out allies that are willing to listen, the ones whose judgment is not clouded by homophobia and religious beliefs- these are our best shots! Let us engage them, soon or later we will influence everyone else.

A few months ago, I suffered a brutal homophobic attack; I was very open about it and I think this is what helped me deal with the trauma. For a while, I suffered silently but then realized I was a voice and could not bury myself in my troubles. I remembered why I had joined activism and couldn't afford to have that stripped from me.

As a counselor, I had to talk myself out of the anger, depression and bitterness. I hope my journey and story can encourage the people who look up to me and I hope we can all continue to stand up to the unfairness we experience daily.

MY SUCCESS WILL SPEAK FOR ME- PRETTY

Pretty is one of the national assistant coaches for She cranes- Uganda's women's national team; she also currently coaches a team that plays in the prestigious Kampala league. She has played football since childhood and regards it as her true love.

Due to her sexual orientation, she has developed a mechanism where she separates her personal life from her professional self. She chose to do this because she acknowledges the environment in which she operates and will not risk losing her job, which is also her only source of livelihood. She revealed that she has often times been discriminated based on the rumours that surround her sexuality and does not want to imagine what will happen if they

indeed put the facts together.

Pretty says that sometimes opportunities arise but her superiors pass them on to unqualified staff leaving behind the ones fit for these just because they have heard rumours that she is sexually attracted to women. Despite being sidelined, she has not giv-

Looking back, Pretty says she realizes the need for mentorship programs targeting sports within the LGBTI community;

en up and has maintained her commitment to her career.

She advises LGBTI identifying persons who have a special interest/ talent in sports to prioritize discipline and avoid exposing themselves to situations that will ruin their careers. "It is hard and painful to act like something you are not but do not put yourself in a situation that will leave you unemployed. Be disciplined, keep your personal life away from the sport and keep your head down. When the time comes for us to stand tall, we will do that but for now, we must remember that the environment we live in does not permit us to express ourselves as freely as we would want to," Pretty cautions.

Asked how she managed to remain focused on her dreams, Pretty says she owes her success to Freedom and Roam Uganda for mentoring her and pushing her in the right direction. "FARUG recognized the talent I had and consistently urged me to make use of it. We all need mentors especially within the LGBTI community; it is already hard enough hiding your sexuality from the world- knowing that



USING MY TALENTS TO SERVE MY NATION

OT works at one of the leading LGBTI organizations in the country and is a passionate rugby player- who proudly sits on the national team. However, she attests that her journey to the top tier has not been a piece of cake mainly because people looked at her sexuality first rather than her talent.

OT hates labels and says she has on many occasions been mistaken or even addressed as male; while she understands the misinformation and quick to judgment character worn by many people, she states that she is a proud woman and has now learnt to react with aggression towards such people.

She does not even pay such mistakes much attention nor does she take offense- something she says has made her recognize the maturity and growth she has achieved on an individual level.

OT explains that Ugandans and most people are misinformed about gender and she has taken it upon herself to educate and sensitize – she has often times had to explain what the term gender non conforming means since most people who are misinformed quickly put her in this category rather than the female category that she belongs to. OT says this, she considers a part of her activism work.. OT began her sports career at a very young age; she used to play football as a youth up until Senior two before giving this up. While growing up, she preferred to dress like a boy and thankfully, OT was raised by a liberal father who gave her the choice to pick her own clothes and she remembers him bringing home boys' shoes on more than three occasions.

Up to this day, she prefers hanging around men; she is more comfortable around men and even trains with the men's team on the rugby fields. In her opinion, many of the women do not take the trainings seriously and she would rather be a part of a pack that is more motivated. She also relishes in the fact that the men have no time for cheap and irrelevant conversations which is not the case for

their female counterparts.

OT known the Ugandan LGBTI movement for eight years but has actively been involved in the movement for three years- she opened up to her brother about her sexuality and to her surprise, he did not react negatively but instead urged her to pursue her happiness.

OT says she has no regrets about actively joining the LGBTI movement because her life has since taken a turn for the better; she has become more confident and has travelled to places that at some point in her life, she had never even dreamed she would go to. She also believes it is good for the movement to groom young and passionate activists to continue advocating for the rights of Ugandan LGBTI persons.

OT is also passionate about feminist issues. Even though the mainstream feminist fraternity has tried to distance itself from LGBTI feminists or even address issues that concern the latter, she is still a firm believer that combining forces and ideas would catapult both groups to greater heights.

OT says she believes the mainstream feminists continue to discriminate against LGBTI person because they too have been misinformed and have not taken a keen interest to self educate or demystify all the societal perceptions they have been fed. She hopes the gap between the two groups can be bridged so that all feminists have one agenda and work together harmoniously.

OT has a hope that one day people like her will be openly accepted sports fraternity without both the policies and laws as well as the sports fraternity. She strongly believes that sports can be a tool used to fight homophobia. On how she copes with the rumor mill within the game, she says she long decided to address the issue. "I do not have to reply to their queries- I just let them think whatever suits him. I am there to play a game not share my life story; my concentration right now is towards perfecting my skill and that is all that matters," OT reiterates.

THIS IS ME - SHIVAN PAVIN

Intro

Ooooh Kizington!!!
Shivanaa... fighting for freedom

Chorus

This is me, I am Kuchu!
It is me and I love it!
This is me, I am Kuchu!
It is me and I love who I am! (X2)

Verse 1

Many people tortured, others are killed, some are being chased away by their families
Most of them arrested, put in jails living, their lives in misery
We are seeking for the liberty of our people we giving our best to get freedom
For our people who are tortured for no reason
I am crying for the liberty of my people I am singing this song to get freedom
For our people who are tortured for no reason
(Please we are all human)

CHORUS X2

Verse 2

Up-town down-town we are hiding
Unity is what we are searching
To live untouchable good life these days, you've got to be bribing
This is what we are, we are living and we can't deny it
No matter how hard it may be we gotta live and keep our rainbow flag so high
Keep the candles burning brighter
we are strong rich and fighters
Keep the candles burning brighter
we are strong rich and fighters

CHORUS X2

Bridge

Raise your flag fight for freedom
Raise your flag fight for freedom
Raise your flag fight for freedom
Farug raise your flag SMUG raise your flag
Spectrum raise your flag IBU raise your flag
Fem alliance raise your flag
fight for freedom...
Kuchu Times where are you, Let's get our freedom... YEeeeeeeah!!!

(Chorus till fades)





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