

# Agbòwó

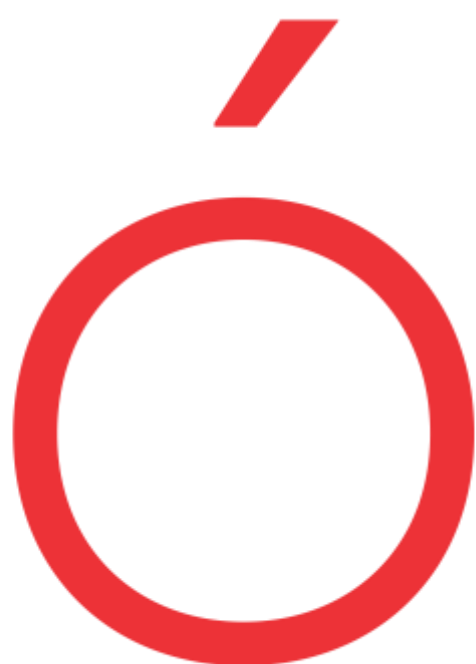
ISSUE 2

JULY 2019



LIMITS







## About Agbowó

**“To provide global access to creative Africans, helping them reach their audiences and markets.”**

Starting from a simple online journal, we are increasing our capacity to serve creative African writers and artists in ways that ensure creative Africans can concentrate on creating great art while we ensure they get the audience and the value they deserve.

We are not the only ones in this space helping the average creative African. However, we hope we can create immense value for art lovers whether as creators or as consumers of African art as they might have not experienced before- both through the magnitude of our service and in the way we have chosen to deliver them.

Some of our initiatives include Agbowó Online literary journal ([agbowo.org](http://agbowo.org)), the Agbowó magazine ([agbowo.org/magazine](http://agbowo.org/magazine)), Monthly ([monthly.agbowo.org](http://monthly.agbowo.org)), Arts n Chill by Agbowó ([agbowo.org/artsnchill](http://agbowo.org/artsnchill)), Artshop ([artshop.agbowo.org](http://artshop.agbowo.org)) etc.

We will continue to seek new, innovative and trusted ways to uphold African artistry, craft and creativity. Whether through our own initiatives, partnerships or sponsorships, we will remain true to our purpose of providing global access to cultural and creative Africans and helping them gain value and audience for their work.

Agbowó's registered name is Agbowó Creative African Company, incorporated with the RC number 1575748. We are an African art company .

Agbowó is an initiative of Bamboo Capital Collective Ltd (RC 1585406), which also runs UITES WRITE([uiteswrite.org](http://uiteswrite.org)) and The Bamboo College ([thebamboocollege.com](http://thebamboocollege.com)).

Bamboo Capital Collective builds sustainable platforms for African growth.



agbowo.org

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# Editor's Note

About two years ago, *Afridiaspora*, an African literary magazine, published my poem - “An Extrapolation of Four Names”. The poem, divided into four stanzas, sought to give extended interpretations, in verse, to four names. The names – Ikulamberu, Ikuforijimi, Ikumenisan, and Ikulala – are all prefixed with Iku-, the Yoruba word for death. For the fourth name, I write- “Death is not a small thing/It fills 79 by 24-inch caskets/It fills 6 feet gal-lows/It fills 25 thousand mile planets/Death is not a small thing”. Upon the poem’s publi-cation, I shared the link to it on my twitter feed, eager to see how it will fare in the world. Roughly eleven minutes later, the poet Tade Ipadeola responded, suggesting, since I didn’t include diacritics, another extrapolation for Ikulala- “Death is the boundary”. I immediately thought this would have made for a more interesting extrapolation and rued not thinking about it first. It was this memory that first cropped up in my mind upon the selection of “Limits” as the theme for this year’s issue of Agbowó. Limit, from the Latin *limes*, meaning boundary. Death as a boundary.

The idea of death as a boundary or limit dates as far back as Socrates. In one of Plato’s dia-logues, *Phaedo*, Socrates is about to commit state-sanctioned suicide and is persuaded by his friends to escape into exile instead. Socrates then proceeds to paint death as something the philosopher should not only be unafraid of but also embrace because death is the un-shackling of soul from body. The soul, constantly seeking truth like all philosophers must, is constantly limited by the body which is too drawn to earthly desires of food, entertain-ment, sex and so on. For Socrates, death is, thus, the breaking out of the soul from the boundaries of flesh in the direction of truth.

But for many African cultures, this dichotomous existence – the either here or there that exists for Socrates – does not always hold. In some belief systems, like those in which the abiku or ogbanje is a possibility, the limits between death and life are mere suggestions that

can be traversed back and forth at will. The exploration of this particular boundary has produced many pieces of glorious writing among which number Soyinka's "Abiku", Clark-Bekederemo's poem of the same title, Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* and Ben Okri's famed trilogy. In Okri's *The Famished Road*, which was awarded the Man Booker in 1991, the major character, Azaro, named after Lazarus, is one of such spirit children. For Azaro, the borders between life and death are not frequented only by fainting and fits of illness but are collapsed all around him. In one beautiful sequence of words, Azaro is being pursued by Madame Koto and as he flees, we see a blurring of the limits between the physical and the metaphysical. Everything is co-mingling, he even comes upon a gate locked not by padlocks but by seven incantations. Reading that passage from Okri made me pause and wish I was an artist – a gifted one – so I could paint what was written and title it *The flight of Azaro*. Within this issue, Adé Sultan Sangodoyin's *A Language of the Unconscious* melds, in the same manner, dream and reality. I was not surprised to see, in his short bio, a mention of Okri.

For Oba<sup>1</sup> Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, the Ooni of Ile-Ife, this blurring of the boundaries between both worlds is not a preserve of spirit children. Sitting, alongside members of my extended family, at his table one October afternoon, he bids us to tell him the number of "us" in the room. I count and supply a physical answer which he laughs off in favour of his metaphysical estimate of "thousands and thousands" which includes the spirits. I, and I suppose others, don't look very convinced. He then asks us why we think babies cry without cause and, in almost equal measure, laugh untickled. A smooth maneuver since we cannot ask babies for exact answers. He then posits that it is these unseen and yet ubiquitous spirits that are responsible. Some clown and the baby giggles. Some are mean and the baby weeps. He says all babies preserve this gift of seeing beyond the border till they start to speak. Once they speak their first word, the special eye shuts forever. He goes on to add that only the initiated, among adults, can see the true multitude of spiritual events constantly taking place around us and that if an ordinary person were to suddenly behold it, they'd run mad.

Madness. Insanity. As a teenager at the University of Ibadan, I was momentarily obsessed with the idea of insanity. I intended to compile a private anthology about the subject. It would include poems, a story and an essay propounding a theory. The theory, which I thought groundbreaking at the time, was about the paradox of healing from insanity. The cornerstone of the idea was that since healing a madman will involve getting him to see that he was mad all along and since a madman by definition staunchly believes in his own sanity, it is impossible to drag him over the boundary. The inspiration for the theory was, I think, from Zeno's paradox which is about the impossibility of getting from point A to B. But the evidence was firmly against my theory. Of course people regain control over their minds. I concluded that treatment was as a result of a transformative vacuum at the limits between sanity and insanity. Limits are the places where the miraculous occur. I gave up on the project since it wasn't heading where I wanted and soon the notebook

became scrap paper for stoichiometric calculations and, subsequently, disappeared.

Masquerades are also creatures of limits. Besides from the physical interpretation of masquerades pushing their bodies to the limits of gymnastic and callisthenic performance, there is a symbolic interpretation. Masquerades, in many African cultures, are thought to be inhabited by spirits of the ancestors. The muscles of the living, animated by the energy of the dead. So that when masquerades dance and somersault, they do so on the borders between here and the hereafter.

But the theme's interpretation is not limited to metaphysical, psychological and geographic borders. Calling for submissions, we suggested other ways the theme could be interpreted – as an exploration of impediments, as a treatise on bodily autonomy and a call to stretch artistic imagination beyond what is currently available or acceptable. The writers and artists whose works appear within these pages responded with a thematic variety that confirmed to us the robustness of the selected theme. In Jarred Thompson's *Scabbing*, limits are sexual. In Fatima Okhuosami's *Picturesque*, they are religious. But I should stop now. I suspect that by these "spoilers", I am robbing you of that immense pleasure that only reading themed magazines give; the "Aha!" moment when one realizes why a work is included.

Moyosore Orimoloye

Akure,

July 2019

<sup>1</sup> – Yoruba King, Traditional Ruler



The Limits Issue

July 2019

Published by Agbowó

Cover Art

Consumer by **Penda Diakité**

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**Sarah Lubala**

# **My aunt tried to exorcise me, and other thoughts on liminality**

“How are you doing?”

I can't tell if my aunt means this sincerely. Her question refers to my recent hospitalisation at a private psychiatric facility, and subsequent discharge. I'm nervous, and when I'm nervous I'm prone to rambling. I hear a disembodied voice. I hear the words “group therapy” and “support system” and the slight lilting of “the right meds”. I sing when I'm nervous too. My aunt's brow creases in the way only Congolese aunts' can – firm disapproval veiled by a thin veneer of pious restraint. The voice peters out.

“I'm here to discuss something very very serious.”

Two verys. I try to gauge the level of histrionics to follow. I shift uncomfortably in my armchair and arrange my face into a semblance of solemnity. She had called earlier that morning to tell me she needed to speak to me, urgently. Something to do with “spiritual matters”, “very serious”, “will affect your whole family.” I sat across from my fiancé, a spoonful of cereal suspended above the bowl. She called twice more after that, oscillating between various eventualities: she was coming that evening, next Monday, immediately. In the end, she settled for 5pm. It was 10am. Ample time for a steady progression into the abyss.

I discussed the possibilities with my fiancé. Was it about my depression? My suicidality? My queerness? I had long suspected my family suspected. When I first announced my engagement to a decidedly heterosexual male, there were audible whispers of “*Dieu merci*”. One aunt went so far as to thank *Dieu* for precluding my future with a female ‘roommate’ as she had long feared. Moreover, my fiancé is white – “the sort of man who can handle your ‘feminism’”.

The chain of phone calls had produced a minor existential emergency. What was at stake? Depression, queer identity, the nature of being? I thought of Sylvia Plath's

verse play for radio, “Three Women”. I first discovered the script during my stay at the clinic. We were allocated two-hour slots for ‘personal development’, which I often spent reading or inhaling chocolate contraband – depending on the day’s demands. I’d read Plath before, a literary staple for the young and depressed, but only ever her short poems.

“Three Women” is set in a hospital, a maternity ward. The play consists of three interwoven monologues. The first voice is a woman who gives birth and returns home with her baby, the second corresponds to a secretary who has a miscarriage, and the third voice belongs to an unmarried young woman who decides to give her baby up for adoption. The themes were simple enough to grasp: women, motherhood, how our bodies, and stories, are both seen and unseen – in medical rooms and elsewhere.

*Waiting lies heavy on my lids. It lies like sleep,*

*Like a big sea. Far off, far off, I feel the first*

*wave tug*

*Its cargo of agony toward me, inescapable,*

*tidal.*

The words moved in my blood. Something to do with waiting, that space of endless suspension. The in-between. Relentless and wide. Waiting has always been my ontological occupation. I exist liminally, in the space between borders. I experienced a literal border crossing when I was three, as my family rushed to South Africa to escape a crumbling autocracy, and I’ve been troubling borders ever since.

As a model ‘third culture kid’, I’m wrapped up in questions of belonging and non-unitary identity. But what does it mean to exist everywhere and nowhere simultaneously, and how might mental illness be queered and seen to exist across borders?

.

“We were praying on the mountain,” she begins, “and we saw you fainting on your wedding day,” concludes her male ‘church friend’.

She doesn’t mention the location of this holy mountain. I conjure her up in the Johannesburg Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens, trudging up its high hills. I feel certain I know where this is going.

“We need to pray for you and the demons in your head.”

It was to be depression and suicidality then. What followed was a two-hour ‘prayer session’ comprised of stern rebukes of the devil, casting out of demons, and calling upon the “Blood of Jeezusss”. One particularly memorable moment was when the church-man-friend bellowed, “Raise your faith or perish!” He roared louder and louder, “Raise your faith!” With closed eyes and bowed head, I raised my own voice in response: “Raise *your* faith!” That seemed to quiet him. There appeared to be some direct correlation between raising one’s voice and raising one’s faith which my reverent Catholic upbringing was loath to accept.

In any other circumstance, this scene might be laughable, but my family are staunch and zealous Christians who emerge from a staunch and zealous nation (more than 90 percent of Congo identifies with some variation of Christianity).

This spectacle wasn’t entirely surprising. My aunt was responding in the way many Africans do to the ‘problem’ of mental illness. As my mom would often repeat, “there is no depression in The Village <sup>TM</sup>”. The proverb makes clear that there is no frame of reference for mental illness in large swathes of Africa. In a study published by the World Bank, authors O. Gureje and A. Alem note that mental health issues are usually given very low priority in health service provision across Africa. In most parts of the continent, people’s attitudes towards mental illness are strongly influenced by cultural beliefs in supernatural causes –witchcraft, etc. To be black (female) and depressed is something of a curse.

*No woman belongs to herself. You are a borrowed thing, gold for the dowry, snatch of river-song, the bowl traced thin, fasting within their sights.*



Depression is also often labeled ‘the White Man’s disease’; a condition devised by colonialists (the irony of using Christian beliefs, another colonial import, to conduct the exorcism was not lost on me). The label forms part of a larger project: the search to uncover or recover an ‘authentic’ African identity from our precolonial past. It’s a delusion. The idea of an authentic ‘Africaness’ that was commonly shared by an entire continent is a myth, one that distorts the true diversity of expressive identities that have existed on this continent before ‘the White Man arrived’.

This myth is also always looking back. It’s rooted in the idea of a static, unchanging culture - a simpler, more ‘basic’ time before the influence of the West. It plays into the thinking that continuously paints people and societies outside the West as its ‘other’, forever trapped in unchanging tradition. It makes Euro-Americanism the viewpoint and benchmark for representation and identity.

This thinking ignores liminality and border-thinking, productive spaces that many people on this continent occupy. Like me, they are immigrants, African and not, queer and queering. Our identities – both personal and national – are always in process, constantly shifting.

.

*See, the darkness is leaking from*

*the cracks.*

*I cannot contain it. I cannot contain my life.*

*I shall be a heroine of the peripheral.*

Liminality operates conversely too. Plath names it ‘the peripheral’ and traces its dimensions. It’s impossibility. How does one hold manifold identities? Particularly if those identities exist at the margins, and are regularly threatened. While highly fruitful, the liminal space is also demanding. The margin affects our living. To be endlessly in transition requires constant effort – the continual code-switching of

ourselves.

In the ward, I was preoccupied with this work. I had been admitted because of my severe depression, and a suicide attempt. On one hand, the problem was medical. An imbalance of serotonin, the slow sputtering of neurotransmitters. But it was also metaphysical, in the literal sense of the word. The Greek prefix ‘meta-’ (beyond) joins the base ‘physical’ (bodily). I had been admitted in the hopes of treating an experience that was both beyond the body and in it. In this way, depression is a liminal space. It exists between and across boundaries – the dark space between what was and what will be. In the days that followed, I would be in between. Not quite ‘healed’, but a little further from the fear that my hands would become my body’s assassin.

In that space in which I am multiply placed, my depression interacts with and intersects across my identities. There is a part of my distress, beyond chemical imbalances, that joins with the consequences of living on the margins.

*What can be done with this handful of leavings? I am only a girl, you see? I came up thin, strained across three countries, the world’s deepest river is in my blood.*

Anzaldúa calls it *la facultad*: the work done by marginalised people whose well-being is often at the mercy of others. She describes it as both an “acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak,” and a “shift in perception” honed by pain and developed most readily by “those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world”. As a tool of survival, *la facultad* allows marginalised groups to adjust to changing (and often threatening) environments. Rooted in experiences of pain and trauma, it involves a loss of innocence and a growing awareness of discrimination, fear, depression, illness, and death.

There exists a behavioral predisposition to cope hyper-actively to discrimination. The medical term is ‘John Henryism’, and generally relates to people exposed to stresses stemming from racism but it may be applied more broadly to the psyche of all those who live on the margins. To quote Claudia Rankine, “[we] achieve [our] selves to death trying to dodge the buildup of erasure.”

.

My aunt moves to stand and motions for me to do the same. The Church Man rises too and asks that we join hands.

“There is a world next to this one. There is this physical world and the spiritual one next to it. Now we are going to try to reach that other world. To do this you need to look into your heart and admit your sins. Only you know what you’ve done. We are Christians, but also only human. We can pray all day, but you won’t access God’s healing if you don’t ask Him to forgive you.”

My aunt nods vigorously in agreement. Her lace front wig shifts almost imperceptibly to the right.

*I am Eve in the garden. Crooked by nature. A crooked thing. I see the first apple. The first tree. I hear the startle of birdsong around me. I am alone. Outside the beating heart of being. I am filled with grief of want. This is the in-between.*

.

What my aunt was attempting to achieve, with the help of this stranger, was surgery.

The excision of the *meta* from the *physical*. Precise, clean, neat. I didn’t know how to tell her about the in-between. About the tangle of identities and the spillage at my ends. Exorcism is a messy business. The body and the mind are not easily parted.

History has long linked women’s mental faculties to their physicality, and both to pathology. In the Aristotelian model, the modern female body is a ‘deformed male’. [Plato](#)’s dialogue *Timaeus* compares a woman’s uterus to a living creature that wanders throughout her body, “blocking passages, obstructing breathing, and causing disease”. The concept of a pathological ‘wandering womb’ is the source of the term *hysteria*, as in ‘the hysterical woman’. I tried not to think of my organs jaunting about as I repented of my ways.

In the religious and cultural context, my aunt's thinking forms part of the colonial-Christian heritage of 'saving the savages' from their mad nature, and the exorcisms of demonic spirits presented as mental illness. Recently, there has been a strange resurgence of this tradition in parts of Africa. Across Charismatic Black churches on the continent, particularly 'mega churches', people have returned to exorcisms and supernatural healings. There has been a proliferation of 'modern prophets' who profess the gospel of health and wealth. Right now, somewhere in Limpopo, a 24-year-old self-styled prophet is spraying, in the name of Jesus Christ, insect-killing Doom in the eyes of his congregants. Mercifully, I was spared any pesticides.

I trace the roots of this revival, at least in part, to the bitter memories of foreign domination, which play a vital role in how Africans perceive themselves (and the outside world). It's the trauma of colonialism and the desperate socio-economic realities it has created. In Algeria, Frantz Fanon observed a link between the local people's belief in spirit possession and their situation of colonialism. People who face insurmountable challenges surrender their lives to the gods.

.

*Tell me, where do I put her? This girl pressed against the border, this girl swallowing her papers whole, this girl bird-wailing through a fence.*

Since being discharged, I continue to think of how I might 'treat' the margins. Narrative remains curative. I practice a poetics of disobedience. I write into being alternative spaces that allow for the existence of my multiple identities. I join a chorus of multivocal resistance by others who live on the periphery. I withstand erasure by writing with my body on the border. I pray. God with me – I die and I return. I swallow the white throat of fear.

My aunt and the man have completed their business. She stands and I lead them to the door.

"You will never need medication or a therapist again," she declares, "in Jesus' name!"



What do I say to that? Thank you? Stellar rebuking? 5 stars – would recommend?

I settle for the innocuous, “God bless you” and mean it. I still believe in the infinite life that exists in boundless spaces, and the Spirit that animates them.

# Aubade with Purgatory

Bless me father [if you'd not blind me] for I've seen— seen a woman  
Drag her son from womb to water to save him from the fire seen him thrash in  
Search of flight like a book midfall from a ledge... it's been years

Since we reduced our knees to prayers or howled our names into  
The waste of confessionals hoping they send them back our way

—

Maybe the city burns because god only swoops in when we are reduced  
To complete nudity as a man or anything that started out coy as a boy  
I do not know love other than the need to be powerless & be punished for it

I do not know home other than what I've been trying to be lately—run towards her open  
mouth

A lonely house below a stonehill but fall steadfast into forgetting before reaching

—

She said I could be anything if I put my mind to it from stoic to  
Tantrum & the smokescreen between but I chose the audacity to burn  
& breathe to be & not to be in a city turning to dust shaken off tired feet

—

I pulled my first set of teeth falling mouthfirst to the floor—a kiss to the  
Devil's scalp my sister between my mother's knees had tripped me  
Grunting afterwards the same sigh our grandfather allowed when he stroked  
His final row on a broken boat towards god

—

So I pull into a field of burning dreams cut the breathing & alight from  
My body loving—like sobriety—is wayfaring no purer penury  
Than watching a raindrop push itself towards the heat of thirsting tongue

—

& though the city burns spent as the outcry of the only forsaken son  
& the gods oblige us to fight their futile wars they let us choose  
Our own weapons our own roads to run...

# I like the sound of that

She smiled. The sadness in her eyes began to disappear.

Now that I think of it, I had never seen her smile in all the while we met.

There are days I would recall her writing to me that she cannot remember what she sounded like; her mother's call, her sister's laughter, and her pet dog, Rufus, his welcoming bark, all faded.

It started five years ago when I lost my daughter to cancer. I began aimlessly wandering around the city. I was not sure what I was hoping to achieve from such walks. There were times I would like to believe that walking brought me much needed catharsis, that the countless impressions of different faces I saw while walking helped me process pain in a more subtle light. There were times I walked out of mere routine. I was not sure what need walking satisfied. Nonetheless, I still took them each evening. It was on one of these walks I met Lami, a little girl who hawked petty snacks between traffic congestion and busy streets. There was a certain gentleness to her sad eyes as she approached me with her bean cakes that evening.

"One for twenty! Three for fifty!" She screamed.

I did not want to turn her down; hence, I took one wrap of bean cake, gave her a hundred naira note and told her to keep the change. She held it towards me and then drew it to her chest and I nodded. She squeezed the naira note and walked away. For the evenings that followed, I bought bean cakes from her.

There had been something about both her delayed reaction to my remarks and the loud, slightly odd way she dispensed her replies that made me wonder if she was deaf. This went on for days. Her response was, most times, different from my intended question. I asked what her name was and she replied, "Thank you for buying."

Initially, I assumed she suffered from some form of sensorineural hearing loss. She

obviously lived on the streets and one can never be too certain what form of viral infections of the inner ear she may have picked up and had resulted in deafness. That was when I took an interest in her, making sure I walked down the same street she hawked her bean cakes each evening. What's more, buying them when I knew they would end up in a bin by the corner of the street.

It was dark, still not night, though; the street lamps outlining the terraced pedestrian walk path lit the entire area, turning darkness into a murky brown. A few adult hawkers could be seen forcing their eatables or drinkables down motorists stuck in traffic and then giving angry hissing sounds when they did not buy.

I do not see Lami. She had not come along the street we usually met. It was cold that evening but the temperature was not unusual for street hawkers.

I began asking the hawkers if they knew a short pale-looking girl who always wore a bright green dress. Rather, I got angry stares for wasting their time and not buying any of their eatables or drinkables. A tall lanky boy with a head the size of a soccer ball was kind enough to point me in a direction. "Don't stop going until you get to the big cashew tree beside the unfinished shelters," he said. I thanked him and planted some money into his palm. I watched as his appreciation grew and he ran to a nearby kiosk.

I set out the next evening.

As the dirt road led down to a small rural settlement just between the outskirts of the city and thick bushy, interior villages that outlined the savannah, I caught sight of Lami. She proceeded into an uncompleted structure filled with teenage children just adjacent a big cashew tree as the boy with the soccer-ball-like head had said.

It was topsy-turvy. The children did not even bother to stare at me as I meandered my way through their tattered sleeping foams and scattered belongings. The children and the old dirt walls lay a melancholic siege on the entire building. Malnourished figures in sombrely worn out rags, barefoot and sweaty, roamed each crook and cranny of the large cemented floor of the three-storey structure. Every available space was occupied by raffia mats and torn mattresses. For a time, it seemed like there was not even a floor to step on. Only children and rags.



A dimly lit cooking fire just by the corner of the room gave heat to a large badly charcoaled pot which seemed to be boiling with soup of some sort. Yet, in some ways, the entire building, and its occupants had unremitting demands of hunger and starvation.

My eyes swept across the room, taking in the emotion-shy faces as I trailed Lami.

Lami sat cross-legged beside a large window of the second storey of the building. There was a lace curtain which was used to partition her section. It was bunched up into the right corner, so I was able to see. Surprisingly, her section was by far, the cleanest among the others. I found a small stool and sat, without entering her partitioned space, facing her back. I was now sure she was deaf as not so much as a flinch came from her despite the loud thud of the stool when I placed it on the ground. Still, I knew also she was not born deaf, for she spoke neatly for a deaf when we first met.

I tapped Lami on the shoulder. It was then I saw she had been crying. She angrily wiped her face and rage filled her brown eyes. She began screaming and I understood I had caught her at a very bad moment. I stood up to leave. By now a girl with big round eyes and a funny nose was staring at me. She followed me outside and ran up to me. She was not looking as sad as the rest. She smiled and I said 'Hello'. Despite her wide forehead, it was not hard to notice the striking resemblance she and Lami shared.

I remember Anna just before she died. There are days I wanted to put her out of her misery, quickly. Her skin was extremely pale. She was in absolute pain. I still ask myself what made her smile through it all. I would hold her hands, fingers all scrawny and thin and shaky. She would try to smile in between short, shallow breaths. I could not bear looking at her, smiling in pain, with eyes so tired you wish you could just close them up to rest. For eight months I had to watch her go through this agony. Each day, watching her try to smile with dry, thin lips fastidiously pursed. Each day, with both my hands, reaching out to her cold hands, and massaging them. Each day, having to listen to her muttering the words: "Daddy, don't be sad." The Tuesday she died, she was not smiling. She was not saying any

words even though I could see that she was trying to. I just held her hands, massaged them as I used to, and forced a smile amidst tears that had welled up. She just stared at me with those eyes, those dark watery deep. I tried not to cry. But who was I to hold back tears of eight months pushing to burst through? “Anna it’s going to be alright,” I managed to say. She swallowed saliva as I saw the effort she was making to nod and smile. But today was different. There was not a full smile like before but I saw a glow of vitality in the eyes of my Anna which I had not seen in a long while. Both her hands were still entangled with mine. They were warm. And as if gathering her last strength, she inhaled deeply. I kissed her palm and drew it to my cheek. They still felt warm. Then she blinked, smiled at me gently, and struggled to say, whispering: “It’s okay...okay, Da...you can cry...cry now.” And the beeping sound of the electronic machine monitoring her heartbeat flattened. My Anna was gone.

Only then, I saw my Anna in Lami. It consoled me. The past month—I had spent working with fellow psychologists and nurses and healthcare workers under an initiative to help street children—with Lami had changed my outlook on life. The inert desire to live, find happiness in life, was slowly replaced by an animated sense of care and love. I told myself I was not ever going to replace the sweet memories of my Anna. I was getting too involved with Lami, and I feared I might have begun to replace those cherished memories of Anna with her.

Yet, I could not have left Lami hopeless to the cold world at such a tender age. She had done so much on her own, even learned American sign language from the large—*Lottie L. Riekehol’s The Joy of Signing*—book I bought for her. I had made plans for her to be taken to a stable facility where she would be looked after. She would also get to interact with people like her. Hopefully, she would not be bitter all her life.

As a year dragged by, gradually, Lami and Laraba, her sister, settled into a daily routine that they found less becoming of a competitive need to survive. The necessity of that defensive personality they had acquired while on the streets wasn’t required again to survive. Still, Lami was taciturn but not to the point of complete si-

lence. One can only deduce that the harsh lifestyle she was immersed in had been a generous contributor.

On certain afternoons, I would drop by to see Lami and her sister. The nurses—in the facility where she was cared for—had probed as gently as they could to catch a glimpse of her past. It was required in order to ascertain the proper steps needed for her care and extensive recovery. At the same time, they were getting nowhere with Lami.

So, I turned to Laraba. In time, I learned that this practical, quiet child had been one with a history of whiny streaks but brilliant nonetheless, with a love for anything resembling a book. She had a fancy for drawing, too—sketches of princesses and unknown castles and flowery landscapes—only now, she made sure they always contained disturbing details of blood and death and faces with jaws that were heavily toothed. With time, though, the calmness of the new atmosphere she found herself made her positive, lessened the dark narratives contained in her sketches. She even showed signs of a natural sense of humour.

The redness in Laraba's eyes showed all the warning signs I needed to heed, to stay out of it when I asked about her parents. For days, she did not say a word to me. Not until I found her one Friday evening, crying by the tap beside the mango tree just close to the fence.

The rain had stopped and now the sour smell that rises from wet mango leaves was hanging low over the building. She quickly turned the tap on and scooped water with her hands, letting it fall freely down her face, strenuously trying to pretend that she was washing up.

I said, "It's fine. No shame in crying."

Laraba began amidst sniffing. "She wasn't born deaf. She stopped hearing eleven, maybe twelve months ago. I can't really remember but that was the time we started living here, on the streets."

She paused. I wanted to ask her what happened but I needed not to. Why, her eyes, as best as I could see, wanted it all to flow—a cathartic narrative of their plight. I encouraged her to speak, giving a sympathetic ear to a story that, for too long, she had

been forced to live with and suppress within herself.

“My father drank a lot. ‘He loved the bottle,’ people used to say. It was something I grew up to know. But it was fine I guess. Mom didn’t always complain. Lami tells me there was a time they argued every day about it. Maybe she just grew tired of complaining and stopped. After all, he was still providing for us. Still, we only felt real love from mom. We lived in fear of him. We couldn’t say what we had in our minds when he was around. He banned us from watching television. ‘This is where you learn to be arrogant and insolent,’ he would say. We watched anyway. Only this time, we switched it off an hour before he usually got home, allowing time for the heated TV to cool off.

We never went to the park with him or played outside with our mates when he was at home. He would lock us up in our rooms to read for hours upon hours until we could remember even every misspelled word we had in our school notes. He never cared about what we wanted or how we felt. We got used to it and found it abnormal to see our schoolmates telling their Dad what colour of pen to get for them. With father, anything goes for us, and so we never complained.

“One night, he came home early and saw us watching the TV. We didn’t know what to do. But mom was different. She had a kind heart. She could bear the pain for us. She came to our rescue and told him it was she who asked us to see a show with her. We ran to our rooms before he even told us to. And lying down silently, we could hear whispers from the other room which turned into crying and the sound of objects hitting the wall.

“But Lami gradually began to talk back. Slaps didn’t hold her back. He would beat her to the extent she would find it hard to shed tears. As time went on, he stopped supporting us with money. His drinking habits got worse and he lost his job. But somehow, he always had money to keep drinking. The police became frequent visitors to our house. If they weren’t bringing him back home from a gutter they picked him up from, they were calling at our house due to reports from our neighbours of a domestic disturbance. And then he would yell for silence as he had his beer. Other times, for no given reason, he’d beat us all, even Mother. Lessons, he sometimes called them. Well, we never stopped learning because the beatings never stopped.”

Laraba was now crying. I did not know if to feel pity or anger. I gave her my handkerchief and for long minutes, she cried non-stop. All the while, I made no sound except for occasional sighs. Shortly afterward, she continued.

“It was past midnight or so, but I knew it was late because Lami and I had gone to bed and later woke up when the police brought him back. The next morning, I woke up to find a different woman at home. Angry words inside mom came out that morning. She cursed and cried and cursed some more. He wasn’t sober that morning. He had woken up and continued where he left off with his bottle. He then started to hit her because that was all he knew, talking with his fists. As usual, we would lock ourselves in our room when he started and listen as mom gets beaten. That morning, Lami wasn’t crying. She just sat on the bed, fuming with anger. Then suddenly we heard mom scream. Then the screaming stopped instantly. We both ran out to find her on the floor. Her eyes were still open, facing the ceiling. No amount of crying or begging or shaking made her move, much less get up. He just stood, watching. Blood slowly flowed out of mom’s head onto the floor. Lami was filled with anger and rushed at him with blows that didn’t seem to do anything to him. Lami kept hitting and hitting and he became irritated and, so he pushed her. She slipped and hit the side of her head on the wall. That was the last day we spent in that house and the last time we saw him. We found this place and found a home here. As time passed, the result from the fall and Lami hitting her head began to show. She began to feel blood slide down her ear more frequently. She slowly became deaf.”

I pulled two sheets of paper so I could write; sort of have a conversation with Lami. She had not left the window all morning. I tapped her as I drew a seat close to her.

She began writing. ‘I may never get my hearing back again, and that’s why I love to sit by this window, turning my eyes into ears. I like watching the wind shaking trees. I like watching the sun smiling on the grass as children play. Boys running after a soccer ball and jubilations over goals scored, and the girls who are swinging a long skip rope while singing songs or maybe they are talking. I don’t know. But I like the way their mouths move together. I try to create sounds for them. It makes

me happy.'

I smiled as I read what she wrote. Then it was my turn to write.

'Laraba told me everything. You do not have to return back to the streets Lami, you and her. I know people who can help.'

Her facial expression changed immediately.

'You only know people who can feel pity for me,' she wrote angrily.

'Lami, you are far too young to fend for both yourself and your sister on the streets. It has all been arranged. I would be going for a while. This facility is temporary. The people I know are very nice. They are like the nurses here and they, too, would help you greatly. I promise. You and your sister would have better lives than being on the streets.'

'You don't have to promise me anything. Promises are only meant to decorate lies. I will go only because of my sister.'

She stood up and left the window. Nothing could be done to appease her now. I explained to Laraba that I would be back for them in about nine months' time. It had taken a long time to gain Lami's trust and reception, and now, leaving for my psychiatric residency, I was not sure if I would be welcomed if I, however, decided to come back.

It had been over a year now. This city, the one I used to call home, has lost its warm soul. You would think that acquiring a doctorate and completing a residency in psychiatry would help me better understand the minds of the human race. Oh but no, humans are far from wholly comprehensible. The level of eccentricity that governs our self-conscious minds varies. It is no longer the same city I once knew. It is scarred now. Slowly dying. Gradually reeling under the effects of the callous abuse of its soul and immoral deprivation of its resources.

The children are the cruel result of its exploitations. They are born and cast off as lots with no one to tend to their needs. Hence, they swarm the streets and find shelter under bridges and uncompleted housing structures. Their eyes tell painful tales

of abuse and suffering. It screams a blatant, yet voiceless appeal for help, hardly noticeable still. We simply carry on.

A short girl of about fifteen, or maybe sixteen years ran up to me and grabbed my coat, and pleaded for some change to get food for the day. Her hands were coarsely veined, and her slant eyes were sad too. She was wearing a dirty yellowed, oversized MALTA GUINNESS t-shirt that had been stretched to the length of her knee. Her brown khaki shorts have been patched so many times, I am not sure it can survive one more touch of a needle and thread. She had nothing on her foot. It pricked me. I felt some sort of irrational shame. She might have been the same age as my Anna if she had still been alive. I hand over some notes to her without even looking at how much.

I was now five minutes away from the facility. The park was brimming with life. It was Friday, mid-afternoon when the place buzzed with young and old alike. It was a symphony of sound: people chattered inaudibly; metallic sounds from lubricated swings; frolicsome children laughed; clicks from the lawn mower by the path railings. I remembered my last time in the park with Anna. I remembered her bright red dress and maroon-coloured stripped scandals. Yoghurt all over her face, the sound of her laughter echoes in my head. I still hold on to that playful memory to remind me of what happiness, true happiness felt like. As ordinary as it appears, it sometimes assuages my feelings of loneliness.

I arrived at the facility.

After I filled in my details, a nurse was assigned to take me to Lami. 'Lami has not tried communicating with anyone in months,' she explained, 'do not be discouraged if your visit shows no results. It's quite normal. But if you keep coming back, time might begin to smooth things out.'

Down the hallway and now inside the large hall filled with young people, it was quite easy to spot Lami. There she sat, by the large window, to the corner of the hall, which poured out a nice view of the park: a sea of people walking in and out the green painted wrought-iron gates; the greenness of grass, leaves, and shrubs, and the brown barks of the trees that outlined the concrete pathway.



I had not considered what I would do if she was not receptive. The thoughts of rejection began filling my mind and I was hesitant. The nurse noticed this and went over to tap Lami. I had no inkling of how acutely she would react to my presence.

Her brown lucid eyes gleamed with surprise. I stood staring, she did too. For what seemed like long seconds, we kept staring. I sighed slowly and lifted my hands, suspended it in the air just mildly below the chest region. It was time-tasking, but I wanted to sign all the words for her. The way she liked.

‘I kept my promise. I came back and learned sign language.’

Narrowing her eyes towards me, her gaze drifted from my moving hands to my face and back. I could see tears gradually forming in those sad eyes. I was not sure what they meant, yet, I continued signing.

‘Let’s go for a walk in the park. The sun is out, smiling. The weather is happy.’

She smiled. The sadness in her eyes began to disappear.

Now that I think of it, I had never seen her smile in all the while we met.

Shyly, as she still smiled, with tears running down her cheeks, she signed: ‘I like the sound of that.’



**Akhona Mbange**  
*Siblings*

Ernest Ogunyemi

# a conversation with my father

eighteen, I get a question like this from father:

*what dream do you carry in your chest?*

I tell my father:

*my dream is to be happy.*

he looks me deep in the eye,  
tongue playing in his cheek,  
then spits:

*what does it mean to be happy?*

I answer that:

*it's waking up to dawn undone,  
knowing that your life is yours to own,  
that no iron or plastic bars can cage  
what you are.*

he asks:

*what are you?*

I look out at a roof, Mama Adugbo's,  
point at a cuckoo playing with its body:

*there,            there is.    what I am.*

*a bird?*

my father asks.

*yes:*

I say.

my father asks no other question.

he rises, a short man,  
goes out the door,  
walks by the window,  
climbs up the roof,  
grabs the bird with one hand  
and breaks my wings with the other.

*lest you fly into fire.*

# A Language of the Unconscious

These birds never sing. They rendezvous on withered branches retelling tales of their former lives, much to the younger ones' scepticism. They claim they were once stars in the most resplendent corners of the sky. That they flew high into the sky shaping our fates and deciding on our destiny. They say these trapped souls of theirs are a form of punishment for their disobedience to the supreme deity. Apparently, they had wandered off their hedge, accosting female stars with an audacious air of insolence and an expected automatic compliance. They say they flew as if they played an integral part in the rigours of creation, often stretching their ability and challenging their limits. I heard them say- in a husky whisper- that they even contacted the Lord of the underworld which they conceded to be the height of their transgressions, hence, their flitting from pillar to post, building nests that do not only demean their former place but expose them to the brimming sun and a once sympathetic rain.

As the younger ones half listened in disbelief, dreams seduced them into its perfection, and they were lulled into sleep on account of their will, painting delectable portraits of decayed fruits and rotten moin-moin on canvasses of incinerators and putrid bins. Noticing its younger ones were traversing out of attention, the Father-Bird poked their heads with its big, sharp and painful beak. 'This is an important part of your history, you monkeys' it said. 'Listen, or I'll make you fly with broken wings'. The mean reality in their father's voice sprung life through their diminutive bodies, they flapped their wings sequentially- they say it is an old Rheidae tradition embedded early in the little ones; a symbol of complete submission. Their father continued in the glorification of their past lives, reiterating their rank amongst the higher stars; the esoteric teachings through which they soared and the mystical doctrines which can only found in the holy scroll of birds. The rather peculiar one was the mysterious means with which they claimed water sprung within coconuts.

They exposed their little ones to many truths, speaking in the language of moths so as to scramble my dream, from which I perused their gathering. However, they were glaringly ignorant of my own pedigree, that I'm half familiar with the language from the twelve seasons I spent in the six illuminated realms of fireflies, where we all day wove beautiful tapestries that came alive on even nights. In return for the favour they taught me their language (which they said was close to that of moths) and they shared with me their dreams and secret teachings.

The Father-bird looked forlorn, it stared at the little ones with distant eyes, its quest into their past had re-invited nostalgia and sorrow into their lives, it wanted to return to its days of grace, it wanted once again to be a celestial body, to fly lofty beyond the clouds and to be regarded high in the scheme of things. Its countenance inspired a little one to ask a question. It wanted to impress their father; to at least appear interested in what they all thought to be arrant folklore. It said:

'But father that's our past and from your teachings you say although there are many things in life we'll miss, it's important to keep moving forward. Wouldn't you rather complete your transformation? I mean becoming a human being, we the chicks have always dreamt of being human and grandfather told us it's the last stage in the cycle of transformation, till the ouroboros effect begins all over again'.

The reflection of wit in its chick's speech thrust upon the Father-bird an expansive smile. Although it didn't agree with the doctrine its father had imparted into its younger ones, the understanding of elements such as transformation and ouroboros were things it was happy its chicks had some comprehension of. But these things should not be misconstrued it thought.

'Now listen, human beings are not that special you see' he started. 'Here in this dimension, they are the highest in the hierarchy of favour, understood. No! Okay! I think I should start with this: there are so many things you chicks still need to know and understand, then you'll become wise. Firstly, there are seven dimensions in this

reality, you see. Seven dimensions! In each dimension, reality is regarded or lived differently. Don't ever look down upon yourself because in another dimension you are kings. I'll give you an example, in the fourth dimension, cattle are the favoured beings. They take the place of humans while humans replace them in the order of things. Here, you see cattle being slaughtered by humans and you feel pity, do not, there's an inexplicable complexity to this universe. In the fourth dimension it is humans who are slaughtered by cattle to appease Zahia (the cattle form of Gaia), the great mother of Earth who springs forth grass for their upkeep. 'Yes, transformation does occur, but it's for us to return to immortality, our former place, our permanent place'.

The Father-bird's knowledge of the mazy layers of reality mesmerised the universe. I heard two sylphs ask each other how these birds knew so much. The power and authority in the Father-bird's speech made even the wind seize in order to listen. I felt an overwhelming heat beleaguer me. The moon abandoned its nightly duty and snuck out of the sky just so it could gain in the wisdom that fluttered through the mist. They didn't notice its lunar immanence; I did. It was large and brilliantly illuminated, which I thought was quite ironic.

The Father-bird continued as if it were reading out of an ancient scroll of ethereal knowledge. Its eyes were bright and curiously human, its pupils glistened as it gesticulated. It spoke with so much eloquence and conviction that I started to wish I were a bird. I continued to peer into their little lives with menacing admiration. It appeared little to me, perhaps, because I looked at them from the outside in. I was able to peruse their entire existence through a prism of complete oneness. Their past, present and future co-existed simultaneously, we floated in a timeless space. I saw their confined souls, their fixated ability and their frustrated dreams of time travel. Even with all these limitations, something peculiar attracted me to the realm. I wanted to be part of their world as the little ones desperately wanted to be mine. I wanted to soar into the world on nights the deepest self would enjoy but those conscience would judge. I wanted to perceive the many hideous things only the night permitted. Their world looked superficially simple, as if they were without worries; as if their primary fear wasn't death; as if they had no pressure of continui-



ty; as if they weren't competitive amongst themselves. I thought like most mortals, bereft of imagination, devoid of the concept of possibilities, ignorant about the actual essence of all existence, but that was soon to change, I was soon to be transformed, my mind was soon to be refined by birds who now spoke in the language of shadows that had a baritone sweetness and equal encryption to it. But above all, the many doors that locked us out of all spheres of reality were soon to open.

I all along thought they hadn't noticed the sylphs, but the Father bird suddenly turned to them and spoke in the most subtle of tones, as one enchanted. It said softly:

'You find the meaning of life incomprehensible don't you?' The sylphs nodded their heads as one ashamed after being caught and questioned in an abominable act.

'Well, do you believe that the most easily accessible knowledge in life is the essence of one's own existence?'

'How is this possible father when Grand-Father said most people live their entire lives without even knowing why they were born.' The same chick interjected, however, this time, with genuine interest.

'It is because they have forgotten'.

'Forgotten what? I don't understand'.

'You see my dear, like I said earlier, there is a place where we all belong, our permanent place, a place where we were before we came to this world. A place of utter tranquillity, simplicity, knowledge, innocence and bliss. But, because our wants were insatiable, we struggled for elaborateness, we weren't satisfied with simplicity so we asked the creator for more. We saw earth being built and we wanted a part in it. All of us: birds, sheep, humans, lions, tigers, spiders; really, all of us. And then because our desires were directed towards a uniform place, our daily lives became insipid; we found our cocoon of perfection boring. We wanted imperfection, we wanted novelty, anything but the conventional, so we contacted, invariably, the



Lord of the underworld for his most grotesque vices. Doubt, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, dishonesty and gluttony were channelled as a way to infuriate the creator so we could be banished. These vices soiled our impeccable home so much that the creator acted accordingly. We got our wish, we were sent out. Sheep left in numbers and chickens came hatched in eggs. We were thrown into the many layers of reality and reminded that one day we'd come back after we'd suffered for our sins and atoned for our misgivings. However, the creator felt there was no positivity to this end so he gave us tasks and purposes that would bring our minds back to the inception. We all had to further our different races and build on in our various capacities the work he'd already started. You see, we all have to keep building in as many batches as we come because no work is ever truly finished. Each of us has a role to play in the continuity of this universe. We were shown in great detail but the rigours of birth superficially liquidate the brain to newness. We knew all about our lives and our purpose but the herculean struggle to begin erases the accessible parts of that memory. Hence, *deja vu*: a slight flash of detail about a life already seen but forgotten; a life we know like it's already been lived. The truth about all is tethered to our personal unconscious, this is why often times the future is revealed to us in dreams because although we by all means cannot remember it, it is locked somewhere in our minds and the subconscious sets it free to roam. However, I can teach you how to remember all,' it smiled.

The last sentence caught our attention, everyone drew closer with great attentiveness to learn what could perhaps be the most evolutionary ability the mind could ever conceive. Noticing our eagerness for knowledge and power, the Father-bird withdrew, realising it'd perhaps said too much. It looked around with eyes that had suddenly withdrawn from trust. 'Not today, however', it said aloud. 'Maybe some other time', winking at its chicks.

We all dispersed in disappointment, displacing all the things taught like they were mere ramblings from a creature that suffered from a severe case of *logorrhoea*. At this time the sun began to tower above us in its suffusing brightness. Cracks began

to show in my dream, I saw a gaping hole within the moon. In it were frogs whose heads drooped over a quantum of indescribable equipment. They had melancholy etched on their skin. I looked closer and realised it was another reality where frogs were erudite scholars. They attempted to solve mystical mathematical theories they believed would give definitive meanings to the complexities of faith and reason. A frog looked up, saw me and released an unearthly squeal that broke the barriers of reality. Suddenly, all became one. The seven realities converged into a single sphere and strange things began to happen. People walked into the wind and were never again seen. I saw goats with heads on both ends of their bodies and tortoises that beat the speed of sound with their pace. They boasted of it as they strutted in front a clan of patient cheetahs. Those who woke up into the sun's dream lost their sanity instantaneously.

I saw the sun fishing with the rain. They both complained all afternoon that the fishes had become clever; the rain lamented that the sun was too bright to be inconspicuous, that its reflection was felt at the bottom of the stream.

'So now, what do you want me to do about that 'Mr Camouflage', it's not like you're better hidden yourself, are you?' the sun said.

'At least I'm not as irritating as you' replied the rain. The sun laughed, the reverberation of its emotion shook the grounds of the river. Something caught my attention as I struggled for balance, I saw something strange within the sun's mouth. There were dead stars in it. A sudden education, one that surprised the sun itself as it looked ignorant of their presence hitherto. The stars had died for thousands of years yet their light shone through the timeless enclave, they had deep history and many forgotten secrets of astrology etched on their remains. In it, I learned that rats fart recklessly and as frequently as they dream, and that they possess a far tranquil subconscious. I stared deep in disbelief.

'Idiot', the sun said.

'Try to act civilised', replied the rain. 'A little argument and you start to throw

around insults'.

'That wasn't an insult, it's what you are', the sun laughed louder and suddenly the fishes emerged, scampering, screaming and warning one another in their language. Their words were inaudible. Soon afterwards, they all disappeared again. The rain shouted,

'They came out, I saw them'.

'Nonsense,' the sun retorted.

'You've started with these your stupid jokes'.

'No, I saw them when you were laughing'.

'No, you didn't; I was laughing not sleeping'. They bickered for long in their contrasting grace. I was bemused at first then wondered at the ridiculousness of the picture. This pandemonium lasted a while then order was restored. Realities re-filled their spaces, animals looked and acted their usual selves but the insane could no longer find a way out of their labyrinthine confusion. People later convinced one another that their insanity was as a result of their consumption of Indian-Hemp. Something happened to me too after normalcy was restored. My sight took an acute turn from its vivid clarity. My stomach became taut. Everything darkened. I became lost within my own dream; I struggled to see. The world suddenly became filled with secondary and balanced colours. I saw trees with wings protesting to the sun about its bias. They claimed its favourite was Africa, that it abandons the rest for many months each year. They chanted 'EQUALITY FOR ALL' in their language that had a sweet rustling sound. I began to feel overwhelmed from the after-effect of the convergence. My brain began to feel heavy within my skull. I wanted out. I tried to wake into the bigger dream of reality but I couldn't. I tried many techniques to no avail. I gave up momentarily and decided to enjoy the mystery. I walked a short distance and came upon two young men who waited for their friend so they could all dream. They were aspiring singers. Their ambition made the air dense. I greeted them as I tried to squeeze past but they looked on, completely ignoring me. Suddenly, they turned to me and raised their palms, I stared back in slight bewilderment. They asked if I were a seer.

‘Excuse me’?

‘Young man, he asked if you're a seer', the other one said in an authoritative tone.

‘No, I’m not.’

‘Why?’.

‘Why!?’

‘Yes. Why?’

‘Cause I'm just not',

‘If you're not a seer, how did you get here then? You're a liar.’

‘Please, help us', the first one seemed more accustomed to manners.

‘I don't know how to, I'm sorry',

I walked on. Although I could see their future - as their fates were to an extent parallel shaped and inextricably linked-, I had to lie to them. I did because of their misfortune. Their futures were bleak. I saw that although they'd become a famous and popular group, greed and selfishness would tear apart their union and the least talented of the group, the one they awaited, would go solo and become the immortal star, but they would be buried in a forgotten past.

'Ignorance isn't bliss afterall', muttered the one with better manners.

I stopped and turned around, they looked at me with a lustful burrowing. I asked for directions and they smiled, pointing in opposite directions; they then released a jagged laughter they borrowed from the depths of spite. I ignored them and walked on. After walking a short distance, I saw a portal. On it was a banner that read:

'Òré kan kítíkítí, ìye kan kàtàkàtà, ijó t'òré kítíkítí bá kú, ìye kan kàtàkàtà ní'ókù'.

I digested the profound words and sighed. I walked into the portal and everything went completely dark, then a dim light shone at the end of the portal. I walked care-

fully towards the light ignoring the different sounds that reverberated within. Suddenly, I found myself traversing without effort towards the light. I realised the light shone brighter as I moved closer. The light affected my eyes and I could feel my mind fattening. My head grew bigger then everything turned yellow, then pitch black.

I woke up to find myself in my father's barn surrounded by sheaves that breathed heavily above me. I heard a familiar voice from a distant space. It took some memory searching before I realised it was the Father-bird's voice. It sounded like something struggling to reach the four corners of the universe. It screamed as one being subdued by the guardians of the first teachings.

'Rejoice in whatever form you find yourself', it bellowed. 'We are all kings. Many will come back in different forms. Men will come again as spiders and sheep will be pirates'. I looked on with eyes adjusting to the spells of colour. I was already late. It was 11:27am.

Kofi Antwi

# Southern Gospel

beyond grass-fields occupied by serpent snakes transcribe bluish black wounds, laminated; licks upon forgotten daze, pastors summersault over biblical hymns, praise exodus verse, while southern belle yearn Ivory Coast skin, an overshadow rises as false profits profit off backs of men who pave, blurred lines repeat as abstraction mimics unspoken testimonies, a furry of corrupted sources remain untapped, as street hustlers feed *Uncle Sam's* tab, but momma is left with the bill, taxed; as the casket shuts on another lost brother's soul.



**Penda Diakité**  
*Black Noise*



# A Souvenir of Me

1.

One afternoon, I saw a mannequin in a building that was falling apart. The outstretched wrists were tied to the railings with a thin red piece of clothing. The mannequin appeared as though a gentle wind would topple it, but at the very moment, it was standing, as if by being upright—shoulders square, chest out, empty eyes fixed on the rowdy road before it—it could compensate for everything else crumbling.

2.

A schoolboy bent and gently rubbed the skin around a small open wound on his left leg. Then he stood, hands on hip, eyes faraway into the distance, perhaps wondering why the school seemed unusually far today, and if his legs would be able to carry him all the way. The sun rose behind him, pink and warm, oblivious of the world that breaks people open and breaks them apart.

3.

Something had been happening inside his body. But it was not until something went wrong in his spine and he could not walk properly, that he started to pay attention. And so for many months, after several surgeries, and severe pain was eating into his back and legs, he took evening walks in the compound. He needed to exercise, strengthen his muscles. With a neck brace and a walking stick in hand, he walked, slowly, his footfalls making a crunchy sound on the granite. I stood behind the wine curtains, watching him struggle to lift one leg after another, one after another—all the while crying and praying quietly: God please, don't let him fall.

4.

A woman on Twitter left her husband because he told her to cook. She had gone into the kitchen and, as she was washing the chicken, something snapped inside her. She had just been discharged from the hospital, you see, after having a preemie. She wrote that although she was strong enough to prepare the food, she left the chicken in the sink, washed her hands, went into the room and packed her things. She just knew she had to leave.

5.

*Snap.* I have often thought about the woman's choice of that word. I imagine this *snap* to have a soul. A small voice—small, but with a certain conviction and finality. Like the *still, small voice* that spoke to Elijah on Mount Horeb. Every part of her soul assembled to speak to her as she prepared to cook, and all she could do was save herself.

Things snap when they no longer have room to take more. A stretched rubber band exceeding its elastic limit; skin, following an abrasion; a weak artery in the brain, after years of pressure. The day the blood vessel would give way and spill its content into the brain would be like any other day. You could stand from where you've been sitting, as my step-sister did that morning, and only manage to open your mouth to tell the people around you have a splitting headache, before falling, slipping into a coma, and then into death the following day: Aneurysm. Bodies snap too.

6.

Fear crept in one night, quietly, as stream water meandering on a hot day. It whispered something into my ears and I turned to look back. I saw the period my eyes suddenly started twitching; the times my thumb and index finger had a life of their own, moving of their own will – the same way my father's fingers twitched many years before the anomaly manifested in his spinal cord. It turned to me and asked: what manner of grief lay quietly in your genes now, moving with your blood, convo-

luted with your neurons?

Fear came after the third strike, which came with a mass. After years of unrelenting headaches, my sister discovered the migraine diagnosis she'd been medicating for was wrong after all; there was a tumour in her brain. The surgery came and I began to think to myself, *are these all connected, or is this some baseless fear?*

One is an occurrence

Two is a coincidence

Three is a pattern

Blood is an efficient messenger.

7.

The surgery went. And I replaced the fear with an absurd hope that nothing was going to happen to me.

8.

That afternoon, as I walked away from the building, I kept thinking about the mannequin. *Oh god, it'll fall. It'll fall soon.* And it bothered me deeply. So deeply I fought the urge to weep. But in that brief moment that I watched, it stood upright. And oh, it was such a relief, seeing it stand tall like that in the midst of chaos. And isn't it such a wonder, that in a world that offers pain until one falls apart, life's small joys serve as banisters so we can journey on?

For so long, I carried with me a dread of falling. Not my own fall—the final fall—but of those I love. But to live in fear is to suffer.

I never saw my father fall. For many years, I have watched him, as Thomas wrote, *rage, rage, against the dying of the light.* Oh, what a relief to have him still standing. Because to live is to rage.

# Anorexia Nervosa

[nûr-vō'sə]

An eating disorder<sup>1</sup> characterized by a distorted body-image<sup>2</sup>, fear of becoming obese<sup>3</sup>, persistent aversion to food, and severe weight loss<sup>4</sup> and malnutrition. It most commonly affects teenage girls and young women, who often develop amenorrhea<sup>5</sup>, osteoporosis, depression<sup>6</sup> and sometimes death.

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1        the first time i told my parents about depression  
my father recoiled like a gun, my mother —tender  
as the palms of evening sun—, folded into a smile  
and asked if i was alright.

when a body is set on fire  
do you save the man inside  
the moon or the light thrown  
upon the face of the sea?

& indeed  
no one  
knows  
what  
creaks  
the floor

except what creaks it

2        pear-shaped girl with curly hair  
broken in all beautiful ways

turbulent / i held a sea shell  
to my ear at the beach when  
i was four / the rancorous silence  
still burn in my ear / it still reminds

of my little brother swallowed by the  
beach that evening / his body  
dancing lifeless to the music  
of waves / my mother's heavy  
body crashing into the silt / &  
a father's long walk  
his shadow the body-image of a god sliced  
into a plate of grief formed a portion of the night

3      a fallout bird  
        little brown kite broken by wind  
            a country too heavy for its people  
                music too loud for ears  
                    grief beaten into a lake  
                        history has a way of retelling itself  
                        my grandmother died by hanging  
                her body clenched into a  
                fist & knocked itself out

4          *i fear my mind*  
*is a horizon*  
*that sets itself ablaze*

                    i am afraid of losing you  
because you are the sea to me  
                    (afraid)  
i read my brother's letter aloud  
to start a church (of people crying)  
in our house  
                    (burning)  
my eyes  
                    no longer  
measure the height  
of my suffocator's shadow

5      for god so loved me

- a. *he gave me a brother that crashed in a sea*
- b. *he died for me but i still bleed his sins*
- c. *sedative drugs no longer command my body to sleep*
- d. *one day, the body will take flight*
- e. *he prepared a place for me in my mind, a burning paradise*
- f. *he gave me an alternate reality of stones, a little boy drowns in my dream  
but he does not carry the face of my brother*
- g. *my brother will come back to us*
- h. *he kept my tiny soul in a big body*
- i. *he planted a petal of thorns in a broken vase*
- j. *all the above...*

6     broken girl—  
*pick up your pieces*

*you filth. you big  
broken map. you puzzle  
of a body. pick the fuck  
up and don't make this  
room a mess. you  
stink. you...*

(scream)

i throw a dart  
of words at myself.  
mistakes made by  
~~genetics~~ self can't  
be undone in prayer.

may the ground open  
in a room full of people  
& swallow me.

*you lake, smelly fat ass  
leave a note for your mother  
and hang the fuck away*

*what is a war when you can't fight it?*

## Jarred Thompson

# Scabbing

The door to my new apartment needed a little nudge, but eventually it gave way opening onto a new, dark space—deserted and quiet. Nina would have commented on the smell first I think—a vague citrus I presumed the realtor sprayed a few hours ago to freshen up the place. Parts of me laid in boxes on the floor, organized round the few things I had that made up a kitchen, lounge, bathroom and bedroom. Dust piled itself on every surface—it always amazed me how it did that, getting onto everything despite our best efforts.

Tonight would be the first night I sleep alone in five years and I couldn't help but wonder where Nina was sleeping. But at the same time I didn't want to know. On the bed, covered in two blankets and eating nachos, I watched reruns of Will and Grace until I fell asleep.

The next morning I hauled myself up, deciding to take a walk through Kilarney Park. A tiny, itchy feeling had settled at the back of my throat during the night and I knew that meant I might be coming down with something if I didn't nip it in the bud quick. But that was a concern for later, right now all I wanted was to sit under a tree and try not to think about Nina for at least an hour.

If thoughts are a flowing river then Nina was my whirlpool: everything spiralled round and back to her; which was strange given the email I sent declaring her systematic removal from my life. They say that's one of the things that define the human condition: an ability to believe in two or more contradictory things. I always harboured the suspicion that Nina wasn't fully human though. She saw things differently, did things differently and somehow managed to shrink everyone round her to mere mortal size in the process.

One evening she came home with two capsules of MDMA. I got them from Eric, she said, glinting at me.

“He says it's a real magic experience to share it with someone you love.”



“So you love me then?”

“I thought that much was obvious.”

“You’ve never said it.”

“Well that’s because saying it is so cliché. I thought we had moved past clichés.”

“Clichés are nice from time to time. The odd bouquet of flowers wouldn’t kill you.”

We laughed, even though I knew there was some truth behind what I’d said. Later, we took the pills and ended up in the complex’s pool, naked—Nina’s fingers conducting a symphony from out my body.

Kilarney Park is a small stretch of green amongst the blocks of apartments that congregate around it. Each apartment has its own style to it. There’s the white-walled Mediterranean-style building opposite mine, and the Italian Villa-style building that overlooks the park. Then there’s my building which has more of an industrial feel to it. But all in all when you’re in Kilarney it generally feels like you’re in your own perfect white bubble. Sure, there are black people who walk through on their way to work, blacks who walk their boss’s dogs in the park and certainly blacks who live in some of the apartments. But mostly it’s a white neighbourhood. One can tell that from the cleanliness of the area and the pillars of silence that file into the air when the commotion of cars fades away. Perhaps, I’m being stereotypical; perhaps heartbreak rids one of any devotion to political correctness.

Everyone here seems to look as if they know you’re new to the area. They try and catch your eye when you walk past—black and white alike—and I hesitate as to whether I should greet them or not. It would seem like the polite thing to do, but sometimes politeness is tiresome; sometimes you just want to sit in a park and not be bothered by anyone or anything.

How do you manage to be polite and mean simultaneously? I asked Nina at the counter of a CNA as we were returning faulty ink cartridges. She was working on a new art installation that reflected on the possibilities of creativity in the every-

day technological devices that surrounded us. She was smart like that: always on the cusp, pushing the boundaries in her field.

“Well I think you can say mean things in a nice way. You know, like the Victorians used to do. Insult through euphemism: a lost art form if you ask me.” She squeezed my hand and cradled her head in the nape of my neck, making the man at the counter ogle at us before getting embarrassed and returning his eyes to the monitor in front of him.

I’ve always had a problem with eyes. Their unpredictability unnerves me: being still and reticent for a lasting moment they can, suddenly, jut out in any direction, catching you in their gaze. It’s that sense of being caught by someone else, knowing they’re thinking something about you, but you have no idea what. Sure, eyes are useful in their spinning 360 degree kind of way, condensing the world to guide you through it. But I can’t help but wonder if they condense the world too much, if they block us from moving in different directions.

I was staring off into the distance in the park, thinking about eyes and Nina, when a man walked into my field of vision. He wore dark blue overalls, thick black boots and carried a shovel over his shoulder. I assumed he was the landscaper of the park. He was bulky, but not in an obese kind of way; it suited his frame and he carried himself like he was balancing a bowl of water on his head.

As the man walked past me he suddenly turned to face me and, catching my eye, he smiled and said hello. It was so white—his teeth I mean—and its whiteness overshadowed anything I felt at that moment. I felt lighter for that brief moment, caught in his glimpse and able to reach out and greet back.

“You’re new to the area?” He asked, resting his shovel in the earth near the tree I was sitting under.

“Yes, how did you know?”

“Saw you directing guys with boxes yesterday. Well welcome, I’m sure you’ll like it here.”

“Thanks, I’m sure I will.” I said, tightening my lips into a forced smile. “What’s your name?”

“Sfiso. Yours?”

“Rebecca.”

I wanted to say more; there was a gleam from his face that warmed me. I felt like I needed a friendly face, but I couldn’t shake this hollow feeling of being transplanted in a body I wished so much to be part of but that felt populated with another human being who made it clear that I wasn’t enough for them.

I spent the rest of the day unpacking and cleaning, naming and claiming the different spaces in the apartment. This was where I’d hang my keys, here was where I’d toss the mail, and over there was where I’d hang my favourite painting—one that Nina made for me. The painting was called *Scabbing* and was part of her *Worlds and Wounds* exhibition at the Wits Arts Museum. The background was a coffee brown, the same tone as my skin. It spiralled in a circular motion, opening into these dark maroons, fresh reds and light brushstrokes of pink. This she began to cover with clotted blobs of black, brown and some fine touches of white between the black and brown blobs of paint. This was, as Nina later related to me, to give the impression of a wound scabbing, drying out, healing.

“That’s all we ever do in this life anyway. Bleed and Scab”. Nina said when we got home from the opening night of *Worlds and Wounds*. She never spoke about her work while she made it, choosing to discuss it with me only after it opened to the public.

“So what makes *you* bleed babe?” I pressed her up against the doorframe of our flat, red wine on my breath, kissing her neck, tasting perfume mixed with notes of perspiration.

“Being a woman I bleed monthly.” She nudged me off of her and went out on-to the balcony to smoke.

“You’re doing that a lot these days.”

“Doing what?”

“Avoiding my questions. Avoiding really speaking to me about yourself.”

“That’s not what I’m doing.”

“Then what is it?” Nina blew an arrow-like puff of smoke into the air as I watched her from the threshold of the balcony.

“I don’t think this is working for me anymore.” She turned to face me with those dark eyes of hers; eyes that were the depths of ecstasy in which I drowned myself, willingly. But now those deep, dark eyes were just two cigarette burns pressed into the place where our love for each other wove a tapestry of safety.

Mounds of indiscriminate dust were gathered and scooped up, five buckets of dirty water were poured down the drain, mirrors were wiped translucent and clear and the smell of lavender-scented Mr Min now wafted off every wooden surface. I succeeded in ridding this new apartment of mine from its decayed history and, sitting down on the couch, I knock back an entire bottle of Chardonnay. I’m not sure why but I decided to place *Scabbing* in the lounge where I could stare at it while drunk and listening to FKA Twigs simmer on the airwaves.

I didn’t make her *feel* enough, she said. Didn’t reach right into the mess of her and truly *get* her. But did she ever really *get* me? Sure, I was just a marketing consultant, nothing as sophisticated as a rising star in the art world like she was, but I tried to understand her work, and who she when she was working. Nina always treated me like I was part of the public, like I was an audience for her brilliance.

“Enough!” I shout into the deserted apartment. “No more mellowing, no more simmering. She’s gone okay! Deal with it.” I tell myself, pouring the last bit of wine and slipping into bed.

The next morning my head is throbbing but I don’t let that stop me from putting on my running shorts and shoes and heading out for a morning run before work. I’m getting use to the sights of the morning here in Kilarney: the men who rummage through garbage, the scuttling of the carts that carry recyclable plastic and bottles. The snoozing cars warming up at the traffic lights, the security guards who stare at you with sleep in their eyes. For a moment I begin to think that this area will begin to accept me as I accept me in it.

I run past Kilarney Park and see Sfiso sitting on a bench eating a sandwich.

“What’s for breakfast?” I ask, brushing hair out my face.

“Just some peanut butter.” He smiles. I can see he is unsure of what to say next.

“So I know this is really strange but you’re the only person I’ve been introduced to here and I’d rather not spend another night alone with an entire bottle of wine. So would you like to come over and have dinner with me?”

He’s taken aback by my question. He looks embarrassed. He’s probably not used to a woman asking him to dinner, I think. Maybe in his culture that’s a man’s job?

“I live in Soweto and if I don’t catch the evening taxis home I have no way to get home.”

“Oh, I can take you home if that’s a problem.”

“You sure?” His question seems to mean ‘you sure you’re not scared of driving through Soweto at night?’

“Yes, I’m sure.” I reply, trying to signal to him through my confidence that I’m quite comfortable being in Soweto at any time of day, thanks to Nina.

“Well okay. What time?”

“Come at 7. Devon Place. 405.”

“I’ll be there he.” He says, wolfing down the last of his sandwich and drinking from a bottle of water. I nod and head off in the direction of my apartment, thinking about what I can make tonight.

Nina and I once got lost in Soweto at night. We were coming from one of her artsy friend’s place. It was 10pm and I was getting worried about our safety in the area

“Would you please relax!” She said, rolling her eyes at me.

“Relax? We’re stranded at night in Soweto of all places. What are a coloured

and a white women supposed to do here, sticking out like sore thumbs.”She sighed and got out the car. I got out with her to make sure she was okay.

“The night sky looks different here. You notice that?” She said.

“What do you mean?”

“I guess it seems closer in a weird way.”

“It looks the same Nina.”

Her lips pressed together and drooped when I said that. I think that was the moment she realized she was going to break up with me.

“Wait here.” She bolted off the road toward the nearest house that had its light on. I stood by the car, shivering, and watched as she knocked on a stranger’s house, told them our situation and called me over.

That was the night we met the Ndlovu’s—a welcoming family whose flamboyant son was clearly gay but whose family was not ready to see it, let alone accept it. They put us up in their back room for the night, saying we’d only manage to get someone to come to this area in the morning. We accepted their generosity—Nina doing most of the talking—and later settled into the bed in the backroom, with our backs facing each other.

It was 7pm. The pasta was steaming, the chicken was grilled and the vegetables were hot. Sfiso walked through the door at five past seven, wearing a fresh buttoned-up black shirt and jeans. I didn’t expect him to have changed from out of his work clothes, and this expectation that I had of him unsettled me somewhat.

We ate and drank white wine on the balcony overlooking the pool.

“My dad was a gardener and his dad too. It’s always been in my family. I just decided to take on a fancier name for it.” He sipped slowly on his wine; I found myself watching the way his lips gripped the brim of the crystal.

“Landscaping is an art form I think. It takes a real eye for space, shape and colour to bring together different plants and make them work together.”

“My family just think I do gardening for Joburg Parks.” We laughed as I re-

filled our glasses.

“So you work at other parks all over the city I’m assuming? Must be busy job right?”

“It can be. It’s pretty physical too. But I enjoy sinking my hands into the earth, feeling it fall through my fingers. There’s nothing like it. What about you? What’s your story?”

I take a gulp of wine before I answer. “Well, I’m a marketing consultant. Basically, I help companies design campaigns and advertising strategies for products.”

“And what made you decide to move here?”

“I just got out a relationship with my girlfriend, and I needed a change of scenery.”

“Girlfriend huh.” He says, and I can almost hear the gears in his mind working overtime. So I decide to put him at ease.

“I’m bisexual in case you were wondering.”

“Oh, that means you...” He doesn’t finish his sentence, instead choosing to perform a wagging gesture with his index finger.

“Yes, it means either women or men. It doesn’t matter.”

“Wow okay. I don’t mean to offend you but I always thought people like you were lying. I mean liking both men and women. That must be a headache. So many options to choose from.”

“You’d think so huh.” I giggle, sitting back in my seat and feeling all the times I’ve had to explain my sexuality throb in the back of my head.

“I hope I didn’t offend you.”

“Oh no, you didn’t. I get it a lot. You know it’s really not so much about what the person has down there. Sure, it plays a role in what happens in the bedroom. But if you think about it, every time two bodies come together in that way—two men, two women, man and woman—a unique dance takes place. And what my girlfriend, or I should say ex-girlfriend, always said is that the dance depends on the shape. ‘It’s all shapes darling,’ is what she use to say, ‘and the sounds you can make

when you bang hollow parts against solid surfaces.”

“I never thought of it like that. You’re a smart woman.”

“That’s my ex talking.”

“No it’s not. I don’t see your ex sitting next to me. That’s you.”

He reached out to hold my hand and I could feel callouses on the ridge of his palms. Without thinking, my nails began to scratch at them.

“I’m sorry. My hands are kinda rough.”

“I don’t mind.”

I started massaging his palms, feeling the tightness of his muscle between his thumb and forefinger.

“That feels really good and really painful.” He sighed, putting his head down on the table as I rubbed his palms. Norah Jones started playing in the background as I watched his body contort the tension out of itself. Seeing Sfiso like that, so vulnerable in my hands, I slipped out from underneath my thoughts, observing the tight muscle in his palms make space for blood to flow again.

The next time my thoughts regained their rigid shape I was facing the bathroom mirror, naked, with candlelight draped across my body. From out the steamy darkness the outline of Sfiso’s body emerged, the white of his teeth just showing from behind his lips. I noticed the many scars on his body just as I’m sure he noticed the many stretch marks on mine. His scars laid on my stretch marks, his thick arms, like ropes, knotting us together—our skins fusing into a velour fabric that gave texture to the darkness.

When I dropped him off outside his house later that night, he thanked me for the evening and the deep tissue massage. We giggled like two naughty teenagers, our eyes shifting to different parts of one another, trying to steal as many glimpses as time would allow.

“It was...new to me.” He said, showing a hint of embarrassment that I understood.



“If it makes you feel any better, it was new to me too. I didn’t really expect...”

“Me neither.”

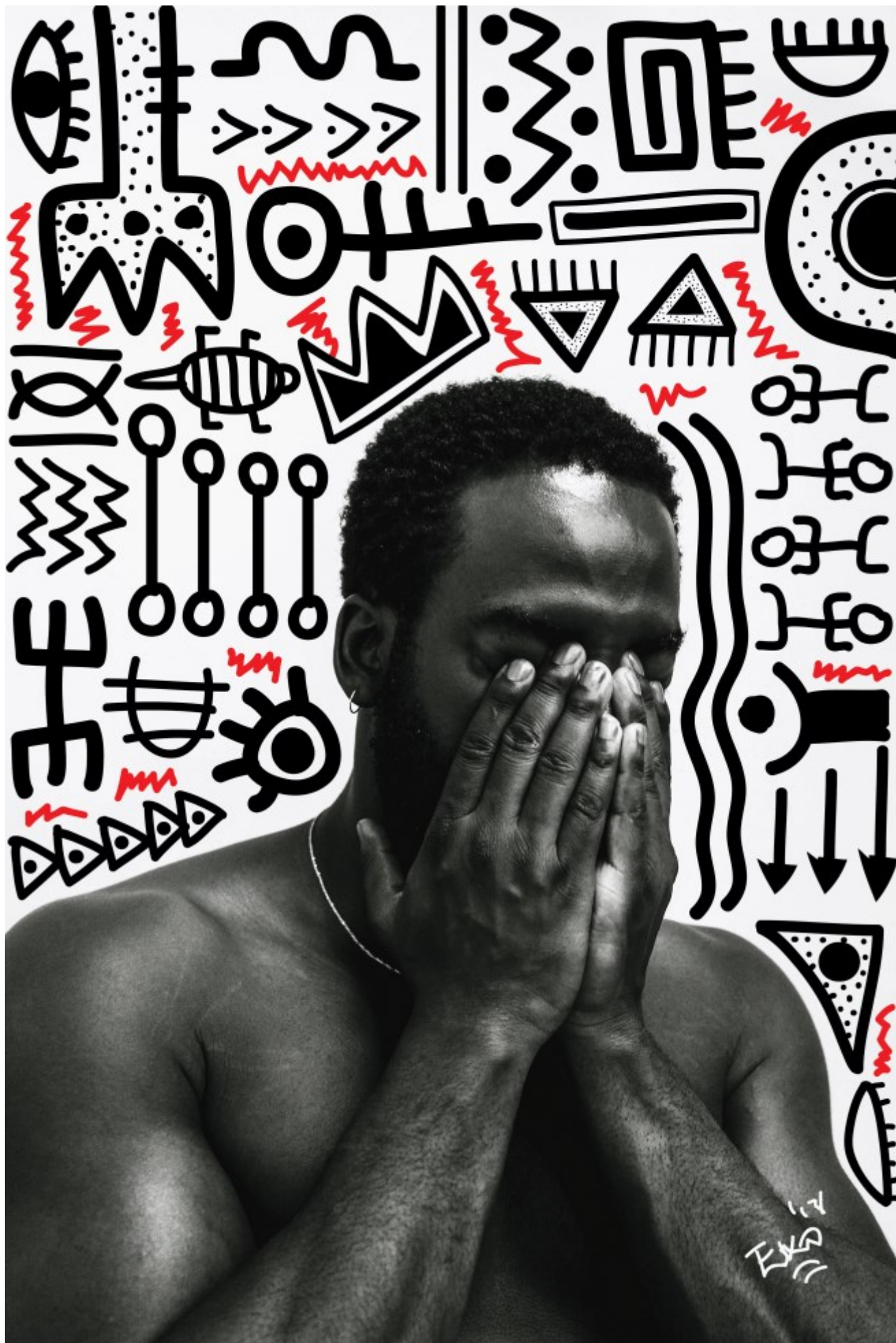
“Well I hope I see you again. And even if I don’t...”

“I’m sure I’ll see you again. You know where to find me.”

“Okay. Great.”

He got out the car and waved, his dark eyes catching the orange streetlight overhead. It made me look up past the streetlight, towards the stars. Nina was right, the sky was different here. But it had nothing to do with the place.

When I got home I tidied up the lounge area, the place where Sfiso laid me down and entered me: softly, sweetly, slowly. We had sex right underneath *Scabbing*—the mixtures of brown, red, maroon, black and pink reaching out as if wanting to devour us. After tidying up I traced my finger across Nina’s painting, feeling the intention behind each brushstroke of hers move in unison with the intention behind each thrust of his. Each black blob became the place where Sfiso and I held each other, breathed, and carried on. And at the center of the painting, the place where dark maroon met baby pink, I felt my finger slip inside Sfiso’s bum again, hearing him yelp and exhale—his body transfixed and exultant at the place where I penetrated him, too.



**Eko Adetolani**  
*Despair*

# Brittle

I am in this room that smells of aged books,  
where darkness hedges out the flow of sunlight.  
I stick my head out the window to bathe in the rays,  
pouring down relentlessly on my skin like it loathes me.  
I know when my mother is camped at the front door,  
I feel the softness of her voice whispering a prayer before knocking,  
I do not allow her grief-stricken face bore a hole in my mind,  
because upon entry, my numbness becomes discontinued.  
She is here to work her way into my heart & unearth feelings,  
like the ones I forced down my throat & drowned with wine.  
I do not want to haul my weight down the stairs to the door,  
it becomes clear when I dictate my unwillingness through muteness.  
I want to tell her about my largely unsuccessful death,  
how I emptied gasoline down my stomach without fear,  
how desire nearly stretched to darkening the room with fire,  
& how I felt a voice lunge at me which smothered my plan,  
I want to say that my head has no memory of its origins,  
that I raised my head to gaze but struck an empty room.  
I have undergone days that sucked up my strength,  
& have resisted sleep to begin exploring poison with my tongue.  
Television says another teenager will build grief in his mother's chest  
that he/she will stroll into the direction of a knife's tip.  
I want to say that all I will grow into is a bright daisy,  
& make her heart harvest the colours of my jewels,  
but I continue to barricade this body from her reach,  
& I grow into a cut-out from the base of my mother's name.

I hear her footsteps causing dust to stir up from the ground,  
I document her departure by placing my face on arranged palms to cry.

Wesley Macheso

# A Night in Ikhaya

The skies wept that night.

It had begun like an ordinary day, with chilly winds and brown leaves flying off dancing trees, as most mornings of Stellenbosch are. I remember how lost I felt when I first arrived in this small village in the Western Cape. It did not feel like the rest of South Africa. It had no loud music blasting out of taxis, no fraudsters roaming the streets looking for foreigners to take advantage of, and none of what most people out there think South Africa is about. This was a town that isolated you and left you thinking of where you really belonged in this world. Stellenbosch doesn't swallow you the way big cities do – it casts you to the wind.

This was not my first time in the Western Cape. I was somehow used to Cape Town where I had attended several writing workshops and Queer Rights conferences before. I always loved how the city welcomed you with the stench of the ocean, which carried old salts and wet fish into the atmosphere. Mixed with the smell of rotting algae, this city almost forced you to taste the bittersweet memories of its history.

But these functions I attended did not prepare me for my experience as a doctoral student at Stellenbosch University. There is a thing I have repulsively gotten used to about academic conferences like the ones I had been attending in Cape Town. These are mostly austere events where people smile at each other under the strong fragrance of coffee and indulge in sterile laughs from lifeless small talk. These are functions where you meet people who pretend to be very interested in learning about where you come from and always feel obliged to remind you that, “Oh! It is such a beautiful country!”, as if you need their sympathy.

I always have a problem when people talk about Malawi as a beautiful country. Most times I want to ask them what they mean by that but there is something that always chokes me when I want to do that. It is like my spirit wrestles my body and this anger that has been swelling from my stomach to confront this pretender in front of me is suddenly caught by the balls in my throat and I am left speechless. I never ask my host, or another conference attendee from Spain, what may be beautiful about one of the poorest countries in the world. I never ask what beauty may mean where people are wasting away to hunger and can't even afford to put a roof on top of their naked bodies. I just smile the pain away – amused at these strangers who know nothing.

As a doctoral student, I had a lot of things to do and I wasted my days studying in the library or attending seminars that run throughout the day, leaving you exhausted. After such seminars, all you want is a long sip of cold beer and perhaps a cigarette to get this life over with as soon as possible. I had savoured the town with my fellow PhD students a few times before I settled on the one spot I frequented for a night's drink. The fact is that I did not really like hanging out with these eccentric scholars from across Africa who behaved too sophisticated to be in the same company with – my lesson was that enlightened company is too much.

Most of these students had come to study on bursaries that demanded that you be extremely poor before they considered you for selection. Most times, scholarship organizations, especially in Africa, are not very much concerned with your academic potential or previous achievements. What catches their eye the most is your poverty – first, you must be as poor as that infamous church rat before they see the contents of your mind. As such, it was disgusting to watch students who were recipients of these awards acting as if they once dated Prince Charles.

There was this other woman who came from Uganda but she always reminded you that she was now a permanent resident of Britain. She said her husband was a big man at some oil company there and that she didn't even know what she was doing in South Africa. We watched her as she slipped on her rehearsed accents and scrunched her face to the disgust of food that was not good enough. They did not make bacon that dry in England. Don't you people love tuna? You eat so much meat, I don't get you people. She was a load of work and I could not stand her for longer. Fortunately, she saw herself out of the group when the pressure of research blew the pretentiousness off her lips leaving her mouth dry on a haggard face.

As days turned into weeks and the sun refused to shine, the town became colder. The winter was settling in and it was strong enough to dismantle our small group of doctoral students that used to drink on Dorp Street. It is the winter that opened my eyes to the town, and with most of my student friends out of the equation, I had time to think and reflect on the world around me. It was on one of these lonesome evenings that Shumi, our regular bartender from Zimbabwe, talked to me for the first time. I had always seen her eyes melting and I knew she wanted to talk, but I wanted her to do it first. She was the one interested after all.

"What happened to your friends?", she asked when she finally let loose of her tongue.

"Well, I guess they don't drink as much."

"Ha! Ha! I always knew you were the drinker. It was as if you forced them to be

here.”

“Ha! Ha! Really? Forced them? Or you mean seduced them?”

“I don’t see you as somebody who can seduce....” She laughed.

“Try me!”

Suddenly, she had this serious look on her face as if she had something more burning than passion she wanted to release from her body. She asked me if I needed one more drink, but I told her that I had to leave for it was getting chilly out there.

“I guess I will see you tomorrow then.”

“Sure.”

“By the way, why do you love this place so much?”

I failed to understand her loaded question, but I still tried to find something to say about it. I told her that I did not really like the bar, but it seemed like it was a good place to spend an evening after a long day.

“Look around you...”

I obeyed her and wondered what it was she wanted me to see.

“It is beautiful,” I replied almost absent-mindedly.

“It is. But don’t you sometimes feel like being around people like us?”

“You mean beautiful women?” I was being smug, but she seemed not to be amused. She forced a tight grin that melted into a serious expression on her face.

“I mean people like you and me.”

Then it struck me. I looked around again and this time understood what she meant by her question. Shumi wasn’t sexually attracted to me (or she may have been), but she was concerned for a lonely man on a lonely street. Everybody around me was white. The people spoke in either foreign English or Afrikaans. I was the only black man with a beer on the table. The other black people I saw were either waiters or security guards. I cast my eyes across the street where there stood a BP Gas Station and the other black people I could see stood against that facility and they were fuel attendants. That’s when I opened my eyes to the reality of this South Africa.

In all the weeks I had spent in this town, I failed to notice that people walked and laughed in strictly defined groups. There were the whites who dominated every spot on Dorp Street – the street my friends and I had unknowingly considered ours. Then there were the coloureds who smoked together while pushing trolleys to Ida’s Valley where they lived. And the blacks were mostly the hands of the city – always

hurrying from work with serious faces projected ahead as if they were peering into the future. Did these groups ever mix? I wondered. And that is when I realised that I was too far away from home.

“Where can I go?” I asked Shumi, shaking the embarrassment out of my voice.

“Well for a start you can try Ikhaya Lounge, four blocks away. Black people drink there....”

She wanted to say more but I did not want to hear anymore.

“Thanks, Shumi,” I took out my wallet to pay for my drink and tip her.

“I hope I will see you there one of these days....”

I smiled as I tucked my hands into my jacket and hurried down the street. That evening, I finally noticed how some white women picked up their paces or trotted to lock their cars when I walked behind them.

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Shumi was right. Ikhaya Lounge was a place where blacks really met, and it was one of the few places I had experienced some warmth in the winters of Stellenbosch. I quickly made friends with one of the regular barmen there who, like Shumi, also came from Zimbabwe. His name was George. He told me that he had just finished his master’s degree in Agricultural Engineering, but he did not want to go back to Zimbabwe.

“You know the economic situation in my country, my brother. Unfortunately, I have no work permit here but these people will let me work illegally in this bar, and I make tips,” he shrugged.

He was unsure of his precarious situation, but I understood him. There was a longing in his eyes that you could not easily define, but it was there. I understood that, just like myself, this man was looking for something. He was an ambitious man in a world that had denied him his dreams. Where some of us come from, life happens, and it stops us from dreaming.

It is George who told me that the other bartender who assisted him was from Malawi but that he did not want people to know his nationality and so he kept speaking in broken English or other broken versions of IsiXhosa that he had picked up on the streets. I saw some light beaming in this guy’s eyes every time there were two to three people from Malawi, speaking in our local language at the bar. He wanted to join the conversations, but he was a slave to his own secrets. He looked as if he would bite his tongue and continued in his tired IsiXhosa like a lost dog. I never told him that I knew about him – every man deserves the respect they choose for



themselves.

On this night, I had come back to Ikhaya Lounge after being away for two weeks. I had first gone to present a conference paper at the University of Zambia, then I travelled further down to Malawi for the Easter break. When I came back, things were different. One of my friends from campus told me that he had heard that Ikha-ya was closing. He said the real reason behind this was not known. He said a lot had happened and since there were reports of fresh xenophobic attacks, the owners did not want to take any chances on a place that mostly entertained foreigners. But being the academic he was, my friend concluded that it was just a simple issue of gentrification – the rich wanting everything to themselves.

I stepped into Ikhaya on this final night to have one last drink with George and the other guys who were friendly enough to laugh. It was strange to see that on a day like this, the bar was not full. The atmosphere was somehow sombre, and people did not seem interested to say goodbye to this homely place. They must have been in denial of the end of an era. I looked for George, but he was not behind the counter where he usually leaned against a fridge full of Black Label beers. I did not want to talk to his confused Malawian counterpart, but I had no choice – I needed to know where George was on this big day.

When I asked him, he looked straight into my eyes and his lips trembled as if he wanted to say something he had forgotten. As if he wanted to lie. I deduced that he was trying to recollect bits and pieces of his English, good enough to impress a homeboy studying for a PhD. But the words that came out shook me off the ground for they were in our vernacular language. His tongue was flat. For the first time since I knew him, he had taken off his mask and spoke to me as a Malawian.

“You walk up here with your educated friends, drink and laugh, get Uber and go back home at night, and you think everybody is happy.”

I did not answer him because I did not think he had asked any question. Then his face contorted in what may have been anger, bitterness, or pain. But he became disfigured as he continued to speak.

“We also want a good life. That is why we are here pretending to be exotic and happy!” his voice almost cracked.

“Do you think....” Then I saw tears breaking from his eyes only to suddenly freeze on his plump cheeks that had not been oiled for days.

“I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you....” I was lost for words as he stood there frozen as were his tears.

“I just wanted to talk to George.... I wanted....”

“George is dead!” the thunder in his voice cut through my veins.

“They killed him! They put a burning tyre over his head! They killed him! We are not white people like you – living here in Stellenbosch among your fellow whites! Do you think you are like us? They kill us in the townships for being foreign! Here the police protect you when you wave your student cards, and you think drinking with us makes us equals?”

I wanted to say something – anything that could be said – but the man in front of me was in tears. I could not open my mouth. He had said too much in so little time that I was losing my balance.

“We don’t belong here!”

He turned his back on me and headed for the kitchen, leaving the counter vacant and the bar almost empty. I looked out of the window into the darkness. That it when I noticed that it was raining outside. It had been raining the whole time.

Chrissie Chinebuah

# The Pacification of An Afro

Your eyes,  
or your looks that kneel with every blink,  
as if to pray for conformity,  
put a leash on my untamable crown -  
the one whose roots  
are watered by the sweat of my ancestors.  
So, I shackle the coup d'état my curls and coils throw,  
and dress my defeated warrior in an armour  
of hair condiments that make my heritage palatable  
for you.

Sometimes,  
I do not recognise the shell of an afro  
that no longer glistens like black gold,  
but lies limp in your foreign territory -  
a stranger on its own throne.

I have found  
home in the wilderness that frames my face,  
and cured the identity theft  
your weapons branded onto my scalp-  
please, do not touch my hair.



**David Adamu**  
*Afrofvtrv*

## Ebuka Prince Okoroafor

# Beyond Dreams

“Snake! Daddy, snake!” I screamed and jumped back, staying clear of the ambit of its thick sweeping tail as it sought for what to grab onto, what to roll its whole body around and tighten. My whole body shivered, engulfed by the morbid fear of this huge thing that had found its way into our one-storey home, and the glaring reality that it was either I ended up the predator or I became the prey. Somehow — I wouldn’t want to use the word ‘miraculously’— amidst the frenzy, a machete appeared in my hand and, the next second, I was swinging it in a powerful arc.

One clear blow and I split the creature in two; then my world went black. Daddy woke me up again, shouting “Chu! Chu! It’s not yet dead!” and I heard some banging and then crashing, he was fighting it and it was fighting back. When I rushed out of my room back into the lobby, he had its head pinned down on the cemented floor with the leg of a back chair, while its body squirmed violently, throwing blood on the acrylic-yellow painted wall, making a graffiti of some sort. Soon it began to tire out, its scaly black and brown patterned skin wriggling, wriggling, then it stopped. Finally dead, my world slipped back into open blackness again.

I scrambled up from the bed, sweating and panting hard. A mosquito buzzed across my ear and I swatted at it in the pitch darkness; missed. *Stupid ungrateful things, haven’t they had enough of my blood?* I cursed.

I had dreamed. A deep, unsettling, experience happening on a Wednesday morning, when the heat hung low and the neighbourhood electricity had failed again. Usually, I rarely would dream and whenever I managed to have one, it never manifests into reality. So, it’s safe to say my actual dreams are useless.

By the break of day, I was sceptic, hung in-between telling someone else or the entire family about it, or just forgetting it and acting as though nothing happened. I paced about on the rugged floor of my bedroom, weighing the burden, the entire

bulk of it in my head. It was just a dream anyway, I don't even remember dreams—usually don't bother to—but this was different. The images kept flashing back and taking form before my eyes: the machete rising high above my head, Daddy screaming my name, a huge muscular contracting thing separating into two spurting bleeders. It hung like a leech on the skin of my mind and it deeply bothered me, even when I'd successfully furthered it.

Eventually, I told Daddy. He gathered the few members of the family who were around into the parlour and said to me, “Chu, Chu, repeat what you have just told me.” In our home, just like in many other Igbo families, it is tradition that one gives a detailed account of a dream to another person or a group of persons. It has been an age-long belief even before my Great Grandfather was born that narrating a dream either raises the odds of its manifestation in real life if it's a good one, or waters it down (even prevent it completely from happening) if it's a bad dream.

As I recounted the experience, Mommy clasped her hands and buried them in her thighs. She shook her crossed feet, and exclaimed *hei!!!* when I started talking about Daddy holding down the head of the snake. Daddy quietened her. He was more composed and listened with rapt attention as though he had not heard the story before. I felt shy with all the attention and, at a point, became unnerved. I wondered why they attached such magnitude of importance to something that happened in an artificial world. I wanted to tell them to stop the theatrics, it was just what it was: a *fucking, useless* dream! But once I was done, Mommy called her Pastor, he fired prayers into the phone which was put on loudspeaker, and, while their heads bowed and murmured follow-up prayers and verses from the bible, I looked at them from the corner of my eye. A dream had turned my family into a prayer group. How was I ever going to tell them to stop? How would I tell them that I don't believe these pastors—that, in fact, since the beginning of last year, not that I doubt the existence of a God but I've become more realistic and started using a practical approach towards things that bothered on faith. How was I going to tell them they do not need to worry, that I've already furthered this dream?

The pastor kept firing prayers and soon Mommy broke into another realm and be-



gan to speak in tongues.

\*

I started exploring the limits of my dreams when I was twelve. Before then, I believed dreams were absolute, short revelations of future events. Although I didn't dream much, I always ran to Daddy to tell him all about any dream I had. Once when I was seven, I dreamed the big African star apple tree in our compound at the village fell down and killed one of my Grandmother's goats. When I told Daddy, he said he was going to think about it. He thought about it, said it was a bad dream, I watched them pray against it and then Mommy suggested the tree should go. The next week it was mowed down into logs of timber. My Grandmother was devastated because that was just prior to the season when the star apples ripened and were ready for market. Daddy told her it was all for the best, what if the dream came to pass and, in reality, the goat was going to be a human being? He ended up paying her in cash, the equivalent of what that year's harvest would have brought forth.

After that period, I began *undreaming*. I didn't tell anybody because they were going to call me crazy. Mommy would drag me to the pastor's altar and tell him I've been possessed by an evil spirit. He would sprinkle holy water on my body, do so many abracadabra prayers and I didn't want all that. So I kept my mouth shut.

Undreaming a dream, or changing the course of a dream, or furthering a dream to the end required a whole lot of energy. It required concentration, detail, and quiet time. At first it was difficult, but with time I honed this manipulative ability such that once I closed my eyes after a dream, my body became an inanimate thing; water molecules, or wisps of smoke, diffusing back into my subconscious.

The first dream I undreamed, I was standing in the middle of a sea and a friend Kosi stood at a farther distance, calling my name. She was drowning and I swam through the water to rescue her. The waves became more intense the more I approached; they pushed me backwards and I stretched forth my hands and screamed. In that dream, my scream worked the magic because the world upturned and Kosi fell out of the water, which had almost eaten her up, but into a clouded

sky. My parents shook me up, I was sweating and had wet my shorts. Mommy, visibly frightened, held my face in her palms. They demanded the details on the spot and prayed with me afterwards. When I crept back to my space on the bed, I shut my eyes and seeped back into the scene of my dream. I walked to Kosi, grabbed her out of the water, and carried her on my shoulders to the shores of an island. I did a chest manoeuvre and she coughed up jets of water, and then we appeared in front of their home, not quite far from ours. The world did not spin around, I did not scream.

The next day, Kosi saw me in school and shared her biscuits with me. I wanted to tell her how I'd saved her life in my second dream. How I don't think it was the prayers or anything but me undoing it. But I stopped myself. There are things you don't talk about in primary school, lest you get labelled a water boy possessed by marine spirits and dreaded by your classmates.

The next time I saw Kosi in my dream, I went beyond the limits of the counterfeit madness and created an end. We were supposed to kiss behind the Orchard tree in their compound. We were sixteen. I held the curvature of her hips and dragged her warm body close until we made skin contact. Her soft breasts pushed through her silky blouse against my bare chest and she ran her fingers through my dreads and confessed how she loved them. The moment she was about to plant her lips on mine, my world went black. I woke up vexing. I climbed out of my bed and looked myself in the mirror and there were no dreads, just a mishmash of uncombed blackness. Back to bed, I slipped back into my dream and conjured her face and we kissed, then we hurriedly peeled off our clothes even though we heard the voices of her parents ringing out from inside the house. We fucked. A wild, passionate fuck. Our bodies simmered with pleasure in the bristling afternoon heat and I woke up with an erection and a trickle of pre-ejaculation wetting my shorts.

Then I undreamed my Grandmother dying, I undreamed WAEC seizing my result, I undreamed PHCN cutting off our power supply, I undreamed my parents separating. I undreamed Mommy inviting a pastor to our house for deliverance.

\*



Early last year when my Grandmother eventually died, Mommy dreamed and in her dream she saw a black lioness in our sitting room; it stood staring at her, unmoved, unblinking with whiskers coloured like rainbows. It had been an afternoon dream and she could swear she had seen the vestige of the lioness leaving the moment she opened her eyes. Daddy interpreted the dream, said when a lion was seen in the dream of anyone from the house of a son of the soil, it meant an elderly person was about to go home—we come from a kindred called *Umuagu* meaning ‘children of lions.’ Daddy says our ancestors send an emissary in the form of a lion or lioness to guide the spirit of the elderly person back to them when the time came. That evening we prayed, Mommy even fasted through the next day, but Granny died a month later. She went away after a brief illness, and I wished I was the one who dreamed the dream for I would have chased the lioness back to the world of our ancestors with a broom or any other object. My Grandmother wouldn’t have died.

Till this day, Daddy does not know about the several successes I have had with un-dreaming my bad dreams. Before engaging all the theatrics involved with exorcising a bad dream from reality—which oftentimes I see no need doing—I stay back in bed and undo the great calamity, like the morning we killed the big snake in our lobby.

That day, I did not un-dream. Rather, I’d furthered the dream into a scene of triumph. In my new dream, I carried half the body of the snake down the stairs. Daddy brought down the other half. He’d always had the heart of a lion and, in my new dream, I gave him the face of one. Our neighbours came down exclaiming, *hey God! Jehovah! Chineke!!!* They clapped their hands together in awe and held their heads and snapped fingers and soon they started firing prayers. I’d knowingly put the prayer scene into the new dream because I wanted it to be more relatable, more real. Before we burnt the snake, I took pictures of it and put them up on Twitter, got a few retweets. Then I woke up satisfied.

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Some days, I have thought of the communities in Igbo land known to hold snakes as sacred things. I have heard that in these areas to kill a snake, especially the python species, is an abomination and if by chance it happened the individual will bury the

snake like a king. I have heard of pythons visiting barren women, after which they conceived and put to bed; and I'm left to wonder that if they dream my kind of dream where they see a snake, won't they say it's a good fortune? Won't someone like me, if born into such kinship further the dream and see to it that the snake is unharmed? Having these thoughts, I would say that dreams do not really end up manifesting in our real worlds. Rather it is our beliefs that are diverse, and even when we meet them in dreams, they tend to conform to reality—the dream we see as bad may thus be seen as good in the eyes of another. This is the only thing I can say I believe to be true about having dreams.

My parents still believe so much in dreams being fundamental in defining our futures. They wrap so much cloak of superstition around dreams that sometimes I get so vexed I want to come out open and tell them how I un-dream, how easily my mind slips back into a dreamscape and I do anything I want. But I always end up not talking because Mommy says the circumstances surrounding my conception and birth came like a divine encounter, like Jesus. She says she saw Virgin Mary appear in the sky of her dream, gave her a rosary even. She's always very excited to tell this story again, and again, and most times I've reasoned that it isn't best to destroy a twenty-six-year-old belief with a few demeaning words.

Osaze Amadasun

# On origins, process, inspiration and filling a visual gap in 16th century Benin art.

Interview by Sheyi Owolabi

*It was my first time maneuvering the streets of Ikosi-Ketu, Lagos. Trying to follow the directions I was given the best I could. I was going to meet **Osaze Amadasun**, an illustrator and painter, whom I have always admired albeit from afar. I alighted from the okada that took me into the inner streets where he resides. He welcomed me at his gate wearing a warm smile, a black T-Shirt, brightly-colored patterned Ankara pants and a pair of Crocs. There was a calmness about him that I would later find reflects in how he goes about his work.*



*He showed me the workspace that also doubles as his bedroom. A painting of Fela sitting on a "Fist Throne" (in allusion to the Iron Throne from the popular HBO series, Game of Thrones) hung on the wall to the left of the bright-blue painted room. There's a large table in one corner, a reading lamp clipped to its edge and some art materials scattered around it. His laptop makes its room at the center of the whole arrangement.*

*He went on to show me a commission he was working on – an offshoot of his series for Rele gallery's Young Contemporary exhibition titled "Once Upon a Kingdom" (A collection of paintings depicting some key events in the Benin kingdom around the 16th century). We spoke, at length, about his experiences before, during and after the exhibition, his connection to his native Benin Kingdom and limits he has had to overcome as an artist working in Nigeria.*

**Sheyi Owolabi: During our discussion, earlier, you mentioned that you don't actually speak Bini. However, you decided to make the Benin cul-**

## **ture a part of your latest project. Why?**

Osaze Amadasun: For me, how this whole project started was kind of like an accident. When I was in the university, we had a project we were working on and we were to design a theme park. So, what I chose to design was the Oba Esigie Memorial Park. It was centered around one of the Obas of Benin. So I got on the Internet and tried to look for inspiration and material. But most of what I was seeing were bronze works from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century that everybody already knew about and also the Queen Idia mask. I felt like that couldn't be all there was to the Benin kingdom and Benin art in general. So I started doing more research. I could spend the whole day researching Benin art. Over time, there were certain names that popped up consistently. So I felt these were most likely some of the key players when it came to Benin art and history. From there, I was able to get books to learn more. I got one written by Barbara Plankensteiner titled *Benin Art & Rituals* and another one, *Royal Arts of Benin*. This began like 2015. Since then, I've been collecting data around the Benin kingdom. When I read all these things, I make sketches so I have different stories or themes I want to explore. So, when I got the opportunity with Rele gallery, I just pushed out what I had gathered over the years. That was what I showed at the Exhibition.

**SO: The Benin kingdom, from which you hail, has a long history of artistic production dating back to at least the 13th century. Do you credit your early interest in art to this cultural pull?**

OA: I don't think it's my culture that pushed me to be an artist. I spent maybe a year or two in Benin. I know I finished nursery school in Benin. So from like primary one to University, I did everything here in Lagos. I have always been interested in drawing and things relating to art. So I wouldn't say one hundred percent that it had anything to do with me being from Benin. Like when I came to Lagos, I was always interested in how roadside artists did their work and how I can get my work to be like theirs.





**Osaze Amadasun**

*The Baptism of Oba Esigie |  
Once upon a Kingdom series*



**SO: What made you decide to become an artist?**

OA: Well, I will still have to give the credit to the roadside artists. There were lots of roadside artists when I came to Lagos. I think that kind of like pushed me to pursue a career and focus more on art. They were producing really good work from my own point of view and I wanted to get to that level. That was really it.



**Osaze Amadasun**

*Farabale*

**SO: You are well known for your illustrations and posters. However, what/who inspired your Danfo series?**

OA: There is this artist, his name is Karo Akpokiere. He is based in Berlin, Germany. When I got to know him, he did lots of Nigerian and particularly Lagos-inspired illustrations. I found his illustration style and rendering technique interesting. Even more interesting were the stories he was gathering because they were centered around what's happening in Lagos and Nigeria at



**Osaze Amadasun**

*Seek*

large. I guess that kind of rubbed off on me. My day-to-day experiences also had an influence. I move around in Danfo buses a lot and I thought, what can I do with this experience or with this typography? That was how it started. If you go down my Instagram page the first things regarding that was just me drawing maybe Eyo arts. Then I broke away from that and I started adding my own elements. Maybe I think of a word or a phrase, then I find a way to make that into a poster. It's still something I am looking to explore more. But it is on hold for now. Those are just the first set of drawings I have done relating to that.

**SO: Can you share some things you discovered while working on “Once Upon a Kingdom” that made you feel more connected to your Benin heritage?**

OA: What I can remember from when I was in Benin are just flashes of images, a scene or two that, maybe, happened. However, when I was reading on some of the bronze works and festivals, those flashbacks began to make more sense to me.

**SO: Can you go into more detail about the process from the beginning of creating the “Once Upon a Kingdom” series to the Young Contemporary exhibition?**

OA: Okay, I mentioned earlier I had been doing some research since 2015, I wrote down some ideas for drawings and, possibly, exhibitions. The works I showed at Rele gallery were actually meant for my personal exhibition. I pitched the project idea to an artist and he said I needed to do a lot more research on it. Which was actually true. I wasn't very knowledgeable on the subject matter at that particular point and the idea needed fine-tuning. After a year of fine-tuning the idea, I got a mail from Rele gallery asking if I was interested in participating in the young contemporary exhibition and for me to submit a proposal so they could consider if I could get in or not. So, I just pushed everything I had been working on to them. They got back to me that they were interested in it. That was how I got into that. The hard part was knowing the story that you want to tell and composing the work





**Osaze Amadasun**  
The Fall of Ahianmwēn-Oro  
Once Upon A Kingdom Series

in a way that makes sense to people. I am not an abstract artist. Even if they don't totally get what is going on, I still want them to have an idea of what I am trying to talk about in my artwork.

**SO: How was the series' reception at the exhibition?**

OA: The reception was really great. I got to hear different peoples' point of view on these events that people don't know happened back then. People connect with or remember images faster than words. For me, it was a great experience. I had to narrate the stories a couple of times. It was tiring, but it was worth it. I put everything together in a document so whenever anyone reaches out to me I can send it. So they can read up on it. There are also references if they want to do extensive research on it.

**SO: Did you sell all your artworks from the exhibition?**

OA: Yes, I did. (laughs)

**SO: In a video introducing the work you were going to showcase at the Rele Art Foundation, you cited the incompleteness of the documentation of ancient Benin brass casters. Can you explain what you meant?**

OA: From what I could see from my research, there were certain key events that didn't have a picture to represent them. To me, it seemed off. There was a King that got baptized but, in the bronze works, there was no depiction of that. I felt that was a very important event. So, what I did with the exhibition was highlight some key events. I don't even know if they were recorded. We only know what's shown to us. Maybe it's hidden in someone's private collection, we don't know. Basically, I just picked what I felt was important and I created them.

**SO: Essentially, you were trying to fill a visual gap.**

OA: Yes, you could say that.

**SO: Late last year, a delegation from Easter Island petitioned the British Museum to return *Hoa Hakananai'a* which was stolen in 1869. The governor of Easter Island, who led the delegation, commented amidst tears “We are just a body. You, the British people, have our soul.” Do you feel the same way towards stolen African art?**

OA: I share the same point of view. It doesn't make sense to take someone else's artwork and not return it. Their own point of view is that those works will not be kept or handled properly. If we want to destroy them, you shouldn't have a say. It's like I buy something, then someone comes to take what I bought with my money and say it's because I will not handle it well. It doesn't make sense.

**SO: What do you think can be done? Do you think the government should get involved?**

OA: I think the government is already involved trying to get them on loan after the Museum in Benin has been constructed.

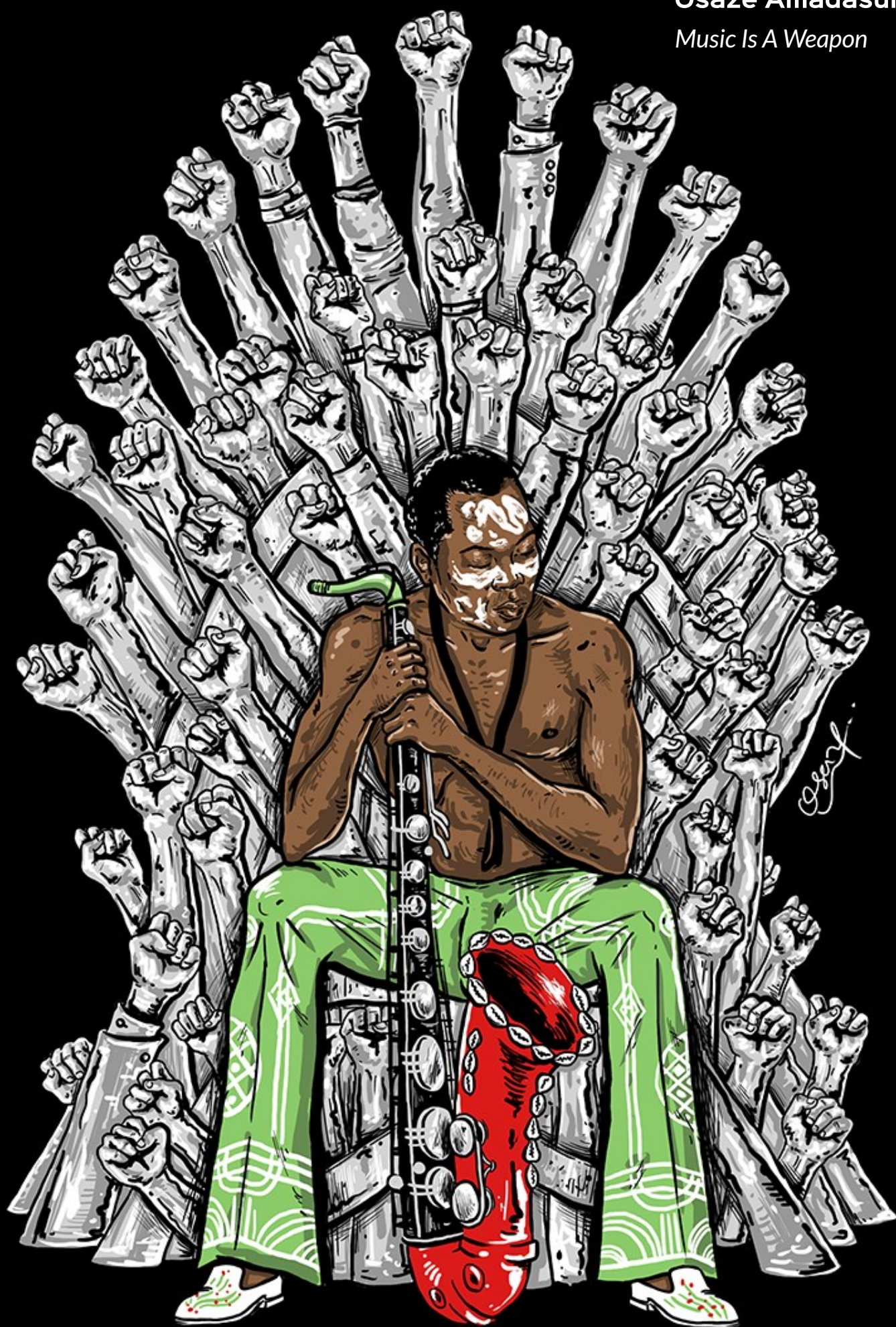
**SO: Artists generally tend to have a way they describe their style. How will you describe yours?**

OA: Different artists have their own style. I am coming from a background of Architecture and Graphic Design. When you are designing a logo for maybe a law firm, the style or form of the logo will be different from say a logo for a kiddies' party. The use of colour, shape and all will be different. The way I approach my artwork is practically the same. I don't approach it from a painter's point of view. It's more from a designer's point of view. If I am creating artwork for a merchandise or product, the way I will approach it will be different from creating a painting to hang on the wall.



**Osaze Amadasun**

*Music Is A Weapon*



I don't really think about style. I just do my work and move on.

**SO: Your work can get intensely political. You have many illustrations featuring the Afrobeat legend Fela Anikulapo Kuti. I particularly liked the one in which Fela sits on a "Fist Throne". Would you say you are a fan of Fela?**

OA: Personally, what I like about Fela was his style of music, the arrangement of the drums and all, the message he passes across and how he was able to push the African (particularly the Nigerian) narrative and give it international appeal. It's something I also strive to do with my own work. Going back to the Benin project. How do we present these ancient things and make them appealing to the international audience? That's basically it.

**SO: Most people have come to associate Fela with politics and "struggle". What's your opinion on art that is political? Do you think visual art has the power to influence people as much as Fela's music?**

OA: Definitely, art can influence people. One four-year-old boy can look at your art, be inspired by it and say "I see myself in this work of art". Art has driven and can drive political movements.

**SO: Do you think artists have to be political?**

OA: Like music- I don't think people should make just music that's talking about the country. People - what do you call them? Shepeteri boys (laughs) – make music to just "vibe". I think everything is fine. People create art for different reasons. Some create to address issues in society. Personally, I think everything is valid. I don't think one form is higher than the other. Just do your thing.

**SO: You've been in the Nigerian art space for a while. What do you think are the limits or challenges you have to surmount just to get to where**



**you want to be?**

OA: First of all, getting materials and useful books that you would need to advance your skill is quite difficult because they don't sell most of them here. So most of the time, you have to order them from the US, UK or Germany and, obviously, the cost of shipping and all have to come into play. So that has been one aspect.

Another will be production. Getting the quality that you really desire can be hard to get here. Let's say you want to produce something for a T-Shirt or you want to make a pattern to print and put it out there, it's relatively harder to get vendors that will give you the right quality. At the end of the day, you'd have to look to China or



somewhere overseas and then shipping costs and the Naira to Dollar rate come into play again. It is discouraging.

**SO: You don't face challenges with people trying to poach or devalue your work?**

OA: I mean, it's always there for everybody. People trying to devalue your work. Trying to give you a lower price than what you are asking for. People taking your work without your permission. I've found that if you keep on dwelling on it, it's not always the best. Do the work. Make as much as you can. Move on to the next thing.

**SO: So, what are you working on next?**

OA: It's still going back to the Benin project. I have a couple of other series that I would like to paint. I just haven't had the time yet. I just released a deck of playing cards centered around Benin art.

We know about the Benin bronze casters but I'm trying to see how can we present the culture in a way that people in the modern times can relate to. That is also something that Japanese people have been able to do with their ancient art form. They've been able to diversify and push it into different streams. From fashion shows to 3D toys to gaming and animation.

**SO: Thank you very much for your time, Osaze.**

OA: You are welcome.

# Made of Water

This is a paved road. One that has been worn over time and in desperate need of a new coat of asphalt. On both sides are green and brown bushes amongst trees that are all too foreign. It is hot but then it gets cooler as the sun is covered by some dark clouds. I am standing on the better part of this road looking ahead. There are no signs of life ahead, no signs that a car would maybe pass by. On my side of the road are upturned cars, some of them burnt. There are also some tires stacked atop one another, and some sacks filled with sand. All of them are being used as a blockade to whoever may dare to emerge from the other side of the road. On my side there are young men carrying guns as precautions against the 'insurgents'. They don't see me. Only one of them does. He always sits on the unburnt station wagon, rifle by his side and his bloodshot eyes ahead and alert. He is shirtless and sweaty despite the constant dabbing with a wet cloth. His name is Akpo and he could not be more than 17. He had told me what was going on. Why he and the other boys had to sit there every day, watching and waiting. He spoke some form of broken English but I understood every word.

"The matter start small. Oil company people discover oil for here. Them help us build primary school, build water tower even give us generator and our chiefs give them free pass to work. When time reach to con work, those Oteri people, our neighbor town say make the oil company people no drill for the land."

This was where he paused to laugh like he just remembered something funny.

"Them start to claim land wey no be their own. Because na land wey oil dey. Before you know na so fight start. Them kill one of our own, we kill one of their own. Them think say we be pikin wey no get sense? Say we go just lie down meek meek as them they pour san san for our garri?" Then he did something to his gun, moved a part of it and frowned so that part of his upper teeth showed. I had asked him about school and he shook his head replying, "forget that marra, forget that marra."

I look up at him now and his bare feet which are extremely dusty. He dabs his sweaty chest with the cloth a few more times.

"Hey you don come back?"

"Yes," I reply him. We never talk about how I always come and go. He never truly asks me anything serious. I think I like it that way.



"No insurgents today?" I ask.

"No."

None has ever passed through that blockade ever since it was mounted on the boundary between Akpo's town and Oteri.

"What if they come?"

"Person wey no wan hear person word no be die e go die? We shoot all the baggers down no time."

"Hey offspring! What are you doing there staring into nothing?"

I blink and realize where I truly am. Sitting on the bench across the street from Ariel's house where she is having a party with the few people from school she invited. Why did I even come here? Oh, I remember. I had decided to take a walk and ended up here. But why did I stop here? To lament my exclusion from a party? Or to see if Benedict would come out and I would get to see him just for a bit. Could I be more of a stalker?

"Offspring!"

"My name is Risetete mom! Remember?"

I walk to my mom's parked car and enter the passenger seat. She hugs me with a huge smile on her made-up face and kisses my cheek. She is obviously happy and cannot help but take it out on me.

"I've got a surprise for you."

"What is it?"

"Patience offspring."

She drove away from the curb and headed down the street.

"What were you doing sitting there anyway?"

"Nothing mom."

"Were you at the party?"

I look out the window and roll my eyes. "I wasn't invited."

"Oh don't worry offspring. You'll get invited to other parties."

"Sure mom."

"So what are your plans tomorrow? It's Saturday. Wanna spend some time at the library? Or the aquarium?"

"I don't know. I'll call Jazz later to see what we can do together."

"Oh alright. Does she still wear her pink bob?"

"She loves the hair and will never get rid of it."

The time is five past seven when we get home. The wine bottle decorations on the porch we made ceremoniously together clink against each other. A subtle reminder of the brief time my mom turned to alcohol for comfort after my dad died and she lost her job.

I help her take out the groceries and put them on the kitchen table. There are a lot of things I take out from the bags which makes me wonder how she got the money for them. She had told me she found a job but would not tell me what the job is. Unlike her last temp job at a warehouse, she is not extremely tired when she comes home and for that I am happy.

"I got you this." She hands me a box. I open it and see a V Neck pink tulle dress inside. I gasp when I take it out and feel the texture.

"Mother!" I nearly faint with excitement. "This is so beautiful!"

"I know, try it on." She places one hand on her hip.

"Isn't this expensive though?"

She frowns. "Oh come on. It's nothing. Go try it on while I get started on the spaghetti sauce."

I go up to my room to change. My room is just like any regular teenage girl's room; bed, stereo, ACDC, Aerosmith and Bruce Lee posters on the wall (my most prized possessions which I inherited from my dad), a dressing table and a brand new computer on my desk which for some unknown reason I have refused to start using. I wear the dress and feel like a million bucks.

When I come down the stairs my mom takes a picture of me with an instant camera. The picture comes out and we wait for it to clear up.

"Oh, you look so beautiful Risetete."

"Thank you, mom."

She hands me the picture. "Go change and let's cook."

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Jazz meets me by the lake where the ducks like to come together to plot world domination. Or so Jazz says. She too cannot hide her anger that she had not been

invited to Ariel's party.

"That girl be tripping," Jazz hissed. "Acting like she own everything."

"She may be an entitled biatch who treats people badly but she throws some good parties," I state.

"I heard from Richie that she had the pastries and liquor imported and the party favors were home spa packages from a Korean spa, in Korea."

"Can't cry over spilled milk."

"What happened to us? We used to be the three female musketeers."

"Well Ariel's father moved up in life and we both became commoners unfit to be a princess' friend."

"That's messed up."

"Yeah, it is. Look at this."

I show her the picture my mom took.

"Girl you already got a dress for homecoming and I don't. My mom be all like 'you ought to go get a job' when I ask her for some allowance. Other moms be buying nice things for their daughters and she there painting her nails all the time," she says in one breath and laughs. I chuckle and look into our reflections into the water.

"Rizzy, what's up with you?"

"It's nothing."

"Is it about your ghost boyfriend in Africa. Are you still seeing him?"

"He's not my ghost boyfriend."

"Well, he is something. You think you might be going crazy?"

"No, I do not," I snicker.

"Then why you keep zoning out and going to another continent to see a boy? Think he's God and he's trying to tell you something?"

"Oh come on. It's about my mom. I'm worried about her." I do not want to tell her I'm worried about where she's getting all the money for all our new stuff.

Jazz moves closer to me. The smell of her guava shampoo wafts into my nose.

"Is she sick?"

"No."

"Then why are you worried about a perfectly healthy woman?"

"I have no idea."

"Your mom is an amazing woman. She's a good person too. You worry too much."

We both stare out into the water, watching the ducks make splashes until Jazz nudges me to let me know Benedict and his best friend Alan are coming. I turn to look and see them approaching from the wooded area. Ben looks so darn good looking in his jeans and t-shirt with the sleeves rolled up. His coal dark hair had been expertly cut away from his face so that his blue eyes are easy to see. I take a deep breath and squeeze Jazz's hand.

"What are they doing here on a Saturday?" I whisper to Jazz, my heart beating rapidly. "Shouldn't they be in an arcade or something?"

"I don't know.. Hi Alan, Ben, what are you guys doing here?" Jazz asks while I try unsuccessfully to hide my face underneath my curls.

"We're going to see some deers," Ben answers. "You guys wanna come?"

"No thanks," Jazz replies. I look up at Ben and he smiles at me and I smile back in bits and pieces. "Maybe some other time then. Bye Risetete."

"Bye Ben."

My heart rate steadies as I watch him walk away.

"The boy is so into you he doesn't know what to do with himself."

I giggle. "You think so?"

"Yes. The question is what are you gonna do about it?"

I think about Jazz's question as I lay on my bed that night. And I think of Ben and the way he had smiled at me. What if Jazz is right? What if Ben is truly into me?

I want to sleep but I cannot. I suddenly feel very hot and take off my covers to stand near the open window. I look back and behind me is Akpo swinging his long hairy legs and staring straight ahead. He is wearing a plaid shirt with the sleeves cut off and khaki shorts. Still no shoes.

"Oh, you are here."

"Yes, I am."

"Good."

"No insurgents today?"

"No. But them go come."

"What were you thinking about before I showed up?"

"My life."

"I've been thinking a lot about my life too recently. Well I've been thinking about my mom. I'm worried about her. But I'm sure my problem is nothing compared to yours." I lean back against the station wagon .

He looks down at me with an expression I cannot fathom and says, "everybody get their own wahala. Whether rich or poor."

"Tell me about your life, how was your childhood like?" I quickly ask knowing I may not be able to be with him for long. Sometimes I am there a few seconds and I am back to wherever I had zoned out from. The first several times I had come here was during Spanish class and Senor Suarez had been so pissed for my lack of attention.

"Nothing too good about it," he answers.

"What do you mean?"

"My mama she marry my papa. Born three children. All boys. I be the last born. We happy for a few years but then my papa die and my brothers die too. For our culture if man die e brother fit choose to marry his wife."

"No way."

"Yes na. So my papa brother marry my mama join e first wife. My mama become second wife. But things still hard for us. My papa brother stop to pay my school fees so I drop out for primary school."

His voice is clear and without any emotion. As if he is telling a fictional story.

"Why did he stop paying your fees?"

"I no know for am. Evil mind? But e stop so I join my mama for farm you know. Man's got to eat. This work," he holds out his rifle, "it will give me and my mama money so we can find house of our own. The oil company people will give chiefs money, the chiefs will give us our share. Na so e be." He pauses. Then he begins to speak again with emotion in his voice. "And the oil land is our land! I must protect wetin belong to us by fire by force. No small pikin mind here."

His face speaks for him the depth he is willing to go to protect his land. To kill or be killed.

One of the young men walks toward Akpo and speaks to him in a local language. By the look on his face, I know trouble is brewing.

"I dey go," he tells me.

"What is happening?" I yell after him.

"I no know yet. I hope I see you again."

I find myself standing next to my window with the cold wind chilling me to my bones. I close it, run up to my bed and hide underneath the covers. Now I had two people to worry about. And one of them might just be a figment of my imagination.

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"Ben has looked this way several times now," Jazz tells me munching on a particularly green apple. The cafeteria is less crowded than usual, with the glee club kids beat-boxing in their designated corner.

"You serious?"

"Yeah. Don't turn your head, just use your eyes. Subtlety Rizzy, subtlety." I carefully angle my body and use the corner of my eyes to see Ben and his friends sitting at their usual table. They laugh at something he says then he looks up and winks at me.

I look back at Jazz with my eyes almost popping out of their sockets. She leans back on her chair and nods.

"Yes. He's going to ask you to homecoming."

"Oh my god Jazz. Wait what about Ariel?"

"What about her?" Jazz asks taking another bite, one brow raised, one shoulder raised also.

"I mean they are close. And she's very pretty."

"You're more beautiful than Ariel. She doesn't hold a candle to you. Look at all that melanin," she gestures at me. "You know she ain't gonna ever have curves like yours even if she tried."

"You always know what to say to make me feel better. What about you? You think Rodriguez will ask you?"

"If he doesn't I'll ask him."

I shake my head in awe of the person that is my best friend. "How do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Be so confident."

"I was born this way," she declares.

I brave one more glance at Ben and find him talking to Ariel. My spirit dampens again but I hope he still asks me. I wait for my mom one hour after classes end but she does not show so I start to walk home. My mind becomes filled with thoughts of her and what she must be up to. Thoughts of Akpo and the look he had on his face as he left with the other boy still haunted me. Was that goodbye?

"Hey Risetete!" I hear my name and turn to see the jeep next to me. Inside is Ben in a new set of clothes waving me in with a big smile. I get in and my discomfort doubles. His eyes search for mine as he resumes driving.

"You were really deep in thought back there weren't you?"

"Yes, I was."

"Your mom didn't show I suppose."

"Yeah. Thanks for the ride."

I concentrate on tracing one finger over another.

"I love your shirt," he says. I look down on my shirt with the word Aerosmith on it.

"Thanks. You listen to them too?"

"Heck yeah."

I smile unconsciously and relax. Ben is a human boy I like I think to myself. He doesn't bite. A conversation won't be so bad.

"So did you find your deers?" I ask.

"Unfortunately no. I think we spooked them the last time we were there."

"Well, I hope they come back. For you."

His gaze lingers a little and I feel those butterflies again.

"There's something I want to ask you. Would you be free to go out tonight?" He's going to ask me to homecoming!

"Um, sure..sure."

"Alright, I'll pick you up at seven."

"Ok," I chuckle.

"Alright, it's a date." He chuckles back.

I see the police vehicle before Ben pulls up at my house. I get out of the jeep as quickly as I can fearing the worst. I hear the driver's door open and close and know Ben is not going away very soon.

A policeman is standing on the porch next to the swing chair. He is tall and muscular but not in a threatening way.

"Are you Risetete Cameron?" he inquires

"Yes, I am."

"Your mother is Eliza Cameron?"

"Yes."

I fear his next words would bring my world crumbling down to a pile of dust.

"I'm Lieutenant Dan. Your mother was arrested an hour ago."

"What?"

Ben comes to stand beside me. "Yes," the policeman carries on. "She was dealing with some shady people who sold illegal drugs."

"No, you've got the wrong person. My mom doesn't sell illegal drugs, she..."

I try to recall what my mom does for a living and come up short. I sit on the swing chair and continue to think very hard. Maybe she had mentioned it to me once before and I had forgotten. I try and I try and nothing

"She has asked that you stay with your best friend and her parents until she can post bail."

Ben sits by my side and takes my hand in his. His hand is warm and soft and comforting.

I close my eyes and open them to see the station wagon had been flipped. There are bodies on the ground, some injured and some dead. I look around but I do not see Akpo and my anxiety triples. Ahead on that bad road is an army truck parked by the side next to a bush on fire. At the back of it is Akpo and three other boys with their hands tied. Some army officials with big guns walk around surveying the damage. Akpo smiles when he sees me.

"Insurgents came. I kill some. Those baggers no know say we set trap." He sounds genuinely happy telling me he killed some people in his condition and I fear for him. For his psyche.

"Where are they taking you?"

"I no know. Maybe to kill me. But I see you again so all ok."



"My mom was arrested," I tell him quickly seeing the army officials making their way to the truck. "I don't know what to do."

"You know na."

"I don't know," I tell him with tears running down my cheeks. I walk with the truck as it begins to move slowly.

"Akpo," I call his name like it will save me or save him.

The truck begins to move a little bit faster so I run after it. "I don't know Ak-po!"

"Take care of your mama," he says to me. "Take care of your mama that is all."



**Dele Aniwa**  
*Floating Kid*

## Tolu Oloruntoba

# Near Field

Zaria, Rainy Season, 1996.

I am crouched beneath the concrete ironing slabs,  
almost a cube without two sides, adjoining the bath hall  
twenty boys had snuck into on a balmy night.

A double dare—furtive communal nakedness, and the risk of  
doom for this after-lights shower, in Nigerian Military School.  
In the 2-week interview camp (several die here annually),  
soldiers have been eager to preview for us pre-teen boys, in our hundreds,  
what iron to expect.

There have been push-up drills, and marathons,  
and batched scrotal exams. *Faces to the left. Cough!*  
Panel interviews. More running, jogged past by chanting crates of cadets,  
gas cylinders on their shoulders. Sit-up drills. Assemblies.  
Impromptu assemblies. A choice of  
Catholic or Protestant on Sunday.  
Masara on the cob after missing dinner in the scramble.  
Dorms where they steal your stuff.  
And all the while: northern weather a dull knife scraping the limbs white,  
and the sustaining hope of selection by our fiat-lords.  
It will be all over for them in 3 years but no one, but the CIA,  
knows that now.

I am at the end of the hall, in a darkened and damp Stonehenge,  
rafters high, indistinct enough to be stars. Some hint,  
or premonition, or lookout has scattered our bath party.  
No one warns anyone else but suddenly, I am alone and grasping  
for a towel, torchlit soldiers shouting down the corridor,





Alex Nderitu

# How Pepe Went 'Beyond Limits' and Shook the Kenyan Book Market

On Monday, October 12, 2015, motivational speaker and writer Pepe Minambo launched his tenth book, *Beyond Limits*, in Nairobi. Never before have I ever seen such a long queue for a book launch. I had to check with another attendee whether I was at the right event!

Well-known in Kenya for his talks and books, Pepe was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo and raised in less-than-enviable circumstances that included an absentee father. But he was determined not to allow his past dictate his future. His appetite for life is impressive and his positive attitude infectious. He now teaches other people how to embrace a positive outlook and how to speak in public.



His previous books include *Be Inspired Before You Expire* — *Attendees stream into the Kenyatta International Conference Centre for the book launch (left) and a section of the packed Tsavo Ballroom*

and *The Game Changer*. Regardless of whether you like motivational material or not, you've got to admire his business acumen when it comes to books. Entrance to the *Beyond Limits* launch was free but a host at the event said that they were looking to have sold 10,000 copies at the bottom of the night. The book, a paperback, was retailing at Kshs 500 (US\$5).

I don't know if they reached their goal but a Member of Parliament in the audience did pledge to buy 6,000 copies to 'motivate' his constituents. There were also quite a number of attendees carrying the black-jacketed book around. One *mzee* said he had bought three copies: for himself, his daughter, and his girlfriend (The idea of a grandfather-esque geezer having a 'girlfriend' made the audience chuckle.) So, knowing that Pepe sold *at least* 6,000 copies at Kshs 500, he made at least Kshs 3,000,000 (US\$30,000) that day. And if they reached their target of 10,000 sales, then that's Kshs 5,000,000. Some writers will scoff at this commercialism, which brings me to my first point:

‘The reality is that as artists, you are a business. You are a brand. And marketing is as much a part of selling toothpaste as it is selling art...To make money in art is not “selling out” and, unfortunately, many artists feel that way.’ — Adrian Salamunovic, co-founder of DNA 11/Canvas Pop

Pepe is a terrific marketer. To promote the event, he partnered with *The Nairobiian*, a newspaper he writes a column for. *The Nairobiian* is owned by Standard Media Group which spans print and electronic media. This resulted in plenty of free publicity. The ‘buzz’ around the event, book and author no doubt increased its demand in the bookstores since no bookseller likes to be the one without an in-demand title. Success breeds success. Having spoken in numerous institutions (from schools to prisons) across the country and beyond our borders, Pepe utilised his contacts to marshal a mammoth crowd.

The pre-launch promotion made it clear this was going to be a mega-event, perhaps the greatest of the kind locally. That kind of hype roped in literary stakeholders such as myself. As we streamed into KICC’s Tsavo Ballroom where the event was held, our contact details were harvested. We also received brochures for Pepe’s Motivational Speaking Academy, where a course goes for Kshs 40,000 per student. Again, some writers will balk. One thing I know from experience is that most 'artists' are averse to marketing/commerce. But the reality is unless you have an agent who does it for you, you are – *de facto* – your own agent and will have to promote your work, or yourself as a brand. I could be wrong, but there's no way around

it.

Sure, you could get lucky and win a major award or be published by an entity that knows what it's doing but, for creative writers in Kenya, that's a long shot. You would be surprised how many Kenyans have self-published books no-one knows about. No one. They do zero marketing, and they're not about to start. But how will they get any recognition if they don't complete the book chain (writing, editing, manufacture, promotion, sales, distribution etc.)? If you're self-published, then you have no choice but to handle every aspect of the business yourself. Mainstream publishers do a better job of promotion although there are some that make me wonder why they accept manuscripts if they will not later promote the book or the author through a book launch, media release, posters, sales drive etc. This brings me to my second point:

‘Artists often have a hard time getting their art work out there and appreciated. And it's not because it's not good work. It could be amazing work. But it's because you don't have the marketing/communication skills to let people know what you are doing.’ — Evan Carmichael, entrepreneurial advisor.

I am not sure why most writers are averse to marketing but the excuses are endless: 'I don't have time', 'It's not my thing', 'It's beneath me', 'I'm an introvert', 'I am not a sales person' etc. Over the last 10 or more years, I have sold both physical books and e-books and I can assure you that, *in Africa, at least, books are a hard sell*. But it doesn't help if the author themselves is unwilling promote their work! That's why one writer will be starving while someone like Pepe is laughing all the way to the bank (literally, he's always jovial). Reacting to an aspiring author who was refusing to take a sales course, bestselling business author Robert Kiyosaki (of *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* fame) once said, ‘There's a difference between a *bestselling* author and a *best writing* author.’

But is refusing to promote your brand or book reasonable? Aren't you always marketing yourself, consciously or subconsciously, anyway? You may as well take charge of it and throw in a strategy! I am sure you know of someone in your workplace or neighbourhood who seems to get by, not by doing a good job but by mar-

keting themselves very impressively. In another life, I was an IT guy. One time, I was working for a Dutch IT company in Nairobi and a certain lady joined us. She was the classic go-getter type: extroverted, talked a lot, sharp dresser. She came from a super-rich family and didn't *need* the job so she didn't work hard at it, and even once tried to get us to go on strike over a single minor delay in our salaries. Irony of ironies, when a senior position opened up at the same company, she got the promotion and entered the six-figure income bracket while the rest of us were left chained to our workstations! She really knew how to market herself. Economics expert Philip Kotler, author of *Marketing 3.0*, said:

'All of us do marketing...Did you ever compete for a job when you knew there were other applicants? Didn't you dress up as well as you could and even prepare what you were going to say and so on?...Did you compete for a desirable apartment which was scarce?...Or a member of the opposite sex if you wanted to court someone?...We are human animals who know how to make an impression and market ourselves, to some extent.'

This leads me to my third and final point:

'The fact is if there wasn't marketing, the world wouldn't really go around. You wouldn't be able to get a girlfriend because, essentially, you market yourself to this girl to get her. You wouldn't get friends because you, essentially, market yourself to friends to get them to be friends with you...It's the advertising first and then being good at what you do.' – Marshall Wayne, film maker.

I am sure some people don't want to hear that but the purpose of this article is to give you the lie of the land. I wish it were the other way around. I wish the best person in any given field would automatically go farthest. I wish the sky were always blue and all of God's children had shoes. But that's just not the *reality*. The truth is, in business, *it's the marketing first and then being good at what you do*.

I said that to an aspiring author at an outdoor literary event and he snapped his head away from me like a wind vane. He couldn't take it. He's all about the art. He's



a 'msanii'. He's an 'artist'. He's also unknown.

As writers, we are not special. To get ahead, we will have to do everything other people do: if they market their products, we must do the same; if they invest time and money in their enterprises, we must do the same; if they lobby the government until they get favourable national policies (like Kenyan musicians recently did), then we must do the same. And if you catch some disgruntled, starry-eyed, scribblers complaining about how 'motivational writers are minting money', 'a certain poet is getting all the spoken word gigs', 'Ngũgi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka and a few other writers have dominated the literary scene for too long', 'so-and-so wins awards back-to-back and he/she is not even that good' etc., then tell them this:

'You can have the greatest product or service in the world but if nobody knows about it, your business won't last very long. Whatever market you're selling to is likely full of competitors. Even if you have a better quality product or service, your competition can get more business than you if they promote themselves properly.' – Evan Carmichael, business guru.

## References

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# How To Start A Revolution

*(after Keith Boykin)*

How do you start a revolution?  
does it begin with the blooming of  
flowers in the morning sun or when  
the fruits of the standing tree begin  
to ripen?

does it begin with the birds singing  
sweetly after the first rains have  
kissed the earth or does it start  
with the passing of the morning  
clouds to see the sky make love with  
the morning sun?

does it begin with protests and placards?  
media commentaries and mediation contents?  
piercing poetry, powerful prose?  
facebook posts and fiery postulations?

does it begin with a priest's call to prayer  
or the sprinkling of water at mass?  
does it start after your tithes have been paid  
and the pastor's hand has been shaken?

if gandhi, luther and malcolm,  
azikiwe and ikoli stirred in their  
graves, maybe came back to grace the  
earth, would that push you to begin a  
revolution?

if your blood tests came back positive  
and the doctor pronounced that you had  
three months to live, would you write petitions  
to begin that revolution?

does it take burnt bodies, broken limbs,  
orphaned children, dismembered humans,  
soot covered babies, or sobbing fathers to  
begin the revolution?

does the revolution begin after you have  
mourned friends and your heart has been  
broken into many pieces, your soul spent and  
your body numb?

does it begin when you lie to sleep at night  
and fear becomes the only companion you  
know?

does it start with placards saying  
“we’re queer, we are here”  
or does it begin in the lines of an ancient philosophy??

does it begin with the dead turning and twitching

in their graves,  
their lips pursed in crooked pain  
telling you that the world hereafter  
is not milk and dreams but blood and  
gore?

does the revolution begin with  
the choir singing?  
a pastor preaching?  
students rioting?  
or bodies burning?

or does it begin with a kiss from judas  
to jesus?



**Oyewole Bukunmi**  
*The Hauler*

## Fatima Okhuosami

# Picturesque

A peculiar calm prevailed over the atmosphere. We had just performed *janaza* prayers for the dead woman. Hemmed in by a half-circle of relatives, her mother alternated between moments of madness when she banged convulsive fists on the cold cement floor or tore at her hair and eerie episodes when she merely stared on stone-like. Expecting and dreading it, she would remain to witness this last journey. Hassan, father to Leila and husband to Alima, stood beside the main entrance to the house sobbing like a forsaken baby. I moved about shaking hands, saying his “*thanks for coming*” and receiving consolatory hugs. Later that evening, I kept company with Leila while most men headed for the cemetery, some kilometres away. Processions unnerved me and Hassan had insisted on going.

Leaving Leila, I drew farther from the crowd; the widower’s misery a noose around my neck. “Breathe Abu, breathe” came the caution to failing lungs. “What reason can you call to account for such melancholy?” How I yearned to wipe those tears of his face, to envelop the weak frame in an embrace and murmur; “I am here for you.”

I cannot really explain the strange pull that forced me into Hassan’s world. All I know is happiness was being by his side. You know that strange feeling you get when somebody you are fated to is close by but you haven’t seen him yet? The nervous tingling that makes the hairs at the nape of your neck itch? That’s what it felt like with him.

He was not so striking a man. There’s the matter of a rather massive head balancing most precariously on the thinnest, longest neck imaginable. He wore glasses... small, round black-rimmed ones that swallow a little of your beauty and replace it with a nerdy look. He was short, had a massive nose, was bald as a Buddhist monk and had eyes fixed so far apart, they gave an impression of fleeing towards the opposite ends of his wide face. His bow legs were somewhat shorter than normal and



deeply browned. Regular feet were always housed inside regular palm slippers.

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“Be quiet. Do you hear that? Quick, check while I hide these papers.”

“How do you know it is Amina? I know you are sick of her *interruptions* but for goodness sake, stop tapping the table so hard and go.”

“Your aversion is becoming quite worrisome as well. The editor was most insistent that every detail be put down.”

“Including hers. There is money involved.”

“You don’t think I should? Last week, you said she was perfect story material.”

“God have mercy. Where are you off to in such anger? It must be the green tea. Always puts you in a rage. Patience, my dear. I promise we get to the good part soon.”

\*\*\*

On the day our paths crossed for the first time, sun rays and dust particles attacked with unwavering, unforgiving fury. Outside, surviving yellowish- green leaves attached to browned branches swayed gently to the suffocating breeze. Boredom had chased me from my room and *qadr*- destiny was about to bring us together.

I was tired after a morning spent fighting burnt debris off the windows of my boys-quarters apartment. The reason I had undertaken this insanity considering how vicious my nosebleeds could get was, as the first streaks of dawn tore through the sky and upon flattening my face across the glass pane hoping to catch a glimpse of my neighbour lacing his sneakers in preparation for a customary jog, I could only see debris. I hadn’t quite worked up the courage to initiate a friendship and now, I was just irritable.

My brain registered the details of the stranger’s frame. That he was lost was a given. As I set in motion a procedure for ordering visual apparatus to explore more cheerful views, his full lips straightened into a grin and an arm was raised in salute. It



was one of those quirky, everyday smiles; the ones that say “I’m nervous, save me.” I remember thinking the green backpack hanging loose from his left shoulder would look really good on me. His eyelids contracted to build a partial cover over sapphire pupils as waves of happiness coursed through my veins. I remained rooted to the spot and shuddered when my heart suffered a tightening twitch. It was time to acknowledge his greeting yet, I kept gawking.

Like black clouds pregnant with rain drops, we drifted closer to each other, and he asked a question; the direction to a mosque, I think. Feeling light-headed, I tagged along although, I don’t quite remember my reply nor being invited; so strong was this strange pull on me. My atheism still in its first bloom, it was the first time in months that I stepped into a *masjid*.

The brothers made no effort to hide their surprise at seeing *brother Abubakar who Shaitan led astray* return. I forgot to make ablution but when Hassan raised his palms above his shoulders and proclaimed; “Allah is the greatest,” I lifted my unbelieving, unwashed hands and repeated the words. While we stood straight, eyes peeled to the floor, Hassan recited the verses; “In The Name of Allah, Most gracious, Most merciful...” I contemplated how it would feel to run my rough fingers through his soft-looking beard; so black and curly.

“Allah is the greatest” and we bowed keeping our backs straight. “It must be heavenly to have such fairish skin” I thought, giggling inside while smoothing creases on my trousers. A cursory inspection of my nails confirmed what I already feared; they were long, uneven and dirty. I sniffed both armpits and recoiled from the discouraging odour. “Why did I not bath and wear something nice today of all days?”

“Allah is the greatest” came the call ordering us to touch our foreheads to the carpeted floor. “I wonder if he has a girlfriend. Surely, he does not indulge in alcohol so why the pot-belly?”

In time came the final salutations; “Peace be upon you” to the left and right. I had spent all that time fantasizing over him.

We became fast friends. “We will be together in paradise, Abu” was his favourite

phrase. He spoke to me a great deal about his childhood spent hidden in a *madrasa*- an establishment of learning ruled by whip-wielding teachers who enforced memorization of the Qur'an. I watched him become animated as he spoke about anything and everything. He was unconscious of a tightened grip around my slender fingers while he went on with his speech, telling me of *Iman*- faith and *Ihsan*- perfection and *Fiqh*- jurisprudence and *Tawhid*- monotheism. Perhaps, he sniffed out my disbelief and like all mullahs, became eager to turn me around. My throat went dry and I could only manage a slight nod.

"*Insha'Allah*" I said in a broken voice.

\*\*\*

Quite a pity Sonia is absent today. It is such a beautiful morning. The rain last night has made my garden, a vision to behold. The sand smells of my carefree childhood, chrysanthemums are ablaze in the sun and strange birds won't stop singing.

I miss her. Those rough fingers with perfectly trimmed nails, perusing page after page. Numbering and editing, pointing out the smallest errors.

The way she places her elbow on the desk and rests her face inside closed palms. The long gowns caressing the floor like an altar-bound shy maiden. Her empty seat torments me. Worse still, Amina may suggest taking her place.

I should kiss her but I am not certain. I think she likes me. Why else would anyone agree to spend hours working at a manuscript for a wannabe author?

I will kiss her. It is settled.

No, I will not. *My palms feel so itchy.*

When next we see, I shall know.

What if she kissed me? What would those full lips taste like? Her tongue encircling mine; fighting to receive as much as is given. She is strong as a mule, that one. We could have an affair. How delightful and shocking.

One minute while I play besotted husband. I have lived in such insanity for so long; I begin to think myself truly mad.

“The drafts? Still not ready, dearest. Your critique will be most welcome when I’m done but for the present, I need be alone. By Allah, whenever you are close, all I can do is gaze at your beauty and marvel at my luck. No wonder this manuscript remains unfinished.”

“Bah, silver-tongued devil” she says, beaming with joy.

*I’m not one to tarry but, this woman is punishment for some sin for which, I must have forgotten to seek forgiveness.*

\*\*\*

Hassan was soon appointed deputy Imam by the *shura*- election body. I stood at the front row whenever he led prayers, baritone voice resonating from the pulpit one or two times every day. Weekends he spent, doing house to house *dawah*- giving fiery sermons against *boko-haram* and encouraging guardians to send their wards to school. He’d have rice and chicken at these homes- *most people went out of their way to make mallam happy*. His schedule was simple; sleep, prayer, eat and more prayer. He kept a beard, put on trousers which never extended below his ankles and talked to everybody with *khushoo*- shyness and tranquillity.

He learnt to ditch cap and *above the ankle* trousers during our outings. When we were without money for cinema, we had film nights after night prayers- often sit-coms, using bowls of street popcorn and Coca-Cola as snacks. He had a very healthy laughter which exploded from deep within his larynx and away through the mouth making him jerk uncontrollably to and fro. He’d wrap his right arm around my shoulder or grip my knee trying to draw me into his amusement at something funny on-screen. What anxieties I lived through!

\*\*\*

Gentle steps on the staircase. I’m soon to feast on home-made cookies.

“Do you know that Hassan encouraged us to wed? He was our go-between, practically dumping her on me when she made a move on him.”

“I have someone else in mind” he said. “Amina is good-looking, homely, and humble. She has no other interests in life besides a husband and children of her own.”

“I suspect people started talking to him about us. Remember Yusuf, the one with the cleft palate; a chronic do-gooder, always praying and fasting away his “problems?” Did he not tell you I was *different* and did you not believe him?”

“Why deny the truth? Remember how you suddenly had so much work to do whenever I wanted to visit? Positively rude you were. Such horrible business too, with everyone avoiding me like a plague. The peculiar thing about sadness is that it gives you no time to do things that can release you from its hold. You think more and more about your deplorable state which only drags you deeper into depression.”

“I loved him. Is that what you wish to hear, heartless child? Shall I be judged even after everything you now know? Yes you do, lonely creature. You are far worse than me unfortunate friend, for I have loved and a soul that has not, is not alive.”

“You think I too have not....” She stops suddenly, hands over her mouth, dragging the words back in, as if by sheer force of will. Whatever she planned to say, I would never know. Every few seconds I catch her eye. There’s anger, shame and something else within. I am not sure I want to find out.

\*\*\*

“Amina and I have had a somewhat happy life save her desire to ever be reminded of my affection. The true battle is at night; “You have to move like this, darling. I will have more pleasure if we do it that way. I might even...”

“Allah forbids Abu. Behind? You are my husband but what you suggest is haram.” Impatient to end each session, I shut my eyes and summoned Hassan’s image. In such treachery, I did spend many nights with this unsuspecting woman.”

“Oh dear, where are my meds? I should tell you of the sore-throat which drove Has-

san into the waiting, willing arms of Alima.”

Hassan’s lover; tall as a Russian model and graceful as an Arabian princess. The goddess who bumped into his world undoing months of bliss. She was perfection. Even Abu, who does not fancy the delicacy of women... yes, I can say that with conviction.

*Immaculate. Picturesque. Beautiful. Dainty. Young.*

Whenever she smiled, her dazzling white teeth with its beauty gap lit up the world. My once feathery blue, romance-laden sky, she transformed into a dull brown scourge of lonesomeness. Everybody loved her. I suspect they liked Hassan even more because of her. Nobody ever seemed to notice the slight limp on her left leg or its one extra toe.

In the clinic where she worked as a nursing assistant, patients could not have too much of her. Complaints of their many imaginary illnesses met an attentive ear. She laughed when spindle-legged, dirty children with runny noses and swollen bellies came running into the reception. They fought to sit on her laps not caring for the uniform and devoured the sweets she offered, scurrying off before they were hailed in for check-ups.

The morning was foggier than usual. We languished on my living-room settee, clad in sweaters and socks watching a repeat wrestling match on television. Hassan’s ailment had plagued him for almost one week. When he inhaled, it sounded like a fuel-starved truck moving up a steep hill.

“Why don’t you go to the clinic?” I asked for the umpteenth time, bored and dozing off. The contender was about to deliver a flying kick that would win him the *WWE* title. “Anything they give you would be better than drinking warm water and salt.” Hassan obliged. He went later that evening. He returned with lozenges and a lost heart.

On the seventh day of January last year, he told me he was getting her an engagement ring. Mentioned it in the most casual terms armed with his trademark smirk.

He was here in my house he claimed, to consult Amina on the type to buy.

*How dare he do this to me without warning?*

I shrugged off a jab of pain and conjured my killer smile, baring all teeth. “Finally taking the step brother? I am delighted. Allah bless you both.”

I felt prickly sweat below my epidermis. My body itched in one thousand different places and I was certain my face crimsoned.

“Rather fast though” I ventured to add squeezing all the fingers of my left hand with the right.

Amina seemed amazed. “Abu she is a catch and he is perfect.” In a way I pitied her. She still wasn’t over her obsession.

“Alhamdulillah” was my reply.

Like a hungry pig in a sty, I shadowed them. She had introduced him to social media by that time. I recalled the many occasions I tried to get Hassan to open a *Facebook* account. His reply, always: “Whatever for Abu?”

Never was there any sign of a quarrel or break-up in their posts. Her photos and status updates spoke simply of passion and luck and contentment to my disdain. I wept alone lots of times. Every second, I spent wishing a protracted illness upon my rival.

A short courtship followed. Before long, invitation cards for the marriage ceremony of Alima to Hassan were distributed. I persuaded myself something might still happen. I could bare my mind to Hassan and make him choose. An unsettled suspicion that his choice would not be in my favour delayed this occurrence.

I gathered my courage days to the big day; helped in part by a modest drug overdose. It was to be the turning point of my adult life; a confession once unfrozen, never to be forgotten.

I spoke to my hero of a concealed love and to my surprise, Hassan did not react

with outrage. He hugged me close and brushed the tears which streamed down my shamed face. I rubbed his' off with the back of my palm and managed a shy smile.

“*Bu*, I will marry Alima” were his words; using a name he called me only while we were alone. To my hungry ears and wounded heart, it seemed he said other things I longed to hear; “*I’d rather have you.*”

“You will come?” A statement more than a question.

My nod was barely perceptible. In those moments, I struggled against a particularly intense wish to shout. This must be how heartbreak feels.

“I won’t miss it *Alfa*” I replied, with my own nickname for him. We laughed awkwardly and somehow without thinking or even planning it, our lips touched. My palms cradled his face while his clutched my shoulders. The finger marks would be visible on my skin when I take off my *jersey-turned-T-shirt* later that evening. His taste was salty and our kiss long, broken only because in the end, we both needed air.

\*\*\*

It has been five months since her burial. Hassan left four months, three weeks and five days ago. It’s surprising how natural talking about him with friends has become. We laugh and I even throw in a few private jokes. The finer feelings of my heart lay shut up far away.

“As the moon, shining and shimmering in its orb takes over duty from our sun.”

“When daughter and wife retire for the day and my house goes still.”

I pull aside huge curtains and peer at the scintillating stars. My thoughts are of Hassan; beautiful reveries of what different turns our lives could take in an emancipated world. Too soon, my knees grumble and I seek the bed turning away from the back of my wife; the poor woman having given up on unimpressive appalling love-making, now comforts herself with sleep all nights while I battle insomnia.





**Oyebola Famuyiwa**  
*WalkManShip*

# Free State

every day, I preach  
a gospel of my legitimacy,  
to an Afrikaans H.O.D.

her office filled to the brim with Caucasians,  
I am, the lone black academic battling  
syndromes reserved for imposters,

the pressure  
on my shoulder blades,  
any day now  
my bones will soon be crushed to powder,  
and by the end of days  
I've always had enough.

the burden of my skin  
my flesh, my bone,  
my bare feet,  
the weight of cement shoes

will I ever find any rest?

perhaps she will only find peace,

when they find me,  
face down,

with my forehead touching  
the ocean floor.



A photograph of two young women laughing heartily. The woman on the left is wearing a dark floral dress, and the woman on the right is wearing a colorful patterned top with owl motifs. They are in front of a large red and white graphic that says 'Arts'n' Chill'. The entire image is framed by a red border.

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# **A Rant about Society's Reluctance on Transgender Discrimination**

Let us cut to the chase. I have come to rant, and mourn, and cry. How can society be oblivious for so long about discrimination towards transgender people? Perhaps it is because the victims are in the minority? It hurts to grow up in Africa, where backwardness, epitomised by the violation of human rights, is intense. One can't be who they already are because there is a section of society he has to appease or a way of life he has to adhere to. Not only is this unfair, it is very inhumane.

The age-long discrimination against transgender people is fuelled by and also continues to fuel ignorance about the victims. Transgender people are those who have a gender identity or expression that differs from their assigned sex at birth. As in, the girlish boys and boyish girls. This is a vice, right? At least that is what many people think of it. They say it is just a bad habit we have decided to adopt. Certainly, that's one of the reasons why many have discriminated against us, and bullied us, and activism has been tremendously low.

Now, ironically, we do not force or teach ourselves to be so. I was born that way. As an infant, I looked like a real girl. Before my family could even tell my character, my face was beautiful – I was not handsome. My puberty came in later and made me look masculine physically, but that's all it managed to do. I remained a girl inside and out. From my handwriting to style of walking, to talking, to hobbies, everything was girlish. Is that enough to convince any reader that what we are is involuntary? That it is what nature has deposited. That ours is merely to discover, not to invent. Whereas there may be cases where some adopt the behaviours because of peer influence, those cases are extreme and will be ignored for this argument.

That words like 'sissy', 'tom boy' etc. that are offensively meant to bully us exist should be a source of shame to our society. Transsexuals (transgender people who transition from one gender to another) would probably not have to exist if we simply accepted the transgender people as they are. They are acting instinctively, so they

can't be blamed, lest the courts would also pass damning judgements against insane criminals. Many people are out there facing gender dysphoria, that is distress the transgender experiences because of social discrimination, and have gone into measures against their own will just to fit in. These include seeking medical treatments such as hormone replacement therapy to induce beard growth, masculinising skin, hair, voice, fat distribution, the chest and genitals and remove the womb, ovaries, and fallopian tubes for trans men, or feminising fat distribution and breasts, removing excess hair, feminising the voice, skin, face, Adam's apple, breasts, waist, buttocks, and genitals for trans women.

But why should someone go through all that (by the way, trans men who have not had a hysterectomy and take testosterone are more likely to get endometrial cancer) if they are free to act girlishly or boyishly regardless of what gender society gives them? Who even ever set the rules for us? Who set the rules that one gender is supposed to act in this manner and vice versa? I dare say those are just conservative stereotypes and anyone who oppresses girlish boys or boyish girls is backward, uncivilized, and unfair.

Oh, but isn't it God who set the rules? In his holy book, he commanded that men must not put on women's clothes and vice versa as it is shameful! Also, his apostle in the New Testament taught that it is sinful for men to grow long hair like women, adding that it is shameful (paraphrasing to mean, the bible/God wouldn't entertain transgender people as he doesn't encourage cross-dressers in the first place)! I do not dispute that the scriptures have said this, but I'm torn between choosing between what is godly and what is natural. Is it not God also who created Sissies and tom boys the way they are? So it's really a hard debate and that's where another measure transgender people use to handle their Gender Identity Disorder (GID) without compromising on those biblical commands comes in. Most mental health professionals recommend therapy for internal conflicts about discomfort in an assigned gender role. People who experience discord between their gender and the expectations of others or whose gender identity conflicts with their body may benefit by talking through their feelings in depth. However, research on gender identity with regards to psychology, scientific understanding of the phenomenon, and relat-

ed issues, is relatively new (which is not surprising).

With the above suggestion, the reader may be quick to say that's what all transgender people should do. Go for counselling and they are good to go. But here is the reality: 'transgenderhood' is like falling in love. A Romeo and Juliet kind of love – it's a lifelong memory and scar that can never be completely undone. Or rather, like those ones we watch in Philippines' soaps and the couple are being asked to split, for instance, because unknown initially to them they are relatives. They are now bound together like glue and can die for each other. They decide, come what may, they won't split. If they are relatives, it wasn't their fault. That's what it is like to ask a transgender to change character. They enjoy and are bound to the personality they are accustomed to.

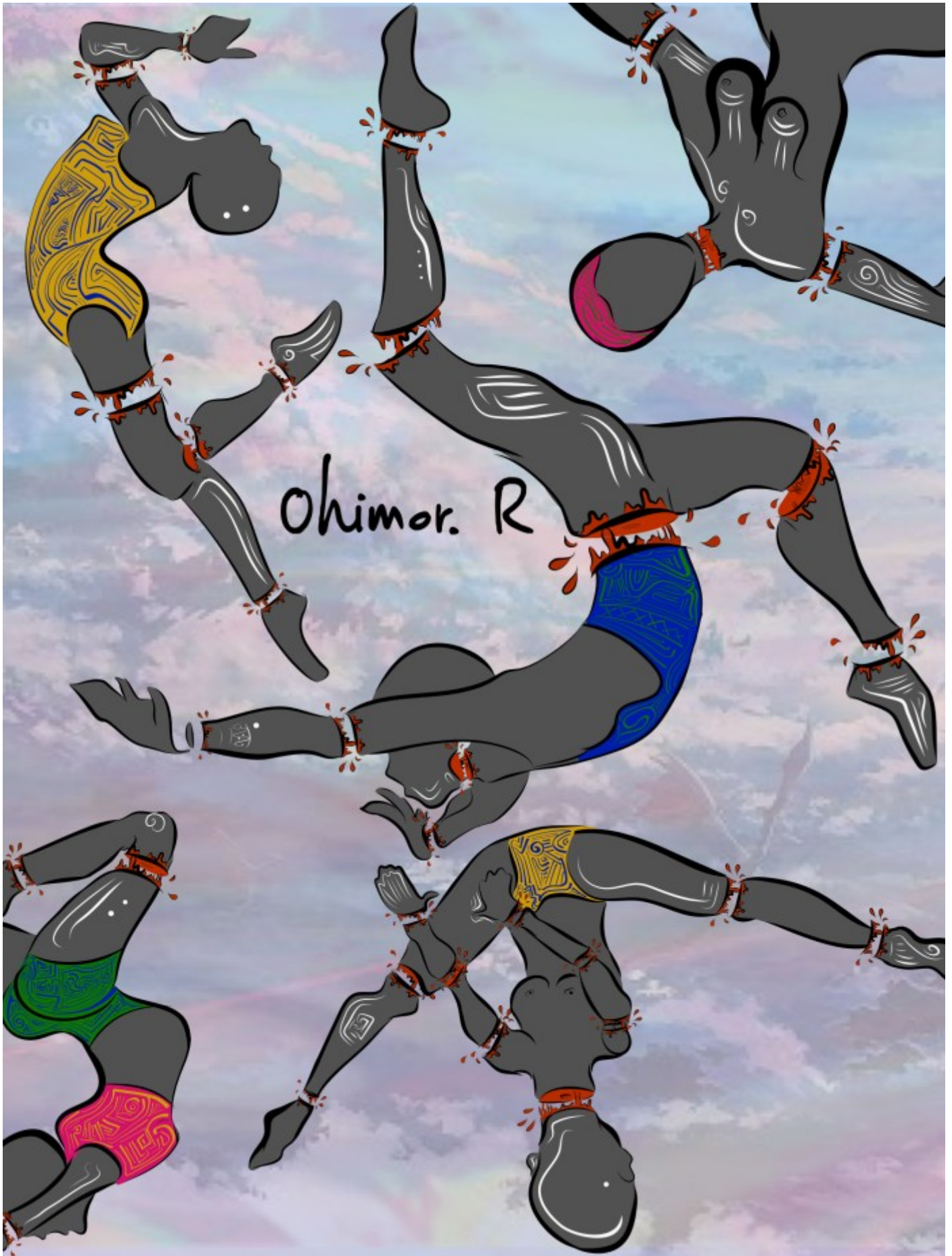
That transgender people face difficulty at the workplace, accessing public accommodations etc. is true as evidenced by my own experience. I had a terrible time in boarding school. Innocently, and naïve about the society's assigned expectations of me, I went on with my beauty cares – I painted my nails, walked like a runway model, and sometimes put shiny stuff on my face. The boys didn't scorn me; they mocked me, they killed my confidence, and pushed me to the furthest corners of isolation every day. I became the middle guy between females and males in the school. I belonged to neither groups. I was a freak. At times, they called me names that belonged to the girls and other funny things in the hope of bullying me. If I wasn't a principled boy in other matters, I would have become the laughing stock of everyone.

But what hurt most was not even the discrimination. What hurt most was the fact that I could not report this kind of bullying to any authority. Our administration was keen and strict on any kind of bullying in the school...but this one; it was one of a kind. It was surely going to leave all the heads scoffing at me after I left. How ridiculous! Needless to say, it would increase my awkwardness among other peers if they discovered I had reported something of the sort. In fact, even those that had not been bullying me would start too. It would mean I could never pick a quarrel with anyone or else they would insult me straight away. Can you imagine? It is op-

pression without a chance to get back – even lawfully.

To all transgender people, one day we will see our God who made us this way and get to ask why he rejected cross-dressing. And to all our oppressors, you need no condemnation or insult from me. The tag of unfairness already shines through your acts of cruelty.





**Ohimor Rume**  
*Limitless*

# The Solace of Scapegoats

At first we dream tapestries  
Of extravagant yarn  
From the softest down  
To colour the calvarial galleries  
Of our notional legacies  
In the largest crochet hook

Resolutions are penned  
In tangible goals  
Translations  
Transliterations  
Of necessary patterns

- Cast a slip stitch
- Follow with a chain stitch
- Multiply by fifteen
- Rivulets of self-doubt
- A chip on the shoulder of despair
- Single stitch
- It can't be done
- "The yarn ran out"
- Increased Critique
- "The crochet hook is broken"
- Double stitch
- Decreased Endurance
- It can't be done

- "There is no market"
- Half double stitch
- "The supplier is out of stock"
- Turn
- It can't be done
- "The dream is destined for larger shoulders"
- Treble stitch
- It can't be done
- "It's time-consuming"
- Double treble stitch
- Triple treble stitch
- Increased Complexity
- It can't be done
- "The shipment is delayed"
- "Ordering platforms are offline"

Or am I?

Plausible excuses

Casting smokescreens

Of solace

For when grey and white matters

Languish in the self-imposed

Confines

Of a skull

Acquiescing

Waving the white of surrender

Yet

Ambition gurgles

A hungry pit

Of grit  
Setting flaming cliffs aglow  
Where sand dunes sing  
And goats ascend  
In cashmere snow

To herald a cliff-hanger:  
Will the yarn be dehaired?  
Ready?  
Set?  
Will mind dominate matter?  
Come the Spring?





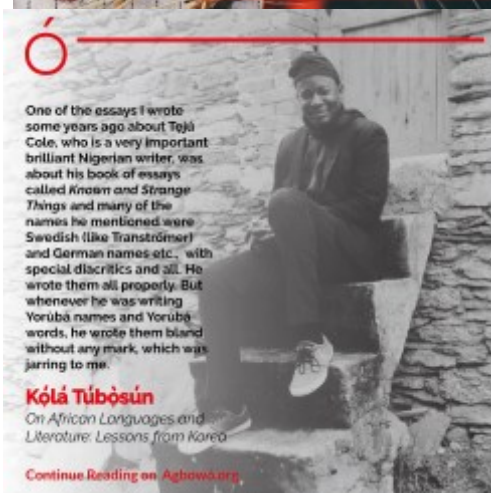
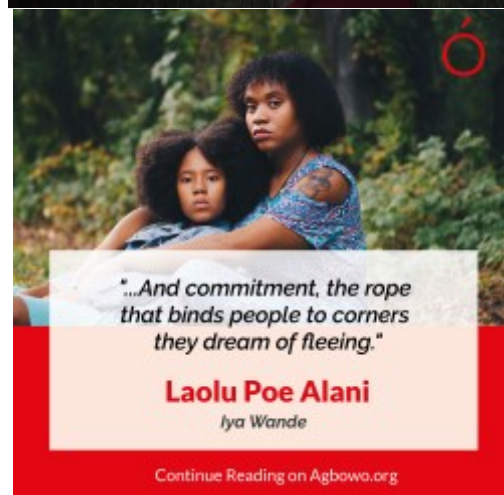
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# The Heaven-S(c)ent

She lay beside him breathing gently in her sleep while he tossed and turned in the tiny bed of his one-room apartment near the Lagos university campus. The calls of the late-night hawkers below his window did not help in his quest for sleep on this hot November evening. He pulled himself off the pillow, rested his weight on one elbow and turned to look at her. The wicked song of a mosquito interrupted his thoughts and he slapped the air around her, not wanting even a mosquito to hurt her.

His eyes wandered over her dark silhouette, long and slender beside him.

She was beautiful. Not only in a physical way. It was the things she said and did that touched him most. He tried to remember if those who had briefly been a part of his life before her had smiled differently. Had looked at the sky or touched his arm in a different way.

His feelings scared him.

He tried to feel the inner walls that he had built up with such dedication over the years. Were they still strong?

Since he met her he was constantly on guard, fighting to resist the thoughts that had begun to crowd his mind.

His walls were crumbling.

He hated that he could not fully enjoy the moments shared with her. Every time she smiled at him, his mind catapulted years back, only to crouch fearfully between the hidden shadows in his memory. Something so elusive always crept up in between these moments with her, forcing him back to the gates he had closed behind him so many years ago.

Today he had been forced much closer to those gates than ever before.

‘Why are you hiding yourself from me,’ she had asked? ‘You are like a precious gift of which I am never allowed to open the wrapping.’ She had laughed and said it playfully but he had seen her eyes searching him. And he knew she had meant it.

He had not replied. He would have loved to tell her, ‘I am what you see before you.’



But he knew it would have been a lie. He was a Trojan horse. Deep within him was something dangerous. How could he show her himself, when he was not even sure he knew himself?

He got up and walked around the room, quietly, so as not to wake her up. An hour later he went back into bed still unsettled. He tore off his t-shirt from his shoulders. As he did so, his fingers brushed one of the scars on the back of his shoulders and he shuddered. He tried one last half-willed attempt to resist but he knew he wanted it. And so he watched himself walk back to those gates. Those high, grey, rusty old gates behind which he had spent his childhood.

What he saw was stained. Like an old Polaroid. Some parts of the picture blurred out forever. Dark marks imprinted on the faces and in the hearts of those eternalized in that moment.

Few dots of light animated the listless grey of their existence then.

There were children, too many, too young. A long tight corridor. Alternating rays of dusty, dull light falling in from the doors left and right of the corridor, cutting through the black. The corridor was like the striped back of a long zebra on which a thousand times, he had imagined himself galloping away, out over the rusty grey gate and far away.

He remembered the sounds. Hushed whispering when the director was in sight. Loud screams when someone was being punished. Heartless laughs of children laughing because they were children and because laughing, no matter how heartless, was despite all, part of childhood.

The smells. His heart raced as he remembered the smells. Mostly it was the smell of disinfectant. Disinfectant mingled with the smell of too many children in one room. Mingled with the smells of sickness and decaying existences.

But once in a while there was the lovely scent. The heaven scent. That was all he had known of the outside world. The heaven scent.

They stood in rows. High heels followed by shiny black laced shoes would walk up and down in front of them. And that heaven scent following the shoes and lingering around them. Time stood still and held hands with Silence in such moments when they all stood in their rows, eyes burning with hope.

He saw himself standing there in that row, a hundred times. His little body tense

with the hope of fulfilment of his one and only dream. His dream of arms, that would hold him. Eyes, that would look into his. Ears that would take their time for him. But most importantly, lips, that would kiss his forehead and wish him ,sweat dreams' at bedtime.

He struggled, trying to remain in the past, forcing his mind to walk through his childhood. A step further.

'Nooo!' He screamed as his dream was shattered, when once again another child was allowed to go. Another child that was not him.

Hand in hand with new parents and a paper bag of one and a half belongings.

He stayed. Till he was eighteen. Till he had built up walls inside of himself.

He woke up suddenly, startled out of his dream. It was her lips on his forehead. 'Good morning,' they said and smiled shyly at him.

At first he was confused. But then, he smiled back, breathed in her heaven scent and let her hold him in her arms.

Prudence Okeoghene Emudianughe

# When They Ask How You Lived

you tell them  
this is how you learn  
to breathe under water /head first.

## i

your mother's breath smells like tired blood/and you listen/as she sings of your beginning.

your first breath was  
music to her soul like  
the redemption song  
playing in the background  
the older wife breathing  
relief in the background.  
you had a gap too.

## ii

your mother's tears pretend. like scared toddlers, they run back to her eyelids. her eyes hold water when she smiles. she says her joy is full and her heart is a sea. she lays the holy book, peering in, nose first, as she picks her words, hands fragile. some words are repeated like she's tasting them again, sometimes you complete a word she's holding, fearing it would shatter. she says the psalm as she faces your father, you fear she'll break. one time, she broke down. her sea opened, current rising and waves crashing, she curses him...

## iii

at night, she hovers around you, her cold hands feeling your skin/ pulling a cover/ her breath singing of a rematch. her tiny body shredding at today's loss/she whispers your name, says 'we would leave'.

## iv

Your father's words taste like  
raw flesh.

he serves them and stays  
to watch you eat.  
you eat  
and like Eve  
you hide  
from your skin  
you hate yourself

when they ask you how you lived.  
you tell them-

this is how you learn  
to breathe under water- put one foot after the next

**v**

your mother's steps say run.



**Darnilola Onafuwa**  
*Street Deity (Egungun)*



# Contributors' Profiles



**Penda Diakité.** Swiss-Malian Artist, Penda Diakité grew up between Mali, West Africa and Portland, Oregon. As a result, she meshes the vibrant colors and patterns of her Malian heritage with influences of her American urban upbringing. Her artwork is a reflection of these blended cultures and is a visual commentary on historical West African tradition and how it co-exists among popular media's portrayal of people of color. She often illustrates her experiences as a bicultural woman of color. Diakité's mixed media work comprises spray paint, acrylic and paper collage (a blend of modern and classic mediums which reflect the traditional and contemporary theme of her work). She cuts and pieces together old and new aspects of her cultures; each art piece telling a story about identity and humankind. Penda graduated California Institute of the Arts with a BFA in Film/Video and a minor in Cultural Studies. She is currently based in Los Angeles where she focuses on professional pursuits in art and film, and runs her art inspired fashion line PendaWear. Find her on Instagram [@thebeautifulartist](#), Facebook: [pendadiakiteart](#) or her website: [pendadiakite.com](#).



**David Iditere Adamu.** David Iditere Adamu is a multi-dimensional creator who loves to create 'out of the world' experiences through digital products, digital art and audiovisual expression. His work reflects his purpose to create. Infusing his African & cosmic identity into his art. David relies heavily on experimental techniques like photo-manipulation for his art. See his other works via [be.net/dayveadams](#) or [@afrogodd](#) on Instagram.



**Akhona Mbange.** Akhona Mbange is an abstract artist based in South Africa. He studied graphic design at Damelin College. He likes to challenge reality and that is one of the reasons why he chose to be a creative. He strives to enhance people's image of how they perceive the world through his art, unite what people thought would be impossible to unite and create simple but profound creations and will change reality as is known. See more of his works via Instagram/Twitter [@akhonambange](#).





**Damilola Onafuwa.** Damilola Onafuwa is a documentary storyteller based in Lagos Nigeria, interested in human-interest stories that create consciousness about social issues, how human cultures are formed and how they shape our perception of the world. He has worked with notable organizations, NGOs and corporations both locally and internationally like UNICEF, MTN and RCS London to name a few. A member of APJD (Africa Photo-Journalism Database) and an Associate fellow at The Royal Commonwealth Society, he was also a Fellow at Akoma, an African Storytelling Fellowship between 2017-2018 and a Skoll World Forum Fellow 2019. Damilola was nominated for The Future Awards 2018 Prize for Photography and World Press Photo Joop Swart Masterclass 2019. He currently lives and works as an independent photographer and filmmaker in Lagos, Nigeria. Get familiar with his works via his website [www.damilolaonafuwa.com](http://www.damilolaonafuwa.com).



**Bukunmi Oyewole.** Bukunmi Oyewole is a travel and documentary photographer, and a picture story teller. He enjoys listening to the radio, reading novels and has a passion for maps. His other works can be seen on Instagram as @omnivisuals.



**Eko Adetolani.** Eko Adetolani is a multidisciplinary abstract visual artist based in Lagos Nigeria. He works with diverse media. Some of which include acrylic paint, graphic design and motion pictures and videos. Some of his works has been showcased in exhibitions across Nigeria and West Africa. He prides himself on having multiple styles as he believes this helps to keep his audience entertained and surprised. He also likes to experiment with different ideas around African motifs, patterns, illustrations and modern art. His social media handles are @Eko\_\_a on Twitter and Instagram.



**Dela Aniwa.** Born in Yendi in the Northern Region, Dela Aniwa is a Ghanaian based photographer. He made the decision to take photography professionally in 2018 after he was gifted his first DSLR by his elder brother. To him, photography serves as a means to express himself as well as bringing the best out of his subjects. He enjoys documentary and photographing portraits as well as traveling just to capture great moments. He is currently a post graduate candidate in animal science and hopes to fuse it with photography in the future. See his other works @dela\_madeit



**Oyebola Famuyiwa.** Oyebola Famuyiwa ventured into photography while studying Electrical/Electronics Engineering at The University of Ibadan. He is a Fine Art Photographer at ArtbyOye where he expresses a lot of his creative visions in photographs. He exhibited at the 2011 "Creative Expo" organized by the British Council in Lagos Nigeria. He is also the Lead Photographer at Potterclay Photography (Wedding & Lifestyle) and PixBus (Mobile Photobooth in a 1979 Volkswagen). He's an award-winning photographer and also a finalist of many competitions like the "Life in my City 2009" and "This is Lagos" by the African Artists' Foundation Lagos. He's had his works published in various magazines and many websites.



**Fatima Okhuosami.** Fatima Okhuosami is a Nigerian Pharmacist and freelance writer. Her works appear online and in print at Everyday Fiction, 101words.org, Third Word Press, Connotation Press, Creative Diadem, Flash: The International Short Story Magazine, CFwriterz Magazine, Cuento Magazine amongst many others. She loves writing almost as much as she loves good food.



**Erhu Kome Yellow.** Erhu Kome Yellow is an Urhobo writer. She is also an Otaku and a local guide. Her work has been featured in literary magazines, anthologies, and as a Google Ad. She mostly writes speculative fiction for young adults. Her debut novel, 'Dawsk', is forthcoming from Love Africa Press.



**Jarred Thompson.** Jarred Thompson's poetry has been published in Typecast Literary Magazine, Type House Literary Magazine, Outcast Magazine, the Esthetic Apostle, Sky Island Journal, Cosmographia Books (forthcoming 2019), Best New African Poets Anthology of 2016, New Contrast Literary Journal, Alegarse Journal and one of his poems was longlisted for The Sol Plaatje Award and Anthology of Poetry in 2017. His chapbook Universes and Paradoxes was shortlisted for the Kingdom in the Wild Poetry Prize. His fiction publications include Typecast Literary Magazine, New Contrast Literary Journal (forthcoming 2019), The Rainy Day Literary Magazine, ImageOutWrite, the Johannesburg Review of Books and The 2018 Writivism Mentoring Anthology Transcending the Flame. Additionally, his short story Changing I's was longlisted for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize and his works "Bench Presses and Erectile Dysfunctions" and "Between Rock and Water" was shortlisted for the Geraald Kraak Award and Anthology (forthcoming 2019).



**Adé Sultan Sangodoyin.** Adé Sultan Sangodoyin is a Nigerian filmmaker and writer. He studied English Literature with Journalism at the University of Buckingham in England. He's known for the films, "Different Plains" (2015) and "A Cemetery of Doves" (2019). His short story, "Dad Attempted Many Things and Failed" and "The Charred Flower" have been published in the Kalahari Review. His creative aesthetics are driven by a host of things that range from the quiet rhythms of nature, to the works of, Oscar Wilde, Ben Okri, Souleymane Cisse, Mahamat Saleh Haroun, Wim Wenders, Bernardo Bertolucci, Kore-eda and David Lynch, as well as old, new and emerging mediums of dreaming.



**Jonathan Durunguma.** Jonathan Durunguma is a 2017 winner of the Okike Prize for Literature. He is currently at work on a collection of short stories that seeks to explore the cultural perceptions of mental illness.



**Efua Traoré.** Efua Traoré is a Nigerian-German writer who grew up in a small town in the south of Nigeria. For as long as she can remember, her head was always filled with little stories, but it was not until her late twenties that she discovered her passion for writing them down. She won the Glimmer Train prize for the first 1.000 words of a novel. Her short story 'True Happiness' won the 2018 Commonwealth Short Story Prize for Africa and was published by Granta. The story was published by Lapham's Quarterly in May 2019 and will be included in an upcoming collection of short stories.



**Wesley Macheso.** Wesley Macheso is a Malawian writer currently reading for his PhD in literature at Stellenbosch University. He teaches literature at the University of Malawi to survive and he writes to live. His short story "This Land is Mine" is published in *Water: new short story fiction from Africa* (2016) by Short Story Day Africa. He won the 2014/ 2015 Peer Gynt Literary Award in Malawi for his children's book *Akuzike and the Gods*. He is a columnist with *Malawi's, The Daily Times*, hosting a weekly column under the title "The Write Stuff". He edits for [www.africanwriter.com](http://www.africanwriter.com).



**Sarah Lubala.** Sarah Lubala is a Congolese-born South African writer. She has been shortlisted for the Gerald Kraak Award and The Brittle Paper Poetry Award and longlisted for the 2019 Sol Plaatje EU Poetry Award. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in Brittle Paper, The Missing Slate, Apogee Journal, The Shallow Ends and Entropy, as well as The Gerald Kraak Anthologies, As You Like It and The Heart of the Matter, Botsoso's 2018 Poetry from Public and Private Places and the African Collective's Best New African Poets 2018 Anthology.



**Ignatius Bambaiha.** Ignatius Bambaiha is a passionate literati, a writer in all literature genres. He has participated in several writing competitions such as the MEBO Theater 'Bold, beautiful and brainy' national essay competitions in 2014 and also in 2015 and finished in the first runners up among other competitions. Also, he has submitted writings in various literary magazines and publications through which some of his writings have been published such as; Writers Space Africa magazine, the Bridport prize, Okadabooks, DWARTS magazine, Writers' Global Movement, 20.35 Africa, Bakwa magazine, Wreaths for a Wayfarer poetry anthology, Agbowó Magazine, End of the world podcast, thebestofafrica.org among many others. He has written and also ghost-written several novels, poetry anthologies, short story anthologies, essay anthologies among others genres, although not yet published. As a writer, he can be followed on his Facebook literary page via this link: [www.facebook.com/writerignatiusbambaiha](https://www.facebook.com/writerignatiusbambaiha).



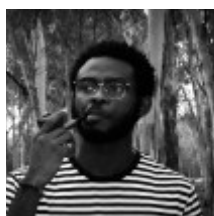
**Kemi Falodun.** Kemi Falodun has been published in Electric Literature, Saraba Magazine, Africa is a Country, Wawa Book Review and Kalahari Review. "A Life in Transit," her essay chapbook on Invisible Borders Trans-Nigerian road trip was recently published. Twitter - @kemifalodun Instagram - kemifalodun



**Ebuka Prince Okoroafor.** Ebuka Prince Okoroafor is a Nigerian Medical student. His work has appeared on Litro USA, Bangalore Review, Eunoia Review, AFREADA, African Writer, and elsewhere. Follow him on IG @show\_fantastic & twitter @bukadobigshow



**Alex Nderitu.** Alex Nderitu is a Kenyan poet, playwright, novelist and critic. His first book, 'When the Whirlwind Passes' (2001) has the distinction of being Africa's first digital novel. Some of his writings have been translated into Swedish, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic and Swahili. In 2014, his poem 'Someone in Africa Loves You' represented Kenyan literature in Poetry Postcards distributed during the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland. His fiction is available worldwide via the Worldreader app and devices. In 2017, he was named by Business Daily newspaper as one of Kenya's 'Top 40 Under 40 Men'. Nderitu is also the Deputy Secretary-General of Kenyan PEN and is the Kenyan Editor of the international theatre news portal, TheTheatreTimes.com. He can be found at [www.alexandernderitu.com](http://www.alexandernderitu.com) and on social media at [www.facebook.com/alexandernderitu](https://www.facebook.com/alexandernderitu), [www.twitter.com/nderitubooks](https://www.twitter.com/nderitubooks) and on Instagram via @alexander\_nderitu



**JK Anowe.** JK Anowe, Igbo-born poet and essayist, is author of the chapbooks *The Ikemefuna Tributaries: a parable for paranoia* (Praxis Magazine Online, 2016) and *SKY RAINING FISTS* (Madhouse Press, 2019). He's a recipient of the inaugural *Brittle Paper* Award for Poetry in 2017 and a finalist for the 2019 *Gerard Kraak* Award. His poems have appeared in or are forthcoming from *Palette Poetry*, *Brittle Paper*, *Elsewhere Lit*, *Expound*, *Enkare Review*, *Gnarled Oak*, *Poetry Life & Times*, *Praxis*, and elsewhere. He is Editor: Poetry Chapbooks, at *Praxis Magazine Online*. He lives, teaches, and writes from somewhere in Nigeria. Twitter: @JkAnowe IG: @jk.anowe



**Adedayo Agarau.** Adedayo is a documentary photographer and poet from Nigeria. He is an Executive Assistant at Animal Heart Press and a Contributing Editor at Barren Magazine and writes on loss, boy child abuse, and absence. His works have been featured on *Gaze*, *Mojave Heart*, *Glass-Poetry*, *Honey & Lime*, and elsewhere. His Chapbook, *Asylum Chapel*, is forthcoming by Pen And Anvil Press, 2019.



**Chrissie Chinebuah.** Chrissie Chinebuah is an aspiring lawyer from Ghana. She first began writing poetry in 2010 and has since been published a number of times, most recently in the *Momaya Review* 2018. She also served as an editor-in-chief at Boston University, her alma mater, for a publication entitled *The Chimaerid*.





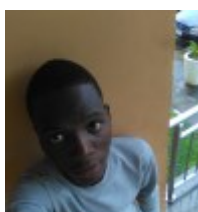
**Prudence Okeoghene Emudianughe.** Prudence Okeoghene Emudianughe is a poet, spoken word artiste and writer. Her poem focuses on girlhood, loss, grief, abuse, depression and love. Her works have been featured on Barren Magazine and Sabyfy. She was the second runner up for Chrysolite Poet of the year 2017 and was also shortlisted for the Communication League prize for fiction, 2017. She lives in Anambra, Nigeria, where she works as a nonlinear editor for the state broadcasting service as a serving corps member whilst writing and trying out different forms of poetry. She is also a member of The Poets in Nigeria, Awka Connect Centre and Anambra Literary Society.



**Tolu Oloruntoba.** Tolu Oloruntoba was born in Ibadan, Nigeria, and practiced medicine before his current work in healthcare management. Some of his recent and upcoming bylines include Pleiades, Bird's Thumb, Columbia Journal Online, Entropy Magazine, and SAND Journal. His poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and his chapbook, "Manubrium", will be published by Anstruther Press in 2019.



**Aaishah Mayet.** Aaishah Mayet was born and bred in the City of Gold, Johannesburg, South Africa. She currently works in the healthcare sector which, for her, has bridged the frontiers of our shared human experience. As a self-confessed bibliophile of many years, literature remains, at once, her teacher and her sanctuary. Her works include Haiku published in the Lotosblute, as well as online poetry published on Amaliah, Active Muse and Poetry Potion.



**Ernest O. Ògúnyemí.** Ernest O. Ògúnyemí is an eighteen-year old writer from Nigeria. Some of his works have appeared/ are forthcoming in: Ricochet Review, Ink in Thirds, Litro Comedy Issue, Erotic Africa: The Sex Anthology, Canvas Literary Journal, and more. He was recently selected from the 2019 Adroit Summer Mentorship Program, to be mentored in poetry by Sebastian Paramo.



**Kofi Antwi.** Kofi Antwi is a writer of poetry, nonfiction, and fiction. A graduate from St. Joseph's College MFA Creative Writing program, Kofi works as an English professor at St John's University and St. Joseph's College. The prolific writer was



born in Brooklyn and raised in Staten Island by parents of Ghanaian descent. Kofi is currently finalizing his first poetry chapbook.



**Sihle Ntuli.** Sihle Ntuli (@sihlexntuli) is a Kwa-Mashu born South African writer and M.A graduate from the School of Languages and Literature at Rhodes University. He is a lecturer of Classical Civilizations at the University of the Free State for the 2018/2019 academic year. Since 2009, his poems have been published on New Coin, New Contrast, Itch and Saraba amongst others. He has also been published in an array of African anthologies such as the Best New African Poets 2015 Anthology & the Sol Plaatjie EU Poetry Anthology in 2016 & 2017.

He has read his poetry at several literature festivals such Time of the Writer and Poetry Africa for the launches of print editions of Poetry Potion and Uhlanga respectively. In 2015, as part of Bakwa's music feature edition, he curated a Pan-African playlist in collaboration with Ja Magazine entitled 'Phola'. In the same year, he released his debut anthology of poetry entitled 'Stranger' to favourable reviews.

In 2017, Nigerian Singer/Songwriter and poet Douglas Kaze wrote a paper entitled "bodies starved of the city's pulse": The Post-Apartheid Urban Space in Sihle Ntuli's Stranger" this paper was presented at Yale University in the United States as part of the A.L.A Annual Conference."



**Michael Akuchie.** Michael Akuchie is a poet from Nigeria whose work appears on The Hellebore, Rabid Oak, Kissing Dynamite, Sandy River Review, Burning House Press and elsewhere. He studies English at the University of Benin, Nigeria. He has a micro-chapbook, "Calling Out Grief" forthcoming with Ghost City Press. Find him on Twitter as @Michael\_Akuchie.



**Edaki Timothy.** Edaki Timothy is an undergraduate Mass Communication student of the University of Benin in Nigeria. His works have appeared in Kalahari Review, Praxis Magazine, EverGreen Poetry Journal and elsewhere. He was a top entrant for the 2018 Lagos State International Poetry Festival. He spends his time dreaming too much and listening to art from pop singers. Find him tweeting contently @EdakiTimothy.



**Osaze Amadasun.** Osaze Amadasun is an artist of creative elasticity whose artistic mediums cut across drawing, painting, illustration and graphic design. Osaze first trained as an architect graduating with a BSc. in Architecture in 2014 and went on to receive a Master's Degree in Environmental Design in 2016, both from the University of Lagos. His works reflect the diverse culture of His environment and he shows a keen interest in documenting and storytelling through his art. Over the years, Osaze has undertaken various art projects illustrating, designing and creating for high profile organizations. He recently got commissioned to create murals for the NG\_HUB building, Facebook's first flagship community hub space in Africa located in Yaba, Lagos. He also worked on 'Say my Name ' a children's book celebrating cultural diversity and 'Bini playing cards' which pays homage to the ancient kingdom of Benin and its classical works of art. Osaze's work has featured in the Guardian Life, Reuters, Konbini, Blanck Magazine UK, Art-X Live, amongst others.



**Ohimor Oghenerume Yinkore.** Ohimor Oghenerume Yinkore's ethereal digital artistry is not simply about drawing graphic designs but the reverence of the divinity of the female form and her rich African heritage by creating alluring images that are an appealing harmony of intricate line work and mesmerizing color combinations. Oghenerume sees herself as tasked with the mission of portraying the modern appeal of women and African tradition in a digital era. With a variety of art styles ranging from abstract to animation, she is able to reach beyond the restrictions of what art is generally defined as, by encapsulating the combination of ancient African expression and the allure of contemporary skill. The artist lives and works in Nigeria. See more of her works @ohimor.r



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