FEMINA COLUMN

WOMEN WITHOUT MEN

By Van Zirimu

"What job does your husband do?" That was the question the Mkombozi at the road block was asking. Although my Kiswahili was rather shaky I was quite sure of that. A number of responses and accompanying emotions flashed through my mind:
"Of what relevance is that to my identity card?" – indignation.
Or
"Mind your own business!" – defiance.
Or
"Where he has gone I don't know how they employ him." – mysticism.
Or simply
"He died".

I chose the last because, after all, it was the simplest. And I was trying to reason with myself, "This ndugu could not have meant any harm. His response to my response was sentimental. "Ohhhh!" he intoned. "Nendelea, mama". One of the ways to discourage one feeling is to call up another. So deep down within me I was saying, "You just shut up and leave me alone. I don't want your pity". But again the voice of reason. "Cool down; nobody meant to exploit your feelings". And the same question has been asked again and again.

One dreary, cheerless weekend, I said to a friend of mine, "Let's go out to this Dinner-and-Dance". She simply exploded, "I'm sick and tired of moving about with gangs of women. You go in the midst of a gang, you get there to find gangs of other women struggling to cover up their boredom by gossipping and bickering and backbiting". I resorted to some bravado and said, "Thats the order of the day. You have to either share or scorn other people's miseries.
"I have enough of my own, thank you very much", my friend said. "I have been told again and again that in seeing others in distress I will gain strength when I realise so-and-so's lot is worse than mine. Well, my feelings don't seem to function that way. I don't think someone in distress can thrive on other people's distress. It only makes the situation more unbearable". I could not help admitting that she was right, since I felt exactly the same way too.

But then we could not help moving together anyway so this time the Ndugu at the road block commented, "Gaari ya wa-ki-namama". Anger and impatience only helped to complicate the situation, as I was trying to express a complicated idea in a language I barely knew. How do you say very rapidly in Kiswahili, "Look, brother, the majority of women in Uganda are without men for one reason or another and you are seeing only two," and manage to look friendly and good humoured at the same time?

Then there is my sister who lives in daily fear that some woman or other will snatch her man, seeing there are so many without. At every other woman's tragedy she moans, "Ah, such a young widow, don't you think our men are going to be interested in her?" And thereafter she would like to shut her door on her. And as for those who have never married and those who are separated, she's ready to pick a quarrel if she thinks there's been a greeting, or even a glance exchanged between one of these and her man.

But the greatest one of us all is the one who has shared friendship with understanding. She has never seen her manless sister as a threat to her security, but as she herself might have been, or might be; for if there is one thing that our hardships have taught us, it's this: If it has happened to my neighbour today, tomorrow it may be my turn. And the attitude I would appreciate from my neighbour if I am the one in distress is the one I will try to give.

Some form of sharing is being forced on us. And those women like my sharing friend might be better off because in taking the innitiative they might prevent the worst from happening – like sharing the bed. After all, if another woman likes and respects you she may think twice before venturing to loot your man. And the moral? LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR.

When husbands play "housewife"

For the great German writer, Schiller, the roles of male and female were plain: "Men must out, into the hostility of, life". And as to who should look after house, home and children, there was no mincing of words either: "At home, the diligent housewife has command".

However, as of the beginning of the 1970s, Schiller would have run into trouble over the apportioning of male and female roles. More and more West German women are making their way "out into the hostility of life". It may be that a wife doesn't want to abandon a highly-paid profession she worked hard to learn or that a husband is still studying and can't afford to sustain the family or even that the husband pursues an occupation he can carry out at home.

In the old days, no-one quibbled when working wives had to come home and start work all over again, patiently bearing a double burden. But nowadays, womenfolk are rebelling more and more. Husbands working at home ought, they say, to function as "house-husbands". In-

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A REVIEW

THEATRE

By Judith Naluggya

Theatre is fighting fit to keep the drama candle burning and even during the period of petrol shortage when no car roosted in her park, the house was packed to full capacity. After liberation, presentations were triggered off by "Makula Ga Kulabako", a Kampala City Players production and among live presentations have been "Engule Ya Kamukukulu" by Asita Theatre Company, "Vva ku bakazi" and "Nakumusana" by Nsereko Sebuliba and Company. The concert by the Tanzania People's Defence Forces excelled in stage discipline, body control and stage team work. Theirs was a piece to be emulated by all. Congratulations.

The Educated versus the Illiterate Wife.

This was a glaring theme in Magoba's "Zonna Mpayippayi" presented by Uganda Theatre Stars. Dr. Luti's marriage to Harrite, an arrogant, educated and nagging wife fails and prompted by his elder brother, Dr. Lu i, experiments with a village, naive and illiterate female who proves an alien to the Doctor's elite society. She is extremely fond of visiting witchdoctors and is physically carried out of the home when she is caught bewitching the doctor. Whether it is her magic that does it or not, Dr. Luti never gets another wife, becomes a fugitive and is struck off the medical register. He sells his household goods one by one and finally commits suicide on realization there is nothing else to sell – no more money to pocket.

Excellent acting by the whole group and special credit goes to Lugaju Kayonga – Dr. Luti and Sarah Nakintu – Harriet. Jane Nabakooza also convinced the audience of her evil character as Nambi, the village female.

While we criticised the former comic version of the play as too light and unconvincing, the tragic version proved to be too heavy for the human mind. It was enough to watch Dr. Luti struggling with death and finally collapsing but when it came to actually placing him in a coffin and bearing him off for burial, the play jumped off the entertaining peg.

COMING SOON:

"The City Game" by Ngoma Players. See you there and have Fun.

NATIONAL THEATRE: TRIALS AND CHALLENGES

**By John Kakooza*

The National Theatre, like most institutions, wobbled with much difficulty throughout the eight years of miserable living under Amin. This slow move to nowhere did not pass without catastrophes.

Artistic Director, Byron Kawadwa, was murdered on his return from Lagos where he had successfully led a formidable team of artistes to FESTAC.

As if this was not enough, the performing groups were faced with the hurdle of having to submit their scripts to Nakasero for censorship by a team of men who knew little about drama. And if they knew, they had little interest in the art. Several plays were either barred by the censorship or were withdrawn by the group for the personal safety of the members. Ngoma Players withdrew their booking for an Easter play "Watch your Step". The Producer, like the actors, was not ready to take chances. Later their other play "THE BURDENS" by John Ruganda failed the censorship examination.

Subsequent to all these frustrations, the group decided to lie low for sometime. Kampala City Players were unable to recover from the shock inflicted upon them by the death of their celebrated writer, producer and founder Chairman, Byron Kawadwa.

Wycliffe Kiyingi, one of Kampala's leading playwrights, several times cancelled his bookings to save his neck.

In effect, all the powerful and serious groups took a low profile. Robert Sserumaga's professional group, Abafumi, kept their shows for European and Latin American audiences. They only came to Uganda to rest. Later Idi Amin declared them CIA agents and they took refuge in Nairobi before proceeding to Europe. All this fuss did not allow the theatre to observe standards. In consequence the place turned into a cheap commercial house. It became a platform of half baked plays and songs just to earn quick money. It did not survive the speculative jobless guys masquerading as artistes. The audience was fed on shoddy stuff in the absence of anything of value.

The Theatre Club was ordered to close down, accused of being the meeting place for "subversive elements". This was the club for theatre artistes. It had nothing to do with politics but Idi Amin would not listen. Here ideas were exchanged about theatre and the performing arts. We discussed culture at large. We organised talks and discussions on subjects of cultural and general interest. Cultural value or any other civilised value was of no meaning to Idi Amin.

With liberation, we must participate, and fully at that, in the task of rehabilitation and reconstruction of the theatre. Writers and producers must tighten their belts and raise standards. Theatre is not a play house. It is a place of serious activity just like any other place of ritual. Gone are the days of cheap shows for easy money. The speculative mind of the neo-artistes must be brought to an end if the theatre is to grow. Instead of the Censorship Board I think a team of men with theatrical expertise could be set up

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