Remembering my late mother

She was not one for politics. Often seeing revolutionaries and politicians as two sides of the duality of a tragicomedy. Her passion was for her children.

BY PHILIP MATOGO

On January 12, in the small hours of Sunday, my mother, Pauline Nyamikamo Matogo, died at Victoria Hospital, Bukoto. She was 79.

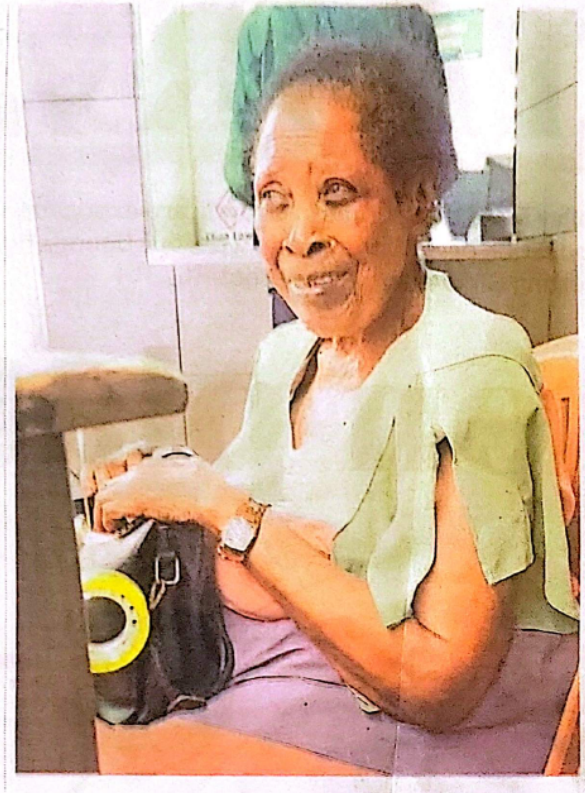
Although preferring aquamation (water cremation), she was flame cremated on January 14. We held a church service in memoriam of my late mother on January 30.

My uncle, Mr Nicholas Byengoma, a thoroughly urbane and venerable 82-year-old, eulogised my mother as being the favourite child of her late father, Paulo Kangwagye. He was a prominent historical figure in Uganda, recognised as one of the pioneer chiefs of Kigezi.

Unlike the "Saza Chiefs" of the Buganda Kingdom, he was a key administrator who helped lay the foundation for local governance in southwestern Uganda during the early colonial and post-colonial transition.

Kangwagye's younger brother, Sepi Mukombe Mpambara, is recognised as having been selected as the first chairman of the Front for National Salvation (FRONASA).

As a former secretary general of Kigezi and chairman of the National Trading Corporation, he took on this leadership role after a political falling out with his childhood friend, Milton Obote.



The late Pauline Nyamikamo Matogo. PHOTO/COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Mpambara would visit us in London, England; he came across as a fictional character. Because I had never seen a person of such royal bearing. I told all my friends at school that he was a king.

Unbreakable bond

Beyond this heritage, my maternal grandfather and my mother shared an unbreakable bond. He was Paul, she was Pauline. They were thus joined at the hip. So, when it came to rationing sugar at home, my mother was appointed store keeper. Her eight siblings were then introduced to her peculiar brand of strictness.

When she met my father in the late '60s, she met her soul's companion. Yet they were from different worlds, Ben

His grandfather was a dreadlocked member of the Nyabinghi Uprising (or Movement), a series of anti-colonial revolts in southwestern Uganda. The movement was crushed.

Although my paternal great grandfather, his name was Katulu, amassed more than 1,000 heads of cattle, his wealth dissipated when he was murdered. He was killed by the locals, they say. But the 2009 book *Ghosts of Kanungu: Fertility, Secrecy & Exchange in the Great Lakes of East Africa* by Richard Vokes reveals how the colonial authorities cynically hunted down ex-warriors like Katulu.

My father's father, Mzee Kanyonyozi, was thus a somewhat impoverished man, made popular by his famed clair-

... after a round of hard drinks

ISSUE

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own family considered colonial "collaborators."

Consequently, the tension between my father and my mother initially reflected the tensions between humbled and exalted, rich and poor.

In Chinese philosophy, however, this pairing indicates the Yin and Yang. This philosophy describes how seemingly opposite or contrary forces are actually interconnected, interdependent, and complementary.

'Political gonorrhoea'

As Uganda spiralled into all-out war, my father was summoned by President Idi Amin to State House Nakasero, then called Government House, in 1976, to explain why he was spreading "political gonorrhoea."

As assistant librarian in-charge of magazines and periodicals, my father was still allowing magazines like *Newsweek* into the library despite their being banned in Uganda.

After a lengthy tirade, President Amin let my father go. But his name showed up on a mysterious list of men to be killed by Amin. That year, we went into exile.

My father was driven to the border by my mother's brother, Festo, while my two brothers and I were carried by my mother across the border.

I was barely two, Derek was one and Martin was three going on four. Michael was not yet born. He would come into this world when we decamped from Kenya and wound up in Zambia.

There were so many FRONASA dissidents in Zambia at the time. As my father sunk his fangs into their ideological fare, my mother raised us. She was not one for politics. Often seeing revolutionaries and politicians as two sides of the duality of a tragicomedy. Her passion was for her children.

were always on the move. After an attempt to poison the family in Zambia and my mother received a number of breathy and threatening phone calls, it was time to hit the open road again.

We went to London. There, my mother supported the family as my father completed his PhD at the University of London and served as National Resistance Movement (NRM) representative in London.

Working at a fashion agency as a secretary, my mother enjoyed herself. She was into haute couture (high-fashion luxury) and stylish design. She knew how to incorporate accessories, colours and textures to create a "vibe".

The sort of "vibe" I only saw Princess Elizabeth Bagaya, a frequent visitor to our home, matched but never duplicated. My mother's singular fashion sense left no room for aesthetics of revolutionary rhetoric, all told.

Ambassador's wife

The late John Nagenda told me that she once threw him and several other NRM revolutionaries out of our Bloomsbury flat. They, along with my father, continued their deliberations in a nearby pub. My mother, coming from a conservative home, had little respect for those persons who sought to overturn the comfortable values she grew up with.

In 1986, when Mr Museveni came to power, my mother settled into being an ambassador's wife. Being born in the lap of luxury, she was to the manner born when it came to the protocols and practices that came with wifely ambassadorial duties. She attended the cocktails and other diplomatic events, but somehow, she never seemed to belong to that scene.

In the Dar es Salaam of the early '90s, she really only bonded with the British woman next door whose dog Simba had taken a shine to our dog, Lucy. Other than that, she was frequently alone. After my father died, she became even more insular. Always charming and forthcoming in public, she was a rebel in private.

The dichotomy of her private and public stances revealed to me a lady who wanted to be more than a favourite daughter, trophy wife and adored mother.

Subsequently, the delicate balance she maintained between her public duty, her conscience, and her private life was thrown off balance towards the end of her life and it is only then that she started living life on strictly her terms.

Thus, her life finally found its full expression in who she was outside of what the world perceived her to be. And this is what makes her memory a true

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