

My salary is gone by the 27th, but I keep working anyway

Our dear President was sworn in for the seventh elective term on Tuesday. I will admit something I am probably not supposed to admit: I was actually looking forward to the parade. The military fanfare. The quick-step. I like the precision of it, the way men in boots can pretend, for 45 minutes, that the world is orderly. But as I watched, it hit me; most of those soldiers, if not all, were born and raised under this one government. To them, the President is not a politician. He is as constant as nature.

I have been thinking about what that does to a person. To grow up without ever seeing a transfer of power. To have the same face on the classroom wall that your mother had on hers. It is not loyalty. It is not even acceptance. It is something more structural; an absence of alternatives so complete that alternatives stop being imaginable.

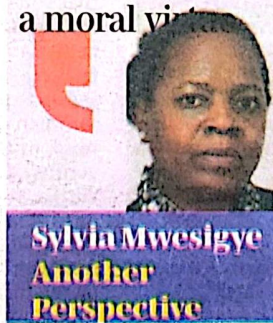
And yet, there was a moment during the swearing-in, televised live, when he placed his hand on the Bible and I felt the strangest thing; a déjà vu so strong I could have recited the next line of his speech before he said it.

Here we were again, as last time, and the time before that. Only this time, he looked less vibrant. I know the years show on all of us, but he looked tired. And I missed his usual humour.

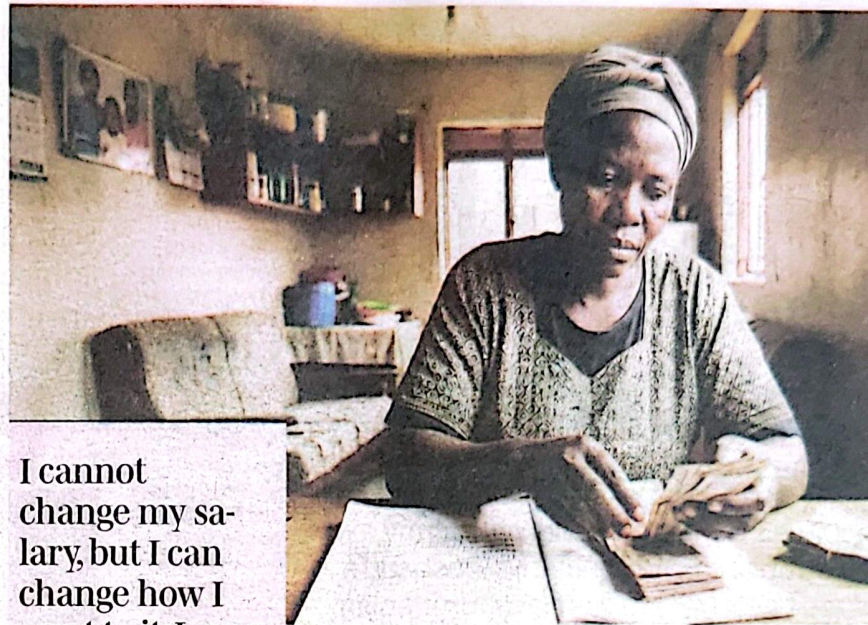
This is the part I do not know what to do with; the affection. The residue of familiarity. He has been the only president of my adult life. That might not be love, but it is not nothing either. It is the weariness of a long marriage that never ends because divorce is not an option.

Then came the part that always stings. He displayed his ideal citizens. The ones who heeded his advice and now live in abundant prosperity. His message to the rest

I cannot change my salary, but I can change how I react to it. I can stop pretending that working harder is a moral virtue.



Sylvia Mwesi Igwe
Another Perspective



of us: if you want what they have, sleep less. *Kisanja* no sleep.

I laughed. Not because it was funny, but because I cannot remember the last time I had eight hours of sleep. When I am not teaching, I am hustling. I grade papers after midnight. I buy vegetables at six in the morning before the prices rise. I do not sleep less out of ambition. I sleep less because there is no other way to reach the end of the month.

There is a specific kind of exhaustion that comes from knowing your sleeplessness is invisible. No one celebrates it.

And yet, the President's ideal citizens probably sleep more than I do. They hire people to do their

menial tasks. They have drivers, cooks, house helps. They prosper while I remain exactly where I was five years ago. Ten years ago.

I have done the calculation. I have done it in the dark, lying awake at 3am, staring at the ceiling, and it is always the same; work more, earn the same.

This is the cruelty of the advice to work harder. It assumes that work and reward are married, and that the marriage is a faithful one.

But any teacher can tell you that sometimes you work and nothing changes. You work and the salary arrives on the 25th and is gone by the 27th. You work and the world does not notice.

The cruelty is compounded by the fact that you cannot stop working. Because the children are there. The rent is due. They remembered that not all returns arrive as money.

Last week, a former student, now a nurse in Gulu, sent me a message thanking me for encouraging her to stay in school when her circumstances were bleak. Her father had died. Her mother had remarried a man who did not want her. She was 12. I told her she was smart and could achieve whatever she set her mind to. I told her this every day for three years. And now she is a nurse.

That is my return on investment. It is not a currency the President would recognise. But it is real. It is as real as the glue on my shoes.

So I ask myself; what is my strategy to tap into the abundant wealth the President mentioned? Do I believe his programmes will lift me to screen-level prosperity? No. That would require a different scale of capital, a different set of connections.

But do I believe they can keep my shoes from wearing out quite so fast? Yes. That is the depth of my ambition now.

I cannot change the salary that evaporates by the 27th, but I can change how I react to it. I can stop pretending that working harder is a moral virtue. I can stop measuring my worth by my exhaustion. I can remember the nurse in Gulu and say that is enough.

And some days, enough is the most honest word I have.