



WSA
Writers Space Africa
Empowering African Writers

AFTERlife

**The
Other Side**

Trisha
Uganda

Heaven

Agboni Christiana
Nigeria

**Bridging
Panorama**

Simon Ng'uni
Zambia

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A circular porthole view of a boat's wake on the ocean. The water is dark blue with white foam from the wake. The porthole frame is visible, and there are some reflections on the glass.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS THEME: FREEDOM

Writers Space Africa, a monthly literary online magazine dedicated to giving literary enthusiasts a platform for their work, welcomes submissions for her February 2021 Edition in the following categories:

- Short Story
- Flash Fiction
- Poetry
- Essays
- Children's Literature

The Submission windows is open from 1st of December to 14th December.

Response times is typically within 4 to 5 weeks after submission window closes.

We look forward to receiving your best.

To submit, please visit www.writersspace.net/submissions

EDITOR'S NOTE

A person is born every other day with every other breath they take. Life is the most beautiful of things; yet in certain contexts, it is the cheapest of things. There are certain elements that make life worth every moment of being; like how the human ability to Love and Sacrifice breaks the bounds of expectation and reality; or how Failure and Solitude will always be ingredients that form the base for the breakthrough of potential and success. All of life is a lesson in Transition and overcoming Fear; a lesson in Reconciliation and the discovery of Self – we are nothing without our Identity.

Despite this burst of being, of existence, like a faithful friend Fate will meet us all; we will part when we meet with Death; and for us for whom life means all things, we will find purpose in every moment of Rebirth and (for those of us who do) hold out our belief in an Afterlife.

As deliberate writers, we bend the rules. For us, time and life are a constant and we forever live even when we are gone. All of life is resilience; all living is resilience and as such, we will always be a resilient people for whom a chance at another moment of being will always be a chance at living a life worthwhile.

Always remember,
Ubuntu.

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Heaven

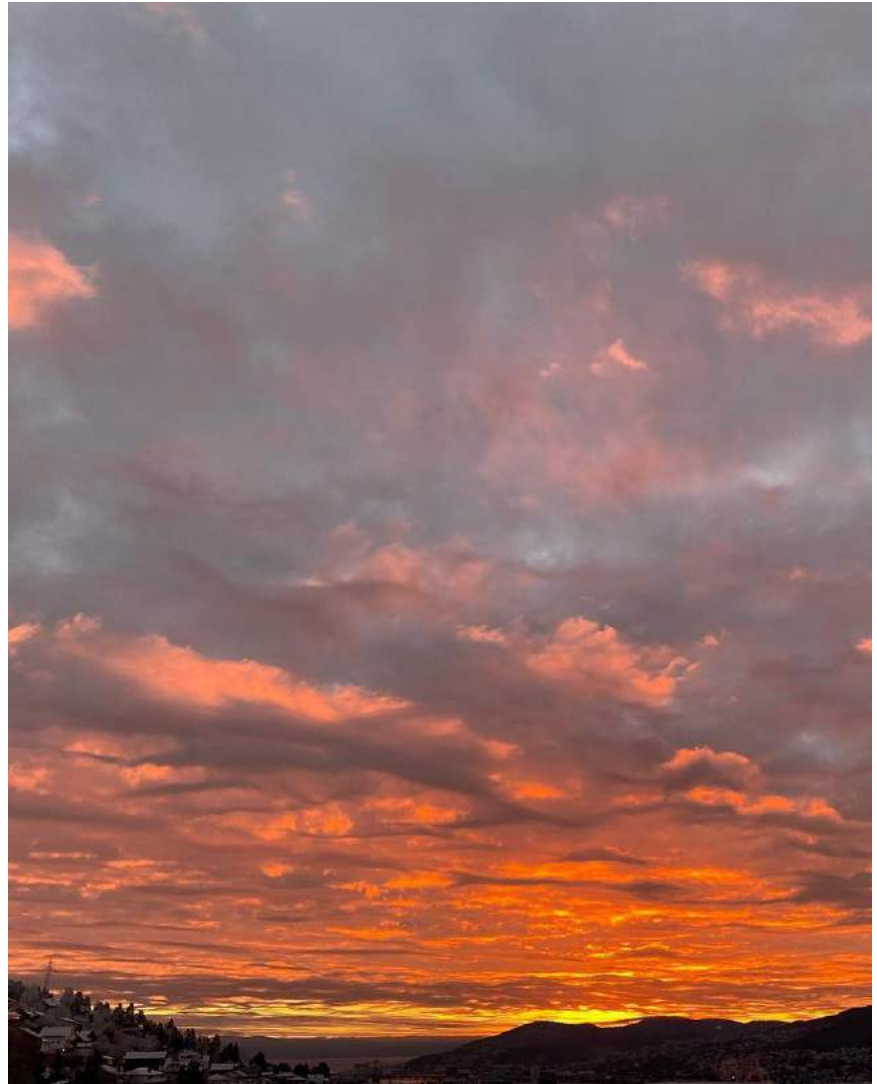
Agboni Christiana
Nigeria

Look at the rail thin woman lying on the narrow hospital bed. I do not want to look, but I do, again and again. My mother has literally become a shadow of herself. She smiles, and I start to cry. I want to lay a hand over her mouth, so I won't see the smile. Despite the haggardness of her face, her smile is still potent.

"Uyomi, don't cry, come here," she whispers, and I draw closer to her.

"It's okay to be sad for a while, but think of where I am going. Where I will be waiting to see you again, after you've lived for a long time, of course." She chuckles lightly, and her body is racked by dry coughs immediately. I dash towards the mini hospital fridge wedged between the bed and door to give her water. She sips slowly, then she sighs and lies back down.

Mother has been telling me stories of God and eternity since I



could walk. She says eternity is life after life. I tell her I do not understand, why there should be life after life; we have not finished living the one we have on earth.

"It is to be with God. God wants all who believe in Him to spend

eternity with Him in heaven. Away from this wicked world." she says, in answer to my question.

She talks about mansions, in different categories, crowns that shine as brightly as stars and streets paved with gold.

This fascinated me; I walked about dreaming about wearing crowns, being addressed as princess Uyomi.

She would always go on, and on about how we will not suffer lack, or want in heaven. Suffering will cease. No pain, no tears, and no death. I cannot wrap my mind around the fact that we will not lack anything in heaven. The more mother talked about heaven, the more questions I had to ask.

"Uyomi, the ways of God are not the ways of man. Be careful, lest you be tempted to go astray." mother delivers this gentle rebuke with a smile. When we are told in church to imitate Christ, I think of mother. Her smile, her demeanor. If she were born during Jesus' time on earth, I have no doubt that she would have been among the women who ministered to Him. A combination of Mary and Martha. I think mother's name, Margaret, is a good fit for her.

In Sunday school, our teacher, Mr. Oche Samson tells us about heaven. He talks like he has been there, his passion is contagious. He tells us about the different angels; Michael for war, Gabriel for peace, and the rest of them. He even knows the exact number of

gates you have to pass through before you reach the throne of God.

"And my dear children, we're going to sing in heaven. How beautiful!" He proclaims as sweat trails down his face.

"And what else?" I ask.

"What do you mean, what else. Don't you like singing?" He asks with steel in his voice. I decide not to pursue it further with him.

"So, who wants to go to heaven?" He asks.

We all raise our hands.

"Then, you must give your life to Christ. Romans 6:23 says, for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord." He reads from the Bible. We all stand and make the confession. We are heaven bound.

Later, we discuss amongst ourselves what we like about heaven.

"To eat all I want. There is hardly food at home," Olamide, a short, plump girl says.

"To sleep all day. I'm tired of working, and working." Yohanna

moaned. He is lazy. His mother says so.

"To escape this pain in my leg. To not suffer or feel pain ever again? I do not mind going to heaven today," Ifunanya says. She was involved in an accident when she was a baby and had broken her leg. It had healed badly. She walks with crutches now.

"What about you, Uyo?" Idoko asks me.

"Me?" I feign ignorance and clear my throat. They nod and draw close to me as I bend my head slightly.

"I want to ask God some questions," I say.

They open their eyes in shock.

"God! Do you know who He is?" Olamide asks.

"He's God, silly." Idoko interjects.

"I want to ask Him why there's only singing in heaven. I don't want to get bored." I tell them.

"You should have asked teacher Oche." Ifunanya says.

"He is not God. Mama says God has all the answers," I tell them with self importance.

"I do not think we will sing all the time. Besides, seeing Jesus alone is enough for me. What more do I want?" Ele, a quiet girl says. We do not say anything again. I still have my reservations about heaven.

As I sit by Mama's bedside in the hospital, I think about heaven. I do not have the reservations I had when I was a child in Sunday school years ago. I do not think of asking God any questions. Mama's absolute faith has made me a believer. That, no matter what, heaven is a place to be. I see her cheerfulness through the terrible pain she endures, and it gives me comfort. Her faith is a warm blanket.

"Just imagine! I will see your father again." Mama says suddenly. I look at the wistful smile on her face, and my heart feels all over the place. I try to picture my father. He died when I was five. His picture rests on our living room wall at home. A brown skinned man with piercing dark eyes, I look like him. He was Mama's second love. God is her first.

"And all your grandparents," Mama continues. I take her dry, translucent hand in mine. Mama, before her sickness, was an ebony beauty. Her skin glittered and her voice was like a bell.

"I can't wait to tell them about you. You, a law student, and an adult too." She smiles. I want to tell her that I do not feel like much of an adult, that I feel nine instead of my nineteen years. But I cannot form the words. I sit holding her hand, trying to prolong the moment; I know I will cherish it forever.

I believe in God and heaven. I see them reflected in mama's life. She loves life, a vibrant personality. Mama is a butterfly with the prettiest of colours. There is no way her leaving this earth will be the end of her life. She is too precious, her energy too beautiful, to be blackened out forever.



I see heaven in her smile, warm and golden. I see God in her speech; how she is quick to offer a kind word, a helping hand, to tell others about Christ. Mama is the poster child for the saying that, you cannot offer what you do not have.

close her eyes and begins to snore quietly.

I know the journey has started. Five years of lung cancer, of pain, and tears, while mama turned unrecognizable before my eyes. Five years of mama never giving up hope, even when pain turned

young again, before cancer aged her prematurely. Then I remember her telling me once, that there will be no age in heaven. I want that for mama. I know I will not see her eyes open again. Not in this world.

Mama is finally going to meet the



"God that is calling me home will take care of you. You do not need to worry one bit. You do not need to think about the why, remember that His ways are not..."

"Our ways." We complete it together. We're crying and smiling now.

"Keep an eye on my mansion, and crown mama." I tell her. She nods with all seriousness. Then she

her eyes to slits and her mouth to a bloodied mess as she bit on it. She knew from the first day she would not survive it. Yet, she never wavered in her abiding devotion to God, she took it all with good grace. Mama's faith is like a spring. Refreshing and continuous.

As she snores, I watch her face, she looks so peaceful; almost

God she has loved all her life. To the home where she had always longed for. Two feelings merge inside of me. I am sad and happy at the same time. I finally know how something can be bittersweet. I sit by my mother's bed and watch as she transitions into the afterlife.

**WAKINI KURIA PRIZE
FOR CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE**



MADEHA MALECELA
(Tanzania) 1st Place



BLESSING TARFA
(Nigeria) 2nd Place



HALIEO MOTANYANE
(Lesotho) 3rd Place

AFRICAN WRITERS AWARDS



GLORIA AKAYI ASOKOLO
Drama (Nigeria)



OLUYEMISI OLADEJO
Creative Non-Fiction (Nigeria)



DURU NNEKA JOYCE
Poetry (Nigeria)

Telling Our Stories Ourselves: The African Identity

Namwanja Margaret Chikwabi
Zambia

The 3rd African Writers Conference took place in Lusaka, Zambia from 5th to 7th November, 2020- the year in which the continent had to adjust to the global Covid-19 pandemic. Following health guidelines, only fifty people were physically allowed to occupy the library at the French Cultural Centre where the event was held, from the 400 who had registered online to be there. The entire conference was streamed on Facebook Live, starting with the opening evening session on Thursday 5th November. Twenty countries tuned in. The theme of the Conference was 'The African Identity', and so, this Writers Mingle (online-only) session was about just that: defining the African identity and its relationship with contemporary arts, especially writing. Seventy participants took part in this Zoom session that went on for two

hours and six minutes – because no one wanted it to end!

Moderating proceedings was Anthony Onugba, founder of Writers Space Africa and Executive Director of the African Writers Development Trust, who travelled to Zambia from Nigeria for the conference.

On what African identity is, what emerged were i) our physical characteristics: kinky hair, melanin, from the darkest blue to the palest white; ii) stereotypes imposed on us which end up being part of African identity, such as images of starving babies with flies across their mouths, corruption, HIV/AIDS, etc.; iii) having a love for the continent, being engrossed in her problems and solutions; iv) self-love: understanding where you come from and how you see yourself before anyone else sees

you; iv) how you show the world who you are and how they see you from what you portray.

With regards to African identity and contemporary arts, it was noted that contemporary arts must be about showing how society is in the present moment. In other words, contemporary art should speak to and bring attention to the realities of our communities as they are. However, there is a bemoaning of artists now going for things that will give them fame and monetary success quickly. For example, using 'choice words', in their written work, that appeal to the Western world; writing stories that cater to commercial success and glorifies the Western idea of what Africa is. We write about, and define ourselves as, Africans based on how someone else sees us, instead of us dictating how the world sees us.

The clarion call is to write our stories, not to impress others, but to be true to ourselves. The call is also to not put limitations on ourselves as writers, but to expand our imagination and our vision of the world.

The morning session on Friday 6th November began with Ms. Marita Banda, poet, author, co-founder of Network for Society Transformation (SOTRANE) and founding Chairperson of Writers Space Africa (Zambia) welcoming the speakers, panelists and attendees to the Conference. Special welcoming remarks were given by the representative from the National Arts Council Ms. Mwiche Chikungu. Ruth Simujayangombe of the Zambia Reprographic Rights Society (ZARRSO) and the Director of Alliance Française, Nail Muniglia also gave their remarks which centred on the importance of freedom of speech in the arts, the role of public curiosity in the success of events such as the AWC, importance of networking and bringing value to the writing and publishing industry, and urging writers to write authentically about African culture.

Following this was the first session of the day titled 'An Emerging African Identity'. The panelists were young Zambian writers including Ms. Fiske Serah Nyirongo, who contributed an article to Twaweza, a collection of twenty-four non-fiction African stories, published this year by the African Writers Development Trust and is available for free download. Moderated by journalist and radio personality Mr. Jacob Kabwe, some of the issues tackled were how emerging writers describe African identity, how world events have changed African identity and how much control we have had in forging the identity we have as Africans. The discussion brought out identity as being complex and dependent on who defines it.

There's the Euro-centric view of Africa, based on prejudice, slavery and colonialism, with Africans being in the peripheral of any and all narratives. There's the Afro-centric view, which is about centering Africa and Africans in narratives, and there's the Africanist view, which is unique in its own space and is about bringing balance to how we see ourselves. Christianity, Islam and

colonialism were identified as the greatest influences on Africans and Africa. The fear is also that in fifty years' time, our languages will be lost to English and we may be fighting for spaces in majority-white countries.

The afternoon session was on 'The Media Perspective'. Mrs. Victoria Chitungu, historian, author, previous Director of Lusaka National Museum and current curator of Choma Museum spoke about the value and priority that we place on ourselves as Africans in media spaces. For instance, on Zambia's national television broadcaster, ZNBC, there is an hour of news in English. In contrast, the news in Zambia's seven main local languages is allotted five minutes each, and is presented in succession. An hour in English of information being given to the public and only five minutes of that same information in Lozi, Nyanja, Luvale, Tonga, Bemba, Kaonde, Chewa. Publisher, onomastician, cultural heritage expert, founder and series editor of the Encyclopedia of African Names, Mr. Chanda Penda spoke about private media being more about politics than arts. There is a neglect in favour of sensational

headlines that are political or scandalous in nature; things that are seen as commercially more viable than the arts, especially books and writers.

On the last day of the conference, the first session's title was 'The African Identity- An Academic Discourse'. Intangible Cultural Heritage Expert (UNESCO Certified), poet, lecturer and founder of Kalulu Kreativez, Mr. Gankhanani M Moyo submitted that all cultural spaces are interlinked and borrow from each other; therefore, there is no such thing as cultural purity. He added that political identity and boundaries are a false sense of identity for the African. For instance, the Chewa ceremony, Kulamba, in Zambia always has people coming from Mozambique and Malawi to take part in it.

For the African writer, what is important to know is that identity is fluid, it is not static. One writes because someone else has written; this means we have to be aware of our cultural spaces to be able to write from within them. The role of the writer is to explore complexities, to question our reality, our space and inter-

relations between now, yesterday and tomorrow. The writer should not be boxed into 'this is the beginning and this is the end'.

Mrs. Chitungu, who spoke after Mr Moyo, posited that Eurocentrism informs academic discourse when it comes to writing. The centres of power are European academic institutions. As a result, this creates a bias because the measuring tape for quality and accepted (and acceptable) work is not here in Africa and it is not African. The question is then put: how do we talk of an African identity in academic discourse if the measuring stick is not African? How do we change the narrative? The authorities referenced and consulted in African academic work more often than not are not Africans. In pre-colonial times, Africans were grouped into clans, not tribes. Clans cut across cultural groupings in terms of language, but with the arrival of the Europeans, Africans became categorised under 'tribes.'

A panel discussion to wrap things up followed. This included Mrs. Natasha Omokhodion-Kalulu Banda, author of No Be From Hia, Mr.

John T. Njobvu, renown actor, economist, civic activist and poet, as well as Mr. Chanda Penda. Mrs. Omokhodion-Kalulu Banda emphasised the importance of using the rich information of our heritage in museums and national archives to mine new stories about ourselves and our identity. Mr. Njobvu urged the attendees to embrace traditional dresses and African names. Mr. Penda reminded the audience to take up the fight for a positive African identity and not look to the West or Europe to tell our stories, in academia and in general.

To cap it all off was the vote of thanks by Mr. Anthony Onugba, as well as the announcement of the winners of the 2020 African Writers Awards. For Creative Non-fiction, Oladejo Oluyemisi from Nigeria won for Each Little One. Poetry was won by Duru Nneka Joyce, Nigeria, for Ode to the Blackbird (Haiku). The Drama Award went to Asoloko Gloria Akayi, Nigeria, for Who Knows Amanda? This year the Wakini Prize for Children's Literature was expanded to include three winners. First Prize went to Madeha Ezekiel Malecela from Tanzania for Scared Little Boy.

The second went to Blessing Aliyu Tarfa from Nigeria for *Sophie, What Do You Say?* The third prize went to Halieo Motanyane from Lesotho for *Hessy and the Lost Tooth*. Halieo, who is also a passionate filmmaker, travelled to Zambia, especially for the conference. On hand to present a visibly shocked Halieo the award was Zambian Marjorie Moono Simuyuni, winner of the maiden edition of the Wakini Kuria Prize

for children's Literature in 2019. Attending the conference too was Andrea Matambo, who won the 2019 African Writers Awards for Poetry.

This 3rd African Writers Conference in Lusaka was a vibrant, exhilarating and profound event. The onus is on the African writer to grapple with uncomfortable truths, take the baton and be the change agent in

the narratives that are put out there about Africa and about Africans. In the words of President Obama, "we are the change we've been waiting for."



Namwanja Margaret Chikwabi is a Travel Consultant turned freelance Book Editor. She runs Rosebud Editing & Proofreading Company. The company offers editing and proofreading services for books, magazines, academic papers, articles, etc. She co-founded and was Editor in Chief of *Arise Zambia Magazine*. This is Zambia's first ever youth-dedicated magazine published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 2015. She is currently the Assistant Chief Editor of *Writers Space Africa (WSA) Magazine*.

Bridging Panorama

Simon Ng'uni
Zambia

one day, "tomorrow never comes"

as formerly vague. loops of ambiguity voyage
time

In celestial eminence,
with clarity — this knowledge of good. and evil,
has no place to run.

when all things have played out as they should,
this is the final frontier
— the last unmapped country left to discover

here forthwith,
wrongs have been righted
— fruit from rightful tree will be disemboweled
and savoured —
rightly.

everything restored, back to its rightful place.
no need for things
that slither and crawl
the underbrush. or moons dying
from sadness. nor absent suns
from overwhelming grief.

then, the veil of eternity laps across time —
fulfilling the space upon which it hovers.

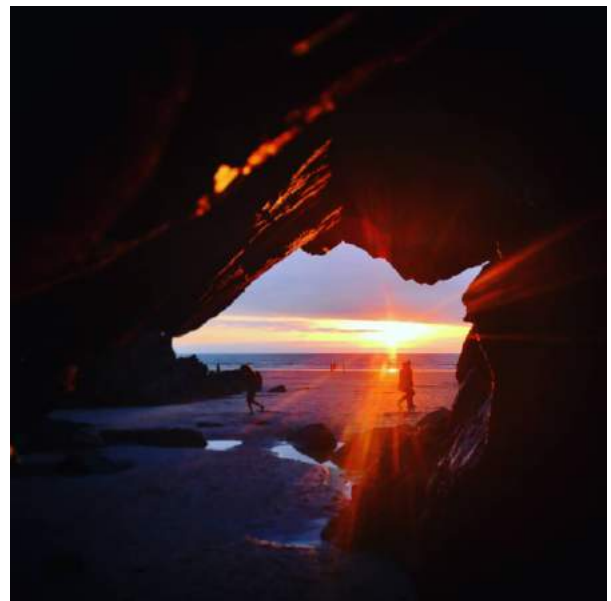
here forthwith,

when I am done making music from the silence
& unanswered questions remain

each day is a sunrise
with a new meaning to all of history.

inexhaustible.
then a thousand
then more

there is still a future outside of time
a between. knowledge and understanding
which only unbreaking suns can reveal



How Grandma Sees Afterlife From Balcony

Isaiqhy Adepoju
Nigeria

Yesterday, on the balcony, I asked grandma
Where she would go if she falls flat from here;

She said among the mercury cloud where
Her scars will be covered with vapors:

Where grandfather cannot reach with his rod.

I would have told her the clouds are for angels
And not a broken sack with a serrated cut on
thighs
And knees and the corners unknown, where
blood clots;

And not for arched backs flushing blood
With their broken tooth down the sewers.

Perhaps afterlife is for those whose lid
Are weary and blood-coated with terror –
My grandma said she's received too much blows
to count;

Too much insult to name, and too much torn
wrappers down the quiet streets.

Perhaps afterlife is for burnt grandmothers
Trapped under a fallen log – burnt to ashes.

Afterlife is a safe harbor for children
Standing over their limbless parents;

For wives tired on ambulance's screeching tires;
For husbands tumbling over bottles of booze;

For Boko-haram victims running like handle of
pincers –
Their graves forming the Maiduguri map.
Perhaps Afterlife is a gift wrapped with terror.



The Other Side

Trisha
Uganda

Across the River Styx

Far within the deep bowels of earth

The journey to eternity begins

Entering the sunless palace of Hades

Relinquishing all my past pains

Longing for the peacefulness of Elysium

I saved my pennies for Charon the Boatman

Forward to a new beginning

Everlasting quiet rest.



If you Ask Me About Afterlife

Shuaibat Muhammad-Raji
Nigeria

If you ask me about afterlife,
I'll tell you tales retold from generation to
generation.

A tale modified by your actions.

A tale of life after death.

If you ask me about afterlife -

I'll tell you it's a place of dread and
helplessness,

and hopelessness is a chant you hear
everyday.

it's filled with nightmares with no beloved to
cradle you back to sleep,

telling you everything will be fine when you
open your eyes.

If you ask me about afterlife -

I'll tell you it's a place of raging infernos where
homosapiens will serve as it's kindlers;

where mama's hug won't be existent.

and Papa will be busy accounting for the dime
he swindled,

and Imtiyaaz, your best friend will be sweating
from seeing his worldly records.

If you ask me about afterlife,

I'll tell you it's a place filled with beauties,
untainted beauties created perfectly by the
greatest creator.

A place where there shall be no sadness and
tears but happiness.

A place beyond the description of man.

So, if you are asked about afterlife,
tell them it's a two way lane to the final abode;

A lane of eternal dread or eternal peace,
and nothing else will matter except that which
you've done.

Where even an atom of good and bad will be
adjudged by the greatest of all judges.

Tell them it's the final abode where the truth
shall unfold and prevail.



Lagbaja

Akinmayowa Shobo
Nigeria

Chief Lagbaja,
Our illustrious son is alive

So alive, he is
To his beautiful Oyinbo wife, sons and dog
Yet he died,

That fateful day, our votes did indeed count.

So dead, he did die
The moment he rose to the hallowed chambers.

Nothing else would matter
He was long gone
Never to be bothered
By our heaping litanies.

At his feet, our rarest stones
He erects the tallest hanging gardens
Across the sun, we hear
Amidst the slums, dumb and scums
He has come to create.

Today he walks among his creation
Completely numb and dead.



GENRE: SHORT STORY

TITLE: OLD SOJAS NEVER DIE

WRITER: OLASUBOMI OLUMOFIN, NIGERIA

REVIEWER: YOLANDA KUEI P. MACUEI, SOUTH SUDAN

“Baba, when I grow up, I will become a Soja like you because Sojas can never die.” Boldly, I claimed the stand of my future dream and my forever life time Soja of Sojas; heroic father embraced me in his arms with pride. As a reader among other readers, I recalled the piece of advice at my father’s funeral, in connection to the African settings of this story.

“Macuei was and is a great teacher, a soldier, who fought and served the entire nation, not just us. Paul is not dead, he has you and your little brother to relive him on. It doesn’t matter whether you’re a girl, you can do anything, look after your mother; she is already dead alive. Your father’s death will deeply pain the entire nation with regret, the very day you decide to depart ways with his righteous paths as you turn left. For now, his work is done here and he has been called by who brought him here to rest or continue his beautiful life after here.” (RIP BABA).

One couldn’t emotionally hesitate towards such a unique and styled piece of creative writing; thus uncontrollably permitting my recent and childhood memories to strongly flash in mind due to this anonymous deadly threat, upon the dedication and confrontation of death as the major theme that has been conveyed through the phrasal title of the story: “Old Sojas Never Die.”

Perception of being alive and dead independently varies, but at a general view, people often believe the concept of death as a one-way traffic of no return or divergent on the same path; that’s the end of the beginning but without the beginning, there is no end, vice versa. Hence, the relative phrase states that, “every finishing line is the beginning of a new race.” Does this statement denature the nature of our thoughtful nurture of death?

Therefore, the author has entangled the main theme of death with other valuable themes such as life and war: thus, heroically represented and revived the historical memories of the brave African soldiers who fought and died during the pre-colonial and post-colonial era, in defense of their motherland to always live on for generations. The power and weaknesses of the African soldiers before and now is portrayed the same in the eyes of death but what always make them stand out tall above, even in the mouth of death is their bold declaration that Old Sojas Never Die. “Once a soldier, always...”

Furthermore, the persona has skillfully applied perfect diction, flashback, symbolism and imagery to vividly paint HD memorial pictures, in the mind of a reader; through descriptive narrative in comparison of the present, past and the future beyond. The tale entails the details of a seasonal journey (wet and dry) of life variables at one point of the time to another; thus reflects on the definite trust process of life changes from birth, infancy, growth, death and rebirth: that’s why Old Sojas Never Die. “E go just die! Old Soja? They never die.”

Not only is death defined as a natural factor of life and a compulsory human race of no competition but also a crucial part of life that is viewed negatively due to its nature of human perception that sadly appears faded, ugly, destructive and very old to be associated with ordinarily. But according to the writer, death can positively be part of our daily lives and the dead can be revived, restructured back to its initial lively state by recovering the positive memories of the past, and relive them freshly in mind because the attitude of the mindset towards death is the most dangerous effect more than death itself. “What didn’t kill me could only make me stronger.” Emmanuel Jal. Some people decide to die mentally before death attacks them physically.

the African society ancestrally believes that “the dead are not dead” because while one was still alive, they must have had their identity in form of children, wives, and property among other possessions that represent them for the legacy to always live on. If at all death occurs without any accountable remains, one is highly honored through ritual and animal sacrifices to start a wealthy life from the other side after death; marry wives, name and rename children after them in order to remain alive.

Conclusively, every living thing dies and will always die; be it humans, animals, plants. Everything that's subjected to life has a time frame to go down the same road. So let's happily embrace death and believe it as the recycling cycle of life. The invisible power to conquer and relive death is to believe that, the soul and the spirit can never be seen or touched after the body is laid to rest. The ironic tale of “Old Sojas never die leaves rhetorical questions of faith and hope in mind. From its end question: “Will old Soja ever die?”

“Are the African soldiers that died, completely dead after making the motherland stand or still alive?

“Don't you think there is a possibility of a soulful and spiritual life after death?”

“Do you think one can still be alive over a dead body?”

“How dead and alive do you think mama Africa is; yesterday, today and after?”



GENRE: COLUMN

TITLE: LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

COLUMNIST: UGBEDE ATABOH, NIGERIA

REVIEWER: PAUL WAMBUA, KENYA

“Life as we know it” offers us a perspective on death, pain, loss and grief. Contextually and with deliberate subtlety, it addresses itself using what is otherwise ominous to talk about. It presents a reality fragment that we humans tend to overlook. Through the story of Ifeoma's death and their relationship, we get to understand the intricacies of death, grief and pain.

In a broad sense, it refers to death both figuratively and literary. Death is the cessation of life and all associated processes; the end of an organism's existence as an entity independent from its environment and its return to an inert, nonliving state. We observe dead relationships, dead reality, dead parenting among other instances lacking life.

When someone dies, instinctively, we mourn the departed before giving them a befitting send off. How we cope with the death of our beloved is directly informed by our environment. Ugbede observes through a personal experience, the trauma of losing a loved one and how it's influenced by the fact that their upbringing shielded them from pain and grief. There is exploration of how our own ineptitude in fostering good relationships with our friends only to regret and acknowledge their centrality in our lives when they are no more. Criticism is meted on our social relations and responsibility to our peers. These are childhood friends, and generally people we know, whose experiences are more or less the same yet due to one being on an official assignment, despite the proximity, will not see their friend instead goes drinking with buddies. Later, they regret this decision. Our human contact should matter at all times and we should live like it matters and fosters warm relations.

Important thing to note is that we ought to live life as we know it. We should not hold back even under what circumstances. Through the rhetoric, presumably, scribbled in Ifeoma's obituary, the persona seems lamenting by opening that they ought to have visited their friend despite their schedule. The point is that we should live in the now acknowledging the peculiarities of our lives as well as that of those close to us.

The column begins by stating a fact of life. It is a simple but universal observation of death. It is an explanation both objective and subjective. The subjective statement is inclined to the persona who uses it as an illustration with far reaching consequences and most importantly symbolic significance.

The persona again is, or at least thought, dead to pain and grief. This is exacerbated by their upbringing and especially their climate around their father. The father attempts, through all ways possible, to disassociate the children from the experience of death and its consequent drama. We can deduce that it is human to feel and we should not shield ourselves from pain and feelings generally. Suppression of emotions returns to haunt us which does little or no help.

Life as we know it is challenging but our humanity should always rise above all. Appealing to what's humane in us is of paramount importance in order to give life to humanity. Please, try to make each day count and cherish every memory; it just might be the last.



GENRE: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

TITLE: DEATH

WRITER: HELLEN OWUOR, KENYA

REVIEWER: PETROSE LESAOANA, LESOTHO

The hardest questions to answer are those about death, because death is so hard for any of us to understand. Every death leaves a gaping hole and a pile of questions, especially for kids. Where did they go? Can they still think? If we talk to them, can they hear us? “And why she would never see her best friend again, or why they would never see each other again?”

Death is illustrated as black dormant trees as seen in the in black and grey skies background. The main character, Nana, is sad because her friend, Cate “went to be with the Lord.”

“Her parents did all they could to help her cope. They decided that it was best to take her to her grandmother for some time, where she would be distracted.”

Looking at the grandma's behavior, it fulfils the reality of black people where a mother plays a dominant role literally every time. “Nana was always delighted to see her grandma because there, she was always treated like a queen...” as portrayed by the author.

The story is creatively written with a simple choice of words that children can easily understand and connect with. The flow of the relationships' hierarchy in the story is well represented.

However, I feel the writer could have done better with the title. It appears too direct and raw for children. It also appears to go contrary to the subtle representation of death in the story, especially when the writer said Nana's friend “went to be with the Lord”. I think “Cate” would have passed as a better title.

Nonetheless, it's a beautiful story that's worth reading over and over.



GENRE: FLASH FICTION

TITLE: EVERYONE'S FOE

COLUMNIST: JUSTINA OYEDEJI, NIGERIA

REVIEWER: BILDAD MAKORI, KENYA

In life, we have goals and expectations that we hope to achieve. Thus, we set for ourselves targets and deadlines by which we hope to have accomplished them. However, one sad but realistic thing is that it is never a guarantee that all which we plan will be accomplished, all thanks to everyone's foe, death.

This is what Justina Oyediji's flash fiction, *Everyone's Foe*, is about; that while making plans and setting the goals and resolutions, most of us - if not all of us - become oblivious to the fact that there is death and that it can happen at any time, any place, and at any moment. And in the end, when this foe comes and visits us who have made resolutions, what happens next is that we are taken on a journey of no return. We die and that becomes the end of us, the end of our resolutions.

Although it appears to be short, the lesson which we get from this story is of great importance, something that we always need to have in mind because it is never a guarantee that all which we plan will be accomplished.

I would like to give credit and highlight on the structure and style which Justina used to write this flash fiction. It is just amazing! Right from the title, to the introduction, to the perspective she used to tell the story using different points of view, the ending... Everything in the story falls in place well. Kudos Justina!

GENRE: POETRY

TITLE: DEATH

WRITER: PEACE OGEBOR, NIGERIA

REVIEWER: JOSEPH ODURO, GHANA

The poem 'Death' is both a narrative and speculative analysis of death in two perspectives, the first being one that examines death from a living person's point of view; looking at the possibility that we live only to die. When the persona says 'another one gone,' it presents the idea that whereas uncomfortable, death has become routine, each passing minute, we lose another. Why then do we live?

The second perspective, one on to which more attention has been put is the afterlife. Speculative analysis. The overriding and resounding question is, what lies beyond the curtain of time, what happens in that other world? It is the answer to this question that the rhetoric questions in the poem seeks to find. 'Where is there?' he asks. These questions also come in specifically to bring to our attention that while we live in uncertainty, we die, retire and still head into uncertainty.

It is important to note the adverse use of the technique of imagery in this piece. It is used to give the uncertainty presented in the poem a body, a face, an image we might draw in our minds and understand. From auditory images of dirges that portray agony to beads of sweat, purple knees that build a tense mood, to the stars that we speculate are the homes of our ancestors and our own destination, the writer is drawing our attention to how death is absurd, peace even after we die isn't guaranteed.

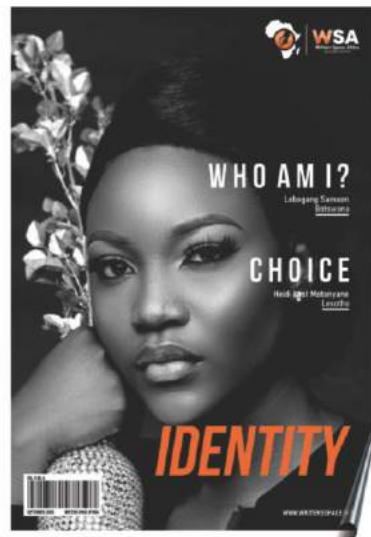
Given that the theme being discussed attracts negative feelings and could easily insight fear, it is important to appreciate the rhyme scheme that enhances musicality and sustains the readers interest. Sight out "wailing and failing", "knees and deeds", "where and there". It's very important to keep the reader hooked given the absurdity in the poem.

If we assume that the dead watch over us, then who watches over them? Do we then die to watch over the living? The conclusion is that in either perspective, uncertainty is a common factor. Death might be peace, but it might also be grief.



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