

THE CONVERSATIONS ISSUE

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BOLU BABALOLA

ON BLACK LOVE
IN LITERATURE

Also Inside

BLESSING OKAGBARE

NICOLE ASINUGO

THE CAST OF
NETFLIX'S JIVA!

AND MORE!

TEMIS

*On God, stillness and finding
joy in the chaos*

What Sort Of Conversations Have You Been Having Post-Lockdown?



amazing discourse with some really interesting and talented women. We speak with best-selling author and Forbes Under 30 listmaker, Bolu Babalola (*Love in Colour*), Olympic medalist, Blessing Okagbere, award-winning screenwriter Nicola Asinugo (*Living in Bondage*, *RattleSnake*), artist Renike, and the stars of Netflix's new South African original series, *JIVA!*, Noxolo Dlamani and Candice Modiselle who play Ntombi and Vuyiswa in the dance series.

And of course we've got our cover star, singer, songwriter and producer, Tems, with whom I had an incredibly honest conversation about stillness, God, spirituality and what she learned from her time in a Ugandan prison. Though it was brief, we managed to pack a lot of chat into our time and I have to say, I left feeling a calming energy, I hadn't quite felt in a while.

We've got all this and so much more waiting for you on the pages of *The Conversations Issue*.

Peace and Love!

Sonia Trabor

editor@genevievemagazineng.com



O It suddenly feels so alien, returning to social settings (responsibly, of course) and having to talk to people outside of our homes, once again. For me, I've dumped the small talk altogether and have decided to delve into more weighty conversations. This somehow brings me comfort. What sort of conversations are you having with people post-lockdown?

In this edition, our first this year, we dive into



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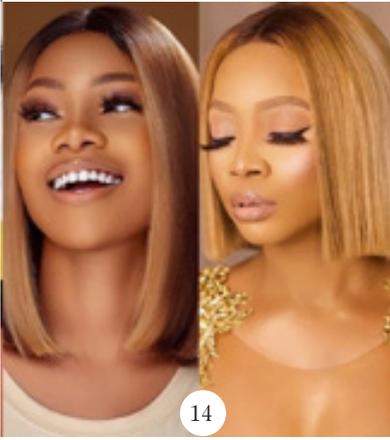
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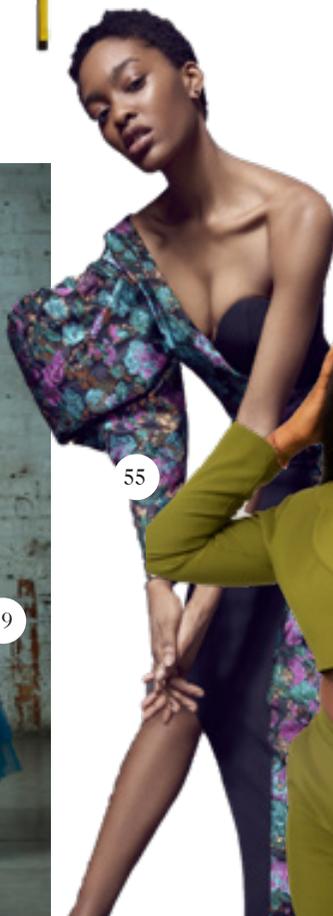
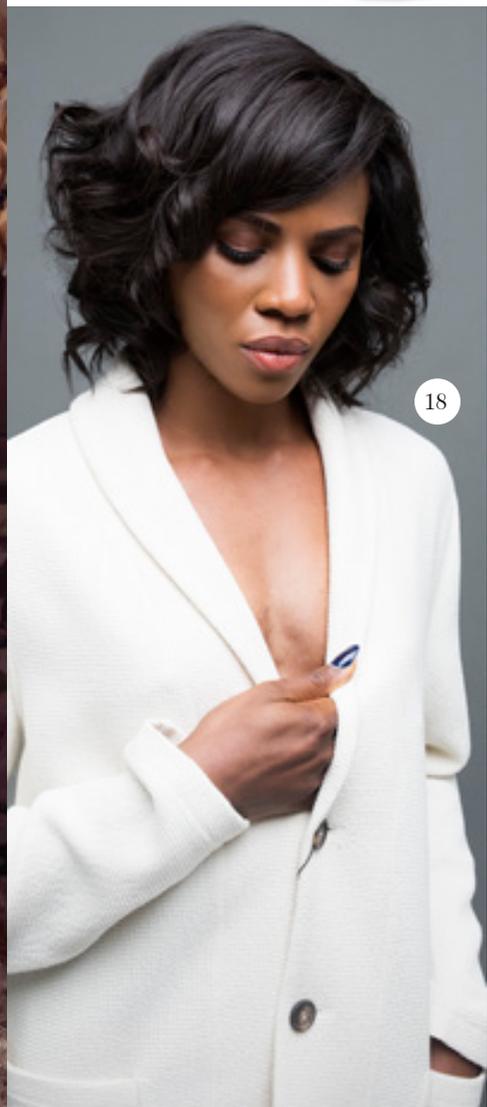
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Take it
all in...



LIFE IN THE ARTLANE

RENIKE OLUSANYA is an illustrator and graphic artist with a bubbly personality and an infectious laugh. In this interview with Nneoma Ekwegh she talks about creating art amidst a global pandemic, her journey into full-time freelancing and why packaging is where it's at for creatives in 2021.

Photography by Sean Osipitan

In 2020, creatives suddenly had to find inspiration to create while hunkered down indefinitely. How was your art impacted by the events of 2020? Were you taken down new paths with your work? And did you find that you were kinder to yourself or putting yourself under pressure to create?

Well, last year because a lot of people were at home, there was more time to create and share. My art was majorly my escape from everything that was happening, like the EndSARS protests. I also figured that my work, or putting my work out there more often, would reach more people than before and it worked for me. During the pandemic a lot of people noticed my work. As for pressure, I don't put pressure on myself to create because I am trying to satisfy an audience or something, no; I create when I want to.

Increasingly, social media has given creatives an opportunity to share their work with the world, therefore increasing accessibility and exposure. How have these elements (accessibility and exposure) contributed to the themes you take on?

Social media does not influence that for me. When it comes to the work I put out there it is for me. I am very careful not to be considerate of what people think before I post what matters to me as regards my artwork. So, that does not usually occur to me, I just put it out there [and] if they like it, they like it and if they don't, they don't.

I do not use social media. (Laughs) I actually think it is dangerous to give social media that kind of power over what you create; it is very dangerous because you do not want to depend on their feedback to realise you are a good artist. It will affect your mental health and your work rate.

Still on themes explored through art, do you find that when dealing with an international audience, there are assumptions and preconceived expectations on what a Nigerian artist is meant to portray?

I think the work I do is something that people on an international scene can relate to as well. It is not culture-specific, it's [about] black women. People do not know I am drawing from my reality as a Nigerian until I open my mouth and say I am a Nigerian. So, I see that my artwork communicates to people anywhere in the world as long as they are black. Moving to expectations of what my art is to represent as a Nigerian, my art is my escape, there is nothing wrong with artwork that depicts subject matters

like poverty, corruption, political tension but this is my escape, my way to leave that mental zone. My art actually speaks on some issues, it targets colorism, fatphobia, and oppression as black women, but they do not target political issues in Nigeria. My focus is representing a group of women that are underrepresented, dark-skinned women, drawing plus size women in their glory because they should show their bodies, because there is nothing wrong with their bodies, also by drawing women with albinism because there is a stigma about how they look when it's really just a lack of melanin. So, I focus on those issues but not aggressive political issues because it is not my thing.

“

Vulnerability and uncertainty are things I think all artists go through and I sense we are going to go through these emotions for the rest of our lives. Art work can be emotional; [so can] creating, so there will always be that emotional tie to what you create

”

The art industry is growing. What has been your experience within the industry when it comes to competition and collaboration with other artists and illustrators, is one more prevalent in the industry than the other, or is it an equal ratio on both sides?

I am open to collaboration, but I am very conscious about the type of people I collaborate with, because we have to share the same subject matter and the person has to put out the same quality of work that I put out before I can collaborate with them. For example, I draw black women, so I am not going to collaborate with someone who draws landscapes. Even if we are going to collaborate, it has to make sense. I have not yet done this because, to be honest, I [won't] go out asking for people to collaborate with me; there are artists that have reached out to me but

we don't share similar styles. On [the topic of] competition, I never have the mind that I am competing with somebody, I do not compete with my fellow artists. when I see work that I think is better than mine, what I do is that I stalk them so much, (Laughs), and watch how they work, so I get why the artwork looks better than mine. I try to discover what they are doing right. I obsess about them, every day I am on their page, looking at tutorials; looking for videos on how they do what they do; studying their art work and that is how I learn. I never have the mentality that I have to be better than somebody. I don't compare my work with other people's work in that sense, instead I am always looking for how to learn and develop myself as well.

There is a vulnerability that creatives feel with their work, moments of second-guessing how good they are, and if their work will be received positively. Are these experiences familiar to you and how do you navigate, and work through them, to do the work you enjoy doing?

Vulnerability and uncertainty are things I think all artists go through and I sense we are going to go through these emotions for the rest of our lives. Art work can be emotional; [so can] creating, so there will always be that emotional tie to what you create. How do I navigate those moments? By closing my eyes and doing it anyway by taking my time and not rushing into the process. Like when I have an idea, I usually daydream about the idea for days before I start drawing it, although there are times when the way I envisioned it does not translate and then I get worked up about it. (Laughs)

Sometimes it's really sad, [and] when that happens and I [might] cry, but I have learnt to be patient with myself; I don't beat myself up when things do not look how I want them to look.

You have mentioned that you come from an artistic family which speaks to your innate inclination towards art but when did you realise for yourself, that this thing, this path, was not just a hand me down but something you seriously wanted to pursue?

Well, this wasn't something that I just woke up and thought, "Hmm, this is what I will do with the rest of my life", it was something that I was pushed to because the 9 to 5 work in Lagos was stressing me out and disturbing my mental health. I was living on the mainland and working on the island, it was hard. I was juggling my 9 to 5 as a graphic designer and my freelance [work], so I was not getting any sleep; I was always tired.

She Will Not Be
Silent. She Will Never
Be Silenced



She Will Not Shrink
Herself In Order To
Make Others Feel
Comfortable

Then one morning I woke up and I thought “Hmm, I am not going to work today,” (Laughs) they called and were like, “what is happening”, and I was like “Sorry, I am done, I can’t do this anymore”. I was not going to drop my passion; my art. So, I decided to try this freelance thing full time, and it went well, and it was towards the end of last year I decided this is something I can do for the rest of my life. It is sorting out my bills and I

am able to be responsible [for] my family, so it works for me. Right now, I am just trying to figure out ways to grow revenue and for the art work to work for me without me doing any physical work and that is what my print shop is doing for me right now, so that is my focus now.

Let’s go back to the first sale of your career, how did that influence/change the way you view(ed) the monetary value of your work and your career in general?

When I think about my first sale, I actually shot myself in the foot because it was a lot of artwork for very little money. It was for a guest-house. The owner of the guest house ordered some art, so you can imagine how much art I supplied and now imagine how little I took. (Laughs). It was so bad, but because it was my first sale, I was like let me not call big money so the person will run away, but now I am very bold and audacious with how I call my money and I have had a lot more time to experiment with talking to people about their budget, presenting [potential] costs and seeing how people react. When I was a baby artist, I used to be scared [about pricing]

but now I am not scared again, because if you do not ask you will not get. (Laughs). Right now, I am lots better at pricing my artwork and attaching a fee to every service.

How do you navigate monetisation, especially when there are many voices

offering advice and warnings about how an artist can monetise their work?

I don’t give room for that, the only time I have reached out to someone to have that kind of conversation was when I got a huge client and I didn’t know how much to charge. So, it wasn’t a charge this or charge that, it was me asking the person what their range is like, and they [told me]. But when it comes to advice about whether I charge [too] much or not, I do not welcome it. If it is negative, I do not welcome it. I know the worth of my work, I will not listen to you if you tell me to reduce my fees. When it comes to charging as well, I look at what my fellow creatives are charging. It is good for people to do research; you go online and then you check what people are charging from the up and coming to the established ones and then find your rate. It does not matter if these other creatives are in the US or wherever, charge your worth.

Are there particular skills, experiences and lessons you have gathered from the previous year that you believe have benefitted you so far this year? If so, what are they?

I learnt that as artists we should learn to package ourselves, so that people respect the process. Especially in our society, once you are an artist, or a musician, or doing anything in the art industry, or look a certain way, there is a stereotype. They assume you are unserious, they think you are playing. But really, music, dance, art is a lot of work and they do not know that, so it is important to package yourself when you are communicating with them. To have a contract, to have invoices. Even the terminology you use for your art work; don’t use deliverables or call them work, use words that attach value to your art, call them art or art pieces. I have a process. For me, no one has my number to make enquiries, you have to email me your inquiries. I have a contract, NDAs, that they have to respect. When they see all of these things, they know this is not someone they can talk to anyhow, they see this is someone that knows what she is doing and she is serious about it. Another thing I learnt from 2020 is to shamelessly put your work out there on every platform, if you can. Self-promotion is important, nobody will carry your work on their back and be promoting for you. When people see your work, they reshare, retweet and you don’t know who is watching you might just get a big client. All the big clients I have gotten in my entire career are from twitter and Instagram, so it’s important that you always put out your work.



Albino Woman

“

I think it is dangerous to give social media that kind of power over what you create; it is very dangerous because you do not want to depend on their feedback to realise you are a good artist.

”

“

I don't put pressure on myself to create because I am trying to satisfy an audience or something, no; I create when I want to.

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Has your makeup routine changed post-lockdown? Tweet me! @cbeautips

I wear less makeup 67.5%
I have changed products 2.5%
I wear more makeup 5%
Nothing has changed 25%

Has your makeup routine changed post-lockdown?

Lockdown changed everything in seconds. The party you had been counting down to... called off, your weekly gym sessions... cancelled. All parts of our daily lives were shaken up, including our beauty routines.

Take away meetings, commuting, and all social interaction, and many of us were left sporting bare faces and 'comfy' clothes. The pandemic has almost rendered us a shell of our former selves or even diluted our identity somehow.

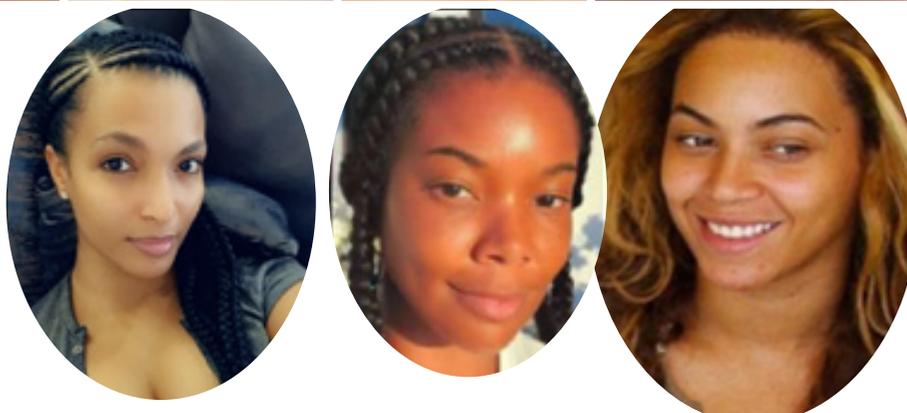
Fast-forward to the end of 2020, and I was curious to find out whether this shift had a lasting effect. And according to my twitter audience... 67.5% said they were now wearing less makeup than they did pre-lockdown. Is it more confidence? Or the extra time you got in bed each morning? I turned to my followers to find out how lockdown had changed their beauty habits...



THE SURPRISE MAKEUP TRENDS TAKEN OUT OF LOCKDOWN

The biggest tweaks are...
Less contour; more *bonne mine*
Bushier brows with no filling in
No more glitter

“Women are more comfortable with their own skin and confident without foundation.”





“Women have also been wearing less eyeliner.”



“I have been wearing less eyeshadow, but the main switch-up for me has been ditching my eyeliner. I used to smudge a dark eyeshadow into my upper lash line and use a kohl liner in my lower waterline... but not anymore! Instead, I have been enjoying experimenting with different mascaras to give a more natural look to my eyes. My favourite discovery at the moment is the DHC Mascara Perfect Pro it has a tiny little brush that makes your lashes long and fluttery, and it doesn't budge!.”

Here are some beauty hacks... for when you have been barefaced for too long (we have missed you, makeup!).



Start off slowly

By now, a make-up free face is more familiar than a full out-out look. But going back to our beauty bags does not have to mean a full face every day again - especially if natural days have done wonders for your skin and confidence.

Smudge-proof lipsticks are the only way

It might be time to leave the house again, but we still won't be going anywhere without a face covering. So, if you're going to opt for bright lips, glosses or stains, there are tricks we should keep up our sleeves for making sure our lip products do not smudge.



Lightly exfoliate the lips

Use a sugar scrub beforehand and then dust on a little loose powder after application, for longevity.

MAC Prep + Prime Lip and MAC Lip Scrubtious Exfoliator should do the trick.



“We might be meeting up online or in smaller groups, but we all still want to look and feel good again.”

Make a fresh start...

If you have not even thought about make-up application in weeks, chances are your unloved makeup are in need of a good clean. Make sure your full set get's a deep professional-style clean before they go anywhere near your product, let alone your face. Your skin will thank you for it. When it's been some time since you last wore eye make-up, it's easy to forget how much cleansing goes into getting it off at night. Make sure you're using an effective eye makeup remover that doesn't require a lot of rubbing and scrubbing at the sensitive skin beneath the eyes.

Do not neglect the SPF!

Foundations that contain SPF should be top of our list, especially after spending so much of our time out of the sunlight. "Sunscreen is so important, now that we will be expecting more outdoor meet-ups, products that contain SPF should be our best friend.”

All-over foundation... is so 2019

Face masks now dictate our everyday beauty choices, wearing foundation all over the face might be a thing of the past. Concealer or tinted works well on the lower chin, where we need a little more longevity these days.

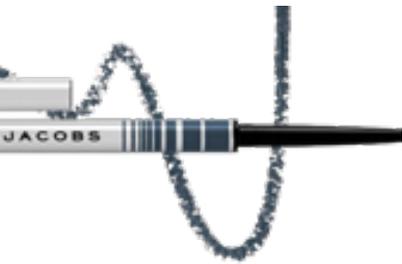


Mascara

Maybelline
New York Lash
Sensational Sky
High Mascara



L'Oréal Paris
Revitalift Anti-
Wrinkle + Firming
Eye Cream Treatment



How to Make Your Eyes Pop In the Age of Face Masks...

After all it has been a year of social distancing, and your makeup bag has barely been touched. If people only see your eyes when you are out and about, what's the point of wearing a bold lip? But if you are ready to experiment with your look again, get started with these simple eye makeup ideas that will make sure your peepers stand out with a major oomph, above your protective face mask, and does not steal all the attention

Bright Eyes

Looking well rested, smooth, and radiant is the best backdrop for gorgeous eyes. That means combating the most common issues that crop up in this area. "The skin here is very thin and delicate, which is why its so prone to puffiness, dark circles, and fine lines."



Peter Thomas Roth Clinical Skin Care Potent-C Power Brightening Hydra-Gel Eye Patches for dark panda rings that won't fade no matter how many hours of sleep you log.

Eyelashes

cessoryhub.co.uk
Dramatic Mink
Eyelashes



The New Norm

Estée Lauder collaborated with Perfect Corp to develop technology that matches customers' preferred shade of foundation.



A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) the new norm in the beauty industry... The pandemic finally made consumers care about it. For many years, digital innovation has been quietly disrupting the beauty industry, but the touch points consumers saw most were often gimmicky, faulty, or simply far too niche. An exciting prospect in theory but frequently disappointing and unrealistic in practice.

Ask CLARA

Here is my take on wearing a full face of makeup after post-lockdown...



Makeup and I go way back. When I started earning, makeup soon became a fun hobby. When I landed my job as beauty editor it turned into a lifestyle I adored – and I still do. Up until March 2020, not a day went by where I didn't rock a full face. I would wear the latest game-changing foundation the coolest

eyeshadow palette or habitually swipe on a great lipstick. But when the lockdown took place, my makeup routine went out the window. Outings and face-to-face meetings were cancelled. I woke up a lot later than usual. I felt lazy and I just didn't see the point.

At some point and time I am sure that the idea of

having to wear makeup for some women, or to be seen as 'presentable' to the outside world became redundant. Wearing a full face out and about made me feel more put-together and self-assured. Delving into my beauty bag just to sit at home felt like a waste – I'm pretty sure that I am not alone in thinking this... as proven in my research earlier.

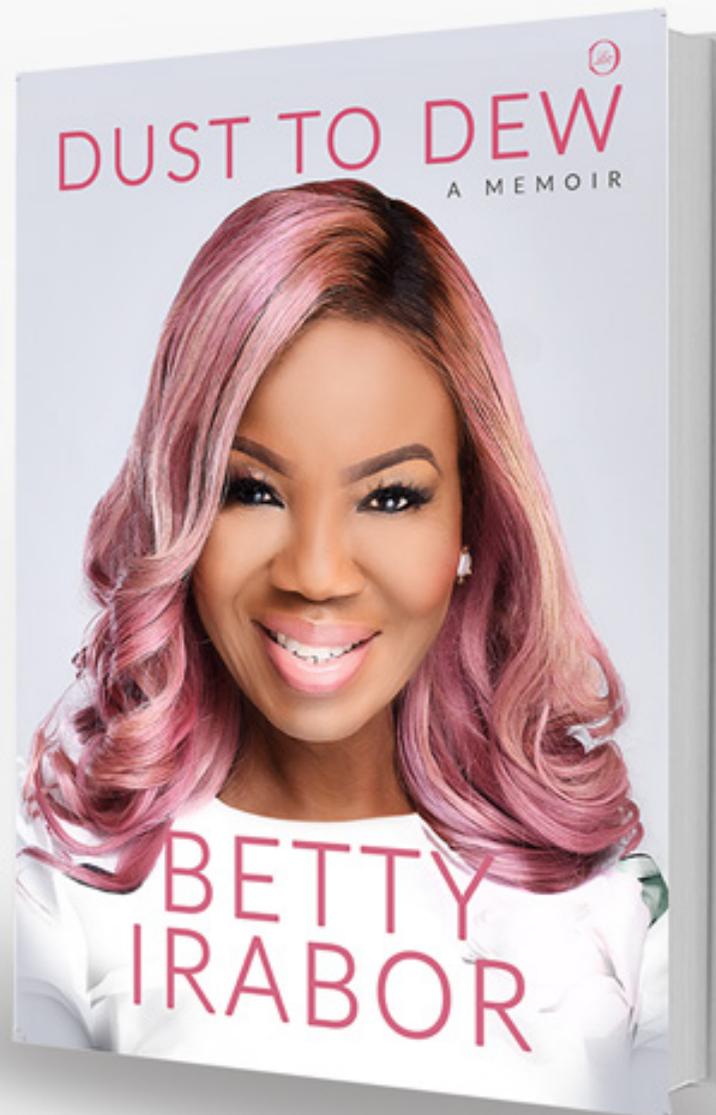


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IS LONG BUT CAN BE BROKEN”



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The Undaunted Champion

Blessing Okagbare

In this interview with Nigerian Olympic and World Championship medalist, Blessing Okagbare, we get a candid look into her life as a Nigerian athlete living in the United States; the significance of her Guinness World Record and the one thing obstructing the quality of sports in Nigeria. With a good sense of humour and lots of giggles, the champion shares the bittersweet experiences that have shaped her on and off the track. -NNEOMA EKWEGH

Take us to the very beginning, who was blessing Okagbare as a child, what are some of the earliest memories of your childhood?

I grew up like every other child, in a big family: My dad, grandma, mum was not there a lot; my brothers and sisters were always keeping an eye on me. I grew up without a silver spoon, I would say. I got to bond with a lot of the kids on my street, it was always fun. We always wanted to play, get up to something. Overall I wouldn't say it was bad, I was just a child living; just enjoying everything.

It has been said that your parents and teachers encouraged you to go into sports, but when did you know in the course of your journey that this was something for you; that this career in sports was no longer about what people wanted for you but it was what you wanted for yourself?

Yeah, I like to say they saw me before I saw myself. I started doing it but there were a lot of ups and downs. I would go to competitions and get disqualified and even when I made it, they wouldn't put me on the team. This was around the time I wasn't so serious about doing it, and my coach said to me, "Young lady, you need to go home and figure out if this is what you want to do". (Laughs). So, I started taking [it more] seriously and I told the coach I really wanted to be number one on the team, and that year, I was just dominating, winning everything. The following year, I

broke the national record in triple jump, and got my scholarship to go to the US for college.

Still on the subject of influence, there are young girls out there who are keen on a career in sports. They look at you, your international exposure and achievements and want to follow in your steps. What insight can you share with them, in terms of character building, pitfalls to avoid, and life in general as a Nigerian female athlete?

What I will say first is that it doesn't matter if you are a female or male athlete; I generally put it across the board. To be an athlete in Nigeria is hard. The platform in Nigeria is not set up in a way where you can really, really be up there. There are a lot of young boys and girls who really want to do this, but they are going to school - and I encourage everyone to get an education - but the system we have in Nigeria at the moment is not set up in a way where you can do both efficiently and effectively, so it's sort of hard. But at that age they need to have a school system that [also] focuses on sports or they come out of that and get a coach. I remember being in school in Nigeria and a lecturer told me I will fail if I go for a particular competition, but I was trying to run for my school, I was in a polytechnic school at the time. This accounting professor gave me [such a] hard time, and it was already hard to train well. But in the US it's different. What happens is that you are given a consent form for the teachers to sign so if anything happens

to the athletes' grades, the teachers can get fired from the school. It is not like they are forcing them to do it, they are telling them that these students are actually representing us, they are helping us, so do what you can, even when they miss a test, make sure whenever they come back they can take it, support them. But this is not the system in Nigeria.

You relocated to the United States to further your career in sports, what were the factors and events that led to this decision? How has this decision impacted your mindset and career in general?

There are two things, if the structure is not right, you need a place that is right for you to do it. I tell people I am not talking down on my country, but it is just the way it is. For me it was an opportunity and I took advantage of it. When I moved to the US, I was 19 and that was when I won my Olympic medal and, trust me, even at that age I didn't know what I was made of yet. The thing is I know that I love what I do; I know there is an opportunity that I can actually do this right. I don't know how far I can go, but the system was so designed that I could have it all when it comes to my sports. I am not saying the system is so rosy and easy but honestly, it gives you this opportunity to work on what you really want and that was what it did for me, and it has been worth it.

What were those early days like for you in terms of readjusting, i.e., moving to a new country, training in a new

environment? Were there challenges that came with the transition? How did you work through them to get to the point you are now in your career overseas?

The first couple years, I kind of struggled a little bit, because as structured as they are, they don't play. You are going to school, you get to take classes for six hours, and then sometimes you have a 30-minute turnaround [before] you have to train. When I get home, I would be so knocked out and all I would want to do is sleep, but you can't sleep too much because you have assignments and you have to go online. And that was another thing I struggled with, everything was done electronically, but the good thing for me was I had a little computer training in Nigeria before [I left]. (Laughs). Then there were incidents where I'd go out and see people saying What's up? What I was used to was greetings like, Good morning/Good afternoon sir/madam, with a slight bow, but all I heard was, What's up, men! especially towards older people, it was a culture shock for me. I was doing the bowing and Good morning/Good afternoon sir/madam. I was doing it a lot, even when I would get on the bus, my friend would be like Blessing calm down and I would argue but it's a sign of respect, and [my friend] will go yea, but people are looking at you like 'what is she doing?'. I did eventually adjust and learn a lot of things but the respect stayed, minus the bowing. (Laughs).

How do you mentally prepare for competitions, and why is mental fitness important for sportsmanship?

I volunteer as a coach, but if I had to coach full time, I would like to coach the mental aspects of sports, which I think is neglected. The mental state of an athlete is key but people tend to forget about it. I can look at an athlete and just sense that something is wrong. There are days one would look like a car-wreck, when they show up on the track for practice and as your coach, I should be able to bring that up. It might be a pain in your leg, your knee, trouble at home; something that happened on your way to training changes so much about you at that moment and I think some coaches today don't pay attention to this. There is a part of you as an athlete that you have to build to be ready for whatever is coming your way. Discipline affects the whole mental state of an athlete that is why when you are actually having a bad day; it is the discipline that makes you say, 'No, I have to keep going. I have to keep doing it,' you have to build that part of you to be so strong that even when those days are so bad, you have to be ready to do what you are meant to do. I have had days where I am standing on the track and I am crying, and venting at the coach and when I am done, he asks, 'Are you done?', I reply 'Yes'

and then I do that workout and it's like nothing happened, because I had to figure out, do I really want this, and when you know you want this, you put so much discipline into it and trust me it affects the mental part of you.

You have achieved numerous accomplishments in the span of your career, and most recently you were in the Guinness book of records, how significant is that to your career especially as a Nigerian female athlete?

Honestly, I didn't even know that there was such a thing. I didn't know people were keeping count of my participation in these competitions. For me, when you get this recognition and this award, it means you have done phenomenal and that people are watching, people can see and appreciate what you do. Just to know that people see and appreciate what I do, I am really honored by this.

Over the years, Nigerian female athletes have not been given adequate resources or credit for their skills in Nigeria. However, with the overseas success of

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There is a part of you as an athlete that you have to build to be ready for whatever is coming your way. Discipline affects the whole mental state of an athlete.

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athletes like yourself, do you sense this has begun a chain reaction, whereby these successes are positively influencing the ways in which female athletes in Nigeria are treated and trained by local sports organisations, and coaches? Or are things still very much the same, whereby these athletes are still being underrated, overlooked and frustrated in their fields?

It doesn't have to be about everything I have acquired, and what I am winning. It starts from the people at the administration, because if they are doing what they are doing right, there will be no questions like this. You see, I have said before, when it comes to sports, if you're not an administrator of passion and you lack

understanding of how it works, you don't have any business being there, and this is a major problem. They are not working; they are not doing the things they are supposed to do. We have the Olympics and no one is talking about how we will prepare properly to go and you think me getting into the Guinness Book of Records or winning things influences anyone to do right? No. Once we get the right people in office things will be better. Right now 80 to 90 percent of the people we have running sports in Nigeria are not athletes. This has to be fixed, we need to get people who understand what it takes to groom professionals, Olympic athletes, and world class athletes. This is the truth and honestly it is sad.

You have experienced challenges in the span of your career, like injuries for example. How were you able to navigate through these seasons and the emotions that came with them on a personal and professional level?

I believe in my God-given talent, and I will know when I am done and I am not done. I am a child of God born with a purpose; I am a strong believer of my faith. Even with the downsides I have had, injuries and set-backs, I believe it's all for a purpose and I just keep going. If I have achieved all the things I set out to achieve, I will probably be like, 'Blessing, it is okay,' (laughs). The last four years of my career have been a mess, everything just crashed. And that was not me, I was like God cannot give me this much and let this happen, I just believe there is a purpose and I want to fulfill that purpose. I don't know how He is doing it, but He is doing it.

There are lots of pressures athletes face i.e hours of training, strict diets to maintain physical fitness, as well as the pressure to win every competition, does it ever get overwhelming for you or is this something you are used to now?

There are days I work on the track and it's like ain't nothing anybody's gonna tell me (laughs), I am winning. I don't care who is there, that's because you are fully ready but for the last four-five years, I have gone to the track and I am nursing this injury and I feel exhausted before I get on. That is the stress on me and the pressure of Okagbare must win this. Honestly I was freaking out; what if I don't win? How will they treat me? What will they say about me? I had to deal with a lot, but when I started understanding that when you are not doing things the way people want you don't count and they stop caring, I had to learn to put myself first. So, I shifted focus from them to me, to being healthy mentally and physically and then I can give results first for myself.



Moving for a minute to your life off the track, you recently announced the launch of the Blessing Okagbare Foundation, which focuses on women, children and young adults. Can you elaborate more on your vision and plans for this foundation?

My foundation if you noticed has nothing to do with sports, I am just big on helping people survive. I would try to help when it comes to the sports, and I would help outside the sports because I am very passionate about that too. I just launched the foundation, but the truth is this is something I have been doing for years; I am just not big on telling people what I am doing. But I have come to realise that it is not a bad thing, I may have not been comfortable with that then, but I think I am now and I want to do more and I wanted to have time to actually set it right because I want to be involved a whole lot. Giving gives me joy.

A lot of sporting games both locally and globally were cancelled and suspended last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, what was it like having to pause at the peak of the pandemic? The pandemic and lockdown led to drastic change in routine?

It felt like my dream crashed that year (laughs), when it started things were getting shut down bit by bit, then they cancelled the Olympics! I was disappointed, you know we athletes all we want to do is compete. I was thinking like, first of all I am 32, I am not younger (laughs) and this Olympics means so much to me and I have been training so hard, with a lot of investment. Because a lot of money goes into what we do, you still get to pay your coach, you still get to pay physiotherapy, and those are things you are not getting back if you are not competing, so, imagine doing all that. Even when they cancelled it and we were hoping for other competitions, I still had to keep the same routine, I trained all the way to September. For two weeks I did not do anything, I took a break for my head, not even my body (laughs) but at the end of the year I was very grateful to God because the way I am feeling now, I wasn't even feeling that way prior to the training.

You have attained notable success in your career, where do you see yourself in the next five years?

Five years? Let me tell you this, I graduate from Grad School in May. I have the Olympics, and I still have another two years depending on when God says, You are done now, it's okay. (Laughs). While I am winding down and taking a break from track, I want to start my family. I also want to build on the foundation to make it a big success, and then I will get involved in some part of the sports in Nigeria. I don't know the part yet, I may start from my State but I would be involved in order to fix things, because a lot of things need to be fixed.

GETTOKNOW

A portrait of Nicole Asinugo, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a black and white floral patterned cardigan over a black top. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting with a green cushion and a wooden frame.

NICOLE ASINUGO

... Is Walking A Preordained Path

Nicole Asinugo's blockbuster screenplay Living in Bondage: Breaking Free put her in the spotlight and earned her an AMVCA award for Best Writer in 2020. In this interview, Asinugo discusses how it all began; her start as a news writer at a national television station and the one conversation that changed her life...--NNEOMA EKWEGH

You haven't always been in the movie industry, you started off in an advertising agency, and as a content creator for Ndani TV, talk us through your transition from that position to film, how did that come about?

I actually started my career off in a newsroom; I worked as a news writer. Working in the newsroom was interesting but it just didn't give me the licence to be creative. I remember at the time I was watching Mad Men, and thinking Wow! I didn't know people created these sorts of adverts for a living. That was my first encounter with copywriting. I then found out that the agency that Mad Men is based on, is actually DDB on Madison Avenue, and there was actually a [branch] in Lagos. I showed up at DDB Lagos [one day] and told the Creative Director I [was] very creative, and he gave me a two-week internship, unpaid. I was there for three and a half years. I had this Ankara-themed photo shoot that caught the attention of Ndani TV, which was my entry into television and film and production. The creator of Ndani at the time let me write a few episodes of one of their TV shows, Gidi-up, which I really enjoyed. I was hooked and became really interested in screenwriting.

Still on the topic of DDB, does that confidence, and ability to go after what you want boldly, come naturally to you or is this something you have had to consciously work on?

I don't overthink things. I am not a big planner, I am more of: If I have a desire in my heart, I will find a way to get it done and God has always come through when I take a specific course of action towards something. I also back up my desire with research, to get as much information as possible on it.

Your first major film screenwriting credit is Living in Bondage: Breaking Free tell us how it all came about?

It was one of those serendipitous things, where you just know this has to be God at work. I was out having dinner with my brother-in-law. He was speaking to me in Igbo and I was replying. He asked, how come you are the only one out of your sisters that understands Igbo? and I replied, 'perhaps it's because I watched a lot of Igbo films when I was younger'. He asked which ones, and I mentioned Living in Bondage and we had quite a long conversation about the film. Two days later I was at a wedding, standing next to Charles Okpaleke, the executive producer of Living in Bondage. I knew him socially. He turns to me and tells me he is looking for screenwriters because he has just bought the rights to Living in Bondage. I replied, 'Living in Bondage? I love that film, I will write it!', but he was hesitant. I assured him I could write it and he said I had to meet the director, Ramsey Nouah. So, around 1am I met up with Charles and Ramsey, and we talked about the film till dawn. I wrote a synopsis for them and they loved it.

Living in Bondage: Breaking Free and Rattlesnake, both amazing movies with critical acclaim. These two films are staples of Old Nollywood, and before Living In Bondage: Breaking Free, the industry had never successfully done a remake of a film. To what extent did you turn to or not turn to the pre-existing material for inspiration?

Well, the good thing is it is a sequel, not a remake so there was that liberty to go beyond and tell a different story but still anchor on the truth. So, for example, Andy never had a son in the original so how do you explain Nnamdi? How do you remove him from Andy's shadow? So that was how we came up with the idea of him being adopted and him being Ego's son. In the last movie, Ego left, so implying that she was pregnant when she left justified it for us. We relied on pre-existing material but also tried to use it as foundation to tell our own [story].

Thanks to social media, creatives have access to every kind of opinion about their craft. It's a difficult thing to contend with. How do you respond to criticism when it comes up, especially when it comes to building on a story that has an established history, fan-base and has even created a subculture in many ways?

For Living in Bondage I found myself always on Twitter and I am not even on twitter, not really. If people don't like you, Twitter is where you go to find out. (Laughs). I was coming across a lot of stuff, and there is no way it doesn't hurt a little bit, but then I think I developed quite a thick skin from Ndani. I had hosted a show called Real Talk after quite a successful host and there were people in the comments complaining about my voice, [and saying] I was not natural. So, I have had time to figure out how not to take offense from people that I don't know, and I think that actually prepared me for Living in Bondage criticism and subsequent criticism of my work. It is also helpful when you realise that you can take the constructive and just leave the petty.

You won the Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards for Best Writer in a Movie or TV Series for your first ever screenplay, how significant was that win for you?

It was one of those confirmations from God that I am on the right track. The way everything came together; meeting Charles, getting to write the script, it was just a big sign to me that I was on the right path.

As a content curator/creator, and a scriptwriter, what would you say makes a compelling story for an audience?

I think there are two answers. One is about what makes for a compelling film for a particular kind of audience and what makes for a compelling film period. In terms of what the masses like on screen I think comedy is definitely something that they prefer and if you want to make a blockbuster that



has those numbers, comedy and drama together is definitely a hit for the Nigerian audience. Also relatability. I think Funke Akindele-Bello is a brilliant case study in terms of relatability with the audience and that is why her numbers are outstanding. Then away from the mass market there are the films that transcend all markets, like *The Wedding Party*, which all enjoy. There haven't been many of those and I think that is because we as an industry need more authenticity. Classic Nollywood had this authenticity; the stories were relatable. Living in *Bondage* in the early nineties was relatable because at that time there were stories of Otokoto and money rituals, it was a reflection of the time. But I think over the years, as we got better with our equipment and technology, we kind of left our stories behind and followed Hollywood. It's not our fault, it's a process of learning and unlearning.

You have a background in law, worked in a newsroom, and hosted a talk show; you have such a dynamic background, career-wise, how have these experiences influenced your work as a screenwriter? Are there skills from those parts of your life that you found handy in your work now?

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I have had time to figure out how not to take offense from people that I don't know, and I think that actually prepared me for Living in Bondage criticism and subsequent criticism of my work.
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I am definitely part of the school of thought that believes nothing is wasted. I am writing a novel right now, and the main character is a lawyer, so I find when I am reading cases it just feels natural to me. In *Living in Bondage* and *Rattlesnake*, there was always a reporter saying something, which speaks to my background in news. All these things

come into play, you might not even know but your subconscious is picking it up.

Last year you spoke about experiencing anxiety when news got out about your role in the *Rattlesnake* movie, and how you found calmness in those moments. Can you share the ways in which you nurture your mental health and protect your space while creating, and even when you're not creating, do they differ?

I am Christian so I pray, I read my bible as consistently as I can; embracing that spirit of peace. I am also reading a book right now, called *The Artist's Way* [A Spiritual Path To Higher Creativity], by Julia Cameron. It teaches you how to link the idea of your creativity to God, the creator. This has been very freeing for me, knowing my creativity comes from God takes the pressure off me. Also doing affirmations, I find both help me.

How has the pandemic and lockdown affected you as a creative? Did you find that you struggled with creating and being inspired to create in the early stages, or did the pause allow your creativity to flow because now there was more time to dedicate to it?

In the beginning I had *Rattlesnake* coming out and I had to submit it by June, I had already started writing. I think the first few months because I was delivering something I was fine. The issues began after the screenplay. When I was done it was like, right, what do I do? And I started to feel very useless. A friend had to say to me 'Nicole, you wrote a screenplay this year, you can rest.' And I was like 'Woo! It's true, I can rest.' It was a period of unlearning and learning to be kinder to myself.

We're a few months into 2021, do you have a theme for the year, in terms of personal growth and development, career, love, health?

Four major resolutions I had coming into the year: that the path I follow should help others find their own path, which is why I started the Writers Room, a platform for writers to connect and have a sense of community. The second is to take my writing more professionally. Prior to [*Living in Bondage* and *Rattlesnake*], I have often approached my writing as a side-hustle and so, I haven't really put the structure in place to have more professional conversations, so I got management this year to deal with the business side of things. The third resolution is to take care of myself more than I usually do and finally to have a better relationship with God, which for me is the main goal.



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Celebrating Dance And Friendship

With The Cast Of **NETFLIX'S JIVA!**

Jiva! a South African slang term, meaning 'dance', is the newest South African original series to come to Netflix.

The series takes us into the world of competitive dance through the eyes and experiences of 'Ntombi', and her friends, as they join forces to compete in a street dance competition worth millions of Rand.

In this interview with stars Noxolo Dlamini and Candice Modiselle, who play Ntombi and Vuyiswa, respectively, the two share their thoughts on the themes explored throughout the series, their characters, friendship and the beauty that is dance!

--NNEOMA EKWEGH

Tell us about Jiva! in five words.

Noxolo: Jiva! is passion, love, freedom, expression and joy!

What was it about Ntombi's story and journey that resonated with you?

Noxolo: Playing Ntombi was up and down, left and right, a mix masala (melting pot); much like what real life is. We are all fighting for something in our lives, fighting to live out our dreams, and Ntombi is simply striving for that - to live out her dreams. As an artist, I fully understand and respect Ntombi's journey and I get everything that she is going through.

And Candice, how about you? What was it about Vuyiswa's story and journey that resonated with you?

Candice: I am extremely grateful that I had the opportunity to play Vuyiswa on a platform as great and extraordinary as this one, because it allowed me to expand my range as a performer and as an actress. I can relate to her constant yearning for better and having to take the road less travelled. It was imperative that I played her in a way that was extremely human, so many people could see their lives reflected in her own, [and] experience her without judgment.

Both these characters embody an interesting balance between simplicity and complexity. How did you go about finding and understanding how best to portray their nuances?

Candice: Balancing out the nuances of who Ntombi and Vuyiswa are and fleshing out that dynamic was almost organic, simply because Noxolo and I are experienced and seasoned performers [who] believe in the power of playing. We rooted a lot of our scenes in just being honest and authentic.

Noxolo: Understanding our roles in the friendship and understanding our characters' personal journeys already created such beautiful shades and contrasts in the relationship. The relationship may seem confusing, until it's understandable. They seem so different, but they are more similar than we realise.

Let's stray a bit, if you could be any of the other characters in Jiva! for a day, which character would you be and why?

Noxolo: [It would still be] Ntombi. We see so many different sides to her and being given that task is so exciting for an actor. I get to interact with most of the other characters. We see how she navigates her way around these different people and how she alters her personality in different spaces.

Candice: I would love to step into the shoes of Makeke. He is so layered and there is something mysterious, but conniving but vulnerable of who Makeke has the potential to be and to explore the layers of who that is will be such a joy ride and I

think a very insightful experience.

We are all still dealing with the presence of the pandemic, which must have thrown a spanner in the works during filming. In what ways did the pandemic affect pre-production and the show's release?

Candice: The filming of Jiva! took a completely different turn when the pandemic hit. However, we acknowledged the responsibility we had as a production. In the initial stages, the shooting process was quite daunting. We were used to proximity; I mean in a dance series we are used to the closeness and the vibrancy when there are many bodies there. Finding the ebb and flow was at first difficult but we managed and we have a product to show for it and I am grateful for that.

Noxolo: The number of people on set needed to be reduced and we were all - cast and crew - put in a bubble for the remaining shoot weeks. We all stayed in one hotel and our movement was limited and guarded. We were also required to get tested once a week. Yiiiiip, the nose!

Still on the pandemic, going forward, what valuable lessons would you say it has taught filmmakers, actors in Africa and across the world?

Noxolo: I think it has taught everyone to respect time. The time we have to prepare and shoot. With covid there are more expenses, and a positive case means putting a halt to production, which means more time and money.

Candice: Keeping the pandemic in mind, I think that storytelling has evolved in such a way that we as a collective industry need to be both flexible and open. Flexible in a way that anything can happen at any given moment and unfortunately you will run into circumstances that are beyond your control and so, how do you adapt to these circumstances. And open in a way that we are giving ourselves and each other an opportunity to learn from these changes that we cannot control.

Jiva! explores the pursuit of passion. Vuvu pursued her passion for a comfortable lifestyle - perhaps at all costs, Ntombi found herself at odds with her mother because she embraced her passion against her mother's call for "better judgment".

Have you ever been in a situation where it seemed passion compelled you to follow in spite of contrary opinions, and how did you handle or navigate that dilemma?

Noxolo: I'm extremely blessed to have a family that is supportive of my dreams. They've always seen the direction I was heading in and I've always known the path I wanted to take. Like any parent, my mother did worry slightly about the choice I was making as she did feel it may not be a sustainable career, but she then realised that this was always the plan and there was no plan B. Their never-ending support has carried me through my many ups and downs. They give me confidence!

Candice: I previously mentioned that taking the road less travelled is one that I can identify with, not only in Vuyiswa's life but also one thing that in retrospect I can celebrate in my own life. Being a young black woman that affirms herself as a storyteller isn't always easy. I have trusted the process, no matter how difficult it has been, I have been as prayerful, as faith driven and as God-loving and fearing as I am, I have been consistent in the journey. So, I am extremely grateful that even with the fears, doubts and apprehensions, I took the plunge and now, I am on a Netflix series!

We're in a new age of music and dance in popular culture and the impact seems to be consistently on the rise. And now, we get to see that reflected in this series. Do you think this could be the beginning of the dance genre taking over in African film and TV?

Noxolo: I definitely see it flourishing. Music and dance are such integral parts of African culture. As Africans we enjoy one another's music and dance too, and this can be seen with the many artist collaborations that happen within Africa, not just recently. South African dance and music has also become really popular on the continent with our African brothers and sisters.

Candice: Jiva! could not have come at a more suitable time, and I say this because dance culture has evolved in a way many people could not have anticipated, through the boom of amapiano, and how TikTok has created global communities of movement, dance music and just curation of culture. So I am extremely excited because this culture is infectious and it is palpable and it is inclusive.

Was there anything about this experience of portraying dance in film that surprised you even though you have prior experience with dance?

Candice: The experience of Jiva! came with a newness and a fresh outlook on dance. I am very unfamiliar with this style of dance and it took a great deal of training and commitment to the process to stretch my range and allow myself to explore uncharted waters. My experience in dance comes from contemporary, theatre and movement studies. The commercial world of dance is something I have somewhat stayed away from, but I am glad this project pulled me in.

Noxolo: Besides the fact that you will do it over and over again and then never do it again, nothing really surprised me. What I absolutely loved was having the camera dances with you, or you dance with the camera. It feels as if the audience is moving with you and it looks so incredible.

The power of friendship is forefront in the series, and an important aspect of that is how much of the women's lives are given attention and fleshed out. We get to see







and appreciate the complexities of these characters and thus their friendships. How important is depicting the fullness of friendships in film/television?

Noxolo It is extremely important, so that we can see the dynamic of the relationship. It is so beautiful to watch a comfortable and organic friendship on screen, especially when each actor understands what their character is meant to bring. What it also does is that it brings the audience into the story through these relationships. It makes the audience feel comfortable and included.

Candice: It is important to note that before the audience sees Ntombi and Vuyiswa as friends, they are two black women navigating their way through life, exercising and exploring their autonomy. We don't get to see strong black leads often enough in cinema, and a lot of the time the protagonist of the story is viewed through the male lens. The focus is a lot more on desirability and whatever aesthetic ideals a character should fulfill when in actual fact the sentiment and the core of all these women and how they are trying to assert themselves in life is what is the primary narrative here. To look at the dynamic between two friends who are opposing whatever odds they face as a collective and in their individual lives, is such a great thing for other women to see and I am so proud to be a part of work, where we get to see that.

Focusing on Ntombi and Vuyiswa's friendship, what would you say made that bond sturdy in spite of their many perceived differences?

Candice: The differences between Vuyiswa and Ntombi are undeniable, how they approach life and how they approach their challenges are very different. But what holds them together, and how they see each other is what grounds their friendship. Irrespective of the circumstances, they

know each other through and through, they know the core of who they are.

Noxolo I think their genuine love and respect for one another. They are very honest with each other, and they both know that the other, no matter what, comes with pure intentions. Being together also reminds them of where they come from as friends, but also as individuals. They ground each other.

Let's discuss the relationship between Ntombi and her ex, Nathi. I actually found it refreshing that the betrayal did not come from another woman, but a man. Ntombi was paralysed by that betrayal until she realised her need to thrive in spite of it. Talk about that turning point where she 'sees the light'?

Noxolo Ntombi realises that she still deserves the dreams she had with Nathi. He is living "their" dream; therefore it is definitely possible for her to do it on her own. She remembers just how close she came to living those dreams and how that ended instantly. I also think that seeing Nathi revives the passion, confidence and fighting spirit within her. She sees the challenge and she doesn't back down.

There are choices made by characters in the series. For Ntombi the choice was self; she had spent a lot of time being everything to everyone, thereby overlooking herself. As women we tend to be taught (or perhaps some naturally are) self-sacrificing at the expense of our own needs. In what ways do you protect 'self' and ensure that your 'person' (wants, dreams, goals) is not lost in any relationship.

Noxolo I surround myself with people who believe in my goals like I do and support me. I also have a lot of alone time, where I can go back to self

and figure things out. I never let any relationship hinder the relationship I have with myself. That is my strongest relationship.

Candice: Firstly thank you for acknowledging this, because many women are still in the process of unlearning the social conditioning that many of us have been subjected to, in the way that we are not aware that pacifying our emotions and stifling and invalidating our needs is a form of self betrayal. And it is one thing I still very much am coming to terms with and because it is a state of unlearning, it is a continuous process of checking in and being honest with myself through mindfulness and meditation. I am always able to check in on the things I need, the things I want, what they mean for me, and how they feed into my purpose.

What is the conversation you desire Jiva! to start, or change?

Noxolo Noxolo: I would like Jiva! To start the conversation of just how much talent South Africa has. How many stories still need to be written and told, because we have so much to give as a people. I would also like it to start the conversation of artists constantly working on themselves and their crafts. Never becoming complacent and getting comfortable with just being good, but constantly striving to be better, therefore adding more value to their work.

Candice: Of the many conversations I am excited that Jiva! will ignite globally, one of them is the importance of having women leads that are autonomous beings, women that are the architect of their narrative because our voices have been drowned out for too long, we are multi-faceted beings and we are layered with stories to tell and we are valid. And I am grateful that Jiva! will be a space that will reflect that.



PARENTING

Unlearning the Nigerian Way

I became a mother for the first time in 2013. I remember that day like it happened yesterday. I had been rushed in for an emergency C-section, and after my daughter was skillfully brought out by the young doctor, one of the attendants in the theatre brought her to me for closer observation. She was perfect; I shed tears of joy. However, when I first learnt that I was pregnant I was a ball of mixed emotions. On one hand, I was excited about the journey ahead; shopping for the baby, finding names for the little one, and watching my belly evolve into the shape of a watermelon. On the other hand - and some days it felt like the bigger hand - I thought, What do I know about raising a human being? I was burdened with thoughts of all the things I didn't want to carry over from my own childhood and put on my child.

-NNEOMA EKWEGH



grew up in a loving and close-knit family, but there was a high level of restriction due to the conservative nature of my parents. Artistic activities such as piano playing, creative

writing, and sports, were encouraged as pastime activities, as hobbies, but not deemed career-worthy. We were all channelled towards specific career paths, and while some of us have loved the paths we were channelled towards, others have had to navigate that path to find what they truly love and have a passion for.

So the first thing I knew I did not want to do as a parent was to channel my daughter into a path that she did not wish or desire for herself. But I must confess it is not easy to refrain from this urge to control her choices because I assume, being older, being her mother, I have a better idea as to what will work for her. Case in point, my daughter who is now eight years old, came home one day and excitedly announced that she wanted to join the science club at her school. She gave me the form to fill, and I noticed the other clubs there. There was the debate club, hip-hop group, painting, ballet, and so on. I admit I did my best to persuade my daughter to consider some of the other clubs; I was projecting my disinterest for all things sciencey on her. I was saying to her that because it didn't matter to me, it shouldn't matter to her, even when it clearly did.

My daughter looked at me as I kept glamorising other club activities, and said pleadingly, *'I want to join the science club, please,'* and I stopped lobbying for the others. I signed the consent form allowing her to participate in the science club and I watched her skip out of the sitting

room very happy. On her club days, she comes home excited; telling me about erupting volcanoes they created, and new experiments ahead. She can barely keep still when she is recounting this, her eyes alive with animation. I was going to deny her this excitement and sense of purpose for what, because it didn't fit into my plan, my idea of fun and worthwhile?



Another thing I was very cautious of steering clear of as a parent was being excessively strict with my daughter. Me and my siblings were terrified of my father growing up; he was a very strict man back then. There was no room for conversation or expressing your feelings, where my father was concerned.



Another thing I was very cautious of steering clear of as a parent was being excessively strict with my daughter. Me and my siblings were terrified of my father growing up; he was a very strict man back then. There was no room for conversation or expressing your feelings, where my father was concerned, you just fell in line, basically, no questions asked. Now, being elderly, he has softened up but our memories of those yesteryears of terror linger on. My mum was the opposite in this regard, she created spaces for my siblings and I to talk, and I want to imitate this as a parent.

I do not want my daughter or any child of mine to be afraid of expressing themselves and asking questions. I want them to grow into adults who are confident in their voice, and opinions no matter how differing it may be. The intent is not for them to become saucy and abrasive with their opinions, no, but for them to be fearless about speaking up and speaking out. So, with my daughter, I am allowing her to speak up, ask questions, which I do my best to provide answers to and not hush her because I think *'Who are you to ask me this?'*

One of the many things that stuck out for me last year during the EndSars protest was how some *'parental'* figures were quick to discredit the validity of the issue because it came from the youths. It was considered an insult that *'children'*, as one lawmaker said, demanded for justice and change. Who were these *children* to ask questions - well within their rights - and expect answers?

So many lamented the loss of culture but personally, I do not think their grouse was the loss of culture, their grouse was that these youths - the ones they deemed *children* - had realised their voices had impact, and they were now demanding to be heard. What had been lost as far as I could see was the oppression, which one had to live under because they were considered to be children.

I know firsthand that parenting is not a straightforward journey; there are highs and lows. There will be star-worthy parenting moments and then those moments when you feel like you have completely failed, but one thing that helps me is remembering to be intentional on this journey. I look at my daughter and I know I want her to be fearless and vibrant, I want her to know her voice and opinion matter and because I have this clearly in my mind's eye, I am keen to unlearn any parenting style that will get in the way of this reality.

Getting Pregnant with Blocked Tubes: Understanding your Options

Infertility is one of the most emotional medical challenges. It typically whips up a lot of socio-cultural issues, particularly in this part of the world, with its attendant stigma that rips homes and families apart. It is said to occur when couples regularly having unprotected sex for at least 1 year do not achieve conception.

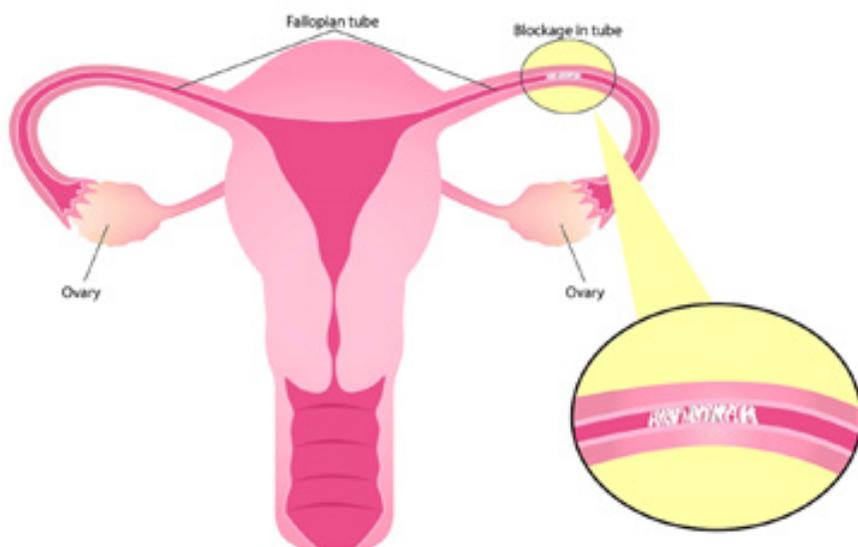
the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that infertility affects 50-80 million women worldwide with 48 million couples and 186 million individuals generally living with infertility globally.

Did you know that tubal factor infertility was what spurred the development of the technique of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), which led to the birth of the world's first IVF baby, Louise Brown in 1978?

Since then, IVF has helped millions of women

advanced surgical techniques requiring a camera and light source. Another important consideration before tubal surgery is the fertility status of the male partner. Poor semen parameters may make attempts at tubal surgery unnecessary, as they rarely ever result in a successful conception.

As IVF becomes more widespread with Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI) further expanding the frontiers of what is possible, tubal surgery has dipped in performance and popularity.



2. IVF (In Vitro Fertilisation)

IVF has been dubbed the greatest medical breakthrough of the last century and with good reason. It completely bypasses the tubes and ensures that even women born without tubes (of which some exist!) still have a chance of carrying a successful pregnancy.

The IVF process is a series of steps that starts with hormone therapy to stimulate the ovaries to produce many mature eggs simultaneously. Under ultrasound guidance, the eggs are retrieved with a specialized needle. These eggs are then combined with sperm in the laboratory and nurtured for a few days as they develop into embryos which are then transferred back to the woman's pre-prepared womb. Injection of eggs with viable sperms (ICSI) is also used to achieve fertilization particularly in older women and those with male factor infertility. The events, which ordinarily occur in the tubes, thus occur in the laboratory, providing a bypass. All that is required are eggs, sperm, and a well-nurtured womb to carry the pregnancy.

These treatment options clearly offer women with tubal blockage the chance to fulfill their ambition of carrying a pregnancy in spite of the seemingly insurmountable obstacle of tubal blockage. Couples are encouraged to book an appointment to consult with a fertility expert from a trusted fertility centre to help find the best solution that addresses their own unique issues.

One of the commonest causes of infertility is tubal blockage, accounting for up to 30% of cases. Essentially, fallopian tubes must be open and have no swelling or scar tissue to perform optimally. With one healthy tube, natural conception is certainly possible. On the other hand, once both tubes are blocked the woman will require assistance in achieving conception. The commonest cause of blockage is pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).

This is often the result of poorly treated sexually transmitted infections that spread from the vagina to involve the fallopian tubes. The consequent effect is damage to the inner lining of the tubes and the formation of scar tissue. This sequence of events leads to rigidity of the tubes and the inability of the fan-like ends of the tubes to pick up eggs at ovulation and even when this does occur, the damaged tubes cannot move the fertilized embryo along to the womb and thus leads to tubal pregnancies. At the end of the spectrum is a complete tubal blockage that makes the egg and sperm unable to meet in order for conception to occur.

with tubal blockage get pregnant. It is important to note that the tubes can also be blocked from contraceptive procedures such as surgical sterilization and surgical removal of the tubes for tubal pregnancies. Other causes of tubal blockage include endometriosis, miscarriages, and pelvic surgeries.

What are the options for couples with tubal blockage who desire a pregnancy?

The answer to that question is as varied as the couples asking it. Generally, the options are either surgery to unblock the tubes or IVF. Other factors to be considered will include; cause of the blockage, site of the blockage, and cost of the procedure.

1. Tubal reversal

Surgery becomes quite challenging when large segments of the tubes have been damaged by infection. This is usually the case when the tubes are removed for tubal pregnancies. In a limited number of women, tubal reconnection can be achieved by key-hole procedures such as hysteroscopy and laparoscopy, which are both

By Dr. Olayinka Ayo,

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COVER

A Spiritually-Driven
Conversation
with
Tems!

I haven't had one of these in a long time; a conversation so unintentionally spiritual and calming it encourages you to be still. But that's exactly where I found myself, in conversation with our very introspective and spiritually awakened cover star, singer, songwriter, producer, TEMS. Throughout our too-brief discussion, Tems spoke with a self-assuredness that never wavered; about finding joy in even the ugliest circumstances and living in full surrender to God. It's not where I expected the conversation to go when I was putting my questions together, but as it progressed, I found that this was unequivocally the only type of conversation I wanted to have with the Essence singer, at that moment.

The day before, we met for the second time - the first was a brief interview two years prior, when she was just one song into the industry - Tems showed up for her cover shoot as cool and calm as you've heard she is, dressed down and carrying a massive water bottle. The energy of the day never strayed from calm, positive-leaning, even with little hiccups presenting themselves, as any endeavour in Lagos is wont to have. By the end of the day, we were all laughing, drooling over the stunning photos taken by the very talented Seye Kehinde. I had other expectations of our interview based on the shoot day, but I soon realised that my line of questioning was far more surface than she deserved. I have never been more willing to eschew my notes and questions in favour of just listening, chiming in and spitballing.

Speaking with me while running errands on a rainy Tuesday afternoon, the first few minutes of our conversation were upended by the sort of hilariously typical bad luck that occurs when you're about to get to work. As it had been a day of heavy rain, it appeared that every single telecoms network and internet provider had died the same death. There was panic, but it seems it was only from my end as Tems, unmoved, assured me it was fine. I am no good at small talk, and in fact care very little for it post-lockdown, having realised the uselessness of idle chat in most situations. We can waste time talking about how terrible the weather is and how predictably bad all networks become once it's even a little bit wet, but why should we? We know this, we all experience it for the better half of every year. I sensed that Tems wasn't particularly keen on water cooler conversation either, so with relief I shifted gear.

Story: Sonia Irabor

Photography: Seye Kehinde

Wardrobe: Orange Culture, Torlowei, Tobi
Onabolu x Kkerele (shoes)

Make-Up: Ose for Zaron Cosmetics

Styling and Creative Direction: Sonia Irabor

Opening image -Shirt - Orange Culture
Mules - Babouche! By Tobi Onabolu x
Kkerele

SCasj Flare Jumpsuit -
Orange Culture
Durum Corset - Torlowei



It may just be the aftermath of the strict lockdown, but it feels like energy, identity and spirituality have been the biggest themes of conversation as we slowly get back into social-mode. I find that I'm having them more often as an increasing number of young Nigerians embark on personal journeys of self-discovery and truth, in spite of a place that still chooses to place them in singular boxes with no room for query or exploration. But there's a shift now. We know who we are... Or at the very least, we're ready to find out and are taking steps to ensure that we do. With Tems, it feels easy to identify the sort of person she is: Self-assured, rooted, centred, aligned... Anything that seems synonymous with the kind of balance that many are still searching for. "I would say that I am pretty self-aware and self... assured. I'm aware of who I am and what I'm here for. [Having] that knowledge makes me calm in all circumstances. I know nothing external can affect my internal, and for me, that translates to being self-assured."

One thing is certain, to some degree or another, we are all searching for that level of synergy within ourselves. Individually, we try to interpret what peace looks like for us and how we can go about achieving it, and for the lot of us still figuring it out, we often wonder how people have managed to reach that space of inner-peace. "I had a life of just... craziness. Something was just always happening in my life and it forced me to find answers, solutions. And to find myself. I mean I'm still on that journey but I've gotten to a point where I don't doubt certain things about myself [and] about the world."

There's no doubt in my mind that this must function as a sort of superpower in the world of entertainment, where recurrently there is a vulturous response to naivety. But what happens when you simply can't be taken advantage of in that way? Tems began her career at the age of 17, but even then she understood the power of no. It's a power many of us are only just beginning to harness, especially where our careers are concerned. She had a clear enough understanding of the type of industry she was getting into and navigated those murky waters with a strong sense of conviction and certainty. "I loved singing and writing songs but I didn't want to do anything that God wasn't sending me to do. So when I got into music it was because I got a clear indication that this is where I'm meant to be, so nobody could tell me otherwise".

"I knew God was going to do something through me. I still don't know what it is but I'm living in the moment, [hopeful] for the future and steady in the knowledge that I'll be good in all circumstances."

Going back to the beginning of her career, when she was meeting industry folk; auditioning for big-name insiders, and listening to feedback from people who, though they may have meant well, could only see her through one lens - her afrobeat-ness or lack thereof, it dawned on Tems that this may not be the route for her. They seemed to see it too, but for different reasons. Tems isn't an afrobeats artist, she tells me this herself. Unsurprisingly, this caused many to conclude that she just wasn't "anything special". This is a tale as old as time. It's something

that has deterred many aspiring musicians, and understandably so. It has forced others to bend and contort to be more 'palatable'. For Tems though, and others like her, it simply meant that she had to return to her starting point and try a different route; to be clear, there was no desire or attempt to become more afrobeats-friendly. That wasn't an option. "I said no because I would rather be myself and be poor."

But the truth is, oftentimes, this is far easier said than done. How does one not bend and conform in the face of perceived authority, especially when they are wet behind the ears. "I'm not the one that gave birth to myself. I didn't give myself talent. It is definitely God that brought me here and if he is the one that sent me on this path, he will definitely provide for me as long as I am staying true to myself. If you are not staying true, you will give in to powers that you feel are above you. And [these experiences] will look like challenges to you because you don't see past them; you don't see above your circumstance."

“
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”

That's why, even as young as 17/18, Tems didn't view her return to the drawing board as defeat, but instead saw it as an opportunity to review her approach. It was why early in her career she decided to make her own music, singing, songwriting and learning to produce. She understood that she wasn't ready then. But it wasn't a waste, that false start. It was preparation for now. With the way things shifted into gear for Tems, it's clear that every single experience or attempt to limit her or box her in, and every single time she said no to something, was leading her to this moment. And look at her now.

Just over a year ago, the entire world stopped. A virus was ravaging every corner of the globe and in response to such a disaster, governments asked citizens to hunker down for a "few weeks". What unfolded was a months-long lockdown that saw every physical business, every physical iteration of social interactions, seize. What shocked most people, far beyond the absolutely unfathomable concept of a global pandemic grinding the entire world to a halt and rendering even the most powerful of places helpless for a time, was themselves. Many people had been going a mile a minute and had

never really been challenged with the idea of not being busy. No matter whether that busyness was productive or healthy; they were just going. Then the world demanded that they stop. They suddenly had all of this time alone with themselves - and their families in some cases - and it was then that they realised that they weren't quite comfortable with that. For Tems, it was something she welcomed. Having come off the full itinerary that December brings entertainers, Tems yearned for home. She saw it as a time to reflect. For others, the idea of no longer being in control or in charge of one's life, seemed like a mountainous task.

"I got the message to be still. I know that people were disorientated by it. I know that our lives became different, but I never thought I was in control to begin with. So when the lockdown happened I just went with God. I think what happened was that there was an illusion in people's minds of what they had control of, and [God] was just like, let me show you who you are, which is nothing."

“

*I know nothing external
can affect my internal,
and for me, that
translates to being self-assured*

”

“

*If you are not staying true,
you will give in to powers that
you feel are above you. And
[these experiences] will look like
challenges to you because you
don't see past them; you don't
see above your circumstance.*

”



Adanma Bodysuit and
Tenicka Trousers -
Torlowei

“

And even though he has given me this gift it's a decision everyday to choose him and that's always the best decision I want to make because he chose me.

”

There's something about the energy of someone who truly believes that there is a cause greater than themselves and a relationship far more rewarding than any they have experienced. Tèms took the time during lockdown to not only experience stillness but to learn more about God. She allowed herself the chance to better understand just what that meant for her and her life. “The joy is not in the gift that he gives you, it's in him. And even though he has given me this gift it's a decision everyday to choose him and that's always the best decision I want to make because he chose me. I just learned the enormous love he has for us and anybody that is around me. I see God in everything.”

Two weeks into December 2020, the internet was ablaze with outraged fans, initially in their tens of thousands but rapidly growing in number, when it was revealed that Tèms, along with singer Omah Lay, had been arrested and detained in a Ugandan prison following a concert. By now, details of what occurred have been reported and shared across the digital sphere, but due to the depths of our conversation, and where Tèms appears to be in her spiritual journey, I was curious about what sort of taste the whole experience left her with. Was she bitter? Angry? Traumatized? Had she moved on from it? Where is she now?

“For me, it was God showing me things like he always does. It was me seeing the wickedness of man and what really goes on in systems and what really is happening in the world.”

That wickedness of which she speaks, is not a seediness that is unique to Uganda, of course. On these very shores, we are dealing with a grotesquely inexplicable law enforcement and prison system, where many are left to spend their days in a cell without explanation or trial. And the truth is, we can't know fully about these things unless we find ourselves experiencing it first hand, and even then it depends on your perspective. For Tèms, the darkness was glaring.

Even at that, in the thick of such murkiness and loudness, Tèms' felt suited for the moment, in so far as being able to see the light and the silence even while locked up. And somehow found peace and some sort of joy that saw her through. “I was really just there to witness the world in a different way than I was used to. I met so many people and throughout my whole experience, I was just laughing and smiling. I had even gotten so used to the prison that I was already taking care of the babies, because my philosophy is no matter where I am, I will enjoy it. That will be my palace.”

But don't be mistaken, to laugh in this situation, to even decide to make it her palace, is not to in any way ignore the evil of it all or to trivialise the circumstances. These two things exist in the same space. Tèms was as aware of herself as she was of her surroundings and what the people inside these

cells were experiencing. The uncertainty, the seemingly impossible-to-escape life that they found themselves in. “There's people in those prisons; in prisons in Nigeria; women in prisons... that did absolutely nothing [wrong]. They just found themselves there.”

When I think about songwriters who are able to translate their human experiences into intensely poetic, soul-baring songs I often wonder about how much thought and feeling goes into the moments before the engineer presses record. For some artists, they write the poetry first. For others, they allow the words to fall out of them - surprise them even - when they enter the booth. The latter seems to be Tèms' experience. These are simply thoughts. To her, she cannot 'plan' a thought. It exists only in the moment that it comes out of her and so she can never quite tell what a project is going to be, or what it may sound like, or even what it's called, until it's done. When I ask her about stories she wishes to tell on her upcoming album, she simply cannot say. Not because it's this huge secret, but because, at the time of our phone call, she doesn't know. “It's like thinking about what your thoughts are going to be [before they happen]; thinking about the topic of your thoughts. You can't control it. You just think. Music is that for me too. It's an expression of my mind, I can't really plan or know how I'm going to feel.”

What she does know though is that things she may not have expected to come up - because she hasn't thought about them or confronted them yet - are likely to, again, fall out of her when she gets in the booth. “I'll be going through life as normal and I'm secretly feeling something but I haven't really said anything [about it], but suddenly it comes out in my song.” The result is pure elation. It's a literal release, a therapeutic exercise in allowing things to come to the fore when they wish to, and accepting that that is the form that they wish to take. Tèms describes it as the “sweet spot just before you sleep, when you let everything go”.

A lot of our conversation has delved into and remained in the space between spirituality and identity. It feels like a good time to shift gears slightly. One of my favourite ice-breaker questions - I have those - is the one about aliens who have come to earth and have tasked the person I am speaking with, with sharing the very best music on the planet. I pose this question to Tèms. She pauses for a moment to carefully consider what this means.

“I won't give them any music, because they'll copy it. I don't know what they want to do with the music anyway. Do they want to control people with it?”

I cackle but offer some clarity. These are chill aliens just looking for the best music from other planets.

“Maybe Michael Jackson, I don't know which song. Definitely Whitney Houston... I'd probably get one of Sade's songs... I think I'd give them something chill. Something nice and dreamy so that while they're in that state I can assassinate them. Just in case they're trying to kill human beings.”

I cackle again. The conversation has reached its end. Tèms has to get back to her errands, but I pose one last question to her, inspired by our conversation. It's simple:

What do you know to be true, despite any argument or even proof to the contrary?

God lives. Love always wins.

“

I was just laughing and smiling. I had even gotten so used to the prison that I was already taking care of the babies, because my philosophy is no matter where I am, I will enjoy it. That will be my palace.

”



A portrait of Bolu Babalola, a woman with long, dark, braided hair, wearing a black turtleneck and blue jeans. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. Her right hand is resting near her chin, and she is wearing a ring on her finger.

A BRIEF [VIRTUAL] ENCOUNTER WITH BOLU BABALOLA

Take it from best-selling author and Forbes Europe Under-30 list maker, Bolu Babalola, the world needs love now more than ever. The love Bolu speaks of is not the kind we see in films, made up of stolen glances and passionate kisses, Bolu's concept of love is a guiding principle. During our short but enriching conversation, the writer explained that for her, love encompasses faith and hope and joy. Her debut anthology, Love in Colour, focuses on this understanding of love.

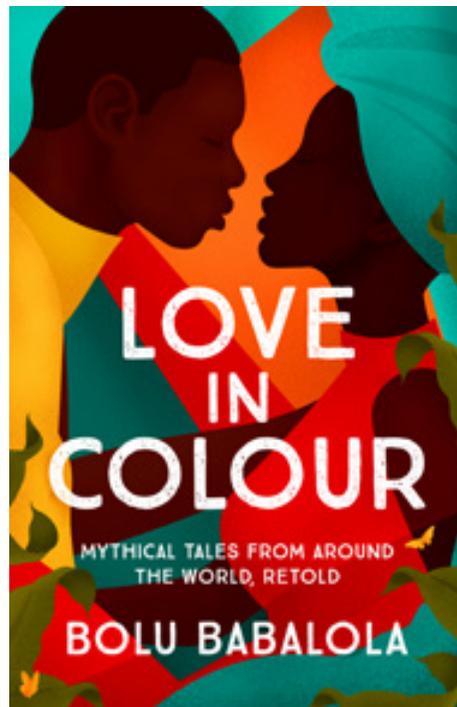
Released at a time when many lived in state-mandated lockdown, Bolu's aim when writing these stories was to give the reader joy – "literature brings me joy; the world is so full of darkness that it can really get you stuck in that darkness. Sometimes, you don't have a choice but to be in darkness... and if it's in my power to seek joy, I will. I now have the blessing to create landscapes that can bring people joy. If I have that power, why wouldn't I?"

-MAYOWA OMOGBENIGUN.

Going into my phone interview with Bolu, I was nervous. You can't read body language over the phone, and silences can often be misinterpreted, sometimes even incredibly awkward. However, over the course of our conversation, I was struck by the kindness in Bolu's voice and how deeply philosophical her perspective and approach to her writing practice were. She explained to me that this is the amalgamation of a lifetime of storytelling. While her professional writing career started in television, a transition to publishing prose came naturally because, in her words, "It wasn't about saying, 'I'm going to write a short story now' - stories were the first thing I wrote. So even if it was a case of deciding between the two, short stories have always been part of my life. I am a storyteller". Her short story, Netflix and Chill, shortlisted for the 2016 Guardian and 4th Estate BAME Short Story Prize, launched her career as a published author, which eventually led to *Love in Colour*, which has enjoyed acclaim from readers and critics alike.

The success of Bolu's book is ground-breaking when you consider the fact that she centres black and brown women in a landscape dominated by white narratives and focuses on folklore and myth rooted in African and Middle Eastern cultures. She doesn't feel the need to explain the world her characters live in to the reader because as she argues, "We are not foreign and I think there is this reaction or thought that black people are automatically foreign and othered. Yes, my book was published in England first but we are indigenous to the world. We are not an adjunct and we are not extras, and that is why there were no translations or explanations." To some, this may read as defiance but to those with the lived experience of being Black and brown, consuming content that often doesn't centre them in grounded settings, this feels like a moment of long-overdue normalisation. "These people exist in their world and I didn't want them [to be] othered in their world". Bolu leaves it to her reader to do their research. Drawing inspiration from Toni Morrison, she also shies away from focusing explicitly on race because "we are the default, we are the mainstream and so in talking about race,

[it] is only an issue when it is black against a white backdrop. I just didn't want [race] to be an issue". She wants to explore her characters in the absence of the white gaze. When she explained this to me, I simply asked how. How was Bolu able to publish stories rejecting the white gaze while working with white editors and in a white-dominated publishing industry? Her answer was simple: "The thing about me is that there is no way anyone can work with me or choose to work with me without knowing what I stand for and who I am. My editor, Katie, is a dream because she worked with me because she likes me and she likes what I stand for." She continues, "I am very clear about who I am and the stories I want to tell". Bolu



understands that circumstances differ and some writers need a chance, however, she urges young writers to know themselves, "even when you're swayed or pressured, [who you are] is something you can go back to. That is what integrity is".

In *Love in Colour*, whether Black or brown, the protagonists in Bolu's stories are women, a conscious choice by the author. "I really wanted to combat the fact that strength and

softness, especially in Black women, don't have to be the antithesis of each other. They can sit side by side within the same entity. Women do not have to choose which side they want to access." Bolu's voice softened when she explained to me that this is the womanhood she has come to know and experience because of her family, one where women are nuanced. However, Bolu's portrayal of women and love has greater implications. "I made sure that even if there is romance - and, of course, it's a book about romance and love - it's also about the love of self. It's not gratuitous romance, it's romance that the woman is choosing to be an active participant in... It's an addition to her life, it doesn't make her whole life." Where mainstream films and novels often portray romantic relationships that centre men, Bolu's stories present love as mutually beneficial. In doing this, Bolu challenges the idea that love is pain and also fights back against the Strong Black Women trope. "I wanted it to be very clear that women can be warriors and career women but can also be soft if they choose to be." The love in these stories elevates, embraces and challenges.

It is rare to come across a young writer as self-assured as Bolu. When I asked her what we can expect from her in the future, I could feel her excitement over the phone. Her debut novel *Honey and Spice* will be released next year and the writer is also working on a television show. She describes the novel as 'me, unencumbered' because where *Love in Colour* worked with existing stories, *Honey and Spice* is entirely original. Set in a British university, her protagonists are part of the African Caribbean Society (ACS) and are Nigerian. At this point in the conversation, we both became animated talking over one another, about what we love about rom-coms. Our conversation ended as it started, with laughter and both of us talking about our love of literature and romance. We both agreed that the best part of a love story is the journey the characters embark on, in order to be together. I thought this a fitting way to end our conversation because in many ways, Bolu's journey as a writer has only just begun.

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FASHION

THE BECCA LONDON EDIT

This Spring, the Nova Collection launches to fulfil all post-lockdown dreams in light, airy and flirty options. It's time to put your own spin on major trends from co-ords to cropped blazers and thigh high slits.

"Every Street is a Catwalk"

By Lucy Williams
Web- beccalondon.com
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Andrea Iyamah



Jacquemus



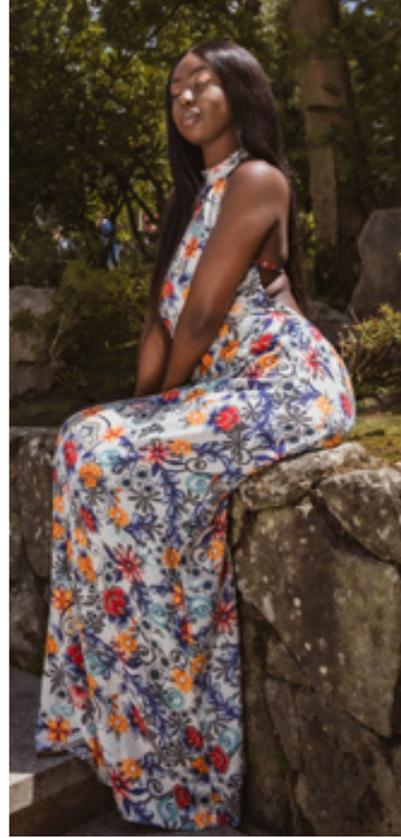
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RICH & REGAL

Looking for bold new approach this season, fall in love with hot pinks and purples, the perfect balance between sweet and intense. Whether it be a floaty dress as offered by Becca London, smack of lip colour or iamisigo's hot new tote, you can't go wrong as this luxurious hue is flattering to all skin tones and is a perfect new pop of colour.

By Marie Moses.



Andrea Iyamah



The Attico



Malone Souliers



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Bottega Veneta Intrecciato Raffia Mules



Bottega Veneta Intrecciato Raffia Mules



Chanel double flap bag



Manolo Blahnik



My By Mahina



Zaron cow girl

Taylor Yates
Mary Tote



Petra Kovacs



Tiana Jewel



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Petra Kovacs



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SPRING MOODBOARD

As prospects of full international travel beckon, IRL dating makes a comeback, gatherings get a nod and stores start to buzz, now more than ever is the perfect time to make fun memories. So grab your girls, a few of your favourite things and head on outside for the perfect day! Whether your style is minimalist chic, floral queen or pastel darling2., don't hold back on picking out feel good prints, colours that uplift and styles to make you feel sexy all day long.

By Marie Moses
Credits- Graphed by Blue





Taylor Yates Drawstring Bag



BLACK MAGIC

Safe to say black never goes out of style and that's why it's favoured by many fashion insiders³. Easy to wear, slimming, minimalistic and edgy all come to together for looks that say you're cool without doing too much.

By Marie Moses.

Tribal Eyes 'Onyx' Sunglasses



Becca London



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Shahini Fakhourie



Native Dubai Mini Structured Bag



Denola Grey



Shahini Fakhourie



Teni Oluwo

Add Drama

As trends come and go and the world of fashion offers more and more exciting ways to dress, don't be afraid to inject 'everyday drama' into your personal style moodboard.

Style Tips

Make the impractical practical by going for striking details that draw and inspire like an extravagant sleeve or oversized hat.

Go for one or two statement pieces at a time.

When it comes to accessories, the quirk-ier the better!

Don't be afraid to mix patterns, shapes and colours.

Lastly you will need loads of confidence!

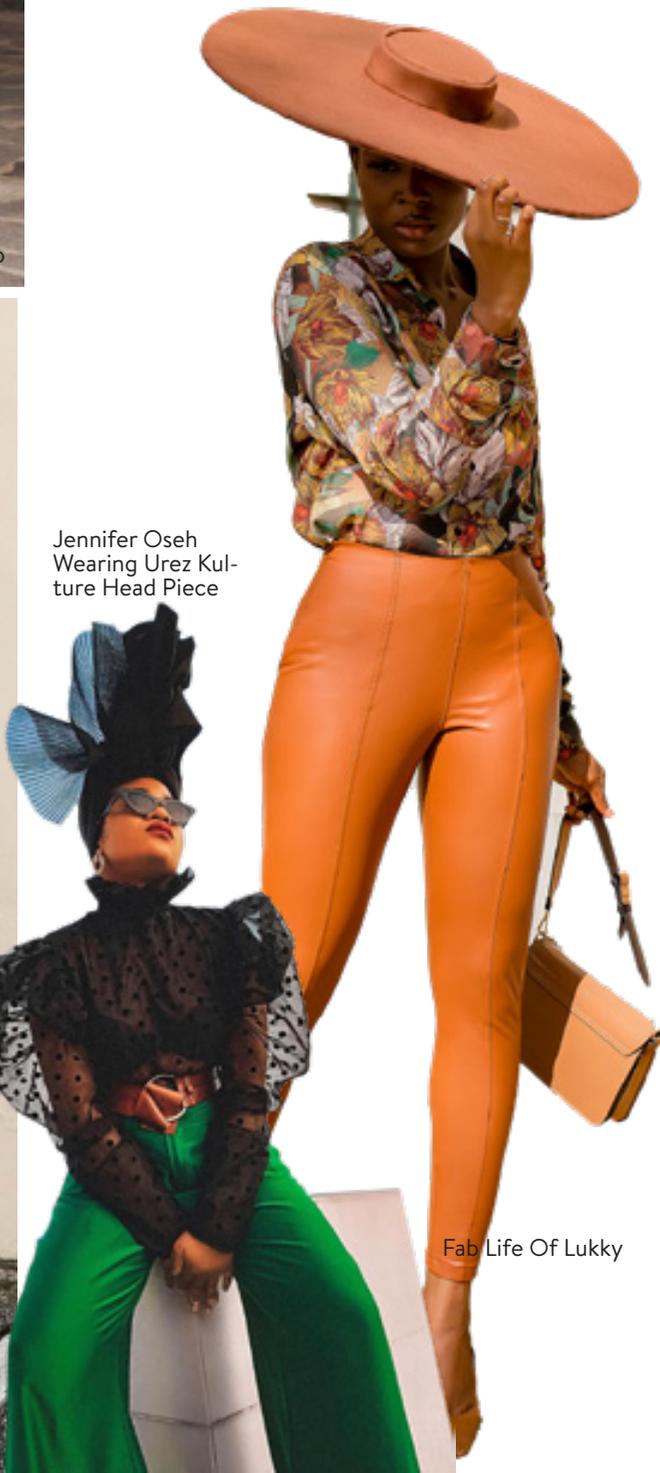
By Marie Moses



April&Alex
Aw21

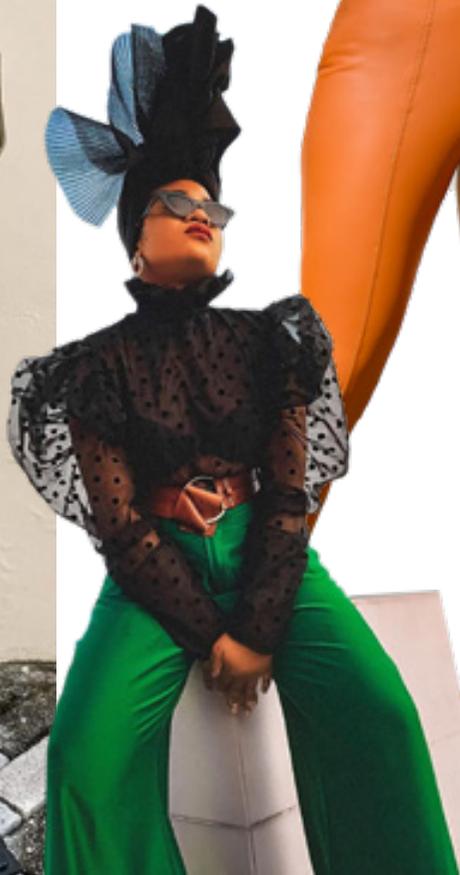


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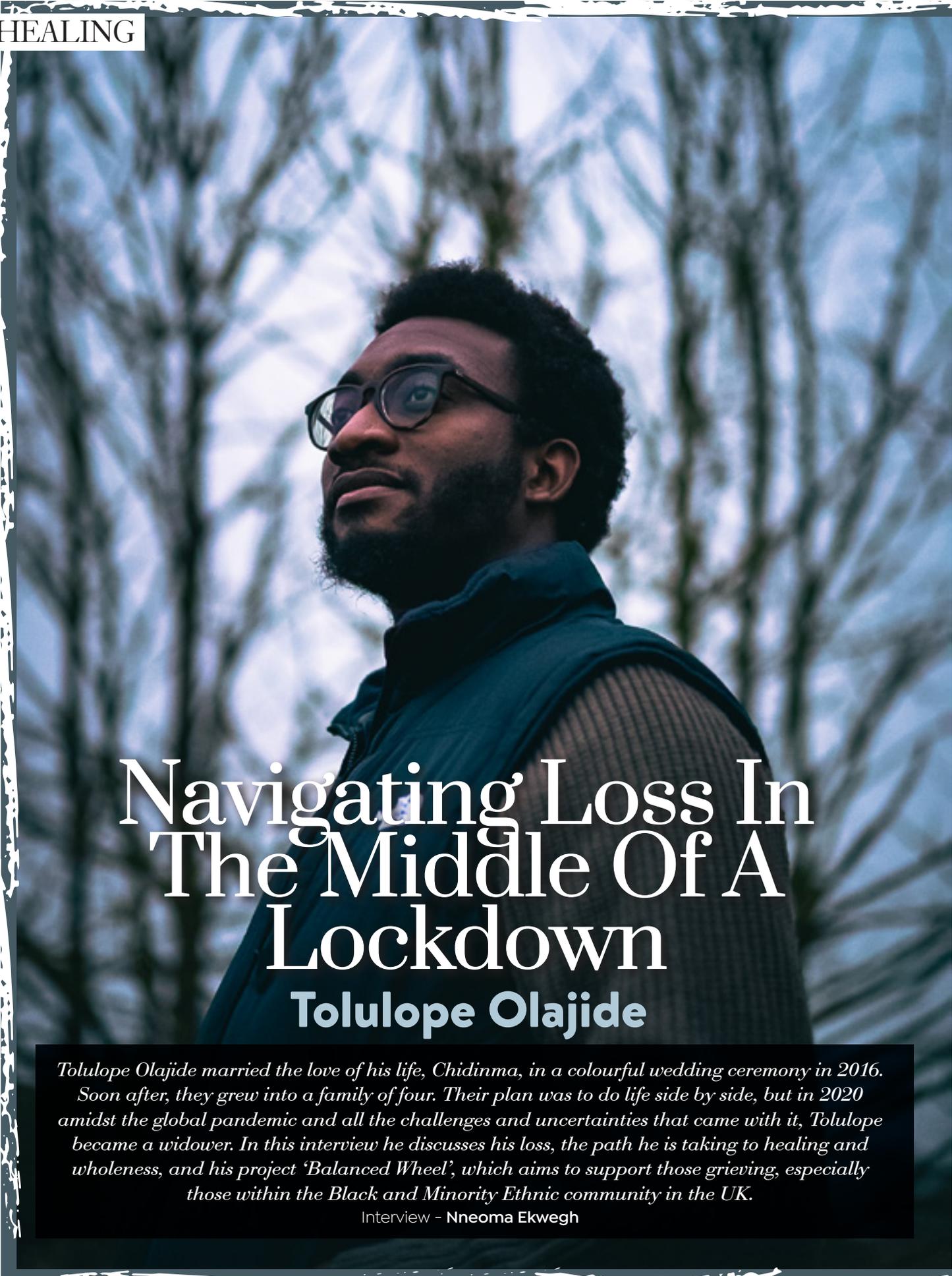


Jennifer Oseh
Wearing Urez Kul-
ture Head Piece

Fab Life Of Lukky



Teni Oluwo



Navigating Loss In The Middle Of A Lockdown

Tolulope Olajide

Tolulope Olajide married the love of his life, Chidinma, in a colourful wedding ceremony in 2016. Soon after, they grew into a family of four. Their plan was to do life side by side, but in 2020 amidst the global pandemic and all the challenges and uncertainties that came with it, Tolulope became a widower. In this interview he discusses his loss, the path he is taking to healing and wholeness, and his project 'Balanced Wheel', which aims to support those grieving, especially those within the Black and Minority Ethnic community in the UK.

Interview - Nneoma Ekwegh

Thank you for speaking with me. Could you tell us a bit about how you and Chidinma met? What was the journey from dating to 'I do'?

Chidinma moved to Coventry [in the UK] when she began her Master's degree at Warwick University. We attended the same church, served in different capacities within the church and together in the worship team. We worked on quite a number of church projects and our friendship developed over time. It turns out that my soft spot for her had grown so much that everyone else but me knew that I was already smitten! One day, I am unsure how this works for most guys, but for me it felt like scales were removed from my eyes and I was like "Ye! Ye! Wait a minute... Who's this girl?" We journeyed from friendship to an exclusive relationship. We prepared for marriage as best as we could by learning about ourselves, planning dates, praying about the journey ahead and spending time discovering our unique rhythm and DNA as a couple.

Talk us through the day you learnt your wife had passed on. How were you able to process such news?

Prior to her passing there had been a glimmer of hope because the doctors had commented that she was making incremental progress. Though we were not out of the woods yet, they had reduced the strength of her medication and turned off one of the machines. Then one morning whilst worshipping and preparing breakfast for the children, a phone call came from the hospital to inform me that Chidinma had died. I felt [like I had been] hit by a train, I was in a state of shock and I became acutely aware of how unprepared I was to deal with this conflicting mass of emotions called grief.

People tend to talk about grief in an academic way, designating it to five stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance), which are said to occur in sequence. Has this been your own experience as you process your loss? If so, how did you experience these stages, did they come in sequence or did you find that they overlapped or some stages were missing completely?

We have different ideas of what grieving should look, feel and sound like and we sometimes put higher pressure on ourselves when the reality of our grief experience doesn't match up with the imagined. The closest understanding that I had about grief was through one of the modules I did when I was studying for my MSc in Engineering Business Management in 2015. We had learned many things about people management, processes, and HR management. One of the topics that intrigued me was stages of grief by Elisabeth Kubler Ross.

It was here that I first learned about the five emotional responses to grief with the starting point being shock/denial, then anger to bargaining to depression and finally to acceptance. The key [piece of] information I remembered from that lecture was that bounce back, or recovery is better when the time between shock/denial to acceptance is shorter.

At first, I tried to shoe-horn, I wanted to fit the model. I would revisit the framework each night with the hope that I could figure out where I was but I soon found that I wasn't able to relate to the stages of grief as I felt that some of the emotional reactions I was experiencing weren't on this model. For example, I struggled with where to place envy and loneliness.

What I wished someone had told me was that grief is not linear and it's messy. A quote by Vicki Harrison comes to mind, "Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim."

Your family dynamic changed at the peak of the pandemic, not only were you experiencing loss in the middle of a global disaster, you were also thrust into being a single parent to your little ones. There was also a lockdown, which limited your access to help in a lot of ways. What were your initial fears and challenges you experienced during this time?

Following the death of Chidinma - you are right in a sense that I had fears and I guess I still have some fears even now. I think about how inadequately prepared I am to face the future without my wife, my running mate, and best friend. I had fears of not being able to carry on with life, fears of not being a good father to our two children. In addition to grieving the primary loss, which is the death of Chidinma, I also began to consider what the secondary losses were; such as the loss of companionship, loss of identity, the financial implication, the challenges associated with being a sole parent caused by the death of a spouse and many other things, which I am going to share soon on my website.

When it comes to the death of a loved one, most parents struggle to communicate this to children, especially younger children. How were you able to explain the absence of Chidinma? What has been her response to this change?

Anisa was two years old at the time, she knew Momma wasn't around; she is yet to understand what death means but [she] knew that something was amiss. I mean there were occasions that she would call for Momma. These moments break my heart afresh, I would usually pull her and her brother close and say, "I'm sorry to tell you both

that momma is dead and I believe that as a result, she's in heaven with Jesus right now and I miss her so much". In the meantime, I am learning about how to share grief with children as well as praying for wisdom in anticipation for when Anisa and Josiah will begin to process their own grief and ask questions. So that I am available and approachable to honestly talk and share my grief with them at an age-appropriate level. Whilst also keeping the lines of communication open and encouraging them to ask questions.

Can you share some of the ways you are keeping lines of communication open with your little ones?

One of the ways I am keeping communication open is keeping reminders of Chidinma around the house, either through a framed photo or a pillow with her face on which they both have on their beds. Whilst they're not fully aware of what death means, they are both aware when I am emotionally drained, for example when Anisa lent her favourite teddy to cuddle me on a difficult day. I imagine parenting being different at this time, especially amidst another lockdown in the UK, can you give us some insight to how you and your children are readjusting.

Have there been notable changes in your children, regarding behaviour, for example, needing more attention, clinging onto you more than before?

Let me share a story. Perhaps my first rude awakening was early one morning, I had woken up to go for a pee. When Chidinma was around, toilet time was almost always 'meeting time' for Anisa, as she would always barge into the toilet and hold either a musical concert or have baby-conversations, which I always referred to as gossip with Chidinma. Can you imagine how shocked I was when I was standing by the toilet bowl and then the bathroom door flings open and it's Anisa. The reality of my new life began to sink in as that incident reminded me that Chidinma is not here any longer to have concerts and baby-conversations with Anisa. I am grateful for the support network of friends and families especially in the early days as you can imagine Josiah who was four months at the time had to stop breastfeeding to learn to take baby formula. So, the presence of females through friends and family significantly helped the children find some balance. I also found that creating a system and routine helped us a great deal.

You launched a website 'Balanced Wheel', a platform where you share your experience of your grief and loss. Tell us about the symbolism of the name, and how it came about?

Chidinma and I were on a journey of faith and one of our favourite scripture from the Bible is

John chapter 10 verse 10, which talks about abundant life and so right from the courtship days, in search of what this meant we stumbled upon a framework called the Wheel of Life with which we had based our relationship on. The wheel of life broadly looks at the four major areas of one's life namely spiritual, mental, physical and emotional. So after she died of course my wheel of life was now out of balance, out of spoke. I originally wanted the name "Wheel of Life". A quick search online confirmed that the name had been saturated then I thought since we were trying to achieve 'a balanced wheel of life' why not call it balanced wheel.

The logo represents life as a puzzle. The circle represents life, and the puzzles represent Heal, Hope and Thrive. My dream as a result of Chidinma's death is to make the world grief sensitive one day at a time and eventually run scholarship programmes in her name for the things that she was passionate about.

You have mentioned on your website that you embarked on the 'Balanced wheel' project due to the limited information and support available to the grieving black minority, what sort of limitations did you find existed that necessitated the development of your platform? And in what ways are you working to bridge this gap?

I've always been passionate about personal growth and development so I find that I'm energised by learning though I hate exams. I was hungry for answers, hungry for information to help me understand what was happening to me, what lay ahead, and how to navigate this uncharted water of my grief. So after Chidinma died, I just wanted to know what's next, what do I do? What are the steps to take? I was spending my sleepless night pouring through personal and professional blogs, podcasts, journals, ebooks and hard copy books. I wanted an insight into their journey. I found that more than 95 percent of the information online was from people who don't look or sound like me. Not that there's anything wrong with the things that they've shared, the things they shared were actually helpful and gave me the boldness to wanting to share my unfiltered journey with grief, but I kept asking myself if ethnic minorities or should I say Africans don't lose their spouses young and is it that I am the only one experiencing these emotions of grief? I found that mainstream Bereavement Service providers acknowledge that there is a lack of cultural competencies and perspectives in their work and found it challenging to identify with some of the solutions available because their solutions had little or no context for those bereaved within the BAME community. My overarching desire for Balanced

Wheel is to be an online resource hub for all matters relating to grief, loss and moving forward; where those bereaved, friends, relatives and colleagues can have an enhanced ability to cope with grief as well as gain an improved quality of life and mental wellbeing especially for the BAME community. To provide solutions for the identified pain points of these other community groups in order to contribute toward creating a grief sensitive and friendly culture (family, friends, neighbours, congregants and work colleagues) and for Balanced Wheel to remain relevant when I am gone.



My dream as a result of Chidinma's death is to make the world grief sensitive one day at a time and eventually run scholarship programmes in her name for the things that she was passionate about.



Therapy & Counselling: whether it is due to culture, religion or a combination of both, there is still a large percentage of Nigerians, Africans who are hesitant when it comes to seeking professional help with emotional and mental traumas, what role if any has therapy/counselling had in your journey to healing? Would you say its inclusion has significantly impacted your journey?

Therapy or counselling hasn't really been a part of my journey except the one time a friend scheduled an appointment for me to speak with a therapist. I did make the appointment but then because I had already started talking openly about all of these issues and educating myself through books and journals, I just found that it wasn't for me. Do I think I would need one in the future? Maybe, but right now I don't think I do. If I find myself in a place where I think I need to speak to someone then I would.

Still on therapy and counselling, how important is it to have a counsellor/therapist of black (African) descent available and accessible to grieving black minorities like you pointed out on your website.

Oh! This is very important. I have noticed that the resources on grieving, especially podcasts,

which I listen to a lot, do not speak into that niche area. In 2020, in the midst of my reading and research, I stumbled across data suggesting that BAME community are at risk of Covid-19, and as a result, a team of experts who are from BAME community came together and published a report in August and their recommendation was that there is a dire need to set up mental health services and bereavement services that are BAME led because there are certain things you can say to someone who is not of the same heritage or culture and you have to explain. I am pro finding counsellors, therapists or even helpers who understand your cultural context because it makes it easier for you to communicate and express yourself.

There is also the known fact that therapy (in places like the UK and US) is expensive, and this has made people who need that support (black minorities/Africans) to hold back. In what ways do you hope to financially bridge this gap with a Balanced wheel?

Yes it is expensive, some charge £175 per hour and I thought, well, do you know how many books and audio books I could buy with that? Balanced Wheel is still a baby project, but when I look at the overall picture of what I am dreaming for Balanced Wheel, at some point it would touch this area but I am also mindful that to run an organization requires a lot of funding and bringing people who are experts into this field will be as well.

I recently came across a factual story of a mother who lost her child and she talked about how she lost sight of those around her who were also grieving the loss of her child. She stated that she was hesitant to open herself to their vulnerability because she didn't want to hurt more. How has it been grieving alongside Chidinma's extended family and friends, was there a period where you struggled with this? What reservations, if any, did you have and how did you navigate this?

One of the things I suppose I have benefited from is that I have read extensively around this whether it is from a Christian perspective or from a professional perspective or from people who are journeying alongside this personally. One of the things I did earlier on, was to ask people how they were doing and intentionally telling them it is okay to cry where I am, you don't have to be strong for me. I remember sharing with them that we have all lost someone that is important to us, she is my wife, your best-friend, your sister, fellow worship minister, so I understood that, and this is why I always took time to ask them how are they doing. I didn't struggle with this



because I understood, Chidinma meant a lot to all of us. And I think collective grieve was kind of my go-to.

What to say: Knowing what to say to someone who is grieving is a challenge many have. We all want to say the right things, but we often fall short. Can you tell us some helpful things we can say to encourage and support grieving loved ones, and what are some of the things we can do to show our unwavering support to them?

On my website, *Balanced Wheel*, I have a blog post titled 51 least helpful things to say to someone grieving, I would share a few here.

Avoid saying things like ‘Time is a healer,’ time by itself doesn’t heal wounds; it is what you do with time (positive corrective actions) that makes time a healer. Also do not try to give an explanation for the death of the person. Attempting to explain why things happened the way they did will cause more harm than good. And finally, a statement like ‘You have to be strong’ creates a sense of pressure upon the person to suppress their emotions. Showing emotion is not a sign of weakness, do not make a person feel their emotional expression equates to lack of strength.

Wholeness and Healing: Apart from journaling your experience with others via your platform, in what other ways

are you nurturing yourself to healing and wholeness?

I love walking. We live in a village so by default we have lots of farmlands around us. What I would do, especially in those early days, is to just get up and go walking and sometimes I would intentionally find a path way I have not been on before and I would take it, maybe I just needed to get lost because at that time that was exactly how I felt lost and I would find that I would always find my way back home. I also read as well. I have bought at least 30 books on this topic, just feeding myself with information and benefiting from their wisdom and of course I have the children, and as their primary carer we spend a lot of time together.



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