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Woman who fled torturers that killed her family tells story in new book

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A Ugandan woman who narrowly escaped death at the hands of the unrelenting torturers that killed her husband and abducted her children has had her story published in a seminal new book.

'My Painful Journey' is the story of Jade Amoli Jackson, a long standing client of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture and a prolific writer with the organisation's writing group, Write to Life.

It is one of 16 true stories featured in 'From There to Here', the second decibel Penguin prize anthology, described as "the widest reaching contemporary survey of the immigrant experience published for many years".

"I sometimes feel ashamed of my story, but I have had so much encouragement from the Medical Foundation that I felt able to put it in writing," said Jade, who has attended an Arvon Foundation writing course and is now studying drama at Morley College, London. "When I'm writing, it's like I have closed a door on the past and another one is opening."

Jade fled Uganda seven years ago, where as the niece of former president Milton Obote, political rival to current president Yoweri Museveni, she had been subjected to a lifetime of harassment. Staunchly opposed to the guerrilla warfare that was claiming the lives of her fellow country-folk, Jade helped many desperate families flee the country.

In 1991, Jade's own life began to unravel. Her husband was abducted and murdered by the military and just weeks after identifying her husband's dismembered body, Jade's twin sister and her father were killed as Museveni's men descended on the family's farm to seize their property in the ongoing power struggle.

Scrambling together her three children, Jade fled to northern Uganda. The family lived in relative safety until 2001, when Jade returned home from work to be confronted with the sickening news that the village had been attacked and her children had been abducted. Desperate and distraught, Jade sought refuge in a neighbouring village and it was not long before that too was destroyed and the villagers captured.

For two days, Jade was marched barefoot into a secluded jungle enclave where she was to spend the next few months enslaved in impoverished conditions, confronted daily by death, rape and starvation.

Jade considers herself fortunate to have escaped, and though the loss of her children haunts her still, she has slowly managed to rebuild her life. Her prose and poetry, which chronicles her experiences both in Uganda and her reflections on life in the UK, has earned her praise at literary festivals up and down the country which she has attended with other MF clients.

Six judges, including Shami Chakrabarti of Liberty and the novelist Kate Mosse, selected the most illuminating and powerful entries to be published



My Lone Soldier, by Jade Amoli Jackson

You have been my best
friend and my love since we
met
You were clever in class and
your ambition was to join
the army

Your beady eyes pierce my
heart like an arrow
Your unkempt beard
scratches my soft cheeks
I think it is a while since
You had a proper bath
So lie still and let me scrub
your whole body
Let me wash your long hair

Barber, please shave off his
long hair and beard
Which have become a
breeding ground for lice
Oh dentist make his teeth
white again
At least for the one month
he is home
I will cook nice meals for him
So that his hollow eyes and
neck can be covered with
some meat
His ribs are sticking out like
tree branches

No meat on the bones
Where has the meat gone?
Hunger has eaten all the
meat
So let me cook for him
Good meals for the days he

in the book.

Samenua Seshier, Director of decibel, said: "The anthology is an exciting collection of the authors' journeys and experiences of fleeing persecution, or seeking new lives and opportunities in another country. The stories are important in today's multicultural Britain, illustrating how our country is ever changing, and how these kinds of experiences add to the diversity and collective history of our society."

*From There to Here is published by Penguin in paperback on November 29, priced at £8.99. To order a copy, visit www.penguin.co.uk.

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is home with me.

Tomorrow my lone soldier
Is going to the end of
another world
Bye my love, he said
I will be back soon
Look after yourself
And you too love, I said
Tears finding their way out
of my eyes
He turned to go
Army bag on his back
His heavy shoes for
company
Alone in the distance
Oh my lone soldier
Come back soon

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