The Weganda Imperative

Uganda was producing intellectual journals by 1962. How could there be nothing to speak of in 2023?

Founder of TWR

Let's begin with the name of the journal. It came about during a spell of insomnia, and after scratching our heads for some days looking for a name that captured the spirit of the periodical we wanted to produce. So many names had been tossed out, partly because the title also had to meet the registrar's legal standard. It couldn't be called the *Uganda Review*, for example, because that was taken years ago. We couldn't call it the *Uganda Journal*, because a periodical by that name exists in limbo as a publication of the Uganda Society. One night, as we tinkered with the possibilities, we removed the "U" in Uganda and replaced it with "We," finding with a blend of satisfaction and alarm that "Weganda" didn't sound so bad after all, if it wasn't already in use. It wasn't. Thus, ticking the essential boxes, this quarterly periodical came to be named *The Weganda Review: a journal of culture, art & ideas*.

In the months after our efforts to create *TWR* turned a corner, it felt sometimes as if what was at stake was something bigger than a literary magazine. The Weganda spirit became almost an imperative, intense with a lambent promise that could be felt but not yet within reach. For what purpose and at what cost could such a journal be produced? Who wanted it anyway? The questions itched and ached like jiggers.

There are Ugandans in recent years who have thought hard about creating a solid literary journal without going anywhere with their ideas. Some people said we would have more success creating a magazine that focused on real estate or cars – because that's what middle-class families are mostly into. It didn't help matters that some others who might have assisted in the publication of the inaugural issue couldn't, finally, be counted on.

TWR faced an existential crisis from the beginning. Who was its audience in a country with a poor reading culture and where even learned people

Rodney Muhumuza, founder and editor of *TWR*, photographed just outside Kampala © Edgar Raymond Batte for *TWR*

don't care deeply for intellectual pursuits? And could it be tolerated in an increasingly anti-intellectual environment, even with the journal's stated neutrality as an ideas forum only for those who don't have an axe to grind?

Thankfully, the most important question was also the easiest to answer: Even if the journal had only 10 subscribers, those people mattered, much in the same way a priest doesn't turn back and go home when he enters his church to find only a dozen people in the pews. On the contrary, if he's really a priest, the empty furniture may charge him with such energy that he suddenly decides to distribute Holy Communion. In the case of this journal unwanted delays somehow proved fortuitous, chance encounters yielded desirable essays, silences provoked conviction, trickery drew iron determination, and, ultimately, hope coalesced into faith.

We find it scream-worthy that in a country which was producing intellectual journals by independence in 1962, until today there has been practically nothing to speak of. To accept these sad circumstances today, as individuals and as a society, is to say that we can no longer think for

ourselves. As a matter of course it's no way to live.

The Weganda team is impelled to create the most instructive journal of its kind south of Khartoum. We know that those who want such a journal, who want the idea if not the reality of it, will be unflinching in their devotion to it. This is enough encouragement to at least try.

A precursor to *TWR* can be said to be the aforementioned *Uganda Journal*, a now-defunct periodical whose goal was to be our society's forum for intellectual exchange. First published in 1923 and then irregularly until the 2000s, the *Uganda Journal* proved indispensable then 2014 – as it is now to those who search the archives – as a repository of knowledge on popular as well as obscure subjects. In that journal one could read about anything from economic affairs to sacred relics of the Cwezi dynasty.

Our journal aspires to that solidity even as it's fuelled by a more contemporary wind. It shall retain the academic yearning of the *Uganda Journal* while asserting a versatile energy in style and substance.

TWR is simply designed but attractive with its mix of original art and striking photography. It's offered as a sophisticated journal examining cultural life and curating ideas that can help explain African societies.

Our roots are in Uganda, but our ambitions are pan-African, and so we invite contributions from across Africa and the Black diaspora. We want to engage with writers, academics and artists of different nationalities and varying experiences, including and especially those who are not yet famous.

Uganda, like many African countries today, can be said to be in flux, whether it's religious, political, or whatever else. There are currents everywhere, real or imagined, begging to be explained or deconstructed, including obviously so many political questions.

The task of enlightening society today cannot be left to courageous but despairing newspapers, and in their failures or shortcomings a gap has long existed for the entry of an intellectual journal such as this one.

Where others offer news and investigative reporting, we will focus on the exposition of ideas and historical events underpinning daily happenings. *TWR* shall capture and distil for a wider audience ideas that try to put a finger on the soul of the land, in so doing serve as the principal theorist of whatever animates Ugandans and Africans elsewhere.

TWR will be printed four times a year. Its offerings will include mostly essays but also diaries, memoirs, short fiction, art portfolios, photography, poetry, reviews, obituaries, and dispatches from afar. Each and every piece shall stand on its own, contributing to the curated whole not by mistake but by careful consideration.

TWR's tone shall be neutral but authoritative, at times provocative but not sensational, sometimes challenging but at all times lucid. Its topics shall range from religion to politics, natural history to music, the social sciences to art and design.

Who can write for *TWR*? Anyone who brings a thought-provoking piece of prose, poetry, or art. A herdsman in Kashaari who has something to say about the anthropomorphic qualities of the Ankole longhorns as much as a zoologist in Kibaale who thinks humans can learn something from the lives of bats. A priest who may have discovered a new way of seeing things as much as a high-school kid who pens an astonishingly ironic poem. How wishful we are! The only elements we ask of our contributors are honesty, intelligence, authority, and a desire to be understood. Advice to writers? Keep the boring stuff out. Keep the polemics out. You shall not plagiarize.

TWR is not a platform for drumbeaters, who will be resisted, or partisan hacks, who will be ignored. This journal's independence shall be fiercely protected, and to that end we aim to be a reader-supported journal. You can support us by subscribing to the journal and, in the process, rid us of all advertising.

While we may accept adverts from educational, cultural and scientific organizations in order to support our editorial work, we shall not deal with political organizations and partisan groups of all types.

TWR is published by a non-profit foundation set up mainly to publish *TWR*, and *TWR*, to be clear, is a journal produced at the intersection of art and ideas, targeting serious readers who want thoughtful interpretations of historical facts as well as current affairs.

For what do we hope? That you, dear reader, will find in our work something to be grateful for. ■