

FEARING OUR SILENCE AND SILENCING OUR FEAR

THE 8TH CONVENING OF THE
UGANDA FEMINIST FORUM

30TH JULY TO 1ST AUGUST, 2019
JINJA, UGANDA



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“For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.”

AUDRE LORDE, THE TRANSFORMATION OF SILENCE INTO LANGUAGE AND ACTION



UGANDA FEMINIST FORUM 2019: "SILENCING OUR FEARS AND FEARING OUR SILENCE"

1. BACKGROUND

The UFF was born out of a number of national and regional processes aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of the feminist movement at national and regional level. In 2005, women leaders and activists came together at a historical gathering in Jinja, Uganda under the auspices of Actionaid Uganda, Uganda Women's Network and Akina Mama wa Afrika. The meeting sought to map a way forward for the women's movement in Uganda in the aftermath of a series of setbacks which culminated in the government ban of the play *"The Vagina Monologues"*. Similar initiatives around feminist organizing were taking place around the continent. Further, it was felt that the women's movement in Africa was losing momentum on the political landscape, including donor support to women's rights initiatives. There was an urgent need to create a safe space for feminist organizing on the continent. Thus the African Feminist Forum (AFF) was established and convened for the first time in Accra in November 2006. The 'Jinja' participants joined forces with AFF and became the Uganda Feminist Forum (UFF).

The 7th Uganda Feminist Forum (UFF) held was held in November 2017 under the theme "Detonating the Power of Uganda Feminist Movement." It was attended by about 60 Ugandan Feminists and sought to "deepen feminist politics while contributing to feminist organizing through conversations, connecting initiatives, and catalyzing a new wave of activism to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in Uganda." Some of the issues discussed at the forum included: shrinking space for feminist organizing, violence against women demonstrated by the unresolved serial murder of women in Kampala and its outskirts; dwindling resources for work on women's rights; and feminist perspectives on the constitutional reforms which included amendments for compulsory acquisition of land before payment and lifting of the presidential age limit. A series of strategies and action points were agreed upon to further the agenda of the movement.

In preparation for this year's UFF convening, two build up events were held. In October 2018, Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), on behalf of the UFF, hosted a dialogue to interrogate the state of organizing and accountability on sexual gender based violence in Uganda during the National Women's Week in October. The purpose of the dialogue was to create a safe space to talk about sexual violence in Uganda, with the aim of building and strengthening an intersectional movement to combat the vice. The UFF working group also hosted Sisters to a conversation on Sisterhood on 14th December 2018. The dialogue which brought together about 60 Ugandan Feminists aimed at fostering collective organizing; inter-generational knowledge sharing, and cultivating self-love, inclusivity, solidarity and commitment among Sisters.

In 2019, the UFF will take place from the 30th July to 1st August under the theme "**Silencing Our Fears and Fearing Our Silence**". The forum held annually, is an independent space that brings together women's rights defenders, activists and Ugandan feminists to deliberate on key issues of concern to the movement. At UFF, we celebrate, harness and amplify our feminist journeys at national and regional level. The UFF adopted the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists, which was developed by the African Feminist Forum and provides the philosophical, aspirational and principle values that all who are members must uphold. This year's forum is an opportunity to celebrate Sisters' courage, risking life and limb in speaking out against injustices, but also examining our complicity, inadvertent or not, in keeping quiet when our voices could have made a difference. It is a space to name and face our fears, and individually and collectively work to dismantle them.

2. CONTEXT

The theme is replete with myriad interpretations. We ask ourselves, what is there to fear in our silence? How does it bode for the feminist movement, both as individuals and as a collective, to remain mute on issues that oppress us? What is it that cripples us and keeps us from speaking out? Conversely we ask ourselves, how do we silence these fears? How do we rid ourselves of this paralysis, this dread, and doubt? Whatever the responses to these questions, Audre Lorde, in her seminal essay, *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action* posits that to remain silent is to sign one's death warrant. She asks, "What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?" In other words, "your silence will not protect you." You will die anyway.

But Lorde also understands that there is much to fear. "In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear - fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation." In Uganda, as women, our fears are just as various, named and unnamed. We fear for our children and what tomorrow may hold for them and us. We fear that we may get killed as we walk home at night. We fear that we may be thrown into pitch black dungeons, emerging battered and bruised, if we ever join a protest. We fear the almost inevitable rejection and violence from families, friends, and church—a community that means so much to us—when they find out about our sexuality. We fear working on contested issues such as abortion and sex work because they are in conflict with our Faiths and moral stances. Sometimes the silence emanates from genuine fear for our lives, other times it is wilful blindness to the plight of the marginalized. The fear of upsetting the status quo and losing our privileges. Our fears are numerous. Our fears define us, and define movement.


As the winds of political change blow for Uganda's Northern neighbours, our status quo characterised by corruption, militarism, corporate capture, further calcifies because of this fear. Women's bodies still remain sites of violence, battered and commodified for public consumption as exemplified by the Miss Curvy contest where Ugandan women were co-opted as tourist attractions, alongside flora and fauna, or the public shaming of Hon. Sylvia Rwabwogo who was condemned for taking her harasser to court. Within the context of a shrinking civic space, the silence of many Ugandans is State imposed. In 2018, there was no bigger manifestation of this than through the arrest of Stella Nyanzi who has been in jail since November 2018 charged under a number of laws designed to silence dissent.

Interspersed within this discourse on fear and silence is women's troubled relationship with the economy and their deliberate exclusion from this space. Women's engagement with and participation in the economy remains on the margins, characterised by no ownership, access to and control over resources which effectively nudges them out of the conversation on economic policy. Furthermore, because discourse on the economy has been calibrated as complex and technical, only held by IMF and World Bank functionaries in suits, the fear of exposing ourselves as unknowledgeable about economics holds us captive and compels us to abdicate that role to men. And yet women are most affected by the vagaries of the economy. In Uganda, of the 61% of people in vulnerable employment (characterised by irregular work, no contracts, no social



THE CONVENING OF THE UFF
CREATES SPACE FOR UGANDAN
FEMINISTS TO INTERROGATE HOW
FEAR AND SILENCE SHAPES OUR
ACTIONS AND THE IDEOLOGY OF
OUR MOVEMENT AND CHART OUT
STRATEGIES TO REDRESS THE STATUS
QUO. THE FORUM WILL ALSO BE
HELD AS A BUILD-UP EVENT
TO CONTRIBUTE TO NEXT YEAR'S
AFRICAN FEMINIST FORUM.





security,etc), 71% are women.¹Women have remained at the bottom of the food chain of a rapacious neoliberal economic agenda that favours profit over people. They predominate in low skill and largely unsafe working pursuits, from the garment industry, assembly plants, and flower farms as flower pickers. Patriarchy intersects with this oppressive neoliberal capitalist system to leverage and exploit women's already low status in society for profit, exacerbating existing structural inequalities. The prioritization of corporate interest at the expense of women's rights is evident in the proliferation of Public Private Partnerships as is evident in the Lubowa hospital project where a foreign corporation has been given carte blanche to construct a private for profit hospital. Neo-liberalism's lifeline is anchored to the further degradation of women which keeps them subordinate and prevents them from demanding a fair wage and safe working conditions

Reading the tea leaves tells us that the future remains unchanged without concerted effort from the collective. How then do we create change in a society in which to remain silent is prudent, is a form of survival, but also a death sentence? In 2017 and 2018, more than 42 women were brutally murdered. In June 2018, the Women's Protest Working Group, made up of citizens who were concerned about the lack of action from the State on these murders, was formed. The group planned a series of protest actions to culminate in a march through Kampala with the intention of drawing attention to the rampant killings of women and to also demand that the police produce a report on the murders, and that they take deliberate steps to change the police ranks to include more women. The march was historic and a major milestone because for the first time since the passage of the Public Order and Management Act Ugandans were able to protest over an overtly political issue under police protection. It also demonstrated that peaceful protests are possible in Uganda.

Were these women in the vanguard of this protest not afraid? What lessons do we learn from this action and many similar ones around the continent? Since the threat of reprisal will never go away and we are doomed if we do or we do not, how do we learn to break the silence? How do we demand for justice, even as we know the risk this poses? Lorde believes that fearlessness simply needs to be practiced and learned until it becomes a habit. "[We] can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired." This merits further examination in our context where we have everything to lose; our families, our jobs, our limbs, even our lives. It also bears clarifying that Lorde's perspective is influenced by the prospect of impending death as she faced a cancer prognosis. Does this however make her recommendation any less feasible?

The convening of the UFF creates space for Ugandan feminists to interrogate how fear and silence shapes our actions and the ideology of our movement and chart out strategies to redress the status quo. The forum will also be held as a build-up event to contribute to next year's African Feminist Forum.

3. THIS YEAR'S FORUM SEEKS

To build and strengthen the Ugandan feminist movement into an accountable, inclusive and intersectional movement that is better able to withstand and confront oppressive systems of power.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To create a safe space for Ugandan Feminists to reflect, heal, strategise and re-energize to identify, name and confront fears that lead to the movement's inaction and silence.
- To generate new feminist knowledge and pedagogies, elevating women's voices and opinions
- To document and amplify the movement's herstories in order to increase historical consciousness and re-member the contributions of women and people from marginalized groups

To further expand and transform the movement into a bedrock of organising and activism

¹ Ntale, A., 2018, Minimum Wage and Women At Work: An Analysis of Uganda's Labour Market and Its Implications on Securing Minimum Wage Policy.

MOTHER'S LETTER

SYLVIA NALUBEGA

Dear Daughter,

I will be long gone by the time you read this letter and missing you terribly. The happiest day of my life was when I held you in my arms. You were a little thing that warmed its way right into my heart. I called you Kiconco because you were Ruhanga's gift to me. I know hearing these words makes you wonder because I never outwardly treated as a gift that you really were to me. I am so sorry my daughter.

My lifetime was spent in silence. I was taught by my mother and grandmother to keep my thoughts to myself especially concerning my family. At home, I rarely spoke to Baba as he only kept company with my brothers. And as for mother, she told me to be a well-behaved girl speaking in calmness and being agreeable to everyone.

The circumstances of your birth were kept a family secret because we feared shame. I know you have always been held in suspense. When I was fourteen years of age, I was raped by my cousin. I remember that day as vividly as yesterday. From that forceful act, I conceived you. Baba was so furious not at my cousin but at me for flaunting my femininity as he called it. He said I wore short skirts and that was why my cousin defiled me. Mother couldn't say anything in my defence because she feared Baba. She kept her silence nursing her wounds in her heart. I saw her cry from time to time. Baba didn't want to be ashamed since he was a village councillor therefore he had me married off to that very cousin who raped me. He said that family issues should remain in family.

My silent anger towards my cousin, then husband led me to poison him as I sought justice for the wrong done to me. Yes, I killed your father for abusing me. I killed him for making me drop out of school when I wanted to pursue my education. I did this before you were born. No one suspected me. I felt his death ease my anger. Yet this special thing happened. When I had you, I vowed to protect you and not let anyone take advantage of you. I also vowed never to get married again. But this was not my choice to make as Baba quickly got a match for me when you were one year old. He didn't want to have a daughter who was a young widow for fear of people gossiping that I had a curse. He had to protect his family's honour.

I had no choice to marry the man my Baba chose for me. I put my energies to raising you my beautiful girl. I had my happy times but the sad moments out weigh them. Your step-father took care of you and I like no one had. He loved us both. He was a respected man as you know. It was an honour for me to marry a recognized public figure in our government.

I watched you bud into a beautiful young woman. I was happy to yet a part of my feared for you. What if you met a man who abused you like I had been? It saddens me that your abuser was right under my nose and for a time I had no idea. Yet when I got to know about it, I did nothing. The latter is worse for I betrayed you in the worst way a mother could betray her child. Like Baba, I held onto to my family honour and not your wellbeing. And yet again, childhood silence had crippled me.

Worse still, my fear of public opinion made me violate your rights as a child. The next thing I am going to tell you will be hard for you therefore let me apologize to you in advance. I knew that my husband took you to have an abortion!

I cannot keep reading mother's letter because tears are blinding my eyes. My heart is sore. Why mother? Do you see the cost of your silence? You knew all this was happening to me yet you chose your silence? nevertheless I have to keep forcing myself to read on.

I saw you that day and I feared to ask what was wrong with you. I know you wanted to speak out but I quickly excused myself for fear of what you were going to say. I feared that the moment you told me I would then be held responsible for what I knew. Yet I wanted to continue in my ignorance since what I didn't know didn't "hurt" or so I thought. I remember offering half-hearted prayers for you yet I knew that what you needed was your mother standing up for you not hiding away in her bedroom.

One day, I mastered up my courage and confronted your step-father as I saw him tiptoe out of our bedroom. I threatened him that I would expose his acts. He simply looked at me and with a mocking smile, he told me "I dare you! You are simply a woman. Who will listen to you? You are under my control. I feed you, I clothe, I meet all your needs. You are nothing with out me. Be the "good" woman that you are meant to be; quiet, meek and never raising your voice at me. The moment you open your mouth about this issue, then say goodbye to all the nice treatment that you and your daughter are receiving from me." And with those words, he left our bedroom for yours.

Silence made me think of doing to him what I did to my first husband. But I feared for he was a prominent person. My daughter I shudder at my silence now. If only I had defended you, you would not have had my fate. I had lived with a belief that if spoke, I could disturb my social order. I also had a thought that not speaking would make the situation go away. But I was wrong. My voice could have meant protecting you my child; this I know very well now. There is a saying that speech is silver and silence is golden yet I have come think that this is overrated.

As I am lying here on my death bed, my silence screams in my ears as loud as thunder. I must speak. I have kept silent for far too long. My silence has hurt the person that I love most in this world- you my little girl. That is why I have decided to put my voice in written words to tell you my story; our story.

Last night while I lay awake on my hospital bed, a woman came in crying and carrying a young girl. "Please doctor help my child. She has swallowed rat poison. Please save her," she cried. The child was taken away. She must have been fourteen years of age.

The woman came and sat next to me. I guess too much anguish made her speak even to a dying woman. "If only I had protected my child. If only I had reported my brother to the authorities for defilement, my child would not have attempted suicide. But my family told me to keep silent for fear of disgracing our family name. I also told my child to keep quiet about it." The poor mother cried. I was thankful that you didn't attempt suicide. Minutes later, the doctor came back and gave her the sad news that her child had passed on as a result of the poisoning. Her silence cost her the daughter's life. I shudder at the thought.

I urge you not to let silence keep you from getting justice. You deserve to be heard. I have seen a leader in you who can stand for others. Use your gift to speak for those who are sexually abused. Let me say this in poem:

If you can't speak, you can write.

If you can't write, you can sing

If you can't sing, you recite poems

If you can't recite poems, you can dance.

It is not a battle that you can win alone. You need your sisters in this fight against silence suffered by victims of sexual violence

I will miss your university graduation and seeing you in your white coat as a doctor.

I love you my Kiconco.

Your Mother, Kemirembe.

1st December 2011

By the time I finished reading mother's letter, my white coat was stained with tear drops. I determined to use my voice and beat the fear of silence against sexual abuse faced by my sisters out there. We should fear our silence because many lives are lost as result.

SYNDROME OF SILENCE

KEMIGYEYO SHEENA

Silence is golden they say. It can kill many souls, assassinate several minds. It creates tension, attracts suspicion, confuses one's opponents, puts one in a state of fear. They have no idea what their silent opponent's next move is! It cripples, it breaks, it is a weapon! But it is a double edged sword! What happens when an amateur swordsman is handed Valerian steel? What happens when a weapon becomes its user's master?

We live with silence everyday of our lives. We groom ourselves to be silent about the injustices that happen in our lives. Your husband beats you up today and then gifts you with expensive jewellery the next day only to 'buy' your silence. A young girl gets raped every night by her father but fears to speak out because she fears that her school fees will not be paid. A single mother is constantly forced to have sex with her boss so as to keep her job and feed her hungry children at home. A young woman keeps in a violent and polygamous marriage for twenty five years scared of what the world will think of her once she 'abandons' her two children and leaves this polygamist. I mean, we have been made to believe and assume that we have been and still are married to the world so we must embrace and accept all the pain, all the torture, the unfaithful and peace 'killing' relationships and marriages so as to keep the world happy. But honestly speaking, does the world give a 'shit'? Does the world really care if you cover up those bruises with make-up every day and forge a smile onto your face and act like your husband is the ideal man for every woman? Does it care when you wake up dead after having sacrificed thirty or more years of your life for this ingrate of a man? Ask yourself that my sister!

We have made ourselves captives of our own fears! We are scared of what our families will say once we leave these high paying jobs to preserve our dignity. We are scared of what our peers will think of us once we report our own brothers, fathers, grand fathers and uncles that demand to have sex with us as payment for their 'duties'. We have continuously fed our fears without thinking about ourselves. We care so much about what others will think of us, how the church will crucify us, what our own tribesmen will brand us. But have you and me stopped just for a second, to think about yourself, your happiness, your peace of mind or are you not worth the thought?

Why aren't we scared of our own silence? Why have we let our fears silence us and let us make crime, make pain our companion, our friend, our lover? Why must we die like flies as we allow our fears to laugh at us, chant our 'victory' and tell us that we **MUST NOT** speak out?

Society has continued to make us spread this syndrome from ourselves to our peers and to even our own children. For example: before a young girl is married off, she is given a 'serious talk' by her mother and aunties. She is educated about the norms and taboos of marriage. Statements like; 'if your husband beats you up, please do not leave. Remain firm and embrace his beatings. It is actually a sign of his love for you! Marriage is like that!'. 'Even when your husband cheats on you with another woman, please welcome him back home with open hands. After all, you are even lucky he has come back.'

Look at the irony in these statements, look at the disaster! In a bid to educate their daughters to become good wives, they end up creating 'punching bags', moving corpses that carry so much pain, so much anger and torture that they silently embrace so as to become 'better citizens', recognizable members of the society.

It is no wonder that the rates of suicide increase day by day and we ignorantly ask why these our daughters and sons are ending their lives. Well my dear, truth be told we honestly deserve a round of applause because we are the 'murderers'.

We have constantly spread the syndrome of silence. We have trained people to accept the violence, the torture, the dehumanization in their lives and made them believe that it is okay to keep silent. But my dear, what happens to the generations that come after us when we don't fear our silence? Is it okay to close our eyes and shut our ears to the cries of those who are trying to actually assassinate the silence? What right do we have to judge those who come out and condemn how girls and women are sexually assaulted at their places of work? Who gave you the right to tell your daughter that getting hit by her husband is part of her 'qualifications' as a wife?

I believe that this nonsense deserves to come to an end! Unless we begin to fear our silence, unless we learn to speak out against this syndrome of fear, then we continue to kill our present and bury our future. Your voice is the most powerful weapon that you possess. What matters is how you use it to defend yourself, your dignity and your womanhood! Once you speak out against the patriarchal chain, sexual assaults, gender based violence, domestic violence, you have at least given another woman, another child, another girl a voice; a reason to also speak out. Our voices are like a wild bush fire, they easily spread out and even those who do not want to listen must listen because speech is power! Through this, a bond is created, the sisterhood flourishes and thrives. We cannot do it alone. We must not do it alone because we are not alone! We all have our weaknesses and pains, we all cradle in the dark soothing our wounds hoping that someone somewhere will be our hero but why don't you let that heroine inside you rise and thrive for the sake of your future generations!

Today, as you continue to embrace those beatings every night, as you continuously allow your boss to unzip that skirt and pull down those knickers, as you allow yourself to be humiliated and abused because of your gender and sexuality, ask yourself these questions; Is losing my life part of my obligation as a wife? Will the world care after I have contracted HIV/AIDS just because I am trying to keep my job? Do I honestly deserve what I am going through?

We all need to fear our silence, we should and must speak out! Each one of us needs to speak for the sake of her daughter, her son, her mother. Let us learn to support each other and also uplift those that actually speak out for us. If you cannot be the voice of your people then do not try to humiliate and judge those that try to be the voice to the voiceless.

We all must learn and help one another to fear our silence and thus silence our fears. For we all have a role to play in breaking this syndrome of silence but the question remains;

Are you breaking the syndrome or rather creating the syndrome?



WE HAVE MADE OURSELVES CAPTIVES OF OUR OWN FEARS! WE ARE SCARED OF WHAT OUR FAMILIES WILL SAY ONCE WE LEAVE THESE HIGH PAYING JOBS TO PRESERVE OUR DIGNITY. WE ARE SCARED OF WHAT OUR PEERS WILL THINK OF US ONCE WE REPORT OUR OWN BROTHERS, FATHERS, GRAND FATHERS AND UNCLES THAT DEMAND TO HAVE SEX WITH US AS PAYMENT FOR THEIR 'DUTIES'.

THE SIN OF INDIFFERENCE

OPHELIA KEMIGISHA

For a year a couple of years ago, I read the Bible every day using an app that has a name that may sound familiar: "Our Daily Bread". I was raised Catholic, which means that my Bible knowledge was limited to the passages read in church and the books I studied in school. Reading the Bible everyday brought me some new insights into some of the teachings. One that stuck with me long after I stopped being an ardent Christian is one of Jesus's parables: he tells the story of a man named Lazarus, a poor man covered with sores, who sat near a rich man's gate every day, desiring to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. There's no mention in the story of the rich man saying a bad thing to Lazarus, or stepping on him on his way into his house. Yet, the rich man goes to hell. What was the rich man's crime?

The Bible passage refers to Lazarus as being "comforted in Abraham's bosom" which may lead us to believe the teaching of certain sects of Christianity, that we need to suffer here to earn eternal life, that having plenty is sinful in itself. I, however perceived the rich man's sin as one of indifference. He saw Lazarus every day, passed him by dressed in fancy robes, but simply ignored him. He couldn't be bothered to share what he had with him, or even to give him a word of greeting or comfort.

I have found a lot of parallels between feminism and Christianity in the way I practice it, and so I often think of my feminist duty, the way Christians think of their Christian duty. The most important duty for me, is solidarity. Having been socialized to see all womxn as cunning, evil, and or in competition with me, being a feminist helped me unlearn this and start to see womxn as sisters - fully human and deserving of my support.

As we have argued multiple times, womxn are not a homogenous group. We are Christians. Muslims. Non-religious. Disabled. Poor. Heterosexual. Queer. Sex workers. Light-skinned.

When I think of allies of feminists, men can come to mind. Male champions. He for She. We have talked often about how these "allies" have failed us by centering themselves, taking up all the space, refusing to make spaces for us to speak for ourselves, and even participated in violence when being an ally was no longer convenient. In conversations with feminists, we talk about the privilege men have and how they should be using that to amplify our voices.

Looking inward to see how little we amplify the voices of womxn who are different from us is a much more painful process. I recently saw a tweet from a Zimbabwean feminist (@justDumo) that read:

"Women community organizers with albinism have done so much to create and solidify our identities across Africa. Yet even with the endless sexual violence women with albinism have to endure, African feminist writers and scholars still choose not to see us. Is there any shame?"

That question made me look inward and ask myself: what does it mean when we fight for our liberation and forget about womxn who aren't like us? We live with these womxn. Poor womxn. Disabled womxn. Womxn with disabilities. Queer womxn. Womxn with albinism. What does it mean for us as feminists to fight for our own rights without including and amplifying these groups?

When we say our feminism is for all womxn, who are we referring to? Womxn we know? Respectable womxn? What happens if the womxn who's in trouble is trans, disabled, or "known to be of loose morals"? Do we walk past in our robes and sit at the small table we have secured near the patriarchs? Can we stop like the proverbial Good Samaritan and ask them how we can help them?

Does the fact that we aren't being oppressed in the same way negate their oppression? Does it mean that we don't believe them? Do we get to pick and choose the kinds of womxn we fight for? More importantly, are we fighting for freedom or are we just fighting for ourselves to get a share of the patriarchy cake? The bisexual poet and writer June Jordan once wrote:

"...freedom is indivisible or it is nothing at all besides sloganeering and temporary, short-sighted, and short-lived advancement for a few. Freedom is indivisible, and either we are working for freedom or you are working for the sake of your self interests and I am working for mine."²

If we all agree that womxn are important, that the lives of womxn matter, then we cannot pick and choose. We are not allowed to look away, to walk past, to keep quiet. The feminist author Roxanne Gay has said this more aptly: "All too often, when we see injustices, both great and small, we think, 'that's terrible,' but we do nothing. We say nothing. We let other people fight their own battles. We remain silent because silence is easier. *Qui tacet consentire videtur* is Latin for 'Silence gives consent.' When we say nothing, when we do nothing, we are consenting to these trespasses against us."³

We are feminists because we are fighting for ourselves, but also because we are fighting for others. We are feminists who understand our enemy is, in bell hooks's words, the imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist patriarchy. That makes it our responsibility to fight patriarchy in all the forms it manifests: classism, neo-colonialism, ableism, fatphobia, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, etc. By extension, that means we are in solidarity with all womxn, even if their lives are vastly different from our own. That solidarity, like I have emphasized, is put across through words and actions because indifference amounts to complicity.

It is time for us to speak up for every woman.



² June Jordan – A New Politics of Sexuality.

³ Bad Feminist – Roxanne Gay

BREAKING MY SILENCE

KARUNGI ANNE PATRICIA

I've written and deleted and written and deleted and written. I've wanted to write this story down for a year and seven months (yes, I've been counting). I've had a good number of mental breakdowns as I wrote this because it feels like it happened yesterday.

So once upon a time, there was a girl. Not doe eyed, not innocent like in the other stories. You know the ones? The ones that make you say "she was such a nice girl; she didn't deserve it". So far from this type of girl was she that she was. And still is, labelled a whore.

Once upon a time, a girl went to a bar for a night out because she was going through a mental breakdown. With a man, probably one of the closest friends. A confidant. A friend she'd call and say "I'm in a bad place and need company, can I come over" and he'd say yes. And this was one of those nights.

There are words in this life that I will never forget but not like being told "You know what happens when you come here" just before being violated. He only stopped because I started bawling my eyes out, wailing loudly. He tried to convince me later on that he would never do something like that to me as this wasn't the first time a man had violated me and I'd told him as much. And I convinced myself that it wasn't rape, it was just a misunderstanding.

I've had many reactions to being violated but none like looking at him the next day and smiling like everything was okay mostly because I wasn't sure I had been raped and because there were his friends (my friends?) around; his place was quite the popular hangout spot amongst them. They have a whole group, with a name in fact and a WhatsApp group. I've been disappointed before but not like when I was told, one random Tuesday night (yes, I remember) while at the Junction, that a section of his friends (some my friends) knew what type of person he is; that I was not the first person he had hurt; that they had kept quiet about everything and had continued to let him hang around. What did I expect though?

I've felt pain before but none like when he was finally exposed on Twitter, one random Friday, and seeing one of my MALE friends laughing under the tweet saying "Is it your wife that was raped? *insert laughing emojis*". I've felt betrayal before but none like when my "friend" texted me that same day asking what happened. I opened up to him, he conveyed sympathy. It seemed genuine but a few weeks later I found them together; him and the rapist; at Panamera.

efore but none like being told that he was present at the most recent Human Rights Convention working for an organisation that, among other things, advocates for women's rights. Or being asked to give my story, a year too late, so he could stop being hired by these organisations.

e. If there's any variation to it, it's that I am alive. It's that I did not catch anything. It's that no permanent physical harm was done to me. Mine is purely mental, emotional. Yay me, the survivor! It's funny when we're retelling these stories we sometimes say "my/her rapist" yet in those moments one's body is treated as if it is not their own.

I'm not entirely sure of what direction this entire piece is supposed to be going but I needed to write something. I titled this piece "*Breaking my silence*" but I cannot name my rapist for fear of being shamed further.

I was told to go to police. And say what? "Hey I was raped (kinda) in 2017. I was drunk, willingly took myself to his place and continued to smile laugh and talk with this man for a few days after. And did I mention that I have no evidence aside from my memory. But I still want to prosecute." We all know I'd probably be the one thrown into a cell for wasting their time.

Uganda is a largely patriarchal society where women are treated as second class citizens, and in a society that doubts the credibility of reported sexual assault cases, particularly if society feels the victim precipitated her victimisation, through a behaviour deemed "inappropriate". Rather than looking at the merits of rape cases, issues of dressing, behaviour and one's marital status become the determinants of the case's credibility or lack thereof.

How do I classify what happened as rape, when I'm not sure if it was? I'm 23 (24 in December) and only learning that from 2014, when I lost my virginity to now, a good number of my sexual interactions amount to sexual assault. The times I was "convinced" to do it, the times he said "I don't like condoms but I promise to pull out." but came in me and did not say anything, the times I was too drunk to say no and just let them have their way.

How do we expect to hold men accountable, to protect our sisters, when there's no one teaching them what's what and comprehensive sex and reproductive health education is considered evil and will "encourage bad behaviour"? Boys are taught to conquer girls. "No means yes. No means try harder". And girls are told to that if a man persists after her no, then he must REALLY like her.

How do we expect to curb the rates of sexual violence when "What did she expect to happen when she went out dressed like that/when she decided to get drunk/when she decided to go to his home/when she decided to move at night?" or "Where's the evidence?" or "Who would want to rape a girl like that/ She's not attractive enough to be raped?" are the responses to rape accusations.

I was told people said that because I was a very sexual person and I'd slept with this person before, it couldn't be rape. After all, apparently, I used to say yes to every one so I must have said yes. Right? I must have consented in some way; maybe the sex was oozing from my skin and enticed him. It is common for the morality of the woman to be questioned and for society to say it is her fault.

And this is the stigma that lies around rape and sexual violence. If you're raped and weren't significantly scarred, how bad could it have been. If you were, you have to prove that it was indeed *that bad* or else you get looked at as the bad one. There's also an outdated belief that "good women don't get raped", and such notions stop the victims dead in their tracks, thinking that it was their fault that they were sexually assaulted.

You must be believable, look weak, be pretty, be a good girl, have your story straight. If you're incoherent with your story, how will you be believed? So you must rehearse, put yourself through the mental anguish of remembering it play by play, word for word so that you will be believed. If you look like me 5'9 (or is it 5'8) and heavy, "How could you have been raped? You look like you know how to fight."

Lately there's been uproar online about the 1% (I was unable to find the exact figure and only found an estimate) of false rape accusations that happen. Apparently being viewed as a victim of rape is something to be famous for and apparently there's money to be made from being known as a victim. Excuse me, where do I claim my cheque? Victims of sexual assault believe that speaking up is futile because no action will be taken, or, as strange as it might sound, they choose to live with the pain while the perpetrator walks free. So how can we be sure about even the 1% being false when even the "real victims" have not come forward to seek prosecution of the perpetrators.

Despite the prevalence of the problem, rape remains one of the most violent crimes that society continues to sweep under the carpet despite its consequential effects on the moral, mental and physical fabric of not only the victim but society too. The culture of silence that lots of women have adopted needs to be broken, and there is need for society to nurture a culture of oneness; "*Believe women*". If they remain silent, society will think that sexually assaulting women is acceptable.

Sexual exploitation is a scourge on our nation's conscience and degrading to all women, not just the victims, therefore it should not be allowed to continue. It also degrades the standing of men, because for women to always be cautious around you because of the actions of, yes not all men, but enough men to be scared, that should be a slap in the face. A slap that should encourage men to fight against this scourge not yell on top of rooftops "Not all men" because their egos have been bruised.

Stigmatisation of victims must stop to enable them to heal and move on. Every time society points fingers at victims for the crimes of their perpetrators it perpetuates the stigma; creates a brutal world in which traumatised women feel too ashamed to seek help and suffer in silence.

If we do not believe victims, have not taught children how to detect when they are being abused, have not taught men from a young age not to abuse, and that no means no; how do we expect to "break this silence"?

A LETTER TO THE UGANDAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

RUTH ASHIMWE

Dear sisters,

I am writing to you about the restaurant in which I am seated. It's called Mokka Café, at The Oasis Mall. I am taking black tea. Spiced. Reflecting about the women's movement and all the wonderful people I have met and learned from. I am also reading Irène Assiba D'Almeida's *Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. It has inspired me to write to you about our own silences in the movement. And surely, surely, I say unto you: you will always meet people that will talk to you in their free time. Cherish those who free up their time to talk to

you. They are thinking about you. For "*In the end we remember, not the words of our enemies but the silence of our allies,*" Martin Luther King said.

\In this letter, I talk to you about my experiences in the movement. I admit that some experiences are borrowed and others direct experiences of mine, but I have changed the context to allow room for reflection.

\Not so long ago I joined all of you. My first meeting was in a board room in Essella Country Resort Hotel. (You know us and our boardrooms). I met distinguished women on that day some of whom I had seen on national television. They spoke so passionately about the work they were doing and alluded to previous discussions and it appeared that this discussion had been going on for years. I was excited to be learning from them all. The energy and sisterhood in the room was admirable. The meeting ended. I left.


\A month later, we met again. We discussed some of the framework and policy documents we work with. We had a presentation on the progress made towards ratification, domestication and/ or implementation of these documents. The presentation was made by more or less the people who presented at the last meeting, similar views were shared, and similar uncompleted discussions were alluded to. It felt like I was in the same meeting, almost the sitting arrangement. The meeting ended. Only half of what was on the proposed agenda had been discussed.

Another month. Another institution invited us. Different agenda topic. Similar discussion, same faces.

I did not go back when I was invited the 4th time, my dear sisters, not because no one called me after the meeting to check on me as a 'new sister' that had just joined the sisterhood as constantly referred to in the meeting. No. As a collective, I felt our authorities were silencing us. That's why we kept going back to the same recommendations. At least that's what I told one of my staff members when she asked me why I was not going back to attend the women's meeting. But later that night, deep inside my heart, I felt I was not going back because I was not a sister. I did not feel the sisterhood that was being evoked and referred to constantly. I felt like I was on my own.

Four months passed. I remember women murderers were on the rise and there was a need to get back together, grounded in the knowledge that we work for others, each other, and not for ourselves. I got up and joined the struggle. I continued meeting with each one of you in different forums that brought us together, and soon we became friends and every time we met we talked and laughed and promised to 'call soon' and check on one another or 'have tea someday.'

As I write this, I remember one of you that I met at the feminist forum in 2017 and we promised to have dinner the Friday after that forum. We exchanged numbers and promised to call. We both forgot. I have not seen her in two years.



I am thinking about the few months I have spent with no job. I told the organisation I was working for a year ago that I would not be going back to work. I preferred to stay home and look after my two girls. I can tell you that life was completely new. I got to experience the real life experiences of unemployed youth in Uganda. (At least now, when I talk of youth unemployment, I will know what am talking about.) But yes, I know what it means when taking your child to school and they turn and ask; "Mummy, are you still broke and cannot afford to buy a snack for me?" Or even, getting stranded in the car with no fuel. Or even spending the night to make liquid soap so that you can sell it the following morning and buy milk for your baby! By this time, I had started being absent from the movement's meetings mainly because I had no transport to attend the meetings. One day I was told about a feminist sister who said, "That one we don't see her these days. Most likely because she has a baby. You know mothers!" Now, I had already left my workplace when the project we were implementing ended and other staff were laid off. Externally, it was perceived as though there was a problem and that's why the funding was never renewed. Some of the sisters actually got to know what was happening. In my limited knowledge of sisterhood, I expected them to call me and actually ask what exactly happened. I know they had read Chimamanda's dangers of a single sided story and hoped they would love to know what the side of my story was. Didn't they want to know how I was feeling? Or even if I wanted to talk? One day, I dusted my dictionary, and looked for what the meaning of sisterhood was. On digesting the meaning, I decided to meditate, not an as an escape from the world, but rather as a means to comprehend the world and its ways.

This experience was good for me because it made me reflect on my own practices within the movement and the ways I reached out to my other sisters in the past. I remembered the time we were in a meeting and one of our friends talked to us about her 'side hustle.' Oh how I never followed up on her to support. I reflected further on my fellow sisters in the movement who are running institutions with no funding but we never talk about how we can support them and work together as sisters. It reminded me of a sister who had shared with us that her organisation had not paid them for close to a year. Then she became absent in the movement; I called and this is how she concluded. "...*When my silence does not alter your life, then my presence has no meaning to it.*" She continues to make her online social media contributions, but physically, she remains absent. I reflected on many of those who had left our online groups citing a 'toxic' environment. Did we ever go to their inbox to ask why? Or even talk about how sisters never leave each other. And persuade them that this is sisterhood and we do not leave?

In trying to interrogate our silence as sisters, I talked to a friend. In her words she said; "... *sisterhood in Uganda is about class. It's a class of women who talk about feminist theories and lack the practice. It's the women who are close to power who separate the mind from the body; sisters in our movement, are the middle class feminists with their friends...*" she laughed and asked me not to take her seriously. But she advised that we could have an honest conversation and push each other a bit.

We can always talk and understand patriarchy as our enemy that has treated us in some unkind ways. Sometimes, we are caught off guard by what the system does to us, but it's never unexpected. But our own sisters' silence (and sometimes it is a deafening silence) and the lack of support, can cut deep into our emotional soul because we just don't expect it. We expect that our sisters will cheer us on. We trust that they will lend a hand or give an encouraging word when we need it the most. This is what we should strive to do. As we continue to contribute passionately to policies and laws and charters and how the women's movement needs to organize and push certain agendas; as we talk about how The Alliance for National Transformation has taken some of our brilliant minds and how we should join the People Power movement to demand for justice for the young people; let's also remember in the evening when we go back home to call a sister who did not come to the meeting and find out if she is okay. It is only then that we shall all be reminded that we are not alone.

I write this letter not to apportion blame to any of us. No. I write because I recognize that we are all wounded. We all bear historical wounds and colonial wounding from which we must seek healing and from which some of us will never detach. For some of us detachment may be problematic due to religion and for the rest of us it may be due to colonial attachment we now call "our African culture and tradition" without realizing the colonial and historical constructions and erasures. And for that reason, we may fail to see how much woundedness we bear for the sake of gender. I could go on. We are silent because at the individual level we have struggles that silence us, while at the same time we convince ourselves we are okay, better than the next sister. I write to ask us to heal together, to engage in difficult dialogues. We need to be healed so as to make progress and ourselves whole. I write this to acknowledge the sisters that do reach out and hold us together. You know who you are and I celebrate you today.

UNLEARNING CONSERVATIVE NARRATIVES ON SEX WORK, LEARNING SEXUAL POSITIVITY AND LIBERATION

NATENDA SHIRA

Narratives about sex work and sexuality shape the way sex work and sexuality is perceived and the way laws are formulated. Over the years most societies in Uganda have pathologized sex work and have responded to sex workers in moralistic, punitive and violent ways. In Ugandan culture and some religions, communities only justify holy matrimonial sex and it must be between a man and woman. Premarital sex and everything else is a disgrace. It is an abomination for a woman to sleep with several men but a privilege for a man to have many women. Any woman who acts against the norm is labeled impolite names such as Sinner, Malaya, Kibafu and so forth. Men prey on this typecast to suppress women's sex liberation and positivity. This is how patriarchy contributes to sexual gender based violence and transmission of sexually transmitted infections because men are adorned and granted more sexual power over women. Whereas women are viewed as responsible for controlling men's sexual desires, for a resilient woman who chooses to do sex work in such a community, this is a challenge to the conservative narratives of how a noble women should behave. Society defines work as almost everything than sex work. Sex work is a way for people to talk about exploitation, lack of protection, hopelessness, immorality, worthlessness and violence. Typically a woman can do anything; nursing, teaching, house chaos, unpaid work but not sex work.

Media presents a woman engaged in sex work as one who is damaged, should not be trusted and needs to be rescued. This doesn't justify detesting the sex work industry since every industry is full of damaged women. Victim narratives, misinformation and wild exaggeration on sex work and sexuality further perpetrate marginalization, instill hate and fear. As open society Foundation's "ten reasons to Decriminalize sex work" indicate

"Violence in sex work doesn't come from the doing sex work but the stigma and illegality surrounding it, which pimps society, police, media and health workers alike to be violent towards sex workers with impunity"

Perhaps removing the stigma from sex work will help us think more clearly about work, liberation, sexual positivity and equality. There is a difference between choice and coercion into sex work both can't have one generalized definition.

Just like Lola Davina quoted in her Book Thriving in sex work "People say follow your passion, so just what exactly is wrong with work involving actual passion?"

Women who choose to do sex work, choose to liberate themselves and use that freedom to earn a living. They have body integrity and are moving past the enslaved narrative on how a woman should receive sexual pleasure. They have enforced the woman's right to initiate sex and demand for safe sex, a situation that was restricted before. They have inspired women in toxic relationships and dying in silence to believe that it is actually not a wrong for a woman to have a life and sex after a failed relationship or marriage. They beat the patriarchal norm of men having sexual power over women to recognition of social equality. They have spearheaded sexual liberation of women and abolished the cultural religious classification of wanted and unwanted sex to all sex is pure as long as it's safe and consensual.

That is why is it important to note that the inherent violation of women's rights and bodily autonomy is not related to sex work. It is rooted in the patriarchal systems that are infringed on all women, the divisions among the women's movement and the silence about our sexual pleasure as women regardless of our sexual orientation, nature of work, gender identity, race or origin. Otherwise all efforts designed to promote women's rights will be jeopardized if some women are excluded and silenced. It is time to break the silence!

THE SILENCE OF ALLIES

NAMPIJJA SHAMIM

In social justice, allies are people from one social identity group that stand up in support of members in another group that are being discriminated against or treated unjustly. In this case mainstream feminist organisations would support organisations for girls and women with disabilities. But what have the allies of girls and women with disabilities done except quietly watch from the sidelines as these sisters continue to be left out of a movement that should be embracing them with open arms? The feminist movement has been silent on the women and girls with disability and their rights are also enshrined within the very foundation on which the women's rights and feminist movement are built on - gender not disability.

Allies have failed to take the initiative to learn about disability, the categories of disability and the unique needs that come with them. This failure to educate themselves about disability, experiences and challenges faced by girls and women with disabilities has kept a tight lid on their issues.

We have had situations where girls and women with disabilities are called to participate in meetings and trainings organized by mainstream feminist organizations without reasonable accommodation in place. Furthermore, when convening panel discussions on women's rights, women and girls with disabilities are excluded and yet they are just as concerned and affected by gender issues albeit differently. Instead they are relegated to contributing only to panels about disability, as if they are not women and girls first. Where are the opportunities for learning? Creating linkages and meaningful relationships with feminist organizations if we remain chained to the "special" corner by our allies? It then makes one question what they are after, disability representation or full engagement of women with disabilities? We are not fighting for disability representation but full inclusion with reasonable accommodation in place.

The formation of alliances goes beyond capacity building of women and girls with disabilities in program development. It calls for the provision of a seat at the table and representation in all the spaces available to a feminist abled woman in order for the disabled sisters to thrive and grow in both their environment and decision making.

Equality is a song chanted by many but practiced by a few allies. We are vying for places in politics, education and employment. Places and positions that could be availed us if we had the support of the women's rights movement through provision of career opportunities within their organizations, use of affirmative action in development programs for applicants with disabilities.

Women and girls with disabilities shouldn't have to fight to get into the women's rights movement because they are women first. Disability rights for girls and women with disabilities are women's rights in another language. Allies need not be silent on account of the language for it is this difference in language that makes us unique.

In order to build a formidable Feminist Movement; allies should engage and learn from girls and women with disabilities for they are the experts when it comes to the field of disability. Embrace sisters with disabilities, learn from them, support and equip them with the resources necessary for their engagement in society; because they share a common goal with the mainstream movement- the attainment of their rights as women!

SHOCKED INTO SILENCE: WHEN YOUR OWN TRAMPLE ON YOU

PHYLLIS WANJIRU

The deliberate silence within the Feminist movement about Lesbian Bisexual women, Queer women and trans women LBQT is so loud that I would term modern day feminists as the drivers of Patriarchy. Yes, they will advocate for the human rights of women but will see Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer and trans women as lesser women. I have been to many feminist spaces in Uganda and it is only once that I was in the same feminist space with a trans woman. Even some of our respected seniors especially those in the Mother's Union that initially began as an initiative to advocate for the human rights of women will openly shame lesbians, bisexual women, queer women, trans women and sex workers. What are the other truths about LBQT women are we hiding behind our skirts as feminists?

LESBIANISM, BISEXUALITY, QUEERNESS:

It is appalling that in 2019 there are feminists that refuse to acknowledge and understand LBQ women and who they really are, I and others like me have been in the same space with many feminists and they still do not want to sit near us or line up next to us at dinner queues. Imagine delaying to get food because you think a fellow woman is less than you! Some feminists deliberately refuse to accept that lesbian relationships are between two women. One such woman asked "Why is it that in lesbian relationships, one of the women takes on the masculine role?" Some lesbian relationships are between two feminine presenting women, masculine presenting women while others have a combination of the two.

TRANSGENDER WOMEN:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says trans women are not really women because they were not assigned female at birth. What is disappointing is despite all this, her dismissive explanation is that this gives trans women cis-privilege. She is actually the one who has the privilege of being born in a "desired body". Put yourself in the shoes of a transwoman, trust me one wouldn't be able to walk 100 meters. I have seen movies and recently Pose- the series, where I was able to finally paint a picture of what trans women go through. Imagine not feeling comfortable with your own body to the extent that some trans women will go to extremes to cut off their undesired body parts. And then Chimamanda had the nerve to say trans women are not real women. What is even more disturbing is the fact that she refuses to take back her words, even after several trans women and intellectuals called her out. Such airs, such cisgender privilege, such disregard and silencing of trans women within the feminist movement. If she can do that as a revered feminist what stops others from doing the same if not even worse to trans women?

OVERSEXUALISATION OF LBQ WOMEN:

Some feminists look at us like sex objects. It is very easy for a heterosexual female feminist to jump on an LBQ woman asking them to either kiss them or hug them. That is sexual harassment. We feel sexually abused. They invade on our personal space. They think we are okay with that because after all we love women. On the flipside, there are feminists who still will not sit near us because they think we will sexually abuse them or their kids. This this narrative has to change. We have our tastes and preferences. We do not jump onto every Monica, Hanna or Diana.

HIV:

Female to female transmission of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a subject that has for long been ignored within the feminist movement and LGBTIQ community because apparently according to decades old research transmission of HIV between women is scarce and incongruent. It should however be noted that we cannot end HIV/AIDS in Uganda if we keep on ignoring this seemingly "small" population in the community. LBQT women who use sex toys and are into Bondage Domination Sadism and Masochism (BDSM) M are at a high risk of getting infected with HIV. Using sex toys vigorously may cause tearing leading to exchange of blood and may lead to transmission of HIV. LBQT women need counseling and guidance on safe sex. In the Ugandan setting many LBQT women are bound to engage in drug abuse including use of injection of drugs. These syringes if shared with an infected person could lead to transmission of HIV. LBQT women who suffer corrective rape and want to abort are not protected by any laws so they could end up going to shady clinics in order to access abortion services. Blood transfusions could go wrong in such circumstances where one is not even assured of safe tools being used for the abortion. Due to homophobia experienced at health centers some LBQT couples opt for self-medication where they share medicine. This is harmful to their health because they end up not finishing their doses as required.

CONCLUSION:

Fortunately this is a good starting point for us to address these issues and give LBQT women the platform to fully express themselves without being asked disrespectful questions. We need to call out abusive people within the feminist spheres. It is 2019 and we have all the resources needed to educate ourselves on how we can be better feminists. The internet is a good resource that we can turn to and learn how to ask appropriate questions. There is need to begin a conversation about how HIV affects LBQT women in Uganda, together we could learn more about availability of PrEP condoms despite ones sexuality because HIV affects us all.



WITHOUT RUFFLING FEATHERS: INSIGHTS ON NON-THREATENING FEMININITY

LYDIA NAMATENDE-SAKWA

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I highlight the salience of agency as embodied in performing non-threatening femininity. I argue that the potency within this form of resistance is in its slipperiness and/or elusiveness to power. While radical acts of resistance can reshape reality, they are also more visible and vulnerable to power and/or patriarchy and are as such, more likely to be nipped in the bud. The normative repertoire of the agency as embodied in individual rights, freedoms and empowerment (Evans, 2013; Wilson, 2013), are more likely to be embodied and “entitled” to men within patriarchy. This normative repertoire/script is disturbed in my study which uses women’s narratives of non-threatening femininity, emphasizing relationality, pluralism, collectiveness, communality as a possibility in re-making women’s realities, within socio-cultural structures of subordination. Non-threatening femininity as such, makes it intelligible to locate agency within women’s epistemological and ontological frames. Indeed the women in my study, far from lone rangers in remaking their reality, leant on other people. The women’s narratives are explicit about the networks and relations on which they drew support in navigating gendered constraints. Indeed as Madhok et al. point out, the constraints relate to social, not just personal power relations, highlighting “the need to shift from the more exclusive focus on individual capacities and vulnerabilities to wider power regimes within which we operate” (2013, p. 7). I argue then, that we shift our theoretical gaze in regard to agency towards exploring less overt forms of agency. Indeed Madhok advocates a “displacement of the chief site of agency from free acts to speech practices and ethical reflection” (2013, p. 116) as demonstrated through the women’s narratives.

WOMEN’S NARRATIVES OF COVERT RESISTANCE

The paper, based on snippets from narratives of 7 women in academia within a leading university in Uganda, illuminate the ways in which the women navigated the gendered hiccups they had as school-going girls, eluding powers that might have ejected them from school, in ways that did not upset the status quo—without ruffling feathers so to speak. They found agency in covert resistance, silently trudging on, within conditions where outright and/or overt resistance would have punitively been disciplined and silenced creating more oppressive conditions. Across the narratives is the idea of trudging on without ruffling feathers and/or the status quo. In other words, it was through enacting harmless humility, that the women found spaces to remake their realities. Far from passive victims, the women had inwardly and actively engaged and interrogated the gendered order, well aware that head-on collision with patriarchy would have been counterproductive in re-shaping their realities.

THAT IS WHY IS IT IMPORTANT
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ROOTED IN THE PATRIARCHAL
SYSTEMS THAT ARE INFRINGED
ON ALL WOMEN, THE DIVISIONS
AMONG THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT
AND THE SILENCE ABOUT OUR
SEXUAL PLEASURE AS WOMEN
REGARDLESS OF OUR SEXUAL
ORIENTATION, NATURE OF WORK,
GENDER IDENTITY, RACE OR
ORIGIN.

FIDA

In getting pregnant as Head girl, and teacher's daughter, Fida, currently a professor within the physics department, survived by the support of her father, against forces that would have normally ejected her from school: "I had that hitch during S.6 when I got pregnant...it was bad...I think my father was hurt so much but he allowed me to go and do the exams." She recollects the discomfort, the judgmental talk and stares that affected both her and her father in the school. Indeed Fida was later dismissed from the boarding section when the pregnancy became obvious, commuting from home to school. Mainstream narratives produce teenage pregnancy as bound up with immorality and ideas of poor upbringing, bringing shame to the family (Kwesiga, 2002). When the crisis of teenage pregnancy claimed the news headlines in Uganda, the minister of education, a woman at the time, pejoratively affirmed that such girls should be expelled from schools. The norm within Ugandan schools is to punitively shame and/or expel pregnant girls for their perceived immorality and risk of disturbing the imagined asexual social fabric of school spaces. However, covertly resisting the norms which eject pregnant girls from school, Fida continued with school against the ridicule of society, passing her exams to get admission on a government scholarship to pursue a degree in education with a specialization in physics.

DINA

Dina's father had moved her from one boarding school to another in the attempt to ensure that her mother did not get access to her. At the schools, her father, powerful and wealthy—a gynaecologist by profession, did not include Dina's mother on the list of permitted visitors for Dina. As such, her mother was once turned away when she came to visit Dina. Aware that her mother had been a head nurse and was well known by the nurses in the different schools her father took her, Dina resolved to always introduce herself to the school nurses, asking them to tell her mother where to find her. This made it possible for Dina's mother to visit her in the guise of visiting the school nurse. Without ruffling feathers, Dina and her mother, through networks, found spaces in which to navigate, resisting "the rule of father" as well as institutionalized gate-keeping practices imbued in the visiting card.

BIRU

When Biru's father moved back to Uganda from Kenya, he returned with his Kenyan wife and her stepbrothers and sisters. Biru decried the discomfort of living in a home with "so many people and clicks." Although she commuted to school and engaged with her school work, one of her step brothers spread rumors that "I was actually loitering in town, and that I was not in school." This idea of girls "loitering" within the streets of the city suggests that they are out of control, and implicates them in illicit romantic and/or sexual entanglements with men. This was unsettling for Biru who attributed her struggles in school to instability within the home as well as emotional turmoil. Rather than face off with her brother as well as narratives that produced her as deviant, Biru found agency in turning to her love for reading, immersing herself into another world to escape, if only for a while, the emotional turmoil that enveloped her. In so doing, she resisted the powers that could have "broken" her, developing her love for reading as well as her English, which she teaches at the university.

JOSE

Jose, raised by a single father, faced both financial and emotional issues:

I remember a time dad was struggling with our fees, he put my sister and I out of school and said he had only money for our brother...His argument was that we were going to go digging, grow cabbages, sell and make fees for the following year. The cabbages didn't work because stray animals ate them.

While their brother prepared for school, Jose and her sister went to the garden with a flask of porridge that they fed off, as they dug and watered cabbages from morning till evening. Jose inwardly questioned her father's differential treatment: "I felt it was an injustice. Why did he keep the girls out and the boy in

school for a year?" She was saddened that as her classmates progressed to another class, she and her sister had to repeat because they had lost a year of school. Rather than confront her father, as would an "empowered" girl with "free" speech, Jose resisted the gender arrangements in her home by inwardly interrogating her father's decision. Jose's father's decision to keep the boy in school, illuminates a norm in Uganda, where boys' schooling is prioritized over girls (Deininger, 2003; Muhwezi, 2003; Ochwa-Echel, 2011). This is informed by the gender roles discourse that has traditionally produced girls as nurturers and boys as breadwinners. This notwithstanding, Jose resisting such narratives, remained in school and worked hard. She is now a teacher educator at a university.

BITTE

When Bitte's father lost his job, she took to working in order to raise her school fees, which was sometimes supplemented by her father through selling a cow. One of her moneymaking ventures involved making local brew, which got her enough money to put herself through university. In so doing, Bitte had disturbed and/or transgressed the norm within her community, where the role of breadwinner is relegated to the men, creating a space in which she could earn money for her education, in a cultural context that espouses educated women above their uneducated counterparts. In taking the proverbial bull by its horns to earn her bread, Bitte had engaged in the traditionally male and/or masculine role of brewing local beer, resisting discourses that essentialise gendered roles.

FAITH

Faith and her brother had lived with their father in the staff house, also attending a school where their father worked as a science teacher. While their father was an outstanding teacher, the school decided to sack him because of his alcoholism. At the time, Faith and her brother had gone to their mother's house for the holiday. When they returned to school in Masaka town, their father was nowhere to be seen! Now abandoned by their father in school, Faith and her brother did not have money for transport to take them back to their mother in Kampala, which is about 140kilometers from Masaka. But, as Faith explains, "we also knew that she did not have any money, and that if we returned home, then that would be the end of our education." They resolved in her words, to "find ways to charm the teachers to let us into the boarding section." Faith and her brother survived by picking up whatever other children disposed of: "you know rich people's children would throw pieces of soap after washing—those are the ones I would pick up. I don't know about toothpaste. I don't know what I did about that (laughs)." She recalls how much she hated Sundays because while all the girls dressed up in their very best, she wore her uniform.

The teacher in charge of sending children back home to collect school fees realized their problem. He told Faith, "When I call your name among the school fess defaulters...do not go home. Just go back to class." This is how they survived each term. The problem came however, when Faith had to pay the registration fees required before the national exam to the deputy head teacher: "He did not play the politics of supportive network." He informed her that she had to go home and bring the registration fee. She knew that there would be no money at home:

I resorted to asking children to lend me money—I borrowed from many children—I do not even know how I convinced them, but I managed to put the money together. I did not know how I was going to repay it, but I knew I would cross that bridge when I got to it.

As she contemplated how she would repay her classmates' money, for the first time, her older sister sent her some money—"I remember it was 7000 shillings." She happily paid off her debt, and "even had some money left to eat some 'kamonko'—deep-fried fish, which children who had money always ate with posho and apeta (laughs)." She also spared some of the money for transport to return home at the end of the school term: "And yeah, but we survived—my brother finished his S.4 and I, my S.6."

JENNY

Jenny, currently a lecturer in a chemistry department, compared her childhood to other children's, affirming that she, unlike other children did not have the choice to be a child: "Hard work is good, but for me, it was the only hope I could hold onto, and worry that if I slipped, then my school fees would not be paid." Jenny had to give up her childhood in order to prove herself, in ways that would qualify her as worthy of an education. Jenny's parents had separated, giving her up to her aunt and uncle, who raised her. Similarly, Liz, currently a mechanical engineer and lecturer within a faculty of engineering, was raised in a polygamous family. Given the size of the family, her parents could not afford to pay her tuition fees. Her uncles took on Liz's tuition fees on condition that she scored good grades. She had to work hard in order to achieve this.

SUMMING UP

On the whole, the women made use of a diverse number of strategies to wrestle the effects of gendered power arrangements such as gender discrimination, pregnancy, polygamy, alcoholism, divorce, and lack of tuition, which had produced the conditions of their struggles. Resistance for these women was not head-on—it was covert resistance. Power was negotiated through covertly raising questions and interrogating the status quo, rather passively accepting it. Covert resistance was exercised by Jose for example, when her father pulled the girls out of school, showing preferential treatment for their brother. Additionally, hard work gave most of the women reigns to shape their realities within conditions where they had minimal control. This is illuminated by Jenny for example, when she gives up her childhood to earn her tuition. Through the creation of networks with the nurses in her school for Dina, and with teachers and friends for Faith, the women created a space to navigate power within conditions of precariousness. Further still, transgressing the norm in which men are considered breadwinners, Bitte took to brewing local brew, a traditionally male role, to put herself through school. Biru turned to reading rather than overtly resist the effect of polygamous home arrangements. Covertly resisting the norms, which destine pregnant girls to marriage, Fida stayed in school, passing her exams enough to get admission on a government scholarship, to pursue a degree in education with a specialization in physics.

Citing Bronwyn Davies (1993), a great Australian educator, Connell legitimizes covert resistance as a kind of resistance to patriarchy. He affirms, "challenges to patriarchy need not involve head-on confrontation" (2008, p. 60). Indeed, well aware of contextual readings of head-on and/or overt resistance, the women largely stuck to silence. While this could be read differently within the mainstream, silence in these stories is not passive, but is used to actively interrogate power structures, while working within those structures to create possibility. In complicating speech and silence in the classroom, Jones' engagement with silence of marginalized groups struck a chord with the silence within the women's' narratives:

From the point of view of the silent other, the decision not to speak may be rather less troubling and rather more eloquent than it appears; it may be a pragmatic rejoinder to a set of conditions beyond their control. Silence may be a rational response to their (dominant) peer's lack of ability to hear and understand (Jones, 2010, p. 60)

While the silence might have been construed as passivity to gender power structures, the women, reading their context, used silence, well aware that talking back, would not have been understood, risking to cast them into precariousness, rather than make spaces to navigate oppressive gendered arrangements.



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SPEAKER PROFILES



DR. HILDA M. TADRIA

Hilda is a renowned Ugandan/African feminist and a gender justice and human rights activist. She is the Founder and first Executive Director of the Mentoring and Empowerment Program for Young Women (MEMPROW), an organization whose goal is to prevent violence against girls and women and to capacitate young women in Uganda to defend their rights and participate in leadership. She is an experienced researcher and consultant with a background in institutional management and social development research.



ANNE NKUTU

Anne Nkutu is a Consultant and Manager of the Nordic Consulting Group (U) Ltd. Her work largely revolves around programme development, monitoring and evaluation and organisational development. She has a particular interest in Women's Rights and Governance issues and mainly the role of NGOs in empowering communities to demand and claim their rights. Apart from the typical development interventions, her work on women's rights issues has included documenting feminist organising – movement building and leadership development.



PAULINE KAHUUBIRE

Pauline is an enthusiast of women and girls' economic justice, and envisions a world in which poverty and oppression of African women is alleviated. She is a feminist, a social media guru and budding activist who uses online media to advocate for women and girls' rights.



NANCY KACHINGWE

Nancy Kachingwe is a Harare based freelancer worker specializing in women's rights, public policy and advocacy strategy. She has worked in various international and regional development NGOs in Brussels, Harare, Accra and Johannesburg on a wide range of development issues including trade and globalisation, regional integration, land rights, women's empowerment and climate change. She now works as an adviser to NGOs providing policy and advocacy support including training, facilitation, analysis and programme formulation with a feminist political economy lens.



HARRIET ANENA

Harriet Anena is a Ugandan poet and short story writer. She is the winner of the 2018 Wole Soyinka Prize for literature in Africa for her debut poetry collection, A Nation in Labour. Her short stories have been nominated by the commonwealth Short Story Prize and Short Story Day Africa prize. Her creative works have been published in national and international anthologies, magazines and online platforms. Anena works at the Africa Centre for media Excellence in Kampala and runs Word Oven, an editing company.



FLORENCE BUTEGWA

Florence is an independent expert/consultant on women's human rights, gender and governance. Until 1 September 2015 she was the Regional Advisor for Governance and Leadership in the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women) providing policy and technical advice to the regional office and 14 country offices. She previously served as the UN Women Representative to the African Union and UN Economic Commission for Africa, and formerly as Regional Programme Director for UNIFEM in Anglophone West Africa covering Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone. I am a lawyer by training with considerable expertise in the human rights of women, gender and development, and governance at national, regional and international levels. I have provided consultancy services and training to government and intergovernmental bodies as well as NGOs in several countries. I was the founding CEO of Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), a pan-African women's rights network, and was formerly a lecturer in Law at Makerere University, Uganda.



SCOVIA ARINAITWE

Scovia Arinaitwe is a human rights defender, activist and movement building trainer. She is the team leader at Rhizing Women, a women-led organization that seeks to champion the fight for a just and fair world with women at the forefront.



LEAH ERYENYU

Leah Eryenyu is an African Feminist who believes that agitating for women's humanity, agency and autonomy is a deeply political act that involves confronting head on, the patriarchal structures that center men and their desires as the axis of power and authority. She is presently the Research, Advocacy and Movement Building Manager at Akina Mama wa Afrika. Her areas of interest include women's economic rights with a focus on corporate accountability.



SARAH NKUCHIA KYALO

Sarah Nkuchia-Kyalo is a program officer in the Economic Governance program and is in charge of the macro-economic policy portfolio at OSIEA. Sarah is a passionate afro-optimist bringing six years of experience in human rights and social justice work in East Africa having previously worked in OSIEA's Learning Evaluation and Achievement Program and also with Akiba Uhaki Foundation – an emerging regional East African social justice-focused grant maker. Her main areas of professional and scholarly interest include: inclusive development and economic justice, regional integration, international relations and Pan-Africanism.



ANNA ADEKE EBAJU

Anna Ebaju Adeke is a Ugandan lawyer and politician. She is a Member of Parliament representing the National Female Youth Constituency in the 10th parliament. As an MP, she advocates for the separation of the Ministry of Gender, Labour, Youth and Social Development, to create an independent Youth Ministry. She also campaigns for increased funding for local, regional and national youth councils. She is a member of the parliamentary committee on the National Economy.



IRENE IKOMU

Irene Ikomu is a lawyer based in Nairobi, Kenya. Prior to becoming a Hurford fellow, she was a consultant on civic spaces in the East and Horn of Africa, with the Heinrich Boell Foundation. Previously, she managed the Aga Khan Development Network's East Africa Civil Society Initiative, supporting resilient civil society in Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Tanzania; and co-founded and managed Parliament Watch Uganda, a civic tech parliament monitoring initiative. Additionally, Ikomu was a Mandela Washington civic engagement fellow in 2014 and received the Young Female Lawyer of the Year Award by the Uganda Law Society in recognition of her contribution to Uganda's democratic development.



DR. MAGGIE KIGOZI

Dr. Maggie Kigozi is a medical doctor by profession, a business consultant, and an "avid" motorcycle rider! In 1999 she was appointed Executive Director of the Uganda Investment Authority (UIA), a position she held for over eleven years. Dr. Kigozi founded the UIA Women Entrepreneurs Network which successfully networked business women, built their capacity and advocated against discriminatory cultures and laws. She is currently the Chairperson, Board of Directors for Akina Mama wa Afrika.



CRYSTAL MUGIMBA

Crystal started her career in pensions and insurance sector having worked at the Retirement Benefits regulator in Uganda and the Pensions Institute in the U.K. Prior to joining Open Capital, Crystal ran the advisory function at QuantEast, a boutique asset management firm in Uganda. Crystal holds an MSc in Actuarial Science from Cass Business School, London and a BSc. in Actuarial Science from Makerere University in Kampala. She has certifications in Global Health from John Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health and a Diploma in Business Management.



DR. MARIA NASSALI

Dr. Maria Nassali holds a degree in Law from Makerere University, Uganda, and a Master's Degree in Law and Development from Warwick University in the UK. She holds a PhD in Law from the University of Pretoria in South Africa with vast experience in NGO Management and is a gender and human rights specialist. Nassali has developed resource materials and undertaken action research aimed at guiding law and policy. Maria is the former Executive Director of FIDA Uganda. She is the immediate Executive Director of Kituo Cha Katiba, the East African Centre for Constitutional Development. She has been active in the area of sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls, especially ensuring that impunity is not tolerated where sexual violence is concerned.



MACKLEAN KYOMYA

Macklean Kyomya is the Executive Director of Alliance of Women Advocating for Change (AWAC). She is a passionate feminist and a former sex worker who now champions the rights of female sex workers, their children, and adolescent girls and young women at high risks. Macklean's focus is on challenging criminalization which fuels stigma, discrimination and human rights violations among female sex workers, sexual partners and third parties. She is an advocate for comprehensive sexuality education and **decriminalization of adult Sex Work in Uganda**. Macklean holds a Bachelor's Degree in Social Works and Administration.



MARIA ALESI

Maria Alesi is an out spoken feminist and social worker with over 5 years of experience in the areas of human rights, rule of law, project planning and management, youth political participation and oil and gas. Currently, she provides leadership as a Programme Manager at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Uganda working of the topics of governance and rule of law, feminism, access to information, human rights and the Young Leaders' Forum and Public Relations.



ANITA NTALE

Anita Ntale is a trade and development researcher with a background in studying the dynamics of trade institutions, regional Integration and the political economy of trade. Anita's areas of research interest are centered at the intersection between trade and other key socio-economic issues like development, gender and politics.



RITAH ACIRO

Ms. Aciro- Lakor is a Social development worker and practitioner who has work experience of 20 years in the Civil Society (NGO sector). She has worked and risen in the sector from volunteer and internships positions. Ms. Aciro -Lakor is currently the Executive Director of Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) the leading National Women's Rights Network in Uganda. Ms. Aciro -Lakor holds a Masters in Science (MSC) Governance and Leadership from Jomo Kenyatta University – Nairobi Kenya, BA Democracy and development Studies and ABA Development Studies both from Uganda Martyrs University-Uganda and training in Business, finance and Accounting including other professional continues learning programmes.



ELIZABETH KEMIGISHA

Elizabeth Kemigisha is a unique hybrid lawyer and a dope feminist with expertise in human rights law, feminist theory and project management. She also has a keen interest in social, economic and political inclusion of young people and sexual minorities in development of any society and recognise the need for non-discriminative and more deliberate inclusive organising if there is ever to be substantial progress.



GLORIA MUTYABA

Mutyaba Gloria is a seasoned human rights advocate, queer feminist, sexual and reproductive health rights activist, gender diversity and equity activist, LGBTIQAP++ activist. Gloria is the Programs officer at Freedom and Roam Uganda. She is a Mandela-Washington fellow of 2018 who did her residency at Wagner College in New York. She is also member of the Africa Sex Rights Network and the SRHR Africa Trust. She is Tuwezeshe Dada Fellow of the Improving the Rights and amplifying the Actions of Young African Women against all forms of Gender-Based Violence program.



OPHELIA KEMIGISHA

Ophelia Kemigisha is a human rights lawyer, queer feminist, and writer. She is especially passionate about advancing the rights of womxn and other marginalised groups using the judicial system. She currently works with Chapter Four Uganda as a Staff Attorney. She lives in Kampala, Uganda where she tweets, reads, and spends time with friends for fun and for the revolution.



JANEPHER NASSALI

Janepher Nassali began working as a picker on a flower farm and by the age of 25 had become secretary general of Uganda Horticulture industrial Service Providers and Allied Workers Union (UHISPAWU). Now 29, she is recognized as a powerful voice in Uganda’s cut flower sector. Through the worker’s union, she defends, promotes and protects the rights of workers.

Janepher has created safe spaces for women workers by entrenching zero tolerance policies on sexual harassment at the farms. Her union has made significant progress in educating women on their rights, resulting in a 10 percent increase in reporting of sexual harassment cases at flower farms.



ISABELLA AKITENG

Akiteng Isabella is a Ugandan Feminist working in the civil society sphere who has been in the sector for the last nine years having joined while at High School. She is passionate about programs that deliver on tangible development for young people in any society. She is a sister and mentor who inspires transformative leadership growth as well as influencing of young women to fulfill their potential by walking with those starting up initiatives and teaching from her experience of the sector. Isabella takes pride in influencing success at the various tables on which she seats. Currently, she is part of the leadership team at Femme Forte Uganda a Young Woman’s Initiative that is inspiring the growth of organizations with soul.



EUNICE MUSIIME

Eunice Musiime is a lawyer, feminist, and development specialist with considerable experience in advancing social justice at national, regional and international level. Eunice is the current Executive Director of Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMWA). Eunice has a commendable track record on Feminist and Transformational Leadership Development, Strategic Planning, Research, Advocacy and Movement Building. She has also actively engaged in influencing the following critical policy processes including: Sustainable Development Goals; the Commission on the Status of Women, the Maputo Protocol on Women’s Rights, the Development Effectiveness Agenda and Financing for Development.



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HOPE CHIGUDU

Hope is a feminist organisational development specialist and independent consultant. After a start in the corporate world, feminism opened Hope's eyes and she joined the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Zimbabwe "a changed woman." Later, recognizing the need for women's autonomous spaces, she became a founding member of the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network. She is the co-author of *Strategies for Building an Organization with a Soul*.



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Christine is a feminist activist whose areas of expertise are women's human rights (with specific interest in sexual and reproductive health and rights), gender and development, and communications. She formerly worked as the Gender, Rights and Advocacy Advisor at the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Africa Regional Office and also served as the Regional Coordinator, Africa Programs with Akina Mama wa Afrika. Christine has extensive experience and skills in strategy development, research, advocacy, networking and capacity building around rights-based approaches to development. She is the director of Rukundo Design Décor



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