

I Speak 4 Myself

Photo
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POEMS

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DRAWINGS

PERSONAL
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Articles



Foreword

The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) is a feminist, member-driven, Pan-African organization that seeks to promote the dignity and well-being of women and girls across the African continent.

In seeking to achieve this goal, FEMNET applies an intersectional approach in addressing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SHRH), as well as gender-based violence and other gender equality issues. This has been particularly useful in identifying and giving a voice to the needs of different groups of girls and young women, within various contextual frameworks. This creative book is a vivid demonstration of the FEMNET's intersectional work, as it seeks to amplify and anthologize the voices of African girls and young women, who face unique and persisting challenges, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a system that silences and overlooks them.

Amplifying the voices of girls and young women provides an opportunity to better serve them and empowers them to contribute to discourse and policy making, with a view to building a future that they want. FEMNET views this creative book as a step towards capacitating this subset to advocate for their rights, even with the acknowledgment that much still needs to be done.

Within this creative book, readers will immerse themselves in writing that discusses: the place of girls and young women in Pan Africanism, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on girls and women, reflections on the lived experience of black girls and young women, and a piece on abortion and bodily autonomy.

It is our sincere hope that these pieces shine much-needed light to African girls and young women.

Thank you for your dedication to amplifying the voices of girls and young women around Africa.

- By Julie Okiro

"We are no longer accepting the things we cannot change, we are changing the things we cannot accept"
- Angela Davis.

Editorial

This creative book presents an anthology of writing by African girls and young women on the social, economic, and political barriers that impede their participation, autonomy, human rights and quality of life.

The pieces highlight the lack of representation of African girls and young women in Pan-African discourse and makes suitable attempts to address the structural inequalities that may explain this lack of political participation, but would be strengthened by addressing what can, and should be done to address these inequalities.

Notably, there is a letter to the author's younger self highlighting the daily, social struggles that black women face and remains highly reminiscent and relatable to the musings and experiences of many black girls and young women across the globe. The letter's final sentence, "I am the sweat of work, work of slavery, slavery of children but why little one?" reverberates through the reader's mind; a timeless question that finds no answer worthy of sense.

Further, we have an article critiquing the external authority over the female body, as it pertains to the decision of abortion. The author's stance on the matter remains clear and the tone sharp, but the piece may have benefitted by venturing into a discussion on the complexities around the reasons women may opt for abortion. It largely links this decision to the right to freedom of thought and liberty, neglecting, the right to health and life of the girls and young women in question. Even so, the piece is intriguing in its subversion of the Global South-North framing of human rights issues related to Sexual and Reproductive Health, as it demonstrates that African and predominantly Muslim nations (Tunisia in this case), can be more progressive of these rights than Western countries such as the USA (i.e., in light of the recent Texas Abortion law), thereby highlighting the universality of this issue, and critiquing homogenous language around it.

All in all, the author's concerns are well articulated and demonstrate growing consciousness of socio-political issues within young women in Africa. This ought to be nurtured and promoted in discourse and policy work, for the betterment of society as a whole.

- By Amy Oloo

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For a copy of this journal, contact:

The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)

12 Masaba Road, Lowerhill.

P.O. Box 54562 -00200, Nairobi

Tel: +254 20 271 2971/2

Email: admin@femnet.or.ke

Web: www.femnet.org



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Table of Contents

Let me be.....	6
Our demand for climate justice.....	9
Jhay: A black girl chronicle.....	11
A letter to younger me.....	13
Abortion, a fundamental right for women; or atleast it should be.....	15
Tapping into women’s minds: The unexplored leadership potential	17
Now the four of us will never be in school again.....	19
Difficult choices: The intersection of Rwandan women & girls’ sexual reproductive rights & the pandemic.....	21
Prisoner of thought.....	23
The river.....	24
Tainted.....	26
Smash the patriarchy.....	27
If.....	29
Child abuse.....	30
Photography.....	34
Poem.....	35
Painting.....	37

LET ME BE...

I am an African young woman. Optimistic of what my future holds but there always seems to be something clouding my existence, nothing is ever clear. I look beneath and it dawns on me that nothing will ever be clear.

I was born into a patriarchal society that taught me to never think i am enough, no matter what i do, something will always hold me back.

Being born here places me in a patriarchal social structure and system which is embedded in other oppressive and exploitative structure which i can't seem to wrap my hands around.

This system legitimizes my oppression in school when i want to take on a leadership role, the friends i decide to keep, how much money i can make, what violations (AGAINST MY OWN BODY) i can report and guess what, i am taught to fold my hands and do nothing about it.

In school when it was time to head home, i had to run home everyday because some boys had made it a daily ritual to chase me like dogs chasing prey and me take off like Kipchoge. I was hunted everyday and sadly nothing has changed at 22.

My eyes are open to the truth of how my story has often not been given close examination. I am forced to reinvent it to fit into a crazy, competitive, judgmental world because no one would believe my real story. I have run through life untethered, desperate and clawing my way through murky memories, trying to get to some form of self love.



I have had to fiercely learn to be myself and take on patriarchy by the horns and atleast have a life worth living.

A life worth living can only be born from radical honesty and the courage to shed facades, that is the world i intend to create for myself and other young women and girls in all their diversities. What if social transformation and liberation isn't about waiting for someone else to come along and save me?

What if young women and girls have the power to collectively free themselves?

We will rise beyond the systemic barriers and shackles of patriarchy and maybe, just maybe Africa will understand our real power and audacity.

I long for a world where i will not have to fight for a just world, we shouldn't be fighting for a just world inthe first place, a world that dignifies our existence not because we are someone's daughter, sister or wife, but the mere fact that we are humans. Walking by the streets of Nairobi without worrying about a random guy pressing my butt like tomatoes. Where my body will not be policed. Is this too much to ask?

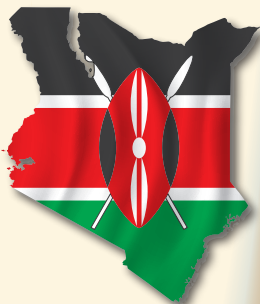


NANCY AUMA BARASA
KENYA, 22YRS OLD





NANCY AUMA BARASA
KENYA, 22YRS OLD



I am a young Grassroot feminist born, raised and lives in Kibra the largest slum in Africa.

I'm passionate about SRHR advocacy and championing for Gender equality.

My belief in communal values especially the love for the adolescent girls and young women in my community , inspires me each day to want to be a part of creating a more accessible and equitable society for our future generations.

I believe my expertise in leadership development, policy engagement, young women's empowerment and as an active member of the feminist/women rights movements.

I am committed to analyzing the private and personal spaces and developing strategies that lead to the emancipation of women.

As someone who believes in equity for all and in rallying people to advocate for their rights and the rights of others.

I'm a firm believer that we should all be standing on the right side of history in fighting for social justice and development.



Am Josephine F. Ngegba, a 22 years old lady and second year student at Institute of Public Administration and Management university of Sierra Leone, pursuing BSc in Public Sector Management. I am a youth and child advocate in Sierra Leone with over six years in the field of advocacy and youth activism.

OUR DEMAND FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

The world has never been equal
Women have suffered societal injustice
Then, fanning the flame
Came climate injustice
Intensifying existing outcomes
Of entrenched gender inequality.

This is not a tale,
This is not a bedtime story
This is the sad reality of women
And girls
Who have been forced to carry
An extra excess luggage
All in the name of vulnerability and duty.

I dropped out of school
Whenever there was extreme weather
Or climate-related disasters like floods
Or drought
Because it led to household livelihood insecurities
I had to work hard to help my mother
Secure livelihood and make ends meet
So the family can eat



I have been working with different organizations over the years to amplify the voices of young people. Am known for my ability to coordinate programs geared towards enhancing youth participation in national development.

Because of this I had less time
To access training and education
Less time to develop skills
But like my mother, I had no choice.
I can remember how my mother refused
To migrate to a place of better conditions
Because she could not afford
taking all her children with her.
So we stayed there, to suffer.

Ladies like me, have had enough
We need climate justice!
We demand that Adaptation initiatives
should identify and address gender-specific impacts
of climate change particularly in areas related
to water, food security, agriculture, energy, health,
disaster management, and conflict.
No more shall we be victims
But now active participants to ensure
Climate Justice.

JHAY: A BLACK GIRL CHRONICLE



Joy Offere
20 years old
from Nigeria



They will ask me how often I told you I loved you,
I will sigh... as if to say, I never did,
this was just an attempt against self-blaming.
I know enough not to stay vexed at the antecedents.
How do I blame you; me, us.

First.

You were born; the second. You grew. Third; the abuse
Fourth; the pain

Fifth; the shame, an English professor will call it Stigma; to
explain what stigmatization is.

That girl was raped, she was called out and the perpetrator
was left out of the scene,

Same professors who impose sex for grade on students.

Oh! You can't relate, your saving grace was a private
University, but private parts are now an exchange collateral in
schools, what happened to the scripts written?

I see there's another, you keep numbers of the girls you hurt,
Karma lives down this same lane, because justice is sometimes
lame, I know he took her eyes so they said she is blind.

Tell me how a blind girl would point a finger; an effort to say he
is the perpetrator.

You see Justice is blind, Is she really?!

Sixth; girls down the streets.

this is my first time in a new street, I watch the people happy,
I am wearing a big smile as the moment synchronizes, with
Asa's song: Happy people, I smiled again

I wished I had bottled up the peace of that moment and
carried it all my life, before the next scene.

7 in 10 have had near rape experiences, I hear the next girls
saying,

We are broken people, I think.
In a playlist some could be; Bitter feminist, Men hater, angry and all the labels that could be added.
But for my sisters I chose to be a vocal soldier, I will write, until you read all about it, and I hope it spurs you to create a safer space with equal opportunities for every black girl.



A Letter to Younger Me

Dear Little One,

How I wish you knew - how I wish you treasured the birds that sung, the flickering of the glow worms, the sweet smell of the morning flowers, and vibrant rays of the sun casting their beauty along the Nile River.

Oh, little one, how I wish you treasured the opportunity you always had to voice whatever came to your mind without a care in the world, without anyone to stop you or ridicule whatever you had to say.

Today here I am, helter-skelter; I work as incessantly and as restlessly as worker bees in a hive, so I can make ends meet in these difficult days. Unforgiving as the course of justice, un-erasable as my scars, the scars of a woman, the woman society wants me to be. I am here, a woman...with my life laid under the radar, with a life strung out



like beads. It isn't privilege or pity that I seek, but rather an opportunity to speak out for what I want.

The only treasure I seek little one, is the power to be what I want, a woman who is free to determine what my future would be like without any of the social, political, economic, cultural, or religious barriers. Charting my own future as a woman is all I crave, is that too much to ask? Am I being selfish by wanting justice, equality, and a shot at what is dictated for only men? Little one am I wrong?

I cannot do my hair as white women do, old fashioned, stupid, and backward I am called, a peasant I am labelled. Why am I blamed for the mistakes I made, not because I wanted to, not because I don't have dreams to chase or ambitions to live up to, but because of the circumstances I found myself in?

I am the sweat of work, work of slavery, slavery of children but why little one?

Yours truly,

The older you.



- From Uganda



Percy Lubwama

Abortion, a Fundamental Right for Women; or at least it should be

Growing up in Tunisia, abortion has never been a taboo topic in my family or society. I remember adults talking freely about women getting abortions and how they felt about it. Now, in hindsight, I admire the fact that they never judged a woman for deciding to end her pregnancy. While Tunisia is a relatively conservative country, legislation has helped the local community destigmatize and accept the idea of abortion. Considered as a pioneer of women's rights in the Arab world, Tunisia has granted both married and single women free access to abortion since 1973. The law outlines that Tunisian women have the right to go to any health institution to seek an abortion, within the first three months of pregnancy, without the approval of the men in their family, and without having to explain their decision to health professionals.

When I was eight years old, my mother got pregnant and refused to keep the baby for financial and personal reasons. She later went with my father to a hospital, where she had her abortion. I remember that on that same day, she felt mentally and physically exhausted. Back then, when I asked her about the baby, she couldn't explain abortion to me, but simply stated that "it was gone." A few years later, when I was older, we had "the talk". Among the many things we discussed, she told me about abortion and how it's meant to protect women who don't want, or who can't safely have children. My mother also highlighted that I don't have to bear a baby that I don't want to keep. Regardless of the circumstances, I have control over my



womb and my body. At the time, this information reassured 12-year-old me that I had some agency over my sexual and reproductive life. It made me feel safe to know that I can have a sexual and reproductive life without restrictions, just like my fellow male counterparts.

This knowledge added to my shock at the announcement of the Texas abortion law, which went into effect, last September, effectively outlawing abortion in Texas, USA at the outset of the detection of a foetal heartbeat. As may be expected, the passing of the law ignited a heated debate between those who were pro-life and others who were pro-choice. As a young feminist, I don't believe that such debate should exist in the first place. Why shouldn't a woman have control over her body? When I think about prohibiting abortions, raped women and girls come to my mind. Isn't it re-traumatising to force them to carry their abuser's child, against their will? Isn't depriving women of abortion, an infringement of individual liberties? Isn't it a form of oppression?

In most countries, especially in the Global North, bodily autonomy is guaranteed under the law, however, there seems to be an exception where issues specific to women are concerned. The crux of the matter is that women should have a right to decide what happens to their bodies. Over the centuries, feminists fought for the rights women nowadays, have. Like our grandmothers advocated for our future, we, young feminists, will take up the baton, and continue this fight against the patriarchy, to provide a brighter future for our daughters and granddaughters, including as it pertains to our bodies.

- From Tunisia



Tharwa Boulifi

Tapping Into Women's Minds:

The Unexplored Leadership Potential

The belief that women need to strictly stick to the place that society has defined for them, and adhere to gender roles and gender norms, continues to limit women in so many ways. This is evident in the field of leadership, where women's desire to attain leadership roles slowly fades away due to the many challenges they face because of their lack of access to equal opportunities.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, women around the world have stood fearlessly at the frontlines, working tirelessly as health care workers and caregivers. However, women are so much more than that. We can take on other roles in leadership, and this has been clearly portrayed in communities and countries where women have been appointed as leaders.

Countries like Denmark, Finland, Germany, and New Zealand, where there has been an effective, rapid, and sustainable response to the pandemic, all have women in national leadership roles. This demonstrates that women have untapped and unexplored leadership potential.

Despite this evidence, new barriers to women's rights and leadership emerged around the world during the pandemic. There has been a notable increase in violence against women and the denial of their human rights. This has led to increased unemployment and poverty levels, posing challenges for women to realize their full potential.



Gender inequality has significantly contributed towards the lack of representation of women in leadership positions. It should be noted that only 20 countries in the world have women as Heads of State.

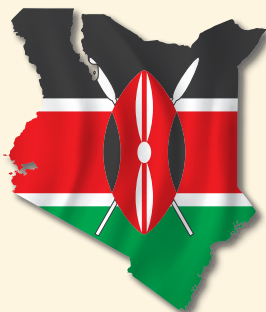
Despite the myths on women's submissiveness, women have the desire and passion to change the world, but these are often dimmed by social norms, social beliefs, and gender inequality. Furthermore, when women stand up, speak out, and interrupt gender stereotypes by putting themselves forward for leadership positions, they often face backlash that undermines their status and strips them of their dignity and human rights.

Education also plays a key role in ensuring that women are empowered and prepares them for leadership roles. Unfortunately, girls are still unable to attend school fully due to factors like lack of sanitary towels during menstruation, harmful cultural practices, and poverty. This leaves women and girls vulnerable and uneducated, and hence unable to know their rights, fight for them and make informed and empowered decisions.

It is crucial to support women to take up leadership and provide an enabling environment where their voices and contributions are not only heard but are also valued and taken seriously. It is time for the world to not only take notice of women's leadership potential, but also create an environment where women will feel supported and respected when they express their interests in various leadership roles.

It is impossible for us to move forward while half of the world's population is left behind. I, therefore, urge governments globally to fully leverage women's leadership potentials and have their voices represented and integrated into decision-making processes. Girls should be empowered at an early age while they are still in school and educated on the importance of partaking in leadership roles so that they can be accountable leaders in the future.

– From Kenya



Esther Aoko

Now The Four of Us Will Never be in School Again

My name is Abdul Majidu Haifa. I live in Kubuli slum which is in Kampala, Uganda. Having lived here, I have always felt unsafe and uncomfortable until this moment that I have an opportunity to share and learn with my fellow girls. I have always felt this way because most people, especially boys and young men in my area, are involved in drug use as a major part of their lives. There is a lot of unemployment, and girls are always the victims. Things were bad before COVID-19, but everything became worse during the pandemic.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, the situation in my community has worsened. Girls and young women are being deceived by boys and men who take advantage of them. As a result, some have ended up with unplanned pregnancies. The girls end up being the only ones who care for their children, despite the rampant cases of teenage pregnancies. I am a victim of this reality. I am only 19 years old, and dropped out of school when I had just started high school. My education sponsor died, and my mother tried to fill the gap, but she also lost her job. I had just started my senior year 5 when I met a man that got me pregnant, and my education stopped.

I thought that life would change, but this man lost his life in a motorcycle accident while I was still pregnant. I now live with my mother on police land, and we keep receiving threats of getting evicted, as the land does not belong to us.



I have joined a youth development group that is helping me to gain skills in baking and catering, including engaging in urban farming. We have a small piece of land where we can grow some vegetables and rear rabbits.

With the leadership skills I have gained in meeting and interacting with other girls, I have become confident that I can change my community. I have had opportunities to participate in national events such as the Day of the Girl Child, a seminar on safe motherhood among others, and leadership trainings under the She Leads programme.

As a Girl Advocate, I have started reaching out to other girls who are in a worse situation than I was, and I have documented some of their stories.

This includes Mercy, who is 15 years old, and lost her father during the COVID-19 pandemic. She is employed as a domestic worker to provide for her family and the young ones who live in the eastern part of Uganda.

There is 13-year-old Zaiab who lives with HIV. She lost her mother during the pandemic and lives with her sister who is only 18 years old and already has a child. They also live on police land, where they are facing the same threat of eviction.

Shamim is 13 years old, with a father who lost his job because of COVID-19. They are struggling to put food on the table. Shamim lives with her 3 siblings under the care of their father.

For Mercy, Zaiab, Shamim and me, what hurts most is that we may never go to school again. For us, life was never easy before COVID-19 and now, we are only learning to speak about what was not seen then.

We have lost our education before to violence. We have lost our education again due to COVID-19.

Now, the four of us will never be in school.

- By Haifa Abdul Majidu
From Uganda



Difficult Choices: The Intersection of Rwandan Women & Girls' Sexual Reproductive Rights & the Pandemic

SPECTRA, a young feminists' activism movement, aims at feminism movement building and working towards Sexual and Reproductive Justice (SRJ) for Rwandan women and girls. In doing this work, SRJ seeks to take a feminist analysis of systemic and structural barriers to the realization of women and girls' Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).



This work is done under a feminist SRJ fund that provides direct community care and support to women and girls. It was established in February 2020, just as Rwanda entered its first COVID-19 total lockdown. The fund is supposed to until the end of October 2020. SPECTRA has received more than 30 cases of young women and girls who have difficulty accessing an SRHR service or affording basic needs like food and other essentials.

The cases reported to SPECTRA were sourced through a countrywide feminists' network of SRHR champions that include young women activists, health service providers, community



health workers, and local leaders, who seek information and identify the most vulnerable young women and girls who need SRHR services but can't access them due to systemic and structural barriers.

The services that the established SPECTRA SRHR fund supports include access to all forms of contraception and access to safe and legal abortion. The cases received have included: young women who got raped as young as 17 years and need access to safe abortion but can't afford extra out-of-pocket costs that aren't covered by the public health system, sex workers whose jobs have been impacted by COVID19, and can't afford basic needs, and SRHR services and young women who get pregnant due to lack of information on preventing unwanted pregnancies, then need safe and legal abortion advice and assistance.

When COVID struck, and the government put in place measures including total lockdown and known closure of some businesses, the most vulnerable women and girls remained most affected, mainly regarding their sexual and reproductive health and rights and livelihoods.

The abstract is for a full article highlighting the intersectionality of race, age, gender, and a class of sexual and reproductive justice and the interconnectedness of SRHR and other aspects of the ecosystem.

- By Judith Kankindi

From Rwanda



PRISONER OF THOUGHT!

Stuckkk! Im stuckk! Its so dark...the walls collapsed.
Chained! chained! a slave of thought I am
Free me! free me! I cry, the key who holds I
Yet a power knows not I, anchors
In deep distress i try to break free..
Unbearable pain taking me.
Harshly consumed..
Having to fight, a warrior was made
A war i chose not; yet in bravery I took course
Sometimes letting it all, is conquering

Accepting surrender is ending war
Don't get lost in thoughts
Feelings are valid
Above all being present choosing
now amidst chaos, is best.
Breathe... nothing matters but this
moment!

- By Glain Nene



THE RIVER

They say it's impossible to change the course of a flowing river? Isn't it?
Because I found it normal in the society I should go with the flow? Isn't it?
But tell me what should I do when the normal is suffocating?
What should I do when the waters of the river is no longer safe for consumption?
GO WITH THE FLOW

But today I am scared
Will it kill me today? I wished it could sometimes
Wishes the pain would strangle me instead, but it doesn't.
Instead it goes for my heart and body, hoping I would
learn better.
But I don't instead I debate whether the physical or
emotional pain is more painful.

Today I looked at his eyes full of anger, the eyes that made me
fall in love,
I begin reminiscing at the good times we had, Imagining
what my life would have been.
Asking myself if am strong enough.
Mama didn't warn me about this
Mama didn't teach me how to tackle this, Instead
she could hug me to ease my pain

I thought we had connected, I thought he was my
better half,
I thought respect goes both ways, I thought being submissive had a part where I could air my
views, thoughts and emotions.
I thought, and what was I thinking, he couldn't be different from my father, they are cut from the
same cloth.

JEEESUUUUUS, I scream as I hear gunshots, seems today he is tired of me being his punching bag,
He wants something spicy, maybe he wants to be an excellent shooter, and where could he perfect his skills?



If it's not home with the help of his perfect submissive better half.

As the bullet pierces through my heart I hear my girl's sobs,

Then I hear a sound whispering, "if the waters are not fit for consumption you change where you get your water."

"Mummy wake up, Dad is going to burn the kitchen up with his bad cooking," My girl wakes me up.

I love her smile, I love how she debates with the father on women rights, I love how the father hates it when someone disrespects her teen girl.

I remind her of our fight to this freedom,

Freedom of being a woman, Freedom of living your dream

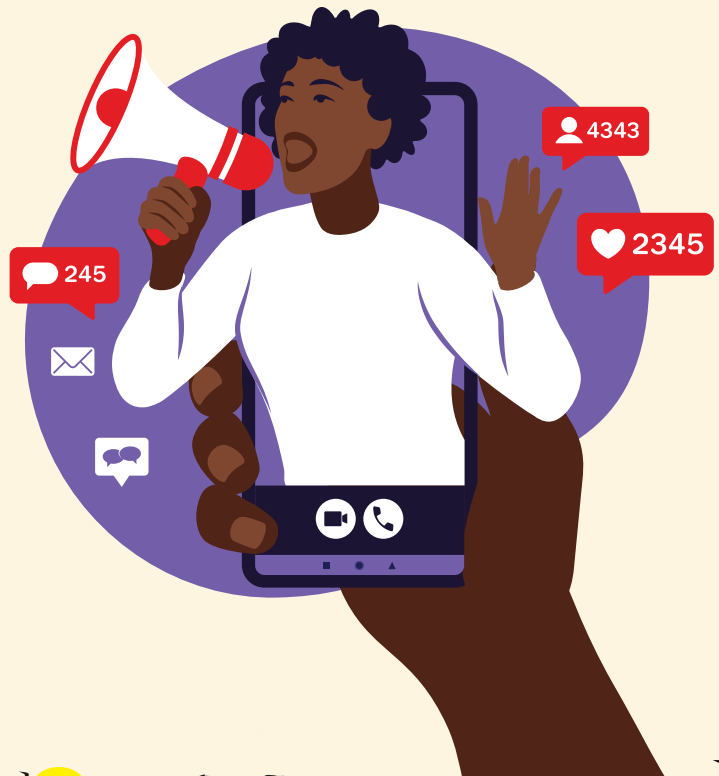
Freedom of getting into spaces that only men were considered.

My dear girl you owe no one but yourself the good things of life

You came to this world to be a leader, a doctor and have the fine things in life

Being a mother, a wife, sister, friend are only ingredients of life not your feminine definition.

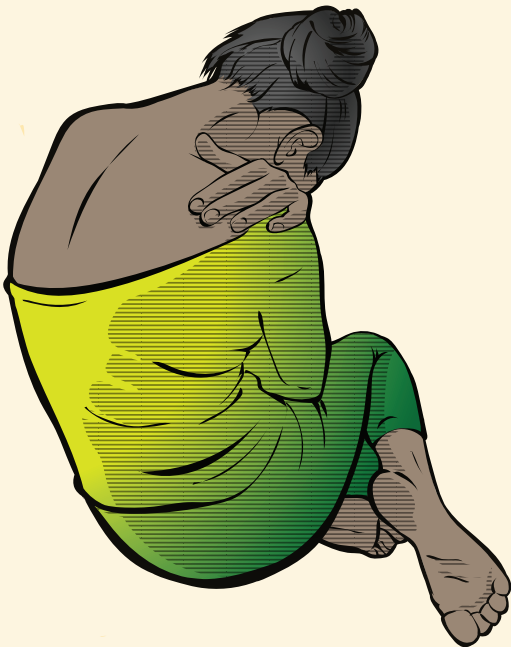
— By Faith Otieno
From Kenya



TAINTED

Her beauty, her pride
The epitome of beauty.
The purity she had
Now all is tainted
Just in one night.
TAINTED.

Law student she was
Wrinkled at 20
Tears on a race
For the pain she feels.
Regret is all she feels
Just one night,
All was TAINED.



Society blaming her
For what she didn't take part in
Pure and innocent she was
Still society judged her
Once an epitome of beauty
Now The goddess of doom
TAINTED

Just another victim
Of sexual harrasment
At just 20
Her journey ended
Along with it she went
Suicide it was
Just another TAINED victim

It should have been better
But society caused her death
Deemed her the TAINED one
A social evil they said.
Another innocent life gone
The life of the TAINED ONE.

- By Finian Kangwamu
From Uganda



SMASH THE PATRIARCHY

As feminists, our biggest challenge is and has always been the gender norms enforced by religion, cultural traditions, families, law makers and enforcers.

The patriarchal setting continues to oppress women through the negative gender norms like teaching young girls that they are inferior to men, some cultures even go ahead to preach sexual practices and habits that completely disregard the concept of consent for example the Batooro say "omusaijja tayangwa" a statement which not only puts the man as the primary beneficiary but also indicates that the woman has no right to say no to a man's advances.

Other tribes like the Baganda have female mutilation practices that are said to prepare young girls usually before the age of 12 for marriage, such practices have been known to lead under aged girls in sexual acts leading to the sky rocketing number of school drop outs. What is even worse is the fact that girls are not given a chance to say no because in most cases families do this thinking they are doing it for marital (husband's) benefits.



Girls are also majorly encouraged to have marriage as their biggest aspiration and a woman's success is measured on the basis of marriage and children while boys are told to push for the stars. Such doctrines train girls that they are inferior to boys.

Sensitization is thereby necessary on a deeper level, women, men, religious leaders, law makers and enforcers need to be sensitized about the dangers of upholding practices that belittle girls, the notion of girls being an inferior gender needs to be deconstructed.

We also need more women in power positions to inspire young girls and show them that is woman can be much more than just a wife or a mother, young girls need to know that they have a right to have bigger aspirations, they also need to understand the importance of consent. They need know that they have the power to own their bodies, their narratives and even their choices. LET US SMASH THE PATRIARCHY!

- By Michu Shams



IF

If someone had told her
She wouldn't be putting on a ginormous dress
Trying to hide the booming belly
With something growing inside

If someone had told her
She would be on different paths with pain
She wouldn't be discriminated
Her heart wouldn't be torn apart
By the guilt of betrayal
She wouldn't be unsettled

Someone should have told her
That all she had to do was ask
Because we no longer living in the past
But information so vast
If only she had asked

If someone had told her
They wouldn't be staring at her lifeless body
The pool of blood, the rusty piece of wire
They wouldn't blame this on themselves
They wouldn't be wishing the impossible; resurrection
They wouldn't have lynched,
The one who was part of the termination
But they never told her!

- By Wechuli Doris Nyangasi
From Kenya



CHILD ABUSE

The world has a story to tell when I come to the term abuse.

But what is child abuse? Why does it seem a relatable issue?

Child abuse is when a parent or a guardian whether through action or failing to act, causes injury, death, emotional harm or risk of serious harm to a child.

The many forms include emotional abuse, physical abuse, exploitation, sexual abuse and neglect.

Does it sound familiar? Nearly one in two adults have experienced abuse in their childhood.

Child abuse is common within our country, Kenya since most people view it as a form of

disciplining the child. Child abuse is often caused by financial stress in the household, domestic violence, unresolved childhood trauma history, use of substance abuse, poor child parent relationship, lack of parenting skills, mental health conditions. This are the predominant factors that lead to abuse towards children.

Child abuse impacts children from their early stages of life to adulthood. Most adults within our society are survivors of childhood trauma. The bitter part of this is that most people are not aware of the abuse that happens within their lives. This has led us to having a broken society. Abuse in this



context doesn't mean hitting a child to correct their action instead it means going over board with your punishment, taking out stresses towards the child ,manipulating them in order to benefit mostly financially.

Abuse manifests itself in adults in five major forms. This could be through addictions and mental health disorders, attraction to unhealthy relationships, loss of childhood memories ,avoidance of relationships and chronic stresses .Child abuse imparts trauma unto adult life leading them to perform poorly in their lives.It is crucial for everyone in the community to reveal sources that educate people on trauma and how to overcome them. It is never late to recognize and treat trauma stemming from child abuse.

They are three stages in healing childhood trauma in adults.

The first stage is denial. Most adults often find themselves denying themselves of the experiences that took place. Adults whom have suffered from childhood abuse reject their feelings as they view it as a sign of weakness. This is normal since when we grow up we tend to use our rational mind rather than the feelings within our body. This causes most adults to dismiss their triggers often sayings it's something of the past or they don't feel well.

Denial is often easy for most of us. Adults tend to build all sorts of excuses rather owning their experiences and seeing them for what they truly are.

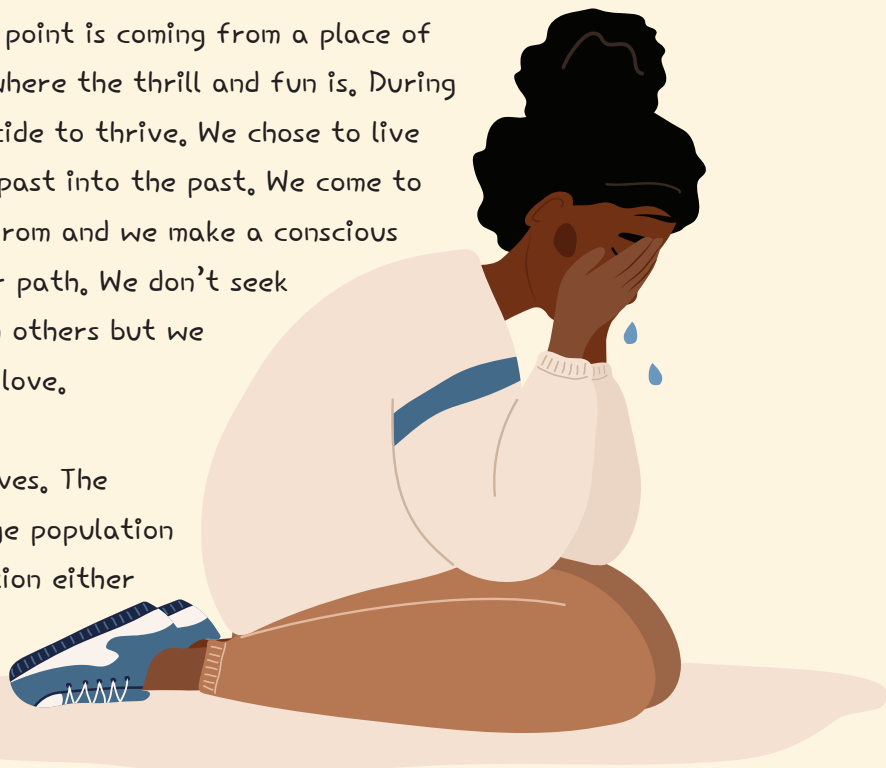


Acceptance requires lots of courage since it needs one to revisit their past which may be very uncomfortable for most victims of child abuse. It is best if one goes through this process with the support of a professional therapist or close friends and family who are aware of what you are going through.

The second stage towards healing is acceptance. This is where the divine breakthrough and healing lies within. Acceptance brings light to the journey. It enables the individual to come into terms with what happened and seek help. This is literally the longest process. Healing from child abuse takes quite some time and it's important for the victim to be consistent through this process. One key thing to note is that despite undergoing treatment one is still likely to suffer from triggers though this time.

The difference is that at this point is coming from a place of awareness. The last stage is where the thrill and fun is. During this point is when we fully decide to thrive. We chose to live a joyous life and putting the past into the past. We come to accept where we are coming from and we make a conscious choice to choose happiness our path. We don't seek validation or acceptance from others but we make room to offer ourselves love.

Child abuse tends to disrupt lives. The fact that it happens to a large population of people is very sad. This action either take place intentionally or unintentionally though regardless each



It is never too late for one to start leaving the life that they deserve to be. One should go through this journey with vulnerability. Healing child abuse gives one liberation to fully live their lives without fear. Breaking from child abuse requires us to heal from the unconscious beliefs which tend to affect our lives.

In conclusion, we can thrive and strive in life regardless of the severity of the abuse as long as we take up the initiative to seek help so as to heal.

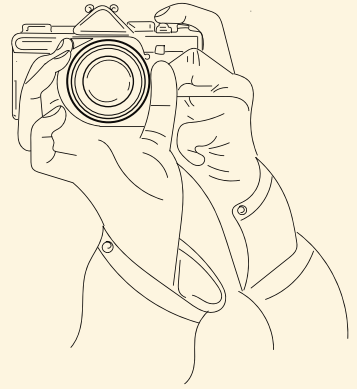
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Photography

My name is Blessing Gasana and I am a 17 year old who comes from a small country in Rwanda also known as the land of a thousand hills. I recently moved to Atlanta, Georgia to continue my highschool and I am currently in the 12th grade (woohoo!) I also play for my school's basketball team as a senior. I am looking forward to a great year!

I recently found a new passion which is photography and you just can't imagine how I've fallen in love with it. Photography is my therapy, it gives me a sense of peace and direction. I hope someday I will be able to help women and girls find their purpose through sharing my experiences. Not long ago, I created a VSCO page with all of my portraits.

Thank you!



Vicky Jelagat Poem

A new sun rose today; I hear a new voice in the chirping of the birds, it sounds nothing like the dirge they have been singing me everyday for the last two years. It's a new kind of song, one that speaks of hope, joy, and reminds me I am not alone. It stirs up something in me, I can't really explain it. It's like a heavy weight has been lifted from my shoulder and for the first time in two years I can breath. The guilt, its all gone, like it was dew in the bright morning sun. It's like yesterday was winter's fog and today is splendid springtime. I don't really know how those that experience these seasons really feel as one transforms to another but I bet it is something close to this; especially if their winter had been hard on them.



I want to talk about it, all of it, to someone, may be a therapist. Or to my mum. I don't know how, but I know she won't judge me. I know she won't read me scriptures or pray with her hands over my head for the 'evil' to leave me. I want to talk to my friends because I know they won't look at me any different or whisper behind my back. My family will not cast me away and my community will not speak about the bad things I did. My church will not shun me and use my actions to educate young girls. My country will not arrest and charge me for it. Instead they will all hug me and tell me I will be okay, that I made the choice that was the best for me. I will not have to hide behind poetic riddles or comfort myself when I'm all alone.

I guess it's some sort of reflex to just speak about it not so plainly. I mean I haven't even the courage to write about it here on my diary, for fear that someone may one day find it, and read it, and my secret be exposed. Some kind of muscle memory to just hide everything about the incident. Things are different now and I don't have to hide it anymore. No one will look at me any different once I tell. My mind will have learnt of

acceptance and it will not torture me with all sorts of curses and reminders that I am less than or not worthy of love. I will not feel like my future has been affected in any way. The sleepless nights are over now. Waking up to a wet pillow, feelings of sadness, depression, all have no power over me here.

my body,
my choice

In this new world, I had that abortion with the help of the best doctors, and then got the support of my friends and family, and I didn't feel any less of a human being. All because I was taught that I have a say on what happens in my body, free of influence from what society thinks or what my church believes or what my family expects. I live, not I fear but in confidence that the person that comes after me will receive the exact same high quality care from all around them, and they will not have to go through the hell I went through in the old world.

BIO

I am Vicky Jelagat, a 22-year-old from Kenya. I am an introvert who spends most of their time watching movies, reading novels and writing. Writing is my escape. I would say I have fought off many demons in my head through my writing. I hope to one day publish a novel, and get my poems published. I recently completed my university and I dream of one day being able to travel the world I have always seen through my mobile phone screen. I like to think that is when I would have lived my life to the fullest.

I am passionate about changing lives in any major or minor way. I feel euphoric every time people comment on my poems about how they thought they were alone, but feel part of the world after reading my work. That is what drives me, what motivates me to write more and more.

Patricia Anane





I Speak 4 Myself