

Challenges in Photojournalism: Award winners speak out

By Alex A. Chamwada

Photojournalism requires a lot of flexibility, skill, stamina, sacrifice, patience and interest. The final product depends on ingenuity and talent not theoretical training. Not all can make good journalists. It can be an exciting or painful taking adventure.

Rebecca Nduku and Antony Kaminju had some of the best photographs exhibited at the French Cultural and Cooperation Centre from 12th to 18th February, on the theme "Reflections of our past."

The two photojournalists working with *The Daily Nation* were among 35 photographers who submitted their photos out of which 22 photographers' works were selected and a total of 50 photographs chosen. Only two lady photographers; Rebecca Nduku and Winnie Ogana featured in the exhibition.

Nduku laments that ladies tend to go for easier jobs and careers, leaving photojournalism male-dominated. "It's taxing and demanding...but women have more job opportunities in this field given that very few of them have ventured into it," she notes.

Kaminju observes that women photographers can sometimes be better placed to get pictures in riot situations as people are quick to clobber and harass men than women. He adds that women photographers have the knack for cajoling people to give them stories. "Look at the case of Catherine Bond who works with

CNN. She has beaten odds to come up with exclusive pictures and news on rebels like Kabila. Were it a man, Kabila may not have disclosed the news on she has managed to scoop," he narrates. "A policeman will hesitate beating a lady, but on a man, he takes no time to act."

However, Nduku has tasted the 'pill' of harassment severally. She was not spared in the skirmishes that engulfed the demolition of Soweto slums, Akasha's High Court case, demolition of shanties in Dandora and riots at Kasarani by Gor Mahia fans. "There are incidents where my camera and films were confiscated," she says.

Flexibility and tact come in at hand in precarious situations: taking photographs during a bank robbery, such was Nduku's fate, and she managed to take good photographs during the Standard Chartered bank robbery. She warns that assignments depend on the people you are covering. "A very humble assignment could turn out to be something else," she quips.

During the clamour for reforms last year, Kaminju took some of the best photos of the riots due to his flexibility. "When policemen embarked on reformists at the All Saints Cathedral, I was the only photographer who dared to enter the church and capture photos of people bleeding and writhing in pain," he observes.

He never takes a photo while standing upright. "I look for vantage points where I can kneel to avoid blows and whips," he

muses. His acumen won him accolades from the news editors, augmenting his impetus to photojournalism.

This photo plus those taken at the All Saints Cathedral have been used in both the local and international press (Sunday Times, Reuters, Business Times-Tanzania) adds Kaminju.

Kaminju prays each morning, "this job is unpredictable. You can go out in the field and not come back. Nduku's interest in photography stems from her interest in art though she cannot really draw. She discovered communication through photography, a form of art. The late Dan Eldon and Mohammed Amin works inspired her.

After her O-level examinations, Nduku undertook a certificate course in photography. But she stresses that the most reliable training in this field is hands-on experience. Her greatest ambition is to further her career through training and become a renowned photojournalist.

Kaminju has the same story to tell. He undertook a course in design at the Kenya Polytechnic and photojournalism was one of his most interesting subjects, though hard. Amidst problems of lack of facilities like films and bromides, Kaminju was always ahead of his colleagues for he used to buy his own materials and spent most of his time in the dark room. "In fact my friends nicknamed me professor," he recalls.

Before joining *Nation*, Kaminju had a lot of hands-on experience at the United Nations Environment Programme's Graphics department. "My sixth sense, that is, the nose for news and my ability to think in three dimensions are qualities that have enabled me excel," adds Kaminju. He advises photographers, like any other journalist to keep alert and make proper use of their eyes, ears, noses, skin... when covering events. His greatest career ambition is to become an art director in an advertising firm.

On professional ethics, Nduku and Kaminju are quick to advise photojournalists to be open-minded, avoid bias, credit other photographers where necessary, avoid bribes from sources and avoid disclosing sources who seek anonymity.

No escape: A scene at the All Saints Cathedral during one of the pro-reformist rallies last year. Antony Kaminju's award winning photograph

