

## **BOMBO ROAD, KAMPALA**

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Hesitate (.) one, two seconds longer,  
cars streaming past, gaps must be  
larger and an unfamiliar caution,  
three, four – fear even – clutches (.)  
before I grab a chance and dash  
(sometimes drivers take pity and let me pass).

Love is patient, love is kind.

Sometimes it is self-seeking. It slips  
accusatory statements in  
to make sure you are blamed. Love says: sorry (.)  
I didn't mean to keep a record of wrongs.

Things I have carry traces like a cap  
you gave me that I wear under helmets  
on the safe bodas I take because  
I know you are worried and what do you do  
with terror when you don't pray.

Love is the not unjustified fear  
that this most precious person  
just won't come back and – five, six – the  
commitment to caution; each time  
I go out you know there's a chance  
– one in how many – that I get knocked down.

Love endures all things.

Love's habit of talking things over can lance  
the impulse to write. But that talk can say things  
that I otherwise can't; something true that can help  
to get all of that back; to write in tongues  
less indulgent, pretentious; tongues less abstract  
(knowledge and prophecies won't pass away).

## Reflection

This poem was written for the fortnightly poetry circle organised by Lantern Meet Foundation in Kampala, Uganda. Lantern Meet is a group of university graduates in their thirties who have been meeting to write and perform poetry, mostly in English, for about ten years. The format of the poetry circle is as follows: each poem submitted is shared anonymously, read aloud to the group and discussed, after which the poet identifies themselves and responds. In February 2019, participants were asked to bring love poems, hence the theme. I brought a first draft to the circle on 3 February 2019 and a revised version on 17 February. The revisions simplified and sharpened the language and strengthened the rhythm.

My research looks at how storytelling can help activists re-imagine development and human rights. I am working with artists and activists in Uganda to design participatory workshops drawing on storytelling practices that are part of their vernacular, that is, stories and techniques they encounter and use in everyday life (cf. Flower and Kelly 2019). Uganda is a highly orate<sup>1</sup> society; the rhythms and devices of storytelling and oral poetry emerge in everyday speech. As for many Ugandans, many of those I am working with are skilled in oral performance techniques, even those who would not call themselves poets or storytellers. There are strong continuities between what would be understood as storytelling in the European tradition and poetry, song, riddling, and other forms of orature.<sup>2</sup> The variety of oral traditions in Uganda's multiple local languages is well represented in research by academics at the department of literature at Makerere University (cf. Dipio, Johanssen, and Sillars 2008 and 2010; Dipio and Sillars 2013). Another storytelling tradition that resonates across language and class boundaries is that of the Christian Bible, a tradition I share due to my upbringing in a charismatic church in Dublin.

This poem brings together rhythms from the Bible – a well-known passage from 1 Corinthians – with those inspired by oral poetry. The punctuation uses a symbol from conversation analysis to indicate pauses to suggest how the poem might be performed; those at the poetry circle immediately understood what it meant although they hadn't seen it used before.

Sarah Pink suggests that ethnographers can collect rich and valid data about other people's worlds even in relatively short time periods – in my case, a series of visits of between ten days and one month – by attending to the senses as they share activities and practices with those participating in the research. In that vein, this poem provides a sensual description of my experience of occupying ways of perceiving and being that are similar to those engaged in by research participants (cf. Pink 2009, 9-10, 40, 65-69). Those I am working with negotiate Kampala traffic on a daily basis, and I have spent many hours with them walking and moving around Kampala. A number of those present at the Lantern Meet circle identified with the feeling of apprehension when crossing the road; others felt that the poem captured the intensity and urgency of love specific to places with very high incidence of road traffic deaths. The representation of love and risk also reflects the emotive and sensory backdrop against which ethnographic research is carried out, especially that involving fieldtrips far from home and loved ones.

## References

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Flower, E., and Kelly, R., 2019. "Researching Like an Artist: Disrupting Participatory Arts-based Methods in Uganda and Bangladesh", in P. Cooke and I. Souria-Turner (eds.), *Participatory Arts in Participatory Development*. London: Routledge. 223-240.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Skilled in oral communication.

<sup>2</sup> Oral literature.

## Acknowledgments

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