



SUPPRESSED REALITIES

An Anthology of poems

SUPPRESSED REALITIES

An Anthology of Poems

Copyright Notice

Each individual poem is copyrighted by its respective author, whose name appears above their work. The compilation as a whole, including the selection and arrangement of works, is copyrighted by Lena Anyuolo under Suppressed Realities Anthology, 2024.

©2024 by Lena Anyuolo.

All rights reserved.

Cover Illustration: Sarah Kitonga
Design and Layout: Sarah Kitonga

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sheila Ngei is a Kenyan creative living in Nairobi. She loves the mundane and the idea that every human is a sum of their depth and loss.

Sandra Nekh is a versatile and accomplished creative talent, recognised as a celebrated writer and filmmaker. With a body of work that delves into complex human experiences and societal issues, Sandra challenges conventional narratives and offers unique perspectives on contemporary themes.

Ema Babikwa is a Kampala based writer.

Praise Osawaru (he/him) is a writer who is on Instagram & X as: @wordsmithpraise.

MK Kuol is a severally-anthologized, multi-award winning poet with a plethora of published/forthcoming chapbooks to his name. He tweets (rarely) @mk_kuol14

Gladys Njamiu writes on mental health, books and entertainment. A rest and boredom advocate.

Mariam Hassan was born in Rufuji, Tanzania and raised in South Africa. Her writing explores themes of identity, womanhood and self discovery formed under formulaic and intimate writing styles.

Wisdom Adediji, is a Nigerian genre-bending writer.

Adesiyan Oluwapelumi, is a medical student, poet, essayist & Poetry Editor of Fiery Scribe Review from Nigeria. He tweets @ademindpoems.

Natasha W. Muhanji is a Kenyan writer. You will find her gaming with her friends on Discord when she is not writing and tweets as @bibliophilicms.

Chioniso Tsikisayi is a writer from Zimbabwe.

Matthew Daniels (he/him) is a poetry enthusiast from Nigeria.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A priest, a politician, and a musician	1
A Short Examination On Genocide	3
A Museum of Ash	5
Friday Post Nimbus	6
[filling blanks]	8
Degrees to Loss	9
Desire	11
Black	12
New Beach	13
here...news look like slices of armageddon	15
Nataraj Confession	18
14,000 Raindrops	20
History of A City Kid	21
The Finish Line	23
Like Ants Squabbling Over Sugary Miracles	26

PREFACE

“Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have. It seems to me that one ought to rejoice in the fact of death—ought to decide, indeed, to earn one’s death by confronting with passion the conundrum of life. One is responsible to life: It is the small beacon in that terrifying darkness from which we come and to which we shall return. One must negotiate this passage as nobly as possible, for the sake of those who are coming after us.”

-James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

Gladys Njamiu

A priest, a politician, and a musician

*(This poem responds to the church's ignorance of the government's wrongdoings.
As seen in the anti-finance bill protests in Kenya.)*

A musician writes a song.

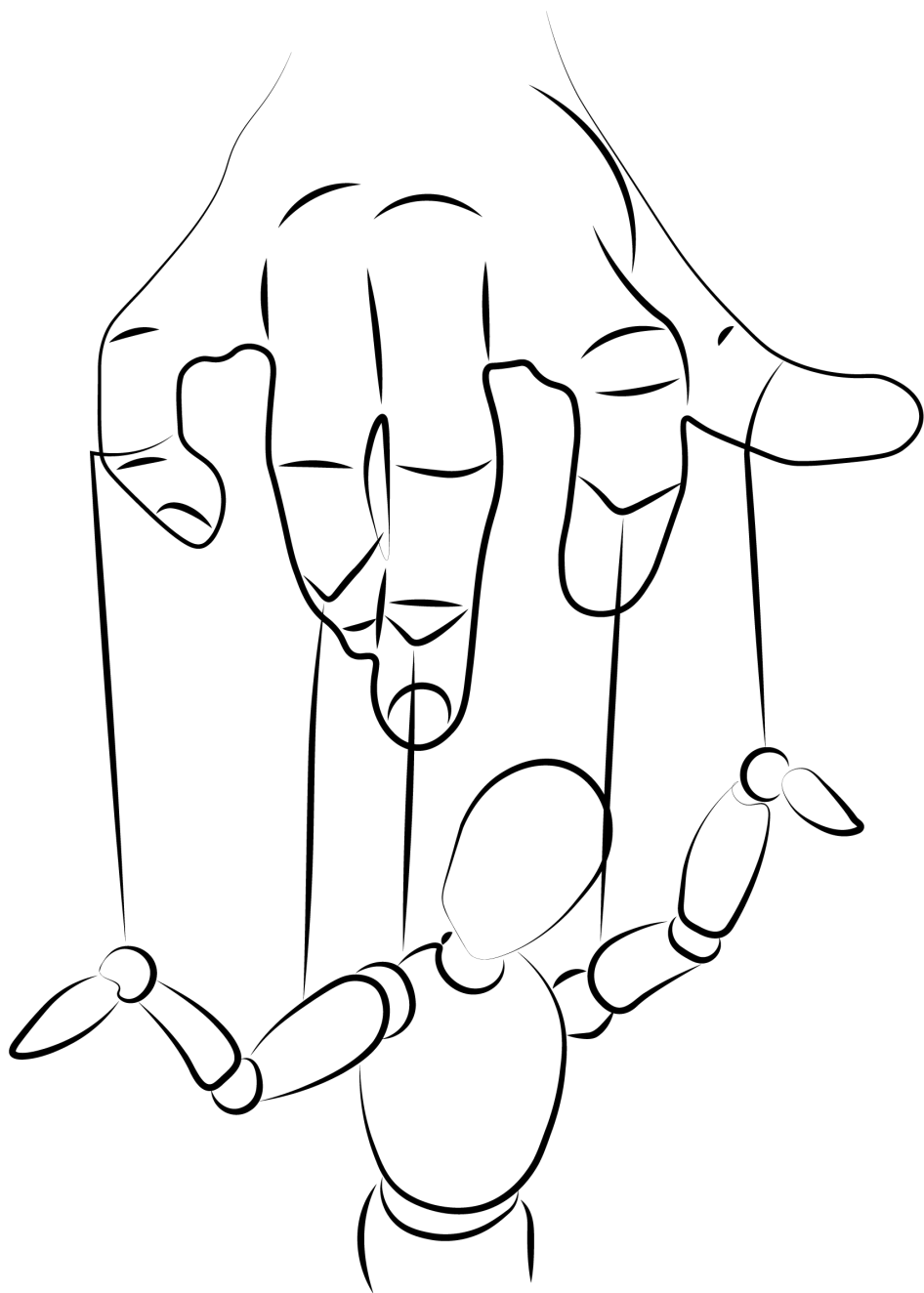
The song questions the politician.

He runs to the priest.

The priest reminds him; to pay your tithe on time and god will reward you.

He greases the palms of the priest.

The musician dies.



A Short Examination On Genocide

The word Genocide has an actual meaning... the terms, in other words, are designed to adjudicate what may and may not be done while fighting a war, not whether the war is just... using these terms in ways that either differ from or actually contradict their legal meaning erodes the power of international humanitarian law.

[The Atlantic, November 15, 2023]

Duration: One Hour

Instructions: Answer All Questions

All Questions Carry Equal Marks

Every Correct Answer Attracts +1 Mark

Every Wrong Answer Attracts Negative Marks

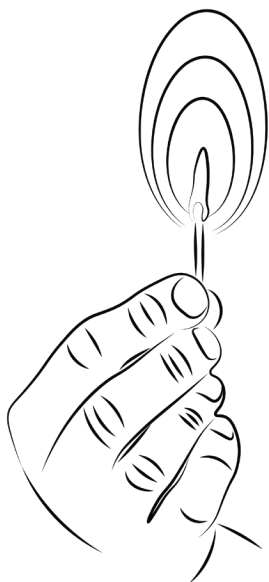
1. Another name for genocide is _____.
 - a. gospel
 - b. revolution
 - c. cleansing
 - d. human wastage

2. How much is a human life worth?
 - a. less than the cost of a bullet
 - b. more than the cost of a bullet
 - c. equal to the cost of a bullet
 - d. undefined

3. A country is a name that can be butchered in the muzzle of a gun's mispronunciation.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 - c. Maybe
 - d. I don't know

4. There are only _____ persons left after a war.
- a. happy
 - b. healed
 - c. living
 - d. damaged
5. A synonym for grave is _____.
- a. earth
 - b. garden
 - c. library
 - d. museum
6. The world is a _____ place.
- a. safe
 - b. kind
 - c. friendly
 - d. cruel
7. Was it an accident?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe
 - d. Yes and No
8. “Her tongue is painted into a sunset. Her smile is plucked like a pomegranate.” What kind of statement is this?
- a. an exclamatory statement
 - b. a simple statement
 - c. a command
 - d. a figure of speech
9. If a heart is the size of a fist, it means every heartbeat is a punch
Against _____?
- a. a nightmarish soldier
 - b. drones without IDs
 - c. grenades without lungs
 - d. all of the above

A Museum of Ash



*Responding to: Fire guts several houses, worship centre in Benin
(Premium Times, 2022)*

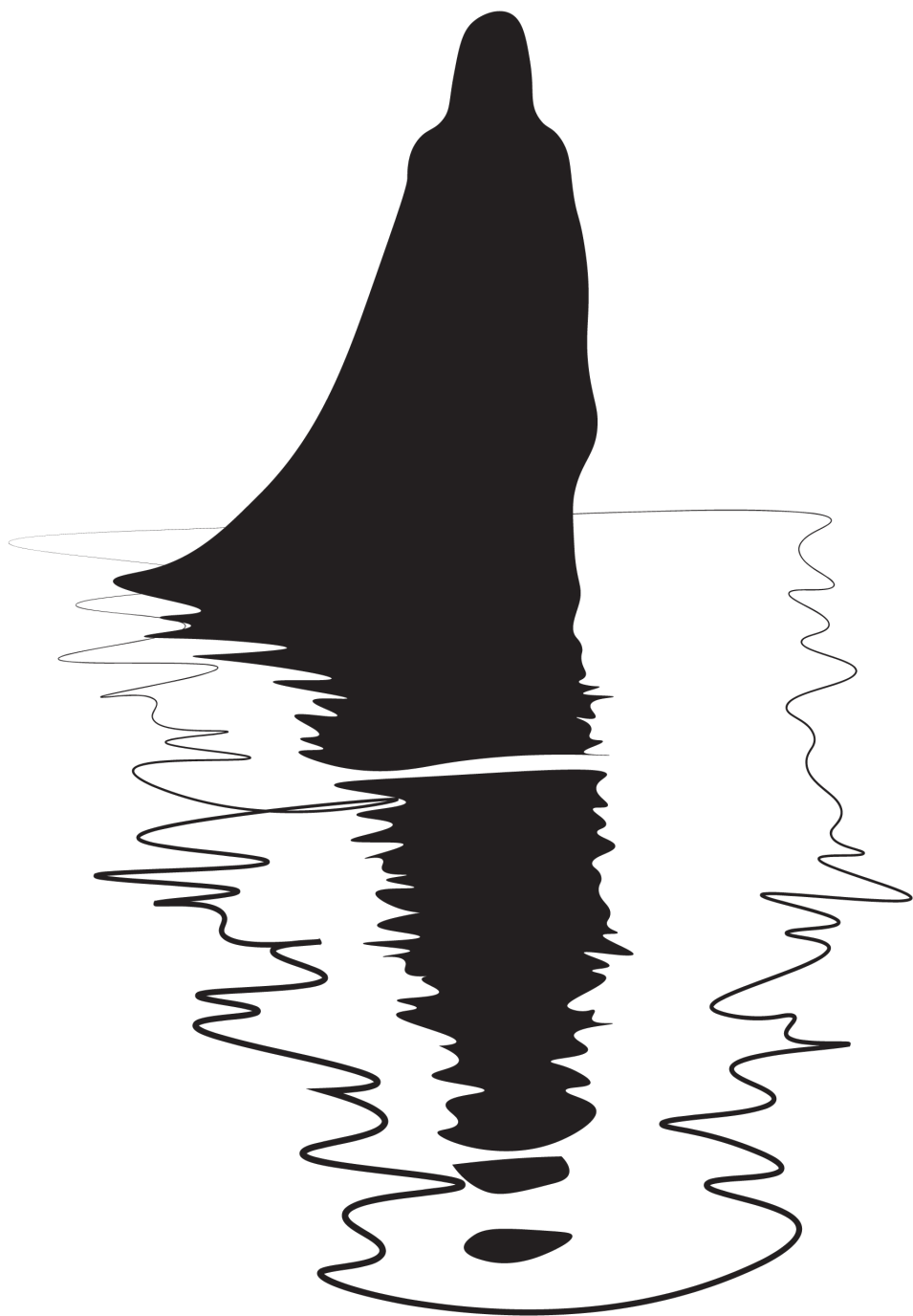
The fire charges—a ravenous lover devouring everything in its path.
The world may as well end, you think, as the heat rises.
As the one within you ends you each day, in slow decay.
A memory crashes in—melody from your father’s mouth
cut through a lantern-lit room, lingers softly on your face.
You wade through the burning remnants of home,
to the living room, whose ground is a museum for your father’s bones.
You pluck the last photograph of him from the wall—because
how can the heart deny its longing to touch the past?
You run outside, to see a sky dark as your father’s lips,
when the illness stole the fire from his chest. The church across
the street burns, flames roaring before a congregation choked with fear.
Any moment now, the same illness will squeeze you out of this world,
& you will join your father—somewhere the only warmth is a touch.

Ema Babikwa

Friday Post Nimbus

[responding to the dilapidated road network around Kampala City that sparked the Pothole Exhibition hashtag on X, April 2023]

another Toyota Land Cruiser hits
the pothole
and the school girls
clap
because it's evening now
not morning
the driver took time out
his hectic day
to make fresh patterns
for their pinafores
the silt
is settling
below the rain water
in the plastic basins
at home
when they arrive
they shall see themselves in it
clearly



Matthew Daniels

[filling blanks]

*Hunger Protest: 17 feared killed as firms, others count huge losses
[The Punch, 2 August, 2024]*

my country has led me to the tombs,
walked my fingers across the visible
borders of silence.
who is to say that silence is not also a song about lost wars or my
trembling
the beginning of another.
i have no delight in war,
but my country has offered me
a pile of dead bodies for a meal.
each one a voice heavy as rain falling back into their crushed jaws,
each jaw a bracket left open
as if saying
here's my tongue buried beneath the spires of a country or here's a country
buried beneath the spires of my tongue. i want my country to love me, to
long after me the
way empty brackets long after words that fit. but the thing is, here,
one body can fill a hole or one hole can fill a body the way bullets can fill
a body or the way our
bodies can fill a bullet. in the end,
will i be filling a blank or will a blank fill me?

Chioniso Tsikisay

Degrees to Loss

(Responding to : Indian Medics stage nation wide protest over doctor's rape and murder: 18 August 2024. The Guardian)

There is no medicine to give for a broken heart.

To offer a dead child to her parents

expecting grief to be the surgeon

that sutures her back to life,

The divinities of a needle and its fraying

thread of

prayer

did they know her father was a tailor?

those who left

every stitch undone, split

the binding of an obedient daughter's

back open. seam for bloody seam.

31 years

snatched,- as pages torn

from the centre of a biology

textbook.

her mother keening softly,

crushed by the weight of loss.

The bedroom door shut to the

mausoleum of her last breaths.

There is the empty white lab coat, the bare

fingers, cold to the touch.

How many degrees to equate this loss

in a medical report?

They expect you to console yourselves, because

she was learned.

because you took her to school,

because

she studied most nights at a
kitchen table beneath glimmering
kerosene lamps.

the human anatomy,
parts of the body.
And yet, they gave you her body
in fragments.

So, this is the cost?
you lend society a healer,
your only child,
and the world spits her back at you,
naked
the autoimmune disease of
a community that turns on itself,
devours its own hand
and then asks you to bless it.

Thank you for your service.
For your long hours on call
in corridors of assault
checking for pulses,
like the pearls of the sea
only for yours to be stolen
in a flicker.

here's the gold length of sari,
an estuary of fabric
never to be worn to the day
of her wedding
death being the collector of the
dowry
return the lab-coat then, if only
to have her, back again breathing
in the ward of life.

Sheila Ngei

Desire

Oh, and everybody feels it / Heavy's the load that we carry around on our backs

Where is everybody rushing to? / Off to the shops to buy all the crap that we lack

And if I was a braver me, I'd go travelling / I dream about it every night it's unravelling

Space, I need Space / I miss Space, just send me to Space

[Tiltson, Martha. 'Space' BIMBLING. Squiggly Records, November 16, 2004. CD]

rarely,

i am better when i accept my grandmother is living within lines i badly color outside of. she neither speaks nor writes in english and all her references can be traced back to her compound. the sea is further east than south from here; two towns over, in the early 1940s, inside a two roomed mud-wall abode, her mother died bringing her to earth and today, within the same town, her sixth born has an office as its elected leader. in 1987, her teenage first-born child died of a migraine and is buried beside the oldest brick house in the compound. my mother says her eldest sister came from school with a headache, and went to the afterlife shortly after she laid down to rest. during COVID 19, while her husband turned eighty-five and his five-minute-memory-span gained permanence, she shared their land among three sons and one unmarried daughter. last year in june, part of her bile duct was replaced with silicone and one night, after checking and reiterating her blood pressure was only slightly above average, i asked if she still worried for her brood even with the youngest aged forty-two and the most senior, fifty-four. "mwaitu, nilea ata? tyo makwa?" she replied. (love-ly, how can I not? aren't they mine?) what i really wanted to know was if i could lead a full life. if after all my time i will find it.

contentment

I dream about it every night it's unravelling

Sandra Nekh

Black

"Reflections and lessons we can learn from echoes of slavery after 400 years." [The Standard, 2020]

Black sister, black brother,
feel that black leather.

Black souls and black hearts, feel that black tither.
Black man, back woman, get on that black river.

Black moon, black tide.
Stream down black faces.

Black sons, black daughters,
race down black river.

Black soul, black mind,
Sail strong, black forever.



Ema Babikwa

New Beach

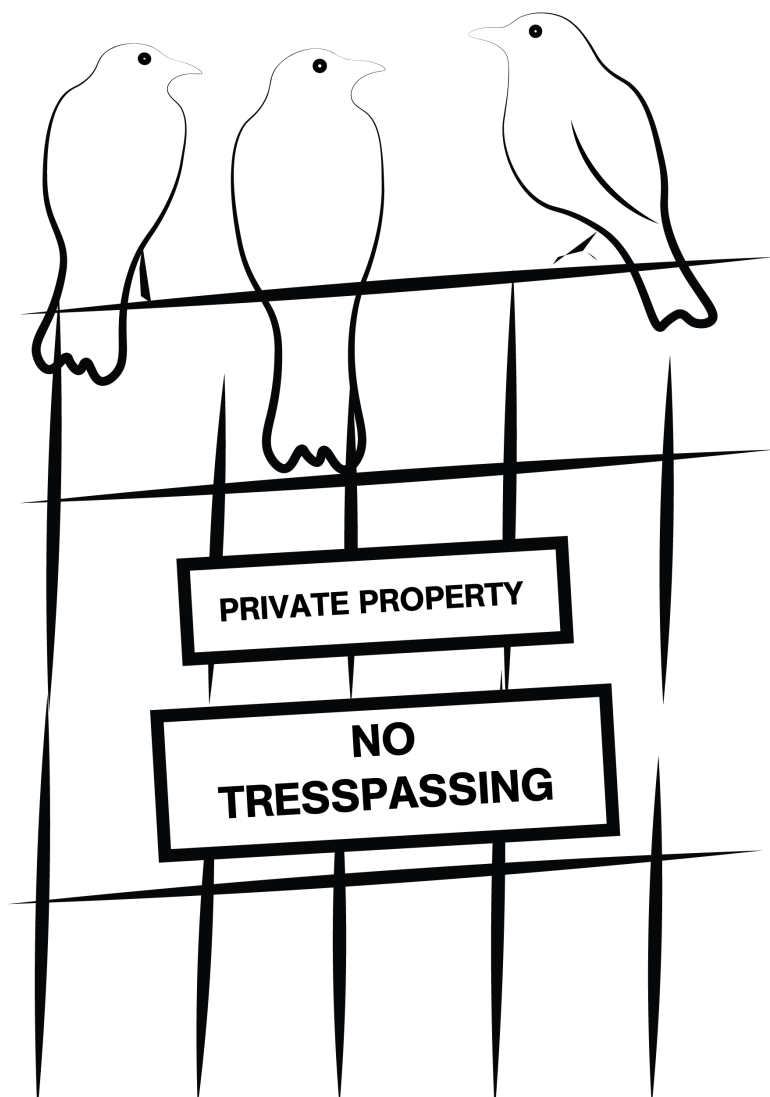
[responding to the ongoing gentrification of Entebbe Town]

there's a new beach
where the old one used to be
there's less shoreline
more sand
the cassia tree is missing
a soft crater
sprouted where it stood
children sprinkle baby rocks
like crumbs for the lake's tongue to find
on its way up the shore
its veil of white bubbles shattering
over the face of the pier
it goes on all day,
the shattering

the children slice the sand-cake
they made and serve crumbly slices
to each other
they must eat some of it
for it to be true

it all tastes the same
sand-cake tastes like water tastes like sand tastes like nothing tastes like
time
a siren blares
“out of the water!”
their feet un-sand
out of the water
they wring their cloths
and their hands
as they move up the shoreline

it is true
he day has left them
the day has left them
like they have left the lake



MK Kuol

here...news look like slices of armageddon

Following a localized firefight between rival military factions on Thursday night in juba, major fighting erupted on Friday outside the presidential compound as Kiir was meeting with Machar; a former rebel leader and currently first vice president. The fighting quickly spread throughout the city (Aljazeera, 11 Jul, 2016)

Negotiators meeting in Addis Ababa have signed an agreement on the cessation of hostilities, protection of civilians and humanitarian access in South Sudan in an attempt to end the four years of conflict that has killed hundreds of thousands of citizens (VOA, John Tanza, 22 Dec, 2017)

war has broken out again. but there's no trace of it in the news
because here war is nothing new. here, it's always anticipated
the way seasons are anticipated. a frightened father tells
his equally-frightened daughter: *it will be alright. it will be alright.*
it will be alright. a nose's reach away,
a bombed building crumbles into itself.
under its rubble, a day later, a wasting toddler suckles her wasted mother's
breasts -a disgusting blend of stale blood, of viscid pus, of lumpy milk
mapping its satiny maws. a remorseless soldier shoulders his rifle,
digs out of his pocket a phone, films the suckling toddler. his friend
suggests: *if you want to make the news or trend on social media,*
cut out his head
& ball with it on camera. in a parallel world, what would make the news
or trend on social media would be a soldier human enough to redeem
to safety a child whose mother is harmed. but not here.
not here where news
look like slices of armageddon. not here where a flower sprouting
from rubble isn't tended to. but instead nibbed. a swishing shrapnel halves
the frightened father at the waist.
his daughter not knowing what else to move on to

holds on long enough until he's all licked-clean bones.& a shrunken penis.
in his all-safe hideout, an immaculately-dressed commander, in his press
release, ornately urges the citizens to keep calm as "his men have things in
control."

in counteract, his counterpart releases his, tailored to befit their
interest-serving

narrative, too. but the citizens are skeptic. who is too dumb to believe,
the dance is over; the dance-ground deserted, when drumbeats can still be
heard

loud as heartbeats? & who cares? who cares enough for the citizens to care
about what they believe? aren't press releases released for presses?
international presses? presses from countries that fund wars at night
& condemn them during the day? a poet voices the skepticism suffocating
in the silence of citizens fear robbed of their voices.& in less than 24
hours,

he receives more than 24 death threats. months into the war, the warring
parties

[through negotiators] contact, agree to the cessation of hostilities;
politicians

widely smiling for the cameras, politicians firmly shaking hands,
politicians brotherly

conversing at interludes. the next morning, adija -the cartoonist -
grotesquely

caricatures those politicians to everyone's amusement. the next morning,
every newspapers detail-articles the headlined news

from africa's horn. the next morning,
every radio stations detail -reports in colloquial arabic -the lingua franca
-it, too.

& upon their return, the politicians will raw-lie to buttress the news'
legitimacy.

& words like igad, addis ababa, agreement will seep into casual
conversations.

& indeed the guns will go mute again. & indeed the birds will sing again.

& indeed singers will sing of peace again. & indeed the memories will be
scraped from tongues & buried in the depth of silence & indeed the

soldiers will return to their broken wives & starving kids

& fade into the mouth of mess they birthed. & indeed the thick layers of
skepticism

will gradually peel off until the make-believe peace will seem believable
except to those
on whom the war has taken toll; those souls are scarred by war's claws.
& the frightened daughter, whose father a swishing shrapnel halved, will
sigh. she will eventually understand that when her father told her: *it will be
alright, it will be alright, it will be alright...*
he meant, *what has, to ashes, burned cannot burn again.* she will
eventually understand.



Content Warning: This poem contains material that may be sensitive for certain readers including mentions of violence and self harm.

Natasha W. Muhanji

Nataraj Confession

“Edwin Chiloba, the slain fashion model was smothered to death, chief government pathologist Johansen Oduor has said as he tabled a postmortem report in court. Three socks stuffed deep in the throat and a pair of jeans tightly tied on the mouth and nose, this was the state in which Dr Johansen Oduor found the body of Edwin Kiptoo alias Chiloba, when conducting an autopsy last year. [The Standard, April 11, 2024]

Kenyan activist brutally murdered, body stuffed in metal box. [Los Angeles Blade, Jan 6, 2023]

spray hizo mamende! my mouth has a bad taste. I liked the song
manjege masanse wakwende! I abhor state dogs
I'm in a Risen and they are saying that he deserved it
poisonous. is the word I can think of as they laugh and
high-five and sneer that he was abnormal
they say he deserved -just because he
 loved a man -to be stuffed into a metal box.
 bright smile, somebody's friend, somebody's son.
I flinch and put on my earbuds, there are tears suspended at my
canthus,
I drag a drop under my nail and take a deep breath.

It is thursday afternoon and I am arguing with someone
they're all initiated, you know. my chest is burning, a scream
 pressing my teeth
 I was never initiated, my chest is charred, black and my eyes widen
 I am fifteen again. I just carved my forearm, with the blade of
 a blue *nataraj* sharpener and confessed
 -in cold washrooms -my abnormality as my parents sit in the
 school garden under a white

tent I get a trophy
I am so happy. it nearly bubbles out of me that I am a chameleon,
a cold palm over my carving makes me forget to
the carving makes me breathe, sending a flying kick towards cognitive
dissonance,
flattening it on the wet green garden grass
and I shut up

one a.m. at the hospital with my parents,
 one two three four five years later.
 an IV in my arm because of *Absolut Vodka*.
 vaguely and still-drunk,
 I tell them how tired of living I have been for years
 I almost say that I am a chameleon.

I am filing short, hard, nails &
 I scratch scratch scratch. my client is spewing vitriol,
 I am silent. *I'd really kick him out and beat him up, what next?*
Animals?
 I am silent and I sigh
do these people think that god makes mistakes?
 I file the nails square and sigh, wetting a cotton ball with acetone, I
 sigh
 I am tired of explaining. I have settled into my exhaustion. I can
 camouflage. I am
 guilty of my exhaustion. subtly, I cover my pretty bracelet with my
 black sleeve.
 how
 do you
 begin
 to explain
 your humanity
 to someone
 who indefinitely
 thinks
 you are a stain?

Mariam Hassan

14,000 Raindrops

responding to: Children in Gaza need life-saving support [UNICEF, July 2024]

There is no death
inside my body, I am
a drop of what makes
the rain, the rain

At the very least,
I am someone,

I was someone's

An extension of a
prolific place.

I had a life before the down world
tipped over into our living rooms, and sunk our playgrounds

I carried all of us in my name alone

Thousands of years, thousands of voices—bristling out of the dust

God loved us into finality, and witnessed us into extinction
more times than I can count.

Our last waters croaked into blood.

The ashes disseminated our clouds.

Who thought to count the raindrops?

All 14,000 raindrops
of children's names

Sheila Ngei

History of A City Kid



Journey ni ndefu, tukifika tumededdi
[Sewersydaa. 'Riswa I ft Dyana Cods'. WADA (HEALING OF A NATION).
2821688 Records DK, 2021. BOOMPLAY]

My world view shifted in bits. The sky was once wide
waiting and opportune for something. Dreams, prayers
on Christmas, and the fireworks show on New Year's in town until
one-bedroom apartments came into style and as I grew taller, I
saw much less, and less light

The tarmac in Huruma's been replaced many times. This ship
is not that ship but the slope is the same. Two hundred meters downslope
from Redeemed Gospel Church, on the left, a street sign reads 'Mau Mau
Rd'

When the post went up, I was seventeen or over, I forget but I recall its
newness

how absurd we found it. Last year, at a literary talk I bullied myself to attend,
a speaker said he'd been teaching something new, 'See this street youngins,
pay no mind to the news that say bad men went down here. Pay no mind.'

The slope. This slope is the very same where I've heard men predict
Canaan is a bank across the rivers of a general election; where I've learnt
dry blood on the tarmac will take at least eight days to clear and its deep
maroon
is a distinct memory. On this slope I've listened to my mother ask an old
neighbor
if her son finally joined high school, if I prefer shorter socks over knee
high ones,
if the newly named supermarket is as well serviced as the former it re-
placed,
if the Bata Shoe outlet owner was back on his feet, if there's a good reason
I only dress in jeans

On this slope, I've watched a peer downplay the demise of the daughter he
had
when we turned seventeen. On this slope I thought, one day
I'd be a billionaire who'll buy the hood, and build it anew

Chioniso Tsikisay

The Finish Line

responding to: Slain Ugandan Olympian buried in Full Military Honours. Reuters Africa: 14 September 2024.

Sunday,
church hymnal- book binding promises
that paradise is around the corner
sweet as incense
 behind the family home built on a Kenyan hill
but for Rebecca, now her father's garden
 patch doused in petrol.
black stain, the earth's record that a body was
Burned here &
how her little girls live with the memory of their mother set alight.
& all we are given is head-lines,
allegedly,
allegedly,
but a human being is no more.
allegedly set alight by ex-partner
but a human being is no more
As if to allege is to imply
 that she lives in part somewhere
not completely lost,
 not gone- just running around the corner
with Agnes and Damaris,

Gun salute,
 Air rifled shots.
Does the ground in Iten tremble?
casket lowered deep in to the parting abscess
 of the red belly earth
Uganda's breast swollen, receiving
a daughter of the soil, her flag swaddling a body that once
bore it proudly past the finish line.

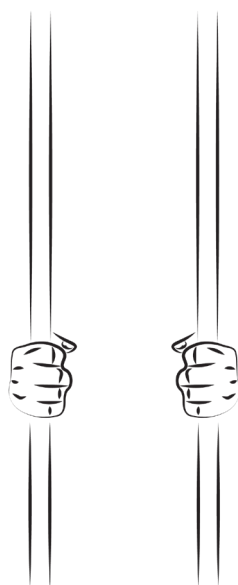
On your marks, these
lacerations, concave teeth
On the bite marks of a lover, on the bruises
of his fist, on the unforgiving click of his lighter
On the betrayal of police,
Report after report till a docket
turns into a death certificate.
Till a matchbox turns into a wooden
chest.
On your marks, on the melanated canvas
of your African frame.
get set
run
run
run

ahead of yourself,
and over the hurdle of the last female athlete who fell before you.

Will we ever get to see the finish line in faith
with our eyes still plugged into their sockets?
Breath still married to its flesh,
Dignified in old age
Unmaimed, unmarked,
unscathed by the knives, the matches, the belts,
the festering hatred of men?

We often pray
that if our mothers can not outrun death
that perhaps our daughters will
at a better pace
because we gave them a head start
took all the blue beatings
absorbed every injustice like vinegar to
a sponge.
wrapped our naked bodies in linen
beneath moonlight lying prostrate as
monuments to their fathers.

Ate all the dirt on the tracks of their success,
left our blood and teeth and spit to mark the laps.



“This is where you start.”
and still it wasn’t enough
to stop the burning
the cracking of bones
the
hissing of fingernails
like
twigs, blood leaves rustling in the wind of change.
from old Testament to new
from the kitchen to the Olympic dome
baton after baton
relay one dead body to the next
as it passes on

Offer condolences, condemn.
and on
and on
to the next runner
, in the next race

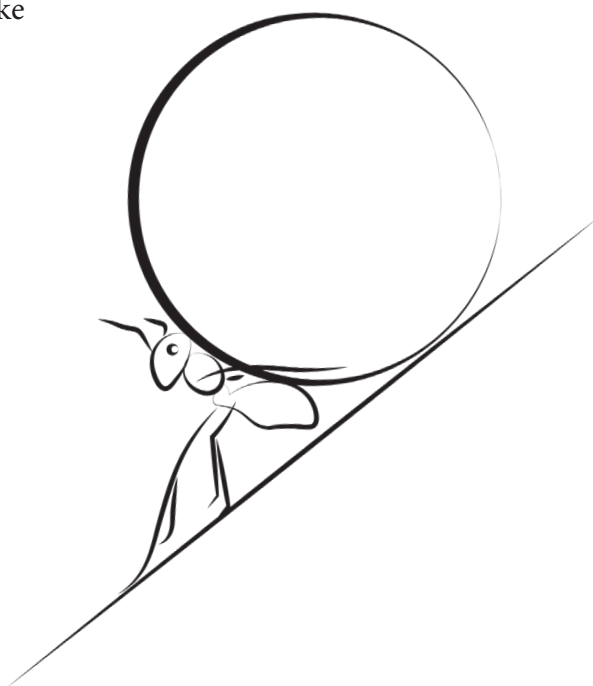
Hoping that she will not ever have to
worry that danger lurks round the bend of her 21st or 29th
or 33rd lap.

Wisdom Adediji

Like Ants Squabbling Over Sugary Miracles

1 in 3 children in Nigeria experiences severe child food poverty due to conflict, climate crises, and inequity— UNICEF, 07 June 2024.

At Dusk, the sun, one-eyed and ever orange, keeps fading into the west.
It's rush hour, children in uniforms walk back home playfully like mice,
like ants squabbling over sugary miracles, and the streets, bustling
with hustling boasts of the ache holed into my country's breast.
In the market, people wander from stall to stall unsure which
marchant's price should empty their pockets. There's no
tenderness here, only hiked cost of living and hope
with broken legs and cracked lips trapped within
hungers grip and sour prayers squirted warmly
on God's bearded hands. Oh pretty nation!
Lost in the chaos of ruling— men mounted
on tipsy legs with belly full of greed.
And its children, broken like
a widow's dirge keep
wandering in a sea
of unfamiliar
suffering.



NOTES

NOTES

