Living on the Margin: Defying African Stepdaughter's Invisibility to Embrace Black Feminism

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Abstract

This article uncovers the hidden stepdaughter's odyssey to Black African Feminism against the backdrop of Kigandan subservient womanhood and Euro-Canadian racism. The first section recounts early childhood experiences of an *othered* stepchild, followed by teenage anti-misogynist resistance to structural second-class citizenship in a majoritized boy's school. Subsequent sections narratively capture the lived experiences of transitioning to racialized and subjugated Black womanhood in Germany and Canada, and the becoming of a proud Black African Anti-racist Feminist. Using personal photographs in the narratives makes the experience more present while the Luganda proverbs call forth the uniqueness of an African experience. This article uncovers different strategies of how a young Black African female combats multiple layers of Kigandan cultural subordination and systemic racism in order to excel as a professional immigration consultant and emerging anti-racism and Black feminism scholar.

Keywords: Black African feminism, African wisdom, racism, narrative inquiry

Introduction

Drawing upon my lived experiences as a Black Mugandan girl-child growing up in a middle-class Kigandan home, in Uganda, I reflect on my hyphenated identity as a Mugandan-Black-Feminist-daughter-stepdaughter-mother-wife-immigration consultant-graduate student. I reflect on how I came to know what I know about the invisibility of stepdaughters in African contexts, and how this impacts Black African women their whole lives. I use my stories, the stories that I live by (Clandinin, 2000), to ponder on my journey through a patriarchal and colonial education to my enrolment in the University of Alberta's doctoral program, in social justice. It is through these childhood stories that I trace my becoming the confident Black African woman I am today - a proud Black African feminist who chastises misogyny in African culture and defends the same culture against racial oppression.

I seek to unravel this puzzle using autobiographical narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) to tell and re-tell the tensions in my life stories as a way of gaining insights into the phenomenon of anti-Black women's cultural and racial subjugation. I wonder how to break the taken-for-granted way in which all 'Black women' are subjugated within the Black feminist movement as if Black African women have no unique culture rooted in their life stories. I puzzle about ways to make visible the unique suffering of Black African girl-children and the apparent need for more in-depth exploration of their life stories. Creswell (2006) describes narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodology that examines people's lived experience using stories taken as both the phenomena and the methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

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Autobiographical narrative inquiry draws heavily from Dewey's (1938) understanding of life experience as the core component for learning and Johnson's (1987) experiential philosophy that highlights how embodied experience shows us how we know what we know.

The objective of narrative inquiry is to unravel the meaning of the human experience that people have lived through (lived experience) by exploring their personal narratives, lived, told, and relived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry operates on three dimensional narrative spaces. It investigates life experiences backward and forward (temporality), inward and outward (sociality), and within and across situations (space) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I use autobiographical narrative inquiry to give autobiographical accounts of my relationship with my family in Uganda; my relationship to my Kigandan culture; and my understanding of Black women's issues such as inequality and emancipation. Narrative accounts can show how my hyphenated identity has been formed, how it has shifted, and reconstructed. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) ruminate that we make meaning of our lives through the stories that we live by. These stories capture momentary snapshots of our life before and juxtapose them on to our life now. This helps us to re-visit and reconstruct meanings of our values and ways of knowing that we have taken for granted.

I will uphold the tradition of narrative inquiry that requires me to weave previous literature on Black feminism and racism into my reflections or re-telling of the narrative accounts. The goal is to ensure the seamless connection between theory and practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I will use the metaphor of *kalandalugo* Luganda term for *cynodon dactylon* or commonly known as Bermuda grass, a sprawling wild plant that mysteriously grows only in places where cattle have grazed, and signals that this place has fertile soil, and is worthy of building a homestead. The term *kalandalugo* is intertwined within my clan name 'Sewali'. My clan name is a proverb that reads in full as '*sewali nte, olabila ku kalandalugo*' - you can tell nutritious grazing ground for cattle by the sprawling plants that only grow up where cattle have grazed before. In Kigandan culture, *kalandalugo* is a herbal medicine that is used as a "leaf decoction mixed with banana beer *mwenge* (Luganda) [and] drunk as a remedy for liver diseases." (CIAR, 2019, n.p.). I am a Muganda woman who was born and raised in Uganda. Like cattle herders back home, I am a nomad who traversed the world to study in Germany and then ended up in Canada. Like the hidden meaning in my name 'Sewali', the stories that I live by sprawl over into my childhood in Uganda, a time in my life when I was not always at ease.

Telling a daughter's sprawling bedtime stories

*Everyone has a place where they feel at ease. Where all the world seems to rest in peace and tranquility. For some people it is in the shower, for others on a balcony and for others it is on a beach looking at the waves. My place where I feel the most comfortable regardless of what is going on around me is my bed. It is my sanctuary where I can think straight. It is where I see myself taking over the whole world. It is the place where every problem I have seems like it has a solution. My bed is my haven, my shelter, my refuge where I can retreat to be without any judgement. It allows me a sense of rest; an indescribable serenity. My sanctuary reminds me of a Luganda proverb: **Otulo tetumanyi alirira nnyina** (sleep does not know you lost your mother, that even though you are mourning your mother, you still fall*

asleep). My bed is in some ways my writing desk and chair. It is from my bed in Edmonton, Canada that I am writing about my life.

As a young girl growing up in Uganda, my bed was my place of solace. Since I was still quietly sleeping from the time I came out of my mother's womb, I was given the role of baby Jesus in the nativity scene.

My biological mother (later on referred to as my mother) describes my birth as the day my biological father (later on referred to as my father) dropped her off at the hospital and showed up three days after my birth. Back then, it was unusual for fathers to be present in delivery rooms. I wonder what if my mother or I had died during delivery? I never asked my father why he was not there. My mother says I was born December 25, 1969 in Nsambya hospital; a catholic hospital. My father says I was born in 1968 because according to him I was already born when the pope visited Uganda in 1969. I believe my mother because she gave birth to me. She remembers the nativity play, and my role as the sleeping baby Jesus.

Re-telling a daughter's sprawling bedtime stories

My initiation into the traditional Kigandan concept of subservient womanhood began the day I was born. I was born into the Kigandan culture where girls are made to be invisible bodies. Traditionally, if a man fathered only girls and died without begetting a son, he would be officially declared to have begotten no children at all. If he fathered five daughters and one son, Kigandan society would describe him as a father of one child – the boy. In Buganda, only male descendants can become surrogate heirs of their fathers as the case of the late, Ugandan former prime minister and university professor, Nsibambi attests. In his will, Nsibambi declared his daughter, Ruth Nakimuli Kasujja, as his heir, but after his death, the mainstream narrative in Buganda was critical of this radical move. Nsibambi was a member of the *fumbe* (civet cat) clan. The head of the clan, Walusimbi Mbirozankya criticized Nsibambi's decision when he claims that "this shouldn't have happened and as head of the clan, I have instituted a committee to recommend the next course of action" (Kabengwa, 2019).

My initiation into the struggle for the emancipation of Black African women also began the day I was born. My mother, a strong independent single Black Mugandan woman, never doubted my ability to play the role of the sleeping baby Jesus in the church's nativity play. I think about my mother's courage and decisiveness at that moment when she made that choice because this stance is against the traditional woman's subservience to men. I reflect on my mother's anti-misogynist mindset that never allowed her to accept being a co-wife to any man. Despite her strength, the Kigandan cultural norms that a child should grow up in her father's homestead forced her to hand me over to my father when I was four years old.

Telling severing the mother-daughter bond

Figure 1. The author at age two with paternal relatives.

My father and mother stayed together for the first two years of my life, but they were never married. I am the third oldest out of 19 children on my paternal side, and the seventh oldest out of ten children on my maternal side. According to my mother, my father in the second year of my life moved on with another lady. He would occasionally visit my mother and bring her some household supplies until I turned four. Within

those first three years, he fathered another child with another woman, then he got married to yet another woman. One sunny day, when I was a four-year-old, my father came at around 4:00 pm and took me away from my mother. He had informed my mother of his intention many months prior to that fateful day, and my older sister on my maternal side narrated how my mother would often mourn and cry about the day when he would come and take me away.

Figure 2. The author at age four with an older maternal sister

Re-telling severing the mother-daughter bond

To this day, when I look at my two daughters, I cannot fathom how a four-year-old can be taken away from her the love of a biological mother and a nurturing environment. How should she survive such a transition? I do not blame my father, the last born of forty children who lived with their mothers in a large homestead run by my grandfather. I recall my father telling me stories about his life as a child. My late grandfather, Yosiya (Joshia) Mbogga Sewali, was once the Prime Minister of Toro Kingdom from 1926 to 1934 (Low, 1971, p. 101). As the regent of Toro, he was 'gifted' with a twelve-year-old Mutooro girl Ketra Teruteesa, my paternal grandmother, with whom he fathered one child, my father. When my father was ten years old, my grandfather died and Ketra re-married. My father became a stepson in my grandmother's new family. The stories that we live by (Clandinin, 2000) are often stories of belonging that reverberate across time, space, and relations. I wonder if my father took me away from my mother because he yearned for the closeness of a large communal family that he missed as a child, and perhaps as an adult. This closeness is what grandfather modelled onto my father, but unlike his role model my father took the children away from their mothers. I am intrigued to know if my father feared for our safety (the four children he brought into his marriage with another woman), and initially sent us to live with my grandmother and paternal aunties. The latter demanded that we should all live in his marital home, and if his bride does not want us there, she should leave because we were in his life before her.

Lying in my bed, I recall my mother citing a Luganda proverb, as she usually did in her wise modest way: *atali nnyoko, akulaba mu mutwe, naye eyakuzaala akulaba eri lubuto* (whoever is not your biological mother will worry about your superficial needs while your biological mother looks at your belly, and worries whether you have eaten enough food and cares about your suffering). I wonder why my father never realized that my stepmother would never treat me the same way she treated her biological children. I recall my father telling me how scared my grandmother was when she was married off at twelve years old to my grandfather. I wonder why he thought that severing a four-year-old's bond with her mother could have a positive ending when his own mother, in old age, still lamented about being torn away from her mother. Looking at the photographs (**Figure 1 & 2**), I reminisce about the interconnectedness between womanhood in Uganda and the neutral knowledge concerning women's innate ability to love and care for children. This dominant theory postulates that women are inherently good caregivers to children regardless of whether they are biological parents to children or not.

The policy of women being better caregivers than men is cemented within the Uganda Domestic Relations Bill 2003 (DRB) that was introduced in January 2003 as the working document of reference regarding marriage, separation and divorce (Mukwaya, 2003). The DRB was crafted and changed many times since 1965. It lays down the framework for the position of women in society. It claims a total knowledge of what marriage is, what women are, and what the role of women in society is. It is from this standpoint that Baganda believe that women are naturally and inherently better caregivers to children than men. Growing up in a patriarchal society in Uganda, with gender non-egalitarian beliefs, this kind of belief came into existence for me due to my observation that girls were pushed into marriage at a very young age. Women spend more time nurturing their children from pregnancy to adult age. Women tended to be more caring to their children than the fathers.

This unchallenged knowledge is produced by the societal norms and cultures backed up by the DRB that guides the day-to-day running of a household and the life of a girl or woman. It is this neutral knowledge that formed and informed my father's decision to place all his children under the care of one woman even if she was not the biological mother to all the children. The DRB promotes the commodification of women whereby they have to be sexually subservient to men, such as the legalization of sex in marriage without consent. However, since the bodies of women are natural conduits for giving birth to children, their commodification as sex slaves to men is, therefore, directly linked to their perceived ability to give birth to children. Consequently, giving birth is perceived as a natural ability to take care for children. Their sexuality is, therefore, not an end but it is a means to an end. That is why barren women are ostracized in Ugandan society. Another example of women's commodification in the DRB is the way a customary marriage ceremony becomes official (Mukwaya, 2003). Accordingly, when a man pays a woman's family dowry before marriage, he may ask for a total refund if the woman decides to leave him as though she is a commodity being traded.

Telling the family house that never became my home

Figure 3. My father's house, family car and stepsiblings

When I was four years old, my father took me from my mother and took me to his house in Makindye. I sat on the front seat between my father and my stepmother. My father said: "this is your mother". Hmm, what about the one I just left behind? She is my mother too. At my mother's house, I was a jolly child who loved dancing and singing. One day while bathing and singing, my stepmother shouted at me to stop singing. I froze. What is wrong with singing, I wondered? I knew my life would

never be the same. I was no longer free. I never sang or danced in that family home again. I became an introvert. I hardly spoke and did not feel free. I was no longer in the loving care of my mother. I was all alone in a house full of children. I had to look out for myself and I felt like I did not belong. I felt like the Other-child because I worked like a child labourer in that house. That is when the bed became my sanctuary. Lying in my bed, I imagined a world with love, dancing, and happiness. The kind of world in my mum's home. I always felt that she loved me. I did not see her much until I was seventeen. She was not allowed to visit me at my father's and stepmother's house. But she sometimes visited me secretly. Our secret meeting place was at the fence of my father's property where I lived. I crawled under the barbed wire to be with mum. We sat behind a nearby bush for hours and she trimmed my nails, cut my hair, and gave me hand-me-downs from my older sisters. I yearned to escape and live with mum. I packed my suitcase several times hoping to escape, but I thought of people blaming mum. I would unpack my case the next day.

Re-telling the family house that never became my home

Propping myself up on my bed in Edmonton, as I re-read and re-visit these childhood stories that shaped me (Sewali-Kirumira, 2017), I realize that this was the beginning of living on the margin. As a pre-teen in living in my father's and stepmother's family house, I felt like *omwana w'obweru* (Luganda, 'outsider-child'). The outsider-child refers to a stepchild born out of wedlock whose presence is more tolerated than celebrated. I felt as if I were invisible to my father and stepmother compared to my stepsiblings, especially my stepmothers' biological children. When I was six years old, my father forgot to pick me up from my boarding school at the end of the school term. After two weeks, the headmistress drove me to my father's workplace. My father and I never talked about the incident. From my early childhood, until in my late teens when I decided to move back into my mum's home, I was tasked with caring for my younger stepsiblings by feeding them, getting them to sleep, and carrying them around. I was treated more as a house help than a child. Looking back at my early childhood experiences in a predominantly boy's boarding school, I feel that Eurocentric patriarchal education also facilitates what I refer to as structural invisibility of girl-children,

Figure 4. Author at age 12

especially stepdaughters. I wonder if this is not a form of domesticated womanhood whereby women are expected and trained to be nurturing and not assertive. Schochet (2019) concludes that even employed women disproportionately take on unpaid caregiving responsibilities when their families cannot find or afford child care and that mothers were forty percent more likely than fathers to report that they had personally felt the negative impact of child care issues on their careers.

In (re)viewing the photograph (**Figure 3**), I cannot help but recall those trying moments when all ‘outsider-children’, myself included, could not eat at the big dining table together with my father, stepmother, and stepsiblings. We had been othered into self-isolation. We instinctively knew that we had no place at the dining table. No one asked us to stay, but no one invited us to join them on the table. We ate in the kitchen after everyone at the table had been served. Sometimes, when we were alone in the house, we would sneak and sit at the dining table, and eat hastily as if we had no right to sit there. A Luganda proverb: *omuganzi tagwa mu bibbo* (a welcome guest does not rush to eat and fall into baskets of food) captures this phenomenon of sneaking to do something that you have a right to do. The proverb means that a guest who knows that she is loved, and welcome will not rush to get his share of food. If she finds the host family eating, even if she is not expected, she will quietly wash her hands because she is sure to get her share. Often times we were not allowed to put sugar in our tea because it was meant for the ‘children’. Whenever I was alone, I would empty the sugar bowl into my cup because I felt that I was a child like the others and my father always bought more than enough groceries.

The photograph (**Figure 4**) takes me back to my teenage years when I was most vulnerable to predatory male house helpers (servants) who always tried to rape me. They also knew that my stepmother and father would not pay so much attention to whatever happened to me. The half-smile on my face is a reflection of the half-hearted care I received in the house and the yet unfulfilled desire to reunite with my mum.

Telling severing the bondage of the house

Figure 5. Sister, author, and mum

I see my name on the list of newly admitted Makerere university students. Navigating the narrow pathways in the slum, I feel like I am conquering the world bit by bit. I have proven every naysayer wrong. I survived the house and come out victorious. I walk the ten-mile-long trek home to share the news with my father. He crushes my spirit by saying that he will only believe me when he sees the official admission letter. I try to put my shattered self-esteem back together by

visiting my mother. She smiles and reminds me that she always called me ‘omwana wange omugezi’ (my wise child). I now know that the house has no more hold on me.

Re-telling severing the bondage of the house

On my journey to becoming a Black African Feminist enrolled in a doctoral program in social justice and policy studies, I have bumped against cultural and structural barriers to girl's education that have instilled in me the resilience, work ethic, and sense of self-sufficiency as a Black woman. When girls in pre-colonial Buganda reached puberty, they were married off to financially stable men. Even in recent times this practice is prevalent as evidence in my paternal grandmother's story who was married off at age twelve. A girl's role in society was to go into *obufumbo* (Luganda, marriage), and *obufumbo* stems from the verb *okufumba* which means cooking. The formative purpose of girls' cultural education was to prepare them for marriage, teach them how to cook, make life easier for men, and take care of the family. Girl-child marriages result in early pregnancies or when the girls return to their families, they are no longer considered to be children and have to look for work often as domestic help. In Buganda, girls are still more often required to take care of household tasks than boys, and many think of marriage as a viable option to post-secondary education which is financially unattainable. Additionally, a girl's education is not prioritized, in some communities, as traditional Kigandan beliefs stipulate that believe when a girl gets an education, it will benefit the family into which she will get married, and not her paternal family. Therefore, families with a traditional Kigandan mindset may not always invest in girl's education as there will be no returns or benefit on their investment (UNESCO, 2018).

Dardot and Laval (cited in Sparke, 2020) pointed out that neoliberalism instructs "everyone to live in a world of generalized competition. It calls upon wage-earning classes and populations to engage in economic struggle against one another [...] it promotes the justification of ever greater inequalities" (p. 3). These inequalities for girls start with not having access to education or when they have access, the conditions at home are not conducive for them to attend and/or stay in school. Mollel and Sabo (2017) highlight these culturally structured gender inequalities in an interview with Sewali-Kirumira in which she narrates that

at the age [eight] I realized life for a girl\woman like in many societies would be impacted differently. One of the traditions in my tribe is that when women are greeting men, they must kneel down. That bothered me at a very young age especially seeing that my brothers who were younger than me were not required to kneel when greeting their elders. With that, I determined in my heart at an early age that I had to leave my country if I wanted to do something meaningful in my life. My family members, especially the girls are okay, but when it gets to the traditions they gave in and do not bother to fight against some of those "cultural practices" that don't make a lot of sense. In regards to kneeling, their response is "Just do it, what does it take away from you!" They live with many of these traditions that make no sense to me. (pp. 304-305)

The above quote reveals how the story of kneeling down, a story that I live by, informed and formed my decision to pursue education outside Uganda, which meant for me, outside of the traditional Kigandan patriarchal norms. Mundy and Manion (2015) argue that "interlocking sets of disadvantages including income, ethnicity, location and gender combine to ensure that the poorest children do not enter or persist in school" (p. 62). It is important to note that the "poorest children" actually refer to the 'poorest [boy] children' and not girls, because girls' education is historically and culturally less relevant. Girls benefit the least from such initiatives as the Speaker of the

Ugandan parliament, Rebecca Kadaga, noted in 2018 when she launched the Busoga education initiative (New Media Uganda, 2018). Kadaga noted the Busoga, a region in East Uganda where the source of the Nile river is located, had performed the worst in Uganda, and girls were the worst performers. This means that in 2018, probably for many years before as well, it was a girl from a poor family attending a Universal Primary Education (UPE) school who performed the worst in the country. Kadaga highlighted the need to change the mindsets of the traditional Kisoga families to also consider girls/education to be as important as boys' education.

Telling racism is like head tax: wherever you meet it, there you pay

Figure 6. Author with her baby daughter preparing for mid-course examination

At the new journalism students' orientation at Dortmund University in Germany, the organizers segregated us, the three international students, from the forty-seven domestic students. The lead facilitator, a journalism professor, informed us that they do not expect us to complete the Master's program within the scheduled time because foreign students have a linguistic disadvantage; the journalism program is delivered in German. I wondered how can you welcome new students by telling them that they are innately disadvantaged? The professor looked directly at me and the Black male student from Cameroun and said: "No one has ever done it. Do not burden yourself with that expectation." I knew she had profiled us as being linguistically disadvantaged Black bodies. I was so ready to disprove her because she did not know me. I kept quiet but I promised myself to complete my Master's degree in time, and even do the internship in Germany, and not in my home country as most international students did. I completed my internship with Radio Deutsche Welle in Cologne and Bonn.

Re-telling racism is like head tax: wherever you meet it, there you pay

As I leaf through my photo albums, images depicting my struggles, successes and life lessons, as a Black student-mother-wife-feminist, rekindle a smile on my face. I faced direct and systemic racism within the university environment, and also outside the campus. In such moments, I thought of my mother who used to say a Luganda proverb whenever a family member fell sick. She would say: "*olumbe musolo: teruddukwa: gye lukusangira gy'oweera*". The literal translation is that sickness or death is like head tax. It is inescapable and you will encounter it everywhere. Wherever you encounter it, you must pay for it. In pre-colonial Buganda, the king levied a head tax on every peasant, wherever and whenever he wanted. The peasant had no option but to pay it because disobeying the king was treasonous and punishable by death. I find racism to be similar to the pre-colonial head tax. I cannot choose when to face it or not and nor can I claim that I have been discriminated enough for a lifetime. Whether I like it or not, I have to pay what I refer to as 'anti-Black racism-tax' which means dealing with struggles that only come up when you are Black.

Systemic racism reverberates throughout Eurocentric education systems that work hard to preserve Whiteness as a means of conserving power and privilege, thereby perpetuating social inequalities (Giroux, 1997b, p. 292; Rivière, 2010). Racism prevails in schools as "...teachers bring to the profession perspectives about what race means, which they construct mainly on the basis of their life experiences and vested interests" (Sleeter, 1993, p. 157). Therefore, many teachers will work towards maintaining the known instead of incorporating the unknown which in many cases is tied to getting to know students and cultures from minority groups. Rivière (2008) argues that teachers have a "vested interest in justifying and maintaining their privileged positions within unequal relations of power, regardless of their intentions, and of whether or not they are consciously aware of this fact" (p. 362). Several studies have shown that school leaders and teachers tend not to notice nor attend to racism or issues of race (Young & Laible, 2000). Young and Laible (2000) contend that administrators do not understand the many ways in which racism works. However, having a good understanding of the forms of racism and finding effective ways to deal with it and ultimately eliminate it, is crucial for Black students in a learning environment.

In re-reading the above narrative and reflection, I realize that my personal anti-Black racism strategies involved using the racial slurs as motivation to excel for myself and those that suffer like me. The hardships I faced became steps that I climb towards a better life for myself and my loved ones. Hard work, self-love, and constantly challenging myself became key components of my academic and professional lifestyle. Combating racism became infused with who I was evolving to be as a strong independent Black African woman.

Telling systemic uncaring towards Black-foreign-student-mother's struggles

Marrying the love of my life and becoming a mother was a dream come true. But dealing with systemic racism towards Black-foreign-student-mothers was a nightmare. As a foreign student, I had to submit my grades to renew my student visa every year. My entry into the journalism program required me to do an internship at a local newspaper. Since my student visa prohibited me from working, the immigration office updated my study permit to allow me unpaid internship (Figure 7). I wondered why I needed two student visas: one to study journalism and the other to do practical journalism course work. I could not understand how course work violates my student status. When I became a mother of two beautiful girls,

Figure 7. Student visa to do course work

their residence permit was tied to my successful completion of my degree program (Figure 6). I had to take my five-month-old baby to the immigration office to prove that I had become a mother even though I had all the documentation from the hospital. They had to see my baby in person in order to give me and her a study permit. Children born of foreign students were exempted from applying for German citizenship or permanent residence. I was already married to a Ugandan

Figure 8. Student/child study permit

foreign student (and we are still happily married after 23 years) when I became a mother. But my husband was not allowed to share the responsibility of having children tied to his study permit. This is a burden meant only for mothers. I had to apply for my children's right to have an education because of my foreign student status. When I inquired about childcare benefits, the immigration officer informed me that I had come to Germany to study and not to make babies. My children would never be eligible for any childcare benefits and if my husband and I cannot financially care for our daughter, we will all be deported. She would do me a favor and not report me to her bosses, otherwise they might deport me immediately because my daughter's visa was tied to mine. My student visa allowed me to work only ten hours a week during the semester for maximally three months in a year, or to work fulltime for three months during the semester holidays. It was difficult to get any job because of racial profiling.

Sometimes employers handpicked all the Black students and asked them to leave saying there were no jobs. Besides, most of the well-paying student jobs were physically demanding jobs that were ring-fenced for men, even though I was strong enough to do them. Finding student accommodation was also difficult and it became worse when I was a married woman with two daughters and a husband who lived 350 kilometres away. He was not allowed to change his major and we decided that it would be financially better for us if he stayed in Saarbrücken so that he could earn something because there were very few jobs in Dortmund where I studied and lived. Sometimes a landlord confirmed on the phone that the place was available but when I reached there, she peeked through the windows and either refused to open the door or told me via the intercom that the house was no longer available. Whenever I asked a German classmate to call the same landlord, she was told that the place was indeed available.

Telling systemic uncaring towards Black-foreign-student-mother's struggles

Looking at the visa entries in my old Ugandan passports, I reminisce about the times I fought to restrain myself from shouting my frustration at the immigration officers for the systemic racism they upheld. Looking back now, I recall another Lugandan proverb my mum told me repeatedly whenever I narrated about my unfair treatment under the supervision of my stepmother. Mum would listen attentively and say in her quiet sweet voice: *"kwata n'owaayo: nga yasikira musikire"* which means "just take the child and hand her over to the authorities for punishment; so says someone who did not give birth to the child, but only inherited the child from her relatives." This proverb means that if you do not care for someone deeply because you feel that you have no familial or genetic or close connection to that person, you will not care how terribly unfair this person is treated. I begin to discern the relatedness between the systemic racism I suffered in Germany and the lack of empathy for Blackness that inheres in Euro-German-centric social policies. Overt discrimination was prevalent with reference to the labor force. In Germany, I had to include personal information on my resume such as date of birth, nationality, marital status as well as my passport photograph.

After completing my Master's degree in journalism and realizing that I could not get employment in my profession, I was ready to relocate to another country. Based on my childhood

experience of cultural misogyny, I was not ready to return to the homeland with my daughters and husband. I felt that my young family needed a place where we could all thrive and grow into who we are meant to be. Canada, with its aging population and immigration system, offered the opportunity we were looking for. Like many educated and skilled immigrants, I applied to become a permanent resident in Canada. After my experiences of how Africans are treated in Europe, I was positive that my Master's degree from Germany would be valued in Canada and that getting a job would not be a problem. Surprisingly, I heard the all too familiar phrase that most immigrants hear: "you do not have any Canadian experience." I had to learn to work through another exclusionary system that is carefully designed to feign equity within diversity. While Canada openly welcomes immigrants to keep the economy strong, many immigrants end up working in new careers despite the fact that they had invested so much time and money in the careers that were considered by immigration for them to become permanent residents in the first place. I always wonder, with all the programs in place to assist immigrants to settle in Canada, how can one attain Canadian experience without having lived in Canada before? Levyeva (2019) echoes this sentiment when she argues that "language barrier, unrecognizable educational credentials, and lack of Canadian experience as the most common barriers that newcomers face after coming to Canada." In 2013, the Ontario Human Rights Commission established a policy on removing the 'Canadian Experience' as a requirement to gain employment as a new immigrant. I experienced this when I worked for CBC Radio in Edmonton. Since I had worked as a reporter for CBC Radio in Sydney, Nova Scotia, I thought that I had very good chances of getting an entry-level position with CBC Radio in Edmonton.

In Edmonton, however, I was reminded of the same situation I had encountered in Germany. I could not directly speak into the CBC's Radio microphone for any of the stories I was reporting on because I had an 'accent'. This is another common cage that too many Black female immigrants fight to get out of. I was not sure if I was overqualified, or underqualified due to my lack of significant Canadian experience as a journalist. After this ordeal, I decided to apply for positions in the Alberta provincial government as the nine-to-five jobs fit in with my family's needs at the time. I was advised to remove most of my qualifications when I applied for entry jobs. When I got an entry-level research assistant position with the government of Alberta, I was able to put my work experience and education back on my resume depending on the position I was applying for. When I apply for any position, I first look up the director of the department on *LinkedIn* and see their qualifications. If I see that their education is less than what I have, I remove some of my education or work experiences from my application.

Concluding narrative explorations and suggestions

Knowing who I was at a very young age was one of the weapons that has helped me work around the systems in place that try to keep girls, women, women of color and minorities at the bottom of any given society. I knew early on in life that I would not be able to thrive in a society that does not recognize me as an equal citizen with my male counterparts. I started looking out for opportunities outside Uganda when I was in secondary school, which was not an easy task, since there was no internet at the time. I would regularly inquire about visa requirements at foreign embassies in Uganda, and also read about the cultures and opportunities in the books displayed on coffee tables at the embassies. Later on, as a foreign student living in Germany, I had to find ways to assist my children to find some form of normalcy despite the racism they faced from day one. I had to stand up for them early on when they had fights with other children. Due to my children's

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darker skin complexion, they did not have any scratch marks like the other children with whom they had fought. Accordingly, they were told that they had attacked the other children.

While living in Germany I was, for the first time, confronted with the way Africa was portrayed in Eurocentric educational materials and in the media. I often felt that Africa was generalized as being one big country from Cape of Good Hope to Tunis. In 2014, Delta Airlines congratulated the US team for defeating Ghana in the soccer world cup. They used a giraffe metaphor to represent Ghana when there are no giraffes in Ghana! Since there was a great deal of negative news about Africa in the media, I became the chief editor for *Afrika Positiv*. We fished out for positive stories about Africa to educate readers in Germany. When we read exaggerated stories of mass hunger in 'Africa', and not in a specific country, we wrote a piece or did an interview to set the record straight, thereby aligning ourselves with the West African proverb that goes, "until the lion learns to speak, the hunter will always be the hero."

Like *kalandalugo*, the wild grass that grows only in the space that cattle have disrupted with their roots, the stories that I live by could only happen because of the unique challenges I face as a Black African feminist. These stories sprawl over three continents, but I feel they impact me the same way, because they all uncover barriers designed to disempower me in one way or the other. One of the ways in which I learnt to maneuver marginalization in Germany was working with allies who would stand up with me against structural marginalization. I would rally my German friends to challenge the system with me.

Another strategy that I used was to learn the system specifically through mastering the German language to a proficiency level with which I was comfortable. Accordingly, I could express myself very competently in German, whenever I felt that I was not being treated fairly. An example of such a case was when I had to extend my student visa every year. Initially I was required to take my daughters out of school and daycare and take them with me to the immigration office to extend my visa. When I learnt to speak German fluently, I got a letter from the university and daycare to show that the children were still in the country so that they did not have to be physically present during my study permit renewals.

As I make myself comfortable in the bed of Black African feminism that I made for myself over the last decades, I reminisce about the singular day, the happiest day that I spent in my father's and stepmother's house. It was at my *kwanjula* which is the traditional Kigandan wedding ceremony whereby the groom's family introduces themselves to the host's family. My mother and father were there to witness my happiness. The margin that I carefully tread on sustains itself in the favoring boys over girls, legitimizing cultural practices that subjugate women, such as kneeling and disrupting the narrative, that it is men's nature to assert themselves over women. The margin that I intend to nourish and allow to flourish through the stories that I live by is a Black-African-feminist-margin. It is an intricate network of resilience, self-love, kindness, and uncompromising dedication to anti-misogynist and anti-racism work. This is the margin that I live by.

Figure 9. Dad, daughter and mum in traditional wear

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