

S P E A K I N G

# SHADOWS



O'Pelumi Francis Salako

S p e a k i n g  
**SHADOWS**

*(A Collection of Photos, Poems & Prose)*

**O'Pelumi Francis Salako**

**ODAN BOOKS**

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## DEDICATION

*... For the Ajilete Woman who birthed a god, Mother.*

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# Acknowledgment

I want to express my sincere gratitude and Thanks to the giver of life and the maker of earth, the giver of vision.

I want to thank everyone who has directly and indirectly contributed to the success of this book. Ranging from the designer, the people who left their gainful duties to model for me and many others

I acknowledge the moral support and encouragement of my family, friends and close allies and others who don't fall into any of these categories.

# Testimonials

O'Pelumi's carefully placed words are guides to what is to come. The silhouettes are the end of depth; figurative and creative. This can't be offered more as a first offering, it's the beginning of what is to come, truly.

**Adedayo Adeyemi Agarau,**

*Creative Photographer, Award winning Poet, and Author, "For Boys Who Went".*

Salako, via his beautiful images and imageries, artistically decodes the puzzles of life and its embers. His is a voice beaming hope and unity in Speaking Shadows.

**Wale Ayinla,**

*Poet, Photographer, and Author of "White Rose" and "The Other Side of Other Rooms".*

Speaking Shadows is inspiring. A thought-provoking book with images speaking in depth for itself. Start with the first line and you won't stop until the last. Brilliant work

**Abah John,**

*Artist, Eljaypress*

The silhouettes speak profound truths about the human state, with great insights from the author.

**Chester Tubbor,**

*Celebrity Photographer, Chicago, USA.*

Speaking Shadows expresses the shades of innocence, an overlapping collage of violence, the frustration of broken dreams and the bleakness of death... Salako dispels the specters of fear with a glimmer of hope. Speaking Shadows takes you on a journey through the eyes of the shutter and the mouth of a poet...deep, dark and gripping!

**Jide Badmus,**

*Poet, and Author of "There is a Storm in My Head".*

A masterpiece this is, with each stroke being exactly where it belongs... Not only is the style unique, the messages embedded are also cardinal. Here is a blissful marriage of lines and images solemnized by nature's design. Here is a journey into the deepest recesses of human emotion and the vastest realms of human occupation. Here is the work of a man who not only has his way with words, but also with hunting down

priceless slices of natural splendor with nothing but a camera.

***Kunle Adebajo,***  
*Award-winning Writer, Poet, and Polemicist.*



# Foreword

Art is not restricted to textual representation of ideas and ideals. Sometimes, we find other forms of expressions to relate pertinent ideas and issues. These forms could be visual, dramatic, graphic, photographic or even computer-generated images. The goal has always been to find the best avenue to express the artist's vision and interpretation of the world. It is, however, rare to find a beautiful fusion of many arts combined into one space to share the author's sentiments. It is this rarity that O'Pelumi Francis Salako has excelled.

It is true that an image is more than a thousand words. However, sometimes, an image, left to itself may be dumb; thus, betraying the unique vision the artist hopes to share. Salako is not willing to leave the reader confused about his intent. Through the power of the camera, he has captured the silences, nuances and moods of life and living – yes, shadows! Shadows offer mythological, mystical and philosophical interpretations of our common existence. And, often, shadows don't lie. Our shadows are the extension of our realities, absurdities and extra-realities.

Speaking Shadows is more than a collection of photographs, poems and prose. The author is not carelessly aiming his lens at expanse of nothingness, he is focused. He is telling a story, through the shadows of his life, our lives. He has been generous to interpret some shadows in poetic lines, while others are reflections conveyed in prose with a hue of philosophical edge. I am awed by how he has handled sensitive issues such as hope, anger, faith, and religion. His mind is rich and evolving.

In Speaking Shadows, Salako invites us to look deep within ourselves, and within others. He is asking us to redefine our values and embrace the best in humanity. He does not pretend to have an answer to all; but like we, sometimes, need some quiet time to hear our shadow speaks to us, this author is asking us to learn of the insights our shadow can offer us. This book is a rare gift, a beautiful work of art!

Thank you.

**Funso Oris,**

Poet, Anthologist, and Co-Author of *State of the State: Sordid Beatification*, Chicago, USA.

# MEDITATION



There are times that we begin the greatest journey of life by looking within for answers to questions that keep coming at us. Those times, we find strength in God; or a Higher Being or Energy as some call it.

Yes, there are moments that we just need some quiet time to meditate and look at issues differently. In doing this, we get answers to our questions. We learn more about ourselves and understand the world around us better.

Meditation is an important source of strength. And when we explore our faith in God during those quiet moments, we have the strength to face life's challenges.



# FACING *the* FUTURE



I saw dried bones  
Align beyond Hades  
And dead souls of mortals  
Afloat six-feet  
Their tongues intertwined  
In an odd triskele  
They sang sonorous dirge  
For their mournful destinies  
(Dead with them)

The grave domiciles,  
Shiniest of the glories  
Very rich, and fat in  
Abundance of young boys  
And men who were to sit  
In the high places

I wasn't dead, like them clothed in plain  
But I was a replica of their state  
Looking all clogged, hitting my aspirations  
The dead, even thirsted fulfillment

*Speaking Shadows*



# CHILDHOOD



Our characters and behaviors offer a glimpse of our childhood. Those days build and mold us into whom we are. And they mar us too. The days of innocence, when all we knew was happiness, while sadness that we couldn't decipher.

Today, I lay down on bare floor in the passage, the chilly floor welcoming my body with the soothing sensation I felt, and reminisced my infant days. The days I crave to relive, sometimes.

As a kid, I would gather nails I found lying around in the neighborhood, then took them to mother. "Keep these nails, let's roof our house with them", I'd say to her.



As a kid, I would gather nails I found lying around in the neighborhood, then took them to mother. “Keep these nails, let’s roof our house with them”, I’d say to her. I was young and I didn’t understand the things needed actually for building a house (except the sand house I built with my friends). But I knew people were building houses of their own, moved into them and became landlords. And I wanted same. I still have my collection of nails. May be one day, I’d roof my own house with them.

I recall that I wanted mother to buy a car then. Seeing other kids in the school being dropped off in their parents’ cars incited this: “Mother, when are we buying a car?” I remember to have asked on a school day afternoon. She told me we’d have to save money if it would happen soon. I gladly began to save money for this cause.

Looking at the shadow of these three boys, I felt it was me, flanked by two childhood friends who held special places in my heart.



# ARISE, O GIANT!



Nigeria, is the biggest African nation in the world, the giant of Africa and a pacesetter to many African countries. But we are not far from topping the list of the most corrupt nations in the world.

Every form of crime and social vice is perpetrated in my country. Corruption (a canker-worm that has eaten deep into the political and economic system of the nation) sounds like an ordinary word.

Thieves and cabals are celebrated, while the honest few are treated as fools. People run from the shores of the country in search for greener pastures on daily basis. But, unlike millions of people, I have not given up on this nation.

Every morning, I say a wish for this country. I believe she shall blossom and rise again. I believe in her potentials. She shall return to her glory days.



# MOTHERLAND

Motherland, Naijiria,  
You weep and cry  
In the secret places of the house  
Like a first wife whose barrenness  
Projects as a tattered kite  
Tossed around by the violent  
Mockery of the society

You wipe your tears with the fold of  
Your impoverished wrapper  
Your hair, gray from years of sorrows and struggle  
And your frame crook and bent  
Your Bosom, haggard and deflated  
From years of unbridled pillage

*Speaking Shadows*



You sit and remember  
Your aesthetic Boyo  
Before the white man's voyage  
long when your regions  
Were empires  
And their monarch, gods

Today, I whisper hope  
To your geriatric discernment  
You shall never have to morn  
And wallow in penury

*Speaking Shadows*





# DEATH



Many a time, I wonder what my demise would look like. If I'd be able to feel my stiff cheek flesh. If my legs would ever kick football after then. If I'll ever be able to read or write poetry, or capture images.

Man's life is an admixture of sadness, failure and heartbreak, sometimes spiced up with loss. We keep finding reasons for our existence. We find happiness in different places. We seek love and acceptance. Man wants to love and be loved.

But sadly, we can't have the things we crave, the things we call accomplishments in life. We wander and wander in the wilderness of life. We forget the true definition of life. We get desperate and thread extreme paths that lead to destruction and total annihilation.



If only man knows the true essence of his life. If only man could sit and draw lessons from nature. If man would only look around him and take lessons from his shadow - an inherent part of him which, even in the darkest days of his life, sticks to him through darkness till he finds light.

Our days are numbered and death is a blessing to every-man's life. It gives us a sense of purpose, a reason to live right. A reason to accomplish things and make things happen in our life time. The subject of Hades and afterlife is not for me to discuss - every man to his opinion (theists, atheists and agnostics).

“ Death, oh you  
Who strikes and takes  
-at will  
Truly you're more blessing  
Than curse!”



# FACELESS

For *Adepoju Paul*,  
Whose cock crowed  
Before dawn.

Silent, emotionless and cold  
The echoes of doom  
Weightless  
Like the air,  
Which keeps the universe alive

The prints of yesterday  
As though it were  
A path threaded  
By ghosts

The dark shades  
Of the mind  
Like the inside  
Of a graveyard,  
Garrote and dreadful

The past's effigy  
Mournful  
And uncertain  
Like man's shadow  
My shadow!

*Speaking Shadows*



# NO-STAL-GIA

For *Funsho Orimoloye*,  
Whom I call father.



Somewhere,  
My old man is sitting  
In the scattered ancient town  
of brown roofs  
Surrounded by hills and mountains,  
Engulfed in the nostalgic reminisces  
Of his youth

His figure, old and crooked,  
The wrinkled face I find on every man  
Wearing a khaki shirt  
Or tracksuits and a baseball cap to match

The one which sight  
of splattered 'milkose' sweets  
I remember  
The smell of cologne  
In their varieties  
Like an attar collage

*Speaking Shadows*




He speaks of his  
Long gone youth  
In Gold Coast; his abecedarian  
His anamnesis of Accra  
A sanctum to his decrepit musing  
Ardor for Dokunu and Ebentie

Recalls in continual,  
The days he peeks to relive  
Those eluding epochs  
That are gone now.



# ANGER

A silhouette of two men in a heated argument against a sunset background. One man is shouting into a megaphone or shouting towards the other man. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow behind the figures. In the background, there are silhouettes of buildings and a construction crane.

*“Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.”*

-Mark Twain

Anger kills us from within. It blinds us from seeing things clearly. It triggers us to behave abnormally and irrationally such that after that fit of rage, we question our sanity in those moments of fury.

I get angry a lot, so easily too, like the lid covering my anger bottle was loosely knotted (I wonder a times). But in these moments of ire, I try so much to lay a finger on no one.

But once, I failed to keep to this rule. A teammate had insulted the coach and the other teammates in the local football team I trained with. It was in the closing days of the year 2015.

*Speaking Shadows*



I got livid, brimmed to the neck with anger. I took it personal. I confronted him and asked him to apologize. He didn't, but insulted me more. And I landed him a slap, that he staggered backwards.

Then after a few more blows to his face, I felt guilty suddenly. I went home heavy-hearted. The next day I made up with him but it registered as a permanent stamp. I still feel that ting of guilt, even now.

I've learned to tame and put my anger to check since then.



# POT *of* BEANS



*"Life is a pot of beans".*

-Victor Daniel

As funny as this quote may be, it has many lessons embedded therein to learn. Our lives are literally a pot of beans. Hot from the fire set beneath it. This fire are our life's challenges. Sometimes, we serve our beans hot, and we end up burning our tongue, and purge in some cases. These times are when we approach our difficulty rashly without guide, we end up hurting ourselves.

*Speaking Shadows*





I sat and reflected on some decisions I had taken in my life. I call some of them foolish now. Many were taken from moments of youthful exuberance. And Some out of sheer impatience.

On one occasion, I resorted to dealing with an issue with force, thinking I would gain satisfaction, revenge... But I was wrong. I ended up getting more hurt and burnt.

Some of these decisions cost me valuable friendships. However, while I have learned from them, I don't have regrets. There's no room for regrets.



# EVOLVED

On nights like this, I feel like I was one of the boys who went and never returned in Agarau's poem. Truly so, I have grown from the shy, clueless teenager I used to be. I've grown mentally and emotionally and physically - that I thought I was some macho, maybe not so macho, or a little less. I now handle responsibilities with little or no skirmishes.


A naive, black little boy I was, who'd happily conform to the directions of others. Those days are gone now and I don't rue them.

Sometimes, I miss those days of naivety, I wish they could be re-lived. The innocence and total obliviousness from the terrors and wickedness of the heart of men.

Those days are long gone as I had early written, I evolved. I went and never returned.



# STANDING TALL



On some days, I get drowned in pride, I defy the rules of failure and defeat. In such times, I hold my head high and vow to not remain grounded.

On one occasion, I had come second in the church Boys Organization Unit Bible examinations, hence putting an end to my seven years' monopoly. The guy who toppled me was a younger fellow, one whose brother was my friend. A number of friends had laughed at this, a good laugh they thought it was. But they were never going to get to me, I wasn't going to be grounded because I was a champion- a god.

And on one other occasion, while I was in high school, I wasn't so good with arithmetic assignments and tests. I was the assistant head boy and was pretty good with the other courses. I had failed a maths exam in the second term of my second year in the senior class. I was placed 18 of 32 students.

Some of my classmates were gossiped about me failing. But this act wouldn't get to me, I learned to develop a thick skin against issues like these, big or small or large.



# REBIRTH



I sat in solitude accompanied in silence on this veranda and I watched a flock of 12 birds fly together in the sky. It's 1800 hours and they obviously were just retiring from their day hustle. Then not long, two birds flew into the direction the first group had flown.

I viewed myself as the lone bird which came after these two batches. Like I was all alone in the struggle of this life, like no one was there to hold my arm and pat my back when I grew weary and tired., someone to make me smile. In those days, a smile was a stranger to my face. And I wondered if I'd have survived this long.

Many times, nature, animals and many uncountable things surrounding us are parables and proverbs. Parables which we could only deduce in solitude of mind, state of soberness debar of disturbance.



These moments make us, they help us review our living standards. You meditate on the past, the present and future in these times. You sharpen and re-strategize your life plans.

Every team game has a tactic discussion session, where players and team coaches discuss different tactics for every match against different teams. Such is this moment to yo; it's undoubtedly crucial and essential to your progress



# DARE!



In those days when I was still very weak in the mind, when I was tired of everything around me. The days I slept and it was no different from being on a faraway farm, splitting wood on a sunny harmattan afternoon.

Those days when I was slowly sliding into depression And no one noticed, poetry and photography offered me salvation.

That I could create magic with words in form of verses, that I could freeze pictures of streets and strangers with my phone camera gave me hope. It bore out some phenomenon that I still have not found the right words to qualify.



These artistic way, give me expression, reasons, purpose, to wake up every day and chase my dreams. To live and love life, to love and be loved.

There is more to poetry than words, poetry is magic, poetry is extraordinary, poetry gives life.

*Speaking Shadows*



# BROKEN DREAM

Broken Dreams  
Are the dried bones  
Of young boys  
Lying inhumed  
Six-feet beneath

They are the lofty illusions  
Of blooming flowers  
Of a scavenger  
Who was thrown out of college  
For daring to confront his professor

They are the hot tears  
That trickled  
Down the cheeks  
of the dead girl's mother  
- She wanted to be a lawyer

*Speaking Shadows*





Broken dreams are the epitaphs  
Which watch flowers grow  
On the tombs  
Of school children  
And Youths

They are the tiny pieces  
Of broken bottles  
Which pose menace  
To the soles  
Of the Society's feet



# INFLUENCE

Why do people smoke?

I've found myself asking this question so many times. I'm yet to deduce how you'd continue eating things you know could pose life threatening risks to you. Things that could bring you painful ailments and would later lead to your grave.

A few people I know who smoke told me they do it to 'get High' or to escape from their worries. Some think it to be salvation. Others draw inspiration to work from it.

When I was still very much a child, a certain uncle in the neighborhood whom every parent respected and could entrust their children to his care without worries sent me to buy him cigarettes. He gave me grounded pepper every time he sent me on errands to disguise, should someone ask me.

*Speaking Shadows*



Then as I continued to buy him cigarettes, the curiosity to try it grew every day. The day I was to try it, I remembered Mother had told me "everything a man does in secret is evil." I dropped it and never returned to him.

As I looked upon this picture, I envisioned the shadow of this smoking boy to be me. It might be me if hadn't dropped that stick that day.



# FREEDOM

I am a spirit  
I am no ghost  
I live freely  
Like a butterfly  
And the bird  
The numerous ones of the sky

Saddle me not  
With the worries of the future  
The fear of uncertainty  
And the dread of failure  
I cannot get trapped in the snares of men  
For I am an Arole  
In a world beyond.

*Speaking Shadows*



# WINNING *Spirit*



At times, we fail to achieve our targets. We miss out on our goals and we lose focus. We lose and never retry. We retire from aspiring hence pegging our aspirations.

Our burning desire begins to die from the setbacks we encounter. We draw quick conclusions on our life. We don't persevere and endeavor.

Many times, I've failed, but I keep going, I keep moving because I can't fail, I don't want to fail, my name can't be associated with failure. I rise and drag myself along. I stumble and I still arise.


In these times, I write about, I have my family fighting with me. I have loyal friends and allies. I'm grateful for the gift of wonderful people.

Be true to yourself and keep hitting!

*Speaking Shadows*



# VANITY



On the 14th day  
Of the egungun month  
In one year  
During my infancy

Bioku 's temper overran  
Like the holocaust  
Bellicose and bestial,  
He blew unvarying  
Like a perpetual glum

A Cuckoo for his standard  
Had asked him to a contest  
Of eke

A game for the strong  
A champion he was

Ballyhoo we woke to  
the boxcar was seen  
Smacked down  
He Fell and never rose



# KEEP *Going*



Sometimes, you just need to be yourself. The wind of life shall shake you. It might just be you, you might not have shoulders to lean upon, there might be no one to tell you it's going to be fine.

But you've got to pull yourself along through life's thorny highway. You might have to sleep and wake up on bed of stones. You might have to walk alone.

You are your self's best friend. You are your cheerleader. You are your own team.

Mockeries shall come in the form of missiles, some shall hit you, but you should keep strong, you should keep going. "When the going gets tough, the tough gets going."



# REEL-HILL-GION

Our religious differences and different moral standards are our greatest undoing as humans. We segregate and cast stones because certain people are not from our religion or denomination. Sadly, we don't get to choose our religion ourselves, they are obviously accident of birth. So, we hate fellow humans because of a religion they didn't get to choose

Many of the crises ongoing in the world are religious. Why people can't tolerate folks from other doctrines, believes and races is something I still can't place. And every day, I say wishes for this reason, for this cause, that people may see and recognize that our religions shouldn't make us inhuman.

I make friends with people from different walks of life - Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, African traditionalists, atheists, agnostics. And I have come to deduce these guys are unique in their special ways; people with a very good heart. And all the times I've known and made friends with many of these folks, I've not had a reason to regret.

Make friends with people from other castes, not everyone is a terrorist. I'm a firsthand testimony.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



O'pelumi Francis Salako is a Nigerian poet, photographer and thinker who hails and writes from Ogbomosh, Oyo state. He is the pioneer of 'Wakaabout,' a street photography project dedicated to daily lives of ordinary people. He is a sports enthusiast. As an Odan, he is passionate about finding the best in people and promoting such.