**customers. For the second beer and many others, you will ask the barman to keep them for you. If you happen to get "Konyagi" or any other hard drink, you deposit it with the barman. Instead, you fill your glass with either water or soda and lace it with a bit of whisky. At the end of the day you reconcile the number of bottles with the barman and either you sell them back to the bar or cus­tomers and collect your money and go back to your children. Thus life goes. *Being a barmaid one has to be intelligent* and sharp.**

**A BARMAID'S LIFE + 273**

**However there is no security of employment as mentioned earlier, you can be hired or fired at a moment's notice and there is no compensation. There is no Pension or Insurance either. In other organizations they have the "Akiba ya Uzeeni" (National Provident Fund) to which both worker and employer send monthly contributions in cash-form. However, there is nothing like that in our case. After termination or dismissal you leave as empty handed as you came and if you decide to terminate your services before the end of the month you don't get paid—so you stay on until the end of the month. You get leave if you ask for it but it is unpaid leave. The same applies to maternity leave. So.if you get preg­nant you get leave but most women come back to work a month ‘or less later to earn money to support their families. Most women do not get financial support from their partners. No woman likes to leave a young baby in the care of another young child—but it is a risk we takc and leave everything to God. Everybody knows about our working conditions and our rigid working hours, 5.00 a.m. [to] 11 or 12 midnight or even longer .on weekends. Like any other woman, we worry about our children and about ourselves as we work so late and the children are alone or with neighbors or young ayahs.**

**I have told you about job security. I must say something about personal secu­rity. We get all kinds *of customers* coming into the bar. Usually when they come in they are gentlemen but after a couple of beers, some of them begin to misbe­have and mishandle you as if they own you! And all along you are expected to remain calm and not lose your temper, and keep on smiling. Some will insult you or paw your ass, shoulders, etc., and you just pretend it is okay. Sometimes you lose your temper, but often you shrug and laugh, or pretend you like them. You have to acquire the technique of diplomacy and survival.**

**There are times when a man will try and force himself upon you or decide to take you home against your will. We also develop defense mechanisms about how to get away from such a situation. Sometimes it works but often times it does not. You see you can always get rid of him if you don't like him. Our cus­tomers also apply different and sometimes mean techniques if they want to hurt a woman. For example he may try to hit you and accuse you of having stolen his money. Others seem to think that once they have offered you beer, then they have bought you. Although the management always intervenes, they always obey the principle of a "customer is always right." They are interested in their money and therefore it is important for them to maintain good relations with customers. They can always get another barmaid! So often they will calm the customer, and, if he says you stole his money, the management will offer to**

refund him. But you know it is not the end, you know at the end of the month they will get it out of your salary! So we end up paying for money we did not steal and that means hardship. It can be very humiliating.

*Translated by Alice Nkhoma-Wamunza*

**274 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

Not all the customers who come to the bars misbehave. You see, there are different categories of people who come to the bars: there are those who come to have a good time and peacefully go home after closing, and there are those who come looking for excitement and women. Some women come to socialize and meet friends. Couples too come and go. You also have some customers who come because they are lonely and feel they can find company and a sympathetic ear. They often find a sympathetic ear in a barmaid. So you listen to their prob­lems and sympathize. It makes them feel great. You relieve them of their ten­sion and anxieties, and you reassure them and make them feel confident! Most barmaids are good listeners. You learn and develop these skills with time. Being a barmaid is also an art—it requires a lot of patience and tolerance, and I think you can cope with so much because you yourself have gone through a difficult time. Not every barmaid sleeps with every man, and not every drinker comes looking for women. Many people cannot understand this. I know. They think that just because you are a barmaidthen automatically you became a prostitute. I am not saying that there is no prostitution. It is there; of course most barmaids do not understand that women do not do this for pleasure. It is all a question of economics! It is often not by choice that a woman becomes a prostitute. I am sure most people believe that we are all prostitutes just because we work in a bar. Some of us have one permanent boyfriend and don't just sleep with any man around.

I must say, not every woman who works in a bar is a prostitute. Some women are decent and being a barmaid should be considered a job like any other although the job carries with it a degrading social stigma. The woman bears` most of the blame and the man who comes is never branded as a prostitute even though he entices and pays for sexual favors. His money and status and power give him the power to dictate the time and terms of the relationship, even when we know the sexual act is an act of equals. . . .

The man with money can use it to speak for him; and they always use your reputation as a barmaid against you. Society looks down on barmaids because most of us do not live according to conventional expectations, so they say. So you can imagine what it would be like to fight against your boss! Today some bar owners pay a regular salary to their barmaids, but I know a lot more women are exploited and are paid less. However at least you can move on to another place if the conditions become intolerable. Currently the salary of a barmaid is between 700 [shillings] and 1000 [shillings] a month. Perhaps Dar es Salaam Development Corporation barmaids get the official minimum wage—but I am not sure. Most women are thankful to get at least a job to support their families.

***Fatma binti Athman***

Two **SATIRICAL POEMS + 275**

**Two SATIRICAL POEMS**

**Kenya 1983 Kipate/Kiswahili**

**Fatma binti Athman has spent most of her life on Pate Island, off the northern coast of Kenya. Her language, Kipate, is a Kisvvahili dialect. She was in her early sixties in 1983 when she performed the first of these poems for Ibrahim Noor Shariff and Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany, and in her late sixties in 1989 when she per­formed both poems,for the Swahili Poetry Video Project team led by Ann Biersteker and Richard Randall. Fatma binti Athman has been blind since birth and learned these poems, and the many others that she knows, by listening to the performances of others. She does not perform poetry professionally or publicly.**

**Both poems are examples of** *tumbuizo,* **or commiseration songs. The *tumbuizo* genre is considered to be one of the oldest forms of Swahili poetry, usually per­formed by women for audiences of women and children in private settings. Unlike other Swahili poetic genres, there is no set metrical pattern for** *tumbuizo,* **nor is a particular rhyme scheme associated with the genre, although rhyming words often are used. As is the case with other available examples of** *tumbuizo,* **the names of the original composers of these poems are unknown.**

**"My Husband Went to Pate" appears to be a parody of the first section of a poem that appears near the beginning of this volume, "A Mother's Advice and Prayer" by Mwana Kupona binti Msham. The narrator reports that she took care of her husband by performing the actions that Mwana Kupona recommended to her daughter in 1858, but the ideal marriage promised by the first poem hardly materializes here. The narrator's anger intensifies when she learns that the mother of her husband's second wife has advised her daughter to use the rind of the fruit of the** *mkungu* **tree to massage the husband. This rind produces an oil that is used to soften the skin. In "The Daughter, the Mother, and the Husband," a mother commiserates with her married daughter, who is being psychologically abused by her husband.**

*Ann Biersteker*

**MY HUSBAND WENT TO PATE**

**My** husband went to Pate to harvest oranges; I waited to welcome him. **I** waited standing until I fell because of fatigue.

I waited for him happily until my heart became sad.

I waited and when he entered **I** told him, "I greet you."

I received him in a cleared space and hung away his bow.

I received his axe and hoe and I put them behind the door.

**I** removed his head covering and put it in front of the door.

**I** took him to the bathroom and washed off his dust and dirt.

I rubbed him with oil and water; **I** shaved him where necessary.

I removed his farming clothes and dressed him in his finest garments

**I made him drink lots of water to clear his stomach.**

**And at night we lay down together and he told me deceitful tales.**

**He told me, "Dear, I'll never marry another and will not do anything to hurt you.**

**In the morning I will go to the workshop and make ornaments for you. I will make clasps, beaded and chain necklaces to circle your neck.**

**I will make ankle rattles for you and ear plugs and bracelets to remove your**

**fatigue."**

**In the morning I went to the kitchen and heard the sounds of celebration. I asked, "What's going on in this town?" I was told, "Your husband has gone off.**

**He has married a young girl and the dowry is the sum of your efforts. He has married a virgin today and her mother can do nothing but say, `Give me the fruit on the mkungu tree.**

**Its rind should be used to rub his spine.**

**You should rub him on both sides but especially on his back bone." Then I smashed the pots and pans on to the ground.**

**I threw myself down, then stood and broke the small and large beds And I cut the bed caning; then I left the house.**

***Transcribed by Ibrahim Noor Shartff Translated by Ann Biersteker***

**THE DAUGHTER, THE MOTHER, AND THE HUSBAND**

***Mother:***

**Day and night his behavior grows more grievous;**

**As a disgraceful husband he has no equal. *Ddughter•***

**There's no one like him; he has no rival. He has passed beyond all limits.**

**He brings nothing but hostility when he enters our house.**

**When he tomes inside, he exudes nothing but hostility.**

**His screams and ghouts torment me. Even the walls and doors all tremble. Even the walls and doors shake with fear. Everything trembles when he enters.**

**He brings war all day and I am afraid to speak.**

**I am silent and fear to speak.**

**I am silent when he enters shouting With derision and hostility.**

**I have no chance to rest—none.**

**Never do I have a chance to rest, not once. Mother, you should not see me thus.**

**276 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (197(1-1995)**

**I am drained by his hostility.**

**Two SATIRICAL POEMS + 277**

**If I were plump and jolly it would be surprising.**

**It would be surprising were I were plump and jolly. *Mother:***

**What is surprising is why you have not forced him to leave.**

**He did not build your home.**

**You must respond to him.**

**Why have you kept him in your house?**

**You must respond to him. Why have you kept him in your house? Why have you kept him in your house?**

**You must speak.**

***Daughter:***

**He says: "You will not depart until I bury you. What you want is a divorce.**

**What you want is for me to divorce you—That is what you want—I buried your mother And you have no father."**

**There is no one he does not curse.**

**But no one curses him.**

**Who is there he does not curse?**

**Who dares to curse him?**

**It's best I be killed so I may die and rest. Being married to him, what happiness is this? What happiness is this? To be married to him? He says: "What happiness is this?**

**All right, I'll kill you so you may die and rest. On my part should I cry whose loss is it?
  
Whose loss is it? Should I cry?"**

***Mother:***

**Whose loss is it? Your friends would**

**Respect you for responding.**

**Even if he is a *Sharif,* why have you kept him in your house? Why have you kept him, even if he is a** *Shen?*

**Why have you kept him?**

**Do you keep a'dog if it torments you?**

**If it's his house, go to the coast.**

**Go to the coast, dies his house.**

**If it's his house, then**

**That which is written must be.**

**To be married to him, I would have rejected it, my dear. I would have rejected it, my dear.**

**The marriage was ordered by your father. He commanded that you many this man. You wanted to stay cooking at home.**

**Cooking at home was where you wanted to stay.**

*Daughter:*

**278 + LATE IVENnETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

I wanted to stay cooking at home But I was forced into this marriage.

I know he is not a husband. Why did I not refuse?

Why did I not refuse? I know he is not a husband.

Why did I not refuse and stay at home with you?

*Mother:*

Your dilemma is sorrowful,

And that father of yours, why is he silent? Why is he silent, that father of yours? Why is he silent, my child?

And if I look after you,

What will others say about your pain? *Daughter:*

Why do they speak, saying I've become thin?

I've become thin as a dried fish.

My friends say: "You are nauseous, my friend;

You are nauseous, my friend. I think you are pregnant.

You are nauseous."

I did not become pregnant.

My husband torments me.

*Daughter and Mother together:*

They say, "Shhh—don't be like that dog. Don't relive her story.

Shhh—don't be like that dog. Don't relive her story; be careful." Truly there are no husbands. Truly there are no husbands.

I said I did not become pregnant. I am tormented.

They say, "Shhh—Don't be like that dog. Don't relive her story.

Look at her carefully."

Husbands there are none.

"Don't relive the story of her mother." She who desires;

She who desires; don't relive her mother's story.

Those who are troubled are like elders.

To be married to thim,.what happiness is there for me? What happiness is there for me to be married to them? What happiness is there for me to be married to any man? What does it bring me?

Even did I desire another to enter,

Were another to enter my desire,

***FROM* HUSH, MY CHILD, HUSH: OF ONIONS AND FRANKINCENSE + 279**

For another to enter could be

Beyond this evil, and you would not have Even a water jug and a cloth to carry it—They would be stolen from your head.

*Transcribed and translated by Ann Biersteker and Salina Hussein*

***Zaynab Himid Mohammed***

***FROM* HUSH, MY CHILD, HUSH: OF ONIONS
  
AND FRANKINCENSE**

**Tanzania 1983 Kiswahili**

**Born in 1918, Zaynab Himid Mohammed began her education at the age of five in a Q\_ufanic school. In 1927 she became one of the first sixteen girls to attend a government school for girls opened in Zanzibar, headed by an Englishwoman; this first group of students would go on to become the first Zanzibari women teachers. A pioneer of women's education, Zaynab Himid Mohammed herself became the head of Town Primary School, the most prominent girls' school in the islands, and the very school in which she had studied.**

**Much of the author's poetry was written to mark special occasions in Zan­zibar, such as the tenth anniversary of the Zanzibar Revolution, and the opening of various schools in Zanzibar. She has also written an autobiography and a short history of the Wangazija people, who came to settle in Zanzibar from the Comoros. Another of her epic poems, *"Utenzi wa Mwanakukuwa"* (The Epic of Mwanakukuwa), has** recently **been published together with the poem excerpted here, *"Howani Mwana Howani,"* or "Hush, My Child."**

**"Hush, My Child, Hush" is an epic poem composed of 401 stanzas, and highly reminiscent of another well-known epic excerpted in this volume, "A Mother's Advice and Prayer," by the celebrated nineteenth-century poet Mwana Kupona. The poems are similar in form: both are *Tendi,* Kiswahili epic poems composed of quatrains. In both, a mother teaches a daughter moral values and proper religious practices. Zaynab Himid Mohammed's poem is more explicitly autobiographical, the mother teaching through her own personal experience. The title of the full poem is redolent of a lullaby. The onion and the frankincense are two of the vari­ous herbs or spices used to cleanse and dry a new mother and her baby so that they heal faster.**

**The poet witnessed the onset of Western education and the gradual erosion of indigenous cultural values and norms. She opposed the idea that everything new and Western was superior, to be unquestioningly relished and embraced, and she wanted her daughter and other young women to value their own cultural her­itage—dispelling the idea, for example, that rituals associated with pregnancy, birth, initiation, and marriage were to be discarded.**

**The extract below comes from the first ninety verses of "Hush, My Child, Hush," which portray the joys and tribulations of pregnancy and reflects the tra­ditional Zanzibari practices for attending to a mother's good health, tending to the baby, and bringing blessings to the newborn. Most women had their children at home, with a local midwife attending and with other family members and even neighbors closely involved. The new mother remained in the tender care of the extended family both during her pregnancy and for the first forty days after the birth. The poet refers to such practices as massaging the stomach with oil to make it supple and capable of further expansion, and mentions many herbs and spices, some eaten and others thrown onto hot embers to provide continuous aromas from an incense burner. All are meant to be part of the healing process. In those days the grandmother, if alive, would be a constant visitor, being the most knowl­edgeable about herbs and other traditional healing practices. At birth the woman invariably moved to her mother's house, where she could receive the constant ministrations described in the poem.The text also hints at various defenses to ward off the "evil eye," such as drowning the labor screams with other shouts and noises. The pregnant woman is encouraged to seek solace in God, and reminded that her experience has been shared by the mothers of great religious figures­Maryam, mother of Jesus, and Amina, mother of Mohammed.**

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**1 280 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (19713-1995)**

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**5. Hold onto this advice; Think it over.**

**You are a woman.**

**Modesty becomes a woman.**

***Abdulbakim S. Yahya and SaidaYabya-Othman***

1. **My child, let me explain.**

**Hearken to these words of mine. Listen with care;**

**Hold them fast in your memory.**

1. **You are grown up now, dear; That much you know.**

**You can distinguish**

**The good from the bad.**

1. **Keep away from trivialities,**

**From things of no consequence.**

**Observe sharply, oh daughter of mine, The dangers you need to avoid.**

1. **Distinguish wisely**

**The good from 'the bad.**

**Do not let the world outwit you; Do not let it drive you down.**

1. Think about your past

***FROM* HUSH, MY CHILD, HUSH: OF ONIONS AND FRANKINCENSE + 281**

And now your present,

And thank God that you are alive today, That you did not die in your mother's womb.

1. When I became pregnant You grew in my womb.

Little did I know

What was going on.

1. In my womb you were Installed as if a machine. Your shape was invisible; Nor did you see yourself.
2. From my back you grew, A drop of seed.

With God's help

You penetrated the womb

1. In the womb you settled With care and no impediment So narrow was the passage

You would never have imagined

1. There in safety you stayed While I did my daily chores. A month passed of wondering, What's this in me?
2. I became sick,

Throwing up every hour. Pandemonium at home, What throes! '

1. This herb and that, Herbs in basketfuls; Parents wailing,

Our child is ailing

1. No doctor could In those old times

Correctly tell

How far gone you were.

1. **Grandma was your midwife, Or it could be your neighbor. Observe your granddaughter: What's ailing her?**

**282 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

1. **Thus did I find out**

**That I was pregnant.**

**From the dates I was given My parents discovered it too.**

1. **I began counting the days; Wished the months were screws That I could turn**

**To hasten the womb.**

1. **And that is how it was: The home hater skelter; All night I cried;**

**Everyone in turmoil.**

**19.1 was counting days and months Like a coconut-climber;**

**Counting a coconut harvest**

**Into the gunny sack.**

1. **The first, the second,**

**And the third, the monstrous month—No roaming during that month;**

**One must take it easy.**

1. **A difficult month it is:**

**Heavy duties one must forgo. Miscarriage is dangerous;**

**It may bring dire consequences.**

1. **In those days, especially, Those days of old,**

**Women did not have easy access To doctors' home visits.**

1. **Pretty soon, the fourth month Arrived on time,**

**And the fifth month came,**

**When something moved inside me.**

1. **When the sixth month came, I began to feel**

***FROM* HUSH, MY CHILD, HUSH: OF ONIONS AND FRANKINCENSE + 283**

**A scurrying in my belly.**

**What is this motion I feel?**

1. **Day and night I cried. My parents admonished me: Daughter of ours, they said, You must calm down.**

**26.1 cry out for mother, Who is full of compassion:**

**There's something moving inside me, mother. And what could she do?**

1. **She sought help from grandmother: Go see my daughter.**

**Please conjure up something**

**To relieve her distress.**

1. **Into the room grandmother came, A cup in her hand,**

**And she massaged my belly,**

**With what, I knew not.**

1. **1 did not realize then**

**That was oil, not coconut but sesame. She sat me in her lap**

**And looked into my eyes.**

1. **She massaged me with oil. She dried my tears.**

**The baby is moving**

**Inside your belly.**

1. **This is how it is, dear one, The state of pregnancy.**

**It is God's decree;**

**On Him we must rely for help**

1. **We all went through this, Even Eve, the mother of us all, Who was used to giving birth Day in day out.**
2. **Except Lady Maryam On whom, we understand, God Almighty showered His blessings.**

**284 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

1. **She was a date, Much like a toffee. The baby moved and settled**

**Inside her.**

1. **She became confused And filled with shame; Hid herself indoors,**

**Not knowing what to do.**

1. **And so Jesus was born, And she was dishonored, Though she was innocent; So God revealed.**
2. **He sent down a revelation To inform the people**

**The child was a prophet**

**Sent by Him.**

1. **Amina, daughter of Wahabu, Mother of the beloved;**

**She bore Mohammed,**

**The Prophet Esteemed.**

1. **The day he was born His glow spread wide, Filling the room**

**With divine light.**

1. **So do not feel, dear, That you are alone.**

**Do not feel worried. Believe my words.**

1. **This she would tell me Whenever she came to me, And many words of counseling Did she pour on me.**
2. Months soon go by, So people say.

***FROM* HUSH, MY CHILD, HUSH: OF ONIONS AND FRANKINCENSE + 285**

Often I donned my sandals To go to the bathroom.

1. So passed the seventh month, And the eighth.

And the ninth glorious month Soon arrived.

1. So anxious was my mother: "This is her month."

And so day and night

She prayed for me.

1. Bring the herbs to the boil; Keep them ready in pots.

With asafoetida **I** was'fumigated, And with black cumin seeds.

1. I was confined to bed And kept out of sight.

My grandmother was nearby, Reciting from the Qur'an.

1. The sitting room overflowed With concerned relations

And friendly neighbors galore; Like a fete it was!

1. This gathering was on purpose, And the purpose was

To muffle

A loud cry from inside.

1. The cry would be piercing Of the mother-to-be

At the time of delivery.

May God help her.

1. She is inexperienced, they said, Never gave birth before.

It won't be easy for her;

Believe me.

1. **The time ordained for me came To obey God's wishes.**

**The pain was not as dreadful**

**As I thought it would be.**

1. **When I screamed in pain, All cried out in unison**

**To prevent my cries**

**From pervading the neighborhood.**

1. **These customs of old Were full of wisdom,**

**Replete with value.**

**Give them deep thought.**

1. **And I gave birth to you. You were safe and well.**

**The women were speechless With happiness and joy.**

***Translated by Abdulhakim S. Yahya***

***Miria Obote*SPEECH ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

**Uganda 1984 English**

**Miria Obote lived a most private life in a public setting, as the wife of Apollo Milton Obote, the first prime minister of independent Uganda (1962-1966) and later its president (1966-1971 and 1980-1985). Born in a suburb of Kampala in 1936, she graduated from Gayaza High School and attended Makerere College, then took a secretarial course in London that eventually led to employment with the United Nations and the Ugandan Consulate in New York, where she met Milton Obote. She returned to Uganda to marry the young prime minister in 1963.**

**Miria Obote—known to supporters as "Mama" Obote—was one of the most soft spoken among Uganda's first ladies. She *was* a Muganda who had married a Lanjo, in a political climate of distrust between the Baganda and the Langi. The Obotes' much-celebrated marriage marked a period of cooperation between the two groups, which unraveled a few years later when Milton Obote abolished Uganda's traditional rulers, including the king of Buganda, and declared himself president. Women's participation in politics was still limited in the early years of independence, but Miria Obote is known to have advocated for local activism.**

**286 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995),**

**She was the first honorary president of the Uganda Association of Women's Organizations (UAW% formed in 1966 as a rival to the Uganda National Council of Women (UNCW). She joined her husband in exile in Tanzania after he was deposed by Idi Amin, returning to Uganda during his brief and controver­sial second term as president, from 1980 to 1985, when this speech was made. In it, Miria Obote pays homage to Ugandan women's role in the independence movement and their long struggle for equality, and highlights issues familiar to women around the world, including day care, maternity leave, and equity in polit­ical representation.**

**SPEECH ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY + 287**

**After a second long period of exile, Miria Obote returned to Uganda after her husband's death in October 2005, when President Yoweri Museveni surprised many by holding a state funeral for his former bitter rival. She went on to assume leadership of Milton Obote's political party, the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), and in the election of February 2006, she became the first woman to run for president in Uganda.**

*Florence Ebila and Margaret Macpherson*

Your Excellency, The President of the Republic of Uganda, Cabinet Ministers, Your Excellencies, The Hon. Madam, Chairperson, National Council of Women, Invited Guests, My fellow Women,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this most important occa­sion. I am particularly happy that for the first timc in the history of this coun­try, Uganda has joined hands with the International Community in observing this occasion. This is also the most representative gathering of women in this country, since liberation and, indeed, in the history of Uganda. As a woman, I share the same concerns and problems that any woman faces in this country and the world over.

As you are aware, today we are here to celebrate International Women's Day (IWD). Some of you may well ask, What is International Women's Day? It is therefore fitting to remind us that IWD is a day born of the struggles by women to be taken as equal partners in all aspects of development. It [was] started in 1907 by an International Congress, which took place at Stuttgart in Germany, acknowledging that women had not been given a fair deal and there­fore urging each country which [had] participated in the Congress to intensify their work to support women's struggle for socio-economic, socio-cultural, and political equality. In 1910 North American countries recognized Women's Day. In 1911 Germany and Austria recognized March 8th as International Women's Day. Since then many countries around the world have recognized IWD.

In 1913 International Women's day was fixed for March 8th, but for several years many countries celebrated Women's Day on different dates. In 1975, the United Nations, of which Uganda is a very active member, declared the Inter­national Women's Year. The U.N. further declared 1975-1985 to be the decade for women, and also that March 8th be a day on which all the member nations should recognize and honour women. Beyond this, it is also a day on which

people all over the world stop to reflect on how far society has tapped the potential of woman in development.

**288 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

Before today, Uganda had not done anything to recognize and honour woman on this day, because of the recent historical problems of this country. We are therefore grateful that IWD is today given that recognition. Under the circumstances it is fitting that the first celebration of International Women's Day, in Uganda, should begin at the State House.

While it is appreciated that the women of Uganda did not have to struggle to vote and to get equal pay for equal work, it is also a fact that there is still a lot Ugandan women have to achieve. It is statistically acknowledged that there are more women in Uganda than men. The question then is, why is it that women are not adequately represented at various government levels and other bodies?There is no negative aspect of the history of our country which has not touched women intimately. The women of this country supported their men in the struggle for independence. During the reign of terror, it was the women who were the comfort and backbone of the homes when men were imprisoned and murdered. Many women lost their husbands, sons, brothers, and relatives. Some even lost their lilies. Ugandan women participated at various levels in the liberation of our country from the murderous regime of the seventies.

The Ugandan rural woman plays a most significant part in the economy of Uganda. She is the major producer of both food and cash crops. She is a food processor; she is a wife, mother, nurse, and comforter. She works more than fif­teen hours each day. Yet if she wanted to improve her farm or business, she would have no access to a bank loan. This is because she is uneducated; and the land she farms belongs to the husband. Yet the bank insists on some form of security before it can give her a loan. She is often not recognized by the field-worker as a vitatrecipient of modern farming methods. If the field officer meets her at all, in most cases he or she will talk to her about home economics only.

Let it be understood that the demand for more attention being given to women's issues is not out of selfishness on our part but rathex out of an urgent need to achieve equality so that our country can leap ahead in development with two healthy legs rather than limp with one good male leg .and one bad female leg. We believe that no meaningful development can be achieved without recog­nition, encouragement, and participation of more than half of the population.

One does not require many examples to show what we are trying to point out. There are no women in the Cabinet. There is only one woman Member of Par­liament. The number of women on Boards of various other bodies is minimal. There are no women judges. At Makerere University, there is only one woman professor: There is only one woman permanent secretary and three under­secretaries. It is ho wonder that the women of Uganda feel they have not been appreciated or taken seriously enough. The Ugandan community should-try to address itself specifically to women as an important part of the population, espe­cially during this time of rehabilitatidn and reconstruction of the country.

The women of this country recognize and appreciate the efforts government

is putting in trying to raise the status of women through the Ministry of Cul­ture and Community Development. We recommend the work the Ministry is doing through the National Council of Women. This working relationship has enabled-the National Council of Women to set up a number of development projects particularly for rural areas. Good as it is, and although much has been achieved in this way, it may be in order for me to say that there are bottlenecks still slowing down the efforts of the society in trying to exploit more fully the potentials of women of this country. May I therefore say here that the consen­sus opinion of the womenfolk is that Government create a separate Ministry to deal exclusively with women's affairs. . . . This would initiate improved and more realistic focus on women's activities with an assured budget to enable implementation of programs and adequate liaison with women's organizations and groups. It would create a national machinery that would reach even the remotest rural woman who is not normally represented on National Planning Boards and whose economic contribution remains unacknowledged.

**SPEECH ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY + 289**

We are happy to note that the Government has always provided equal opportunities for both boys and girls in the field of education. However, we are disappointed by the high rate of school dropouts among girls. This is due to cultural attitudes, which force parents to withdraw girls from school when there is no money for fees. In the rural areas, a father would sell a bull to get a boy back to school but would rarely do so for a girl. We suggest that to remedy the situation, plans should commence towards the introduction of free primary school education for all. We recommend the establishment of village polytech­nics and other vocational training institutions. We also support the revival of an all-out adult literacy campaign by the Ministry of Culture and Community Development to stamp out illiteracy, of which the majority of victims are women, particularly in the rural areas.

We welcome the immunization program that the Government has intro­duced with international assistance. However, we know that many people still die from lack of medical facilities. Mothers die in childbirth due to lack of proper care. There is need for maternity hospitals, and the upgrading of the nursing profession to ensure greater efficiency. Better working conditions and higher pay would revive the morale of the nursing personnel and reduce inci­dents of negligence .and unprofessional behaviour.

My fellow women, I would like us to address our minds to the family as a central unit in any society. There is no doubt that there has been a weakening in the ties that used to bind families together. There is a moral degeneration in our society, which has culminated into "Bayayeism" and loose morals which have pervaded every fibre of our nation. *[Bayay6 is* a word used in East Africa to describe unemployed, often homeless young men who live on the fringes of urban society.] The holding of the family•together is a joint responsibility of both parents—the man and the woman. To absc6nd from that responsibility is to contribute to the degeneration of our society. We all know, "Charity begins at home." Children are the responsibility of both parents and the family is the

most important unit in the life of a child. It is up to the parents to bring up their children in an atmosphere of love and emotional security and this requires love, integrity, honesty and the presence of both parents if they are alive. It is said that: If there is righteousness in the heart; there will be beauty in character; If there is beauty in character; there will be harmony *in* the *family* home; If there is harmony in the home; there will be order in the Nation; When there is order in the Nation, there will be peace in the World. Every parent is aware of how difficult it is to bring up children in these turbulent times, but we must neither despair nor be complacent, because at all times we must have hope and think of the future generations.

**290 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

The step taken by government to assist widows and orphans is greatly appreci­ated. However, there is still need for government, for religious institutions and other bodies to mount a campaign to protect even further the widows and orphans of this country. We know of.incidents where relatives have turned widows out of their homes and on occasion deprived them access to their children. We know that there is a law of succession, which entitles a widow to stay in her house after her husband's death, but this law is either not known or not complied with.

The following four points among others also require serious attention and action by Government: Firstly, establishment of Day Care Centres at places of work is vital. Families, especially those of the working class, are experiencing problems in catering for the care of children of pre-nursery going age, and this has resulted in accidents in the•ome and improper up-bringing of our children. While there is positive action on the part of the NCW to establish Day Care Centres in every urban setting, this effort however is limited by lack of funds.

Secondly, while we are aware that maternity leave arrangements are extended to all women public employees, we are informed that in the teaching profession, unmarried women teachers are still denied this arrangement. We consider that this rather unfortunate policy calls for redress. Furthermore, women would appreciate longer maternity leave than the paid 45 days. Women are aware that maternity leave arrangements are made based on the considera­tion that the mother requires sufficient rest and also that the child at this deli­cate stage requires total care.

Thirdly, on the political field, we call upon all able-bodied women to opt for leadership position in politics and even to opt for candidature at general elections. Here we would like to call upon political parties to sponsor women candidates so that in this way we tap more women contributions in decision-making circles and at other levels.

Fourthly, the World Conference on Women is designed to mark the end of the Women's Decade iii 1985. It is during this conference that meaningful stock-taking and, in particular, resolutions and programming that will lead to total elimination of all discrimination'against women will take place. Women of Uganda therefore should send a big contingent of delegates to attend the Con­ference to accord them the opportunity of sharing ideas and experiences with their counterparts in other countries.

As we recognize the efforts of all the women of the world in the struggle for. social justice and equality, we must resolve that this day in Uganda be a day on which the Uganda women's solidarity is born. Let us go out of here with a determination to have a united voice to articulate our aspirations for the good of our country regardless of our political, tribal or religious beliefs.

**THE LANGUAGE OF HEALERS + 291**

We resolve henceforth to be a part of the International Women's Move­ment. We need to put Uganda securely on the map of the world.

***Queen Namunyala*THE LANGUAGE OF HEALERS**

Uganda 1988 Lusamia

Queen Namunyala lives in a small village in Eastern Uganda, near the border with Kenya. At the time of recording this piece in 1988 she gave her age as fifty-two. A widow with no formal education, Namunyala is a funeral singer who *leads* and manages her own singing group. She performs with the group and composes all of its songs, many of which are recorded live at funerals. A female pioneer in a field dominated by male performers, Namunyala is a celebrity among her people because her songs are bold, challenging, and outspoken. They are meant to expose the problems faced by her people, especially in connection with underdevelop­ment and harmful cultural practices.

Singing at funerals is a widespread practice among the Baluhya community, of which the Basamia, Namunyaia's people, are a subgroup, living on both sides of the Kenya-Uganda border. The singers perform not only dirges, but also topical songs about life and its many trials. The songs are original compositions;written in response to a specific death and referring to a particular individual, family, and community. The main intention of the performances is both to console the bereaved and other mourners and to help them pass the long hours of the com­munal, wake, which is a necessary part of the funeral rites.

The song included here was performed at the funeral for the mother ofJackee Batanda, who recorded it. This satirical text spares neither traditional nor so-called modern medicine. The Ugandan medical services are organized in a kind of tiered system, ranging from village dispensaries through health centers to district and national hospitals. The staff running these different treatment centers have varying levels of qualifications and skills, and it is rare to find a full-time doctor at an insti­tution lower than a hospital. To the ordinary person in the countryside, however, all personnel at these centers are *basawo,* or dOctors. The diagnostic and treatment facilities are rarely satisfactory, even at the biggest hospitals. So the traditional healer remains popular as the last resort for people who have despaired of the infe­rior medical services. The problem with this, as Queen Namunyala suggests, is that traditional practice is itself infested with fast-talking quacks.

*Austin Bukenya and Jackee Budesta Batanda*

**The disease that attacked my mother came like this; The disease that attacked my mother came like this: Fellow Basamia, the disease that came without warning Attacked my mother in the head and the chest.**

**I took her to the health center at Buyinja, And saw a doctor called Badru.**

**Badru examined her**

**And told me to take her to the health center At Lutalo.**

**On arrival at the health center at Lutolo, We saw a doctor called Ojiambo.**

**Ojiambo examined her**

**And he told us to take her to the health center At Nambwere.**

**When we got to the health center at Nambwere, A doctor called Syambi examined her**

**And told us that she had a bad infection in the chest. Then he said we should take her to the health center At Lumino.**

**When we got to the health center at Lumina,**

**A doctor called Nambogo examined her**

**And also told us that my mother's chest was badly infected. And he also told us to take her to the health center**

**At Masafu.**

**When we arrived at the health center at Masafu, We found there a doctor called Mulijo.**

**Mulijo examined her.**

**He told us that my mother's chest was in a sorry state. He too advised us to take her to**

**Dabani Hospital.**

**When we got to Dabani Hospital,**

**The doctors examined her,**

**And they told us that my mother's ailment Required traditional medicine.**

**292 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

**On that advice I took my mother home, And from home I picked up**

**CREATING IN THE MOTHER-TONGUE + 293**

**Two thousand Uganda shillings**

**And gave them to the traditional healer. The traditional healer told me**

**That it was evil spirits afflicting my mother.**

**So we had to slaughter a fowl for Were [God] And another fowl for his friend.**

**But the sickness was getting worse.**

**While we were there,**

**More traditional healers came with bombo herbs. Others came with other herbs, and banana leaves, On which they made my mother sit.**

***Eeeeeee, eeeeeee, eeeeeee, sara sara.* Knock, knock, water.**

**We have chased them away. Power, power.**

**Let me tell you about the tongues of diviners; Let me tell you about the language of diviners: We call them drug-addicted crooks.**

**They twist words around**

**They distort words in order to confuse us, And take our money**

**While the disease spreads.**

**They do not cure any disease.**

***Translated by Jackee Budesta Batanda***

***Penina Muhando Mlama*CREATING IN THE MOTHER—TONGUE**

**Tanzania 1990 English**

**Playwright, performer, and educator Penina Mama (known also through her writing as Penina Muhando or Penina Muhando Mlama) was born in 1948, the second oldest in a family of four boys and three girls. From early on, she devel­oped strong family, ethnic, and national cultural identities, which became impor-**

**tant in her later academic and creative work. Following her early education in the Morogoro and Dodoma regions of Tanzania, she received undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees from the University of Dar es Salaam, where she went on to hold a variety of academic and administrative positions, including professor and chair of the Department of Theatre Arts, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and Chief Academic Officer of the university. She is now the executive director of the Forum for African Women Educationalists, a Nairobi-based, pan-African organization that advocates for the education of women and girls.**

**As a creative writer, Penina Mlama came to prominence with the successive publication of many plays, including *Hatia* (Guilt, 1972), *Tambueni Haki Zetu* (Recognize Our Rights, 1973), *Heshima Yangu* (My Honour, 1974), *Talaka Si Mke Wangu* (I Divorce You, 1974), *Nguzo Mama* (The Main Pillar, 1982), and *Lint; Ubani* (There Is an Antidote, 1984). She also collaborated with two other women to produce *Harakati zaUkombozi* (Struggles for Liberation, 1982), and was one of the founders of the Paukwa Theatre Group, which produced the nationally acclaimedAyubu (Job, 1984). She champions African orature by using it in various forms in her plays. The plays deal with issues of gender, women's rights, education, cultural tensions, and economic and political liberation struli: es, and particularly highlight the inability of the postcolonial state to alleviate poverty and foster true development. She attacks cultural practices that victimize women, while endorsing those that support women's aspirations and expression. In addition to writing plays, Mlama has often performed with the Paukwa Theatre Group, and can be seen on film in *Mama Tumaini* (Tumaini's Mother), where she portrays a woman struggling to find economic and social independence.**

**Penina Mlama is a pioneer of the Theatre for Development Movement, whiCh employs theater as a tool for community education and empowerment. In her 1983 thesis, *Tanzania Traditional Theatre as a Pedagogical Institution,* Mlama argued against the Eurocentric view that had long denied the existence and value of indigenous African theatrical forms and experiences. In her 1991 book, *Culture and Development: The Popular Theatre Approach in Africa,* she documented and analysed the early work of the Theatre for Development movement. During the early 1990s, she helped to found programs for young people, notably the TUSEME ("Let Us Speak Out") program and festival, seeking to empower girls to overcome gender-based obstacles to their education and personal development.**

**While Penina Mlama has written on culture and education in the English lan­guage, all of her plays are in Kiswahili, a choice she has identified as both aes­thetic and political. In "Creating in the Mother-Tongue: The Challenges to the African Writer Today," Mlama deals with an issue that has been addressed by sev­eral other African writers, notably the distinguished Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thioneo, who those to abandon English in favor of his native Gikuyu, and defended the choice in his 1986 book, *Decolonising the Mind.* In Penina Mlama's analysis, the choice to write in an African language is informed by a variety of historical and contemporary realities—including underdevelopment, poverty, loss of cultural identities, illiteracy, and neocolonialism—and has broad ramifications for both the writer and her audience.**

***Amandina Lihamba***

**294 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

I have chosen to speak on creating in the mother-tongue not because I myself write in Kiswahili and therefore want to preach to those who do not write in African indigenous languages to follow the example. Indeed, one may argue that my choice to write in Kiswahili has been greatly assisted by the historical fact that my country has Kiswahili as a national language. Neither am I going to dwell on my personal experiences in terms of the use of an African language in the actual process of creating my literary works.

**CREATING IN THE MOTHER-TONGUE + 295**

Creating in the mother-tongue involves an issue that has been debated in African literature circles for several decades. Numerous viewpoints have been advanced by writers, critics, and linguists about whether or why African writers ought or ought not write in their mother-tongues (see Petersen). I will not bore you by repeating arguments which have been sufficiently aired elsewhere.

I speak of creating in the mother-tongue because the problem has not been resolved, and, therefore, the debate has not been concluded. We have not yet completed the task before us. Creating in an African language poses a number of challenges to the African writer today, and no serious African writer can ignore them.

From previous debate, we know that there is no questioning the right of African languages to serve as the media for communication and literary expres­sion among African peoples. But we are also aware of the historical forces that have denied or suffocated that right and imposed English, French, or Por­tuguese, as well as the colonial and neocolonial conditions that have ensured the continual dominance of these foreign languages not only in African literature but in other types of communication.

We are familiar with, the existing division among writers and critics on whether or not the African writer can write in his or her mother-tongue. Argu­ments against the choice of African languages and the consequent preference for foreign languages have included the clamor for an international audience. And indeed, the literary production infrastructures (including schools, publish­ers, book distributors, literary awards and prizes) make the international audi­ence a coveted goal of the African writer and the foreign language an inevitable tool to reach that goal. A stronger explanation for the choice of the foreign lan­guage is the foreign-dependent, socio-economic structure in which the writer and the entire African continent are trapped. Within that structure are the class alliances which determine the writer's choice • of audience and, with that, the choice of language as well. It has been argued that many African writers are writing for the elite rather than for the common men and women who form the majority of the African population. Thus, they choose English, French, or Por­tuguese, the languages of the elite, as opposed to African languages of the com­mon populations (see Ngugi).

Many obstacles to writing in the mother-tongue for the writers who would genuinely wish to do so have also been cited. The existence of many African

**languages in one nation makes some writers' mother-tongues the languages of a very small minority. Ethnically-based political strife makes other writers' mother-tongues the languages of the oppressor. And indeed many African gov­ernments do not have the political courage to resolve the question of indige­nous languages and instead promote the assumed neutrality of English, French, or Portuguese in the name of national unity; which often does not exist in any case. Forces of such governments have often been quick to brand writers who have written in their mother-tongues as "tribal" and "anti-national unity." (Some people have used that criterion to criticize Ngugi wa Thiong'o on his Kikuyu plays *Ngahika Ndeenda* and *Maitu 1Vjugira.)* Such pressures have forced many African writers to follow the dictates of the status quo and to continue using foreign languages in their creative writings.**

**296 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

**Others have argued that, due to brief or inexistent histories, many African indigenous languages are linguistically underdeveloped and, therefore, ill-equipped to express the scientific and technological concepts of contemporary African society. Considering the continual underdevelopment of Africa, one may ask what it is that is so scientifically and technologically developed that it can exhaust the expressive possibilities of languages. A reminder is also sounded that the same African languages regarded as inadequate have carried from one generation to another the great African civilizations, including their masterful literary creations such as epics, poetry, and songs (see Chu and Skinner). The same African languages were also good enough to translate the Hebrew folktales of the Bible in the early twentieth century, but they are now accused of being lin­guistically inadequate for African writers' literary creations. These same lan­guages remain the communication media for the majority of Africans today. In the use of these African languages, these Africans are describing, analyzing, and interpreting the contemporary African society, whatever its complexities may be.**

**Some writers have pointed out that they have a handicap in using their mother-tongues, because they have become alienated from their own ethnic roots. Indeed, sometimes one comes across people who have grown up in environments, espe­cially urban areas, which 'curtail their chances to master their mother-tongues. Sometimes, though, the mastery of an indigenous African language is an attitude of mind on the part of an individual or his/her parents. At times, writers them­selves often have contradictory attitudes ,toward African languages.**

**The arguments are numerous, and African writers take different stands on the issues raised. Their choice to write in the mother-tongue or not is also deter­mined by the different forces that each individual writer confronts. We know also that more African writers use the foreign languages than the indigenous ones. I am not arguing that contributions should be ignored just for the sake of pushing for African languages, although I would like to draw attention to the significant numbers of African writers who are writing in their mother-tongues today.**

**But the choice to create in the mother-tongue is, as it has been in the past, a difficult choice. It is difficult because the problems raised during the past three decades have not been resolved. Indeed, many of those problems have been**

**intensified by the socio-economic realities of the African continent. For exam­ple, ethnic differences have intensified in many nations due to the realization that ethnicity has fostered the unfair distribution of political and economic power. Also, through the intensification of capitalism in Africa the control over the book production industry has fallen increasingly into the grips of multina­tional companies whose economic interest is served by the promotion of the international languages. Failing national economies have thwarted local book production ventures established, especially in the early 1970s, to encourage, among other things, writing in local languages. (The East African Literature Bureau which has now collapsed is one case in mind.) National language poli­cies for most of our nations are still undefined.**

**The choice to write in an African language is often a choice for obscurity and a renunciation of the international limelight that writing in English, French, or Portuguese could offer a writer. As a writer in Kiswahili, for exam­ple, I have many times experienced how a foreigner's interest in my work has been switched off once I admit that I write in Kiswahili. Many good works in indigenous African languages remain unknown outside their national borders. In Tanzania, for example, over three hundred novels, plays, and short stories had been published by 1988** *(see* **Bertoncini). The fact that the authors of these works are not much known outside Tanzania is not due to the poor quality of their writing because some of them are outstanding. It is because literature in Kiswahili is not given prominence internationally. The same is true for litera­ture in Shona, Zulu, Yoruba, and other African languages.**

**For an African writer, the choice to write in the mother-tongue is not merely a whim. Those who choose to write in an African language belong to a class of writers who are willing to take a risk, writers who respond to the challenges posed by the realities of our African society today.**

**The challenge begins with a writer's re-examination of his or her role in the Africa of today. We know the role the writer has assumed in the past: in the struggle for political independence, in proving to the colonial master that Africa has her own Shakespeares, Shaws, Eliots, and Molieres, in displaying the rich African cultural heritage and civilization whose existence the colonial mas­ter had attempted to deny in promoting literary talent, and so on (see Ngara). But what is the role of the writer in Africa today?**

**Here we need to remind ourselves that we are talking about an Africa thatis ripped apart by an economic, social, and cultural crisis. An Africa where poverty has increased to frightening proportions, driving the majority of her people to the point of starvation. Ours is an Africa where many of our leaders have sold our countries wholesale to international capital, giving the control over our economies and consequently our welfare, indeed, our lives, to the IMF or the World Bank. We are talking about an Africa where the ruling classes are proud, instead of ashamed, of the blatant exploitation of the common people through international alliances and by use of means that defy description. It is an Africa where new problems arise before we have had time to understand how we got**

**CREATING IN THE MOTHER-TONGUE + 297**



into the old ones. It is an Africa where all types of political systems—capitalist, socialist, feudalist, civilian, military—have produced the same results: poverty. The signs are clear in the setbacks we are suffering even in the small achieve­ments of our previous efforts at development. We have built hospitals that now stand without drugs, factories that run below capacity for lack of raw materials or spare parts, schools that are increasingly unaffordable to many, service struc­tures whose operational systems are determined by the changing tactics of the corrupt officials. Malnutrition, war, famine, and epidemics are becoming an African character trait. And in the midst of all this a very few people are amass­ing untold wealth, often without a drop of sweat.

**298 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

What is the role of the writer in such a context? What does the writer create in relation to all this? A friend told me recently that it is time for African writ­ers to describe flowers and clouds.

Many African writers now find it more difficult than ever before not to say something about the pathetic situation of African people. In his or her role as a communicator of ideas and feelings, the writer does not want to stand by and let this humiliating era continue. It is also extremely difficult for the writer not to take the side of the suffering majority. After all, many times, the writer himself or herself belongs to that category. The writer finds it difficult to suppress the urge to use the pen to communicate his or her people's anger and frustration. The writer often chooses to announce her or his position, or to conscientize and to mobilize his or her audience into understanding, analyzing their plight. Even though the situation seems to be so hopeless, the writer feels the need to tell the audience not to despair, and the bolder writer exhorts them to stand up and fight. But what chances does this writer have in reaching his or her audience?

If we take the book as the writer's communication medium, we know such media do not effectively reach the common population. Enough has been said to show that the mass media are not as effective as we are often made to believe. External control as well as financial and infrastructural problems have pre­vented radio, film, television, and the print media from reaching the majority of the population, especially in the rural areas (see Boafo). The cutbacks in the service sector adopted by the current IMF and World Bank controlled economies are worsening the situation.

African written literature has continued to be bogged down by the problems faced by the mass media in general. Limited .and inadequate publishing and distribution systems have kept the audience of African writers very small. Many times the writer has to cling to the school audience, using all means to get his or her books into the school syllabus, for schools often represent the only sure market, although it is increasingly affected by cutbacks in government educa­tional spending. Likewise, subsidized libraries and book distribution systems are forced to reduce their services and thus their audiences. Adult literacy cir­cles have repeatedly lamented that it is difficult for graduates of literacy cam­paigns to maintain their literacy due to the non-availability of a literature that would allow them to keep up the reading skills.

**The communication sector has already awoken to the inadequacy of the mass media, as manifested by the ongoing search for grassroots-based com­munication media. Efforts in this direction involve not only giving a grassroots character to radio, film, or the print media; there has also been an increasing recognition of the importance of indigenous communication media at the local level (see Moemeka). Interpersonal communication, the traditional arts such** *as* **dance, story-telling, song, and poetry are being accorded a communication role once denied them and often overshadowed by the externally controlled mass media. Many development programs in adult education, health, environment, women's projects, and so on now use the indigenous media, especially oral liter­ary and performing art forms in communication for development. For example, the "Theatre for Development" movement has gained considerable significance in Africa during the last ten years because its utilization of indigenous African communication media has widened the opportunity to involve grassroots com­munities in communicating, analyzing, and solving their development prob­lems (see Kamlongera and Mlama). Furthermore, village radio discussion groups, rural newspapers, educational pamphlets, and posters are encouraged in order to popularize, demystify, and democratize the process of communication.**

**CREATING IN THE MOTHER-TONGUE + 299**

**These efforts have brought the indigenous languages to the fore because, by working at the grassroots level, one automatically works with local languages. People's participation is heightened by the use of the languages with which they are most familiar. For the majority of African rural populations, this means the indigenous languages. In recent years, development agents have adopted a more tolerant view toward African indigenous communication media, at the center of which are the indigenous languages.**

**African written literature, though, seems to lag behind these other media in the attempt to reach the grassroots. If African literature were to seriously address itself to the question of reaching the grassroots, then the question of African languages could not possibly be avoided. How can an African writer today address the African masses without using their African languages? We are all aware that, even though our countries have maintained English, French, or Portuguese as national languages for over twenty years, these are not the lan­guages of the people. The majority of all African countries' populations still communicate in the indigenous languages which are their mother-tongues. The writer, in a way, seems to have no choice but to write in these languages. Writ­ers who use languages foreign to their audiences also place themselves outside the community and operate as outsiders, as people who can reach their audi­ences only through translation.**

**Efforts to popularize African written literature, especially in the rural areas, have been few end far between. Theater is an exception because theatrical cre­ations call for performances and thus have a better chance of reaching wider audiences, including the common people. In the theater, more use has been made of African languages than in novels or poetry. This is due to the proxim­ity of the audience and the immediacy of the need to communicate effectively.**

**Indeed, there is a trend among contemporary communication and development agents toward paying more attention to oral literary and performing forms because such people recognize the immediate and wide impact these forms of communication can have in involving rural populations as communicators and as members of an audience. The current drive to ensure people's participation in development programs and projects has found an ally in the use of indigenous African oral literary and performing forms.**

**300 + LATETwErrrrEni CEN'T'URY (1970-1995)**

**Because of my own involvement in theater for development, I have received many requests from various development agencies to conduct theater for devel­opment programs in rural areas. None of them have ever inquired about my written plays in relation to grassroots development work. And, apart from the schools, I have never found any of my published plays in the villages where I have worked or visited. During the last ten years, therefore, I have operated as an artist with two faces—one as a playwright for urban audiences and the other as an oral creator and performer for the rural audiences. Of course, urban audi­ences have the advantage of enjoying the oral creations as well, for orality is a characteristic of Tanzanian theater.**

**The increasing importance accorded to oral forms as a means of involving the masses in the development process defines a trend that may well be strengthened by the current culture and development decade that is promoting cultural identities. One wonders whether these initiatives will not soon over­shadow the written literature, especially since the obstacles faced by written literature in reaching the African majority seem to be more and more insur­mountable. We should also be aware of the fact that these oral literary and performative forms are still alive in Africa. Previous claims that modernity had killed them were** *exaggerated. In fact,* **they have -continued to be the *major* communication media in large areas that have not been reached by the modern media. If oral literary forms are to be promoted in this way, African languages are certain to gain new significance in the African development process.**

**African writers may, therefore, find themselves being dragged into the African lisquage issue without much choice, unless they want to restrict them­selves to an elite or urban audience. More creative writers, however, May want to voluntarily face this challenge by addressing the African language question now**

**If we regard the role of the writer in Africa today from a different angle and say that the African writer is the man or woman of culture, one who preserves, rejuvenates, and guides his or her society's perception of an acceptable way of life, its morals, values and attitudes, its integrity and identity, we raise another set of challenges and questions.**

**The first question is: what is African culture? It is not an exaggeration to say that most Africans cannot describe what represents culture in their own nations today. What is it that represents our way of perceiving and doing things, our identity as a people? Although the revival, promotion, and assertion of African culture represented rallying points for our political leaders during the struggle for independence, only lip service has been paid to the assertion of an African**

**cultural identity during the first twenty or thirty years of independence. And there seems to be little concern over the added onslaught on African culture by contemporary capitalist and imperialist forces. The African way of life has been left to live, adapt, or die in proportion to its own ability to accommodate or fight incompatible foreign influences. At the same time, however, foreign culture necessary to the fostering of foreign-controlled socio-economic struc­tures has been nurtured in Africa through such tools. as television, films, the arts, education, and religion. While our governments have continued to give African culture an insignificant place in their development strategies, they have often aided the influx of foreign cultural influences and their negative impact on the African identity. Because of the increased entrenchment of capitalism in the last twenty years, Africa is increasingly becoming one culture with the rest of the capitalist world—a place where people's perceptions of the accepted way of life are guided by economic gain, and the commoditization of every­thing, including people. Values based on humanity and the common good inherent in some indigenous African cultures are rapidly being replaced by values based on money and individual gain. Indeed, the way of life of the ordi­nary *African man* and *woman is* one *basically of exploitation,* oppression, *and* humiliation. It is a life where morals and values have often given way to tactics of mere survival.**

**CREATING IN THE MOTHER-TONGUE + 301**

**We are talking of an Africa of lost, split, or confused identities. The confu­sion is obvious, even at national levels where governments have not yet reached a point of defining culture. It is common for African governments not to have cultural policies, and many limit their half-hearted attempts at promoting African culture to traditional dances, museums, antiquities, and, surprisingly, football, even though it is not a sport indigenous to Africa. Culture also seems to be the one domain that governments never know where to place in ministe­rial formations. A look at the African ministerial map sees culture placed together with other areas ranging from education, social welfare, labor, youth, women, community development, information, sports, and so on.**

**In Tanzania, for example, culture has been shifted to nine different min­istries during the past twenty-eight years an average of a new ministry every three years. No wonder there is not much to show in terms of an identifiable African culture today.**

**Writing for the African people today is writing for a people who have largely lost their perception of what constitutes "African," their ability to determine or influence their own way of life, their indigenous values and attitudes, and their identity as a people. One wonders whether there is much hope of changing this situation, even in light of current efforts by the United Nations and UNESCO to integrate culture into development, as the declaration of an international decade for Culture and Development (UNESCO: *The Cultural Dimension of Development).* Like the previous development strategies, this new wave (or development fad) of culture and development is controlled by forces external to Africa. The employment of European cultural anthropologists and sociologists**

**as part of such development projects is already on the agenda of most so-called culture and development programs.**

**302 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

**Of course, regaining the African identity calls for an all-encompassing struggle to change and influence both the internal and global factors, balances of power and control over markets as well as socio-economic structures. This struggle cannot be waged by the writer alone; neither can the writer claim to have all the answers. But if the writer has a genuine interest in saving the African cultural identity from this chaos (indeed, this humiliation), he or she will find many roles to play in the struggle.**

**In the many roles the writer may play, the indigenous African languages become important as carriers and tools of a people's culture. The 1987 Or­ganisation of African Unity language plan of action for Africa states:**

**Language is at the heart of a people's culture and ... the cultural advan­cement of the African peoples and the acceleration of their economic and social development will not be possible without harnessing in a practical manner indigenous African languages in that advancement and develop­ment. (OAT])**

**It is difficult to imagine the African writer today making a significant contribu­tion to asserting the African people's cultural identity without having recourse to African indigenous languages. In fact, language is the only feature that presently gives African societies their cultural identity.**

**However, writing in the mother-tongue alone is not enough. In order for the use of the mother-tongue to be meaningful, African writers must extend their interest to areas outside the realm of literary creations. These areas include the struggle to give indigenous African languages a respectable standing in national ideological systems such as education. The writer must see the struggle for the promotion of African languages, ,or for the institution of language policies favorable to African languages, as his or her own struggles. The writer must not shy away from the political sensitivity of such language struggles. The forma­tion and implementation of language policies favorable to indigenous African languages should not be seen only as the business of the politician because lan­guage is, indeed, the writer's business as well. The writer also needs to assist in promoting efforts to provide literacy skills to the still illiterate masses of our countries. What use is it to write in Kiswahili, Bemba, Zulu, or Hausa when the majority of the audience the writer needs to address cannot read? As much as the adult educator and politician, the writer needs to be part of the literacy campaigns. At times, writers have been rightly accused of sitting on the periph­ery and of being concerned only with the production of their next book, as if these other struggles do not concern them.**

**Writing in the mother-tongue for the African writer may require not only writing in the writer's tnother-tongue but also in the mother-tongue of one's audience. There are many cases where writers are actually fluent in other**

African languages but refrain from using them on the grOunds of political or ethnic prejudice. In situations where the writer is not competent in the audi­ence's languages, the question of translation from the writer's mother-tongue to other African languages becomes important. We always talk of translating from African languages into English or French, but it is high time we emphasized the need for translations into the different languages of our linguistically diverse audienbes. This throws out yet another challenge to the African writer who chooses to write in the mother-tongue.

**CREATING IN THE MOTHER-TONGUE + 303**

Finally, I would like to point out that writing in the mother-tongue alone does not necessarily produce good or committed literary works. In confronting all these other challenges, good quality work in terms of both form and content is necessary because such writers have the responsibility to prove to the "doubt­ing Thomases" that, when it comes to literary creations, African languages are just as good as any other language in the world.

There may not be many African writers writing in African languages at the present time. It is my belief, however, that many more African writers will soon be willing to face these challenges. Indeed, the realities of our continent may not allow the unwilling writers to sit on the periphery much longer. It is my hope that those who believe in the significance of these challenges to the future of African humanity will offer a hand of encouragement and support to these writers.

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***Tsitsi V Himunyanga-Phiri*FIGHTING FOR WHAT BELONGED TO ME**

**304 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

Zambia 1992 English

"Fighting for What Belonged to Me" is excerpted from Tsitsi V. Himunyanga­Phiri's 1992 book *The Legacy,* which portrays the struggles of a recently widowed Zambian woman named Mrs. Moya Mudenda. Under customary law, Mrs. Mudenda faces losing her home, and the small farm that has provided an income for herself and her children, to her late husband's younger brother. Opposing both her family and the dictates of her culture, she decides to hire a lawyer to appeal the decision of a local court, and fight for her property and her future. In this excerpt, she reflects upon her experience while awaiting the judge's decision in her case, and finds that, in merely taking up the fight, she has already achieved a victory over fear and passivity:

The piece reflects the dual legal system of statutory law and customary law that continues to govern the lives of many Africans. In Zambia, the laws of inher­itance have become a flash point for the conflict between these two systems, as well as for battles over the rights of women, who are often disadvantaged by cus­tomary law. Despite legal reforms in the last two decades, both families and local courts at times disregard or interpret the law to deny widows their full share of their husband's property: In order to fight these decisions, women must be both aware of their legal rights and willing to break what Tsitsi V. Himunyanga-Phiri identifies as the code of silence that permeates women's lives and all domestic matters.

In *The Legacy* and in her subsequent book, *Celebrating the* Law, Himunyanga­Phiri tells stories of Zambian women using the law to demand their rights and to improve their *own lives* and the lives *of* their *families* and *communities.* She is currently working on the script for a television series entitled *The Legacy,* based on the issues and characters developed in her two books.

After graduating with a law degree from the University of Zambia in 1980, Himunyanga-Phiri was admitted to practice law before the High Court of Zam­bia. She went on to study social development and public policy, with an emphasis on women and development, at Pennsylvania State University, and has dedicated herself to projects that empower women legally, economically, or socially, includ­ing the provision of microcredit loans, civic education, and legal services. She founded the H-P Women's Development Company, which provides affordable housing to Zambian women, and has "been actively involved with the Africa Legal Human and Civil Rights Organization, based in Washington D.C., deal­ing with the legal rights of African immigrants in the United States, as well as with issues of law and democracy in Africa.

*Nalishebo N. Meebelo*

**As I sat in the packed courtroom, waiting for my case to be called, I wondered
  
how manrother people here today felt like I did—lost, dejected and very lonely.
  
I felt as if I was carrying the weight of the whole world on my shoulders, for the**

**outcome of my case would affect many other women's lives. I was the guinea pig, so to speak. I had no control over what was to happen to me. That lay in the judge's hands. He would make the decision that would affect how my children and I would lead the rest of our lives.**

**FIGHTING FOR WHAT BELONGED TO ME + 305**

**I looked at Judge Chanda sitting solemnly on the Bench. He looked so dis­tinguished in his red robe, white collar and wig. He did not look like an ordi­nary man, one who faced ordinary, everyday events. Did he know what it felt like to be in my shoes? A mother of six and a grandmother of four, a mother who had lost her husband less than a year ago, and now a mother who was about to lose her home and business—all she had worked for during the last fif­teen years. Wasn't it enough that I had lost my husband?**

**Did the judge take into consideration all the work and effort that I had put into making life comfortable for my children, or was he like everyone else, who thought that a woman was a perpetual dependent—incapable of making important decisions and only able to survive under the care of "a man"?**

**Did he take into account the fact that even when my husband was alive, it was I and not my husband who listened to the daily problems? That it was I who decided how best to resolve them?**

**Did I really believe this judge was going to rule in my favour? Put the law first and society's rules and conventions last? Was I being overly optimistic or just plain naive?**

**Maybe I should have accepted the Administrator-General's distribution of my late husband's property. Then I wouldn't have to go through all this pain and uncertainty. Perhaps I should have been satisfied with receiving one-quarter of my husband's pension; after all, the children had received half of it. At least between the seven of us we received three-quarters, while his parents, my *Ba mpongosi,* receive the remaining quarter and his brother, my *mulamu,* gets the house and the surrounding ten acres of land—the land that was my only means of livelihood.**

**Yes! His brother, who had not spent any time or money on the property, who had not shown any interest whatsoever in my late husband, the property, or my children until he had died. His brother who spends his salary on women and beer and is always borrowing money from me. Money that I have made grow­ing vegetables on the land that the Administrator-General has handed over to him on a silver platter without regard for where my children and I would live. My *mulamu* made it abundantly clear that my children and I were not welcome on "his" property. He said that the IC300 a month that we would be receiving from the pension would be enough for us to rent a house and to buy food. He generously said that he could find us a small house in one of the townships; after all, now that all the children except the last two had grown and were out of school, we didn't need a lot of space. I would be very comfortable, he assured me, and I could continue my business in the market if I so wished, only now I would have to buy the vegetables from him. If that idea didn't sound appealing I could move back to the village and stay with my *Ba mpongosi.* They would be**

very happy to have me. I could keep them company in their old age and help out with the household chores. My two youngest children could stay with their uncle during the school term and come to visit me in the holidays.

**306 + LATE TwENTIEni CENTURY (1970-1995)**

What my *mulamu* conveniently forgot was that for the last fifteen years I had worked long hours, up very early and going to sleep very late, so that my family could benefit. I transformed our property from a piece of land with a house on it, to a beautiful home with a well-kept lawn and a prosperous garden that had vegetables in it all year round. I had set up a thriving business through that veg­etable garden and it was the profits of that same business that had paid for the household expenses and the children's schooling. We never even saw my hus­band's pay, which went to the mortgage for the property. I shuddered at the thought of all my labour and sweat going down the drain, buried together with my late husband.

Ba Mudenda, father of my children, why did you have to die? You used to say that you were the head of our house and as such you would always take care of everything.

Why aren't you taking care of things now? Why didn't you take the time to write a will?

A simple sentence would have ensured that your children would not suffer. That they would have the home they grew up in. You used to say that wills were only for old people, and, at 50 years of age, you were still a young man and did­n't need one. As though there is a specific age that one has to be before one can die. Yes! You were only 50 years old on that fateful day when you left us, never to return.

When you said goodbye that evening, I didn't realize that you were not com­ing back. I said a non-committal goodbye to you, as I had long ago given up trying to find out where you would be going, or when you would be returning. I only found out that you had been attending a business reception when the police came to tell me that you had been killed in a car accident. You were gone and I had not said a proper goodbye. Gone, before you could secure your chil­dren's future. Perhaps I ,should have died first, then my children would never have been in danger of losing their home.

The whole situation seems so unfair and unjust: Should we have lost every­thing that we worked for for so long and so hard just because I am a woman and society decreed that I cannot take care of myself? It is just not fair!

"Life is not always fair, but this is not a matter of fairness, this is a matter of societal norms outweighing justice."

As I recalled those words, my gaze moved to where my lawyer, Miss Zulu, was sitting. She looked so poised in her white collar and black robe, with such courage and persuasiveness for one so young. She was the only one who had been willing to help me appeal against the Administrator-General's decision. I had taken my problem to two other lawyers who were not interested, as they thought that the Adininistrator-General was probably right. The upkeep of a big house and business would be too taxing. for a woman on her own, they said.

I did not have salaried employment and my vegetable business could not be regarded as a means of providing a steady income to pay off the mortgage. Never mind the fact that it had been providing my'family with a steady income for the last five years. Furthermore, for the same reasons I could not secure any other means of paying off the mortgage, as **I** could not obtain any form of loan. I had been on the point of giving up when **I** met Miss Zulu quite by accident and, ironically, I met her in the Administrator-General's office. I had gone there to tell him that I had decided not to appeal and that he could go ahead and distribute the property.

**FIGHTING FOR WHAT BELONGED TO ME + 307**

**I** was sitting in the reception area waiting to see the Administrator-General. His office door was slightly open and through it I could hear a young woman vehemently arguing with him, telling him that her client was entitled to receive her late husband's property. That it was the wife who had been responsible for the property's upkeep during her husband's lifetime, and why should all that change now that he was dead? As I listened, I marvelled at how familiar that case sounded, at the emotion in the young voice, as though she genuinely believed in what she was saying.

This is the person I need to argue my case, I thought excitedly. When she came out of the room, I jumped up and asked if I could speak to her: If she was surprised she didn't show it. She just sat down calmly in a chair, motioning me to do the same. She introduced hefself and asked me what the matter was. I began to tell her about my husband's death and the Administrator-General's decision on how to distribute the property. I didn't need to say very much before she stopped me, saying she would try to help. She asked my name and asked me to see her in her office the next morning.

The next day when **I** went to her office, I was pleasantly surprised to find that she had, a copy of my file from the Administrator-General's office. She was positive that the matter should be pursued, even if it meant going as far as the Supreme Court. She also pointed out the tough battle we had before us, as we were not just contesting the Administrator-General's ruling. We were contest­ing our culture and its laws of inheritance and succession.

In the six months that followed, her positive attitude carried us through the injunction which restrained the Administrator-General from distributing the property, and through the hearing before Judge Chanda where **I** had stated my claim to the property. This morning our battle was coming to an end, for Judge Chanda would deliver his verdict.

Would **I** be able to keep my home and business or would I lose it all, just as **I** had lost my husband? Only the judge knew the answer to this question.

The judge.

**I** almost laughed as it dawned on me that it was yet another man who was going to decide my future. It seemed that all my life there had always been a man who decided what was good for me, and every time **I** had meekly accepted. But not this time. This time I was fighting for what belonged to me and my children. I had earned it and I wasn't going to give up without a fight, as I had done in the past.

***Sister Mary John*WE WANT TO BE SISTERS**

**Uganda 1992 English**

Sister Mary John is. a Catholic nun of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of Saint Francis, founded in Uganda in 1923. Affectionately nicknamed "The Pil­lar" by her fellow nuns, she is the only surviving member of the first three women and five teenagers who joined the congregation at its inception. Sister Mary John was born Rachel Musoke in 1914 in Kibuye, a suburb of Kampala, the capital of Uganda. She asked to join the religious life at the age of fourteen, while she was studying 'under the legendary Mother Kevin at Nsambya Catholic Mission in Kampala. **Her intentions were** strongly opposed by her mother, but her father was wholeheartedly supportive. After her profession of religious vows, Sister Mary John trained as a teacher and taught with distinction between 1928 and 1978 at nearly all the major Catholic schools in what were then the Mill **Hill Missionary dioceses of Kampala, Jinja, and Tororo.**

**A key figure in Sister Mary John's memoir,** *Service in the Heart ofAfrica,* is the Founder of the Little Sisters of Saint Francis, Mother Kevin, for whom the author shows total love and admiration. Born Teresa Kearney in 1875 in Knockenrahan, Arklow, County Wicklow, Ireland, Mother Kevin came to Uganda in 1903 as one of a group of Franciscan Missionaries of Mary sent to help the evangelists in the newly founded Vicariate of the Upper Nile. Among her considerable achieve­ments was the establishment, under a mango tree in 1903, of the medical treat­ment center that was to become Nsambya Hospital, mentioned in Sister Mary John's memoir. Now more than a century old, this institution is recognized as one of the best private referral and teaching hospitals in Uganda. It is interesting to note that many of the young women who went to study medicine at Nsambya ended up joining the Little Sisters of Saint Francis, as well. The congregation is undoubtedly the most impressive attainment of Mother Kevin's mission.

For Ugandan women, religious life represented an option with no precedent in their history or culture. A life and a *career* without marriage and family were almost unimaginable to most Ugandans in the 1920s, when the Little Sisters order was founded. To those who, like Sister Mary John, rose to the challenge, the rewards could be quite rich, especially for the Little Sisters, since their founder conceived of them not only as holy and devout religious women but also as highly educated and trained professionals. As Sister Mary John recalled, the Little Sis­ters' congregation was also designed to overcome ethnic, regional, and class dif­ferences that still divide much of East African society today.

Today, the little Sisters of Saint Francis have spread from their headquarters, or Mother House, in Nkokonjeru, Uganda, throughout Uganda, Kenya, and Tan­zania. Numbering over 550 today, the Little Sisters are to be found in high-profile professions all over the region. Some are administrators, others medical specialists, and yet others leading educators, including university professors.

With characteristic humility Sister Mary John has not published her memoir; rather, it has circulated privately among her congregational sisters as an inspira­tional treatise.

*Austin Bukinya and Ayeta Anne Wangusa*

**308 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

**Late one evening, April 1923, as Mother Kevin was writing letters in her office, this elderly woman, Paulina Musenero, knocked sharply on the door. "Kodi," said Paulina. "Karibu," replied Mother Kevin. Mother, assuming it was a visitor, continued writing and said, "Yingira"—"Come in." She was however surprised to see a group of children lined up behind Paulina. They came in, knelt close to each other, and greeted Mother Kevin. Paulina spoke for the group, "Mama, we Want to be Sisters." They all nodded, confirming what Paulina had said on their behalf. As it turned out later, this was the group out of which 'Mother Kevin was to found the family of the Little Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi.**

**WE WANT TO BE SISTERS + 309**

**This group consisted of Paulina Musenero, forty years old, Sera Cornelia, thirty years old and Emereciane, a Luo from Kenya. The latter, about eighteen years old, had been sent to Nsambya, here in Uganda, to study midwifery. Oth­ers in the group were: Maria Salome, Agnes, Theresa, Lucia and myself, Rachel. I later became Sr. M..John, the writer of this book. The last five were between the ages of twelve and fourteen and were students of St. Agnes' Board­ing School then situated at Nsambya.**

**At first Mother Kevin was dumb-founded. She looked at the children with real disbelief. She took some time to answer. Finally, still greatly amazed, she asked the group questions. "Do you really want to be Sisters?" "Certainly we want to be Sisters," they replied. Their determination was deep and strong. They wanted to be Sisters like Mama Kevin and her Sisters.**

**Paulina, perhaps like St. Peter, kept on speaking for the group. She told Mother, "Many times I have discussed this matter with these children and in fact the rest of the girls take them to be your own group, Surely Mama, you do not doubt us," she continued, "we do not understand or realize the obligations of religious life, but we want to try it." At once, Mother Kevin told us what we had to know. "Being a Sister means leaving your family and clan; no visits home, no going for feasts and no wearing fashionable clothes." "We shall try;" we answered emphatically. She then informed us of the daily programme, which included waking up at five in the morning, long hours of prayer while kneeling most of the time, silence, obedience, punctuality; no talking to out­siders, not even priests, nor our parents. We were not discouraged. We only insisted on being given a chance, a trial. Eventually, some would make it while others would fall by the wayside.**

**Marriage customs were different in each ethnic group. In some ethnic groups a dowry meant quite a lot. In those days, it was customary for parents, because they knew better, to choose suitors for their daughters. Girls had no say in the matter. All this Mother knew and respected. There was one more important thing for us to know about the life we wanted to embrace. She told us, "Sisters do not get married. This will be very hard for you." She went on to stress the point, "It will be hard for your parents too, who have to be consulted." Mother Kevin would not accept girls into the Convent without their parents' knowledge.**

**During her conversation with us she may have felt the spirit of God in our sincere request. She asked us to pray earnestly and to think seriously about our decision. We went away happily, for at least Mother had listened to us. We did not regret the interview. What about dear Mother Kevin? She had a venture to ponder about. Very soon doubts came to her and she began questioning herself, "What am I going to do with these young girls seeking to embrace a life they know very little about? What will the future be like?"**

**310 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

**Although the girls were eager, this had to be seriously considered. They did not have the qualities necessary for religious life. They were not educated enough. Religious life and their traditional marriage customs were in contradic­tion. In short, they were too "raw" for the life they were longing to live. It was an adventure! It took her time. She had to look up many things. First the Bishop had to give his approval or refusal. Mother Kevin searched the laws of the Church of that time, which allowed people free from impediments "to drink the cup."**

**His Lordship Bishop Biermans was consecrated Bishop in 1912, after Bishop Hanlon had resigned from his office due to poor health. The new Bishop was very popular and was welcomed with great joy and love. He was full of zeal and courage. He had a population of nearly two million people in his Diocese of the Upper Nile. To evangelize all these people, he had thirteen priests and seven Franciscan Sisters as co-workers. Mother Kevin went to dis­cuss the matter with him. At first Bishop Biermans thought Mother Kevin wanted to train helpers or women catechists like those of Bishop Streicher. But no, Mother Kevin wanted to train religious women. The bishop had doubts about the idea of-making Sisters out of "the new material." He was aware of our traditional customs, some of them unChristian. However, he told Mother Kevin that he wanted to interview the girls. This was good news.**

**We went to his house, again led by Paulina. The Bishop looked at us, amazed at our ages. With the exception of the three older girls, five looked too young to understand what the talk was about. He talked about religious life, emphasizing celibacy unknown to the people here, obedience, and mortification. We assured him of our wish and determination to try. After the interview, the Bishop and Mother KeVin were pleased and more than ever convinced of our sincerity. He blessed As. After one week, Bishop Biermans said Mass in the Sisters' chapel and gave us khaki dresses. Despite lack of housing, Mother went ahead. So it was, that on May 1st, 1923, the Little Sisters' Congregation was founded by Mother Kevin G.S.F. after twenty years of her missionary work in Uganda.**

**The beginning was not easy. Mother Kevin was laughed at. "She is turning first communicants into Sisters,'.' they said. Others criticized her for teaching us English. 'The gossip was, "She is making Europeans out of them." "How are they to know God in a foreign language?" Mother Foundress was always mod­ern and up-to-date. She was the first to see the use of higher education for sis­ters and, as usual, always ahead of [her] time. She knew how educatioh would help those who would come in contact with her Sisters, and she was right.**

**In the Sisters' compound there were four different groups, namely: the con­vent girls, workers for the sisters, the boarders, the nurses (usually called *Basawo)* and our new group called *Babeezi,* or helpers. We were very strange to the others. We were the girls whom Mother Kevin intended to carry on the same apostolates as the Franciscan Sisters. Mother Kevin converted three store­rooms into the "helpers' temporary accommodation. Our attire consisted of khaki dresses sewn out of simple fashion, a rosary hanging on the left hand side on a leather belt, and a medal of St. Francis on a big chain around the neck. We felt strange but happy, keeping all to ourselves. We went nowhere, except to Church and the gardens. We walked in silence usually in fours or threes and occasionally in twos, when going to the garden, but never alone. This new way of behaviour caused great curiosity among the three other groups in the Sisters' compound and in the villages. Some of those new formation rules were so painful and contrary to our culture that people got puzzled about us.**

**WE WANT TO BE SISTERS + 311**

**This was the beginning of the formation and we had to accept it from the start. Mother Kevin told us to have as our aim the glory of God and our own sanctification by the observance of the three vows: chastity; poverty, and obedi­ence, not forgetting to pray for the Bishops and priests in the Diocese where we worked. She instilled in us the desire to teach women and children.**

**After May 1st, 1923, there were two occasions when more girls joined the young Congregation. On July 2nd, 1923, four girls entered. Magdalene Nabisoli, who had been teaching the children to read and write; Felistas from Naggalama, who had for a long time been with the Sisters; Magdalene Kafuko, from Budini Parish, the, first Musoga girl in the Congregation; and Maria Babirye, from St. Agnes' Boarding School. We now numbered twelve, the number of the Apostles. "I do not want any Judas," Mother would say. On Sep­tember 17th, 1923, the feast of the Stigmata of our Father St. Francis, four more girls joined us. Maria Therese was a Mugishu from Nyondo Parish. She had come to Nsambya for nursing. She joined the *Babeezi* but did not stay long. Others were: Josephine Nankya. Nakamya, a convent girl from Naggalama, and Philomena Zikusooka from Masaka, Kitovu Parish. These composed the original, number of sixteen members in the Congregation. This was the first set of Sisters to be clothed and to be professed.**

**Unfortunately, some of the parents were furious with Mother Kevin because the group [was] comprised of many ethnic groups. The convent girls and the nurses had noticed what they called a mixture. The Luos, the Samyas, the Basoga, and Bagishu were sharing the same meal, using the same cups, plates, and cutlery. Everything was used in common. To the Baganda of that time, such a mixture of ethnic groups was a big insult. The parents felt offended. Nevertheless, this was exactly what Mother Foundress wanted and intended to foster: Unity in diversity; which has resulted in a rich Congregation of more than forty different ethnic groups among the African Congregations. Mother Kevin faced the challenge bravely. Slowly, it became easy to believe and live the fact that we are all Sisters, children of one Father.**

**During the early formation years, fresh aspirants found it very hard to wake up at five in the morning for meditation. For more than a month, the new aspi­rants would feel lost and extremely strained but "love knows no barrier."**

**312 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

**Morning and night prayers were in the form of repeating words after Mother. "My God," My God, we would repeat. "Our Father," Our Father, "My God I love you" and so on. We learnt prayers mostly by repetition. After a while we got some simple prayer books. Those were of great help.**

**Sister Maria Camilla, O.S.F. taught us other prayers, including the mysteries of the rosary and the seven dolour rosary. It took us two months to memorize them. Mother Kevin loved prayer time and taught us the value of prayer. She lived a life of prayer. Her absolute belief in the Divine providence of her Heav­enly Father was never shaky. Her devotion to Jesus, His birth, Passion and Res­urrection was remarkable. She was dedicated to the sacred Passion, and said daily the way of the cross. In her prayer life Mother Kevin lived the liturgy of the church and taught us to love it too.**

11

***Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye*LEARNING THE SEX TRADE**

**Kenya 1993 English**

**Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye was born Marjorie Phyllis King in Southampton, Eng­land, on October 21, 1928. She developed a keen interest in reading and writing from an early age (a poem she wrote when she was only seven was published in the *Daily Mirror).* A dedicated and astute student, she earned a scholarship and suc­cessfully finished secondary school in 1945. She was then admitted to the Royal Holloway College of the University of London, where she studied English, grad­uating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1948. During the six years that followed, Macgoye worked in various bookshops and bookstores in London. It was also in the course of this time that she continued with postgraduate studies and obtained a Master of Arts degree from Birkbeck College, University of London.**

**In 1954 Macgoye came to Kenya to work as a booksbller for the Church Mis­sionary Society (CMS). Six years later she married Daniel Oludhe Macgoye, a medical assistant, adopted his name, and gradually became fully integrated into the culture of her husband's people, the Luo. When Kenya attained independence in 1963, she chose to become a Kenyan citizen. Life in her adopted country turned out to be a long and tireless journey aimed at enhancing a literary culture in the East African region. This she has managed to achieve with remarkable suc­cess as manager of various bookstores, consultant with leading publishing firms, high school English teacher, and, most recently, as lecturer in creative writing at Egerton University, Kenya.**

**But it is above all as a creative writer that Macgoye has exerted a profound impact on East African literature. A writer across genres, her literary work has enriched and, to a large extent, given shape and 'direction to the tradition of**

**women writing in East Africa, and Kenya in particular. In the corpus of her writ­ing are to be found dynamic female characters: women who evolve new para­digms of living and visioning, and thus become active participants in Kenya's his­tory as well as its insightful "writers."**

**LEARNING THE SEX TRADE + 313**

**Macgoye's novel *Coming to Birth* (1986) earned her worldwide renown by emerging winner of the 1986 international Sinclair Prize for fiction. The text was first published by Heinemann (London) and Heinemann Kenya (Nairobi) (now East African Educational Publishers). Another edition, by the London-based feminist publisher, Virago, is currently out of print. *Coming to Birth* is now avail­able through East African Educational Publishers (Nairobi and Kampala) and The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, which issued it in 2000. The following year Macgoye's second novel, *The Present Moment* (1987), was published. It continues to be in print through East African Educational Publish­ers as well as The Feminist Press (2000). *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* (1993) was published by Macmillan (London and Nairobi) and is also in print. *Homing In* (1994), which won second place in the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature, Kenya's highest literary award, in 1995, *Chira* (1997), and *A Farm Called Kishinev* (2005), have been published by East African Educational Publishers.**

**In its totality, Macgoye's writing constitutes an imaginative record of the mul­tidimensional evolution of the Kenyan nation. The product of an artist of pro­found and unique talent, an intellectual and a moralist of the highest order, this record nurtures and elevates the mind, and ennobles the spirit.**

***Victoria,* from which the following excerpt is selected, is the fascinating, soul-searching story of Victoria Abiero, who decides to run away from the confines and expectations of a largely patriarchal African traditional marriage in her rural Luo community in Western Kenya, and embark, after carefully considering all the available choices, "with complete deliberation," on the path of freedom and eco­nomic empowerment as an urban prostitute. As a sexual worker, Victoria not only opens up her worldview significantly; she also endeavors to make her life worth­while by educating, at least to a reasonable level, the daughter she conceives in the course of her career; and by saving some of her earnings for the future. Hence when she "retires," a mature, elderly woman, she manages to organize her affairs in such a way that she eventually prospers as a "magnificent" businesswoman; and dies leaving behind a small legacy for her immediate relations. Victoria's thus becomes a life purposefully lived despite the invariably threatening socioeco­nomic circumstances.**

**In *Victoria,* the heroine and her house of sexual workers exemplify the view that with determination and hope, women can disengage themselves from the sociopolitical disparities that define them; and by forming communities, they may chart a value-laden future; which, however, still falls short of the realization of their full potential.**

***Emilia Ilieva and Lennox Odiemo-Munara***

**The first time a man came for her she was surprised. It was like a mistake. But
  
she had been married, after all. It was natural. Some of the girls, she found, had
  
never been married, and this was hard to understand. She submitted dutifully,**

**as she had been taught, but here was something she had not been taught, more like what she had experienced with the young fisherman, but different again, since it regarded her only indirectly. She soon got used to it. The provocation was not difficult for her, as she revolted from the whole humdrum experience of her marriage. To be wanted was a pleasure. To draw from Sara the cash for a new dress, a bottle of hair-oil, ear-rings, was a delight. She began to talk to the men, to ask them about their work, their schooling, for nearly all of them had been to school. They usually didn't mind her talking. If it got too much, Sara would warn her about it privately. Some of the men were from Uganda. There were even two Europeans who came quite often. They said they were not mar­ried, which she found hard to believe, judging their ages by their rolls of muscle and money. They said Kisumu was not the kind of place they would bring a wife to. She replied that it seemed very good to her and full of European things. They taught her to say in English "Have another drink" and "Come up and see me some time." Some of the black men found this very funny. Many were not Luos, and they tried to tell her that they all belonged to the same country, but she found this hard to understand. All the same she picked up a bit of Swahili.**

**314 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

**All these weeks she did not hear any news from Gem or see anyone she had known before. She kept thinking about going home, but it was a girlhood pic­ture of home, carrying the heavy water-pots and grinding, grinding away at the flour. One day she asked Sara, "How is it that you can stay here all the time without going back home? I must soon go to my mother's and then I will come back and see you."**



**Sara looked at her closely.**

**"In my country a** *malaya* **cannot go home."**

**"But I am not a** *malaya. 1* **am married. My husband is old and unkind to me. Also he is not very much use as a husband. Therefore they must buy me back. But I was properly married. They received the cow of virginity for me."**

**"In that case your husband must have been of some use! Besides, before you came here you had a child."**

**"For that reason also I came away. But I am still married. When someone else wants me, he will bring the dowry to pay back."**

**"What will you tell them when you return?"**

**"That my husband is no good and they must buy me back."**

**"And what will you tell them about the time since you left Gem? It is two months now."**

**"That you were kind to me and I stayed until I felt better."**

**"And the child?"**

**"Did not the child die?"**

**"But not at home. Where is it buried?"**

**"Buried? At the mission."**

**"And do you belong to the mission?"**

**"No, not exactly. They wanted me to read, but I had not started. They were still asking me questions."**

"And will they not say you are—.spoiled? You have had other men, European men and circumcised men of other communities. You have got used to other ways of living. Will you go to one of your round villages and hoe and bring water with your hair all shaggy? Will you go as fourth wife to another old man, you who sit poring over a newspaper as though you can read it? Will you make do with millet porridge in a good season and pounded cassava in a dry season? And when your old man dies, will you be able to tear your clothes off and weep upon his body, showing that you have done him no wrong? Or if you cannot, what will they do to you?"

**LEARNING THE SEX TRADE + 315**

Victoria remembered falling silent. It was the first thing she remembered in her body as belonging to her present self, and her eyes pricked as they then did, but no tears came. The weeks in the house seemed unreal, as indeed they were at the time, an interlude in the life of digging and cooking which was the only kind she knew. She remembered the teaching the old women had given her as a girl, and the even closer segregation imposed on those of her friends who had been baptized. Perhaps indeed they would not welcome her, would not admire her fine clothes or share the meat she had meant to buy with the bit of money she had saved. She had just walked out of real life for a couple of months. Would it not be waiting for her when she came back? Would she be like the boy who had gone to boarding school and tome home after a term to find fish swimming where his bedroom had been and his father away inquiring about tenant land elsewhere? She continued to stare at Sara Chelagat.

"The overseer took me away to the railway," said Chelagat, gazing past her. "He took several of my friends too. We did not find it too bad at first. But I never saw my father again. Even when he was dying he did not let them send for me. My mother came once or twice long afterwards, when I had started up in Kisumu here. She pretended to bring her gourds to sell in the market and I would meet her and give her some money. There was a time later on when I'd save a bit, and I used to get so lonely here among all foreign folks, that I thought I could get some poor man to marry me. I didn't need any dowry, you see, I had squared that by paying towards my brothers' marriages and all I would have needed was a bit of land to live on and have children. But I was sick by then—you know the white people brought diseases which a woman can get from a man or a man from a woman, and they said I would never have a. baby then, though I was lucky to have been cured and not gone spotty. So no-one would look at me. You see. . . .Well, if they threaten to send me out of town, I pay them, that's all. You won't starve. You've got a good head, you know. Maybe you could even learn to read. They won't let you live like a whole woman but perhaps you learn to live half like a man. But don't say I made you. I gave you food and a place to rest, that's all. You did the rest yourself."

She shrugged her shoulders, ear-rings jangling, long skirts rustling, and left Victoria to think it over.

***Field Marshal Muthoni-Kirima*WARRIOR WOMAN**

**Kenya 1993 English**

**The Mau Mau movement, or Land Freedom Army, operated both covertly, in urban and white-settled areas, and overtly, in the countryside and on the margins of colonial society. The movement, which is most closely associated with the "KEM" communities—Kikuyu (Gikuyu)-Embu-Meru—had roots in established organizations, the Kikuyu Central Association and the East African Trades Union Congress. It had been growing clandestinely for several years before 1952, when the'British government in Kenya declared a state of emergency and arrested Jomo Kenyatta and other resistance leaders. The movement's ideology and strat­egy continues to be a subject of historical debate. Isolated groups often became fragmented through casualties; contacts with other fighters carried risks of betrayal; and the central task force providing supplies and information was increasingly hampered by the close scrutiny of the British government.**

**Muthoni-Kirima joined the Mau-Mau as a married woman. Though her par­ents worked on a European farm, after her marriage she moved to a village in the "reserve," the land set aside for Africans, close to Nyeri. Most women involved in liberation movements worked as carriers of information and supplies, as Muthoni herself did to begin with. However, she became one of the few women to claim active work as a fighter.**

**Muthoni describes much movement on foot, from Nyeri to the Aberdares, Thika (Chania), and Gilgil. Traveling was dangerous work, and individuals needed to be able to cover their tracks. It would have been highly unusual for fighters to move in a group of twenty, as in the plan Muthoni describes to obtain arms from Ethiopia.**

**Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi, who plays a central role in Muthoni's narra­tive, was captured and executed in 1956, a decisive step in the British progress toward winning the battle and losing the war. Muthoni asserts that her group learned of the release of Kenyatta and of forthcoming independence by observing changes in civilian behavior. Possibly these freedom fighters *were* so isolated that they had to fill in gaps of knowledge by conjecture or accept unreliable informa­tion. Muthoni joined other Mau Mau who laid down their weapons at the cere­mony marking Kenya's full independence, at Ruringu Stadium in December 1963. After this point, her story clearly expresses the feelings of many of the thousands of freedom fighters who either surrendered their arms or were released from the brutal detention centers where they were kept between1956 and 1963. Muthoni gives poignant voice to the disillusion they suffered because they were offered lit­tle recognition or reward by independent Kenya. The old landscape of scattered homesteads was never re-created, and in most cases the title-deeds issued while many claimants were shut away in detention camps were not reviewed. Muthoni was given permission to collect and sell "wild" ivory, until the trade was banned in 1976. She was nominated as councilor to Nyeri Counti Council in 1990.**

***Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye and Naomi L. Shitemi***

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**316 + LATE INVENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

I grew up on a colonialist's farm. That is one of the reasons why I developed the need to fight for independence. My parents used to tell us that these people were foreigners and that was why they made us work like slaves.

**WARRIOR WOMAN + 317**

I took my first Mau Mau oath in the African reserves and then introduced my husband, Mutungi, to the movement. In fact I looked for the goat used to administer the oath to my husband without his knowledge, By then I already knew that by doing so I was helping the movement.

Then, when I later learned that Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi was leading fighters in the Aberdare forest, I started supplying his troops with food and information. Such information included the movement of Home Guards and their patrols into the forest.

When my husband became fully aware of the importance of fighting for freedom he went into the forest and joined the fighters.

The Home Guards who monitored life in our village noticed that my hus­band was missing. They came and asked me where he was. I told them that he had taken some eggs to the market in Nyeri town.

On that night I had some money, Sh. 800, which I had to forward to the for­est fighters. After the Home Guards had left me they went on their patrol into the forest but they came back at night. Their leader, Elijah, woke me up and demanded to know where Mutungi, my husband, was. I told them that he had not come back from the market. On hearing that they beat me up very badly.

One day before this incident I had learned that the British soldiers com­monly known as Johnnies were going on a forest patrol towards where Dedan Kimathi was administering oaths. I ran ahead of the soldiers and warned Kimathi. The oathing stopped.

On my way home I met with the Johnnies. They roughed me up but later let me go. At the edge of the forest I put on a heavy coat that I had, in order to dis­guise my looks, and hide my bruises. To avoid being seen I crawled on my stom­ach towards our village. By the time I got home my stomach was so badly bruised that I had to use hot water with salt and liniment to treat the bruises. Village women and friends had to help me because by now my body was all swollen from beatings with military boots.

After three days the Home Guards came to my house and started beating me again mercilessly. Blood was oozing through my mouth and ears. All the house was blood stained. They ransacked the house looking for money. Luckily I never kept any money inside the house. I always hid it in the grass outside.

When my women friends saw the condition I was in they were filled with compassion. They took me from our home at Njoguni to Kihigaini, near where my sister-in-law, Wanjugu, lived. It was near the forest edge.

The village women there started treating me. When I felt a bit well I would go out to the forest edge collecting firewood, but I was actually spying on how I would escape into the forest.

After four days of planning I ran into the forest. I can't remember the date. On my first day in the forest the only living thing I saw was an antelope. It

**coughed. Then I walked for about two kilometers into the forest and sat down to pray:**

**318 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

**"God, you know why I have come into this forest. I pray to you to help me, for you know the reason best. Help us expel the foreigners from our land. God, you know how I have been mistreated. As 1 don't know where Kimathi is, help me to contact them, God."**

**I remained on the scene quietly until at about 4 P.M., when I started search­ing for Kimathi.**

**In those days there were very few people in the forest. Fighters would go into the forest and come out without much trouble. For many hours I would sit at a water fetching point, expecting to find people in search of water, but no one would come.**

**For two weeks I found no one. At night I would climb trees to avoid being trampled by elephants.**

**But in the village people were looking for me. When they failed to know where I was, they assumed that I must have gone into the forest.**

**One day, after two lonely weeks, I noticed ten people coming to the watering point. I noticed Kimathi's brother, Wagura Wambararia, and another called Gitungu. These are the ones who took me to Kimathi's camp.**

**My first assignment in Kimathi's army was in the group that went looking for food. We would raid European settler farms for cattle, goats and sheep. We once launched a raid from Rugoti bush [camp] into Karimurio farm, which was guarded by. the colonial soldiers. We had a heavy battle in which we killed one white soldier and two African scouts. . . .**

**I had learned about the struggle for freedom when I was very young. I used to see fund raising meetings for somebody called Jomo Kenyatta. I would ask my mother, and she would tell me that the money was for a big man who would go overseas and then come back to free us. Sometimes I would be asked to keep the money . . . and I knew it was a secret to be hidden from the white settlers.**

**As the fighting continued in the forest there was hope that it would last only three months and then the country would be free.**

**Then came the aeroplanes. First it was the spotter planes, which produced sad sounds. These were followed by the bombers with slow and heavy sound, which created fear. This time we were up in the moorlands of the Aberdares.**

**Our camps were guarded a mile apart on each of the approach paths.**

**My experience of my first bombing is memorable. We saw the bottom of the bomber open and then something drop. Some of us said, well, so they also go to the toilet.**

**A man among us said it was a bomb and we should lie low, count to five and we would hear the explosion. Just as we counted to five the earth shook many miles around. Then shrapnel started flying past, above our heads. Some trees were falling like there was one big axe swinging past. Each bomber used to drop between five and ten bombs.**

**Just when we thought all was over they came again, spraying us with**

**machine gun fire. We used to call it Bebeta. God is great, the greatest, because we survived all the strafing, which was like a tractor is ploughing the field. And we survived all these! .. .**

**WARRIOR WOMAN + 319**

**Because of the situation we had found that it was a waste of time to slaugh­ter an animal in the normal manner. One would only cut a chunk, together with the skin, and put it in the rucksack. This way we left no trails.**

***Man Man Parliament and Dedan Kimathi***

**Dedan Kimathi used to call meetings at Chania with people like Karari Njama taking notes.**

**Kimathi was a leader, very merciful and wise. The things he used to say, if people followed them, some of the bad things which have happened would not have happened. One of the things which was ignored was to reward freedom fighters. . . .**

**One time he asked: "What do you think should happen to Kamatimu (the Africans fighting on the side of colonialists) when we become free?"**

**Some said: "Execute them and their families." Others said: "Try them."**

**But Kimathi said: "Kamatimu have helped in some ways. We should not kill them. But something will be done like being made to work for us. If they are killed how shall they know what we are fighting for?"**

**But some people were very annoyed with hifn.**

**Kimathi would then say: "Kamatimu are producing children with our wives back in the reserves. Let them live and see that we were fighting for justice."**

**Kimathi's philosophy was proved right at Independence. He had prevailed upon the freedom fighters not to kill Chief Muhoya. It was Chief Muhoya who had signed the death warrant for Kimathi. But Muhoya lived to see Indepen­dence. (And because he had sworn that there would be no Independence, he was killed by one of his bulls immediately.)**

**Then there were people like Eliud Mahihu, who used to fly over the Nyan­darua [Aberdares] broadcasting: "I am sure that no Independence will ever come. So surrender and come out holding green branches . .**

**Mahihu saw Independence and became a senior and prosperous civil servant. . . .**

***Split***

**One of the major splits among the Mau Mau fighting forces came not long after a Parliament was formed. It came during a trial.**

**The colonialists had suggested a truce, that the Mau Mau forces and the colonialists start exchanging letters before they could meet physically and nego­tiate a ceasefire.**

**Several letters had been exchanged through "dead letter drops" but Kimathi was not happy about it. So he called a meeting of all senior officials in the Aberdares. All camps in Nyandarua East and Muranga district were repre­sented. The venue of the meeting was guarded in a ten mile radius. Kimathi's**

message was that those who had agreed to the exchange of letters did not understand the trick the colonialist was playing.

**320 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

When the meeting assembled Kimathi explained the meaning of this letter game. He said the colonialist wanted to know the intelligence and the thinking of the Mau Mau. He said that at the proposed meeting the colonialist did not want to capture us nor kill us, but he would come with sweet talk, then we would be bitter and then tell all our secrets.

Kimathi ruled that from then on no one should cooperate with the colonial­ists. He said we should forget the dead letter drops.

He reasoned this way: how can two fighters separate themselves? It was only the politicians who could meet and talk.

He then ruled that anyone found contravening that ruling would be tried by the "big court" (Parliament).

I was a member of the Parliament and I had been elected by secret ballot. General Mathenge Mirungi was also an elected member of the Parliament, and I was his junior.

Soon after this meeting, General Mathenge went ahead and met the colo­nialists. He was accompanied by one girl named Wangechi.

At the secret meeting with the colonialists Mathenge gave his gun to the enemy and the enemy gave him his. Mathenge's gun was the catapult version, which had become very effective. The colonial soldier studied the forest gun keenly before he returned it to Mathenge.

When Kimathi discovered that Mathenge had met the enemy against the ruling he had made, he summoned Parliament to meet at Chania. Mathenge was called and Parliament sat under a red flag. Mathenge was put on trial.

*Kimathi:* Mathenge, were you at the meeting which ruled against further meetings with the colonialists?

*Mathenge:* Yes.

*Kimathi:* Since you were there, then why did you go and meet them and disclose our secrets? Do you want us to be defeated? You, being a heroic fighter and everyone depends on you, do you know what your enemy is doing? Do you know that you are betraying yourself? What was on your mind? Are the colonialists your brothers?

Mathenge, do you want us to judge you for that action? Do you want to sur­render? Tell us. If you want to surrender, go alone. Do not take us with you. Today this Parliament will judge you.

A member said: Mathenge should not be forgiven. He should be killed, for he went against the decision of this Parliament, so that no one else does like him.

Then all members of Parliament were asked their opinions.

I raised my hand before the group answered. I said I did not favour the death sentence. . . .

Other members of Parliament agreed with me. Then Mathenge and com­pany [who had been tied to trees during the trial] were untied.

**WARRIOR WOMAN + 321**

After one week we received reports that Mathenge continued to meet the colonialists. Kimathi was very annoyed. He ordered that Mathenge be sought and brought to him alive.

Since Mathenge knew what was happening he started hiding himself.

This incident happened towards the end of 1954. Just before it happened, Mathenge, myself, Karari Njama, Karuri wa Gakure—about Wofus, had been selected to go to Ethiopia to seek help for ammunition. But before our journey could start was when Mathenge started meeting the colonialists secretly. His only companion on such missions was the girl Wangechi. Any time he was on secret meeting it was said he had gone to Nairobi.

We looked for Mathenge and did not find him. He had his own group. Then came the rumour that he had gone to Ethiopia.

***Enthronement of Kimathi***

Sometime in 1954 Dedan Kimathi had called an important meeting some­where in Muranga. We from Kabage area had to go: Many were unable to attend because the security situation was very bad. On the way I felt like thou­sands of barrels of guns were pointed at me.

I had been told that we were attending a case. But it turned out to be a cere­mony. I was one of those selected to attend the ceremony.

I met two old women from Muranga who dresied me in traditional regalia, all made of animal skin. They included "Nyathiba". (upper wear), "Muthuru" and "Mwehio" (for lower wear), and "hang'? (earrings).

These two old women were accompanied by two old men of 'Ndungu" age group. That means they were so old that they could not walk without support.

Before the ceremony took place we spent a week of prayers and feasting. We rarely slept.

On the 9th day Kimathi was dressed in a "githii" [cloak] and a colobus mon­key headgear. I stood behind, dressed in my regalia. Then the old women brought some oil in a gourd. The oil was a mixture of sheepifat and castor oil. The oil was blessed with prayers in Kikuyu traditional style.

Then the old men took the oil and poured it on Kimathi's head. It dripped on his cloak. All this time there were chants of "Ngai Thaai." When the oil was poured on Kimathi's head I rendered some adulation.,Then an old woman picked some of the remaining oil and smeared it on my face and back as she said: "Ngai Thaai."

After this solemn ceremony Kimathi said that we would go up to the Aber-dares summit. There we hoisted flags with Kenya's national colours mounted on bamboo poles. There was a flag on each of the three peaks.

We were very tired after climbing. When the ceremony was over we went looking for camps where we could rest.

It was at this meeting of the ceremony that I was promoted to General. It

**was at the same meeting that Kimathi said that anyone who will fight to the end of the war will be called Field Marshal.**

**322 + LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1970-1995)**

**Before I was made a General people in our camp were in desperate state of hunger. They were afraid of going out and seeking for food. So I sacrificed myself by risking to go to the farm of one settler known as Lord Cole, who was growing crops by irrigation. His farm was tightly guarded.**

**That night I used my tactics and, avoiding security, dug under the fence, got into a maize plantation and noiselessly filled a sack with maize cobs. Then I crawled with my sack out of the farm, filled the hole under the fence, and returned to camp without leaving any trails.**

**When the people in the camp saw me back with maize, they carried me shoulder high. . .**

**This year the air raids increased. We could not move from camp to camp. We did not see Kimathi. At one time he had sent a man to look for me, Nyina wa Thonje and my husband, Mutungi. At that time we were looking for him also.**

**People in the reserves did not give us food any more because they claimed we would be betraying them. This was so because they did not trust anyone any more due to the activities of the pseudo Mau Mau.**

**There were three types of pseudo gangs: those who persuaded one to leave the forest, others would run out of sights and those who killed on sight.**

**We decided to avoid the villages. We could not trust any stranger. One had to answer the call of nature in sight of others.**

**When food was not available I lived on juices of tree fibres. At one time I was like the picture of Eve on being chased out of Garden of Eden. I used leaves to cover my breasts and genitals. . . .**

**It was around this time that we heard that Jomo Kenyatta had been released from detention. Then we started seeing members of the public coming close to the forest without fear like before. . . .**

**With the help of some friends I obtained a dress, shoes and a headscarf. Then I changed my skin dresses, which were made of hyrax skins.**

**People who were faithful to the Mau Mau movement arranged for my trans­port to Nairobi. They took me to an office near the Jevanjee Gardens where they tried to make an appointment for ine to see Kenyatta. Kenyatta was busy with meetings but he directed that I be kept comfortable until he would see me.**

**After one week I met Jomo Kenyatta. This was in November, 1963. I told Kenyatta that I had come because of rumours that there would be freedom in Kenya. I told him that since you are the one who can tell the truth, tell me, because maybe people just wanted me to come out of the forest.**

**Kenyatta asked,me with a lot of sadness, in a pensive mood and looking at me right in the ejres:**

**"Nyakinyua (Madam),, is it not a joke that you have been in the forest all these years?"**

**"No, it is not a joke, Mzee (Elder). Are you doubting?"**

**Kenyatta did not say anything. He just stared at me and wept.**