Silencing the African Woman's Body: Protest, Disinformation and Criminalisation

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Abstract

In this short article, we examine the arrest, detention, and prosecution of three Ugandan women who protested naked in September 2024, using their case as a lens to explore the criminalisation of naked protest, rights-based resistance, and gendered disinformation. We argue that their treatment by the Ugandan justice system was not a genuine legal process but a façade - one that reinforces colonial standards and serves as a tool for criminalising dissent, silencing rights-based resistance, and entrenching patriarchal control under the guise of law. We situate these women's naked protest within African feminist histories and recent scholarship, including work by Tamale and Diabate, to challenge popular critiques that framed this protest as misuse of women's bodies, signs of mental instability, or attempts to gain cheap popularity. We then turn to the role of gendered disinformation, showing how it was weaponised in these protests to erase the accountability demands of these women and other protestors. Importantly, we do not stop at critique. We also identify strategies of counterspeech, drawing on a published interview with one of the protestors – Opoloje - and an opinion piece written in the aftermath of their arrest. These voices offer insight into how women resist disinformation, reclaim their narratives, and reassert the legitimacy of their causes. We conclude that naked protest, far from being irrational or culturally deviant, is a radical and embodied form of feminist resistance - one that demands to be taken seriously, especially in contexts where corruption and authoritarianism continue to undermine the rights and dignity of women in Africa.

Keywords: Nakedness, woman, Africa, protest, criminalisation, disinformation, Uganda

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a noticeable rise in the use of naked protest as a form of political and social expression across various global contexts. Individuals, both men and women, have turned to nakedness not merely as spectacle, but as a deliberate and symbolic act to draw attention to urgent causes. In Europe, for instance, Ukrainian women staged naked protests in 2012 to challenge autocratic leadership and highlight gendered dimensions of state violence (Phillips 2014; Labahn 2016). Elsewhere, activists have marched unclothed to advocate for environmental justice and human rights (Ström 2024). The act of going naked in public, often dismissed as indecent or provocative, has in fact become a powerful tool for visibility, forcing observers, media, and governments to confront the vulnerability, urgency, and defiance embodied in the protest.

Across Africa, we are witnessing a growing number of women using their bodies, specifically, public nakedness as a form of protest to challenge oppressive systems and demand accountability. While this may appear radical or new to some, naked protest by women is not a recent phenomenon on the African continent. It is deeply rooted in African histories and cultural practices, where women have long used their bodies to express both vulnerability and resistance. In this article, we focus on Uganda, where recent protests by African women in

Uganda's capital city – Kampala, have involved not only nakedness but also the use of sharp, unapologetic language to critique the government's failure to address socio-economic injustices, including those affecting women. The Ugandan state responded to these protests with arrests, detentions, and prosecution, relying on laws such as the Penal Code Act, an inheritance from British colonial rule. While the charges against these women have been framed as common nuisance, we contend that these proceedings have been used to criminalise women's bodies in protest, raising urgent questions about the legitimacy of such criminalisation.

Legal theorists may offer partial explanations for Uganda's criminalisation of naked protest by African women, but these accounts fall short. Take, for instance, Thomas Aquinas, who theorises that law should promote morality and prohibit actions that undermine reason and social harmony (Wacks 2021:23). Some Ugandans have echoed this view, claiming that the women's nakedness violated African cultural and moral values (*Daily Monitor* 2024). But even if we accept that criminal law should reflect cultural morality, we must ask: whose morality is being protected - African or Western? And what symbolic and political meanings do naked protests by African women carry - meanings that fundamentally challenge the rationale behind their criminalisation? When courts invoke criminal law to respond to such protests, is the law truly being used to uphold justice, or, is it being weaponised to suppress dissent and reinforce patriarchal and government control? Moreover, in the face of competing narratives about the three women protestors - some of which distort and trivialise their actions through disinformation - how do we recentre the real issue: their protest against documented corruption? These are the questions we engage with, using the protest of the three African women as a critical lens.

2. The Façade of Arrest, Detention, and Prosecution in *Uganda v. Kobusingye Norah & 2 Others* (2024)

On 2 September 2024, several Ugandans took to the streets of Kampala to protest entrenched government corruption. This public outcry followed reports of the misuse of public funds by high-ranking officials, including the Speaker of Uganda's Parliament. The protest emerged amid growing frustration with the government's failure after nearly four decades in power to address systemic corruption, even as essential services such as healthcare, education, and women's sexual and reproductive health remain in crisis. Among the demonstrators were three Ugandan women: Praise Aloikin Opoloje, a law student at Makerere University; Norah Tshetshe; and Kemitoma Siperia Mollie, a former university guild leader. In a powerful act of resistance, the women staged a naked protest. Two wore only underwear, exposing their breasts and other parts of their bodies, while the third wore long black trousers but had her upper body, including her breasts, uncovered. As they marched toward Parliament, they carried placards, one of which read: *"Corruption fucked me so hard I am here to mourn"*, a statement considered vulgar in Uganda due to the use of the F-word (Uganda Radio Network 2024).

As the protest neared Parliament, the Ugandan Parliamentary Police swiftly intervened and arrested the three African women. We intentionally refer to these women as African or Black throughout this article because nakedness carries different meanings across racial and cultural contexts - and the theorisation we make here is specific to African women. Returning

to the case itself, these women were charged with common nuisance under section 148(1) of Uganda's Penal Code Act. This offence is committed when a person "does an act not authorised by law or omits to discharge a legal duty and thereby causes any common injury, or danger or annoyance, or obstructs or causes inconvenience to the public in the exercise of common rights." According to the charge sheet, the women "held a procession in the middle of the road while naked and with writing on their bodies, an act not authorised by law – thereby causing annoyance or obstruction or inconvenience to the public in the exercise of common rights" (*Uganda v Kobusingye Norah* & 2 Others 2024). That same day, they were detained at Luzira Women's Government Prison, a facility typically reserved for individuals accused of the most serious crimes. They remained in custody for ten days before being released on bail by the Chief Magistrate of Buganda Road Court on 12 September 2024.

A closer reading of section 148(1) of the Penal Code Act quickly reveals the lack of nexus between the women's conduct (marching naked) and the offence proscribed by that provision. Nevertheless, the matter proceeded to court. It was listed for mention on multiple occasions, but during each scheduled appearance, the prosecution failed to present any witnesses. As a result of these repeated adjournments, the defence filed an application on 11 June 2025 seeking dismissal of the case for want of prosecution. The court granted the application pursuant to section 119(1) of Uganda's Magistrates Courts Act.

It is evident that the charges brought against the three women were never seriously pursued. This is not a case where the prosecution tried to adduce evidence but just failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt. No, it is one where the prosecution, despite having the boldness to lay charges, never produced a single witness. But this practice is all too common in Uganda. These three African women are not the first to be arrested for public nakedness. In 2012, women who stripped to their bras were arrested and detained by police, only to be released without charge (Human Rights Watch 2012). As research reveals (Jjuuko and Tabengwa 2018; Lubaale 2017; HRAPF and CSCHRCL 2013), the practice of bringing charges against individuals who do not conform to societal standards despite knowing that the charges will not be pursued or sustained, is a common tactic. It is used to intimidate those involved and deter others from engaging in similar acts of resistance. The impunity in this tactic lies in the misuse and weaponisation of the legal processes of arrest, detention, and prosecution to penalise individuals who challenge societal norms. But why, really, would the government go to the lengths of arresting, detaining, and charging three young women, only to make no genuine effort to pursue the case? We argue that the charge brought against these three women was never truly about common nuisance as defined under section 148(1) of the Penal Code Act. At its core, it was about their nakedness - a deliberate and radical act that disrupted societal norms around decency and went further to confront the state, demanding accountability.

But aren't these so-called societal norms problematic? We answer this question with a resounding Yes! Why? because they are Western-centric, and we label them as such because, in pre-colonial Africa, many African communities did not require women to cover their breasts, and clothing was minimal due to the continent's warm climate. This made sense given the hot climate across much of the continent. As Olaitan (2021) submits, clothing was not generally needed for warmth or protection in most areas of Africa, and many tribes wore very little. For women, it was not uncommon in many communities to have their breasts exposed. The standard of "decency" and "modesty" based on how clothed a person is was largely Western

and was introduced through colonial "civilising" missions that sought to emancipate Africans from so-called barbaric practices (Lubaale 2025). And so, when commentators justify the arrest of naked African women protestors by invoking the need to protect Uganda's cultural fabric, it becomes clear that the "cultural fabric" being defended is not really Ugandan, but Western. It is against this backdrop that we contend that the purported prosecution of the African woman for public nakedness under the guise of "common nuisance" is a legal façade, one that reveals the state's discomfort with the African woman's public nakedness and the issues communicated by these naked bodies rather than any genuine concern for public order.

But one wonders, where does the zeal to sacrifice our own identity and culture on the altar of Western standards come from? Is it, as Chinua Achebe once described a "dreadful betrayal" of our culture and identity? (Achebe 1975, cited in wa Thiong'o 1986: 7). We assert that it is exactly what Achebe describes it to be – a betrayal of our identity brought about by the Western civilising mission. We know all too well the damage the civilising mission inflicted on African minds. It is no wonder that wa Thiong'o (1986) long reminded us to *decolonise our minds*. The civilising mission taught us to view our indigenous dress codes as barbaric, and in response, we internalised the idea that "proper" dress (or the Western way of doing things) means covering up, an idea that is unmistakably Western and ill-suited to our climate. Very deeply entrenched is this Western view that we now unashamedly claim that wearing less clothing undermines the African cultural fabric. It is these mindsets that African revolutionary theorist call us to challenge. Fanon (1963:41) submits that challenging these colonial legacies will require "untidy affirmation of an original idea" of what African identity, culture and history really is. In fact, Fanon (1963:37) considers it "a complete calling in question of the colonial situation." In his words:

> "the violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters" (Fanon 1963:40).

In that sense, we theorise the nakedness of the three Black women protestors not as an affront to culture, but as "untidy affirmation of an original idea" of what African woman nakedness means. And of course, this affirmation was so untidy in the context of the 2 September 2024 protest that it was met by a prosecution directorate that 'dreadfully betrayed', in Chinua Achebe's words. This Prosecuting entity resorted to the vague and ill-fitting *common nuisance* provision under section 148(1) of the Penal Code Act, and as we have contended in the preceding section, this was not a prosecution in any meaningful sense. We theorise it as a weaponisation of the national prosecution directorate – that point where criminal justice and authoritarian governance intersect, with the justice system being a tool in the hands of government to criminalise dissent, silence rights resistance, and reinforce patriarchal control under the guise of law.

3. Beyond Misuse, Madness and Cheap Popularity: Situating Opoloje's Naked Protest in African Feminist Histories

Not surprisingly, the naked protest by the three Black women was met with criticism. Some described it as a "misuse" of a woman's body, others pathologised the incident, labelling the women as mentally unstable, while others called it seeking "cheap popularity" (*The Observer* 2024; *Daily Monitor* 2024). Amidst this backlash, however, some media platforms sought to understand the motivations behind the protest. We engage with Praise Opoloje's interview, published by *The Observer* (2024), a widely published media house in Ugandan, to unpack her responses and use them as a springboard into broader scholarly discussions that situate African women's naked protests in African feminist histories.

The interview, published on 6 December 2024, four months after the protest, opens with Opoloje explaining the deep-rooted injustices that led her to such an extreme form of resistance. Born in 1999 to a peasant family in Pallisa district, Eastern Uganda, she recounts growing up amidst the devastating effects of corruption. In her words: "By the time I could understand the word 'corruption,' I bet I had seen more than 1,999 forms of it." She continues: "I cannot remember a day in Pallisa where I visited the outpatient department, and it functioned seamlessly." The turning point for her came when she nearly lost her life while giving birth at an under-resourced hospital in Pallisa - her home village. Recounting the ordeal, she states: "I laid there for 45 minutes without sutures to stitch me. When my mum asked the midwife for help, she replied, 'What do you expect us to do?' We had to bribe her with Shs 5,000 [an equivalent of about 1 dollar] to get hidden sutures." She adds: "Now, for me what made me realise this, was having my life at risk on a deathbed. Having my life being valued at a bribe of Shs 5,000." When asked why she chose to march naked and why not protest in another way, her response was simple yet profound: "They don't realise how exhausting this fight is."

At first glance, this may appear to be a personal account of one woman explaining her choice to protest naked. But a closer reading reveals layers of meaning that help us demystify the cultural and political significance of African women nakedness. In precolonial Africa, a woman's nakedness in public carried deep symbolic meaning. Mungai explains that in many African contexts, a woman's public nakedness was considered an ultimate curse. She writes:

> "The reason is said to be that through pregnancy, childbirth and nurturing, women are the givers of life. By stripping naked in front of men old enough to be her children or grandchildren, a mother is symbolically taking back the life that she gave, and so in a way, pronouncing death upon them" (Mungai 2016).

In this sense, when an African woman chooses to go naked in public, she is saying: I have done everything I can within my power; this is my last resort. Diabate echoes this in her book on *Naked Agency,* observing that:

> "Within exceptional and biopolitical conditions, when all else has failed, and when their bodies seem to be all that they have left, the women's insurrectionary gesture often is their last resort. Whether used as an expression of vulnerability, or as a mode of conflict management or resistance, the potency or the inefficacy of their disrobing often stems both from authorising social structures such as the privileges of motherhood and social cohesion and from prevailing notions of gender and sexuality. Paradoxically, however, their gesture is either exploited or repressed" (Diabate, 2020: 4).

Mathebula (2024) adds another layer to this discussion in her observation that African women's public protests are "a feminist tactic that embodies both vulnerability and strength, using the

body as a site of resistance and empowerment". Tamale (2016:58), in her seminal work on Nudity in Uganda similarly notes that "in Africa, women have used their bodies to protest extremities; it is usually a weapon of last resort when they find themselves pushed on the edge of the cliff". Opoloje's statement, "They don't realise how exhausting this fight is", when decoded through African feminist histories, resonates deeply with views of women's naked bodies as sites of resistance when all else fails. Her rhetorical questions in the interview further exemplify this:

> "How many more mothers will die on their deathbeds? How many more November massacres shall we have? How many children will drop out of school? How many more rights will be violated? How many more conferences shall we sit at and have conversations about issues that require us to go out on the streets and march?"

Though Opoloje may not use academic language, her actions and words reflect the same cultural logic: nakedness as an ultimate curse and a last resort. Her protest was born out of desperation having nearly lost her life over a bribe of one dollar. Importantly, this form of protest is not new to Africa. Historically, women across the African continent used nakedness to challenge oppression. Among the Igbo in West Africa, Oorji (2000) documents the practice of *Ogu Omunwanye*, or "sitting on a man," used to call disrespectful men to order. In Durban in 1959, South African women opposed the 1908 Native Beer Act, which banned them from brewing traditional beer. They attacked state beerhalls and, in a bold act of defiance, stripped naked in front of police barricades who often hesitated to confront them (Mathebula 2024). Therefore, the public naked march by Opoloje and the other two women was not without precedent. What makes many quick to condemn it is the fact that, like many African traditions, the meaning of an African woman's nakedness has been deliberately erased and distorted over time. Historically, a woman's nakedness in protest carried a voice and a powerful one at that. It spoke beyond the misogynistic framing of the female body as passive or as an object for male consumption. It held symbolic meaning, rooted in resistance. It is against this backdrop that we theorise the arrest and detention of these three women on 2 September 2024 as a silencing of the African woman body, making this body unable to speak. The voice that emerged through their nakedness was effectively stifled and silenced when their protest was halted through arrest and subsequent detention.

4. Gendered Disinformation and the Erasure of Naked African Women's Accountability demands

As we have consistently demonstrated, naked protests by African women have never been casual. They have been deliberate, courageous acts of resistance. On 2 September 2024, these women were not just exposing their bodies; they were exposing urgent truths. The same holds true for marches recorded elsewhere on the continent. Notably, the message of the South African women who protested the Beer Act was clear: banning traditional brewing would devastate their livelihoods. More recently, the naked protest by Black women students at Rhodes University against rape culture sent an equally clear message - the university needed to act.

But today, the clarity of such protests is increasingly muddied. One reason is disinformation - the deliberate creation and spread of false or misleading information to deceive the public or derail the causes being advanced. While disinformation is not new to Africa, the internet and social media have changed how it operates. It now spreads faster, wider, and more virally. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2024) reported that disinformation campaigns targeting African information systems have surged nearly fourfold since 2022, with destabilising and antidemocratic consequences. Suffice it to note, disinformation can be created and disseminated by anyone including those in government leadership. Studies (Lewis and Marwick 2017) show that political interests and state actors are often behind these campaigns.

In Uganda, the naked protest by the three women alongside broader demonstrations against corruption was a call for accountability. But President Museveni framed it differently. Two days before one of the scheduled protests, he warned demonstrators that they were "playing with fire" (Human Rights Watch 2024). In a televised address, he claimed that "some elements have been planning illegal demonstrations, riots," and that these "elements were working for foreign interests" (Human Rights Watch 2024). The *Daily Monitor* (2024) echoed this, quoting President Museveni's view that the protests were "foreign funded to disrupt Uganda." Anita Among, the Speaker of Uganda's Parliament and one of those implicated in the corruption allegations, similarly offered a different framing of the issues raised. In her defence, she claimed that the accusations were driven by "homosexuals" retaliating against her for her role in passing Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act. Despite the overwhelming evidence presented, she dismissed it as mere hearsay and made it clear that she had no intention of addressing the claims, saying she wouldn't waste her time on what she described as rumours and social media fabrications (Open Democracy 2024).

While disinformation itself is not new, scholars have noted that the industrialised, viral spread of falsehoods, especially by external actors, is. As Hiebert (2025) puts it, "no matter who pulls the strings, the goal is to bend public perceptions, influence electoral outcomes, and shape government policy." So yes, foreign influence in disinformation campaigns is real. And Museveni's concerns about foreign funding or Anita Among's claims about retaliation cannot be dismissed outright. But here is the thing: we do not have evidence to prove that the naked protest was externally funded or a form of backlash. Nor do we have evidence to prove it was not. In any case, that is not the point of this article. What is indisputable, however, are the issues that motivated the protest, among these, widespread corruption impacting on several fundamental rights of Ugandans including sexual and reproductive health rights and the lack of accountability for public officials. These are well-documented, urgent concerns. Even if, hypothetically, the protests were externally funded and a form of retaliation, the causes they highlighted remain valid and pressing. In fact, reports show that the situation is worsening (Global Voices 2024). So, when the focus shifts to whether the protests were foreign funded or a form of retaliation, it becomes a form of disinformation. It distracts from the real issues and trivialises the protestors' demands. This is especially dangerous when such narratives are pushed by those in power - those responsible for addressing these concerns. Disinformation, when weaponised in this way, leaves critical issues like maternal health unaddressed and women, already disproportionately affected, bear the brunt.

Colomina and others (2021) rightly observe that "disinformation undermines human rights and many elements of good quality democracy." And when women lead these protests,

the disinformation often takes on a gendered dimension. As Judson and others (2020) note, "gendered disinformation is used to justify human rights abuses and entrench repression of women." State actors and their allies often rely on stereotypes to discredit women's activism. Disinformation weaponises these stereotypes to paint women as stupid, weak, untrustworthy, attention seeking, unfit to advance causes, immoral, devious, and ultimately to silence them by making them afraid to talk back.

The dismissal of Uganda's corruption protest, during which three African women protested naked, as a foreign disturbance and a form of retaliation by President Museveni and Speaker Among exemplifies a broader pattern of gendered disinformation. Instead of engaging with the substantive issues raised - corruption, deteriorating public services, and the erosion of women's rights - the protest was reframed as a threat to national stability and a product of Western interference. This rhetorical strategy is not new. It aligns with feminist critiques of how dominant political actors paint a picture of regard for women's rights and issues but actively suppress causes intended to address these issues. Tripp (2024:221) observes that this kind of pretence and authoritarian bulldozing "allows the regime to sustain itself in power. It is used to divert attention from human rights abuses and soften the regime's image." Tripp (2024) therefore refers to this as the "instrumentalisation and suppression of women's rights" by authoritarian regimes, which often ignore or trivialise women's claims when they challenge the legitimacy of those in power.

President Museveni and Speaker Among's framing of the protest does no more than misrepresent it. It functions as a deliberate strategy to delegitimise rights-based resistance, neutralising its political potency and silencing dissent. By reducing the protest to retaliation and a foreign-funded disruption, the state avoids accountability and reframes resistance as illegitimate. These distortions are not just rhetorical; they have real consequences. They redirect visibility and legitimacy away from the urgent issues at hand and instead focus scrutiny on the protestors themselves. The women are framed not as activists with genuine concerns, but as untrustworthy, attention-seeking, irrational, or delusional - acting not out of conviction, but under the influence of foreign forces. This framing has serious implications. It undermines how seriously society takes these women, their activism and causes. Despite the urgency and legitimacy of their causes, they are quickly dismissed under labels that strip their actions of meaning and credibility.

But as Judson and others (2020) rightly submit, "women are not passive victims of gendered disinformation and harassment; they are fighting back against it and have many allies in that fight." Those allies include writers like Sanyu and I who choose to look beyond the noise and locate these protests within broader scholarly frameworks. As we wrap up this section, we turn to some of the strategies of countering disinformation that emerged, with a focus on the three naked women protesters. We zoom in on Opoloje's own interview with *Mwanzo TV* (2025) where she reflects on the boldness of walking to Parliament nude, and on Wilfred Arinda's opinion piece in the *Daily Monitor* (2024), which centres the role of allies in counterspeech.

One key strategy that emerges from Opoloje's interview is **countering disinformation with truth**. She begins by acknowledging the impact disinformation had on her, stating: "It has really affected my credibility and that of other activists that try to rise up and stand up" (Opoloje, *Mwanzo TV* 2025). But she does not stop there. Echoing Judson and others' assertion

that women are not passive victims, she declares: “My best strategy to counter misinformation is to flood the system too with the right information” (Opoloje, *Mwanzo TV* 2025). This, we argue, is a critical strategy in confronting disinformation. Rather than retreating into silence - which is precisely what disinformers want; women like Opoloje are speaking truth to power.

Arinda’s opinion piece, published in the *Daily Monitor* (2024) shortly after the arrest and detention of Opoloje and others, offers other powerful strategies for addressing gendered disinformation. Responding to critiques that the women’s nakedness was inappropriate, culturally disrespectful, or attention-seeking, Arinda rightly argues: “to reduce their protest to mere nudity is to ignore the message they are trying to send: the anger, the frustration and the desperation young Ugandans feel in the face of unbridled corruption.” He reminds readers that these women were not protesting for themselves, but for poor Ugandans, especially women, who continue to struggle to access basic services like healthcare and education.

Arinda’s writing, though not couched in academic language offers a powerful reminder: nakedness is symbolic, a matter of last resort - what Mungai and Tamale refer to as the “ultimate curse.” In this sense, Arinda becomes part of a community of allies - those who counter gendered disinformation simply by writing, by making their views public, and by redirecting attention back to the real issues. He reminds us that these women were not exposing their bodies for spectacle, but to expose the failures of Ugandan leadership. As he puts it:

> “The act of going naked in public, especially for a protest, is not easy. In fact, it is one of the most difficult things anyone can do. Even in private spaces, many people feel vulnerable being naked. Now imagine doing that in the middle of Kampala, a city with millions of people, for a cause as serious as fighting corruption. The courage it takes to shed not just clothes, but the layers of fear, judgment and cultural expectations, is immense. These protesters weren’t just exposing their bodies; they were exposing the fact that Ugandan leadership has failed them and countless others” (*Daily Monitor* 2024).

From Arinda’s opinion, we deduce a number of strategies for countering disinformation, particularly gendered disinformation aimed at delegitimising women’s causes. His writing does not rely on academic jargon, but it is no less powerful in its clarity and conviction. He engages in **narrative reframing**, shifting the focus from the women’s bodies to the message they were conveying. By doing so, he challenges the misogynistic interpretations of women’s bodies as the subject of men’s gaze, with men having the to give meanings to women’s bodies (Jimlongo 2018). Arinda’s approach is also a form of **counterpublic discourse**, a space where marginalised voices articulate dissent outside dominant public narratives (Okech 2021). His writing reminds readers that these women were not protesting for themselves alone, but for the many Ugandans, especially women, who continue to suffer under the weight of corruption and poor service delivery. He acknowledges the vulnerability involved in naked protest, describing it as one of the most difficult things a person can do. This framing humanises the protestors. He also engages in **issue re-centring**, pulling the reader back to the original concerns: corruption, inequality, and the failure of leadership. This is critical in a context where disinformation seeks to distract and distort. His work reminds us that counterspeech does not always require academic credentials - it requires courage, clarity, and commitment to truth. In this way, Arinda becomes part of a broader resistance, one that refuses to let disinformation silence or distort the voices of women demanding accountability.

5. Conclusion

In the end, our reflections are not simply about the three Ugandan women who undressed in protest. We have written with a view to theorising the power and peril of the African woman's body especially when it dares to speak truth to power. What we have witnessed is not the enforcement of law, but the performance of control, a state's attempt to silence resistance by criminalising the very bodies that bear witness to its failures. Yet, these women, and many others around the world refused erasure. Through nakedness, they reclaimed power, language, history, and meaning. Their bodies became both mirror and manifesto, reflecting a nation's moral decay and demanding accountability in a system that trades justice for obedience. Their act reveals the entanglement between gendered embodiment and state power; how the female body becomes both a site of subjugation and of insurgent agency. As Butler (1993) argues, the body is not merely a passive surface upon which power acts, but an active field where norms are reiterated, contested, and sometimes subverted. Similarly, Mbembe's (2001) concept of necro politics helps us understand how the state decides which bodies are visible, dignified, or disposable. We have theorised that to undress in protest, is to expose this hierarchy, to unmask the moral hypocrisy through which patriarchy and power sustain themselves. The women's act thus belongs to a longer genealogy of African feminist resistance, where the body functions simultaneously as archive, protest, and pedagogy.

African feminist scholars remind us that the body is not only a site of oppression but also of knowledge, memory, and power. Mama (1997) critiques how colonial and patriarchal structures have co-opted African women's bodies as territories of control, while Tamale (2020) calls for the *re-eroticisation* of the African woman's body, restoring its agency, pleasure, and political meaning. Likewise, Oyěwùmí (1997) destabilises the Western gender binary that continues to frame African women's experiences through colonial lenses. Within this framework, we have theorized that the naked protest is not merely defiance; it is **epistemic disobedience**, a refusal to inhabit the body as constructed by colonial morality and a reclamation of it as an instrument of truth and resistance.

Yet, beyond protest lies another radical proposition; the call to reclaim play as resistance. Play, often dismissed as frivolous or apolitical, becomes profoundly revolutionary when enacted by women whose bodies have long been sites of discipline and shame. To laugh, to dance, to move freely, and to reimagine joy is to defy the architecture of control. It is a refusal to allow trauma to dictate the texture of our politics. Play, as an embodied feminist praxis, disrupts the binary of pain and power; it reminds us that pleasure, imagination, and laughter are also tools of liberation. As Hooks (1995) writes, *"To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality."* Through play, women perform that vision, healing, creating, and daring to exist beyond the boundaries imposed upon them, being free.

Both naked protests and play occupy radical spaces within feminist praxis, each reclaiming the body as a site of agency, expression, and refusal. While naked protest confronts power directly by disrupting the politics of respectability and shame, play resists through subversion, softness, and imagination. The former shocks the system; the latter reimagines it. Both acts, however,

insist on **bodily autonomy**, the right to appear, to feel, to move, and to define oneself outside patriarchal surveillance. These gestures are intertwined forms of embodied freedom: where naked protest says, *"See me and reckon with my truth,"* play declares *"I will not be broken by your gaze."* Together, they challenge the binaries of pain and pleasure, protest and joy, politics and emotion. They remind us that liberation is not only fought through rage and confrontation, but also through laughter, movement, and the courage to delight in one's body. And so, we conclude with the view that to silence these women is to silence history itself. To criminalise their nakedness is to criminalise Africa's own memory of resistance. What remains clear is this: when the law becomes a mask for repression, and morality a weapon against the oppressed, then the naked body, playful, unashamed, unyielding, becomes the final frontier of freedom. And when that body chooses to dance, laugh, and play, it transforms protest into possibility and possibility into liberation.

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