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THE MEN FROM THE EAST
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Kenya

DARK MESSIAH
Philani Amadéus Nyoni
Zimbabwe

AMARYA'S KULI KULI
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Nigeria

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Keynote speaker,
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Remembering Kofi Annan

**Kimberly
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On Heels and High Words
in Harare

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Walter Bassey Archibong, Nigeria

Sakor Inusah Musah, Ghana

Isaac Kilibwa, Kenya

Wanangwa Mwale- Zambia

Paul Masinde, Kenya

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EDITORIAL

There is no tool for development more effective than empowering of women - Kofi Annan

Mushrooming from all over Africa is a new set of writers, they are bold, beautiful, powerful and bring you variety.

In the inside story we introduce Kimberly Chirodzero, a queening beauty from Zimbabwe and Nahida Esmail, a supermom from Tanzania. Two women, countries apart but woven together by their love for words and championing for women rights.

These young literati grew up loving and enjoying the flavours of ink from pioneer African literati and now it is their turn to reciprocate.

This neatly folds into place with the theme 'Reimagining African Literature: New Voices, New Narratives in the Fight for Girl Child' in our 2018 African Writers Conference (AWC) that is set to hold on December 1st 2018. It will culminate with the maiden edition of the 2018 African Writers Award.

See you there.

Wakini Kuria, Kenya
Chief Editor,
Writers Space Africa (WSA)



Artwork by Azubuike Obinna Edmond Ekuma, also known as “Malik Obyna”. He is an Artist (Painter), an Author (Poet, Inspirational and Research writer), a Public (motivational) Speaker, and a Blogger. he has written about twenty-five books – published and unpublished: amongst these literary works are genres in both fiction and nonfiction – poetry anthologies, inspirationals, prose, research



UNITY IN THE AFRICAN LITERARY SPACE

by Edith Knight, Kenya

“If you want to walk fast, walk alone, if you want to walk far, walk together”

- African Proverb

We are living in an exciting literary time as Africa! The future has never seemed brighter. In the past few years, there's been a surge of books by African writers winning prestigious literary prizes, and gaining massive display in bookshops worldwide. And no, we are not talking about the works of Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o or Wole Soyinka, we are celebrating young contemporary African writers who are telling the new African narrative in an unashamedly African voice whilst addressing present day issues.

This new wave of bold writers is experimenting with all sorts of genres; from African horror, romance, children books, you name them. With themes ranging from philosophy, feminism, war, terrorism, to sexuality, urbanization, dignity and so on. We are now writing about the things that matter to us or should I say, we have stopped writing what the West wants and have started writing for us.

All this have been made possible by the emergence of new Publishers, who are willing and eager to promote African writings. The digital space; Online magazines, publications and even blogs have also done a huge chunk in the promotion of African writing, just as festivals, prizes and awards that have been tailored to specifically support the continents writing have also contributed significantly.

However, In the face of all this positivity, there's never been a more challenging time in the literary space than this one. The success of the modern day writer from Africa is still dependant on whether the Western literary critics have endorsed them or not. That's when a bookshop will decide whether to stock their books or not, that's when a blogger will decide whether to promote them or not. The case of a prophet not being honoured in their hometown has never been truer.

Writing in the African continent also has its specific set of challenges that has only been magnified in the recent years. African literature competes in a media space that is being held hostage by reality shows and the music industry. The publishing industry still gives preference to educational books, pirates and piracy has now become the problem child that refuses to move out of home, book distribution is still poor owing to the scarcity of bookshops in some areas, and because of the unfavorable tax laws, the cost of producing books have become so high that books are even considered a luxury for a huge chunk of the population. This has also fueled the availability of pirated copies of books with street vendors.

So what is the way forward, what is the solution?

As Binyavanga Wainaina, a renowned Kenyan writer says "What will build industries is having thousands and thousands of romance books, of kids' fantasy books, of transporting our children away, getting them hooked on these things...like Nollywood." He says it's about convincing Africans, especially the continent's younger generation that African literature can represent a familiar way of life – just like Nollywood or the African pop music industry.

We cannot leave the war to just Chimamanda Adichie, Mukomawa Ngugi or Aminatta Forna, all of us in the literary space have to unite to cause a revolution in the way African literature is being produced and consumed. We have to support one another. African writers need to unite to establish a fully functional literary market.

If we can have a writer's community to edit and critique each other's work, if we can get our books to be read throughout our over one billion population spread over fifty countries, then we will stop caring about validation from the Western world. We will be the sole determinants of what we need to write about, and how we want to write about it. If we will churn out massive quality books that cut across all genres, and support each other in promotion and appreciation of our own books, then the African publishers and readers will have no option but to reckon with us. African literature will become a way of life, just like our music is.

If we have a network that cuts across Africa, then our books will be distributed in all book-

shops' on every street corner. If we speak with one voice, then governments will support the industry and form friendly publishing laws that will make books affordable.

Enter the African Writers Development Trust

African Writers Development Trust (AWDT) has been established to support- by nurturing, developing, publishing and promoting- the works of writers, not just at a regional level, but throughout the continent. With an advisory board that comes from North, South, East, West and Central of Africa, AWDT is talking the unity of African literarists to a whole new level.

The AWDT's objective is to bring together all writers across Africa in order to empower them. They are doing this through providing access to literary and creative resources, holding lectures, workshops and trainings, enhancing networking, mentoring and capacity building of African writers through residencies, publishing grants, and promotion both in and outside of the continent.

This is the future of the unity of the African Literary Space- AWDT is the revolution. It is going to cause a paradigm shift in the way African writing is viewed globally. AWDT is the solution to African Writers.



CALLING AFRICAN WRITERS

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

POETRY

SHORT STORY

WWW.WRITERSTRUST.ORG/AWA



NAHIDA ESMAIL

KEYNOTE SPEAKER,

African Writers Conference

Once upon a time, a young mother roamed the streets of Dar es Salaam in search of books for her daughter, but was disappointed by the lack of storybooks written by and for Tanzanians. And being the super mom that she was, she decided to go home and write a book for her daughter. The end

Except that was not the end for Nahida Esmail, but the beginning of a writing journey.

Nahida Esmail is an award winning author of four young adult novels and ten children's picture books, three of which have been translated into Swahili and one translated into Maa, the language of the Maasai. She has also written two textbooks for the secondary schools and two textbooks for the primary schools. Her four young adult novels, *Living in the Shade*, *Lesslie the City Maasai*, *Detectives of Shangani*, and *Living in the Shade: Aiming for the Summit* have all received CODE's Burt Award for African Literature. In 2015, she was honored with the Tanzania Women's Achievement Award in the education category.

Her latest book 'Aiming for the Summit' is the second book in the *Living in the Shade*



series, and was a finalist for the 2017 Burt Award for African Young Adult Literature: All-Stars competition; a book whose inspiration came while she was researching on people with albinism.

Personal Take

Nahida Esmail was born and raised in Dar es Salam, Tanzania, where she currently lives.

She has a Masters in Child Development with Early Childhood Education from the Institute of Education, University of London and a BSc in Psychology from Goldsmiths College, University of London

Her goal is to write a book in every genre and to provide good books for young people with the hope that young Tanzanians will become strong readers and great leaders.

She considers herself to be a full-time mother of two girls and a part time writer.

She enjoys reading, cycling, mountain climbing, photography, and travelling.

She has lived in the UK, Egypt and South Africa and continues to explore the world with her children.

African Beauty

In their quest for beauty,
Some have traded beauty for ashes.
Some have slimed their true splendour
In the gloss of the world's view of lulu.

Many have subjected themselves
To surgical knives, adjusted and twisted
This in order to look like that,
Just to feel fit for the faux of worldly beauty.

Innocent melanin became victim
Of Chemical Romance as they bathed in it
day after day
Until all layers of their peculiar charm
was cruelly inundated.

In the quest for beauty,
Some have taken their hands and feet
To the enemy's stocks and fetters.
And begged to be enslaved again.
"All we are is vain, all you are, we seek to attain"

In the quest for beauty,
Hallowed, sacred vessels, reserved for
Special occasions, have been displayed on
Shelves, unholy. Gory sight! Virtue's slain.

Amazing African lady, you are beautiful.
Their scale is inaccurate;
you are the perfect plumb line.

Walter Bassey Archibong
Nigeria





Sorcery at the King's girl

I have cast a spell
On the King's daughter-his pride and pearl
The nefarious callipygian demigoddess-the men's favorite girl
The girl at whose feet spartan warriors fell
To worship in swirls
Queer as clockwork orange,
Driven by loon-behind-the steer
Or to beg that she burns them not in hell
Or that she thuds love back at them-even in a jeer

I am her shrine
The bitterest schnapps-yet sweet on her tongue that spurts on her grace
I am the red pebble that fetters the beads around her waist-
I am the most favoured servant that refuses to serve her grace-
That she serves even when I swerve. With me her dominion is ever reserved
I climbed her father's throne with my last mortal life and yelled, I said-
This goddess you worship, I am her verve

Sakor Inusah Musah
Ghana

BE-HOLD AFREEKA

Behold the floral flags in black and red,
The fair lessos on lanky dowels spread!
Inhale the scent of the soil that bears
Sanctified feet, singly and in pairs!
Behold Tunisia, Madagascar, Kenya...
The Kaftan, Sari, Kitenge, Burqa!
These happy - go - lucky social fellows
By the full moon bloom into wild flowers.
The amiable spirit at night bellows
Fills the dark sea in the sky with colours.
Behold resilience, earthlings, behold hope!
Behold the hurt when indecent arms grope -
Purge stray stranger that rises to bicker
And above all else, behold Afreeka!

Isaac Kilibwa,
Kenya.

Every other day somewhere in Africa

In anticipation of the sunrise, the rooster crows
Our early morning reminder of yet another adventurous day
We wake up to gather fire wood; the girls fetch water down the stream
As our elders cultivate the fields
We all know where to be, what to do and at what time
We gather round to eat from one plate together,
cause in unity we believe

In the noon time we hunt for our daily meat and we fish
And sometimes join fish as we dive into the river
Smoke in our eyes, wisdom in our ears
Hanging on to our elder's words, we sit around the fire
Retired for the days as night falls
Jubilating when moon appears giving us a little more light
We play the drums making rhythm for the girls dance to
Counting the stars as we hide and seek
A shooting star flies across the dark skies,
'witch' we scream and hide
The girls heads for their hat, so do the elders
We remain outside besides the fire,
and talk about girls from the next villages for a while
Putting off the fire we retire to our hat too
It was just another normal
and beautiful day at home
somewhere in Africa

Wanangwa Mwale,
Zambia



African Sunset

The bare heels being pricked by the African soil

Sweet sensation of the sunset, and orange skies

The bushes swayed side to side
to the tune of the evening breeze,

The song of the African bees

And did they sting me when I tried to snatch
a bit of their dreams,

The truth in the white man's deal

We were once brothers ready to share each other's meals

But now the hand wants to walk in the place of the foot.

Paul Masinde

Kenya.

Our Home

I remembered the days of green views
The moon was the guardian of the nights
The oceans and seas were deep and blue
All of these we enjoyed before our plights

I recalled the days we rest under tree
In its shadow that breathe peace
Blessing us with its offspring for free
Before our home was turned to pieces

I remembered the days I was the king
My roar echoes and sends around fear
And with others I do not mingle
Before I was sent out of my lair

Little by little I'm forgetting the image
How my home radiate to sun's ray
The birds' melodious chirps when merged
To my roar and cowards stumping away

Today, a new member was brought in
In her eyes lives despair and grief
It explained how our homes turned inn
Alas, we've lost hope and sign of relief

I longed for when I'll be free from this cage
The day I'll fight back for my home
I'll be a lot careful like a sage
And invade their home

Khalid Lukman
Nigeria



An African child, is everyone's child

**An African mother has given birth for the earth
She endures the agony of labor with love
Because she has proved her femininity
Holding the gift in her hands
She speaks to it in mother and child language
I am no longer your mother!
I no will longer nurture you!
They will!**

**Be ready to learn from everything and everyone
You are now a child of a people,
who know no stranger
Accept them, the way they have accepted you
Peace, love, and unity, flows in their African blood
You are now among a people who are religious
A people who teach what they live
They eat religion!
They speak religion!
They live religion!**

**Again! I tell you child of the of the African earth
You are no longer my child
You are an African child, a child for others.**

**Bwalya kasonde,
Zambia**



BECAUSE I AM BLACK



Oh! Black soil.
You that is molded
And formed into a being,
Just like a glittering gold.
See that sparkling ebony
That mirrors my identity.

Because I am black,
The puppy names I hear,
The insults I receive...
They downgrade me.
Punches I receive on my black face,
The pain I bear and carry,
All because I am black.

Because I am black,
I'm created by a lesser deity,
I'm not from the beauty garden.
I be ape, savage, primitive,
All because I am black.
The thinking paving way
into my mind ...
Are they jealous?
Are they afraid of my past heroes?
The intellectual buildings
of Egyptians pyramids,
They hide in their pocket.
The amazing cultures and beauties
They are but dumb to praise them.
All because they are black.

Aremu Ayokunle
Nigeria.

OUR BODIES ARE ASHES

The graves have lost their appetites
Yet we force food in their mouths
Consistency has refined the voices of mourners
With dishes that ring in our ears
Our national anthem.

Rachel is weeping over her daughters
Fell by the hands of men
Hands that once pronounced tenderness.
Daughters, these are not the scars that orate our being
But our choices.

'Take the rope and run away'
'No. I shall hang myself with it'

We exhume our hearts from our chests
Drenched in blood, we feed it to our children.

'Take your bloody hearts with you'
'No. I shall not let my little ones starve'

Now their bellies are full
And our chests are empty
And our scars have licked us like fire,
Consuming what is left.
And our ashes will make the ground fertile again.

Lydia Durunguma
Nigeria



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ETHIOPIAN MEDICAL JOURNAL

OCTOBER 2016 VOLUME 54 NUMBER 4

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EXCLUSIVE

On Heels and High Words in Harare: Queen Kim speaks of her worded early beginnings.



Once upon a true tale in the small town of Chegutu, Zimbabwe, there was a queen born into fairytales, bible stories and African folklore. She heard words everywhere she turned. Words were read to her by brother, mother, and grandmother, till all she knew and felt were the mix match of alphabets like the drumming of rain on rooftops: this queen was born to read and write.

It is my pleasure to introduce you to the queen who from her humble birth in Chegutu has risen to the high stakes of Harare with a fascinating fetish for high heels as she rules her domain with stories; those words that rocked her cradle. Her name is Kimberly Chirodzero aka Queen Kim.



The Queen speaks of her worded early beginnings:

I was born in a small town in Zimbabwe called Chegutu. Chegutu is a town that does a lot of farming. It was formerly known as Hartley after the hunter and explorer, Henry Hartley. The town blossomed in the 90s when gold was discovered and mines were established. I grew up in a house full of avid readers and storytellers and as the last born, everyone read to me. My mother read me fairytales, my brother bible stories and my granny told me fascinating African folklore. Our house was always littered with books and some of my earliest memories are of my mother and sister reading.

Growing up in a house of books meant I got to read and write very early. I was the youngest kid in my first grade because I begged my mom and the headmaster to let me start school early. I just couldn't wait to discover all the new words out there. When I was nine years old, my mother passed away, and my family began to move around a lot. Losing a mother definitely changes you. My love for writing intensified as I began to use it to create new worlds. Writing remained a constant for me.

The Queen speaks of her work for humanity:

I live in Harare where I studied Sociology and Gender Development Studies (SGD) at Women's University in Africa. The Women's University was founded by women whose goal is to reduce gender disparity and promote equality in tertiary education. Graduating in 2016, SGD has helped me understand people and behaviour better. There was time I was in a terrible relationship. The process of trying to survive and leave the relationship led me to women empowerment groups where I discovered my strength. I became the woman who was able to turn the negatives into positives – the woman who rose out of the trenches. I truly became a Queen. I had dominated my fears and unfavourable situations.

Now, I occasionally counsel women in issues of relationships and self-empowerment. I have been counseling a lot of women, via several group workshops last year, teaching on purpose and relationships. Also, when I am not writing, I work with National Junior Councils Association (NJCA), an organisation that specializes in children's rights and youth participation in local governance. And, I volunteer as a Public Relations Officer at Reaching Out Charity Organisation (ROCO). As a PRO, I deal with public communications, planning and writing campaigns and attending events. I am a good communicator, creative and passionate about people. Working with these organizations has made me a better person, fully aware of the sociopolitical state of Zimbabwe. These are satisfying activities for me because I work with some truly inspiring people, and I am a lover of those who help develop their communities.

The Queen speaks of her writing and stories:

I started writing at an early age. Growing up, I wrote mainly for myself, my family and classmates. I hadn't been published until I met Writers Space Africa (WSA). My first short story to

be published was in the November 2017 edition of the WSA magazine. I had no idea there was an African community and platform for African writers, and having my story accepted and published changed everything. I found the courage to work on my first soon to be published book, *Love, God and Relationships*. This is a book close to my heart because I want to inspire people to have healthy relationships and not settle for anything less.

I believe the greatest gifts are those of love and knowledge. In the book, I share on love, godly dating, purpose, relationships and faith. I started this book project because I realized there are a lot of pressures on women to get married, which make many end up settling. I want to touch on the foundations and principles that make for a healthy relationship with oneself, God and others. Besides the book, I write romantic short stories, and stories to uplift and empower women. My goal is to inspire women to walk boldly in their God-given purpose and pursue their dreams.

The Queen speaks of reading, travelling, and high heels:

I am an avid reader. I think I love reading almost as much as I love writing. My favourite genre at the moment is sci-fi fantasy and horror, though I read across a wide variety of genres. Reading is a natural part of life for me. I just finished *As Sure as the Dawn* by Francine Rivers. I prefer to read hardcopy because nothing compares to the feel of a book in my hand, and the scent of real paper just melts my heart. I enjoy hearing stories that introduce me to new cultures. Thus, I enjoy travelling, encountering new cultures, meeting new people and hearing their stories. I have traveled all over Zimbabwe and to South Africa. I'm looking forward to traveling to other parts of Africa and other continents as well.

I have a curious mind and I'm forever exploring mythology and folklore from all over the world. I enjoy photography, good food and anything that brings out my creative side. My dream holiday destination would be Paris in spring because deep down, I am a romantic. One of my romantic obsessions would be high heels. I have an incurable addiction to high heels, which I collect religiously. I love heels because they are such a feminine creation and I revel in being a woman.



I collect them as often as I can when I meet with a pair that calls out to me. I have thirty pairs at the moment and I am not about to stop.

As there must be an end to every story, you would have to follow the queen in her ongoing inspiring walk, work, and writings as she saunters on the streets of women empowerment in Harare on high heels of changing shapes, shade, and shine.

By
Sandra Oma Etubiebi
Nigeria







MANGO IS MORE THAN A FRUIT: THE LEGEND OF MANGO

If, before last night, I were to tell you that I have always been proud of my surname, Mango, I would be lying. In fact, whenever I introduce myself I emphasize on my maiden name Nawiri then whisper Mango hoping that no one catches it. But they always do, and then I never get a break from their teasing.

“Mango Juice,” my primary German teacher once called me, causing me to dash out of class in fury as the rest of the class broke into fits of laughter. Then that evening, I had to endure public humiliation from Mama as she caned me in front of our nosy neighbors for feeling ashamed of my surname. And as if that wasn’t enough, I woke up the following morning to the neighbors’ kids having made a mocking song out of my name. Years later, when I joined high school, I thought I’d be able to outgrow it, but that was wishful thinking. Despite being a multi tribe school, my name still stood out, like a strand of wheat in the vastness of the prairies.

But last night, I finally learnt that Mango is more than just a fruit.

Mango is an Abaluhya name. The Abaluhya are a tribe from Western Kenya famously

known for loving Ugali, chicken and tea. Mango was a legend from Bukusu land. He was the first Abaluhya man in Bukusu land to be circumcised. Some people say he was from the Bameme clan while others claim he was an Omukhurarwa. His father, Kambisi wa Wetungu was an Omumeme and his Mama, Nabwile, was an Omunyala. My father is an Omunyala and my third born sister's maiden name is Nabwire.

For many years, Yabebe, a monstrous snake, terrorized the Bukusu people by devouring their livestock and offsprings, among them, Mango's siblings. Yabebe was their greatest enemy and almost impossible to conquer because it was a flying snake that bit people directly on their heads. But that's not what was special about Yabebe. Yabebe lived deep in his cave, Muyala, and whenever he left his cave he did not return using the same route. He also entered his cave backwards beginning with his tail and then its head. This way it was hard for his enemies to kill him. One crepuscular, in the year 1800, Yabebe killed Masika, on the eve of her dowry introduction. She was Kambisi's most beautiful, youngest and favorite daughter. Mango's father, deciding not to stomach losing his children anymore, wielded his embalu sword, went on a hunt for Yabebe, and came back with its head on his sword.

The Bukusu's elders decided to award Kambisi by circumcising him, but he was old so Mango bravely offered to be circumcised on behalf of his papa. (Mango was a first born child just like me). He sat on a three legged stool which had milk poured on. Then the traditional herbalist, Wele Musiku from the clan of Omuleyi Omuchesongwa Omulusanya sliced him using a knife known as Lukembe which had also been sprinkled by the same milk poured on the stool. When his mother learnt of his bravery, she broke into a song called Sioyayo, a song that has been passed down generations and is still sang today during circumcision rites carried out annually in the month of August.

Sioyaye song in Lubukusu (Bukusu language) version

(Soloist- Response)

Ewe ewe ewe musindewe- hoo o

Ewe ewe ewe khwarakho- hoo o

E siboyo- ho o

Sye bakhale- hoo oo

Omusinde oteremaka acha ebunyolo- haa ho

Acha ebunyolo- haa ho

Ewe ewe ewe sye bakhale- hoo o

You see before then, the Bukusus did not have any traditional songs. Mango's mother was a huntress of the mountains and in the course of her hunts; she came across Namunyu the melodious hyena. Namunyu was a widow who lived in a cave on the mountains. Her husband died protecting their children from Yabebe and this pushed her to teach her babies the Sioyayo song so that they could identify her voice when she returned home in the evenings. This way the children were able to distinguish her from any other enemies.

After his circumcision, Mango declared that all Bukusu boys must be circumcised in order to become men who could marry and own land. When Bukusus warriors finally conquered all the other Abaluhya clans in late 1800 the ritual was adopted and two years later, Mango spread the culture to Uganda when he married a woman from the Bamasaba clan, a clan that habits a place called Emitoto.

To this day, circumcision in Western Kenya takes place in Bukusu land at St. Mary's Girls High School Amukuru (formerly Yabebe's cave). On the day of circumcision, the initiates leave home early for the river where they're cleansed but don't return home using the same route. Then one by one they enter the circumcision chamber backwards. Busaa made from fermented maize flour is sprinkled on the ground, on a three legged stool and on the Luke-mbe knife before an initiate is circumcised. The handle of the Lukembe knife must be made from the special root of Kamukimira tree. Unlike other roots, this particular root is special because it extends deeper and far away from the tree. Due to the rarity of the special root, a surgeon buries his knife deep in the ground until the next circumcision ceremony. Other sacrifices offered is a white cock called Ewanga, and in its absence, the Enaholo (red feathered) or Embangabanga (black feathered) cocks are used.

There are also rules pertaining to the initiator. He must be a man, come from a line of initiators, have been circumcised, be married and his first born must be a male child. He must also not be bald headed. During the circumcision period, he must remain chaste. An initiator's regime comes to an end when either he dies, dishonors the rule of chastity or circumcises a dead person. The last circumstance happens when a boy of circumcision age dies before he's circumcised. It is a taboo for such person to be buried uncircumcised. Then twins are circumcised between 4.00 a.m. to 5.00 a.m. immediately after the cleansing at the river but in the case of heterogeneous twins, a banana leaf is tied around the girl's waist and a mock circumcision done on her before actual circumcision is done on the boy.

It is a taboo for a child born out of wedlock and a child born in a family with both parents to share the same knife. It's also a taboo for father and a son to share the same knife but if the surgeon has only one knife, then one side shall be used on the father and the other on the son. After circumcision, the initiates are taken to a hut far deep in the forest to heal and on their return their families welcome them with praise songs and ululations.

Hence next time should the bank teller who has been persistently asking for my number tease if my surname Mango is spelt like the fruit, I shall have a different answer for him. Proudly I shall lift my chin and tell him, "Like Mango, the first Abaluhya man to be circumcised."

Joyce Nawiri Mango,
Kenya

THE MEANING OF AFRICA



Ki dir, is how the Seychelles Creole will greet you.

I am searching for one Africa, heir of the vision of Queen Nziga Mbande. I hear you now hold the horizons that she saw as she fought against the beasts that scrambled and pierced our virgin lands. I hear that her greatest treasure was her people, hidden in plain sight of racists as they mined for gold, diamonds and whatever name they concocted for our minerals. The tongue she is named after, is it Vai or Ethiopic? This Africa is a new one, they tell me. She teems vibrantly beyond the borders, carelessly used to wrench her children from each other. This Africa reaches her hand out for friends, to forgive and forge ahead.

Idhi nade? An East African Luo would ask you how the going is.

Would you preen your ears for the knowledge that flowed from Timbuktu? Would you rejuvenate the fountain of literacy like the medu neter hieroglyphics of Egypt, the proto-Saharan of Nubia, the Dogon rock art, the Tamazight tfinagh or the pictorial Nsibidi? These gems might be lost to many of my kinsmen but to the future we aim; our heritage of literacy is the arrowhead adventure and a curator of our past in the future.

Na nga def, as they say in Gambia.

Could I borrow your sight to envision the Pan-African banquet of Nyerere, Nkrumah, Machel, Mandela, Mboya, Sankara and Gaddafi? That the blood of the pioneers before them may gush through the AU, SADC, EAC, ECOWAS, CENSAD, COMESA or IGAD? May it gush more exuberantly and perpetually than the Nile or Volta, clean the rivers of blood desired by some evil regents. Let her children inherit the vision built on their kinship.

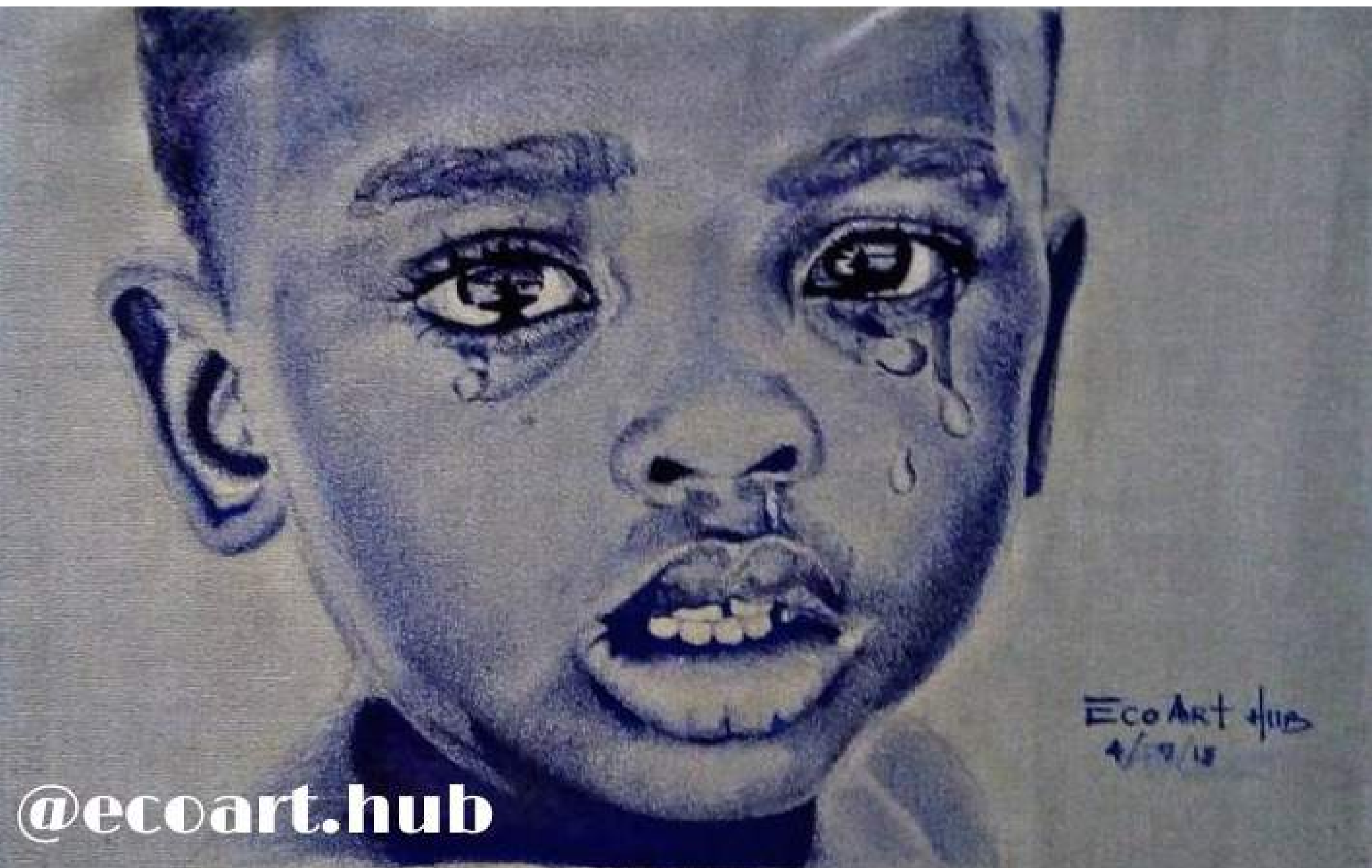
Lumela? U kae? I pass the greetings of Sesotho.

Touch the exquisite grain of the rich mural that is woven by our culture. Culture is too daft a word to encompass your dance. Culture is too shallow a term to comprehend the rhythm of your anthems and too bare to cover the breadth of our existence. Dance to the tune of the nyatiti, balafon, makhoyane, daghumma and tbal.

Wet your palates for the best from Africa's kitchen and grazing fields. Her children have been toiling in the fields and are eager to entice your taste buds. Shall we state with Feijoada (pork and bean stew) from Sao Tome? Or perhaps sweet Makroudh and Baklava from Tunisia? Please sit for Djibouti's Injera, Harira or Niter Kibbeh. Snack on the Gajak and Mazavaroo.

Waft the sweat of success, because that is all Africa is about. We may fail but we will make our way through the jungle of life. The scents and stench are part of our journey so we should not fear. Our noses can never fall off track as we know what we want. Dream and it shall be. Africa is ripe for the winning.

Edith Adhiambo Osiro
Kenya



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Ashenda/Shadey/Solel



Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is a country located in the Horn of Africa. It shares borders with Eritrea to the north and northeast, Djibouti and Somalia to the east, Sudan and South Sudan to the west, and Kenya to the south. With over 102 million inhabitants, Ethiopia is the most populous landlocked country in the world and the second-most populous nation on the African continent. It occupies a total area of 1,100,000 square kilometers (420,000 sq mi), and its capital and largest city is Addis Ababa. Today, we will discover untold stories of Ethiopia.

Most of the world imagines that Africa gives the least of freedom towards its females. Africa is known for underage marriage and gender based violence among other things. This might be somewhat true, but Africa is not the worst continent for girls.

In Ethiopia and Eritrea there is celebration for girls only. Girls wear colorful clothes, sing and dance without fear, and it goes on for days. This celebration is called Ashenda. But there are also some other names for the celebration, in Agaw language they called it Shadey and its also called



Solel around Raya Kobbo, in Adigrat town it is called Mariya, however in Aksum town it is called Ayniwari.



This festival is celebrated in August. Ashenda marks the end of a two-week-long fast known as Filseta when adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church gather to honour the Virgin Mary. The name Ashenda or Shadey is derived from the “tall green grass”, estimated at around 80–90 cm minimum height which grows around July and August and that the girls wear around their waists during the holiday

The celebration takes place between August 15 and September 11 every year. Some cities celebrate it for 3 days while the others celebrate it for weeks. In some places like Raya, Enderta, and Tembienit is celebrated typically from August 16 to September 11. In Wag Hemra zone and Raya Kobo, it is celebrated from August 16 to 18 where as in Adigrat town it is celebrated from August 15 to 17. In Aksum town it is deferent; it is celebrated from August 23 to 25.

There are myths about where this celebration originated from. One is the story of king Yoftahe. In the ancient times there was a king called Yoftahe. This king promised his God that if he won the war he would sacrifice the first thing he see when he got home, hoping he would meet his sheep first. He won the war but when he got home he didn't find his sheep first, rather his only daughter ran towards him. He felt so sad. He sat down and told her about the promise he made to God. His daughter told him that he couldn't break his promise. She said “give me some time to play and cry with my friends and then you can fulfill your promise.”

And so, young girls use this time to play and enjoy their girl time before entering woman-

hood. All the young girls gather around singing and beating drums, while the boys keep an eye on them from a distance, to make sure they are safe from any wild animals or harassments. It is also said this celebration is to remember the ascension of Virgin Mary (mother of Jesus).

On the eve of the celebration, young girls get busy buying or cleaning their jewelries, braiding their hairs with different styles and collecting Ashenda's from the field. Ashenda girls don't wear common clothes on this much-awaited event since it's their special day. They wear special colorful dress with unique hair styles and jewels on their necks as well as ornaments on hands, ears and feet.

No family in their right mind denies their young daughters this.



Everybody looks quite beautiful. There is even a saying "don't ask for a hand in marriage from a girl you found playing Ashenda". For the girls use different traditional make ups and jewelries and one can't discern her natural looks. No one can ask an Ashenda participant girl to do something, not even her family. It is freedom time for them. They sing and play all day long. They chant songs and show their grooving styles with eye catching costumes.

For the past three years there have been some petitions to inscribe the Ashenda ceremony as an intangible heritage at the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural organization, UNESCO in order to get more recognition, protection and treatment at international level. I hope we will succeed!

by

Meaza Aklilu Hadera,
Ethiopia

The African Hero

They say I am just an African. They judge me before they get to know me. What they do not know is the pride that I have in the blood that runs through my veins. The pride I have in my rich culture and the history of my people; the pride that I have in my strong family ties and the deep connection to my community. The pride I have in the African music, African art, and African dance; the pride I have in my name and the meaning behind it. Just as my name has meaning. So you think I am nothing? Don't worry about what I am now; for what I will be, I am gradually becoming. I will raise my head high wherever I go because of my African pride, and nobody will take that away from me.

Kofi Annan
1938-2018



EPISODES FROM MISERABLE NIGHTS

Lanre Apata, Nigeria



I know my malady. I can see its manifestation but I cannot interpret it. It explains why I'm broken, suppose you understand the brokenness that makes me forget the correct spelling of a name I once treasured. Sometimes it's a name. Sometimes it is a mere word. There are mornings I leave bed thinking of it as a name and there are cold painful nights that write it as a wrongly spelt word on my azure ceiling, drifting from short sleep to sober meditations dressed in regrets and incoherent soliloquies aimed at querying myself for my inability to manage pain. Now, the sun chars my skin and heart. Even the moon scars me. On the countless days my spirit curls in a corner turning its back against the world, water hurts my throat like a trapped bone from a piece of meat, leaving me with intense discomfort.

ANABELL. Is it ANNABEL? I asked myself.

When I typed her name in the search bar of my Facebook, I was trying to get more than a user. I was recollecting memories, peeling scabs off my wound. Just like those mornings and nights when I think of it as a name or a mere word, the wound sometimes splays itself as a scar, and sometimes a gangrene that won't leave.

I crutched myself to my window, pushed it for the sun's entry. The glint from the sun revealed the mess I inhabit. The lifeless portraits, chairs positioned to form a curve in my living room and the magazines on the dusty glass table defined my life. I push the plate of unfinished stewed rice to the other end of the dusty table. I once enjoyed stewed rice with a good quantity of pepper for my chapped lips but food is now an irritant since I came to the realisation that it is not to be enjoyed, but to survive the next day of agony.

Hurt is my biggest scare. I manage it like an infant snatched from its mother's breast. I'm yet to recover from my friend's father's fall from a palm tree many years ago. I watched as his body con-

torted his limbs, still joined to his body, separated and wriggled till his soul walked out in pain. The blood that rolled from his head down his lifeless body remains fresh in my head – unclotted. At 18, four years after the tragic fall of the richest palm wine tapper in our town, I watched another painful episode in my home on a cold night in January. I covered myself with a cheap Ankara print wrapper made before the cold intensified weeks to Christmas. Legs curled, beating my pillow to shake off dust from the shabbily plastered walls of my room, I heard loud voices from my father's room. His new wife is around. My mother is being sent to the backyard.

The failed Orkar coup of 1990 left me with grief again. It left me in a bad place as I scrambled to pick fragments of my life from a land of thorns. It reminded me of my failures, or the system that fails me when the sun is illuminating the world except my space or leaves me without shelter when raincloud gathers. The images of horror from the day my friend lost his father to that fall and the shock that ended my mother's happiness as my father announced the coming of a new wife on that cold night in January became my template for defining pain.

“You clearly don't know when to move on with life. Your brother's death is evidence. It's four months since his departure and you're here to tell me you're postponing a wedding that has a date,” Annabel voiced with resignation and continued, “I wasn't there when your friend's father died but I can narrate the ugly story because of your repeated narrations.”

“You despise your father because he took a second wife. Your zero interest in the society you live in stuns me. You don't care about the debate on our return to democracy. You wake up every morning telling anyone that cares to listen about how damned the country is” she growled.

January, 1991, a couple of months to our wedding, she visited me. We had fixed another date for our wedding after my mother's intervention and her withdrawal. Being the light she is, I forgot the darkness thrust on me. The power company at that period epitomized the society I lived in. Years later, when the reading of beautiful lines of poetry became an escape from self, I understood the compounding nature of the agony of long miserable nights.

“I have two boys – twins,” she said after hours of nervousness cloaked with silence. I travelled here to tell you. It can't wait till we get married.”

The words caused turbulence in my head. My midriff contracted as I struggled for breath like someone trapped in a cabin of fumes. “I've known you for four years, I've loved you for three.”

I heard whispers from voices within me:

Don't welcome it.

Those boys are unwanted guests in your life.

They can't see you as their father.

I showed her the door and said goodbye with a nod.

I became queasy. A dollop of pain dropped on my heart. I wondered if she hid this because of the love for me. Is it my fragility or her attempt to be careful with matters of hurt?

My failed marriage was not planned. I met my erstwhile wife after Annabel walked out that dark January night. But talking about someone that constantly brought me pain and reminded me of my weakness is pain. I remember when Annabel left I needed a distraction. She offered herself. Her attitude pushed me away but the events of my yesterday, the sex and the fun pulled me back. Always unencumbered, she was ready for rough sex a week after going under the scalpel for appendicitis. “Don’t act like you had an organ transplant. This surgery is not a serious one,” she said with little concern as I rebuffed her moves. Those words, refreshed by other insensitive moments, stayed with me with their effect. They formed the calm I needed for her moments of madness.

The day my son died opened other wounds in my life. I looked at my scars from the past. I reflected on the dark night I opened my door, my life as I later realised, for Annabel to leave. I also drew mental pictures of the twins she talked about. Do they look like her? Did she return to their father? Like Annabel, do they clean tears off their cheeks with the back of their palms when they laugh? I had returned from a conference in Kano three days before his demise, looking forward to a long period of rest with him. I returned to a scrawny boy struggling to breathe. He exhaled like a tired, old man pushed by currents of uncertainty from his hospital bed circled by relatives to the mystical world of spirits and ancestors preparing for his arrival.

“Just breathing difficulties. I’ve administered cough syrup and ventolin tabs,” she furiously replied when I accused her of shameful negligence.

His last minutes are ones I need to blot out. They tore to fragments all I had tried to put together after years of fall after fall. I watched as his body swelled. I watched as the nurse cleaned water that emitted from the pores of his skin every hour. I watched as doctors and nurses whispered. The clear sky that evening was swept away by the darkness that spread itself as a roof over my existence. They covered him and wheeled him out of the Intensive Care Unit. Nobody bothered to explain the action to me.

I crutched myself back to my living room on my return from my trip to the past. The discomfort with my crutches is a major reason I try to forget how my right leg snapped around the knee and the fracture that almost condemned the leg when I walked out of my home with violent anger on a sad night a couple of months ago. The night’s darkness covered sewages just as my tanned skin covers the pain and regrets of a lifetime. Moving on from a failed marriage, I remember how we used to tell ourselves of the emptiness our lives would bear if we leave each other. I typed her surname after Annabel, searched, scrolled through similar names. Seated beside a bespectacled man, flanked by two teenage boys, the emptiness we joked about stared at me.

No wife. No son. No daughter. No understanding of fulfilment. I’m like the men and women who become numbers as a result of our collective failures, our broken promises, the inevitable and the pain in the love we share. I may be washed away like a name etched in the sand, waiting for rain.



Image source: <http://thelovelyplanet.net/>

The Men from the East

Edith Knight, Kenya

Somewhere between sunrise and sunset, in a chiefdom that lay on the east side of South, a great chief got himself a concubine, as is the nature of great chiefs.

“From which village do you come from, and whose daughter are you?” That was how the girl was seduced.

“I’m from the Langeni clan, sir. My parents are dead, I live with my uncle”

By evening, the relationship had been consummated, but the amahlayaendlela went too far, and as is unfortunately expected from these affairs, the concubine became with child. This relationship didn’t last, and the new mother moved back with her bastard, or rather Shaka, as he was named, to her village, to a people who despised both mother and son.

Somewhere between dawn and dusk, in a province that lay on the east side of North, another child was born- not a bastard, for his parents were properly married. But that relationship too didn’t last, and the mother moved back with her son, or rather, Kassa, as she had named him, to her village, to a people who didn’t care much for them.

Somewhere between morning and evening, in a village that lay on the east side of the West, another child was born. Her parents, even though properly married were properly poor, and so the mother moved back with her daughter, or rather Ahebi, as she had named him, to her village, to a people who loved them.

When her father consulted the diviner over his poverty, it was revealed to him that he had com-

mitted a grave crime and that's why the great goddess, ohe, was punishing his family.

"The only way out of this is igommaogo, yes, you must offer your daughter Ahebi as a living sacrifice to the goddess," The diviner said.

But the young girl, already a rebel, refused the 'honour' and ran away to the north of the east side of the West.

As with many bastard children in chiefdoms that lay on the east side of South, the boy Shaka was greatly ridiculed by his age mates and 'persecuted' by the adults. And so as he grew up, became curiously reckless, but in a brave way. This made him to be recruited as a warrior, where he flirted shamelessly with death.

Well, the other boy on the east side of North, being that his mother was still a staunch Christian, found himself in a convent, where he studied the bible back to back, and later European history, then Shakespeare. When he got tired of reading about white people, he studied the techniques of his own people's warfare and their fighting methods.

Left to herself- after running away from home, with no skills or education, the girl on the east side of West became a prostitute in order to survive. She became very good at this work, so much so that she was invited to different towns to 'work' and hence travelled widely, gained access to the Attah-igala, met the white men who had big power, and in the process learned to speak many languages.

When the great chief of the chiefdom that lay on the east side of South died, his legitimate son took over. But Shaka, now being a warrior with a following, ousted him, took control and became chief; a fierce, ruthless, brutal chief- for he locked a seer in a house then placed hyenas inside to devour her, and when morning came, he burnt the house down. He sliced a pregnant woman open just to see how the baby sat inside. He killed all short men and anyone who opposed him- no one ever called him a bastard again.

He conquered all the neighbouring chiefdoms, built up strong military forces and forbade them from marrying, he too didn't marry, though he kept a harem full of women, and those found pregnant by him were put to death. His mother died suddenly from illness, and how he loved his mother, for he immediately decreed;

"There shall be a one year mourning period. No crops will be planted. No woman should become pregnant, or else she and the husband will be put to death" That was not all " Any cow or goat or sheep that gives birth will also be put to death, so that the young one knows how it feels to lose a mother. And anyone who shows little grief during this period will be killed. Is that clear?" It was clear, for no one would dare oppose the great chief.

Kassa, our young man from the east of the North, after learning of his people's warfare, became

a shifita- an outlaw, organized his own army and captured provinces. In the process he married the beautiful empress Tewabech. After conquering the entire east of the North, he changed his name to Tewodros, for he believed he was the messiah of his people.

When he had been crowned emperor, his beloved wife died, and how he had loved his wife. Her death made him erratic, violent and brutal. So much so, that when his best friend was also killed shortly after, he decreed;

“Kill all the 500 prisoners so as to avenge for the blood of my friend” and later had seven thousand more killed. He heavily taxed his people, demanded that the same starving people feed his army of fifty thousand men, decreed monogamy for all men, and fought the church mightily, for he believed he was the only elect from God.

As the young Ahebi, continued to ‘work’ throughout the east of the West, she led the white men through the inner routes of the land so that her people were conquered. She was rewarded by being made headman and later chief of her village, but that did not appease her, for she wanted to be the king of all the land. She campaigned greatly, and conquered. The young woman was coronated as King of the land and the men could do nothing about it, for she had the backing of the white men.

After getting to be king, marrying many wives- for she became their female husband, her mother died and then she became erratic and brutal. Imposed forced labour, took bribes openly, took away men’s wives forcefully and demanded to receive full manhood. She brought out a masked spirit, but this was an abomination, for the masquerade was only meant to be performed by biological men.

The death of the mother of the great chief from the East of the South, made him tremble with fear at the thought of anything that threatened his mortality. And so he invited the strange white men to his kingdom.

“You have to give me the ointment; the ointment of youth so that I can remain young.”

“But of course great Shaka, the ointment you will get, but in exchange give us a part of your land and sign this document as proof.”

“I will give you anything, as long as I don’t see these grey hairs on my head, or grow old and die.” So he signed, and the white men went away laughing at the foolishness of the Chief.

Because of his erratic behaviour, the soldiers of the emperor of the east of the North deserted him. The people stopped supporting him too. So he wrote a letter to the white men and asked for their support, but they refused to help him, and the kingdom began to fall. So he took all the white men in his kingdom and imprisoned them.

And so as the sun set on the east of the South, the half-brothers of the great chief, struck him dead and dumped him into an empty grain pit, then covered it with stones. But before they ascended to his throne, they found out that the Kingdom now belonged to the white men and the great chief Shaka of the Zulu fell, and his kingdom with him.

And as the sun set on the east of the North, the white men sent their forces to free the white people imprisoned by the emperor and as all his soldiers had deserted him, he put a gun to his head, and took his life and the white men took over his kingdom. So the great emperor Tewodros the second fell, and his kingdom, with him.

And as the sun set on the east of the west, the white men, no longer needing King Ahebi supported the male elders against her and undermined her power. And knowing that she would not be buried properly at death, she conducted her own living funeral ceremony with so much pomp and colour that it didn't matter when she later died and was buried quietly. But the male elders, who thought they would rule, found out that the white men now reigned over their land. So the great eze Ahebi Ugbabe of Enugu-Ezike fell, and her kingdom with her.



Dark Messiah

Philani Amadéus Nyoni, Zimbabwe



Raindrops descended in brisk staccato like a hail of arrows from a vast column of archers. The streets were flooded to biblical proportions, yet no holy man pious and true had been forewarned, bade to build an ark and pair up beasts.

It had torn and tossed pylons like twigs, snatching them off the feeble ground like an elephant trunk uprooting mere saplings and hurled them at the mish-mash of trees, cars, animals, humans and every other thing that misshaped in the way of the waters, furious enough to turn the most rage-swollen Zambezi on its tail and send it back-flowing to its source.

A boy lay in bed, feverish, his tear-drenched mother mopping his brow which seemed to pour like the ruptured heavens. Next to her sat his siblings, silent as death beneath the pall. Food had been exhausted and the house, formerly a shelter was a death-trap. Outside, the water flowed just beneath window-level; inside, the assault-weary roof began to give in and let through murderous pours. The bed had been moved many times, elevating it when mopping the floor proved a futile battle for the hunger-beaten against the apocalyptic celestial terror. They sat with their ankles in the rising pool, taking pains to keep him warm and dry.

His mother cried for his life about to be taken so soon and maliciously, and more from confu-

sion of an apparent betrayal. This was not the fulfilment of the promise made to her at his birth.

Thirteen rains before, a youth barely moulded into readiness for womanhood lay feverish, writhing like an exorcism. Sweating profusely, like the boy she was bridging into the world would during the great calamity. The seed of the wind like Helen of Troy, Jehoshua ben Yosef, and Guatemala Buddha. Immaculately conceived of a virgin, this fact proved by unbelieving old women whose specialty was such inspection and midwifery. This truth terrified them and they would not deliver the baby. Her parents believed neither the proof nor their daughter, so they threw her into the wilderness to return only with the bastard's sire. The girl, knowing she had known no man crawled into the darkness and consigned her fate to the stars.

The owners of the sky are cruel, she thought, watching the ripples form around her ankles from the water streaming from the roof. How did they bring a life into the world under such extraordinary circumstance only to take it so maliciously?

While she wept and shivered more from sorrow than cold, she cast sight across the darkness to the form of her son. One glance revealed the difference. Formerly he had been sweating, gasping for air with a gaping mouth and heaving his chest high with the effort, but his mouth had stilled as had his chest. The sweat had seized streaming, the pain was gone and he stopped quivering like a reed on the river edge. Death had come at last. One after the other the living in the room raised a crescendo of wailing. They had long anticipated death but the confirmation was vicious, what they did not know at the time was that before the water took their lives, they would contemplate eating him.

Thirteen summers before this time of reason manifesting as thoughts of splitting wardrobes for firewood and devouring corpses, the bereaved woman was found by an old man beneath a mangwe's height, crouching, with her head buried in her knees and palms hugging opposite upper-arms, shivering to the not-so-distant laugh of hyenas and coughs of leopards. The old medicine-man had not said a word to her, just towed her by the arm to his home. Only his wife spoke to her, she cared for the girl like her own. Often she felt uncomfortable by the luxuries allowed her by the old woman, a body inhabited by raw energy and kindness, as industrious as the sun. The girl tried to help with a broom here and water-gourd there, but she was not allowed to do much, she needed rest and the child she would bear could not be put to risk.

She often wondered what life would be fruited from her curious circumstance, the one whose birth the old woman anticipated like some await the fabled return of their Christ. She found out on the day you were born, I shall speak of these things with you, but first, let us talk of what you saw when you died.

You wandered into a barren land as dry as the one that spit you into it was wet. The sun was raw and bright but you did not feel it nor did it hurt your eyes. Your feet, light as light, seemed to step not directly on the dust. You wondered how or why; it was your spirit, what the Bantu call your ena, your true being not your physical form that walked. As suddenly as you had appeared, darkness crept around and engulfed you, in the next twinkle

you sat by a borne fire whose tongues seemed to lick the sooty fabric of heaven. Beside you sat an old man who introduced himself as The Lost Immortal.

You studied him pensively while he scowled into what your people call a jackal's fire like a harbinger whose gaze is trained on the horizon, watching hellhounds only he can see pacing forth to extinguish a life. When he spoke again he said, "I am Lumukanda, born of perishing form like you, transmuted to deathlessness in the kiss of the goddess Nanavanhu-Ma." You startled, unbelieving the humourless mouth speaking to you though at the fire. It did not feel like a dream, all too real but you could not fathom the nature of it for you were not yet aware of your own death.

Without facing you even once, he told of the time many eons folded over, when the Phoenicians settled in the navel of Africa and raised great empires under the reigns of Karesu and Makira-Kadesi. Yes, they were strange tales, stranger still how he had been transfigured from the dust-bound being to the realm of eternal blinkers to lead slaves off the yoke in Spartacus fashion. You did not have to speak your disbelief or the confusion that beset your young spirit, he read it plain for child, immortals can read thoughts and hearts as clear as hieroglyphs. So he said he would show you and he did.

You soared like the eagle's feather against the sky, across vast lands of foreign frontiers and times like the unfettered imagination, fattening your eye with scenes of empires raised and razed. From these heights, your spirit-form unburdened by the cumbersome-ness of human flesh peered on the Eastern horizon of time itself where I, the Great Spirit, Ageless of a Thousand Names laboured, smithing the very sun from smokeless fire. The Muslims believe it is from this smokeless fire that I created the jinn, what they call evil beings of unseen realms that assume many forms in the land of men. Some call them demons and aye, I created them as dark as noon is bright, they serve my will, good and evil both do. It is the necessity of opposites, day was born with night, I created all things so and called them perfect. The pendulum must swing both directions, in equal proportion. Extremes must exist in pairs is the first law of creation. You must know these things to fulfil your purpose.

While you saw the formation of all that is from my very being and the creation of life as I delegated through the tri-nippled goddess Amarava and the spouse I gave her, the grotesque Odu, Tree of Life, your flesh was the object of discussion in the mortal realm. Your siblings suddenly overpowered by the demon they could no longer reign contemplated relieving your bones of your flesh. Contemplated? No, the elder spoke out.

"Mother, may we eat him?" he said after a long silence punctuated with sniffs and whimpers.

"You cannot eat your brother, we are not cannibals." She replied curt and brisk.

"No," he spoke quietly, not to his feet but to her eyes unlike his regular manner. "But we are hungry and we shall soon die like him if we do not eat."

"We would rather die than be reduced to that." She said dismissively. On an ordinary

day with the sun in his place and the mulberry bush's roots firmly in the ground, she would have threatened him with a switch or gone right on and crisscrossed his skin with it. But on an ordinary day they would not be discussing eating a corpse.

She wondered what had brought the child to such horrid thoughts, what she did not know was that the shock of watching you die had brought a naked realization to the young mind. The two children had known of death when it had swallowed their father, a good man whose abundant love did not differentiate you from them. But they always thought death was for 'old people'. With you gone their young minds were catapulted beyond their years in cognition and that swift flight without a knowledgeable guide had brought them distorted truth. Surely they could also just vanish to memory, and the beast clawing at their inner-bellies could eventually leave them dead but not so soon, hunger is a cruel killer whose deathblow comes after much begging and a-begging. The child had come to one conclusion: eat or die, rather eat the dead than die of hunger. But a child could not think these thoughts alone, I who made all things uneven and called them perfect hid the words in his heart for I am temptation and salvation. Why would I? So that the faith of the one you call mother may be tested. Truth is fortified in testing. That is why no matter how much she chided and scolded his mind could not be steered off that course.

They argued long and loud, while busy at loggerheads they did not see the younger one, almost knee-deep wading away. They only saw her return with that zinc dish your mother used when she cut the throats of chicken. She brought a knife as well, to carve your meat off. When your mother saw this she sank in spirit below the fabled hell, took the utensils both, laid the dish on her lap and the knife to her trachea. "Eat me instead my children." You were far from all these things. I know you would have let them eat you had you a say in the matter though your mother would not. She believed in the old prophesy of the medicine-man who kept her alive while you lived in her belly. When you were born he held you high above the searing flame glistening her sweat-polished brow and spoke for the first time since she lived with him, blessing you in tongues of the Wakabi, tongues older than Lumukanda himself, not spoken since man was but a speck on the vast face of the blue ball. He was the first to call you by name, the name pronounced by the wise owls across eons' night. As they prophesied, the son of Nozala the Pure would to answer to the name Luzwi. You saw these things in the voyage of your spirit.

Before you witnessed the scene of your birth oh Luzwi, you had to see the most horrible scenes, the plight of your fellow men in the hands of foreign masters. They came across the big pond on ships and took men and women like you, bound them in savagery undeserved even by beasts. They were bred like livestock and worked like bleeding machines as expandable as an autumn leaf.

You saw them come again and live among you with their flags planted in your soil. In the streets beneath the firmament of the very city you call home where the black vagrant makes bed walked these foreigners, elbowing the natives off their podiums of civilization. This city you call home, Bulawayo, divided like the patches of earth your sister played scotch on. In the East lived the masters, the servants in the West. Only a decade before you

inhaled air the black man needed a pass to cross the divide.

It infuriated you, realising how you could have been one of those men living on the other side, the Western side, facing the sun's whips in his gallant rise, blinded by his descent to a wifeless bed beneath the halo of factory smog. She would be somewhere in the Reserves where the settlers forced the natives from fertile lands. Missing her would only make the sock happier while she stumbled maybe in Gwaai through vicious terrain of sandy ground with no pity for bare feet. If you missed her more than the sock could compensate you would get a letter to allow her visit. The letter was necessary for an old time-twisted knave; the Commissioner owayekhokhoba would regularly inspect the rooms to exorcise any female disrupting the design of black men barracked like monks in that place named Makokoba after the gnarled bat.

You had to see these things in more vivid detail than the other time-swallowed scenes for this is from where you hail. And see you did. How you wept seeing your king's pride razed and in pure disdainful mockery the victor erected his 'State House' in its stead in that place now known as Sorcetown. Rage tormented your soul when you watched the black kids of Mzilikazi, the squalor named after a great warrior-king, raiding bins in North End for the saliva of the settlers. The latter would eventually wrap their leftovers in foil before placing them in refuse bins. The black kids called this practice ukudikila.

At this point you were swollen with infernal wrath, blue flame of pure and livid hatred for the white man leapt in you; yet kindling this flame was not the purpose of the excursion.

To calm your spirit, you were shown merrier scenes of coexistence in those times of turmoil. That milky lad you saw gulping opaque beer with his sooty brethren was later to carry the flag of Zimbabwe on his back in England, the mother of the tyrants. His name is Bruce Grobber. Those dust stockinged lads that kicked a plastic ball about with their black peers are Jack and his brother Mark Watson. You saw black and white kids playing war games on that land where Lobengula's cattle kraal once stood, slinging mud from switches.

One black boy whose mind is preoccupied with the national condition wraps a pebble in his mud, slings it and knocks a white boy pink. The enraged victim picks up his bicycle, peddles off to return with his pellet-gun. Twang! Snaps it in half, reloads, twang! You laughed and I smiled, finally you understood what a man of your shade, born across oceans, a descendant of the stolen ones once dreamt. His name was Martin Luther King Junior, and he dreamt of men being judged by the content of their characters not the colour of their skin. You had learnt that the true shade of a man lies in his heart.

It was imperative that you understand or you would blunder like your leaders who braved the hail of warheads that you may enjoy rain; serenading and seducing death-spangled nights with Kalashnikov baritone and the soprano of tingling cartridge-shells, with bayonets cut down the foreign Caesar and birthed a new nation. They fought for justice, preached reconciliation yet when their soles echoed in the halls of the oppres-

or their souls were possessed by the horrors they had exorcised. The Gabriels, the angels turned demons. I wept so, I weep still.

Your mother had the blade to her neck ready to draw her blood that your siblings may drink nourishment from it than have them scar your body. Why would she make this sacrifice seemingly meaningless? Was it not more sensible to eat what was already dead? She believed young one. That ancient man who held up your woeful form with its umbilical cord still dangling, yet unwashed of blood and fluids of birth was Lumukanda, The Lost Immortal. He told the prophecy to your young mother still feeble from labour. Luzwi, your name has been whispered by many prophets, madmen, izanuse and keepers of knowledge of this continent across eons. They spoke of The One To Come, who would liberate mankind from a great calamity. I chose you before your mother was formed in the womb, before the beast that now stirs anarchy like a bull digging his hoof into the ground was. I the Eternal One, who created himself and everything in the ever-expanding universe from myself. All is a part of me, your very soul too.

Do you know what it looks like? It is an orb the size of your head, a perfect sphere, transparent, inhabited by two worms that glow like fire-flies. One is blue, the other red. Ever moving, twining, untying, dancing, writhing. The red is pure evil, the other unadulterated good. A female's soul has wings like an ant lion's, yours and every other male's is wingless. I am good and evil, you I have appointed to bring pleasure to my heart by restoring equilibrium to an aberrated world.

After you had seen your birth and the proclamation of your mission your education was complete. You left the ancient wanderer warming his equally ancient scrotum by the eternal fire. Your mortal form shook and coughed, blinked, your mother sighed, let down the blade and embraced you. At once the great storm abated, the sun shimmered through and the water shined like sheet silver. You were back among the living, with no recollection of your spirit journey.

You have grown now, your beard is heavy and your eye is weary of the world of men more foul and maggot-ridden than at the time of the cyclone. The age of your remembrance is ripe. As you read these things on the wall of this cave written in a language of symbols you understand not how you comprehend, your sun is yawning in its cradle. Rise forth, fulfil your purpose, I God command it, Dark Messiah.

-This story was greatly inspired by Credo Mutwa's Indaba My Children, a collection of African folklore and mythology. I found it imperative to take some of the characters from the African narrative and build a story around it.

THE DAYS OF UNHAPPINESS

Boluwatife Promise Oyediran, Nigeria



“Birthdays are stupid days meant for the harvesting of a year’s unhappiness,” you said to me the day before your birthday, as we snailed home, choking on mouthfuls of boiled corn. I did not understand you but I registered it in mind to celebrate you the following day. I really had it in mind – a plug lodged in my soul – as we talked, argued, agreed, and parted. I skipped all the way left, got home, consumed Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* while my rice burned on the hot plate. I spent some hours studying Kafkaesque, until the heavy thoughts of you and the morrow rolled off my mind like a stone sent off a high mountain. Indeed I had you in mind. But because I woke up worrying that my Mom might not send me cash and I would not repair my tab on time, I met you the following morning, blank. We sat together in English class, in the belly of Afritheatre, you jeering the lecturers as they revised impressively, I staring at my text, trying to make sense of all those inter-transitive and adjunct rants. We left for FAJ Hall afterwards, talked to the engineer about our broken phones, withdrew cash at Ecobank in the wake of a long, drizzling day.

You did not like that your day began without the sun. You said gloom was harsh, although what I’d had in mind was the wet blanket spread in the sky. Back at Uscar-d’Engineer’s corner, I remembered the date. It’s August 7! swelled in my throat but I did not say it. I don’t know what’s responsible for my not saying it, for my forgetting it’s your day.

Funny enough, on your day, you longed for Janet as a miner would long for a fresh breath. “Jane-et?” I asked, as we sliced through the crowd on the concrete grounds of Afritheatre. “Janet, yaga! The lady in a cream top with holes in the shoulders!” I pointed at her in class. “Ohhh, I see.” I remembered: your new girl, dark-skinned, smooth-faced, thick-lipped (the kind you marvel at as purely African), jet black hair washed wet to the back as I had seen on your Whatsapp status when you put up her photo and asked, “What comes to your mind?”

Nothing came to my mind, sorry to say. We can’t crush on the same things. But em, we might. As we did on Chimamanda, your own obsession overgrowing mine in a couple of days. You even imagined her giving birth to you. You were as star struck as you were when you scanned the classrooms for Janet on the day—your day—in which the sun refused to rise. The old yellow ball must have been in a tired sleep, forgetting to dress quickly for the sake of waiting celebrants.

It had always been Olamide I wanted us to talk about when we talked about girls. Yes she had scattered teeth, I agreed, not minding the dismal flinch that I was broken-toothed too. My wanting her to be in the centre of our conversation was an obligation, not of piety for her—because of course we share a similar case in dental misstructure. I just wanted to know why she could be shit to you, the girl who soaked you deep into your first ruins with ladies—first kiss, first night out, and firsttime sex, which you called boring. You tried Janet because you felt you would feel something you wanted to feel.

I wanted to tell you that while you hugged Olamide in Philosophy class after reminding her it was your day and she had said Happy Birthday Toh to you weakly. She noticed me. Twice her eyes held mine. You know I don’t like ladies staring, don’t you?

We discussed our birthdays. I cried on mine because time kept sieving through my fingers and I hadn’t done something worthy with my life, not even found true love yet. You sobered on yours because no one from home remembered your birthdate, including all the girls you had dated, who once had always told you how much they loved and could die for you.

You sobered throughout; later drifting between being sober and sad and gay, in that order. You rarely said Yaga! We sat in a passageway in FAJ, in each other’s arms, telling each other stories, waiting for the discharge of our sick phones. A guy walked past and said, “you no feel hold yourselves like that in this place o; some students dey around, na

gay demdey find beat o.”

We laughed and held each other tighter, thighs rubbing. Were we gay?

For the first time, I talked extensively about my father. I told you divorce is a thing of the heart. It starts when a couple joined to be one refuse to be one in decisions from a moment onwards. “My parents still wear matching clothes,” I said to you, “but to me they’ve never been really married.” I forgot to add that they didn’t fight, they just did not match in perceptions. Could two people walk together if they could not agree?

You told me you’re from a polygamous home: four wives, sixteen kids, you the first to attend university. You minced words, your emotions pouring out your mood like Marah, a river of sad waters. You got up, bored by my stories and yours, and said, “I want to take a walk in the rain.”

I watched you rise and walk slowly into the rain, your fingers holding the cuffs of your shirt, your joggers sagged around your ankles. You walked through the lawn, a lush green, on a path carved by pedestrians. Then you stopped and turned to the sky, face lit with wonder, as a saint’s would at the appearing of the Saviour.

The drizzle kept coming in slants, hitting your face like bullets, making you squint. They mixed with your tears; rivers snaked down your cheeks to soak your shirt. You came back, met me staring at the sky, pointed.

There was a rainbow in the sky, large and colourful, ends dipped behind the outline of jacaranda trees in the distance. A thread of many colours.

“Yes it is. Can you see the shadow?”

“Shadow!” I looked closely. Indeed. There were two arcs, two rainbows. “I’ve never seen anything like this all my life,” I said.

“It’s my birthday. Nature has made it special,” you said.

You turned back, tapped me. My eyes followed your fingers to the sky. Behind grey clouds swollen with rain the sun rose in all its majesty, brighter by the minute, sparkling rays pronging the skies. Rainbows on one side, the rising sun on another.

“The sun is up, finally,” you said.

“Your day is unusual man,” I replied.

We ate buns and drank Fanta all day until our stomachs ached. While darkness de-

scended we got our things and left. As planned, we were to have discussions on English and Literature overnight. We slipped into the basement of the Faculty of Social Sciences and had a recap of everything you had taught me.

When we went out to piss, stars spread above us – twinkling diamonds in the sky – you further affirmed that Olamide was wrong for you, so wrong. We waited to talk about her in the darkness.

I finished peeing and asked, “Have you ever seen her reading a novel?”

“No!” You replied.

“How many of your poems has she read?”

“A few, less than five. Her brain is porous, daft.”

“I know.”

“I can date a beautiful girl with hips like hers. But one with an empty head is an exception. I can’t walk with a coconut head. She’s got to be smart man, not just a lecturer’s daughter.”

“It’s love that matters most.” You laughed, stared at the sky and asked, “Can you see the brightest star? Why is it not white?”

“It’s a satellite man. But must every star be white? There’s beauty in diversity.”

“Mmmh, beauty in diversity.” You smiled deep, your eyes on the sparkling dot in the dark sky, stood fixed for minutes, muttering beauty in diversity, until my legs began to ache.

On our way back to the classroom we came upon two figures kissing on the stairs, in the dark, their pressed bodies arched against the banister like a waving palm tree.

“This is what you used to do to girls.”

“Shit,” you hissed.

At the landing, you stopped suddenly, sniffed the air, discerning. “That’s Janet!” you said.

“What?”

You bundled back down the stairs and without waiting pulled the bodies apart. I followed slowly, watching your head stare at both figures almost at the same time. You caved in, knelt between them, head in hands.

“Noooo!”

In the faint glare of the night, I could recognise both figures. One was Janet, the other was Olamide.

I sat down and held you in my arms, your tears soaking into my shirt. In the classroom, someone was reading *Metamorphosis* aloud.



AMARYA'S KULI KULI

By Angela Umoru (AngieInspired), Nigeria

The dusty street of Bathurst Lane nestled in the heart of Kaduna is the only home I have ever known. Forget the flamboyant cities that I later breezed through as my job required of me. They were more like poorly baked pastries glazed over with egg-glossy on the outside and complete crap when you bite into it.

My street was more of a family than a neighbourhood. It mattered little that I belonged to one of the few Christian families in the area. Up the street on the left, the polytechnic lecturer lived behind the green gates with his numerous children and a wife no one ever saw. Opposite him was Iyagana's family. Iyagana was tall and lanky, delicate the way girls that would grow up to be called 'lady' and not 'madam' were. Whenever she smiled, her perfect dentition peeked through her pink lips.

The light-skinned mischievous twins lived not too far up the street and closer to my home. It was always difficult to tell who was Hussaina or Hassana, yet these mirthful twins would grow up to be a medical doctor and professor of biochemistry respectively.

Down the street was the brood of young guys living together. They could have been five or maybe six. I don't recall now but they were quite a friendly bunch. I didn't take too kindly to them when they first arrived. You see, my good friend Usman and

his family had lived there before these strange guys arrived. So, naturally it was my duty not to like them. However, Shehu, the shortest of them all soon won me over with his wholehearted smiles. He used to call me his wife and though my mother kept a hawk-eye watch over them, she allowed me to spend a few minutes with them in the evenings when the children came out to play football and hop excitedly over lines drawn on the ground.

Our house was on the end of the street, next to my best friend Terso's house. Terso was four years older than me but it barely mattered as I matched him in wit and unfortunately height. Despite his mean streak, I loved spending time with him. I would watch him chain his dog to a post and slap it around. I was repulsed but that puppy always went back to him. Perhaps that is where my interesting choices in men began but that is a story for another day.

Living on Bathurst Lane was like an explosion of flavours, from the too-sweet taste of Sallah to the all too familiar bliss of Amarya's kuli-kuli. Amarya was the younger wife of the old Nupe man at the mouth of the street.

Considering the fact that we all called her 'Amarya', one would expect a young, supple woman but Amarya was at least 50 years old at the time, short and dark-skinned. Her flabby arms always quivered as she deftly moulded the groundnut into flattened shapes. Her face held beady eyes, a small nose and tribal marks on the sides of her mouth, much like whiskers but then her smile was what made her face memorable. It broke out like the beginnings of a flower in bloom and spread across her face, slowly chasing away all signs of the hard life she lived. The smile would then bunch up in crow's feet, leaving a twinkle in her eyes. Whenever she saw me, she would stumble through English to impress me. The attempts always drew disapproving glances from the older wife who, in my childlike mind's eye, was the spitting image of Cinderella's step-mother.

I reckoned that the older wife had given Amarya a hard time as a young wife but others who had known the family before I was born swore that the older wife or UwarGida, as we called her, was a nice woman cursed with a hard face. As if to fan the embers of my imagination, in all the years that I knew Amarya, I never saw her outside her home. I convinced myself that she had been forbidden from ever leaving the house so I would try, without success, to code to her in broken Hausa that I could help her escape. How I would achieve that feat, I didn't know.

The family hardly ever mixed with the rest of us but we trooped daily to buy the crunchy and peppery groundnut cakes. We were like a brainwashed mass that never dared go anywhere else to get kuli-kuli. Hers was so good that when my older siblings in boarding school wrote home, there was always a 'PS: We need Amarya's kuli-kuli'. It was what bound us together, more than anything else on that street. Not even the communal frustration of trudging to Video Club's well to fetch water whenever Water Board deemed us unworthy of having pipe-borne water (the family was so called

because they rented out home videos for the paltry sum of 10 naira) could compare. One Monday afternoon, I was on my way home after buying Amarya'skuli-kuliso my sisters and I could soak some garri when I heard a distant noise. I tuned it out because I was trying to remember what exactly I had been asked to buy. For some reason the N 20 kuli-kuli and N 10 sugar in my hands didn't seem right. I halted, completely confused and lips already quivering. Only the previous day, I had been scolded harshly for buying the wrong thing.

I tried to stay calm and remember but the noise just wouldn't let me concentrate. Someone brushed hurriedly past me, screaming something, I looked up but the person had disappeared around a bend. I was about to run back home and apologize for my mistake when the noise sounded closer. I turned around to find people running towards me. My mother's voice rang in my head that I should run but the fear etched on their faces kept my feet firmly planted on the ground. Save for this running bunch, the street was deserted. Their voices rang out like a crowd in a stadium, only that they were not cheering. I am not sure how long I stood there till someone grabbed me by the scruff of my neck violently. In shock, the contents of my hands fell to the ground.

I craned and found myself peering into my eldest sister's face. Her face was grim as she wordlessly ran with me back home. It was on the news that Kaduna was not safe and my father had called on the landline from the office to ensure everyone was at home. He said he would get my mother from her shop on his way home.

The atmosphere around the house was tense and each time we heard the sound of a car, we all sat up, ready to dash to the gate. The only other excitement for the rest of the day, however, was my parents' return. We heard of the carnage, saw it in the newspapers and on TV as it continued for days before the army was deployed. It was dubbed the Sharia riot but we never saw the violence first hand in our neighbourhood. Instead, everywhere grew extremely quiet. Even the video game sounds we used to hear in Shehu's house seized. We held prayers in church for "our brothers and sisters who had fallen". Our Reverend always said that they were resting in the bosom of the Lord and that vengeance was for the Lord. Whenever we walked back home from church, Mummy would hold on tightly to my hand, almost cutting off the blood supply but I never complained. If a Muslim neighbour walked past us, they would only grunt pleasantries. Questions about the family were not asked anymore. It suddenly seemed rude to enquire about an ailing child's health or a husband's job.

From that time on, the mass exodus began in full swing. Many Christian families moved to Southern Kaduna where they felt safer. We didn't move till 2008 when we built our house but in the interim eight years, we kept out of one another's way and the taste of Amarya'skuli-kuli was forgotten.



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CALL FOR SUBMISSION

Much of African history has been told in obscurity. Its culture and tradition has either been unknown, known and misinterpreted or known but grossly ignored. Writers Space Africa (**WSA**) an international literary magazine, published by the African Writers Development Trust, is calling for submissions for its 22nd edition under the theme "Retelling the African story".

We're looking for words that break the fabric of myths, stereotypes, and gross misrepresentations to tell the colourful tales of the beauty that makes the African continent.

We're accepting literary works in the following categories:

Articles/Essays – 1,200 Words maximum

Flash Fiction – 300 words maximum

Poetry – 1 poem, maximum of 24 lines

Short Stories – 2,500 words maximum

Jokes – 1 joke per writer

Artworks – maximum 3 artworks in high resolution

Personalised quotation – 1 quotation and must be the original work of the author

Please note the following:

You're only entitled to submit for one category.

The Deadline for submission is September 12, 2018.

Due to the number of entries we receive, only selected authors will be published in the issue and online.

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Your work must be thoroughly edited before being uploaded. We will in turn edit selected entries to suit the publication.

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To submit, please visit www.writersspace.net/submissions to upload your work through our submission portal.

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