

CHAPTER 16

ESEZA NABWAMI KIYINGI

16.1 Eseza Nabwami Kiyingi The Widow Who Never Despaired

At the time of Paulo Kiyingi's death, his two youngest children were still at school. Sekkadde was in Senior 2 at Kings College Buddo, while Naluggya was in Primary 6 at Makeerere Primary School. Their mother Eseza (ENK) shouldered the responsibility of seeing these two children complete school and go on to pursue their chosen careers. As documented earlier on in this book, the older siblings in the family helped the younger ones with their school fees. There were several other children at home. Some of these were nephews and nieces, others were grandchildren, the children of her children, as well as children of her other relatives. ENK looked after all of them on the one hand. They, on the other hand, gave her the much needed company to survive the loneliness and depression she would have otherwise suffered following the passing of her husband.

ENK strived for the education of her children, her husband's children and those of her brothers, sisters and other relatives. She had that rare talent of forward planning when it came to the children's education, in that despite her own limited education she would always find ways to facilitate and advance the schooling of any child interested in schooling by getting them places in schools, pleading with the headmasters regarding the payment of school fees and offering to look after some of them in her own home. Unlike many women of her generation she believed in giving girls a good education. In particular she worked hard to get her daughters educated to very high levels. Indeed when the time was right she too engaged herself in some adult education classes at the Salvation Army Adult Literacy School, located on the Kampala to Bombo road, 2 miles from the city centre. She had lessons in English and home economics among other subjects.

ENK was very active in her *Ffumbe* clan meetings. She was very influential in the fight to rectify some anomalies within her clan sub-division (*Omutuba gwa Kalumba*). She therefore came to be regarded as one of the main pillars within her clan.

She served the parish of Makeerere church in several capacities. She was one of the church elders (*Abakebezi*). She was a member of the church choir, singing the Alto voice. She was a member of the church council on several occasions, sometimes serving as its chairman. Sometimes she would be required to represent the Makeerere parish church in the diocesan meetings, including the synod council at the Namirembe Bishopric. Whenever there were big functions involving holding receptions at the church, for example hosting the Bishop for confirmation ceremonies, ENK would be busy in her multiple roles. She would participate in the food preparations, cleaning and decorating the church the evening before. She would then be one of the elders to welcome and seat the invited guests, sing in the choir during the service and after the service serve the guests and visitors at the reception with food and other refreshments. Indeed it would be a busy time, full of intense activity for her. Since her home was very close to the church, within half a kilometre, many times she would look after some of the more treasured church property as well as keep a remote eye and ear on the church building, guarding it. ENK used to visit the elderly and the sick in the parish and pray for them. She also used to counsel

young or newly married couples in how to nourish their relationships and maintain happy Christian homes. She would counsel those in de-facto relationships or “improper marriages” (according to the church) to cleanse or straighten their relationships by converting them into proper church marriages. She was a prominent member of the Christian Mothers’ Union.

ENK’s involvement with church work did not prevent her from looking after her home and her children’s needs. She would wake up early in the morning before sunrise, go cultivate the garden and from there prepare food for lunch (her children used to go home for lunch, rarely having lunch at school since their school was very close to home). She used to grow a lot of taro (*amayuuni*), sweet potatoes, cassava, bananas, plantain and other vegetables. She was one of those who popularised a variety of firm purplish taro imported from Tanganyika, which was very tasty and came to be very much liked and preferred to the soft white variety abundant until then. She used to cultivate it in her garden at Bwayise, so the variety came to be referred to as the “Bwayise taro” (*Amayuuni ge Bwayise*).

ENK was one of the main pillars and promoters of the local church-cum-government school, Makeerere Primary School, where most of her children started their primary education. Most of the school’s administrators would seek the advice of Mrs Kiyingi before introducing any major changes in the school. She used to sit on several school parents’ committees, sometimes as a member, other times as a chairman for most of her active life. She was an extremely resourceful, upright and straightforward person during meetings. She only stopped when she started ailing with age and illness. As an appreciation of her contributions to Makeerere Primary School, Mrs Ezeza Nabwami Kiyingi was posthumously honoured when one of the student’s houses was named “Ezeza Kiyingi House”, after her.

ENK was always full of life. She enjoyed partying, whether in her home or among her relatives and friends, wherever she was invited. She was renowned for her elegance and style in wearing the Kiganda *busuuti* or *gomesi* (a women’s formal maxi wrap-around robe) and gracefully walking in it, without stepping on its long flowing bottom. She kept up-to-date with the fashions, especially the hair fashion changes in Uganda at the time. She quickly embraced the women’s hair fashion of straightening hair with a hot comb, very early on in its inception - one of the pioneers at Makeerere. The husbands at first feared that their wives’ hair was catching fire when they saw smoke emanating from their wives’ heads, but ENK managed to allay their anxieties when she “got her hair done” and survived the ordeal. Similarly, women in Buganda for a long time were not allowed to eat chicken or eggs by custom. ENK was one of those who quickly overcame that taboo and started eating eggs. Although she could not bring herself to start eating chicken, she allowed her daughters to eat it openly. In short she did not keep herself backwards, she always moved with the times and at times she herself shaped it. For a long time in her earlier life she did not touch alcohol, but as she matured and felt more liberated she started drinking a beer or two. She would justify her drinking a beer with a joke that beer promoted good health or that, “beer was food for the children!!” (*bbiya mmere y’abaana*). She would limit herself to two beers, no more. She never advocated nor indulged in the stronger alcohols like wines or spirits, which she regarded as brain de-stabilisers. It is not known for certain what she thought of the local brew (*omwenge omuganda*). She was a woman of substance who, if she had lived in the present times, I am sure would have been a prominent advocate of the women’s liberation movement.

16.2 The Last Days of Eseza Nabwami Kiyingi

ENK was diagnosed with sugar diabetes in 1982, at 73 years of age. She wrestled with the disease for nearly five years, receiving treatment from doctors at Mulago Hospital and other hospitals around Kampala. When I last saw her in July and early August 1987 she had lost so much weight and was down to bare bones. I had taken my newly born daughter and possibly her youngest grandchild then, Makula Nabbosa, barely six months of age at the time, for my mother to bless. As it turned out Makula was the last child ENK blessed before she departed this world, as if she had been waiting to see that child, for it was not long after that ENK expired. That reminded me of some verses in the Bible (although no parallels drawn) about a very old man called Simeon, who had been promised that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. It was written like so: "Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God, saying 'Now, my Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace. For with my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples. A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people...'" (Luke; 2: 29-32).

Eseza Nabwami Kiyingi died on 23rd August 1987, aged 78 years. She was laid to rest with great honour in the ancestral burial grounds at Nakaseeta, Mpigi Bulemeezi, besides her husband's grave. Many Christian clerics, parishioners, friends and family travelled long distances to go and farewell God's child, the beloved mother of all mothers, on the last journey to her final resting place. She was succeeded by her younger sister, Agnes Nabbumba from Asanasiyo Lule Mujugumbya, as her chosen heir. When that one too died she was succeeded by Regina Nabaggala from their paternal uncle (our great uncle) Nekemeya Mulinsike of Buwaya.