

# Forging Black Safety in the Carceral Diaspora: Perverse Criminalization, Sexual Corrections, and Connection-Making in a Death World

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Your aesthetic standards what – what Again?

Bitch, I penned my pieces on the prison floors.

...I sleep in a prison ward renown for ideas.

...Would beautiful poems dethrone a tyrant?

— Stella Nyanzi, *No Roses from My Mouth* (2020)

FORMER POLITICAL PRISONER STELLA NYANZI INTIMATELY AND passionately writes, on any surface available, of conditions in Luzira Women’s Prison, Kampala, Uganda. Nyanzi, a beloved academic, gender justice activist, mother, and now poet, refused silencing. Instead, she slipped her fugitive poetry through prison bars and into the international spotlight with the help of the radical publishers of Ubuntu Reading Group (Nyanzi 2020). The feminist anthropologist writes of her experiences and observations: the cruel and perverse reality of criminalization, the sexuality and humanity of those imprisoned, the drastic loss and suffering produced by a regime of punishment under the Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni. However, reading within and through her text, I argue that Nyanzi exposes much more while incarcerated. Her words reveal the prison as the preeminent sphere of social, economic, political, and physical death throughout the African diaspora: a carceral death world that exists to stifle Black dissent.

Outside of the actual prison, carceralism ensures that this death world extends in tentacular fashion outside of the cell and into Black communi-

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ties and countries. Death worlds, according to Achille Mbembe (2019), are spheres of social existence conferred upon certain populations that render them subject to perpetual injury, loss, and death. They are intentional political formations created to relegate some to slow death, which is imagined as necessary for the sustenance of life and vitality for privileged and powerful world subjects. Serving death world-making, a global carceral regime enlarges state capacities for criminalization, which Dylan Rodríguez (2019, 1586) defines as the “discursive and legal formulation of ‘crime’ as an affixation of notions of pathology/antisociality to particular [gendered, sexualized, racialized] human acts, behaviors, ecologies and bodies.” Criminalization thus controls racialized and pathologized masses through the perpetually colonial cycle of labeling, surveillance, disciplining, silencing, and extraction.

Therefore, states not only expand the mechanisms, but the very meaning of crime. Strikingly, Nyanzi—arrested for the cyber harassment of first lady Janet Museveni—also demonstrates the experience of a newly virtualized carceralism. Words uttered on the scholar’s personal Facebook account were found to be so politically repugnant that she suffered jailing as corrections. Simultaneously, it is through the anti-carceral queer feminist praxis developing throughout the African diaspora that we witness life-building practices and historical-futuristic collectivity. Within collective praxis, we counter corrective violence.

In 1894, the British formalized a colonial system of indirect rule to establish the protectorate of Uganda, a territory ensnaring thirteen kingdoms and politically centering the kingdom of Buganda. Immediately, they invested in a prison system that would transform the separate, autonomous relationships that historically kingdoms had developed for punishment or accountability after social transgressions. Prisons mushroomed alongside the political and economic domination of the newly colonized (and racialized) peoples of Uganda to entrap those who rebel against colonial standards of productivity; the undisciplined are imagined as in need of civilizing. Today, the prison continues imperial aims, suppressing radical, liberatory thought among African people, and serving as a mechanism for the ultimate, upward redistribution of the products of stolen labor.

It is within the kingdom of Buganda that Luzira Women’s Prison currently sits and where Stella Nyanzi suffered from a year of punishment, a miscarriage, and the deplorable conditions of maximum security shared by other Africans labeled woman and criminal, whether suspected (49.8 percent) or convicted (50.2 percent).<sup>1</sup> According to Nyanzi, “idle and disorderly suspects approved the rhythm” of her poems: incarcerated women became a

new set of peer reviewers for the academic. Political imprisonment reveals the utility of prisons as a space of social, political and physical death. Even the productive African body can be determined unruly and targeted for silencing. In a time when the world questions whether Black lives matter, I argue that we must recognize the prison as a crucial site in which anti-Black coloniality enjoys continuous reanimation. Within a postcolonial nation inhabited almost exclusively by people who are globally racialized as Black, it is at the machinations of carceralism (especially through militaristic policing and the utilization of imprisonment) where we must look—and then destroy—in order to make manifest the mantra. Black lives (do, can, must, will) matter.

In this article, I will use Nyanzi's poetry to analyze three generalizable detriments to Black safety globally. The first remains the perversity of criminalization, specifically in the utilization of criminal law to forcefully transform the poor or the political dissenter into productive citizens. Then I turn to sexual corrections, or the surveillance, punishment, and disciplining of the sexed body. Sexual corrections demonstrate the interplay of the corrective violence of regulating sex and gender with the colonial carceral—or the so-called civilizing structure of prisons. Lastly, I uplift evidence of connection-making as a life-affirming practice that produces the possibility of a counter to the death world.

Ultimately, this article asserts that prison relies on dominant, oversimplified notions of sex and gender that create increased challenges to Black safety, particularly those who are sexed differently (intersex, aged, or trans). The solution is not to create individual remedies like housing transpeople in facilities housing the gender with which they identify, or limiting decarceration to the elderly alone. Rather, I argue that we must rid the colonial carceral from global culture, including the institution of gender. We need to situate the prison as the preeminent space of Black death (personal, political, and social) so that we can abolish it. To arrive at this situation, this acknowledgment of the carceral death world, I offer this analysis through a methodology of connection considering historical method and engaged activist praxis (Rodriguez 2019).

### **Perverse Criminalization**

Prison expansion is a feature of neoliberal political economies in which prisons are imagined as catchalls for surpluses. Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) explores California's growing prisonization, which she attributes to surpluses

in finance capital, population, land, and government. She theorizes that at the juncture of these four surpluses, prisons became a way to consolidate and transform excess into something imagined as productive or useful. While expansion has been explored vis-a-vis neoliberalization in the United States (Gilmore 2007), in Nigeria (Agozino 2005, Saleh-Hanna 2008), in the United Kingdom (Bell 2014, Lambie 2013), and in other parts of the world (Sudbury [Oparah] 2005), there remain very few studies that consider the relationship of prisons to the political economies of any of the postcolonial African nations. This remains the case despite the acknowledgement of a forced neoliberalization (no doubt its own carceral relationship) to the “global north.” When we think about the unjust utilization of carceral punishments in Africa, we are discouraged from situating it in a global politic that connects these injustices to the same regime of punishment targeting (disproportionately Black) people in the United States and in other western nations. Instead, we are to isolate and attribute the responsibility for prison-based harms against African people to the extreme poverty and so-called corruption of any particular African national context.

Undoubtedly, however, many fledgling and weakened nation-states within the African continent and diaspora suffer the increased financing of penal responses. States apply these penal logics to transgressions as well as the surplus of land and population described in Gilmore’s work on California. However, California in the early twentieth century enjoyed a warfare-welfare political economy in which an influx of wartime spending led to the proliferation of governance structures to handle rapidly developed public responsibilities. Uganda, dissimilarly, existed as a colony of Great Britain at that time, and the colonized people within enjoyed no redistribution of the wealth extracted. Therefore, the rise of neoliberalism has not followed a generous welfare state model, but colonial exploitation and the manipulative politic of indirect rule.

In Uganda, the neoliberal age began only two decades after the 1962 independence from Great Britain. President Yoweri Museveni’s continual assumption of power since 1986 has relied on a full-scale embrace of western-dominated economic policies that have included structural adjustment programs, rapid privatization, and the proliferation of (international and domestic) non-governmental organizations meant to offer normal governmental provisions (Rodriguez 2019). The country relies on conditional aid for nearly every sector, especially defense and justice, with the United States and the United Kingdom shoveling notable sums annually.

The Uganda Prisons Service (UPS) oversees 254 facilities compared to the United Kingdom's 118, and they are collectively over capacity by more than 300 percent. Fifty percent of the encaged people of Uganda have not gone to trial.<sup>2</sup> Strikingly, and in stride with the United States, while the prison population designated male slightly declined, those designated female prisoners have consistently increased since 2005. Therefore, the expansion and overutilization of prisons is a uniquely growing threat to Black female, intersex, and trans safety internationally.

For those of African descent, imprisonment is especially aligned with an expectation of forced productivity, historically and today. Unlike white, western women who have also faced cruel histories of incarceration, notably in psychiatric institutions, Black women have been incarcerated in order to further their value as colonized and/or enslaved workers and placed in workhouses, jails, and prisons with expectations of labor. Uganda is no exception and the UPS lists various work programs that rely on imprisoned labor, such as crop production, animal husbandry, metalworks, and tailoring. Nyanzi writes the following in the poem entitled "The OC has Cows":

The prison OC has cows  
Tended by female prisoners  
Cleaning the cow shelters  
Scooping up cow dung  
Brushing the cows' big teeth,  
Soaping and rinsing their hinds  
Smearing wounds with ointments  
...  
Milking the udders of the cows,  
Delivering milk to buyers each day,  
Yet the prisoners never drink this milk.

The penological structure of the nineteenth century Auburn prison system, developed in Auburn, New York, emphasized communal work in the day alongside silent, imaginably penitent nights. Although much focus was on the silence integrated into the structure—the imprisoned were disciplined against socializing at night—the striking and lasting importance of the Auburn system was that it was the first self-sustaining and actually profitable prison model. The forced labor of producing silk inspired the global transportation of the system.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, England's Prison Act of 1898 reaffirmed this system of productive work rather than merely hard labor. Although the Criminal Justice Act of 1948 abolished penal servitude in England, England extended ferocious punishments (including flogging and whipping) to the colonized people of Uganda. They also multiplied a prison system that would work on behalf of particular Baganda chiefs so that, "by the mid-1930s, there were 190 prisons under [Buganda] domain" (Bruce-Lockhart 2017, 73). Using the Rubaga Cathedral Archives, Katherine Bruce-Lockhart (2017, 73) finds that early in the colonial prison system, "chiefs would use prison labour for various public and private works, and the kabaka also used prison labour on his palace grounds," which temporally aligned with the globalization of the Auburn system.<sup>3</sup>

While the kingdom of Buganda may have been inclined to mistreat political dissenters or those who transgressed the wishes of the king, it is important to acknowledge the role of the British in centralizing a punitive system around a particular kingdom in order to exact indirect rule over all within the territories. This centralization is why someone today who is Ugandan but not Baganda can be subjected to a type of punishment that was not only allowed but encouraged and required in order to further entrench the colonial aim. Coloniality is empowered by bureaucratizing imprisonment: it is a manipulative politic disguising brutality in the language of civility and modernization. Ultimately, prisons played an indisputable role in the extraction of African resources, as even the taxation of these East Africans "contributed considerable sums of money to the British war effort" and 77,000 recruits in the Second World War, while the Prison Service produced 17,000 military uniforms and materials for internment camps (Bruce-Lockhart 2017, 101).

Perhaps, needless to say, the criminal-legal system has formed in order to sequester and exploit those in positions that the empire imagines as unproductive. Passed down to the postcolonial state, this system translates contributions that do not align with the preferences of the Ugandan state. The poor, the political dissenter, and the minority are corralled in carceral spaces and forced into productivity through the creation of sellable goods (as "The OC Has Cows" explains, or a similar poem that Nyanzi shares called "Beautiful Endiro Baskets").

Nyanzi also shows us how humiliation, deprivation, and corporal punishments work in tandem to psychically break down the imprisoned. In the poem "Women in Brown Uniforms," Nyanzi shares the following about the wardresses of the prison:

Women in brown uniforms search inside the bars  
And inside the knickers of women in yellow uniforms  
This humiliation of women prisoners relies  
On body shaming and intruding upon bodily privacy.

Women in brown uniforms pick up sticks to  
Cane the buttocks of women in yellow uniforms.  
The violence of corporal punishment thrives  
Inside the walls of Luzira Women Prison.

Women in brown uniforms steal the male lovers  
And husbands who visit women in yellow uniforms.  
Unprofessional conduct of prison staff cannot  
Sink any lower than adultery with spouses of prisoners  
....<sup>4</sup>

Reminiscent of indirect rule, women in brown uniforms are afforded a proxy status and serve a purpose meant to harm a collective self (those who share their identity). Correctional work promises violence to benefit a class and kind of people that neither imprisoned nor prison guard represent. The colonial carceral, according to Mecke Nagel (2015), describes the connection between colonial power and the advent of a carceral society marked by the development of prisons. She writes, “the first prisons were instituted in abandoned slave forts by the new colonial masters, eerily reminding us of the continuation of trauma and subjugation of African peoples. The prison cell is a place of social death/trauma of separation” (Nagel 2015, 8). In the case of Stella Nyanzi, the social death of imprisoned women is apparent: separation occurs between them and their most beloved ones, their children left motherless and their lovers even seduced by the women in brown.

The colonial carceral, however, also reveals the power of the prison to usher in a political death for the dissenter. The haunting structure of the prison is not merely physical (Nagel 2015); it is also a civilizing force that meets Nyanzi as a vulgar character who the state desires to correct. Her activist tactics have ranged from naked protest to marches to activist-scholarship on sexuality to the more recent poetic exposés (Mirembe & Mwesigire 2020). Simultaneously, political forces detest her open support for Uganda’s former opposition leader, Kizza Besigye, and current symbol of political change, Bobi Wine. Therefore, the state established the repression of her outspokenness

through imprisonment: they attempted to disappear her for the power of her opinion and so-called obscene forms of self-expression.

The perverse misappropriation of prisons also ushers surplus subjects into political, social, or physical death. In “Asio Died in Prison,” published in *No Roses From My Mouth* (2020), Nyanzi memorializes the death of a fellow prisoner, Asio, whose faith, hope, and body were all diminished by the prison. Hauntingly, Nyanzi reminds us what happens after one life is lost: another is dragged into the same uniform, to eat from the same bowl, to endure the same forced labor, to use—and perhaps abandon—the same medications. The poetic affect convincingly brings us to the cyclical existence of this death world: once politically condemned, the social and physical self both die in service of the system’s reconstitution. The recycled medication and space on the floor (rather than bed) continue on, as only Asio’s prisoner number retires.

In contrast to the language of the state, which focuses on ending perversity understood as shared intimacy and sexuality, what I reference as perverse criminalization accounts for how humanity is stripped from these women by those in power. Those sanctioned by the state enact immoral and unreasonable harm on others, both through policing and when someone enters jails and prisons. When one is dehumanized, access to a shared humanity is also severed. This shared humanity or ubuntu is the underlying logic of many social movements for those of African descent (Rodriguez 2019). In her reading of *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe, Mecke Nagel (2015, 9) locates the prison as the site in which the “collateral *collective punishment*” of doing time occurs. That is, in a cultural imagination of shared importance, no one is disposable—severing one person from the society punishes the society entirely.

Connection—or interdependence—exists as the route through which liberation is made possible. This is why colonial masters, down to prison wardens, down to the women in brown, punish connection-making between those imprisoned (or between those inside and outside of the prison). In Nyanzi’s case, this can be seen as the transformation of the poetry into a fugitive good, as the entire second volume of the text was confiscated. We also witness this, as “Women in Brown Uniforms” demonstrates, when physical and social punishments meet at the juncture of the corporal abuse of the incarcerated and encouraged infidelities with visiting husbands.

Ideological and social connection-making, however, remain important mechanisms for Black safety, even in instances of physical death. When Stella Nyanzi suffered a miscarriage in prison, her saviors were fellow



prisoners. “Sisterhood is forged on that prison floor,” she writes, as she terrifyingly describes the blackouts, both of the prison’s electricity and of her own consciousness, as she loses blood and her blood pressure rises (Nyanzi 2020, 151–52). Nyanzi shares that prisoners give her water, pads, and toilet paper to collect her blood and her unborn baby, resources rationed to them. They protect her privacy, they “hold up blankets as shields,” they lift and blanket her limp body (151–53). The haunting recollection whispers mutual aid as I read, the practice of providing for others’ needs in innovative and necessary interventions that the state has rendered impossible, unnecessary, or excessive. As the prison staff jeers and doubles-down on the rationale for not providing pads or prenatal care, those who are imprisoned fashion ways to provide when she is disabled.

### **Sexual Corrections**

And how crucial it is to acknowledge the colonial carceral legacy that led to Nyanzi’s disablement in this moment. The colonial practice of defining and correcting sex remains alive in the Ugandan prison. As Nakanyike Musisi (2002) reveals to us, the British colonial focus on defining and pathologizing the sexed body of the Baganda existed in the ultimate service of political domination over those considered African and women. Musisi (2002, 97–98) argues that colonizers made continuous, eugenicist assertions of Baganda gynecological “problems” in order to preserve the future of British collaboration with this “most advanced and intelligent” race of Black people. The collaboration, of course, was required for the project of indirect rule, where the strength and wellness of the Baganda would be weaponized in order to dominate other subjugated kingdoms. The intruder in question, Dr. Cook, produced and reiterated the so-called scientific knowledge that assigned the uncivility of the Baganda female in direct relationship to the measurement of reproductive organs and “unfortunately small” pelvises (Musisi 2002, 103). Musisi (2002, 108) concludes that the colonial imagination of womanhood, as defined by projected reproductive capacity, transformed these people into an “index of progress and morality” put under continual, intrusive, and invasive scrutiny. Defining sex and sexual potential among the Baganda was directly shaped by broader concerns about how resources were to be distributed for the benefit of a continued colonial relationship.

With this history in mind, the insistent jeers of a guard haunt Nyanzi’s poem about her miscarriage experience. As she actively bleeds out, as she loses justice, a guard screams that she is a liar; that she is post-menopausal

(Nyanzi 2020, 151). She was assigned this designation with no actual regard for her bodily experience, only for an arbitrarily enforced scientific notion derived by creating an aggregate and female body. Just as the colonial doctors decided who was sexually incorrect in order to inform resource distribution and colonial strategy, so too does Luzira Women's Prison because "menstrual pads are currency" (Nyanzi 2020, 76). While Nyanzi was denied access to sanitary pads, those same healthcare devices became the material that provided the counterpressure and blood collection required to survive this terrifying loss.

The forced and oppressive definition of the (African) sexed body, sexual culture, and sexual practice has endured since colonialism. The colonial attempt to define and differentiate African peoples is counter to that which occurs on our own terms through self-determination. When married to contemporary carceralist practices, this oppressive sex politic becomes inscribed into legislation like same-sex sexual engagement or marriage laws and into policies such as sex-segregated prison placement or resource allocation in prisons. This is made clear with the confused perception of the aged body that belies sexed, sexual and reproductive assumptions. Therefore, when Nyanzi is forced into sexual corrections, she is thrown into a situation of immediate, mortal harm. Her unborn child, most notably, dies by the carceralisms of the prison and the presumptions of sex.

The carceralist presumption of sex is, however, not a metaphor. Measures of surveillance, labeling, discipline, and punishment all construct and reaffirm a static sex binary that does not exist beyond our social imaginings. The harm of sexual corrections manifests as the actual sex-segregated incarceration in facilities that cannot account for sexual difference. This is perhaps most strikingly seen in Nyanzi's (2020, 152) "Intersex in Prison":

You, my friend, confuse their brains.  
 You walk like a man with swagger  
 But reside in a women's prison.  
 You look like a girl  
 But attract women prisoners like a magnet.  
 You squat and sit like a man  
 But you are as tender as a mother.  
 You climb up trees to chop off branches  
 And swing that panga like a man.  
 You chop firewood with an arse  
 And dig up anthills like a tractor.

You bathe as often as a young woman  
Bleach your facial skin like a co-wife

But your moustache belies your gender.  
You wear a bra or bind your chest  
And balance your prison shorts like a show-off.  
You lead the women prisoners' football team,  
And score goals with your bare feet.  
You rear goats won by the football team  
Pulling the ropes in their necks all over the prison grounds.  
You climb up ladders to change bulbs  
And change the batteries in the wall clocks.  
You open up dead TVs and dead radios  
To repair their electrical circuits.  
You burn plastic patches onto broken jerrycans  
And mend the sandals of inmates  
You trim hair into fashionable styles and pay for new hairstyles for your  
lovers.  
You pay for the TV credit of your ward and buy groceries for your lovers.  
You pack toilet paper into your crotch  
And stand slouched like a gentleman.

You flirt harder than most men I know  
But bear your shame like a first wife  
You cut your hair like a man  
But groom your fingernails like a woman  
Your family wronged you with that surgery  
You smile when I call you, "My Son!"  
A child with both a penis and a vulva  
Your intersexuality mesmerises me.  
A man, a woman, a fabulous person.  
How you confuse gender rigidities!  
Your intersexuality confounds certainties  
Ends up confusing the gender lines in prison.  
This institution cannot understand you,  
You are intersex in prison!

I want to argue that the mislabeling of womanhood and its various supposed biological accompaniments is actually more significant than Nyanzi's

specific point that “the institution cannot understand” her intersex prison mate. Because sex and gender structure the prison (Davis 2003), prisons are designed to reaffirm the social construction of sex and to enforce gender norms. Kungu and Waweru (2002, 1) illustrate this point in corrections in Kenya: “women require saving twice, firstly from their criminality and then from their deviance from anticipated female behaviour.” In the logic of its very design, the prison is not meant to understand but to coerce.

Notably, Nyanzi’s account makes obvious that the institution does not understand anyone (read: know how to manage or treat humanely), as even she is mislabeled postmenopausal rather than sexual or reproductive. In light of the distribution (or lack thereof) of resources to prisoners—those inherently imagined as disposable by the state—Dr. Nyanzi experienced both the blockage of antenatal care and the lack of sanitary pads due to this mislabeling. If reproductive capacity is imagined as so central to womanhood, then the institution could not understand her either.

This is the mislabeling that led to Justice’s death in January 2019. With grief on vivid display through her words, Nyanzi laments that “[her] dead child was roughly disposed of along with biohazardous medical refuse interspersed with used syringes, gloves and cotton wool.” She cuts off her dreadlocks to pay her respects, quite literally left with discharging pieces of herself—because what remains when everything is taken from the prisoner? The act symbolizes the carceral abuse that deprives the life of generations of Africans around the world. It is other prisoners who are able to mourn with her, and that she mourns with, in many other accounts of death throughout the book. Their collective power is made evident by their survival. And a queer intimacy is created by this survival.

### **Connection-Making as Black Safety**

Nyanzi’s poems reveal the queer site of the prison, not as in a single queer identity, but as in its relentless desire to survive by grasping onto intimacy and wholeness, even if or maybe especially if it defies norms for individuals or society. Nyanzi (2020, 150, 82) writes of her embrace of her intersex fictive kin, of being “lesbian on the inside” and of taking “Sappho opportunities” to reclaim her humanity by making love to another human. The shared intimacy occurs clandestinely in the chicken house, during a particular time when they can evade guards, when the poultry that they are forced to mind can provide sound to cover the moans. The opportunity to be made human again reminds me of the words of Nwando Achebe (2021) when she

remarked in a lecture that the revocation of someone's human rights is an attempt to force an "un-aliving, un-humaning, un-being" unto them, that actually forces all—oppressed and oppressor—to lose the beauty of their being. And importantly, through reading Mogobe Ramose (2002), we can understand that being (or be-ing) only exists as an active, continual process that requires making whole the parts of (the collective) us that have been harmed (Nagel 2015).

When Uganda and lesbian are written together it is almost never by those who experience and express the transcendent potential of queerness in that context. If it were, it would read like Nyanzi's words: (con)sensual, effervescent, human. Instead, it is almost always written from the white gaze, which eyes new legislation without eyeing history, and which condemns an abstract oppression without condemning the very institutions—those of policing and imprisonment—built and sustained by the very colonial governments superficially condemning anti-gay politics now. This history of harming is reproduced by hegemonic scholars, mostly of European descent, who engage only superficially with institutions in Africa (Achebe 2021) and who produce knowledge without any embodiment or experience of colonial oppression, racialization and racism, or political repression through carceralism.

To focus on connection-making in this case is to identify the shared roots of connected oppressions and to understand the very tangible difference made by actors in shared struggle. It is to imagine not the Ugandan postcolonial state's lifelong leader as the end-all of responsibility for Stella Nyanzi's incarceration, but to hold in greater weight the British colonial and neocolonial power that ultimately benefits from the continued upward redistribution of the products of African forced labor under the guise of civilizing the undisciplined. Yoweri Museveni is most certainly indebted to these forces, but he is not the sole power; his political rule mirrors the European states that control him. We must connect the incarceration of this feminist to the neoliberal policies that deprive those suffering postcolonial statehood of any welfare befitting humanity and the ever-expanding scheme of incarceration. Importantly, we must also implicate the everyday complicity with sexual corrections that we witness among our own families, friends, and neighbors: the artificial and deadly segregation of the imagined sexes, which serves only to ensure the domination of those marginalized by sex and gender.

If we dare to ground this book of poems in the autobiographical works of political prisoners like Assata Shakur, we enable the critical connection-

making needed for the collective struggle against state and imperial violence. This can only serve to strengthen a global movement for Black lives. Connection-making, in this way, becomes a coalitional politic that allows us to see beyond the nation-state and nationality as identity. In this vein, Mecke Nagel (2008,5) posits the possibility of reconsidering the imprisoned as diasporic subjects:

Writing and agitating from the new Diaspora of prison cages, these [African American] intellectuals and spiritual leaders inspire new ideas for the meaning of emancipation from bondage and the meaning of true freedom. Thus, prisons, which were meant to create a compliant populace (cf. Foucault, 1977), actually create a conscientized imprisoned intellectual class writing in the neo-slave narrative tradition, resisting enslavement and subjugation.

While she considers the double diasporic—the African in the United States who is connected to other African Americans through imprisonment—I would like to move us to think of African continental prisons as part of this diaspora of cages.

A methodology of connection allows me to read Nyanzi’s “poverty is a crime in Kampala city” (2020, 8) or “court punishes only the poor” (2020, 133) and be reminded of Assata Shakur’s (1987, 54) realization that her fellow prisoners were women who were “barely able to make ends meet” rather than the hardened criminals that the state would have people believe. Prisons, whether in East Africa, North America, or Western Europe, serve to cyclically punish those left out in the global capitalist margins. As Nyanzi (2020, 80) writes, prisons suffer a logical fallacy that distorts justice as the financial punishment of the poor (through insurmountable fines and fees) and the so-called rehabilitation of drug users by forcing more pharmaceutical drugs like methadone.

Lastly, in the carceral diasporic death world, we can interpret connection-making as the innovative mutual aid and urgent collectivizing that occurs behind and beyond bars. When imprisoned, Nyanzi’s fellow prisoners became confidants, comrades who shielded her from additional harm—lovers, fictive kin; her outside comrades became smugglers of the fugitive poems. Similarly, Assata Shakur (1987) describes her fellows as those who aided her when she was paralyzed, those who shared laughter with her, and those who collectively struggled to shield her against aggressive guards. Crucially, the connections Shakur made outside of various jails and prisons became smugglers as well, except they managed to break Shakur out.

In conclusion, whether inside or out, the collective is all that we have. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, the Kenyan former political prisoner who also turned to writing on toilet paper while imprisoned, stated in an interview that “(creative) resistance is the best way of keeping people alive” (Marshall 2018). What better testament to that idea exists than Nyanzi’s furious scribbles, which will serve to forever keep the unjust and brutal truth of prisons alive? While colonization, criminalization, and interpersonal violence are all utilized as correctives, Black safety is created through collectives. Collective action designed by connection-based knowledge remains the only antidote to corrective violence.

## NOTES

1. These 2019 data, which were collected by the Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research and the University of London, Birkbeck, show that nearly half of those incarcerated in Ugandan prisons are pre-trial detainees. See World Prison Brief (2019) at <https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/uganda>.

2. See World Prison Brief (2019).

3. *Kabaka* is the term for king of Buganda, the kingdom that English colonizers chose to collaborate with to dominate nearby domains. Ultimately, the British chose the name Uganda for the entire region (now country) in an act to politically center this particular kingdom.

4. The text referenced in this version comes from the earliest publication of *No Roses from My Mouth* and may not represent the revisions that occurred after Nyanzi’s release. There may be typographical errors due to misinterpretations of the script.

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