

A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF THE DEPICTION OF PAIN IN STELLA NYANZI'S *NO ROSES FROM MY MOUTH*

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Abstract

This study responds to the relative lack of sustained psychoanalytic scholarship on Stella Nyanzi's *No Roses from My Mouth* (2020), where discussions have largely focused on her political activism rather than the inner workings of trauma and repression in her poetry. The objective is to examine how Nyanzi poetically articulates pain, both personal and political, as a response to trauma, loss, and authoritarian governance, and how her poetry becomes a site of emotional and psychological resistance. Adopting a Freudian psychoanalytic framework, particularly the concepts of the unconscious, repression, and defence mechanisms, the study employs a qualitative textual analysis of three poems: "No Padlock on Your Loins," "Feminists in High Heels," and "Joyously Dance Again." The analysis reveals that Nyanzi transforms individual and collective suffering into metaphoric expressions of psychological fragmentation, anger, and desire, demonstrating the complex interplay between the personal psyche and political oppression. The findings show that pain in Nyanzi's poetry transcends physical suffering and embodies alienation, resistance, and the unconscious negotiation of trauma. The study contributes to trauma studies and gender discourse in African women's poetry by foregrounding psychological self-expression as both a literary strategy and a form of resistance against authoritarian regimes.

Keywords: African women's poetry, Gender studies, No Roses from My Mouth, Psychoanalysis, Stella Nyanzi

Introduction

Stella Nyanzi's *No Roses from My Mouth* (2020) arises from the intersection of political incarceration, feminist activism, and poetic expression in Uganda, a country that has experienced over three decades of authoritarian rule. Written during her imprisonment, the collection exemplifies how African women poets have increasingly used literary expression to confront state repression, gendered violence, and the erasure of dissenting voices. The significance of *No Roses from My Mouth* lies not only in its political content but in its psychological depth, offering insight into the conditions of imprisonment and collective suffering of incarcerated women (Rodriguez, 2020).

Despite growing scholarly interest in Nyanzi's work, existing studies have

predominantly focused on her political activism, radical language, and engagement with gender and sexuality, leaving the psychological dimensions of her poetry largely unexplored. Rodriguez (2020) examines how Nyanzi's prison poetry resists oppression and challenges tyranny, while Benfield and Bratton (2021) examine how Nyanzi's poetry exemplifies "counter-hegemonic creativity" that challenges neoliberal repression and authoritarian impunity. Akingbe (2024) analyses Nyanzi's use of "radical rudeness" to critique Museveni's authoritarian regime. Ottoh-Agede (2020) investigates how Nyanzi employs "vagina metaphors" as socio-political protest, while Selnes and Orgeret (2020) explore Nyanzi's use of erotic innuendo in her social media activism. While these works offer valuable insights into Nyanzi's political and aesthetic strategies, they do not

adequately address how her poetry articulates inner conflict, trauma, and unconscious urges shaped by both individual and societal suffering.

This study aims to examine how Stella Nyanzi's *No Roses from My Mouth* depicts pain as a response to trauma, loss, and authoritarian governance, and how her poetry becomes a site for emotional and psychological resistance. To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- I. How does Nyanzi's poetry depict the psychological impact of political imprisonment and repression on personal relationships and identity?
- II. In what ways do the poems articulate internal conflict, alienation, and the unconscious negotiation of trauma?
- III. How does the poetic expression of pain in *No Roses from My Mouth* function as both a literary strategy and a form of resistance against authoritarian regimes?

The scope of this study is confined to a close textual analysis of three poems from *No Roses from My Mouth* (2020): "No Padlock on Your Loins," "Feminists in High Heels," and "Joyously Dance Again." These poems are purposively selected for their explicit engagement with pain, loss, oppression, and alienation, which are key sites for psychoanalytic inquiry (Hossain, 2017; Tarzian et al., 2023). The analysis is textual and interpretative, focusing on the poetic speaker and the psychological dynamics embedded in the language, imagery, and symbols of the poems.

The study adopts a Freudian psychoanalytic framework as its primary theoretical lens, drawing on concepts of the unconscious, repression, trauma, and defence mechanisms (Freud, 1915/1957; Freud, 1923/1961). This framework allows for the examination of how suppressed desires, anxieties, and psychological trauma are reflected in poetic language, imagery, and symbols (Hossain, 2017; Tarzian et al., 2023; Lester, 1988).

While existing studies address Nyanzi's activism, aesthetics, and political critique separately, this paper examines the intersection of psychological self-expression in *No Roses from My Mouth*. By shifting attention from Nyanzi's

public activist persona to the psychological landscape of her poetry, this study demonstrates how pain serves as both a political instrument and a profound manifestation of emotional and psychological struggle.

Literature Review

Several researchers have examined Stella Nyanzi's work, with studies focusing on a range of topics such as prison writing, political activism, the representation of women's and queers' experiences, and critical examinations of societal norms. This section reviews the existing scholarship thematically, identifying what has been established, where debates lie, and how the present study contributes to the field. Rodriguez (2020) highlights the power of poetry and art to resist oppression, challenge tyranny, and bring about freedom, noting how Nyanzi's poetry and experiences while incarcerated highlight the role of criminalisation in controlling and warehousing marginalised groups. Benfield and Bratton (2021) explain how artists like Nyanzi use creativity to challenge neoliberal regimes. Selnes and Orgeret (2020) explore how Nyanzi uses erotic innuendo to describe Uganda's political situation in her Facebook posts, suggesting that activism in Uganda has evolved with digital platforms.

Another strand of scholarship focuses on Nyanzi's distinctive aesthetic strategies. Akingbe (2024) argues that Nyanzi uses a term called "radical rudeness" which, in a broader sense, means the application of insults, humour, innuendo, and anecdote to critique and protest against President Yoweri Museveni's authoritarian regime, drawing on iconoclasm, dissident sexuality, queer inclination, libidinous metaphors, and subversive feminism to ground radical rudeness in *No Roses from My Mouth*. Scholars have also examined how Nyanzi engages with gender and sexuality as tools for socio-political critique. Ottoh-Agede (2020) studied how Nyanzi uses "vagina metaphors" to critique Museveni's leadership style, finding that the poet uses radical feminist postures to critique repressive leadership instead of favouring one gender over the other. Selnes and Orgeret (2020) further contribute to this area by examining Nyanzi's deployment of erotic innuendo in her social media activism.

The theme of incarceration also features prominently. Rodriguez (2020) examines how Nyanzi's prison poetry documents the carceral experience, highlighting how her writings while incarcerated underscore the role of criminalisation in controlling marginalised groups. While Nyanzi's political involvement, use of radical language, and engagement with gender and sexuality are all extensively explored in these works, there remains a notable lack of research on the psychological aspects of her poetry. Sustained psychoanalytic attention to how Nyanzi's poetry articulates inner conflict, trauma, and unconscious urges shaped by both individual and societal suffering remains limited. By shifting attention from Nyanzi's public activist persona to the psychological landscape of her poetry, this paper aims to close that gap by demonstrating how pain serves as both a political instrument and a profound manifestation of emotional and psychological struggle.

Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychoanalytic theory offers a powerful framework for analysing the depiction of pain in the poetry of Stella Nyanzi. This theoretical lens, first introduced by Sigmund Freud, highlights how unconscious motivations influence human behaviour (Freud, 1915/1957). Freud's structural model of the psyche, comprising the id, ego, and superego, provides a useful framework for understanding the internal conflicts that manifest in poetic expression (Freud, 1923/1961). The id represents primal desires and instincts, the ego mediates between the id and external reality, and the superego embodies moral and societal standards (Tarzian et al., 2023).

Central to this investigation are Freud's concepts of the unconscious, repression, and defence mechanisms. According to Freud (1915/1957), repression is the process by which unacceptable desires, memories, and emotions are pushed out of conscious awareness into the unconscious, where they continue to exert influence on behaviour. The return of the repressed is another key Freudian concept, referring to the manner in which repressed material re-emerges in disguised forms, such as dreams, slips of the tongue, or symbolic expression (Freud,

1915/1957). Defence mechanisms, including projection, displacement, and sublimation, are strategies employed by the ego to manage conflict between the id, superego, and external reality (Freud, 1923/1961).

In literary criticism, psychoanalysis can be applied to the text itself, the audience, the author or the poetic persona. It reveals how suppressed desires, anxieties and psychological trauma are reflected in language, imagery and symbols (Hossain, 2017; Lester, 1988). Poetry, with its condensed metaphors and displaced meanings, provides a particularly fertile ground for psychoanalytic reading, as these features mirror the workings of repression (Hossain, 2017). Using a textual analysis approach grounded in Freudian theory, this study investigates how unconscious processes manifest in the poetic expression of pain in Nyanzi's poetry. The concepts of the unconscious, repression, and trauma are fundamental to this investigation, because they enable us to understand pain as a profound internalised experience that influences identity and emotional expression.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative text-based research design applying Freudian psychoanalytic criticism. The interpretive and exploratory investigation aims to identify unconscious dynamics embedded in the poetic language of Stella Nyanzi's *No Roses from My Mouth*. Rather than focusing strictly on the socio-political dimensions, the design treats the text as a site for uncovering unconscious processes. The analysis operationalises Freudian theory's fundamental ideas, specifically the unconscious, repression, trauma, and defence mechanisms, as interpretative metrics for analysing representations of internal conflict. The texts are evaluated against Freud's tripartite model of the psyche (id, ego, and superego) to observe the difference between the public persona constructed in the poems and the speaker's represented emotional states.

The primary textual corpus comprises three purposively selected poems from Stella Nyanzi's *No Roses from My Mouth* (2020): 'No Padlock on Your Loins', 'Feminists in High Heels', and 'Joyously Dance Again'. These poems were

chosen because they explicitly address the theme of pain, loss, oppression, and alienation, which are key sites for psychoanalytic inquiry. This selection provides a balanced representation of individual intimate inner conflict, internal gendered/communal divisions, and broad collective pain.

The analytic procedures involved close textual analysis informed by Freudian concepts. Each poem was iteratively analysed to isolate visceral imagery, metaphors, and symbols, which were then systematically mapped onto psychological processes to determine how personal and political pain manifests textually; special attention was paid to instances of emotional repression, including what is left unsaid, contradicted, or hidden, as well as the deployment of defence mechanisms and internal conflicts between desire and prohibition.

Analysis of Selected Poems

The Poetics of Inner Conflict in “No Padlock on Your Loins”

The poem powerfully portrays the pain of emotional sacrifice, the loss of intimacy due to distance and the struggle with political imprisonment. The speaker depicts how political imprisonment disrupts interpersonal relationships and compels difficult, self-sacrificing decisions that eventually lead to deep private grief.

The poem begins by immediately presenting a clear and central conflict in the opening lines:

At the courts' holding cells,
Separated by thick bars.
I bit my tongue when I saw you.
I hid my bitter truth.

The “thick bars” in the first line of this poem indicate physical distance, which implies a loss of closure and connection previously shared between the speaker and her partner.

In the next line, the speaker bites her tongue at the sight of her partner, which reflects a repression of emotion that should naturally be expressed among lovers. The speaker's act of biting her tongue implies suppressed pain. The mere sight of her partner brought out an immense surge of emotions and presumably memories of their time together when they were not “separated

by thick bars”. The speaker's choice to conceal her “bitter truth” reveals deep anguish and a strong longing for her partner. She hides this to protect him from the pain of their physical separation, which her political activism largely caused. From a psychoanalytic lens, this first act of tongue biting and truth hiding represents the repressive defence mechanism. As Hossian (2017, p. 42) explains, the unconscious “is constructed in part by the repression of that which is too painful to remain in consciousness”. The speaker's choice to bite her tongue and conceal her “bitter truth” demonstrates this process; the pain of separation and the guilt of causing it are too overpowering to accept publicly, so they are pushed deep into the unconscious, where they continue to impact her behaviour. As Freud argued, repressed material does not disappear but continues to exert pressure from the unconscious. This pressure is seen in the following lines, where the speaker's suppressed emotions break in a surprising confession:

I asked you to get another,
To find yourself a lover,
To stop waiting for my release,
To end your sexual faithfulness.

These direct requests from the speaker are quite questionable within the context of a committed relationship. How can someone in a relationship request this from her lover? The speaker's repeated insistence that her partner seek another lover may be interpreted as an attempt to manage the guilt associated with separation. This moment in the poem illustrates what Kilty et al. (2025, p. 3) describe as the emotional suppression demanded by carceral spaces, where “the appropriate expression of emotion in prison settings includes the suppression of both negative and positive feelings and emotions”. The speaker's insistence that her partner find another lover, despite her obvious longing for him, is a direct manifestation of this carceral emotion culture. Unlike prison writers who express rage at forced separation, the poet persona in this poem internalises guilt and transforms it into a self-punishing command. The next lines underscore the raw pain of surrendering her intimate place in his life, and this pain is masked by a facade of bitter bluntness:

I begged you to find a woman
A juicy wench to quench your thirst
I want no part in your starvation. Simply because I am a political prisoner...
Go find yourself a lover,
Settle down with your new partner
You are a free adult man/ I am putting no padlock on your loins.

The speaker's derogatory description of her partner's prospective new partner as a "wench" exposes the unfiltered anguish of her impending loss. Despite its negative connotations, this term is a visceral projection of her inner turmoil and a desperate attempt to exert some control over an intolerable circumstance. The derogatory language may also suggest a desire to diminish the imaged rival, thereby preserving her own sense of worth. These relentless instructions throughout the lines convey a woman who has mentally prepared herself for an irreversible loss she has actively orchestrated. The metaphor "I am putting no padlock to your loins" symbolises the speaker's refusal to control her partner's sexuality, or by extension, his life; she sacrifices her happiness and the intimacy they once shared to achieve this. Finally, the closing lines of the poem expose the speaker's partner's anticipated reaction:

On the outside of the holding cells,
You looked at me in silence.
Looked at me like I was insane.

Perhaps the most devastating reaction she could have gotten was this look of silence and confusion. The partner's silent response, together with his belief that she is "insane", effectively expresses his surprise, disappointment and deep emotional conflict that has developed between them. The speaker's expectations remain ambiguous. A reassuring hug? An empathetic acknowledgement of her selfless decree? As a strong contrast to her dramatic assertions, his silence, rather than a theatrical outburst, highlights the extent of his own pain and emotional suffering. His eventual act of walking away, implied by her later sorrow, inevitably heightens her sense of abandonment, compounding her already immense pain.

The poem concludes with this raw

confession: "I cried myself to sleep that night", wherein the speaker finally reveals how she truly felt: the loneliness, the regret, the release of the suppressed emotions. Despite her outward display of strength, this line reveals the persona as human, a woman who also craves lasting love, undisturbed by external political turmoil or internal emotional conflict. In Freudian terms, this last line symbolises the return of the repressed (Freud, 1915/1957), the disintegration of her defences and the agonising reappearance of the very emotions she worked so hard to suppress.

This thought-provoking, beautifully crafted poem reveals how pain manifests. It demonstrates that pain can lead to irrational choices that are later regretted, pain can cause individuals to push away loved ones, and pain can also manifest in silence or a raw outburst of dramatic tears. The speaker deliberately endures emotional pain to spare her partner from the anguish of separation. She chooses to play the role of the "villain" and the "saviour" and ends up only hurting herself. The portrayal of loss in this poem lies in the sacrifice of intimacy. The speaker's enforced separation forces her to conceal her true feelings when communicating with her partner, resulting in an irreversible emotional distance between them.

The Poetics of Internal Division in "Feminists in High Heels"

The poem exposes the profound pain of alienation and the loss of solidarity among women, particularly within the feminist movement. Through a series of cutting, bitter complaints and arguments, Nyanzi lays bare the difference between the idealised principles of feminist unity and the disheartening realities of its internal practices. The title of the poem is provocative; it invites curiosity about how the practice may have now become an aesthetic for some, as there is a major focus on appearance rather than the main goal of the movement.

The speaker's pain stems from the judgment and exclusion she faces within her feminist community in Uganda. The individuals who are meant to stand with her and be her allies are the ones perpetuating a harmful cycle of criticism and marginalisation. The poem also

exposes hierarchies in the feminist community in Uganda; some feminists think they are superior to others. Meanwhile, this internal division contradicts the foundational tenet of alignment and collective struggle for a shared cause.

The poem's opening stanza quickly highlights this conflict through its portrayal of a particular feminist faction:

Feminists in high heels,
Stick their noses in the air,
And sniff at my dust-covered sneakers

The contrast in the choice of footwear already tells us what we need to know: the group of feminists who choose to wear “heels” perceive themselves as more poised and distinguished, as opposed to the persona who chooses to wear “sneakers”. The feminists “stick their noses in the air” as an act of condescension, and “sniffing” at the speaker's “dust-covered” sneakers is a sign of disgust and a deliberate act of othering. This behaviour signals that they do not consider the speaker to be an equal, nor do they desire to include the speaker in their group.

The speaker's “dust-covered sneakers” can stand as a symbol of all the work she manages to get done, or hardship and actual struggle; this suggests the pain the speaker must've felt when supposed allies looked down on her.

The use of imagery and symbols deepens in the following lines of the first stanza of the poem, where powerful bodily metaphors expose a disturbing hypocrisy:

They point their tight breasts at patriarchy
And smirk at my saggy bust.
They push their bottoms outward
As if they never shit. They deem my activism too grounded.

The juxtaposition between the two groups exposes a striking contradiction within the feminist community represented in the poem. While one group “points their tight breast at patriarchy,” they turn around and smirk at the speaker's “saggy bust”. This internal criticism reveals a perceived contradiction within contemporary feminist circles; these women, while supposedly battling patriarchy, actually turn on and undermine fellow feminists who don't conform to their physical

standards. This directly contradicts the movement's foundational tenet of uplifting women, not tearing each other down.

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, this behaviour exemplifies the projection defence mechanism, which involves attributing one's own unwanted thoughts or desires to another. As Andriana and Kasprabowo (2020, p. 4) explain, projection is the way individuals reduce anxiety by connecting unwanted impulses to another person; it is seeing in others unacceptable tendencies or feelings that actually exist in one's own unconscious. In this poem, the feminists in high heels criticise the speaker for being too “dirty” and “too grounded”, but these criticisms most likely reflect their uneasiness with radical, unpolished forms of activity. Similarly, their attention to the speaker's “saggy busts” reflects their own concerns about ageing, bodily nonconformity, and the loss of conventional femininity. They are unable to accept these sensations in themselves, so they attribute them to the speaker instead.

The next stanza introduces another type of feminist group, showing more layers of the pain of alienation:

Feminists in power suits
Shake their ponytails
And ridicule my three-piece kitenge
They cling to their briefcases
And shun my papyrus kikapu.
They stretch forward their manicured hands
And sneer at my short, trimmed nails.

Here, Nyanzi introduces us to corporate feminists or professionals. Pain comes through in this stanza from cultural belittling, through clothing preference. The contrast between the feminists wearing “power suits” and “ponytails” and the speaker wearing a “three-piece kitenge” is symbolic. The contrast may therefore be interpreted as a conflict between competing constructions of modern African femininity. Furthermore, their act of clinging to their “briefcases” and “shunning” the speaker's “papyrus kakapo” (basket) also carries significant symbolic weight. The implication is that feminist identity is framed as incompatible with traditional markers of womanhood, suggesting that one

cannot fully belong to the movement without adopting its prescribed outward markers of modernity.

The act of “shunning” highlights the pain of being dismissed because the speaker is considered unserious compared to them. The act of “sneering” at the speaker’s “short trimmed fingernails” conveys a cold and dismissive stance, again rooted solely in outward appearance and perceived conformity. The poem, however, not only attacks these elites; it also captures the psychological cost of their rejection. The speaker is not only ostracised, but also left wondering if her embodied, grounded, culturally anchored activism has any place in a movement that claims to speak for all women.

The poem’s final stanza focuses on a third specific group of feminists: feminists drunk with religion. This stanza marks a crucial shift from external cues, like clothes, shoes or hair, to an internal state. The word “drunk” vividly expresses how this group’s behaviour is influenced by an overwhelming, possibly unthinking, intake of religious dogma, leading to clouded judgment. The poem illustrates their actions:

Roll their judgmental eyes heavenward.
And Shandaramana at my brazenness
They finger their leather-bound scriptures
And distancing themselves from my activism

This constant act of judgment in all stanzas of the poem becomes a constant source of the speaker’s pain. The “fingering” of “their leather-bound scriptures” signifies just how the level of activism they permit themselves to participate in is regulated by scripture, leading to a sense of moral superiority. The word “distance” highlights a loss of closeness; from this particular set of feminists, the speaker does not receive any support because her ways are considered different. The speaker’s pain is further articulated as she complains:

They pray and praise and tithe.
But keep away from the trenches.

These lines reveal a gap between performative piety and genuine activism, reflecting the speaker’s sadness over her fellow feminists’ disengagement from the difficult and frequently

unpleasant reality of grassroots advocacy in the “trenches”

Finally, the speaker states the rationale behind each feminist category’s behaviour:

She’s too dirty to be one of us...
She’s too hot to be one of us...
She’s too worldly to be one of us.

These lines depict the pain of not being able to fit in. The outright rejection of another woman by those who claim to preach female solidarity symbolises a devastating abandonment of fundamental ideals. In psychoanalytic terms, this rejection operates through displacement; the feminists redirect their aggression, which might more be aimed at patriarchy, onto a safer, closer target: the speaker herself. The poem powerfully depicts how internal divisions can cripple a movement and leave its most devoted members feeling abandoned and ignored.

The Poetics of Collective Grief in “Joyously Dance Again”

In this poem, the speaker laments the pain of losing freedom. The poem is a heartfelt cry for the people of her country, whose spirit had been crushed by oppressive rule. In the poem, the speaker laments the loss of collective cultural expression, especially shown through dancing and music. The poem begins with a poignant question:

When is our liberation coming, that we can joyously dance again?

This question instantly pulls us into a feeling of deep wishing or longing for something essential. The word liberation denotes the loss of freedom, and the desire to dance again depicts the pain the people are presently in. When people are in pain, they cannot dance, they cannot express their joy, and they see no reason to celebrate life itself.

The poem uses a strong image in the next line of the poem:

Our backs are now stiffened with oppression.

This depicts how the unfair conditions the people have been subjected to have now taken a physical toll on them; stiff backs evoke physical suffering. The reason for their stiffened backs is introduced in the next line:

Our hearts are frozen by the dictatorship.

It is revealed that the harsh rule of the dictator is the cause of the pain and the loss of joy of the people. The speaker of this poem is talking to everyone and sharing their collective sorrow. The speaker laments how they can no longer move their body freely, and this line of the poem conjures in our imagination the extreme fear that they feel has made them stuck, afraid to make any move lest they face terrible consequences from the dictator. The poem tells us how long this suffering has been going on: "Three decades". The speaker continues to lament over the collective pain of the people, which has lasted for a whole thirty years. The image of "frozen hearts" and "stiffened backs" depicts the physical and emotional toll of prolonged oppression; this bodily imagery may be interpreted as a symbolic representation of psychological distress, where the body becomes the site of unconscious suffering. Nyanzi's poetry makes this clinical assessment more emotional by depicting a population that has lost how to dance. In the next lines of the poem, the speaker lists some unique traditional Ugandan dances like "Larakaraka, ding-ding, runyege, etc." These dances convey something a lot more special when following the tone of the poem; the dances represent their identity, their history of happiness, and a time when things were better. But now, it is all gone, and only the memory remains. Naming these specific dances allows readers to emotionally connect with the deep void left by a lack of freedom and the physical burden of being immobile. The pain is no longer abstract but deeply felt bodily.

The speaker also makes references to traditional outfits for dance and instruments for dance, lamenting:

Our raffia skirts are coated with dust...
Our ankle bells rust away...
Our reed pipes and jembe horns have cobwebs.

The mention of "dust", "rust", and "cobwebs" further highlights how long these people have been in pain and how long their dance has been stolen from them by oppression. The stark imagery in these lines intensifies the imagery of long neglect. The essence of these people, their very spirit, has been lost; it is the central message of this poem.

Nyanzi's use of dance as a metaphor for lost freedom is a common theme in African prison writing, where physical movement frequently serves as a metonym for political agency. According to Buis (2013), in his study of Mandela's captivity on Robben Island, music and dance within prison walls had "ontological agency"; they were not just acts of amusement, but also survival and resistance. This shows how being unable to dance is synonymous with losing one's personhood. While Mandela's jail songs reflected hope for eventual release, Nyanzi's speaker takes a different approach. The poem concludes with a direct appeal to the heavens:

Heavens! Return our dances of freedom!.. Let us joyously dance again.

This direct plea to the heavens conveys a state of total helplessness, unable to rely on any person to save them. The desperate wish in the beginning lines of the poem now turns into an intense plea for divine intervention. In psychoanalytic terminology, this turn to heaven implies the transfer of desire to an external, supernatural power. Why? Because internalised pain and political realities are too powerful to tackle directly. It is easier to ask God or A supreme being for emancipation than to comprehend how mankind could accomplish it. This theological shift also signifies the end of psychoanalytic reading: Nyanzi may be seeking a spiritual vocabulary after political and psychological vocabularies have failed. The return to joy stands in stark contrast to the frozen, rusty images before and a yearning for healing and liberation.

The poem powerfully captures the pain of loss as something that people desperately want to get rid of; it is depicted as a lingering emotion and can be caused by an external force or factor. While dance is a repeated idea in this poem, symbolising freedom and collective happiness, the loss of dance is a direct consequence of the pain caused by oppression.

Conclusion

Stella Nyanzi's *No Roses from My Mouth* provides a rich landscape for psychoanalytic and sociopolitical exploration. Her poetry articulates the psychological aftermath of imprisonment and

repression through symbolic, emotionally charged imagery. Nyanzi's poetry reveals pain as more than just physical or political; she grounds it in emotional fragmentation, the unconscious workings of trauma and deep-seated loss. The analysis of the three selected poems demonstrates how Nyanzi represents pain as an intersection of psychological conflict, intimate loss, and political oppression. In doing so, it contributes

meaningfully to the growing field of trauma studies, particularly at the intersection of literature, gender, and power. By drawing attention to the inner dimensions of civil resistance and gendered suffering, the article also offers insight into how literary expression can mediate the complex relationship between politics, culture, and the psyche in postcolonial societies.

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