

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL: MY JOURNEY THROUGH CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION.

Muhawe Ruth

" There can be no greater gift than that of giving one's time and energy to help others without expecting anything in return"

Nelson Mandela

While joining CLE I was told many things, but these two stood out for me: I would never attend other classes in the semester, and I would realise just how much time we have and waste while at law school. My experience in the class served to disprove one and confirm the other.

But none of the things I was told by those before me became the first lesson I learned about, or from the program. The second semester of my 3rd academic year was to officially begin on 19.01.2019. However, because the lecturers were on strike, law school was not able to resume study until the end of February. The CLE class began running on the 21.01.2019, our first field activity being the attendance of a court ruling on forced evictions delivered at the High Court on Friday 25th January. Social justice should not depend on the comfort or convenience of those serving. That is the first lesson CLE taught me: Commitment- the work must go on.

Through the next 14 weeks I had the chance to work alongside brilliant minds, to experience new things, explore fresh ground, and most importantly, to learn. Although I may not be able to put it all down on paper, I have tried to capture the most memorable and most influencing moments of this journey. The ones that made my blood boil, the ones I look back to and smile randomly in the middle of the day.

Class Facilitations and Guest Lectures.

Even in the heat of the semester, I looked forward to Wednesdays and Thursdays to have CLE classes. This was not just because of my passion for human rights, but also because the interaction and engagement we were privileged to have in these classes were sometimes the only source of life through a hectic week. I have always been a talker in class, (in terms of contributing or asking questions) but CLE sessions were the first classes where I actually felt like my contribution meant something. Usually, the facilitators only started off the class with a background and a discussion of key issues. After this,

the conversation got shifted to the students, guided by the facilitator's supervision. I have not yet had a greater and more effective learning experience.

The depth of knowledge I have been able to amass from the guest lectures is another debt to CLE that I could never re-pay. Before joining the class, I had already had the benefit of attending some of the guest lectures organised by PILAC while still in my 1st and 2nd year. It was always exciting as we looked forward to hearing from the best in the field. The discussion panels were intellectually intimidating and yet inspiring, so it was humbling whenever PILAC brought them closer to us. The CLE class handed me this experience every week. I still vividly remember the lecture on personal branding given by Mr. Simon Peter Kinobe, President of the Uganda Law Society. That is the Thursday I fell in love with the legal profession all over again.

Project Work.

Every experience results in a success story or a lesson learned, sometimes both. The project work taught me the urgency and sensitivity of legislative advocacy. It also taught me patience and flexibility. I was privileged to work with a team of five whose task was to review the Persons with Disabilities Bill 2018, with a goal to present our report at Committee Stage to be considered before the law was passed. We compiled a 90- paged paper reviewing clause by clause and submitted the first draft for review. To our surprise, the Bill went on to be passed by Parliament in April.

While our paper was still at review stage, the Bill was taken before the President for assent. The disappointment and frustration in being told our project had been rendered moot is one I cannot forget, especially because this was towards examinations and we all thought we were going to be handed another project to handle at that point. Fortunately, we were later told that some lobbying could be done and our paper sent to the President for consideration before he assents to the Bill, as long as we simply re-structured it into a post-mortem kind of analysis. We went from frustration at one moment to excitement at the next, elated by the idea of submitting our work to the Head of State. Although I doubt that he will personally read all of it, I am still very grateful for the lessons this experience taught me. More importantly, I hope that our analysis will eventually make some contribution to improving the lives of persons with disabilities in the foreseeable future.

Externship.



The CLE class also gave me the opportunity to closely interact with persons living with HIV. Every Tuesday at 10:00am, instead of heading to a lecture room for another law class with ink, paper and hypothetical questions, I left the University to the TASO headquarters at Mulago to be asked real life questions, face real legal problems and assist in finding real legal solutions. I was brought in touch with the reality of stigma the first time I went for this program, by the look I got from the boda boda men at the Makerere main gate stage as I asked to be taken to TASO. The stare lasted very few seconds but I could tell that they were looking for 'the AIDS in me'. As someone who thought that the stigma had died down due to the awareness and sensitization efforts over the years, this was a wake-up call for me. I woke up every Tuesday determined to go and make my small contribution to the lives of those still shunned by society in their fight against disease. I also woke up in greater understanding and appreciation of social justice work, because contrary to my assumption, the vulnerable are still vulnerable.

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Moot Court.

Mooting was the first way I got introduced to PILAC. PILAC has seen me through internal moots, the CEHURD moot, and even the ALL- AFRICA, all from which we have claimed victory. So for me, the CLE moot was not a first time mooting experience. And yet through all these moots, I had never been robbed. Oh the joy! Oh the excitement! I can still remember how my friends and I decided we were all going to wear pant suits as our small gesture of standing up to the patriarchy.



But being robed is not all I got from the mooting experience. For the first time, I got to be amicus, and we got to win the moot as the amicus team. I worked with the best of the brightest and I still remember being humbled by the fruits of team work. I am glad that because of CLE, I got to meet and work with people like Okaka Jeremiah and Mpagi Cyrus whose commitment, diligence and support I'd never have experienced any other way. I got to argue at a real court before real judges of the High Court and submit actual court documents, which I had never done in any of the previous moots. To date I cannot understand the mind of the person whose view towards CLE was that it is overrated, because all I feel in my heart is humility and gratitude. Thank you PILAC!

"In the end, it is not the years in your life that count. It is the life in your years."

Abraham Lincoln

None of this would have been possible without the guidance, support, and facilitation from the PILAC staff. The supervision, the engagement, the concern, it all made the hectic days less hectic. Ssalongo was always there to pick and drop people off to the field, and he was always smiling. I even remember Ms. Jackie coming in to hold a meeting and provide guidance and counselling when the class was falling apart. She made us tell her what was not working and then asked us to write down our own solutions to these problems. This was put down on a chart and reminded us every day to be sensitive to the needs of others. But it also reminded us that those teaching us cared.

There are things I can no longer be worried about after this experience. For example, I need not tremble before a panel of judges on an interview or presentation. As I get ready to pack my bags for the Summer School on Business and Human Rights in Zurich, my heart is full. The list of things that

PILAC and CLE has done for me is incompressible on 5 pages. But I guess I must instead ask what I can now do for PILAC, better yet, for my society. Interestingly, I still got to attend all my other classes whilst doing CLE, and got to realise that so much time in law school is wasted complaining about just how much work there is. There is so much one can accomplish in 24 hours. So I stand at the end of this CLE journey with the first assertion disproved and the second confirmed.

But there was a third assertion. We were told that CLE is the most prestigious class in law school, and arguably in the entire University. A number of priceless opportunities and golden experiences later, I must confess in sharing the pride felt by those who came before me. But the prestige is not in the white PILAC shirts, the sumptuous meals we occasionally got to eat, or the per diem that sustained us through the semester. The prestige lies in having used the law that I love to touch at least the life of one person, and the joy in knowing that CLE has given me all I need to do just that for the rest of my life.

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

Barrack Obama



THANK YOU PILAC !

Truly,

Your Social Justice Lawyer.