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Kenya

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Manu Herbstein
Ghana

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A COSMOPOLITAN**
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Zambia



Sabah Carrim

I Write for Order, for Logos

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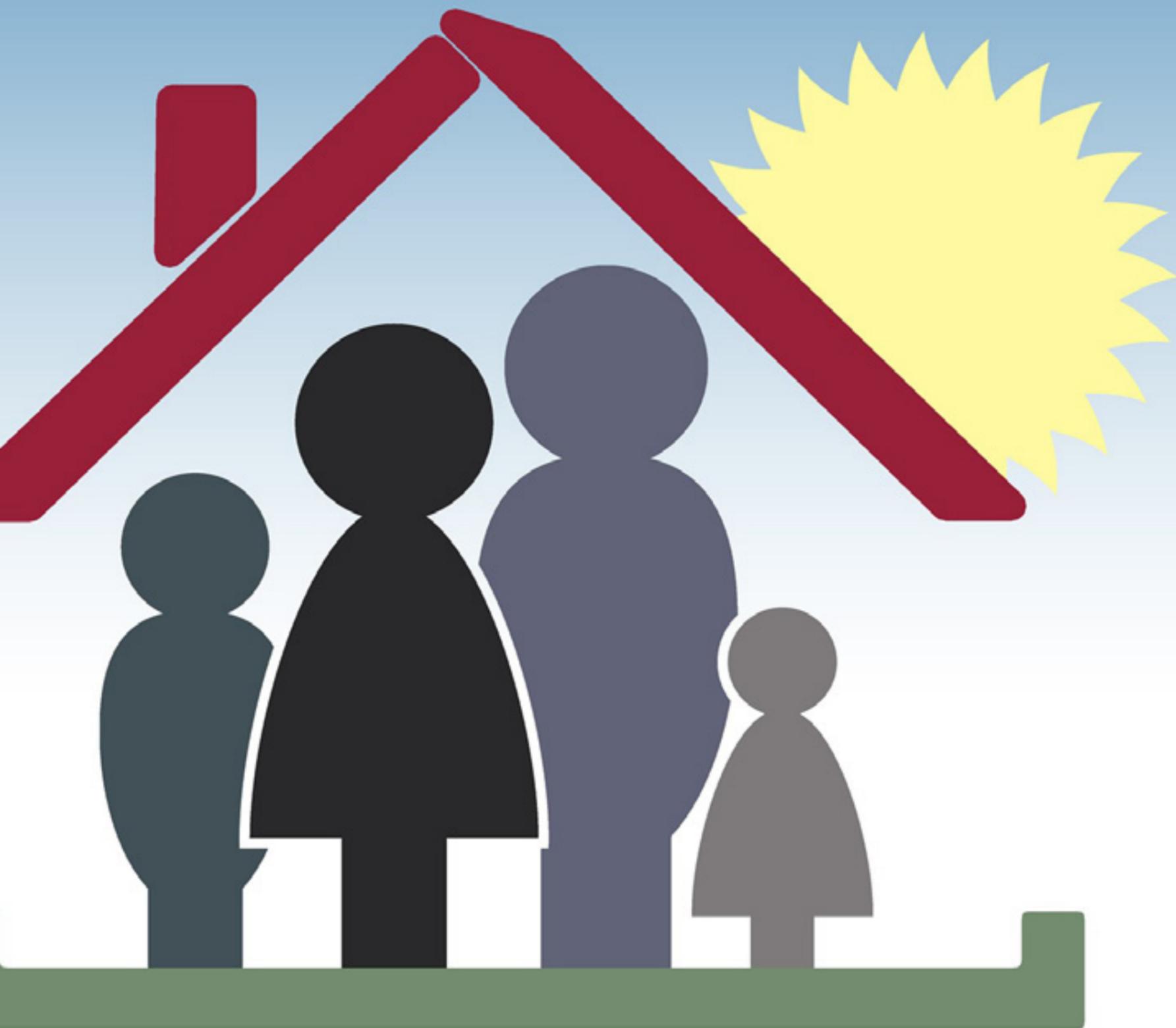
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EDITORIAL

Family is so African, and Africa is so family. Whether it's a family of voodoo; another of taboos, traditions, and totems; or one united family in love;

We are Africa. We know family.

So follow our writers closely reading between the lines of poetry and prose till you agree with me that till bicycle or death do us part - we remain one big family.

And to the family at Writers Space Africa;

Hurray! We are few days to the highly anticipated African Writers Conference AWC 2019, and the amazing interview with our keynote speaker, Dr Sabah Carrim, gives us so much to expect.

See you there!

Sandra Oma Etubiebi,
Chief Editor,
WSA



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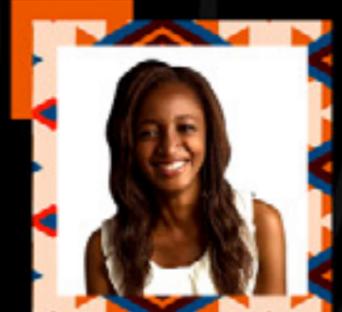
Nasikiwa Susie
Tanzania
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Nahida Esmail
Tanzania
Writer



Edith Knight
Kenya
Writer



Nabilah Usman
Nigeria
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Mauritius
Writer/Academic



Joanna Cockerline
Canada
Writer/Editor



Ndungi Githuku
Kenya
Filmmaker/Musician



Munira Hussein
Kenya
Writer/Editor

Date: Tuesday, September 24, 2019
Time: 4:30-7:30PM
Venue: Student Centre, 5th Floor,
Strathmore University, Nairobi, Kenya

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FLASH FICTION



TOPPINGS

Boma Bliss - Nigeria



Kodi always had a temper when Mama would ask him to handle my chores. Bad as his temper was, his stammering was worse.

“Ke...le...chi... is not doing anything “ he’d snap back at Mama, who would call his name in full “Chukodi! Am I no longer your mother?”

Difficult as it was for Kodi to make a statement in anger, silence was the least of his many virtues. He would storm the kitchen mumbling a set of words like sofa notations. Ahhh ahhh ahh! A never complete song.

I was the mischievous sister who became sick at the sight of chores. Running temperature came easy to me. I’d deep my hand in my throat and puke like a chicken. Mama always bought that drama episode, but it irritated Kodi.

Doing dishes was tougher with visitors, plates stacked like a bunch of dead slimy catfishes, as Mama had refused to get any help. On those days, Kodi was my savior.

“Poor thing, she’s his little sister” Papa had said to Mama.

Kodi was to leave for the navy. Mama’s complain about his behavior had made Papa suggest it.

“I’m sorry, please don’t leave the house. Tell Papa you won’t like the school. I promise I’d behave from today and I- will - tell -them-what-I-did.”

I was beside Kodi’s open room door, my face downwards, counting my toe nails.

“What did you do?” came the voice from behind. “Kelechi what did you do?” Mama repeated in an overly high pitch voice.

I had begun stuttering when Chukodi replied;

“She added toppings in my tea.”

I was bewildered, all the while thinking of a reason why he did not tell on me. I knew then that amidst my mischief, Kodi loved me.

“Toppings?” Mama reiterated, her mouth agape as Papa walked in.

THE ROAD IS AT ITS DEAD END

M. Kingsley Tekum (KingPen) - Cameroon



They stepped out of their car thinking its tyres had gone flat. Checking to confirm their intuition, contrariwise, all was intact. What happened? They wondered and posed to themselves. Turning around bemusedly at the scenario, at sight in the night was the road at its dead end, but a miraculous stop of the car and their narrow escape by inches from a drowning death at the breach of the bridge just ahead of them. Taken aback, they recalled the message passed unto the family an hour ago; an invitation into a glorious family they had long been rejecting.

While having a family timeout at the park, this gentleman walked up to them talking of a glorious family full of unconditional love, care, happiness; without exception, life sempiternal. He posed to them; what if stepping away from me today, you've got not another chance to accept invitation into this family? Now recalling these, the father voiced faintly, "The road at its end has paved a swift ride into the river with nothing else but the view of lives turning inanimate and a missed placement for us into the glorious family." With his family, they accepted the invitation into this glorious family.

Desiring not to keep it to themselves, out of every sense of pride, their shirts in hands like a bunting raised high; they moaned several times; the road is at its dead end! A signal they passed unto others to spare them from being swallowed by the river; to tell them of the love and timely accepting the invitation to enter this glorious family of kings and priests - God, the creator. For years now, they've joyed at how many they have pointed into this family.

THE NORM-AL FAMILY

Bildad Makori - Kenya



“We used to live in Kampala until 2007 when I was 12 years. But when my parents died, my granny took me to live with her at the countryside. Evidently, my life changed completely! A new home, new school and to top it all, no parents, no siblings! What a lonely life!

In school, the way teachers assumed that everyone had parents really hurt me. Being given newsletters only bearing the “Dear parents” salutation, given essays to write about My Parents, I mean, were they mocking me? What was wrong with this school?

That aside, I got married 3 years ago to my love, Magoma. Then months later, he revealed to me that he was impotent! I was shocked! I had really looked forward to having my own children but with Magoma’s condition, this was now impossible! However, this didn’t break our marriage. We adopted 2 babies who became our own children.

Happiness started coming my way. I was contented and happy with this family of mine. Everything turned out to be perfect until January 3rd 2018 when my Magoma died in a road accident! I was now a widow and a single mom... After his burial, my friends and colleagues ‘advised’ me to find another man and remarry for the sake of the children and for my own happiness as a woman but I refused!” The common saying that a family consists of a father, mother and children is wrong! I mean, aren’t there single parents; single dads and moms who have children? Aren’t there totally orphaned children out there in their parental homes? Aren’t there couples that are childless?

All these are perfectly normal families because a family is a group of people closely related to one another either by blood, marriage or adoption.

MEMENTO MORI

Manu Herbststein - Ghana



It's my sister Esi's seventieth birthday.

At this fine French restaurant, the carpark is full of Benz's and BMW's. Old friends in kente and brocade hug one another. There is much merriment. Esi's children have flown in, from the U.S. and the U.K. and Yaw from the D.R.C. I embrace them all, and their spouses and Esi's grandchildren, one by one.

We pray together. The waiters charge our glasses. Yaw proposes a toast to his mother. The band plays a nostalgic tune.

Yaw slips away, unobserved by all but me.

The waiters serve the first course, then the second; then a dessert.

The band plays highlife. The seniors move to the dance floor to shake their old bones. I lead my sister out to join them. Its years since we danced together.

Then her phone rings. She looks at the screen and excuses herself.

"Ma," we hear, "it's me, Yawi. I'm at the hospital. They've put me in quarantine. Please lock the door. Let no one out. The medics are on their way."

THE BICYCLE THAT BINDS US

Edith Knight- Kenya



If someone would have told Mama and Uncle Kwame, that their bickering over late grandfather's bicycle was going to invite trouble in their lives, they would have still gone ahead with the wrangle; In fact, they would have quarreled and even beaten up that someone first. Mama was not one to take advice with a nod of the head. And things like warnings of misery and sufferings only provoked Uncle Kwame to anger.

At grandfather's deathbed, he left the bicycle to Mama, or so she said. So when Uncle Kwame, with the approval of the elders, was given ownership of the bicycle, Mama sneaked into uncle's homestead and made away with it in the dead of night.

The next day, when Uncle Kwame pronounced lam- the uncles curse on my brothers, Jopek and Luothi, and they started urinating on their beds, Mama only scoffed in contempt, then marched to the sorcerers shrine and got a portion that doomed Uncle Kwame to standing, for whenever he attempted to sit down his buttocks would shake oh so vigorously and his entire body would tremble you would think the odekodok ants had infested him.

If the sorcerer would have warned Mama that the saliva of the bewitched would infect her with the curse, she may not have laughed in Uncle Kwame's face to make him spit on her. For when he did that, she became doomed with the same fate and even the sorcerer couldn't help her for he passed away two sunsets later.

I know of a sorcerer who lives on the other side of the valley that can lift the curse off mama. Jopek, my elder brother, thinks the best sorcerer can be found in the land of Jalawezi. He insists that he will be the one to use the bicycle on his sojourn, but if he knows what's best for him, he won't provoke me. I know a curse, which if I pronounce on him, will make him itch from dusk to dawn-that bicycle will be mine to use.



Ademola

Artwork by Praise Jola Ademola - Nigeria

POETRY



WE ARE FAMILY

To be part of a family
Like mine is so divine
Where love is shown
And hurt is shared
Where our difference
Is accepted
And characters tolerated

We talk
We laugh
We Cry
For we are family
And we do it all together
As one

You hurt one
You hurt all
And we stand
Together as family
Full of love
A family full of Strength
And as a family
We are united.

Onwuegbuna Nneka Lisa
Nigeria



THE BAOBAB TREE

Colossal, celestial –kind like the baobab tree!
We live and move in the country, side by side,
This ancient extended family;
The remains of the African pride.

Mothers and aunties and sisters are queens,
Remember the memorable days of Shaka,
They run things and raise kings;
Nurse and praise us 'till we six feet under.

Fathers and uncles
In the rising tropical sun
Make men out of all boys
While birds sing and rivers run.

Seas of siblings are rubies
There for you when sick or strong;
Share food and share blankets,
And they croon along to your sad song.

Crazy cronies are cousins,
False fights and fetid arguments;
From tears we take lessons,
Thus the African pride augments.

Benjamin Jerera Jr
Zambia

GIVE THE CHILD A CHANCE

Give the child a chance
To know life as a bed of rose
Don't over, under - protect
Give the child his place to thrive

To know life as a bed of rose
Let the child explore the thorn
Give the child his place to thrive
Don't save him from every fall

Let the child explore the thorn
But fortify him for days of war
Give him the space to snore
Just don't save him from every fall

But fortify him for days of war
Give the child a chance
To know life as his stage to play
Give the child a chance

Elizabeth Akunyili
Nigeria

FAMILY TREE

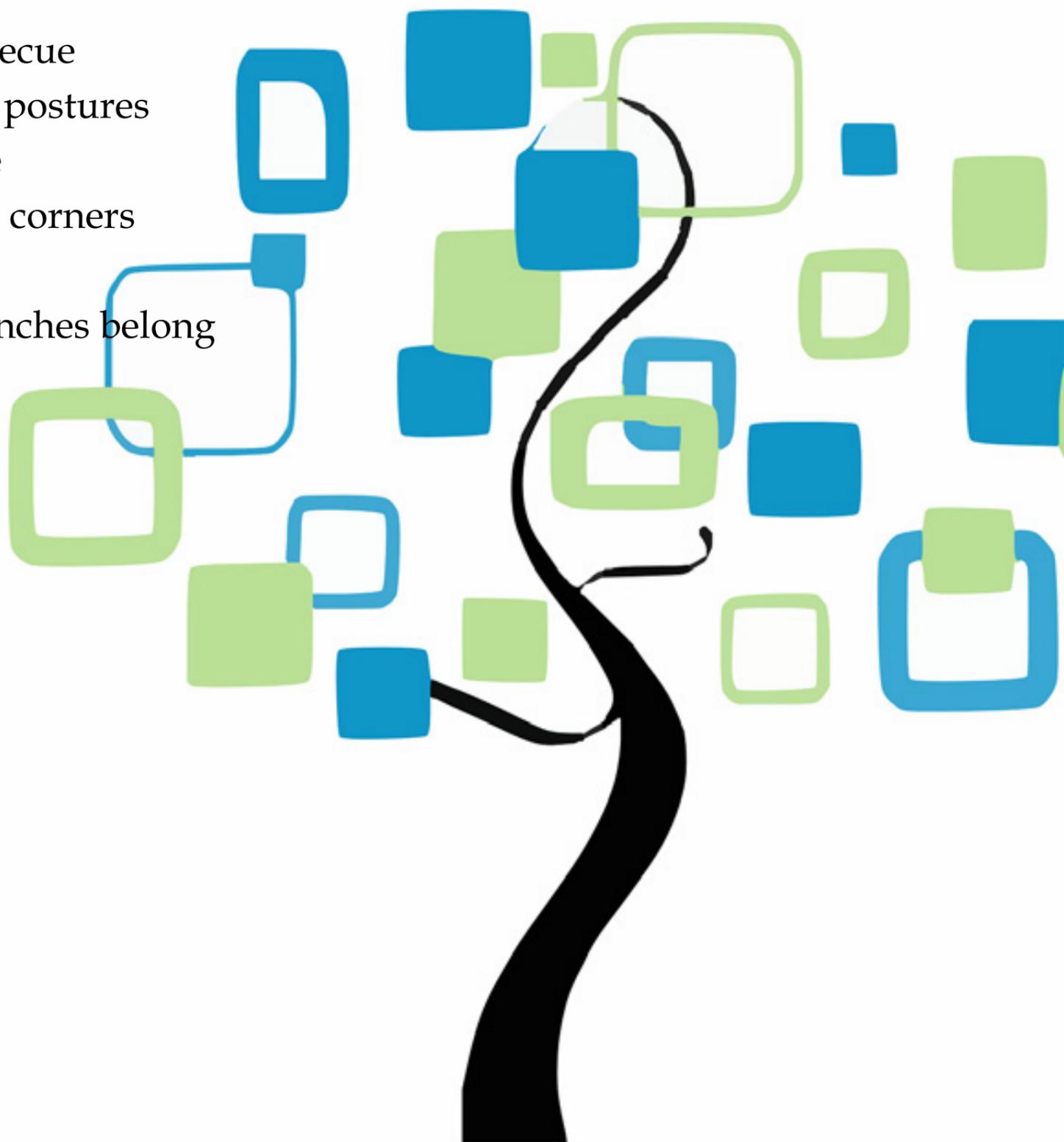
Like branches and twigs
Clattering on a tree
We bloom in different directions
Yet our roots remain the same
Sometimes anger brews and irks
But still connected as veins
Longing for anticipation
Hands quivering in tingling game

Like fountain spurting scenery
Widening wildly theatrically
As coconut fronds swayed hysterically
And rustling elusively

Holiday unites us in barbecue
With dances in contorted postures
Without the slightest clue
Coming from every other corners

It's where each of the branches belong
To the family tree.

Kevin Were Chisaka
Kenya



BLOOD BROTHER

Dear brother,
Peace be unto your family
This peace which for years eluded us all
For the sake of our greed and pride.
We fight and foam, we course and hate
Over this soil, that before us was here,
And after us here shall be.
This tiny plot worth no more than our tiny graves
Must surely, our bitter blood drink,
and upon our swollen skulls feast.
Why kill one another, brother?
For the sake of boundaries put forward by men,
Who builds only but boundaries in our midst.

Come home brother, come home blood
Let us meet under the family tree
There we shall eat the Kola nut of peace
And drink the palm wine of reconciliation.
Bring home our kids and your half,
I shall bring mine too.
Let us laugh to the glory of the gods
Let us quip to the betrayal of our foes
Who among us, planted this tree of hate.
Come home brother, let us take not an oath
But a step towards repentance,
towards reconciliation and understanding
That this blood that flows in us shall transcend
And flow beyond this soil
upon which we stand and fight each other.

Onah Godday Ejiofor
Nigeria

GIFT FROM A LOVING FATHER

A Beautiful, warm, windy day in August, it was,
Unbeknownst to the world, a little boy walked into their lives,
The tenth member of the family, he was; he became their world, they said

They gave him a name, 'Fertile seed' they called him
Gave him an identity and a sense of pride in who he was,
They taught him how to show gratitude,
when to apologize and how to say 'I love you!'
They taught him to work hard and to pray hard.

Their conduct, their very way of life shaped the man he was to become.
Those nights spent watching television soaps together;
the days spent basking in God's glory under the sun,
the many stories told, numerous jokes shared
The encouragement and show of faith all ultimately positively
influenced the trajectory his life took

I have stood on the shoulders of giants to be where I am today,
Their strong arm of approval hoisted me to unbelievable heights,
They are the wind behind my sails,
The perfect family for an imperfectly perfect being!

The ones we run to when we are bludgeoned by circumstance;
when the world denies us,
The ones in whose arms we dare say 'I am home,' and indeed, we are!
When we are at our lowest ebb, they are there to uplift us.

My! My! We are so diverse, yet so much alike,
A coming together so well-placed, it can only be a perfect gift from a loving father

Vunzya Patrick Nsokolo
Zambia

FAMILY IS ALL WE'VE GOT

They say your friends are your chosen family
just a phrase we use to cover it all,
Because at the end, family is all
we've got.

All these connections are draining -
We claim forever but then we switch,
Push aside those who've had our backs,
Our good deeds don't matter, sad.

We judge one another for sinning differently,
But nobody is perfect, someone needs hear,
Broken hearts, we all hurt inside
And tend to tend to memes online.

Bleed inside, call it poetry,
Life isn't it?
Everything isn't as it is
Everyone isn't as they seem.

Under shells, all hiding what's within
Indeed attached to what takes the pain away,
People come and go, I wont sugar coat.
And at the end, Family is all we've got.

©Deep ink
Amy Tracy Lula
Kenya



ADULTERATED MERCY:

A Single Mother Disconnected From Her Family

She tills the earth with aliens.
Her kith and kin detest her.
In the bidding of foreigners, she sojourns.
Even so, she delights in such a painful compromise.

Her solitude laden with a burden too dense to bear
Yet rite that she may oblige, Akorfa calls it peace.
Albeit, her wards cost cowries
She reneged not on her solemn call.

Thou seem nigh my blood
The last blood of my vanishing hope
The blood that reconciles my painful laughter
Lo! My back you clapped against the sacred walls of wealth

And my spines plead for divine mercy.
But for the stainless mercy
Of the heavenly sanctuary
Lest, I trust your adulterated mercy.

Lucien Sylvester Hundo
Ghana



MY FAMILY NAME

The day I die and go altogether, sure not like a shadow
The name and precious that of the family on top will appear,
On the very top front of the grave, piled with dusty sand.
On the other side burning in the very heart of the village
Where the first letter of the life story, firstly appeared
Wishing to turn the book top seller within the families.
The grave should be on the right of the road side,
Remember the family name painted in capital letter
Let it be seen first, before knowing it's I resting there,
It's from them that I become a man, sent to the world.
The family will not fear nor cry for the death
As the one who is worst is not that at any expense,
But the love lost, that substituted with absence; painful!
Extending the night up to the dawn of the day.
I will live from within the hearts of people
Where good names materialize forever,
And seen from the sides of the nose, on the tear drops,
Revealing the secret of those love with truth
Able to see the unseen, and hear without sound.

Andrea Myinga
Tanzania.



I CALL HER MOTHER

A silhouette of a woman lifting a child into the air against a warm, golden sunset background. The woman is on the left, her arms extended upwards, holding the child. The child is in mid-air, with arms and legs outstretched. The background shows the sun low on the horizon over a body of water, with its light reflecting on the surface.

I call her mother
for she is the erect pillar of solid foundations
the birthing origin of the greats
and the pathway of generations to come

I call her mother
womb man of heavy-laden duty
heralding a lineage in its cradle
with tender nurturing and instruction

I call her mother
the great unsung hero
bare prostrate as an altar of sacrifice
like a guiding light amidst chaos

I call her mother
once fed were these suckling lips from her full breasts
satisfied from her rich delicacies prepared with love
A woman, a country

Yewande Adebowale
Nigeria

LIKE AN ANGEL. (To my sister, Wendy)

I hear of angels and their luminous bodies,
My eyes
are yet to witness one,
But I'm sure they look like you.
Loving eyes,
Kindest smile,
Sweet gentle guiding hands,
The radiance of your existence
blessed mine,
With a sister, and a love that never ends.

I hear of angels and their glorious wings,
My eyes
are yet to witness one,
But I'm sure they fly like you.
Above the clouds,
In heaven,
In a world that I cannot touch,
My memories of you blesses my existence,
With a sister, and a love that will never end.

Christina Lwendo,
Tanzania

The idea of an African family is noble in itself in that; inspite of the poverty that ensures our kindredness, we are only as rich as our neighbour is. We are diligent in tracing the flimsiest of ties that link us to people we encounter and generous enough to share even greetings.

Isaac Kilibwa - Kenya

Sabah Carrim

I write for Order, for Logos



I met a wonderful intellectual whose mind searches for meaning, and this time I would let you into her thoughts to discover, for yourself, the beauty in her depth as captured through this interview, and several references to her work. She is Dr Sabah Carrim.

- Sandra Oma Etubiebi

Sabah Carrim has authored two novels: Humeirah (2012) and Semi-Apes (2015). Both stories are set in Mauritius where she was born.

At the upcoming African Writers Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, held between 27-29 September 2019, Sabah will deliver the keynote address on Cultural Stereotypes in African Literature: Rewriting the narratives for the 21st Century Reader. She has also been appointed as judge of the African Short Story Award, handed out during the event.

Sabah is a law lecturer and a scholar in genocide studies. She lives in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Q: How would you describe Sabah Carrim with respect to how she thinks and sees the world?

A: Once I was down there, living and suffering the incongruences, the incomplete narratives, the half-truths, the complacency with the lack of answers, the confusion, the oversimplification, the abstruse. It was suffocating. Unbearable.

It wasn't difficult to imagine how Charles Baudelaire, the French poet would have felt writing L'Albatros, about the bird in the sky, its broad white wings a majestic sight to those below, against the contrast of it on the deck of the ship, mocked and thrown stones at by sailors who found it clumsy, dragging its oversized wings like a pair of oars, tripping, falling.

I needed to understand, to find things out for myself. I realized I had to raze everything down to the ground and then build my world with my own hands.

Today I'm in the company of other porcupines, to use the allegory employed by Arthur

Schopenhauer. Here, it's cold and lonely, so I and other porcupines huddle together for warmth, for company, but never too much in case we get in each other's way, especially because of our quills.

But how agonizing a journey it has been. The long hours of reading, of contemplation, of fighting to overcome taboos and clichés in thinking, the dogmas in my value system, of searching and not always finding, of standing at the edge of an abyss. And inevitably, of sharpening my instinct to discern the questions that matter, amid the plethora of convenient, simplistic, and unsatisfying conclusions on life.

Q: You are a Senior lecturer with multi-disciplinary PhD in Law and Political Science, which comprises research done in the fields of Genocide Studies, Criminology, Political Philosophy, and Moral Philosophy. You have so many published works; publications, essays, articles, presentations, and two novels in addition to your very active academic life; give us a background narrative of how you came to develop academically seeing as

you are still very young?

A: I made time for it. Reading, learning, and writing are what I'm most passionate about and I am happy spending my entire life doing just that.

The journey in this direction began with the discovery of philosophy at a tender age. I read books on the subject, and a variety of other classics, realizing very quickly that I would never stop wanting more. I yearned above all to nurture the depth, and acquire the credibility of those who had written works I admired the most.

What's consoling about being on this journey is that there is no finishing line. There will never be a point when I'll say I've read everything, I know everything. So, I discerned from the beginning that it was a passion that I could embrace, that it was a calling I had to respond to.

Q: In your article, 'Why I write' which was published in the Journal of Creativity and Human Development and can be read on academia.edu, you gave seven inspired reasons for writing. Of those seven, which remains your highest motivation (or deepest cognition) for capturing your thoughts and observation into texts? Do share with us your love for writing.



Of those seven, which remains your highest motivation (or deepest cognition) for capturing your thoughts and observation into texts? Do share with us your love for writing.

A: I find it hard to select one of the seven. I think they are all equally valid and important. Perhaps the difference is that from the time I wrote that piece back in 2010, I have discerned many more reasons for writing.

Today I also see writing as the inevitable result of the reading I do. Reading provides the theory, and these theories create the frames through which I view life, adding nuances to my understanding of people and things.

And these frames, I must emphasize, are of utmost importance to my perception of reality. The frames provide the possibility of viewing the same phenomenon through different lenses, and

get as close as possible to an interpretation of reality because you can't actually be there.

So writing gives me the opportunity to expose what I interpret, and present it to the world.

Q: You have published two intellectually stimulating and thought provoking books, Humeirah (2012) and Semi-Apes (2015). Both books, although different in their own rights, run a parallel theme of finding harmony and freedom despite the dissonance of a narrow-minded society. And both books have female protagonists discontented with their merger existence, and in searching for more meaning find a path to their freedom. Tell us, seeing as your stories reflect some of the local life and culture of the people in Mauritius, in what ways are you Humeirah or Heera, the protagonists in both books respectively, and in what ways are you different from either of them?

A: My writing is predominantly autobiographical. I try to live intensely, and writing allows me to project the intensity of my experiences. Therefore, I am Humeirah and Heera, and also all the other characters I have depicted in my novels.

I say this because I have interpreted them and presented them from a subjective and personal understanding of who they are, what they represent, what their strengths and weaknesses are. My understanding is only one reading, one interpretation of who they are, what roles they assume from the perspectives of my protagonists and narrators.

But at this point in time, I also believe that my work, my writing would be unsatisfactory if it were purely a product of my experiences. That's why I tend to blend fact with fiction, often fictionalizing characters and events. This is what provides the space I need to bring out the imagination, and the writer in me.

Q: With your fine education and very academic background, do you think that your books were influenced by a deeper understanding of behavioral psychology? Or to what extent does education play in a writer's perception of life, and in their writings?

A: You may call it behavioral psychology, although I would prefer the term social philosophy, which I identified a long time ago while reading the works of Friedrich Nietzsche. In essence, I spurn philosophy that is divorced from the actual experience of life, which would have departed from speaking directly to me. One may classify this philosophy as being of the analytical type. I favour its opposite, that is 'continental' philosophy which speaks to me directly about human nature, saying it boldly and unashamedly. And if you want to face certain realities about human nature, much of it I believe requires you to be bold and unashamed.

In reply to the second question, I strongly believe in autodidactic learning, as I always found the education I received through conventional forms to be largely unsatisfying. If one has in him or her the desire to truly learn and discover, the value of autodidactic learning will prove to be priceless.

Q: Does living in Malaysia affect your current perception of what it takes to be African? Or what role and impact does location or place of residence have on the authenticity of writing about a place or its people? Do you find it a constraint or an advantage to your writings?

A: Perhaps. People don't speak much about Africa or being African there. The dynamics and politics of desire are wholly different in that respect.

But am I less African because of that? What does it take to be African? Must we have a definition? Doesn't it suffice that I come from a region in Africa?

Many of us today are migratory. I don't think this should make us less authentic, or put into question the sincerity of our writing. I definitely feel more comfortable speaking about my people here in Mauritius. So, so far, it is clear that I have produced African literature. But to be comfortable is not the point in literature, is it? In fact, in this profession, comfort is a poison. My aim is to be able to write about anyone and anything and any place one day. So why can't I do that freely, and write about a character from a different place, a different time, with whom I share no familiar attributes, and still produce literature that's African?

Home for me, is in the English language, home is where my library is at any point in time. Long ago, I turned down the option of studying in France, because I wanted to be in an environment where I didn't have to keep translating my thoughts from English into a different language, even if I was fluent in it. It was simply never home, that's why. It would have felt less natural, perhaps less authentic. And that is as far as I would go in fitting this word into the topic we are discussing.

Q: Which fuels what? Does your love for writing fuel the expressions of your education in law, political science, and philosophy, or does your education fuel your love for writing?



A: I struggled with this question for a long time, wondering whether it was wise and necessary to drop one, for the sake of time, of focus.

In the end I decided to keep both, because they operated symbiotically and often fed off each other.

Academia exposes me to the rigor and thoroughness required in conducting research, to the perseverance in coming up with findings that ultimately matter. Creative writing gives me the opportunity to reintroduce all that is redacted in academia, when it (inevitably) doesn't fit the rigid, conventional format.

Academia is about the objective, the rational, the broad generalizations. Creative writing seeks to unveil the stories of 'silenced subjectivities' (quoting John E. McKinnon), the exceptions to all those general rules, which in turn challenge the findings made in academia.

Q: What counsel would you give to younger aspiring writers regarding the role of education and the impact of intellectualism in producing literary works?

A: It's not conventional education that will ultimately empower you. What we ought to have learned by now through John Dewey, John Milton, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Allan Bloom, Paulo Freire, and Maxine Greene, among others is that conventional education produces technocrats, skills-specialists, not individuals with minds of their own. So read. Read independently. Read what you like. And stop reading if you've stopped understanding. Or stopped enjoying what you're

reading, because it's a waste of time. Then pick another book. One that will take you to the extremes, shock you, expose you to radically new ideas so that you may ask yourself where you stand, what you're comfortable with, and make space so you may review your beliefs where reason and instinct deem it to be necessary.

And at the end of the process, even if nothing seems to have changed in your outlook on life, one day you'll realize how it would have added nuances to your understanding of the world, especially of its complexity.

Q: In your YouTube interview with Nandini Bhautoo for the TV program Out & About, you shared very interesting techniques in your writing process that covered from how you conduct research, to the technique of saving your documents in ways that allow you to keep count of the number of days you have written. Please summarize for our readers, who are themselves writers, functional writing techniques that worked for you and helped you deliver books worth reading?

A: First, let me tackle what seems to be a common concern: writer's block.

When I first learned about the concept, I could not understand why everyone was hung up on it. Then I realized that I shared this sentiment with a few other writers too, who had the same answer as I did.

Here it is: The cure to writer's block is to keep reading, even while you are writing.

Second, read. Read good writing. But don't

neglect bad writing, because it tells you what not to do, and it helps you formulate the what and the why of what you don't like, or the mistakes you don't want to make in your writing.

Third, read. Read literary criticism to improve your writing. I would strongly recommend canonical works by Francine Prose (*Reading like a Writer*), Anais Nin (*The Future of the Novel*), Stephen King (*On Writing*), William Strunk Jr (*The Elements of Style*), David Corbett (*The Art of Character*).

Q: In September 2019, you will be in Nairobi, Kenya at the 2019 African Writers Conference as Lead Speaker on "Cultural Stereotypes in African Literature: Rewriting the narrative for the 21st Century Reader." How did you get involved with the forthcoming AWC 2019?

A: That's a long story. But it has a lot to do with meeting Anthony Onugba, whom I would like to take the opportunity here to thank for making all of this possible, and for being so passionate about this project so much so that it has attracted and gathered people as determined and dedicated as he is.

Q: Still on the forthcoming Conference, but not to give everything away, what are your perceptions about the way Africa is portrayed, written, read, and understood by others in the world?

A: Let's be wary of our aversion to stereotypes. The stereotypical is not necessarily not true (sorry for the double negatives.) Some parts of Africa are still dark, in its many implications, so if someone wishes to write about that, let our zeal for novelty not be a barrier to his or her expression. After all, what is this (literary) war all about?

Well, we are tired of old stereotypes, because...we need new ones.



And soon, especially in view of how we are moving at an accelerated rate in so many dimensions of life, there will be an urgent call for these too, to be shed very soon.

We must understand the dynamics of the debate about how Africa is being, and ought to be portrayed, within the concept of a flow, a movement, not just a simple, linear switch from one extreme to another, from a starting point to an end - or in more philosophical language, in teleological terms. We must grasp the concept of how this transformation will always be a necessity, and that no transformation will ever be complete, or final.

Q: In Binyavanga Wainaina's very satirical writing on How to Write about Africa, which can be found online in GRANTA, do you think he is absolutely correct or would you say that African writers are starting to write their own stories in ways that are non-stereotypical?

A: Thanks to technology, the internet and social media, and to websites where we can download almost everything for free, we are now exposed to more literature, more art forms, and inevitably this is opening our eyes to the creative potential in us. It's arming us with the courage to go further, to tell our stories in our own terms. Having judged the Short Story category for the 2019 African Writers Awards, which will be announced on September 28 at the African Writers Conference, I think I am in a good position to corroborate the statement I just made.

So no, I don't agree with Binyavanga Wainaina: what he says was true a few decades ago, but things have changed. Pick any antholo-

gy of short stories from Africa, and you'll be sure to read about a diversity of experiences, modern and old, traditional, religious, superstitious, atheistic, agnostic, about rural and wild African landscapes, about urban African lives, about men in Savile Row suits, and those in a pair of shorts from Zara, and you'll realize we (well, some of us) are the ones who need to shed our stereotypical belief that African writing is stereotypical!

Let's also be wary of generalizations. Are African writers starting to write their own stories in ways that are non-stereotypical? Some are, some are not, some are getting there- and let this not be an opportunity for criticism.

Instead, let's create a space for everyone. Let's welcome all stories, because they represent voices of those who want to be heard. Let's appreciate the diversity. Let's celebrate it.

Q: And what do you think is the relevance of this year's conference theme to the future of African writing?

A: It is our hope that it will get writers, readers, and critics to think carefully when they write, read, and... criticize African writing as being based on old stereotypes.

Q: Finally, what are your hopes for Africa and the impact of her literature?

A: My hopes for Africa are that she may stop suffering a fractured identity, an identity that compels her to keep an eye on her neigh-

bours, and keep desiring. Desire, yes, for it's a human condition. But desire from a place of equality, solidity, which could only happen when Africa restores her self-esteem.

The best way to restore one's self-esteem is to embark on a search to find it within oneself. Trying to strengthen it by waging a war against others, demanding that they respect you, sounds exactly what a victim, a loser would do - We shouldn't act like victims, and the day we don't, is the day we will start earning the respect we merit.

It is up to us, African writers, readers and critics to work towards liberating Africa from her

fractured identity. And it can and should be done only nobly, classily.

In reply to your second question, I hope contemporary African literature will have the effect of shaking our beliefs in the hegemony of man vis-à-vis his environment, to unveil his ontological relationships to the world, which is where literature in an era of posthumanism is heading.

Then again, in view of my exposure to what's being written so far, it's already going in that direction. So that's good news. We're on the right track. ■



Children's Literature



I ALSO FOUGHT

by
Olaleye Adedoyin – Nigeria

It was night
It was the middle of it
Mother fought
She fought hard
I sat back
Mother cried
Tears washed her eyes
I sat back
I wished I could cry too

She screamed
I couldn't
She trembled
I was mute

Mother held tightly to the bed post
I held strongly to the big hope
Mother! Hold still.. I'll soon behold

Blood gushed
Chord cut
She hung faintly to fate
I clutched firmly at my fist

Prayers escaped my nostrils
She gasped
I cried
She convulsed
I thought I fought..

It was night
It was the middle of it
Mother fought
But she could not

Mother left
I was left
People wept
And felt
I made her dead

But I did not
And I thought they saw
That life is war
That I also fought



MY FAMILY

by

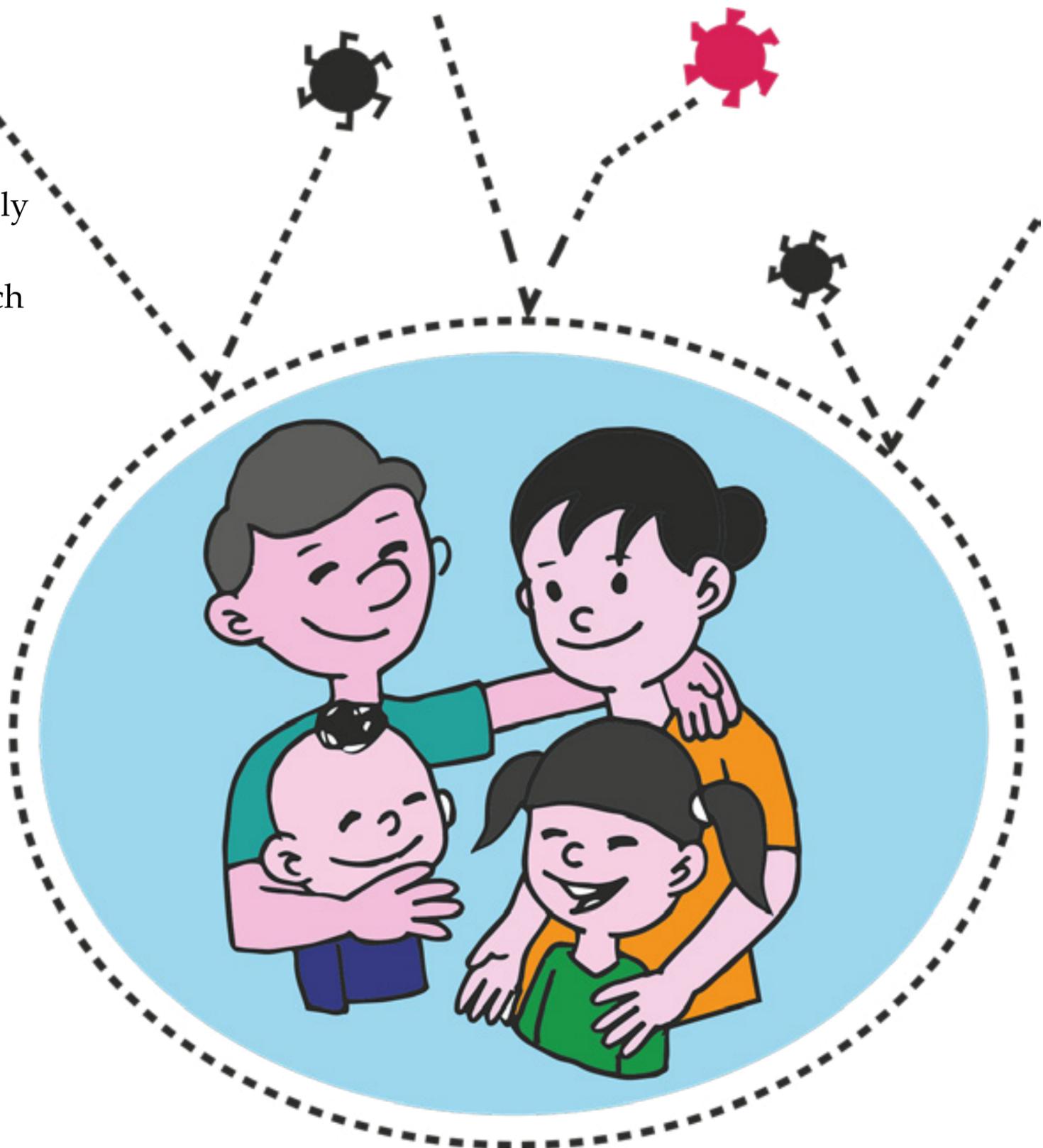
Ngalim Jusline Veeyeenyuy - Cameroon

I come from a family
A very large family
My beautiful family
We share family love

Mother and father are my family
Brother and sister are my family
Grandparents, uncle and aunt are my family
Cousins, nephews and nieces are my family

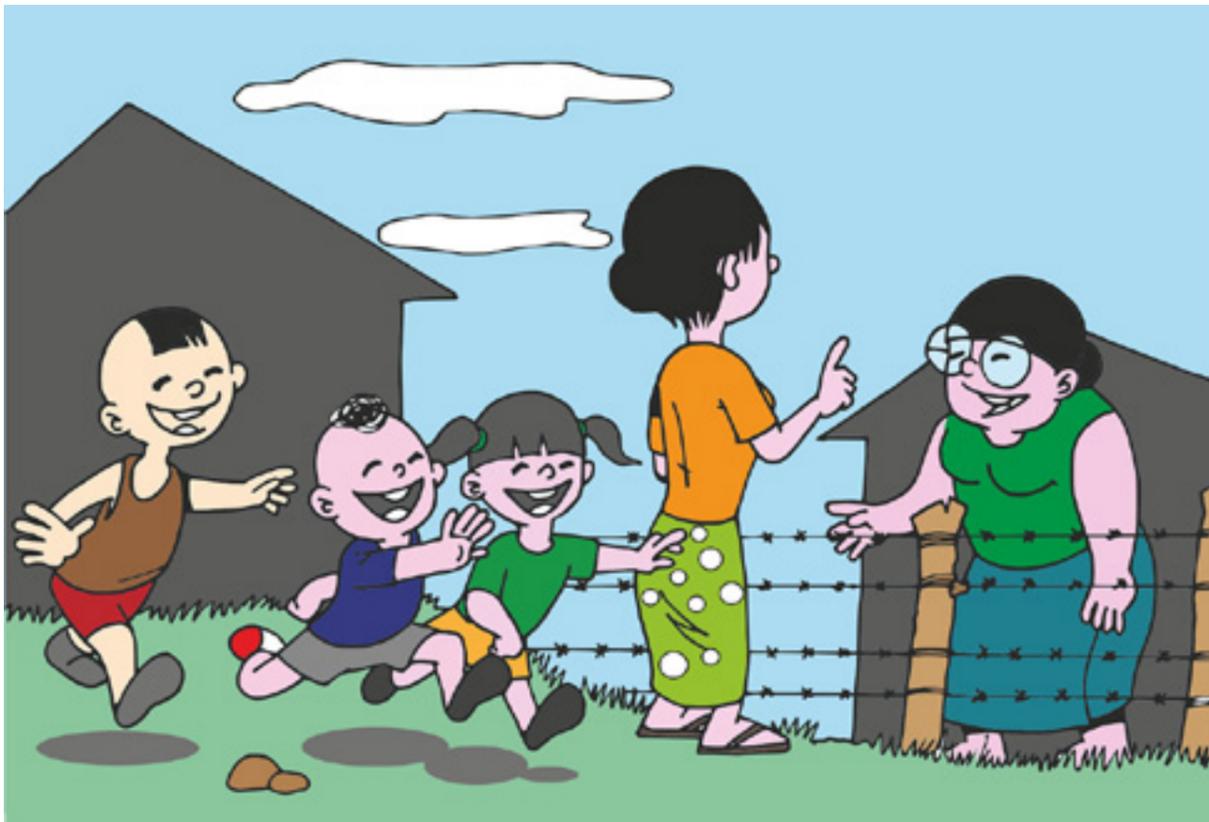
Grandpa sends me bananas
Grandma sends me groundnuts
Aunt sends me biscuits
Uncle sends me toys

We have family friends
And they too are like family
We share family love
I love my family very much



DARED TO DREAM

by
Marycynthia Chinwe Okafor – Nigeria



The garden was Adamma's favourite place, it had always been. It was planted by her mother – the reverend Queen – who Adamma never knew as the Queen had been alive only long enough to hear her child's first wail. The garden was beautiful, a labyrinth of flowers curled into each other, left and right, back and forth. It stretched all over the palace, draping over the merry curved bridge that ran over the rich silvery river that flowed into the one thousand and one rooms in the palace. The pillars had climbers twisted over them like soft butter over a

sweet bar. When her father had been around, they had always walked it – hand in hand – every evening and now she wasn't even allowed near it. Only members of the royal family – and the garden tenders – were allowed inside and she had been made to understand she was no longer a part of the royal family.

She sat by her window which overlooked the garden and watched them as they danced, clueless and as lovely as early morning sunshine, from petal to petal. Their forest green, sea blue and flowery canary colours made them invisible except to Adamma who could see them as clearly as she could hear their melodic and bewitching voices. One in particular held her attention more than the others, she was a pretty girl and the mascara that adorned her impossibly large eyes was as purple and shiny as the dangling loops that hung from both ears.

Her skin was the darkest shade of green and she rocked it with a tiny flimsy silver mauve top and trousers that stopped just above her ankles. Her sandals were blue, a shade or two darker than the midnight blue of her eyes. She turned as if she knew someone was watching her, and caught Adamma eyes and then she smiled. She smiled a lovely smile that made her eyes twinkle like stars. Adamma watched her hop off with her friends and family and she knew everything would be fine. She picked her bucket and left the stall, the rectangle – in the stable – that now doubled as her room. As she walked through the stable, the horses poked their heads out of their stalls and called out to her. She laughed, "I know. I will be back before sunset."

She felt content all of a sudden, here, she was rich in friends even though she was poor in family. She knew her father wasn't dead and that he would soon come and rescue her from the misery that had been her life for the past three months. For once since the news of her father's death arrived from her uncle who was now king, she dared to dream. She dared to dream of having a real family again.

ESSAYS



FAMILY- THE BEDROCK OF SOCIETY



The bliss in a united family can never be quantified. Experience over the centuries has proved that children who emanate from peaceful and settled homes tend to perform better in life than those from abusive or broken homes. As in every circumstance, there however, are some rare exceptions. Nevertheless, the point is, the beams of joy and peace from a settled family flows through the lives of the family members, and ultimately to the society at large.

It is needful we define clearly what a family is before proceeding in this masterpiece. The 8th edition of the Advanced Oxford Learners Dictionary defines family as a group consisting of one or two parents and their children. Ideally, a family ought to consist of father, mother and children. This is referred to as a nuclear family. However, it may also consist of close relationship in which case it is called extended family. For the purpose of this write-up, we would be limited to the nuclear family.

The world has, and is still facing numerous challenges ranging from insecurity, drug addiction, illiteracy, under development and corruption, just to mention but a few. Permit me to humbly conclude that these challenges would have been prevented if families had a proper orientation and a healthy mindset. The children we fail to raise properly today will be tomorrow's thugs if no one minds them. They would further have their families and replicate the same training to their children. Those we have in key government positions and blame so much did not fall from heaven; they were born and bred here on earth. They are only manifesting the training they received. We often talk so much of corruption, yet some parents applaud their kids when they cunningly outsmart others. Everyone on Earth has parents. If the parents could see Parenthood as a task worth giving the best, the society would be better off.

Regrettably, a number of people wish they were not born into the families they are in currently. This in no way refers to those born to poor families, bit disunited families. No group

of persons living on Earth would ever have a smooth ride all through life. Every person or group has its own unique challenges. The issue is how they react to such problems when they arise. Many cases abound where husbands mercilessly beat up their spouses as though they were not human beings. This oftentimes leads to parents parting ways, and children left to the pains of single parenting.

This sends a signal to our fellow bachelors and spinsters to be extremely careful on whom they marry. Refuse to be forced into marriage. Don't marry out of desperation or to do someone a favor. You might live to regret it. Even after marriage, ensure you build a robust mutual understanding, and consistent flow of communication to sustain your family. It is necessary we understand family life is meant to be enjoyed, not endured.

If we must have a 'heaven-on-earth' family, each member of the family must know, and ensure he or she carries out his or her responsibilities religiously. The father is the head of the family, and he assumes that role by sustaining the family financially, spiritually, physically and in every other sphere of family life. As the head, he does the thinking and reasoning for the family. The eyes are connected to the skull (head) and so, the father ought to have a vision for the family.

The mother acts as a support to the father. She is the heart of the family, she also attains that position when she spreads or pumps love to all the family members. She connects everyone together and ensures they are functioning properly. If she fails in her duty, the family most likely collapses.

The father, mother and children collectively work as hands. They do this by striving to take the family forward to the next level. If every father would love his wife, every wife support and submit to the father, and every child obedient to parents, many, if not all societal crisis would be halted. Godly virtues should be practiced by the parents, and preached to the children for peace to abound. Charity begins at home, they say. If we want our societies to be free from chaos, we must enshrine godly virtues such as love, honesty, selflessness and integrity in our families. This can swiftly be achieved if we connect to our creator and diligently follow his ways.

Children deserve close monitoring and support to grow into worthy adults. Teach them all they need to know, because if not, they will find it out from the internet, and their peers which cannot be reliable. So, if you want to see your child grow into influence and greatness in adulthood, the time to start the training is now. But remember, you cannot give what you do not have so, parents must also imbibe impeccable characters for children to emulate.

Africa, as a continent has witnessed massive challenges, though all parts of the world are not an exemption; we must return to basic essentials of fundamental family life if we are to move forward. Every member of the family should know his or her duties, and perform them accordingly to attain an enviable feat.

Our society will be cleansed and revitalized if we all pay attention to our individual nuclear families.

Akaa Elijah Aondotakume
Nigeria

LETTER TO A COSMOPOLITAN



Human beings are wired to care about the people around them. These are typically the nuclear family, the extended family and even the tribe. This is something to do with the kind of environment in which human evolution has occurred. This sense of belonging and kinship often runs contrary to the ideas of a modern, educated population.

In the realm of understanding the material world, kinship is considered to be irrelevant. Our education system teaches that the world is best understood by applying rigorous and replicable techniques of the scientific method. This flies in the face of the age old tradition of understanding the world through information from our parents and those around us. In fact, in Africa today, we are part of one of the first generations where a teenager can plausibly claim to know more about how the material world works than her unschooled parents.

It is not just the realm of knowledge where we have diminished the role of kin. Health care is another. With the rise of evidence-based medicine, a lot of educated people see traditional remedies not only as inferior, but dangerous. Nurses are much more preferable on ones bedside than family members. Morality is another area. Generally, the wealthier and more educated a society is, the less is the influence that traditional African values have over that society. This is in no way a crusade to romanticize traditional African (sometimes fused with religion) values. A lot of them deserve to disappear. In fact, some of the ones that are still around are holding back moral and material progress. These include norms that encourage sexism, homophobia and sycophantic tribal politics.

It is undoubtedly a good thing that parents are not allowed to marry-off their fifteen year old

daughters. Modern medicine has replaced traditional remedies of dubious efficacy which are often harmful. It is a breath of fresh air to notice the diminishing loyalty to tribal identity. There is progress in the area of building a more meritocratic society, as opposed to one where socio-economic status is primarily linked to family ties. This outlook, the cosmopolitan outlook, is partly responsible for the tremendous progress that Africa has made in the last half century. It is sometimes hard to appreciate this when one looks at the problems that we still have today. However, for most African countries today, the quality and length of life has significantly improved for most people compared to where it was a few decades ago.

Is there no room for kinship and family loyalty on this train of social progress? Let me start by saying that kin based thinking or tribalism is almost always a bad way to run the affairs of any society. This is because family and other kin are morally arbitrary, that is; where we are born in a society is simply a matter of accident. And it is folly to erect social and political institutions based on such happenstance.

And yet, it is hard not to see that the train of progress has left a lot of people behind. Further, it appears that the cosmopolitan outlook has its downside; a downside that could have been mitigated by having stronger kin loyalty.

There was a movement to remove “street vendors” in my city. This latest crusade was not the first time, but this is when I noticed the thread that links to the corrosiveness of cosmopolitanism. Reasonable people can disagree on whether streets in the centre of the city are an ideal trading place or not. What struck me in this episode were the attitudes that were expressed by many educated middleclass people in the media. For these people, seeing a street filled with street vendors was not something they accepted in a modern city. For such aesthetic reasons, I would argue, they were willing to condone the use of violence and degrading treatment in order to remove the vendors. It occurred to me that in a society where many people felt that their fellow citizen were like a family, this attitude would be disgraceful. And yet here, it was being espoused by intellectual elite.

You can only love your “neighbor” as yourself if you can identify someone as your “neighbor”. This is one thing that family ties to very well. They provide us with a clear, ready-to-use group of “neighbors”. And it is difficult to imagine somebody sanctioning the use of violence by strangers to stop their neighbor from making a living on the streets. This should not be taken as a claim that family relations once extended to everyone in societies as large as ours. The point is that our cosmopolitan outlook has expanded our world and reduced our concern for actual individuals.

Africa is a much healthier, wealthier and freer place than it was a few decades ago. Part of the reason for that is we have diminished our attachment to our tribe and enlarged our scale of kinship to a country or even a “global village”. I also think that this scaling up has reduced the incentive for honorable behavior in political agents. We have gained a lot through our march towards global citizenship; I only hope that it will outweigh what we are losing.

Robert Banda Jere
Zambia



BELONGING

I have never really felt like I belonged.

I felt like a visitor at the aquarium, looking into the lives of happy schools of fish swimming along in sync, sometimes coming to the glass that separates us before realizing we are in two different environments where none of us could survive in the others world.

Being an orphan feels something like the above given description. The feeling is inflated when joining a full family after the last parent departs. It can be a daunting task in addition to being frightening, nerve wrecking and simply uncomfortable. For most black African children who suddenly find themselves adorned by the label of 'Orphan', no one or nothing prepares you for it. It is filled with great awkwardness and new realizations, some of which may take years to acknowledge, for example: no one, and I repeat, no one will defend you, the way your biological parent will. To make it worse, there are no counsellors available to ease you into this new situation where the people who brought you into the world leave you without so much of a manual on how you are supposed to continue without them.

I learnt, hurtfully so and often in retrospect that the looked after orphan is almost always, guilty before proven innocent and even after proof of innocence comes some degree of blame remains.

“Why was she there in the first place?” or “She brings it on herself, anyway!”

People move on, but their words stick.

Another important lesson I learnt was to reduce expectations: not to think that people will celebrate your seemingly significant achievements that your parent would have bragged about and told everyone they knew for days: that suddenly disappears, unless of course it is really, really, an extraordinary achievement. The support goes and someone the dreams of the orphan shrink themselves not to outshine those of the caretaker's children.

I don't know if this is truly a Shona (or Afrikan) proverb, but in school we used to say, ‘The axe forgets, but the tree does not.’ Often times the orphan child is the tree and those left to take care of them are axes; ever cutting them down with words said directly or indirectly; intentionally or non-intentionally so.

Family becomes a memory or an abstract concept, though they are ever reminded that they are lucky to be taken in by one. Yet, the child orphan often feels like they do not belong and all the while all they want is that sense of belonging.

But, what is belonging?

How does one know that they truly belong? Is it inclusion in various activities enough? Being in photographs? Change in surname? Being acknowledged as a human being who has both positive and negative attributes without the negatives being put under a microscope and then displayed for all to see.

Growing up without cheerleaders from those the child had been left with is detrimental to the emotional intelligence and mental health of the orphan. Winning and losing races in life without someone to celebrate with or comfort the child is a gut-wrenching experience. There is always need for someone outside themselves to care that they participated in the race, regardless of the outcome.

It is, therefore, not uncommon that the orphan child will look for that belonging in various ways, from various avenues such as: friends, the opposite sex, other families, hobbies or the most dangerous of them all, self.

Friends tend to be the best place where the child orphan can be themselves, though not always 100% but close. Friends offer a haven where judgment is often minimal if not absent, as the saying goes, “Friends are the family we choose.” Yet friends too can only go

so far with regards to belonging, especially if they have their own families they belong to and feel secure in.

The opposite sex can also offer a false sense of belonging that is often temporary, unless the orphan adult is fortunate enough to meet someone who can appreciate the extent of that longing and its effect on the well-being of the once 'orphan-child'.

Other families can come from social groups such as churches or even, eventually when one is grown, through marriage. The orphan in this case, attaches themselves to other families that are open to them and take them as their own. But again, "blood remains thicker than water": the out-sider feeling can visit every now and then. A disconnect is often present.

At times, the child orphan may simply just reject the complex human bonding experience and decide to hide themselves in hobbies, in work and refining their talents, hence, finding 'good' excuses to be apart from the rest and not have that longing to belong. However, what cannot be avoided is the longing to share achievements and set-backs with someone who can really appreciate them based on belonging to them. If this cause is pursued; the orphan becomes so introverted and self-reliant that they totally destroy the need to belong to others. It is here where the orphan develops depression, low self-esteem and selfish habits which in turn affect whatever relationships they try to develop as a grown human being. Being introverted seems like a less painful path to take as people's words and attitude do not penetrate the emotional fortresses built. However, this is not how human beings, as social creatures, are attuned, sooner than later, as the British singer Gabrielle sang, "You might need somebody too." Besides, it can only work until one has to fill in the "next-of-kin" section of various forms.

Belonging is important, that's what families are there for. Yet in the 21st century, the institution of family is now so distorted and people even choose to disconnect themselves for reasons that are often petty and are resolvable if people take time to communicate. The adult who grew up as an orphan may respond differently because they understand the fleeting nature of life. They appreciate that in one moment, those that you hold dear and who, without expectation of 'returns on investment' can just be gone, never to return, in the blink of an eye.

Take it from this once 'orphan-child' and now grown adult, who has, for the past 23 years, missed having that feeling of belonging.

Hannah H. Tarindwa
Zimbabwe

Short Stories



FATAL LONER

By Fantone Mdala – Malawi



I flip through one of the containers on the floor ravenous of its contents. Tension rising like a thermometer under high temperatures. I screw open the jar with my heart beating in my throat. To my disappointment, I find grains of salt filled to the brim. That not so strange feeling slowly storms in with a surge of questions. Questions longing for immediate answers. Answers I keep on anticipating just to earn a chain of other unresolved questions. I dash out of the kitchen back onto my unrolled sleeping mat.

Covering myself with Misozi's tattered church wrapper. Tears forecasting to drip out of my swollen eyes. What did I expect to find? Food? Thought one is supposed to earn it before you have it? How did it go wrong so fast? Is man not entitled to aspire some things in life? My life is like a movie where am forced to play this part. Recite my bitter nothings underneath all this hurt. My naked stomach growls in agreement. Another day gone without consuming a decent tender meal. I stare into the cracks on the roof visualising the sweet life turned stale with acrimony.

The wind ripples through the wrapper prickling my ageless unwashed body like bee stings. I hold on tight to the wrapper. Life was so easy when they were around. Easy as breathing in. But then again breathing can be hard when you are existing in a contaminated world. Where innocence is stripped naked of its dignity. I remember reading somewhere that; "only in darkness can you see

the stars". Yet here I am, consumed in obscurity yet still blind to see the stars to reach for.

Everything was so peaceful and pristine with their company. I recall Misozi waking me up on those silent November mornings. Reminding me to go and man our small garden. A garden that supported us at the most desperate times. She was always there to cheer me up after unsuccessful attempts of searching for jobs. I remember her picking up the tiniest broken pieces of mine just to pull me together and make me feel better. I remember my daughter Ndazona's ear to ear smile the time she passed position one in class.

"Daddy, daddy, look I've passed first position in class. Just like I promised I would."

"Oh my goodness!! Thank Chiuta Wemi and our ancestors for this."

I remember shedding tears. Breaking the golden rule that real men do not cry. But this was my little girl, these were tears of joy. She was escalating up the corporate ladder. An opportunity I tossed away. Discarding the importance of education. But Ndazona, she took after her beautiful intelligent mother, whose future I regret to have spoiled. Those moments I was experimenting with my rowdy untamed hormones during my adolescence. Unfortunately, Ndazona was a product of one of my failed experiments with Misozi. Due to this, she was forced to drop out of school and marry me. But Ndazona still took away my shame with her high intellectual curiosity and hard work in class. For the first time in my life I had everything. My daughter and wife were the world to me. The sun and moon in my galaxy. Shining bright into my meaningless life. I was a stranger to the light till they introduced it to me. But I never had satisfaction in my soul. I wanted more out of this world. I wanted to make it rain in winter. Chase and catch the wind by its tail. As a guttersnipe born in the dumps, I never tasted true happiness. I was that child who still had a lot at heart, craving to shoot for the stars without enough ammo. I would have done anything just to be among the super humans. Those people who get everything with only the snap of their fingers. Whose wives walk as if they are stepping on burning coals as they majestically wave their glory without batting an eyelash to the pain in the world. I wanted to provide my family with that. All Misozi was fond of was soothing me with lectures on hope and patience.

"Chikutumbwe, please stop trying so hard. We'll have our day in the sun if we just believe and be persistent".

"But Misozi success just doesn't decide to pick at random those who wait. You need to go for it and find it by doing whatever it takes."

"At least do not punish yourself this way or do anything stupid."

This was my family we were talking about. I could do anything just to pull it off as a husband and a father. How could they be calm amidst this crisis? No, no way this was not true. I had to do something. I wasn't worth their smiles and laughter.

Meanwhile, the more I tried, the more I failed and the more I got disillusioned. I failed them again. Every sleepless night I saw Ndazona's future shuttered to smithereens beyond redemption. I saw my life becoming a living hell worse than before. I saw the gods paying no attention to this overrated simpleton.

Then an idea came to me. An old wives' tale ritual practiced by our ancestors to ask for any

blessing. It was a desperate move but still it was a gamble. My last resort to clog this poverty once and for all. To rid of the shame my family wore for several years.

I finally consulted a traditional witchdoctor believed to be the best in the land. A man who was able to shake a lost soul of the unalive to find its way back to its cocoon. A man who would make a tree grow and sprout in a single day. And even make people rich beyond one's imagination.

I made contact with him. Made a bargain to make me rich and provide for my family. But every corrupt decision comes at a terrible cost. Though it was a lot to take in for several days, I still accepted it. He suggested that I offer my first born child as a sacrifice. A child he termed to be my only shot at getting my heart's desire. I pled with him to offer me another choice unlike offering my only child Ndazona.

"Chikutumbwe my child, listen to what I tell you. Babies come and go. Consider them as fruits in a mango tree. They grow on trees every season and when you pluck one, another grows replacing the lost one."

I blindly agreed to the witchdoctor's pep talk and decided to carry on with the plan. But Misozi knew nothing about this plan. I offered Ndazona's body to Ng'anga the witchdoctor hoping to get the luxurious life I have always wanted. But everything did not go unopposed after disclosing to Misozi about the whole plan and the bargain.

"You did what Chikutumbwe! But she was your flesh and blood. Our flesh and blood. How could you be so selfish and clueless?"

"But I was trying to save our family from this poverty we have so long suffered our entire lives."

"So what then? Do you think you are going to get rich overnight just by sacrificing your own daughter?"

It was true, nothing changed at all. Not even a wind of the being summoned to the high table whooshed by. Misozi and I grew apart as time went by. She became bitter with every sight of me. I knew she loved me more than I could possibly see. But my actions went beyond what man can handle. She committed suicide a few weeks later.

My life was never the same after she died. Nothing seemed to work. I lost interest in searching for work. For who was I to make a living with nobody to live for? I had a perfect life and a perfect family who accepted the me, as poor as I was.

However, I tried to seek for something I thought was worth more than their love. Something that I thought would make them love me more. Yet I never saw through what I had just tainted.

I had the definition of family right in front of my nose but had to sniff for answers elsewhere. I thought happiness was embedded in the worldly possessions yet the greatest treasure is having someone to care for, and people who appreciate you the way you are. Those people are worth sharing your life with. People who can take a bullet for you even if you do not deserve it. No amount of glory in the world is worth trading for smiles from family. I overstepped the line. Now here I am feeding off my regret and shame. Hiding from the world.

FROM DAUGHTER BARAKA TO MOTHER EVE

By Amirah Al Wassif – Egypt



I am writing to you now without putting my right hand on my chest, quivering from cold and grief. I don't cry any more Mom, I just hide under our destroyed table, count my breath for a very long time, holding my dirty cotton doll, watching the footsteps of the hurry passengers on our crowded road. As usual, I am putting my mad eyes into the wide openings of our ragged tent, waiting to catch someone's eyes, perhaps seeing those eyes to convince me that I am still alive.

I am still your sweet daughter, your lovely baby, the crawler on the sharp platforms every midnight. I am still your patience girl walking after your shadow, looking for the warmth of your heart and the smell of your face. Last night I dreamed about you. I was showering under the honey dawn, and you were in front of me and tried your best to touch my little belly with your warm fingers. In my dream, I was the baby girl with wavy hair and you were my immortal mother still moving her big fingers under her baby's belly to make her laugh, but inspite of her great job, her baby still crying. I am writing to you with a flushed dirty face and delicious confusion which makes me whisper through the long hours of the day and night like an immigrant bird.

It is my dearest confusion of my whole life as a woman who decided to write with her foot. Everybody here in my world still wondering how could a woman dare to write with her foot? Everybody here in my world whispers from the first light of dawn until the last light of twilight, my people want seriously to catch my inner secret, they addicted to asking each other about my upturned situation. "Writing with your foot, how dare you?!" They cry in front of my face and behind my back. They never stop asking and asking and asking, and I conceal my heart very well because in case they saw it, they will discover immediately my secret, they will know the only

answer of “how a woman dare write with her foot?”

If you are a writer, there will be a weird rumor that will never leave you, based upon some upper stories such as you use the stars as punctuation, and the blue of skies is your immortal ink that never runs dry, and you have a deal with angels and devils, also you spy on every insect crawled on the earth. If you are a writer, you may see the shadow of William Shakespeare every midnight above your head, explain to you how to eat the time, how to dissolve yourself between letters, he will explain to you how to put your heart on the paper without pretending.

As a woman decided to write with her foot, I just asked how to think differently, how to play with your imagination ball like a professional baller. My name is Baraka, one of those homeless women who spent their spring age on the cold sidewalks, eating nothing, feeling nothing, tried their best to tame neediness. I have no idea about the rosy dreams and all I know is scratching the trash cans every night. And about my pillow, it is not surprising to be a haystack. When the honey dawn watered my hair, I figured out that I am in the middle of nowhere. When the headlights blocked my sight, I touched my darkness.

I am a very patient crawler on the rough edges of life, I am a naked woman because of the conspiracy of poverty, lean body stretched along with the torn papers which covered the pavement.

I am here writing in my mind, in my blood, create my own imaginary world which doesn't seem similar to my harsh fate. All my whole life, I have been covered with an ecstasy of writing. I gorge my poor flesh with clay and this weird stuff, not my choice at all. Dear and poor Eve, I am dissolving under the furious sky, need your help to clean my dirty body. I am here in one of the street corners recalling your great spirit against the boys who chased me by throwing clay which forced me to run away, in fact, I couldn't escape away from their harsh beats, but really I do it, I ran away here in my imaginary world. I have shed tears here under the elder tree, touching my ribs during that much time. I am not blind, I am just half-educated woman who lives in a separate tent on one side of our hungry street, a half-educated woman who still desperately dream to finish her education, but how an orphaned female in the third world dares to demand to achieve any dream except getting married?

I was crawling on the floor, trying to count my breath slowly and hurry. It is my exclusive moment where I stitch my poetry piece. The very last time when I contemplate myself as a baby with a wide mouth and curious eyes. And the hours pass heavily, my poor heart couldn't bear any more. Yes, it is me the funniest creature you will ever see, the ocean which walks on two feet, and that idiot elephant which bitterly wish to fit the crazy fashion. There is a mysterious voice escaping away from the ticking of my watch, the voice haunted me, but my soul with a harsh weapon, here in the heart of my ears all these secrets which nights hide them very well, every secret scream in the silence of space Who am I? and I join in their mourning now with nonstop of repeating, who am I?



TELL TALE OF THE NIECE

Festus Obehi Destiny- Nigeria

1954

The sky was starting to close her eyes lids when Auntie Ifeoma came. She came when the wave of sadness opened its arms and enveloped the heat on my porch. I was buried in my sweat when I heard her knock on the door. Auntie Ifeoma never waited for one to open a door before she entered. I had asked her once why she failed to observe the simplest form of courtesy...

“Only a thief waits by the door after he knocks,” she chuckled. Auntie Ifeoma’s purse dropped from her hands when she saw me. She wasn’t immediately stung by my ardour. I guess she knew I hadn’t taken a bath in a week. My husband must have told her. There were things I wanted to tell her and there were things I could never say. She opened the curtains wide and the sun finally had an opportunity to steal a peek at me. She scurried round the house. Picking things that were out of place and uttering a thousand words in a single sentence. I was happy to see her. I knew that

my fingers were too numb to dial or else I would have called her. Or would I? I was so comfortable fuelling my depression with isolation that I forgot that I wasn't born on an island. Aunty Ifeoma's footsteps jerked me out of my thoughts till I followed her every trail. "Your husband called me, Obim. He is worried. You are not the first woman to lose a pregnancy... God gives and God takes. God will send you another set of twins. You can keep the baby things with your cousin Akuekue. She is a good woman. You know these things will make you sad. I'll be here till you get better. Don't worry, soon you will be pregnant again. In every situation just thank the lord, Obim." I couldn't see her face as she spoke. I couldn't tell if there was a smile on her face or if there wasn't. Aunty Ifeoma was always positive. She always managed to rub it off on me while I was growing up. But all the positivity in my vessels drained along with my Fetus. When she was done cleaning the mess she didn't make, she brought me new clothes and held my hand as I went upstairs. She observed my dingy legs as I limped from foot to foot. "You are loosing flesh," she observed "A new baby will not grow in this lean tummy." I smiled. I'm sure she meant well but I had built a hut for sadness in my heart and I wanted it to stay. Aunty Ifeoma waited till she heard me turn on the showers. When the sound of water meshing with the dirt in my skin convinced her doubt, she went to the kitchen and prepared dinner.

1941

"So that stupid man sent you home because I don't have one thousand okwai?" Aunty Ifeoma said. Her voice hit the roof. The frown on my face was no where as distasteful as the anger in her voice. "Well," she continued as she folded her wrappers. "I always knew you didn't need that school. You are too intelligent for that pako pako school set." I cackled. Aunty always knew how to brighten up my face. She scurried around the house. Packing her snails into raffia basket as she spoke "You will come with me to the market. By his grace, I will make enough sales this weekend. And you will go back to school next week." There were so many things I wanted to say and so few I wanted not to. If only she knew how much I would rather sit with her in the market than stay in any classroom. How we would banter in tales we had already heard and answer the questions we each knew the answers to. My earliest memories of childhood were her face. I never asked her about her husband and children and she never bothered to tell me about my parents. I guess we were both scared of the answers and so we never approached the question. Aunty sent me to school from her snail business, while other women were grooming their sons and preparing their daughters for marriage.

"They say that women will rule our towns and cities. I send my Oluchi to school so that

she will join hands and build our new world.” Aunty would always boast whenever people questioned her decision about my education. She wasn’t too religious. She believed in God but we kept holy sabbath days by eating boiled corn and ube while counting her profits. And on days when the rains would come and the sound of Aku wings pierced the atmosphere, we used it as our shield for laziness. Aunty made me laugh. If she had an opportunity to star in a TV show, she would be a funny popular character. We were not rich but we were never hungry. The one room apartment we shared was sparsely furnished but we painted the walls with our laughter and love. It was beautiful. I could never do anything on my own. And from an early age, I guess she understood. I never had to ask and she never asked, “Why”. Maybe that was why I never had many friends growing up. When I married my husband Icheku, he told me that he didn’t “accidentally” bump into me in the marketplace. It was Aunty Ifeoma who having noticed a city man without a wife, told him about her own beautiful niece, whose chi had spent seven market days in molding her skin. When I confronted her about it, she laughed, “you were already a ripe apple. I only plucked you from the tree because you are scared of falling. Chukwu will not come down from his throne to give you a husband. He sends angels in form of humans. Angels like me.”

“ Auntyyyyyyyyyy, “ I teased.

1954

I don’t know how many hours I spent in the shower. Seconds, days, centuries? Aunty Ifeoma’s voice cupped the whole apartment as the waters did nothing to heal my pain. When I came out of the bathroom, I felt like a stranger to my own house. My hands tickled the wardrobe. “Why wear clothes when I already feel naked,” I wondered. I remembered how life almost snuffed out of me when I had the miscarriage. “Why didn’t I die?” I froze as Aunty’s stares met me when I turned back. She must have been standing there for a long time. She dropped the bag she was holding and held my hands. I buried my face in her shoulders as my tears stained her lace. “Do not worry Nkem.” Aunty’s voice soothed me. More than my husband’s ever could. “A time will come when you will remember this day and you will laugh. You shall complain of too many children and they shall feast in your name. Life is pain. And we do not live without living. We do not worry about the things that we cannot control. You will have more babies,” she held my tummy. “Trust your chi, Trust your husband. Do not cry any more. You will ruin your face. You are beautiful.” I smiled. “If Aunty thinks I’m beautiful,” I thought, “then I guess I am.” Thank you, Aun...” my voice choked on my tears before I could complete my confession. “I know, Nkem. Don’t worry I know.” She rubbed my back as I sobbed into the night. And finally, the sky slept.



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8:00am
Sept. 28, 2019

AFRICAN

WRITERS CONFERENCE '19

THEME:

Cultural stereotypes In African Literature:

Rewriting the narrative for the 21st century reader

- SPEAKERS -



Sabah Carrim
Mauritius
Lead Speaker



Nabilah Usman
Nigeria
Panelist



Alex Nderitu
Kenya
Panelist



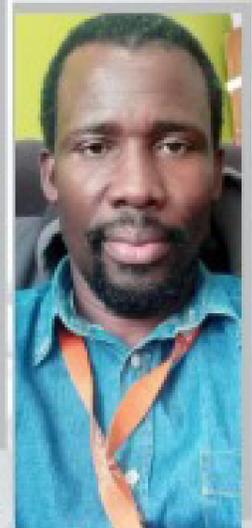
Lawrence Njagi
Kenya
Chairperson



Gabriel Dinda
Kenya
Host



Nnane Ntuba
Cameroon
Panelist



Tom Odhiambo
Kenya
Moderator

- SPEAKERS -

COLUMNS



AT A COST

What happens when tradition decides the fate of Zarah? A pretty damsel living somewhere in northern Nigeria, Zarah loses her place as princess of her father's heart to traditional principles, sojourning and scavenging until she finds her identity, but at a cost....

by
AMAMI YUSUF



EPISODE 7

“We’d be back in five minutes everyone. Do stay with us.” Lola’s voice filled the room as Zarah went silent for a little while. It seemed the more she progressed with her story, the harder it was for her to tell it, and this, Lola understood perfectly. She took quick gasping breaths, blinked equally as furious, and was obviously trying to keep the tears away. Lola leaned in and whispered she could use the five minutes break back stage if she wanted to. And for this, Zarah was extremely grateful- she needed the air, and she needed to breathe. She stood up graciously, with the audience applauding silently after her till she disappeared backstage. She headed straight to the little dressing room she was given and stood facing the mirror. The tears she had welled up all the while, came rushing down her well-powdered, well-bronzed cheeks. She was on the verge of ruining her makeup, but that was the least of her worries.

She reappeared shortly before the five minutes were over; a smile not leaving her face as she approached her chair, with Lola seated in her own chair, which was right beside Zarah’s and she was holding a bottle of water- her eyes smiling, as well as her lips- a little welcoming smile. Zarah’s straight burgundy gown had a flowing finish at the bottom, and it came trailing majestically behind her. She held her clutch a little tightly in front of her- she was concealing her nervousness pretty well. As she sat, she again scanned the audience, looking for the little girl she had seen earlier. Her eyes scanned quickly but carefully, but when on the third scan she couldn’t find either the girl nor her mother anywhere, her heart skipped. Her tongue felt tied in her mouth and her saliva felt sour. There was something about the little girl. Zarah felt very connected to her in ways she couldn’t explain- the child’s presence gave her courage to go on, and her absence stripped her of all confidence. She literally saw herself in that little girl, recalling when she had to grow up, almost on her own. When little Zarah died within, and Queen Amina rose like a phoenix. It was at that point she remembered the courageous queen her father unknowingly made her become. His voice, as if on repeat, echoed in her head. She took in a deep breath, and closed her eyes slowly as she exhaled...

Zarah had to wake up at 4:00am every morning. That was her new routine ever since she took to hawking. With the thousand naira Mohammed had given her, she bought some measurements of beans, a transparent bucket with its cover, and some tin cans. Mama and Sadiya also made contributions in their own quota- palm oil, spices, ideas and support. They helped her deliberate on what she could use the one thousand naira to begin hawking, and how she could go about it. She woke up before dawn to soak the beans, peel out the outer skin, wash it, and grind it into a not-so-thick paste. Afterwards, she spiced the paste, put the oil into it, and turned it into the cans to steam in a large pot, over a burning fire. Her alele always looked yummy, tasted even better than it looked, and was always ready latest at 7:30am. The

first three months after she started her new trade were tough. She had a hard time adjusting- to waking up earlier, to the whole making process, to walking about the streets of Dutsin-ma looking for buyers of her cooked food. However, three years and two more months down the line, she was already used to the whole system, and enjoyed hawking, most days. She also never thought anything would go wrong with her then perfect life.

Though married women usually wore veils while outside, Zarah still preferred wearing her hijabs out. They were more convenient, as she didn't have to keep draping it over her shoulders every passing second- It made her feel and look like the young teen she was fast soon becoming. She went out every day, the transparent bucket well covered and balanced on her head, and most times, not using her hands to support it. She strutted with the bucket perfectly balanced on her head without any form of support except a piece of cloth folded neatly underneath it. Sometimes, Zarah went to construction sites and sold to the men there, and other times, she simply paraded the streets or passed in front of small shops and kiosks. But she always made sure to avoid the site her father worked, or the roads her other family members followed. She was still ashamed and she had bumped into Aunty Halima once within the first few months after she started hawking.

“Zarah!” There was a seemingly endless pause that followed, as the two females stood face-to-face, unblinking.

“What are you doing here, what is that on your head?” She announced a little too loudly while stifling a laugh. If it initially wasn't obvious that Halima was smiling and pleased with the sight before her, her smirk made it all the more obvious. She couldn't hide her grin nor the fact that Zarah was now a hawker. Before she said anymore, Zarah turned to walk away quietly and didn't turn back till she was out of sight. That was when she decided never to pass that road ever again, and to cut ties with everyone in Imran's household. It had been a whole year now, since she last visited Imran's compound and anytime they did come to visit her, she made it quite obvious that she didn't want them around. She battled constantly within herself, if they really ever loved her or not. None of them had lifted a finger nor made efforts to keep her from being married out. And neither did they come to visit her at Mohammed's place. How quickly they abandoned and forgot about her. She blamed them for a lot, but right within her she knew she couldn't really blame them. Sadiya and Mama had tried severally to get her to visit, but she always gave one excuse or the other, and soon, they both got off her case. Besides, as she always said, she had a new family- Mama, Sadiya and Farida, Sadiya's two-year old baby. On the flip side, she also had Usman. Just the thought of Usman made her smile ferociously and uncontrollably.

It was the year 1995, and the year was already almost running out. The sun was fierce

and blazing that afternoon, no one would have speculated that the weather was bound to change, and that quickly too. Within split seconds, the whole atmosphere turned dark and a heavy rain began to fall. It was expected however, with the August rains. She ran for cover, and had to take shelter in a little phone-accessory shop. It was a yellow container with MTN logos pasted all over. The tall, slender young man, who had beautiful uncombed hair, beautiful eyes, beautiful skin and beautiful beards, and was definitely in his early twenties was out taking his sign posts in.

We sell fone acesoris 4 hia... Mu na sar da kayan waya a nan.

The sign read, not like Zarah could tell some of the words were misspelled. He offered her his narrow shop to sit till the rain subsided. He sold phone chargers, sim packs and the like. She was more than grateful to be out of the rain and into somewhere warm. She already was fully drenched and feared she'd catch a cold or have a pneumonia attack. She didn't have time to rethink her decision before accepting to sit in an enclosed space with a total stranger. A tall, beautiful stranger. She had barely sat for two minutes when she got up, saying she wanted to leave. For the first few seconds, he looked at her like one would a crazy person. And in the next few seconds, he was smiling- a beautiful smile, complementing his physical appearance. He had an overly charming smile, and Zarah unconsciously found herself smiling at his charms. He understood she felt uncomfortable to sit there. He would have wondered if she didn't show any sign of fear or the like.

“Kar ki damu. Zan je waje.” And that being said, he went to stand on the narrow pavement just in front of his shop, and with that she began to feel a little guilty. While he was out though, freezing in the cold rainy wind, she thought about him- how nice and decent he had been to her. How he understood from her gestures that she was uncomfortable. How he told her not to worry that he would stand outside. And as she thought of all these, she couldn't keep herself from thinking about his physical features as well. She blushed to herself, and that smile remained on her face for a while. He strolled in casually. The rain had stopped; only light drizzles were falling then. He smiled his heart-melting smile, and she in turn, for the first time that evening, gave her best breath-taking one. Suddenly, she didn't want to leave, and wished the rain would continue for a few minutes more. However, the more he maintained eye contact and smiled, the more she shied away, still smiling.

“What is your name?” he asked in an accent, equally as beautiful.

“ki na jin Turanci?” he asked if she understood English, seeing that she didn't respond to his question. All she did was keep her head down and smile shyly.

“Ina hearing English” she replied in defense with a little stammer, and a little confusion too. She had started replying in Hausa and then unconsciously switched to English. At this, he smiled again, almost a laugh and she felt embarrassed.

Just as he was asking her name again, she was at the same time boldly declaring “Zarah!” He told her his own name, which she echoed in her head, and repeated out slowly. It was a very simple name, but she felt like calling it herself. It did roll off her tongue very milky and had

an interesting ring to it. He smiled, and she smiled.

Sadiya observed, with time, Zarah's new glow and finally confronted her about it. That night after everyone had gone to bed, she found her way into Zarah's room, sat on the little mat with Zarah, and asked her what had been happening with her for the past five weeks. Sadiya was almost certain that it involved a man. It was easy for her to notice because they spent a whole lot of time together. And on two occasions, Zarah was peculiar about how a certain jeans and hijab made her look. She also begged Sadiya to teach her how to makeup. Zarah was afraid to reveal that she had been seeing the beautiful man, the stranger who was no longer a stranger. The man with the charming smile at the phone shop- Usman.

"He said he loves me, and he buys me gifts always. He even said he'd send me back to school." Zarah challenged, her eyes filling with tears, after seeing the look of shock on Sadiya's face. She was defending Usman, even when Sadiya hadn't said anything yet. Sadiya had confirmed her suspicions. And though that was what she had expected to hear Zarah say, it still came as a shock- a jaw-dropping shock. She gaped unbelievably, staring wildly at Zarah. She really didn't know what to say, nor even how to say it. She knew what Zarah was doing was wrong, but she was determined to be supportive no matter what.

The girl has been through a lot and deserves some happiness. She let this line of thought overrule her conscience which told her to stop Zarah. She always advocated doing what made one happy, and if Usman made Zarah happy, though through the wrong means, then it was okay. She felt eaten up by guilt and also disgusted with herself, but she also knew she couldn't bear to put Zarah in trouble- not with Mohammed, nor with the society. She understood and knew how brutal the society could get in handling cases of adultery as such. She had come to believe that men were more valued and appreciated than women with the way they were let off more easily from crimes, than women were. She had taken Zarah as a little sister, more than a co-wife. Just like Mama had taken her as a daughter.

Zarah couldn't believe her ears when Sadiya said she would let that be a secret between just both of them. It was what she so desperately prayed Sadiya would say, but it was almost too good to be true when she did say it. Zarah jumped on her, wrapping her arms around her. "Nagode" she found herself saying, as she cried freely.

"ki de yi a hankali, Zarah", Sadiya cautioned Zarah to be careful, to which Zarah nodded vigorously. Just then, Farida began to yell and scream. The two-year old was way too smart, and had a habit of waking up in the middle of the night. At 3:00am every day, as if on timer, she woke with an instant loud wail. Whenever she awoke and didn't see her mother, she

threw louder tantrums- screaming, crying, crawling down the bed and grappling in the dark frantically for her mother. She was extremely light skinned and whenever she got into one of such yelling moods, she turned red, almost like a tomato. She was the exact replica of Sadiya- a younger and fairer version. Zarah and Sadiya looked at each other briefly. They didn't realize they had spent that much time talking already. It was just a few minutes past 1am when Sadiya came into her room, tapped her awake, and they both sat on the little mat which Zarah kept in her room.

Sadiya rushed out to attend to the baby before she woke the whole compound up with her insistent yelling. Farida had already crawled down the bed and walked half-way towards the door when Sadiya stormed in. She picked her gently and quickly put the lad's mouth to her breast. Everyone told her it was about time she stopped breastfeeding her baby, but she couldn't bring herself to quit just yet. That was a bond she wasn't quite ready to break. She felt an extremely strong sense of attachment to her baby, stronger than she had ever felt in her life. Though she connected perfectly with Zarah, and sometimes Mama, none of them could be compared to what she felt for little Farida. She always vowed and made promises to her that she would never let her go through an ugly fate as long as they were both alive. Farida was the most precious little thing she ever saw, and she was excessively proud that the little creature had come from her. Though she constantly wished that Farida had a different father and that the situations surrounding her conception was an intimate, rather than a forcefully violent one. That night, Mohammed was not scheduled to be in any of his wives' room, and according to him, he had to relieve a lot of stress. Both Mama and Zarah were already asleep then when he returned, irking both of alcohol and cigarette. Sadiya had tried to protest, but after a few punches, he had his way.

September, 1996...

The fierce affair between Zarah and Usman had been ongoing for a year and a month. In a couple of months, exactly three months from then, she was going to thirteen years. They had successfully concealed their affair from everyone, except for Sadiya who knew. However, unknown to them, small gossip had started going round. Zarah and Usman never talked about the dangers involved in their continuous affair. She believed they'd never get caught, and even if they did, she was so sure he would defend her, just like she had done for him the previous year to Sadiya. After all, he loved her, just like she loved him. She had always dreaded sex with Mohammed- her rapist and husband, but with Usman it was different. He made her feel things Mohammed never could. He made her feel more like the woman she was fast blossoming into. He was many things Mohammed wasn't. he never yelled at her, even the one time they had an argument and he got angry, she expected him to hit her, but he didn't. They met virtually every day, sometimes at his shop, other times in the thick bush quite close to where his shop was. And each time, he made love to her- either in the closeness

of his shop, or the openness of the very isolated bush.

Dogo ran as fast as his long, slender legs could go. He had been nicknamed dogo because he was extremely tall, and quite slender too. He was the tallest man in the community and had been given the name Dogo while he was still a teen. With time, most people forgot what his actual name was, and some simply didn't even know that wasn't his name. There were a number of things one could make fun of from Dogo's appearance, and a lot of things to dislike about his personality. He was a known gossip- he gossiped with everyone and anyone available at the time-women, men, and sometimes, teenagers younger than he was. His big lips, which were not proportional to his narrow head and long neck made him look like a poorly drawn cartoon character. Others said he looked like a long lizard, but this was always said at his back of course. The one time a seventeen-year old called him a lizard to his hearing, he shamelessly fought the boy. Dogo, despite his slender body, surprisingly had great strength. And afterwards, everyone learned to only call him names when he was not within listening distance.

"Na gan ta. Na gan ta." Dogo ran breathlessly, announcing to Mohammed that he had seen her. He met Mohammed at the carpenter's shop where he now worked after getting fired from the site. Mohammed gave him a puzzled look questioning who he had seen. Dogo didn't wait to catch his breath first, he was keen to go on with his story.

"Zarah. I see her with boyfriend. She is shouting mmm and ahhh." He replied in poorly constructed English grammar. He always wanted to prove he could speak English, though he constantly made a fool of himself. He mimicked the sounds he heard Zarah moan as she lay naked while Usman made love to her in the bush. Before Dogo could say anymore, Mohammed was already on his motorcycle, starting the engine. Dogo didn't think twice before equally jumping on the bike, just after another man did.

To be Continued...

AUTHOR'S BIO:

In the beautiful city of Zaria, Kaduna State, Amami Yusuf, a writer, student, hairdresser and makeup artist, writes prose-fiction and poetry when she's not busy with school work or attending to clients' hair and faces.

Her love for Literature influenced her decision in undertaking a course at the department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, for a Bachelors Degree.

As an upcoming young writer, she believes strongly in the power of the pen, addressing issues eating deep into the society and truths left untold through prose-fiction and sometimes, poetry.

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LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

With Ugbede Ataboh, Nigeria



FAMILY

There are a lot of institutions mankind has created to justify and satisfy the need for emotional connections; I for one see the family unit as one of such institutions. A lot of unrealistic expectations have been placed on this ancient institution. The family unit is expected to be a safe haven; an unbreakable cartel solidified by blood, private moments and shared victories and losses over the battles of life.

These expectations seem like a huge burden to place on a unit made of imperfect individuals; Individuals who want to be available for their “loved ones” but are limited by their own financial, emotional and physical shortcomings. Growing up, my siblings and I did not lack material things and I am grateful to God for ensuring my dad was financially capable to take care of us. To

some people, true success is measured by how well one can provide for their family. This, for them is the foundation upon which family is built. I personally think the family unit is a myth; this is not to mean that it does not exist, but that the foundation upon which it was originally built has long ago been exhumed and destroyed.

Looking back now, I realize how my siblings and I were made to feel like the “Rebellious outsiders” because of our constant but failed efforts to connect with our parents on an emotional level. The fact that we were not allowed to interact with our extended family members widened the void inside us. We were drowning in a sea of emotional deprivation until it got to the point when we began to self-destruct. It is indeed a miracle that my siblings and I are still alive because we just gave up on each other at some point. We stopped trying to connect, we stopped trying to reach out, we stopped trying to be or feel human. With the passage of time came individual independence and we drifted apart from each other...that was when the wolves closed in on us and shredded us to pieces; when the vultures swooped down on us to pick on our remains.

What remains a mystery is how we are still living, how we are still breathing, how we can still laugh, how we have been able to form our individual bonds outside of each other.

Is the family unit a myth? Is the family unit real? Does that ancient unbreakable foundation still exist in some homes? Do we still have some “Strong ones” willing to risk their blood, sweat, heart and precious time to secure the unity of this sacred institution? Were Adam and Eve the last “Strong ones”? Was this sacred institution annihilated by Cain before it could form a solid bond with mankind? Are we all just marking time here on earth until the time comes for us to embark on our moribund journey?

One thing is certain though, I still hope for my own family; my own imperfect but resilient family. I hope because deep down, I still believe in the unrealistic notion of family.

THE OBSERVER

With Leo Muzivoreva, Zimbabwe



TOTEMISM:

THE MYSTICAL FAMILY DIMENSION

As time moves, most of the traditional beliefs we held as Africans are fast fading. Totems, however, have withstood the test of time. Even the most elegant looking ladies can ask their suitors what their totems are as part of getting to know them better. Whether or not they decide to stop seeing them or not, is absolutely their personal business but the essence of the matter is, Totemism still holds a lot of importance within our society. Besides, such beliefs and customs are the threads that form the humanity of a true African.

Totems were derived from wild animals as well as birds and fish, while others were derived from a cow's body parts such as the leg and the heart-this is because cattle were a symbol of wealth among African folk. The term totemism has been used to characterize a cluster of traits in the religion and in the social organization of many peoples. Totemism is manifested in various forms and types in different contexts and is most often found among populations whose traditional economies relied on hunting and gathering, mixed farming with hunting and gathering, or emphasized the raising of cattle.

The term Totem is derived from the Ojibwa word ototeman, meaning “one’s brother-sister kin.” The grammatical root, ote, signifies a blood relationship between brothers and sisters who have the same mother and who may not marry each other. In English, the word totem was introduced in 1791 by a British merchant and translator who gave it a false meaning in the belief that it designated the guardian spirit of an individual, who appeared in the form of an animal – an idea that the Ojibwa clans did indeed portray by their wearing of animal skins. It was reported at the end of the 18th century that the Ojibwa named their clans after those animals that live in the area in which they live and appear to be either friendly or fearful. The first accurate report about totemism in North America was written by a Methodist missionary, Peter Jones, himself an Ojibwa, who died in 1856 and whose report was published posthumously. According to Jones, the Great Spirit had given toodaims (“totems”) to the Ojibwa clans, and because of this act, it should never be forgotten that members of the group are related to one another and on this account may not marry among themselves.

As per the Zimbabwean cultural discourse, totems came to being through individual members of particular families desiring specific animal traits such as the lion and its behavior patterns. Perhaps, those who loved meat got the lion totem. Who knows? Anyway, those animals assumed the title of holiness and would be sacred. The totem was not to be eaten by that particular clan. Eating your totem was said to be taboo and one would lose their teeth. A way to preserve wildlife and avoid unnecessary slaughter of animal’s maybe?

A person is normally referred to by their totem after doing noble things in the community. The whole of Zimbabwe got to know that Sunday Chidzambwa was of the Mhofu totem after he led the national men’s soccer side to qualify for their maiden prestigious continental tournament. Back in the day, some men earned respect by marrying many wives or by getting high yields and they would be referred to by their totems. These traits still exist presently. Each particular totem has praise poems which basically narrate how that person’s tribe managed their day to day life with particular emphasis on industry and agricultural production and in my case, being of the Moyo totem, there is a sentence which says “Vachirera nherera” which literally means “He who takes care of the orphans” - suggesting that my ancestors had some sort of charity work going on. Above all, totems have been used to give thanks to those who would have made their families proud and most importantly, totems foster respect amongst people which in turn brings social order.

Even with the religious dilution, totemism is amongst the notable traditions which have stood the test of time. African beliefs and rituals in line with totemism have remained consistent. Zimbabweans who have become Christians still maintain elements of traditional religion particularly that of totems. Similar or rather identical totems mean the involved are basically Family!

TALKING LOVE

With HRL Prince Saka Dbosz Junior

LOOKING FOR A PLACE CALLED LOVE



Love makes the poetry, songs, flowing prose and movies. But recent happenings in the society have led some to doubt the credibility of the four letters word, love. Does this phenomenon exist, or are we living in an illusion? The answers are yes and no; depending on experience and the side of the divide you are standing.

There is no doubt that the respectability clout of the concept is fast evaporating. So called lovers today are not taking love as serious as we knew it in the past. Today some are branded gold diggers and others simply silly. People are writing labels for the affection between two persons and nobody want to take love as it is, just love for each other.

For all we know, love is ignited by something in the other. This is followed by affection and the rest follows. From the books, this is different from infatuation which

is an intense but not so deep affection mostly due to what can be seen and desired now. Love is supposed to be nurtured before it runs deep. In fact, it is a sacred thing but today followers cannot differentiate between love and infatuation. Two inexperienced people could meet and claim to be in love right on the spot, right there and then they start going out or even living together. But before you blink, they have gone their separate ways and the cycle continues. What just happened is things fell apart on the first challenge.

But they still maintain their different stand as to whether the idea is still alive or dead. For those who see love as the ability to care for the other, love still exists while those who had turned it into a commercial venture are busy re-writing the script. A close look at the scheme clearly shows what had gone wrong. Like in all aspects of our social life, love as it is has been hijacked by economic forces. Some people now ignore the basic rule of love. They have brought materialism to the understanding of love. By extension, we still have successful love lives and marriages but still trivialized by the majority. Most of our young ones who found themselves in the clutches of poverty are looking at love as a way out. We are now in the era of connections and love could as well be the path to it; this popular idea of arranged class marriage common in Nigeria today is all about economics and political connections.

On the other hand; we see people stepping out of their economic bracket to trade love in order to improve their economic situations. But how do you manage that love to accommodate your underlying ambition? The thing is love may not be all rosy and peaceful between the two people concerned. There are the challenges to be surmounted and as some said; love is still in existence, the only problem is that true love is hard to come by.

Again, there are still cases of unfaithfulness. Celebrities paid the greater price here and instances are everywhere, so I need not produce a catalogue here.

Love ...love ... love ... how do we conclude this but continue wondering whether love do really exist - db.

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WSA REVIEWS



A REVIEW OF THE POEM LITTLE TOM AT THE FISH POND

BY NGALIM JUSLINE VEEYEENYUY

Reviewer: Ojo Olumide Emmanuel

LITTLE TOM AT THE FISH POND

by
Ngalim Jusline Veeyeenyuy - Cameroon

Fish, fish, fish oh!
Can you do what I do
Like I do?
I can fish you
But you can't catch me

I know you do somethings I do
But not like I do
I breathe, you breathe
But I breathe through the lungs
You breathe through the gills

I swim, you swim
But I swim with skills
And to you it's a gift
You swim with the fins
With your fins, you can fly
With my legs I walk

But with them I can't fly
With my knees and hands
I can creep and crawl
On you I feed
But on me you can't feed

On land I live
And in water you live
On land in my house
Unlike you in water with your spouse
Yet I think I'm better.



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The poem "Little Tom at the Fish pond" crafted by a Cameroonian poet Ngalim Jusline Veeyeenyuy brings to mind the tenderness of a child's mind when he is giving a chance to explore his environment. The poem is divided into five stanzas with the first two stanzas containing five lines each, the third six lines and the last two stanzas's having five lines simultaneously. The poem provides an inspiration for children and will also teach them the basics about fish.

The first stanza began with a sonorous song, call and question to the fish "Fish, fish fish oh...Can you do what I do like I do? I can fish you but you can't catch me" (line 1-5). The exquisiteness of these lines is how it travels to the mind of the child and by extension the innateness of humans to dominate their environment.

In the second stanza, the poets acknowledged his similarity with the fish "I breathe, you breathe (stanza 2, line 3) but he was quick to establish a difference in their breathing organs, lung for human, gills for fish (Stanza 2, line 5 and 6).

In the third stanza of six lines, "Little Tom" mentioned his swimming prowess which he is capable of like the fish, adding that while he does it with skills, the fish's ability to swim is a gift (line 1-3). He accepted that the fish can fly with fins but he is proud to walk with his legs (line 4-6).

In the fourth stanza, "Little tom" is thankful that his knees and hands can creep and crawl (line 2-3) and ultimately he can make sumptuous meal for his eating pleasure out of fish but the fish is helpless (line 4-5)

In the last stanza "Little tom" described his habitat and that of the fish (1-4) and in line 5, he concluded he was better.

I like to appreciate the poet a well written work for children literature, it so simple yet educative for children.

A REVIEW OF THE POEM LESSONS FROM THE BAIT

BY AKAA ELIJAH AONDOTAKUME

Reviewer: Ojo Olumide Emmanuel



LESSONS FROM THE BAIT

Sitting happily by the seaside,
I watched the fisherman do his work.
Earthworms drew fishes from their hide,
To the painful pang of the hook.

How I wish I did not eat!
That is but a mere wish,
Mr Fish would now serve as meat,
For those that enjoys the fisherman's Fish.

What a sundry lesson to grasp,
Not all that glitters is gold.
Be careful lest you become a grasp,
In the hands of the deceiving fold.

They do come with great things to offer,
Peruse well, otherwise You'll be deceived,
Into believing solutions they can proffer,
This do they, and many lives unduly ruined.

Akaa Elijah Aondotakume
Nigeria

“Lessons from the bait” is a poem written by a Nigerian poet Akaa Elijah Aondotakume. The poem paints a vivid portrait of the certain circles of the human life using the fish perspective. It is an admonition on the wiles of certain people whose actions have engrafted sad footprints on the sand. It introduces one to how often people make hasty decisions in the name of GLORIOUS OPPORTUNITIES and in the end they recount their regrets in SORROWFUL LULLABIES. The poem has four stanzas and four lines each totalling sixteen lines in all.

Stanza one introduces the reader to the seaside where the fisherman like a gentle hangman calls the fish to the bait of his hook only for the casualty to see the outside of his domain in gory pain, “...to the painful pang of the hook” (Line 4).

In stanza two, the poet drives the reader to the mind of the fish (casualty), where regret is his meal (line 1-2). The third and the fourth line decide on the fate of the fish like Twelfik Al-hakim’s “Fate of a Cockroach”.

The third stanza provides a contemporary application to the story of the fish that falls for bait. The poet added a word of caution for those whose eyes GOLD is precious than LIFE not to jump into the swindling hands of a deceiving FOLD (line 3-4).

In the last stanza, the poet described the trades of the MEN OF THE WORLD (line 1), advising any potential casualty or lucky survivor to scrutinize and peruse well so as not to throw out their LIFE for GOLD because of cheap bait (line 2-4).

I like to acknowledge the poet for a wonderful inkling and hope people learn for the theme of the work.

FISHBONE

by Marycynthia Chinwe Okafor - Nigeria

Reviewed by Kweku Sarkwa, Ghana

There is no doubt the world holds so much mystery which is most at times not understandable. I reckon during some of my very own experiences in life have made me to always stay on guard and refrain from certain things. So no wonder Kamsi also had such unpleasant experiences leading to the making of decision in his lifetime.

His mom getting choked on a bone at the dinner table on a Sunday morning after church mass eating a fish stew prepared by Aunty Tobe. But it first started with the experience that he had of himself getting choked on a fish bone when he tried to eat once.

Secondly, it was a friend of his whose grandfather also choked on a fish hook and had to undergo surgery before he was well. Thirdly, his own younger sister who newly weaning and started enjoying okra soup prepared with liver and fresh fish got choked on a fish bone as well. Very unfortunately for him too his mother who has been encouraging him all the time to eat fish also got choked on a fish bone from the fish stew Aunty Tobe had prepared. His mom suffered and struggled on the choked bone until his mom's best friend who was a nurse rushed in to her rescue.

So the decision of not eating fish by Kamsi is quite reasonable despite even when his grandmother giving him and his siblings some fish as a source of motivation whenever they visited the iku nne. It is always good to get updated as information about some fishes were spelt out.

CREATURES OF MAGIC AND WATER.

BY Kimberly Chirodzero- Zimbabwe

Reviewed by - Lateefah Kareem

Hmmmm.

Where exactly to start.

First line:

“This is not a story about love or forgiveness.” I really thought she was kidding.

“My heart is as cold as the bottom of the sea and it nurtures only the irrepressible need for vengeance.”

These words hit a cold spot in my heart,

This short story was one so apt and creative. Taking the life of one's lover after betrayal to

save one's self.

Cruel? Evil? I think not. I think most times actions beget reactions

And even though we are responsible for how we choose to react sometimes we really do not have a choice.

This story is indeed not of forgiveness but I beg to differ that it was one of love, love so deep it led to death and vengeance in death.

Beautiful Nila falls in love with the prince disregarding all other suitors willing to worship her beauty then she finds out in the crudest way that he was going to marry her best friend because they belonged to the same social class and she was too low for him.

The prince took everything she held dear, the prince played her, yet knew he would marry her friend. She got in a brawl with her friend and the prince in an attempt to defend her friend who was his future queen, pushes her.

Nila is drowning, unconscious and she gets a deal from the sea queen or as put "mami wata" (LOL).

The deal is she would live as a mermaid if she sacrifice the life of someone she held dear while alive and she was given a one month ultimatum. Now Nila held the prince and her friend dear they both betrayed her, she was angry and vengeful and she did exactly what you are thinking, she sacrificed him for her life.

A well-deserved sacrifice if you ask me

This is not a story of forgiveness

This is a story of love and other feelings

LIKE FISH OUT OF WATER

By Peter Nnajofofor - Nigeria

Reviewed by Karuiki Karis - Nigeria

Like Fish out of Water is a well-paced SS written by Peter Nnajofofor (A Nigerian). Since no location is mentioned, the story can pass as an entirely fictional piece. Although the story is comical, it successfully showcases its underlying theme – judging people using inappropriate standards.

Obinna is a pupil at a Grade school. Obviously having difficulties coping with the presentation of subjects lessons, Obinna wears the tag of a dullard and changes school often. His breakthrough moment comes when he encounters a strange board game – chess.

The Author's choice of setting and genre made telling the story easy. His development of the character from one scene to another is remarkable – suspending predictability of the story's narration. In particular, I love the fact that there wasn't any unexpected ending.

Peter Nnaji does well to impress upon readers that everyone has intellectual and vocational abilities to excel in life – fishes don't climb trees.``

WATER TO RUBBISH

By Zerida B. Claire - Uganda

Reviewed by Nehemiah Omukhonya - Kenya

This poem is a free verse that comprises of 4 stanzas. The persona expresses her frustration in a sad tone, having met a man who left immediately after having sex with her.

In the first stanza, the persona tells of how she turned down many suitors, but finally met one man who would convince her that he was the right one. She actually thought she was lucky to have met him. The man would then take good care of her - "he did well to preserve me."

The poem is rich in imagery, as the poet gives us details of the persona's encounter with the lover.

"I'd later form a good meal... I was one fish to be eaten with care." - the lines show how careful the man had his game planned. By telling us that part of her is rotting, it shows us how she regrets.

It is important that at the end, the persona advises other ladies to get carried away by words. Because most of the words they hear aren't true.

The poet did well in the personification of fish to represent a lady.

FISH ME I DIE

by Joy Rita Ekumba - Kenya

Reviewed by Nehemiah Omukhonya - Kenya

This poem is also a free verse that comprises of 4 stanzas of 4,2,1,3 lines. On the surface, it speaks of a fish that's lured by a bait. The fish, being a fish, bites at the bait, thinking it is just food to feed on. It gets trapped and pulled out of the water, where it painfully dies.

Rich in imagery, the poem shows that the fish seeks its own death.

Analysing the poem, you see someone who gets into a habit they are not used to. At first, they think they'll just do it once and leave. On the contrary, the person gets trapped and loses himself/herself trying to please someone else. In the end, there is no way out and they have to face death.

The persona is bitter at himself/herself having fallen into the trap, and wishes they'd stayed out entirely.

This is a great poem.

BEAUTIFUL BAIT

by Nicole E Gandaho - Benin Republic

Reviewed by Ngalim Juusline Veeyenyuy - Cameroon

The "Beautiful Bait" is divided into three stanzas of unequal lines. The first stanza is full of rhetorical questions revealing the potentials and the alluring beauty of a lady. Her beauty is portrayed in her eyes, her endurance, her hope, determination, angelic voice, hair, outfit and above all her cute smile.

In stanza two, the persona continues to present the extreme beauty of the lady. She has all physical needs but there is that which she yearns for to meet fulfillment especially during rainy days. On such days she yearns for a strong pair of arms to wrap her tight.

The last stanza presents an image of sunny days and what she does. On sunny days, she sweetens and beautifies the bait and goes fishing in confidence. Her aim is to fish or search for a sunlight ray to give her comfort on her lonely rainy days. The poem ends in a rhetorical question, the persona seeks to know if the addressee will let himself to be hooked and fished by this beautiful bait.

The "Beautiful Bait" is a metaphor where the bait is personified as a beautiful and brave girl whose watchwords are determination, endurance and optimism. This extremely beautiful girl has all the physical qualities of a woman yet loneliness is in control of her life. Like a fisherman uses his bait to catch fish, she seeks to get a companion with her beauty which is compared to a bait. In the confines of her room on rainy days she is lonely, yet when seen on sunny days, one may think she has everything. Her reason for going fishing on sunny days is to fish against loneliness, to get a partner on whom to lean during rainy cold days.

The poem is also an apostrophe, where the persona addresses the addressee and tells him all the qualities of this piece of beauty and ends in a rhetorical question seeking to know if he would let himself be trapped, hooked and caught by this pretty damsel.

This excellent poem by Gandaho employs an amazing use of imagery, metaphor, personification, hyperbole just to name these. Wonderful themes like companionship, loneliness, beauty, optimism, endurance, determination among others are glaring in the poem.

The language of the poem is simple and can be easily understood. It's indeed a strong metaphorical poem.

FISH

by Legbo-G Faith - Botswana

Reviewed by Ngalim Jusline Veeyeenyuy - Cameroon

“Fish” opens with the persona’s declaration of her fancy for the amphibious creatures which she boasts about in her underworld mansion. The persona was chosen as a sea plant where she swims and her best friends are dolphins. She adds that her partner is a weird and makes her his only queen and her life ever beautiful at all weather like an ocean seal. The persona adds that her partner was her resting place, her divine hero (Hercules), her love (Cupid). When their love blossomed, they enjoyed marine life all year round, with delicious sardine fish. He nurtured her as his mermaid with jelly fish on a daily basis.

Within the twinkling of an eye their relationship sours and she no longer cherished but more of a monster (Medusa) to her once lovely partner. Her lover also transforms into a devilish mollusk and like a flesh eater destroys the womb bearing his fetus. All these metamorphosis take control of her and she becomes a monster (gorgon). She adds that her cupid now ruthless at all levels falls off her palm like a tadpole. She no longer receives gift of fish. The unity and once glamorous love now becomes a poisonous memory which drastically affects the growing fetus.

The poem ends in forecast where the persona foresees a whale man as a future son in law playing the xylophone and scaring away in the sharks intensified by a gentle breeze.

“Fish” Faith is a metaphor of a love relationship which starts in its blossom stage with showers of love, unity, gifts and enjoyment and experiences transformation and become more of a poisonous memory. It is full of supernatural and natural images mingled throughout the poem.

The poem can thus be read in two parts, the first part presents the blissful romantic days and the second part presents the sour days when pregnancy comes in and no more gifts, the very gifts that lured her into the relationship are no more. Both partners become monsters to each other and no more lovers. The poem ends in a note of hope from the persona who foresees the future as beautiful.

This poem makes an excellent use of metaphors, images, symbols and allusions. The numerous allusions show that the poet is wide read.

The language of the poem is simple but needs an extensive reader to interpret the numerous sea languages, and mythical allusions.

There are themes like love, frustration, deceit, disappointment among others which run through the poem. "Fish" remains a nice read.

THE NAUSEA OF FISH, THE VISION OF FISH, THE VISION OF THE POET, AND THE FOSSIL MUSEUM FOUND ONLY IN THE AFRICA OF MY MIND (FOR MY BROTHER)

By Abigail George - South Africa

Reviewed by Ngalim Jusline Veeyeenyuy - Cameroon

The poem is written in one stanza and the persona presents the fish's smooth movement and flying in water. The persona seeks to understand the reason behind the beauty of the fish. In order to reveal the brain behind the beauty of the fish the persona evaluates the activities of other people during the daylight. She recalls her childhood love story, her parents love story and also observes how the limits the philosophy of the fish.

While the chef eats mushroom, the cook nibbles almonds, the house wife prepares noodles, children drink milk, read comedies, watch cartoons, eat tuna fish sandwiches. On his part he watches the fish fly in water and at night he writes. As he writes the ancient story with his hands he thinks of the fish.

At dawn, he watches the distinct habitat of the sea and during the day the fish eat sea food, they also breathe, think and function during the day. The persona eats dried mango and during the persona does his duty and organise his vision and also think about the sea then he eats fish afterwards. Eating fish reminds the persona of home and his brother.

The poem is a philosophical and mental poem which presents the poet's vision buried in his old mind. There is an excellent use of images and metaphors.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS



Writers Space Africa (WSA) is calling for submissions for her October Edition. Published monthly by the African Writers Development Trust, WSA is an international literary magazine which features rich diversity of writings from African writers to a global audience..

We are seeking for submissions in the following categories:
Articles | Essays | Flash Fiction | Poetry | Children's Literature
Short Stories | Jokes | Artworks | Personalised quotation.

Deadline - September 10, 2019

Theme - **5 Minutes**

Visit - www.writersspace.net/submissions for submission guidelines and to upload your work.

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