



Queering Authoritarianism in Uganda: Dissident Sexualities and Tropical African [anti]-Aesthetics in Stella Nyanzi's *No Roses from my Mouth*

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that queering female sexualities as 'dissident sexualities' Stella Nyanzi in her collection of prison poems, *No Roses from My Mouth* (2020), harnesses the aesthetics of radical rudeness (insults) through expressions of humor, innuendo, and anecdote grounded in the Baganda cultural repertoire, to critique President Yoweri Museveni's authoritarian regime in Uganda. Her poetry draws attention to queer sexualities grounded in stylistics of dissent. Humor in the prison poems allows Nyanzi to develop an audacity that alludes to the authenticity of her queer consciousness. To this end, the article teases out how radical rude poetics, a corollary of tropical [anti]-aesthetics, affords Nyanzi a literary platform to manipulate pejorative imagery, libidinous metaphors, subversive phrases, and lewd expressions entrenched in humor as political protest. More evocatively, the article asserts that within the context of tropicality, radical rudeness as pan-Africa's anti-aesthetic response to the Western (English) culture of politeness is focused upon in *No Roses from My Mouth* as a literary fuse that expands tropical aesthetic's critique of colonialism/postcolonialism in Africa to poetically confront authoritarianism in Uganda.

Keywords: queering authoritarianism, female dissident sexualities, Museveni's Uganda, Stella Nyanzi, tropical African [anti]-aesthetics, "radical rudeness" poetics

Introduction

This article seeks to elucidate how Ugandan poet and anthropologist Stella Nyanzi stretches the power of imagination using lewd remarks couched in ‘radical rudeness’ as a form of tropical [anti]-aesthetics in *No Roses from My Mouth* to criticize authoritarianism. ‘Radical rudeness’ refers to a writer juxtaposing the personal with the artistic to shun decency and politeness through the trope of humor expressed in satire, sarcasm, irony, and burlesque, in order to depict situations of staggering oppression. ‘Radical rudeness’ can also satirize despicable individuals and personalities considered perpetrators of oppression in societies where human rights are denied. Nyanzi’s conceptual shift away from the aesthetics of decency to vulgarity in her poetry thus needs to be discussed in the context of political protest of Uganda’s predatory political practices. Nyanzi’s firmness and resilience as underscored in her collection of prison poems, *No Roses from My Mouth*, diverts the passive protest previously associated with the prominent Ugandan opposition figures Kesse Besigye and Bobi Wine, into a new, boisterous, trajectory. Nyanzi’s emergence as an important alternative voice in Uganda’s contemporary politics lends credence to the appraisal of Naminata Diabate’s *Naked Agency* (2020) and Sylvia Tamale’s *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020) in which it is noted that these writers recognize the “diversity of the African experience in their indication that to imagine Africa, its women, and identity as a single entity falls prey to essentializing tendencies” (Siluonde, 2022, p.40). Thus, Nyanzi’s ability to upset the political situation in Uganda through dissident female sexualities,¹ likewise subverts the stereotypical narratives of women as being weak, apolitical, and helpless, as has so often been portrayed in African literary works. Nyanzi’s audacity shifts political activism away from reticence to embrace radicalism, and thus demonstrates how the tactics of dissent employed by both Besigye and Wine remain stereotypical and predictable, and ultimately do not forge a convincing path of resistance. Arguably, Nyanzi’s shift to ‘radical rudeness’ opens a whole new set of poetic possibilities in Ugandan political dissent. Even though Nyanzi’s poetics of African anti-aesthetics—a derivative of tropical aesthetics—is seen as an anomaly to the craft of poetry, nonetheless, her poetics of radical rudeness serves as a blueprint for harnessing voices against President Yoweri Museveni’s dictatorship in Uganda. By refusing to obey the rules of politeness, Nyanzi’s subversion of the language of poetry establishes a radicalization of protest in Uganda’s political sphere.

¹ Sexualities is used in the paper to delineates male and female sexualities alongside lesbian, and gay sexualities in relation to queer sexualities. Female sexuality is a weaponized tool of discourse in Stella Nyanzi’s *No Roses from my Mouth*.

In terms of ideological orientation and concomitant stylistic variation, Nyanzi's exploration of 'dissident sexualities,'² grounded in biting humor, reinforces the legitimacy of queer sensibilities rooted in dissension. Its use ambitiously attempts to re-assess explanations of culture constituted through a Western colonial system of binary oppositions which inevitably privileges 'culture' rather than 'nature'; 'masculinity' as against 'femininity'; and 'the public' as opposed to the 'private' (Lazarus, 1990, p. 167). Queer literature is often described as that which focuses on minority sexuality as a rhetorical device (Hartford, 2018, p. 31). Zethu Matebeni et al. argue that "African sexualities are dynamic, multifaceted, and resilient, however, people with non-heterosexual sexualities and gender-variant identities are often involved in struggles for survival, self-definition, and erotic rights" (2018, p. iv). This implies that the vulnerabilities of queer Africans are strikingly shaped by social, cultural, and political processes that tend to foreground innovative queer arts and literatures as a political strategy which arose in the 1980s as a hybrid of concerns associated with gay and lesbian communities. Nyanzi appropriates a queer sensibility and infuses it with political activism to weaponize resistance against authoritarianism and dictatorship in Uganda. By incorporating queer sensibility in her collection of poems in order to navigate the intersection of rudeness, humor, and dissension, Nyanzi makes the artistic assertion that transgressive female sexualities can be harnessed to make a volatile political statement that unsettles dictatorship in Uganda. This article focuses on a selection of Nyanzi's poems.

Radical Rudeness as an Offshoot of Tropical [anti]-Aesthetics

Samantha A. Noel in her book *Tropical Aesthetics of Black Modernism* infers that the "notion of tropicity...disrupts the construction of Africa as the anti-thesis of Europe and the embodiment of the past and renders the pan-African world as a purposeful interlocutor of modern life" (2021, p. 5). It has been well documented how the tropics, more than just geographical, is also an imaginary space strongly tied with colonialism. As Denis Cosgrove notes, tropical imaginings and the sensuous have encapsulated varied experiences and representations of "visionaries and voyagers, merchants and missionaries, conquerors and colonists" (2005, p.197). In the postcolonial era, tropicity has become intimately entwined with decoloniality. Aimé Césaire's notion of '*tropicalité*' was used as an anti-colonial imagery and practice. It offers "a geographic, cultural, and political site of decoloniality" (Lundberg et al., 2023, p. 5). Tropicity thus becomes a decolonial and subversive gesture. Radical rudeness as a basic building block of

² Dissident sexualities are a corollary of queer sexualities. The term is used in the paper to reiterate Nyanzi cyberactivism's soft spot in the defense of gay and lesbian rights. It also references her militant feminist, non-conformism exegesis in *No Roses from my Mouth*.

tropicality in *No Roses from My Mouth* is situated within the proclivity of subversion as it breaches the English etiquette of politeness. This subversion is what Homi Bhabha deconstructed as “a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them” (1994, p.89). Hence, Nyanzi’s recourse to the appropriation of radical rudeness as an offshoot of the Baganda culture of satire and impoliteness in the collection of poems, reverberates with Gilles Deleuze’s illustration of deterritorialization of the dominant language (English) by a minority group (Baganda) whose cultural aesthetics has been ignored and undermined through oversubscription to the colonial dictates of obsequious politeness (Miguela, 1999, p.4). Deterritorialization in this circumstance is not distinguished from counterculture/anti-aesthetics. Despite decades of humiliation suffered by people of Africa through slavery, Western religious manipulation, and colonialism (with its latest incarnation in neocolonialism), tropical aesthetics have offered Africans an emboldened means to project affirmative identity politics through protest, confrontation, and subversion of Western cultural practices (Noel, 2021, p.17). Subsequently, radical rudeness rooted in tropical [anti]-aesthetics affords Nyanzi a boldness of self-definition and transformation that has enabled her to transgress unimaginable socio-political boundaries, hitherto policed by the Ugandan autocratic government. By capturing anti-aesthetic poetics within the locale of tropicality, Nyanzi has undoubtedly reinforced the capability of radical rudeness to bring about a reclamation of humanity and dignity.

Despite being labelled a demagogue who ostensibly preys upon the Ugandan masses’ vulnerability, fears, and prejudices, Nyanzi’s exemplification of an anti-aesthetic sensibility, grounded in tropicality, is better understood to be circumscribed within a liberation-versus-tyranny dialectics. Consequently, by deploying tropical [anti]-aesthetic propensities, Nyanzi has exposed Museveni who has traumatized the Ugandan society through complex authoritarian methods. This dictates that people must be coerced, civil societies harassed, and oppositions contained. Ogenga Otunnu in his book *Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda* has underscored how Museveni continues to retain his regime, despite the many protests against his government, through his willingness to use violence and threats. Otunnu argues further that his strategies of employing political repression, political violence, ethnicity, cooption, and outright bribery, persist. These strategies have been continually used by Museveni to offset the crisis of legitimacy he faces (2017, p.189). Thus, the once liberatory National Resistance Movement became a party machine for foisting dictatorship and perpetuation of Museveni’s political longevity (Sassoon, 2016, p. 40). This has led to the despicable, but familiar, tradition where the boundaries between order and disorder are abolished. Such

abolishment has created a circumstance where the Ugandan civil populace struggles against despotism and manipulative strategies on a continuous basis. Examining the dilemma of a disordered society, Ahmed Souaiaia comments that “given the dependence of human communities on...stability provided by governing institutions...institutional collapse inevitably causes traumatic ramifications in any society” (2013, p.147). Invariably, Ugandans continue to daily witness political crises as the police are clamping down on political opposition and civil society. These political tensions have morphed into scores of threats, assaults, and extra-judicial killings against militant dissensions.

The result of this totalitarianism has given rise to a bastardization of government institutions which has paved the way for entrenchment and institutionalization of barefaced nepotism. With the emergence of Museveni’s wife as a minister, his son hastily promoted a general in the army, and his uncle made the chairman of a state-owned corporation, Uganda remains a captive state. Aili M. Tripp draws attention to how Museveni has entrenched nepotism into politics when he states that: “[t]he creation of mechanisms for popular participation through a local council system were converted into patronage-based political machine to maintain the ruling party in power” (2010, p. 4). Hence, Museveni’s personalization of governance in Uganda has ostensibly undermined the viability of government institutions as referenced in the poem “Nepotism” (2020, p. 58):

The first husband heads our country.

The first lady heads a ministry.

The first son heads our army.

The first daughter heads a church.

This is nepotism!

The first uncle heads our bank.

The first aunt heads a board.

The first niece heads a parastatal.

The first nephew heads the police.

This is nepotism!

Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz have fittingly acknowledged that politics in Africa has yet to be “emancipated from the overriding dominance of localised and personalised political contests” (1999, p.1). The foregoing poem, “Nepotism” illustrates how

Museveni's covetous political dominance in Uganda is premised on an inordinate quest for power, esteem, and respect from the populace. Museveni's personalization of power further reflects Chabal and Daloz's description of the abuse of power in Africa, when "a well-managed moral economy of corruption does involve the abuse of formal power for personal gains" (1999, p. 159). Breaking the line between fact and imagination, concrete instances of corruption through the instrumentality of nepotism are often associated with Museveni. Against dictatorial rule, a trope of biting humor deployed in "Nepotism" rearranges the major fault lines of Museveni's regime in Uganda. The poem clearly delineates how the nepotistic fostering of appointments of Museveni's wife, son, daughter, uncle, aunt, niece, and nephew to undeserving positions has hurt Uganda's nationhood. Situated within the context of poetics of radical rudeness, the accusatory tone of "Nepotism" propels Uganda forward to a yet unknown and unpredictable future, a future where its political readiness for transformation will be eventually determined either through a ballot box or a military putsch. Having developed a resistance to intimidation, the flourishing absurdities perpetrated by Museveni have sprouted radical dissensions from Nyanzi's weaponizing of radical rudeness and political activism as she seethes with rage in *No Roses from My Mouth*. This is underscored in Kenneth W. Harrow's argument that "the imbrications of nationhood in the elaborations of national literatures would seem to be the essential site in which the collective conscious works through its most painful struggles..." (2001, p.44). Hence, as the political strikes deeply into the personal, Nyanzi, through tropical [anti-]aesthetics encased in rambunctious humor, unearths the scandal associated with Museveni's prebendal governance in Uganda to engender national consciousness. Besides foregrounding frustration with the country's political disequilibrium, Nyanzi's defying voice in "Nepotism," rooted in pain, indignation, and bellicosity that are sweepingly personal, also creates reverberations that are communally inciting. The damning and overwhelming instances of Museveni's personalization of the ruling of Uganda for over three decades through the shameless perpetration of nepotism, brutality, repression, and corruption of government institutions are bound to incite civil disobedience, as championed by Nyanzi, the opposition parties, and members of the LGBTIQAP, as a defensive response.

Intersection of Queer Sensibility and Dissident Poetics

Dissecting the notion of differences between conventional sexuality and queer sexuality, Lisa Duggan refers to queer community as a critical term to delineate a collectivity that is no longer defined solely by the gender of its members' sexual partners but, rather, as a new sexuality community which claims more than half its aggregate members only by a shared dissent from the dominant organization of sex and gender (Duggan, 1992, p. 20).

'Queer' thus transcends the popular notions of gay and lesbian identities for the naming and capturing of a different desire, that unobtrusively transcends the seemingly compulsory hetero/homosexuality. Queer sensibility demands rights to diverse sexual, erotic, and affective relationships and gendered embodiments (Mennel, 2012, p. 11). Queer sensibility is teased out in the poem "Feminists in High Heels" (2020, p. 34):

Feminists drunk with religion
Roll their judgemental eyes heavenward
And *shandaramana* at my brazenness.
They finger their leather-bound scriptures
And distance themselves from my activism.
They pray and praise and tithe
But keep away from the trenches.
They deem my praxis too immoral...

Invoking queer sensibility, Nyanzi, in "Feminists in High Heels," affirms her militancy and iconoclasm to articulate the validity of private conscience away from the propagandistic playing to the gallery of Uganda's pseudo-feminists. "They finger their leather-bound scriptures" suggests that the Ugandan Feminists' conventional morality serves as a cover for hypocrisy and selfishness. The poem provides a heightened awareness of the collective deception often exhibited by these feminists, who say one thing but do another. Sarcasm, embedded in biting humor, in the line "They pray and praise and tithe / But keep away from the trenches..." further condemns the hypocrisy of a network of Ugandan feminist advocates who would rather acquiesce to timidity by superficially embracing Christianity at the expense of important political struggles to liberate Ugandan society from dictatorship.

Morland and Willox, summarizing the facts and views subtly undergirding queer activism's necessity and urgency, have reiterated the inherent "challenge to the notion that identities could classify people, keep people safe, and keep them alive" (2005, p. 25). In other words, queer is not an identity but a strategy, and politics can be queer (p. 25). As such, Nyanzi neither claims to be a lesbian nor a heterosexual; however, facing a hostile and bewildering environment created by the authoritarian government, she found allies and soulmates in the queer community. Shunning any act of homophobia that could instigate extremist disdain, Nyanzi's political activism, entrenched in queer and dissident

sexualities that empathize with LGBTQBT communities, is mirrored by her brief but noteworthy experience inside the Luzira Women's Prison in Uganda. Nyanzi witnessed the complexity of lesbianism firsthand in the prison, where women, denied contact with the opposite sex, engaged in same-sex copulation. Nyanzi's use of dissident sexuality's framework conforms to Judith Halberstam's argument that the evocation of erotic narratives in a literary work goes to a reasonable extent to reveal a veiled representation of the problematic of sexuality in that society, which the author strives to share with the reader (1998, p. 117). The Ugandan government has condemned lesbian and gay communities in the country as misfits, and this dominant discourse hides the fact that their sexualities and aspirations equally need to be addressed. By weaponizing queer sexualities on both Facebook and in her poetry, Nyanzi has taken it as her duty to give succor to lesbian and gay communities in Uganda. Queer sexualities intersect with political activism to draw attention to the lingering stranglehold of Uganda's dominant homophobic discourse. Furthermore, Nyanzi's queer strategy, as a trope of dissension in *No Roses from My Mouth*, is harnessed to draw attention to the worsening plight of Ugandan women. For Nyanzi, female sexualism bridges the gap between self-liberation and communal emancipation. Nyanzi's dissident female sexuality determines new forces of identification, which create a fiery radical feminist political activism.

Radical rudeness in *No Roses from My Mouth* ricochets off enduring complacency, creating a driving force inscribed in Nyanzi's activist poetry, and presenting a challenge to the passivity pervading Uganda's political space. The intersection of dissident sexualities and [anti-]aesthetic poetics is further expressed in "Drenched Sanitary Pad"³ (2020, p. 27):

33 years of Dictator Museveni lording it over Ugandans
Is akin to a dirty drenched sanitary pad
Remaining stuck between a woman's legs...

Nyanzi's poetics of radical rudeness in "Drenched Sanitary Pad" becomes apparent in the comparison of Museveni's thirty-three (now thirty-eight) years of escalated repression

³ Showcasing Nyanzi's sanitary pad's distribution advocacy, it is acknowledged in *No Roses from my Mouth's* introduction that "[w]ithin academic and LGBTIQAP+ activist circles, Stella Nyanzi is more renowned for her stellar scholarship on sexualities as a medical anthropologist and is a leading authority in African Queer Studies, or Queer African Studies...she went to schools and taught girls about menstruation" (Mirembe & Mwesigire, 2020 p. vii-viii). Under the regime, while the elite of Uganda live in unimaginable opulence, female students and adult women in the rural provinces are largely impoverished. As such, they constantly lack the means of getting sanitary pads and must rely on government handouts and donations from international donor organizations. Before her imprisonment, Nyanzi took it upon herself to regularly distribute sanitary pads among students in the rural areas of Uganda.

to a drenched sanitary pad stuck between a woman's legs. Considered in the light of discontent, the poem highlights the possibility of radical rudeness in disclosing Museveni's governance as an abuse of power. Museveni, the once-liberator who fought against the brutal military dictatorship of Idi Amin,⁴ has undoubtedly outlived his usefulness to Uganda yet he has stuck to his presidency with increased tenacity. Tellingly, the vocabulary of dissension is invoked to juxtapose unexpected correlations between Museveni's long, tortuous rule and a dirty sanitary pad. The allusion to "a dirty sanitary pad" is apt here to deconstruct Museveni's false messianism. Just as it becomes unbearable to keep a blood-soaked sanitary pad longer than necessary in-between a woman's legs, Nyanzi is decrying Museveni's thirty-eight years of agonizing authoritarian rule, rallying poetics of rudeness to call for its dismantling. This call is further forcefully reiterated in the poem: "When the dictator asks for more time as president/ It is akin to the dirty drenched sanitary pad / asking for more time between my legs. / When the dictator clings onto power with his iron fist / It is akin to the dirty drenched sanitary pad / sticking stubbornly between my thighs. / Just as women remove their sanitary pads, / So shall we dispose of this dictator!" (2020, p. 27). Dwelling on chords of subjugation narratives, radical rudeness tropes are violently appropriated in "Drenched Sanitary Pad" to draw upon recollections of vicious waves of political persecutions and acts of brutality (Akingbe, 2023, p.136).

As the circumstances of authoritarianism are further referenced in the poetry collection, a tense relationship between the ruler and the ruled is established. In postcolonial Africa, psychological abuse subsists when individuals or institutions subjugate or expose others to behaviors that may lead to psychological trauma, chronic depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder (Borghini, 2012, p. 8). Roiling a long-running autocratic rule in Uganda, a poetics of radical rudeness is referenced in "Free Captives" (2020, p. 38) as it satirizes pervasive authoritarianism in Uganda. Rudeness in the poem displaces decorum to strengthen the poetics of insult that exposes Museveni's dictatorship:

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

⁴ Idi Amin served as a military head of state and third president of postcolonial Uganda from 1971 to 1979. Amin is considered one of the most brutal despots in modern world history.

“Free Captives” paradoxically describes the measured freedom enjoyed by Ugandans under the Museveni regime. It is a freedom derived from an atmosphere that straddles illusion and intimidation in a sovereign but pseudo-democratic country. Nyanzi has found a voice as a radical political activist and an anti-aesthetic poet who is quick to expose these shenanigans. This she acknowledges by “declaiming that even if her language is considered vulgar, it has conterminously unmasked Museveni’s creeping totalitarianism” (Akingbe, 2023, p. 137). While her subversive attitude is considered a personal affront to some readers, it serves as a corresponding reaction to the suffocating, unbearable political tensions created by Museveni’s authoritarianism. Despite the diversity of opinions regarding Nyanzi’s poetic stylistics, her embrace of radical rudeness in the poem speaks to the necessity of transgressing linguistic boundaries.

In speaking truth to power, Nyanzi has always had an uneasy relationship with the Ugandan elite. While a few seem ambivalent towards her speech and offer a charitable disposition, the majority are resentful of her personality and poetry. This is underscored in her poetry when, in a moment of frustration, she asks rhetorically in “Defenseless Uganda”: “Oh Uganda, my homeland! / Who defanged the viper you once were? / Who destroyed your protective shell? / Who castrated your men? / Who sterilized your juicy women? / Who pounded flat your fighting hands? /...Who ate up the brains of your thinkers? / Who sucked up the energy of your youth? / Alas, you are defenseless and besieged! / You lay flat on your face before the dictatorship” (2020, p. 43). A chain of rhetorical questions in the poem interrogates and condemns the obtuse passivity identified within the Ugandan elite in their acquiescence to authoritarian intimidation. If we place Nyanzi’s criticism of this passivity in its social context, we can also comprehend why tensions between her and the elite class rose to a feverish pitch. The Ugandan elite makes no attempt to conceal its hatred for Nyanzi, as further described in the words of Esther Mirembe and Bwesigye Bwa Mwesigire in the introductory pages of *No Roses from My Mouth* when they comment that Nyanzi “went to schools and taught girls about menstruation.... She went to many parts of the country with the campaign. Then the Kampala Metropolitan Rotary Club invited her to speak to them about the campaign. She went. And she was arrested that Friday night. She was betrayed....” (Mirembe & Mwesigire, 2020, p. viii). This implies that while Nyanzi cuts an image of a heroine of the liberation struggle among the Ugandan masses, the country’s elite loathe her. Often shocked by the vulgarity of her language couched in radical rudeness, her stylistics both awes and perplexes the political circle. Her fidelity to subversive political philosophy has pitched her into a political struggle grounded in queer, literary, and cultural productions, including cyberactivism. Building a fiery rhetoric that stands as a bulwark against tyranny,

Nyanzi's radical campaign for LGBT rights is situated within a simulacrum of iconic visibility. Her dissenting stance and outspokenness have caused unprecedented astonishment, giving way to horror among the circles of the Ugandan elite and the political class.

If good governance demands the cheerful acquiescence of the citizens to the leadership authority of a country in return for adherence to constitutional structures, insults in *No Roses from My Mouth* enable a transgression of prevailing societal ethics as a reaction to irresponsible governance. Such transgression instills terror, more so when women are involved, as society often prescribes codes of sexual ethics strongly to women (Kittredge, 2003, p. 1). Insults in the poetry collection transgress Ugandan traditional aesthetics by reconstituting a moral vocabulary that denigrates malevolent abuse of power. Thomas Conley has suggested that by insult, we imply a word or series of phrases and expressions of a severely negative opinion of a person or group to subvert or undermine their positive self-regard and esteem. Conley emphasizes that insult is "a sign of fractures or fissures in social and political civility" that give rise to turmoil and conflict (2010, p. 2). Hence, Nyanzi's poetics of radical rudeness are precise, conscious acts, interrogating the interplay between civility and incivility. What Nyanzi asks for through rudeness in her poetry is politeness, accountability, and compliance with authentic democratic governance. If the government no longer observes the protocols of ostensible standards of democratic practice and if political correctness no longer guarantees conformity to constitutional demands, then adherence to a culture of politeness should not be expected of the citizenry. Conformity to an ethics of respect by the Ugandan citizens has continuously failed to steer tyrannical rulers away from further perpetration of oppression, brutality, and dictatorship.

Nyanzi's Resistance against Tyranny in Uganda

Since its publication in 2020, *No Roses from My Mouth* has enjoyed wide reviews, not just from critical literary engagements but also from literary magazines and Civil Rights' organizations' tabloids. S.M. Rodriguez has affirmed that "Nyanzi's *No Roses from My Mouth* offers an appropriately unrefined look into imprisonment. Her words are raw, vulgar, and always political" (Rodriguez, 2020). Similarly, Wairimu Muriithi has commented that "one of the most powerful things about Nyanzi's poetry is her description and critique of prison conditions, including her insistence that "prison congestion is a man-made catastrophe" (Muriithi, 2020). A few critics in non-literary articles have acknowledged how Nyanzi used social media to challenge Museveni for renegeing on a promise to deliver free sanitary towels to girls in schools (Kasadha, 2020, p.2; Kakungulu-

Mayambala & Rukundo, 2019, p.182). Even though Nyanzi's *No Roses from My Mouth* is yet to make a significant political difference, it has succeeded in providing a rich new model for dissident creativity through its style and form. A political gadfly, Nyanzi is an indefatigable activist who stands out boldly to explore the power of female sexualities embedded in radical rudeness and harnessed as a potent weapon of political liberation.

Daring and fiercely independent, Nyanzi's controversial emergence from academia into the Ugandan political struggle not only offers the most radical voice of dissent, but her presence also represents a possible hope for a revolutionary realignment of the Ugandan political space. This is underscored in the introduction to *No Roses from My Mouth*: "Nyanzi located herself within a tradition of radical African protest that utilises the body and custom to condemn injustice and oppression" (Mirembe & Mwesigire, 2020, p. vii). Nyanzi's audacity and confrontational polemics are irrepressibly steeped in a rebellious and dissident poetics of radical rudeness; her willful transgression of taboos bordering expansive, expressive, libidinal impulses and a great deal of sexual imagery fill the pages of her debut poetry collection, *No Roses from My Mouth*. Arguably, the leitmotif of rudeness as a concomitant of tropical [anti-]aesthetics resides in the Baganda culture, which Nyanzi, as a *Nalongo*—mother of twins—has utilized in her poetry. This conscious move towards identification with the Baganda tradition of radical rudeness underscores Frances Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman's comment on tropicality when they contend that "tropicality...means to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values" (1997, p.8). Although tropicalization has been critiqued as a colonial imaginary, recent studies recognize how tropical writers' trope their texts through drawing on indigenous poetics and performance (Lundberg et al., 2023, p. 5). Rather than dissembling or hiding the significant practice of the satiric aesthetics of rudeness in her culture, Nyanzi weaponizes it as a counter-culture against the ethics of English politeness. Indeed, radical rudeness in *No Roses from My Mouth* serves as a discursive tool to hurl insults at oppressors and dictators. Ultimately, Nyanzi, as a *Nalongo*, has certain powers in her speech, body language, and actions that enable her to perform radical rudeness (Wilmot, 2020, n.p.; Akingbe, 2023, p.136). This goes beyond text and is also expressed in bodily protest. While an academic at Makerere University, Nyanzi publicly stripped naked to protest against mistreatment. Nyanzi stripping naked embodies the creative manifestations of tropical aesthetics astutely referenced in Naminata Diabate's *Naked Agency*, which articulates how women in traditional African communities would often strip naked (as dictated by cultural practices) to protest, for instance, the king's overbearing manner in dealing with his subjects or against the desecration of communal ethos (2020, p. 32). In no less measure, Nyanzi's stripping naked on Makerere University's campus constitutes a revolt against pernicious injustice.

In the contextualization of the concerted struggle against Museveni's stranglehold, it becomes imperative to draw attention to the astonishing resourcefulness embedded in Nyanzi's poetics and performativity, which demonstrate the versatility imbued in her embrace of consummate activism to confront the overwhelming tyranny ravaging Uganda at all institutional levels.

Importantly, Nyanzi's development as an academic, briefly domiciled at Makerere University, has brought her activism closer to the conventional tropes of dissent and rearranged her poetry away from the danger of its analysis from the perspective of revolt. Rather than insurgency, Nyanzi, as a poet and activist, is only calling for civil disturbance. Such disturbance serves as a sustainable resistance that could possibly end Museveni's long-running dictatorship. Akingbe and Onanuga (2020, p.3) contend that resistance can be re-arranged as a platform through which people speak truth to power to orchestrate possible social change. Such resistance serves as a confrontation that deconstructs Uganda as a captive state. Her agitation is beginning to attract world attention to Uganda as a country that urgently needs to be rescued from the grips of totalitarianism.

Nyanzi's dark imageries of radical rudeness in *No Roses from My Mouth* were essentially forged within the walls of the notorious Luzira Women's Prison in Kampala, Uganda. Even though prison writing occupies a relatively minor and marginal place in individual African writers' oeuvres, prison writing in African literature ostensibly offers a subtext on tyranny as it provides a rumination on the politics of repression in postcolonial Africa. From the experiences of celebrated African writers incarcerated at one time or another in their respective countries, the following memoirs come to mind: Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died* (1972), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained* (1981), Jack Mapanje's *Skipping Without Ropes* (1998), Nawal El Saadawi's *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* (1994), Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day* (1995), and Rachel Knighton's *Writing the Prison in African Literature* (2019). In these memoirs and diaries, the prison has become a repository of recollections for writing resistance to repressive African governments (Akingbe, 2013, p.131; Akingbe, 2019, p. 23; Akingbe, 2023, p.140). Post-independent Africa's run-down prisons are often presented in this literature as dingy and crowded cells. This sorry state of the prisons is elucidated in Nyanzi's scathing assessment of the Luzira Women's Prison in her poem "The Cell": "Solitary confinement is abused at LWP. / Cold water is poured on the ugly hard floor. / No bed, no chair, no stool—nothing! / No mattress, no blanket, no shield. / No toilet, no bucket, no sanitation" (2022, p. 22). The Luzira prison projects the image of bare floors with differing shapes of threadbare mattresses and broken sewers. Prisons in postcolonial Africa have constituted enduring birth places of radical creative writing, historicity, subversive ideology, and stoic philosophies that have often outlived the African

writers, poets, and playwrights. Appraising the necessity for documentation of individual African writers' experiences in prison writing, Jack Mapanje contends that "the subtle neocolonial view that the publication of African prison writing fabricates yet another negative image of the continent; arguments like this were death to many creative projects in the last century" (2002, p. xiii). The four walls of a discomforting cell in the Luzira prison provided the needed inspiration for Nyanzi's poetry collection, *No Roses from My Mouth*.

Notably, while most political prison memoirs and writings in Africa have focused on the troubled experiences of confrontational encounters with authoritarian governments in their respective countries, Nyanzi also embeds within her poetry collection the psychological trauma and deprivations suffered by women. Her descriptions range from the lack of sanitary pads and poor prison hygiene to lesbian copulations and their attendant orgiastic pleasures. The Luzira Women's Prison holds within its fold a locale for the grounding of barbs and invectives embedded in radical rudeness. Invective is used to show the deprivations she suffered during her brief but painful incarceration in the Luzira prison, including deprivation of speech. In the poem "Political Prisoner" (2020, p. 16), she is framed for alleged cyber harassment of Museveni, which leads to her having been arrested, incarcerated, and charged in court:

Last year, I was Remand Prisoner LWP 313/2017.
I got bail after 33 days of incarceration.
This case still gets mentioned monthly in court.
I was charged with cyber harassment
and offensive communication against the president.
I penned and posted a rant on Facebook.
My "Yoweri Museveni *matako butako...*"
Was muddled up in translation to:
"The president is a pair of buttocks!"
I am a political prisoner.
I am a prisoner of conscience.

While referencing "a pair of buttocks" goes beyond artistic uses of obscenity to caricature Museveni's distinctive, awkward gait and swashbuckling, its humor forcefully brings out the evocative power of sensual vulgarity imbedded in the iconography of a grotesque object of disgust. Thus, "a pair of buttocks" is weighty and coterminous with the obvious

depiction of an object of trauma. If a strangulating pair of “buttocks” stokes a sense of sensual gratification, its iconography displaces an emphasis on vulgarity to generate a sense of humor. Janet Gibson, in her book *An Introduction to the Psychology of Humor*, argues that humor “comprises an emotional response that is elicited by a particular set of appraisals, namely the perception that an event or situation is incongruously funny or amusing” (2019, p.7). Humor also relays the intricate emotion of mirth that references awkward and grotesque depictions. Deployed in the image of “a pair of buttocks” humor sparks a high level of hilarity, yet its biting signification nonetheless remains thoroughly within the domain of queer sexuality.

Amplifying a long-simmering wrath against abusive governance, “a pair of buttocks” scrutinizes a colossal representation of every form of tyranny in Uganda. This goes to emphasize that Nyanzi had firsthand experience of brutality when she was arrested and detained on the orders of Museveni. As depicted in her poem, such experience “succeeds in triggering back into human consciousness that same sensual reality which had previously energized the artist, however unconsciously” (Makiya, 2004, p. 9). Investment in the aesthetics of radical rudeness from a perspective of sexual eroticism is represented in “a pair of buttocks”. Convincingly, Nyanzi in *No Roses from My Mouth* has repeatedly mapped anatomical areas of female sexualities to ricochet Museveni’s sadomasochistic unleashing of pain on the Ugandan people. The subtext of “a pair of buttocks” in Nyanzi’s oeuvre is an imaginative metaphor of the continual smothering of a nation with a large pair of buttocks by an autocratic ruler. Struck with revulsion at the mindless totalitarianism in Uganda, the poem “Political Prisoner” evolves witty, slanderous, and provocative salvos of condemnation steeped in radical rudeness. Its revolting poetics blatantly constitute building blocks of anti-aesthetics to reinvigorate and reinforce a recollection of the abuse of power. Abuse of power has been continuously perpetrated in Museveni’s stranglehold on Uganda since he led a historical guerrilla war between 1983 and 1986.

Crafted and nurtured on the egregious feedback from decades of political domination, *No Roses from My Mouth*’s audacious poetics of radical rudeness are overt political shots fired at Museveni’s relentless dictatorship. In a salvo of bellicosities, these shots are pointed toward the deconstruction of falsehoods in “Not My Grandfather” (2020, p. 97):

No, you are not my grandfather!
I refuse to yield my ancestry over to you.
I reject your efforts at familiarising me.
My grandfather’s hugs transfer safety.

Your iron fist hugs guns, gold and our government...
Idiots, cowards, users and jesters call you grandfather.
But I call you a treacherous traitor.

Tension is perspicaciously embedded in the poetics of radical rudeness in “Not My Grandfather”, becoming more intense as the poem appropriates and parodies the signification of ‘grandfather’. The committed denial of allegiance to a false grandfather in the poem seeks to show a new and relevant understanding of totalitarianism. What Museveni represents to his loyal party members is incorporated in his dubbing as grandfather, a sobriquet often met with knowing approval among Ugandans captivated by his personality cult. Humor encased in “Not My Grandfather” erases, defamiliarizes, and deconstructs any nationalistic-premised bond between Museveni and Nyanzi. The humor in the poem is derived from the factual and sustained condemnation of the paternalistic legacy of a tireless totalitarian. Here, parody is used as a form of indirect but double-voiced discourse (Hutcheon, 2000, p. xiv). In the poem, Nyanzi trenchantly rejects a continued propagandistic portrayal of Museveni as Uganda’s savior and grandfather by his National Resistance Movement party.

Calling Museveni a traitor openly on Facebook and in her poetry is presumptuously brash and has clearly delineated Nyanzi as a promising voice of liberation. It bears remarking that, previously, no opposition to his paternalism has been this daring. It is also on record that in over three decades of autocratic rule in Uganda, no critics, activists, poets, or political oppositions, save Nyanzi, have dared use words with pejorative connotations like *matako butako* (a pair of buttocks) against Museveni. This display of a confrontational stance has without doubt galvanized public opinion against the prevailing tyranny in Uganda and influenced the latest militant activities of the Ugandan youth and gay, lesbian, and queer communities. As the voices of prominent Ugandan opposition figures like Kizza Besigye and Bobby Wine have continued to be silenced, Nyanzi’s emergence into the stifled Ugandan political space marks activism’s long-anticipated turn around that could break the political stalemate. Nyanzi’s courageous deployment of radical rudeness—grounded in the Baganda cultural repertoire—has reenacted a possibility for the overhauling of the country’s governance. Expressed in tumultuous rage and an ostentatious poetics of derision, the extension of the radical rudeness leitmotif in “Not My Grandfather”, translates the unimaginable into a paradigm of struggle. This has the possible potential to sufficiently demystify fear and intimidation for a reconstruction of political engagement with a nation building gambit in *No Roses from My Mouth*.

Conclusion

The article has established that radical rudeness is a corollary of tropical [anti]-aesthetics. It further argued that through alternative discourse rooted in dissension, Nyanzi in *No Roses from My Mouth* has proven herself well capable of assessing the political realities in Uganda. She has successfully appropriated the leitmotif of humor to coalesce both impoliteness and the tropicality of [anti]-aesthetics into a veritable platform of subversive poetics. This platform has been effectively utilized to sustain the most bizarre, but gusty, campaign against Museveni's hegemonic totalitarianism. This article has referenced several poems in *No Roses from My Mouth*, where Nyanzi has deployed tropes of radical rudeness to highlight the perplexities of Museveni's oppressive rule of thirty-eight years. Drawing on iconoclasm, dissident sexuality, queer inclination, libidinous metaphors, and subversive feminism that defy fixed constructions of African femininity, Nyanzi has grounded radical rudeness in *No Roses from My Mouth*. The article argued that Nyanzi has significantly appropriated the largesse of radical rudeness to resist Museveni's dictatorship in Uganda. Such eloquence has forced us to rethink women's involvement in political governance in postcolonial Africa, providing an insight into how women handle the oppressive tendencies of tyrannical rulers. Arguably, such involvement continues to invest confidence in a collective struggle for liberation.

The article is situated at the intersections of queer exegesis, erotogenic imagery, dissident sexualities, and radical rudeness poetics as dividends of dissension. Furthermore, the article has highlighted that the poetics of anti-authoritarianism are expressed in interlocking tremolos of realistic anger, defiance, and confrontation in *No Roses from My Mouth*. Such expression has succeeded in demystifying Museveni's aura of invincibility. In conclusion, as much as the article does not in any way claim that Nyanzi is the only poet-activist fighting against political tyrannies in Uganda, nevertheless, her unbridled courage and revolutionary cyberactivism have drawn world attention to the beleaguered tropical country. Again, Nyanzi's subversive stylistics have snapped Ugandans out from decades of political lethargy hitherto associated with passive political activism. Anger embedded in the subversive poetics of *No Roses from My Mouth* has enormous potential to liberate Ugandans from the enduring complacency they have succumbed to over the long period of tyrannical rule.

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