

Crossroads: Women Coming of Age in Today's Uganda

Christopher Conte, Editor

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This is an elegant collection that will contribute greatly to the discussion of global feminism.

In *Crossroads*, editor Christopher Conte brings together a beautiful and thoughtful series of essays from women navigating life in contemporary Uganda. With perspectives as diverse as their backgrounds, these dynamic women bring the Ugandan experience into stunning relief.

Typically, the collection is no-holds-barred: these women critique traditional culture, Western influence, the bureaucratic bloatedness of NGOs, religion, and gender roles, all with clarity and nuance. They are as likely to draw influence from the West as they are to be suspicious of it, or to seek the good aspects of traditional marriage as they are to name its shortcomings. They even establish themselves as beneficiaries of sexual revolutions. The result is a well-rounded, compelling, and edifying picture of the challenges that women face in modern Africa.

In “Gods and Ghosts,” journalist Lydia Namubiru explores the intersection of traditional Ugandan beliefs with the religions pushed by Western missionaries, struggling to reconcile the most deeply rooted aspects of her culture with imported moralities. In “A Victim No More,” the lasting effects of rape—and silence around rape—are explored with poignant detail.

“Ssengas and the Single Woman” and Caroline Ariba’s “Crossroads” both thrust traditional gender expectations and contemporary feminist impulses into conversation with one another, maintaining respect for the old ways while also hoping for something more. And in Harriet Anena’s “No Time For Pain” and Peace Twine’s “Wife of the Enemy,” the effects and aftermath of Joseph Kony’s war and Milton Obote’s regime, respectively, are articulated in painful detail.

Each essay is gorgeously constructed, affording the authors a space to discuss postcolonial Uganda’s growing pains as they affect individual women in the nation. Subjects held in some distrust by the West, particularly surrounding marriage and sexuality, are explored with greater depth than is usual; an essay on “pulling” should be a point of particular discussion. These are women keenly aware of what is native to Uganda and of what is imposed, and the resultant richness of their conversations is well worth appreciation. These talented authors present a thorough, engaging picture of Uganda as it exists, but also as it may exist in the future.

Crossroads is an elegant collection that stands to be embraced by all who have an interest in modern Africa, particularly in the unfiltered stories of its women, and is bound to contribute ably to ongoing discussions in global feminism.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September 9, 2015)

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