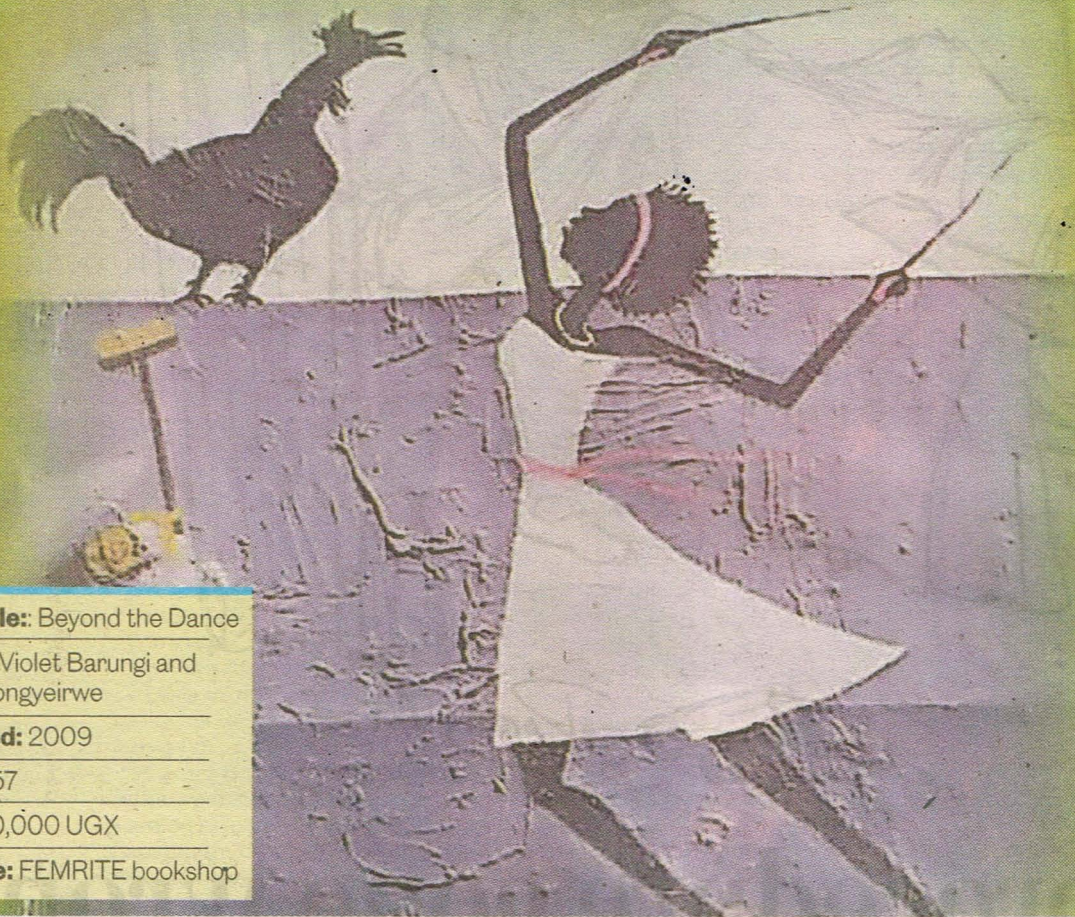


Beyond the Dance



Book Title: Beyond the Dance

Editors: Violet Barungi and Hilda Twongyeirwe

Published: 2009

Pages: 157

Price: 20,000 UGX

Available: FEMRITE bookshop

Beyond dance will change your FGM outlook, forever

There is more than enough information on FGM. However, this book is different because of the shocking singularity of the voices it holds like a conversation you cannot miss.

BY PHILLIP MATOGO

There are some books that you do not want to read if you are faint of heart. That's because they are so powerfully emotive that you will be reduced to tears.

One minute you're a person, the next you're the very personification of weeping. Then, everyone who meets you becomes Ngugi wa Thiong'o as they urge you to Weep Not, Child.

Which is also a 1964 novel by Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o. It was his first novel, published in 1964 under the name James Ngugi.

Beyond the Dance, a book by Uganda Women Writers Association (FEMRITE) is such a tearjerker.

It anthologizes voices of women on female genital mutilation (FGM).

I know.

We have more than enough information on FGM, you say. However, this book is different because of the shocking sin-

gularity of the voices it holds like a conversation you cannot miss.

Beyond the Dance is a compilation of testimonies and poems about the humiliation of FGM, and about the resulting deprivation and loss. It encompasses accounts, factual in some cases and lyrical in others, of the experience of this practice lived or witnessed, and the visceral responses to the practice.

The anger is palpable, the bafflement tangible. Beside the pain, though, is the hope borne of the voices raised by governments, organizations, institutions and individuals, urging a stop to the practice and coaxing off-unwilling communities into abandoning it or transforming it into a meaningful ritual that builds up rather than ruins.

The voices that bring FGM into sharper focus in this book are strong beer, so to speak.

However, the effect that takes hold of you packs something of a whiskey punch. It hits hard, leaving you stumbling. You might even collapse under the sheer emotional weight of the tales herein. Thereafter, you will be transported by every word and inflection paired to impair your ability to remain indifferent.

In the first story "Don't Count on me", we are introduced to a circumciser Amina Buraimu by Betty Kituyi. The REACH programme described her as 'dangerous' because, as the most experienced circumciser in Kapchorwa, she was as swift as Kipsiro, the Kapchorwa-born athlete, scampering from village to village, and from hill to hill in her red circumcisi-

uniform, as if possessed, cutting an average of 100 girls per village," writes Ms. Kituyi. REACH is a European Union (EU) regulation that stands for Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation, and Restriction of Chemicals.

Yes, you read that correctly: 100 girls per village. Kapchorwa has 453 villages. So I will allow you to be left dumbfounded by your own Maths. There is a silver lining to this storm-tossed story, however. It lies in the title.

Another story which really got me, they all got me, but another one was by Lillian Tindyebwa. This one is semi-eponymously titled: *Beyond the Music and the Dance*.

Bear in mind that the title owes its being to traditional dance associated with the rituals surrounding FGM among communities in Uganda, particularly the Pokot and Tepeth ethnic groups in the Karamoja region, is called the Naleyo dance.

Among the Sebei (Sapiiny) in the eastern part of the country, who also practice FGM, pre-initiation ceremonies involve general singing and dancing as a festivity.

It was sad how the interviewee felt loved by her father as a child because she was blissfully unaware that the real source of his love lay in the fact that he could commodify her gender and snag some bride wealth. It is heartless, actually. But the story gets worse.

I told you this book will knock you for a loop. It not only highlights a cultural evil, it does so in way that arrests the reader's attention in ways that are sure to change your outlook, forever.