

Top 11 Anthology Entries

20
23

Black History Month

Literary Competition

THEME:

**Roots, Bridges and Echoes:
Reclaiming Our Stories**



PROGRAMME FOR
AFRICAN LEADERSHIP®



Firoz Lalji Institute
for Africa

Top 11 Anthology Entries

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JUDGES

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Dr. William McInerney

FOREWORD

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BHM2023 Literary Competition

The African experience is hard to capture in a simple narrative. As Su'eddie, our esteemed judge for the competition likes to say, it is like a fully embroidered dress that can only be understood through the careful stitches that come together to form its entire tapestry.

This underlies the spirit behind our anthology, born from the 2023 Black History Month Literary Competition which we organised to help reclaim our stories while infusing roots, bridges, and echoes, a way of bringing in the past, present and future. The anthology is a testament to the extraordinary talent and diversity of our contributors. The entries resonate deeply, capturing the essence of our collective journey with poignancy and eloquence. Each piece in this collection reflects unique experiences, struggles, and triumphs that show the talent and diversity of our contributors, each one bringing a unique perspective to this feast of words.

From the vibrant streets of Dar es Salaam to the bustling neighbourhoods of London, from intimate personal reflections to broader social commentaries, these are broad strokes that speak of the importance of Black History beyond a month on a calendar or a singular commemorative event. Indeed, these voices in the collection show the voices of a community and together, project Ubuntu, that profound sense of interconnectedness that binds us together as a community.

This anthology would not have been possible without the dedication and passion of our judges, Victory Osarumwense, Su'ur Su'eddie Vershima Agema, and Dr. William McInerney, whose expertise and commitment ensured the selection of these outstanding works. Their guidance has been invaluable in curating a collection that truly resonates with our theme and mission.

I extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who participated in this project, including the readers who will engage with these works. Your support and enthusiasm are what make endeavours like this meaningful and impactful. As we enjoy these pieces, let's continue to reclaim and celebrate our stories, today and every day. It is imperative that we continue to share, celebrate, and reflect on our narratives before, during and beyond Black History Month.



Tosin Adebisi

Senior Manager, Programme for African Leadership.
and Project Manager, BHM Literary Competition



I am proud of the younger people whose works are featured in this volume. Each piece is like a young flower caressed by smooth winds, a reminder that change never happens without passion. As we celebrate Black History Month, I hope that in these pages you also will feel that eternal tradition of faith and possibilities.

Chude Jideonwo

Chief Executive, Joy, Inc. // Creative-in-Residence, LSE



Storytelling has long been the foundation of how we connect, both with our origins and our current realities. This anthology; Roots, Bridges, and Echoes: Reclaiming Our Stories, is a celebration of those connections, past and present. This competition is more than a commemoration of Black History Month; it is an opportunity to amplify young voices contributing to a powerful tradition of narrative reclamation, shaping not just our individual experiences, but the collective future. I look forward to discovering the depth, beauty, and wisdom in each of your contributions.

Tsitsi Dangarembga

Patron, Programme for African Leadership (PfAL)

JUDGES

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AUTHOR & POET



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Where Nations Meet

By Ayokunbi Ajijedidun

There are few things that make you more aware of yourself than being surrounded by unfamiliar faces that are nothing like yours. This is a lesson I quickly came to learn in my adolescence. As though identity development isn't enough of a confronting experience for Black girls in their formative years, being one out of the whopping total of four in an institution dominated by Chinese, Malaysian and Russian students (to name a few of the large subgroups that made up the rest of the school populace) has a particular way of shaping character.

All of a sudden, at a young age, I found myself in a space where I could no longer fly under the radar so easily. I could no longer hide behind known corners with the finesse of a child playing hide and seek in their own home. I was not exactly sure where 'home' was anymore, but I was certain that I was miles away from it. This reality was quickly affirmed to me when a purportedly well-meaning German classmate took the liberty of informing me that a person of my hue had no use for black eyeliner, considering how I was "darker than normal". It didn't take long for me to become hyper aware of my blackness, in a manner that would have been inconceivable to me as a child in Ireland or a preteen in Nigeria.

I suddenly became cognisant of my distinctly Yoruba features: the large span of my forehead and the fullness of my lips, with a smile that almost perfectly mirrors the breadth of my mother's. She doesn't wear hers nearly as wide anymore, not since my father left us – setting out on his own path and taking every semblance of stability within our family along with him. I, on the other hand, wear mine like a brilliant tattoo; plastered between my cheeks with all the same pretence and ingenuity of my mother's, her mother's, and the many women who came before her.

Much to my frustration, I began to notice the way my nose lay fat and flat on my face, slapped in place by my father as though to lay claim to a child he had no hand in raising. "The Osun nose!", as he would often hail it. I wasn't nearly so eager to associate myself with his background, although I often like to believe that perhaps these features of mine allow some element of my identity to precede me; that even in diaspora, members of my community can find their way back to one another.

I am certain that these are the parts of myself that immediately steered Fatimah, another one of the college's self-acclaimed Famous Four, in my direction. I recall us frantically introducing ourselves and delving into the timeline of our displacement when she code-switched to a language that was instantly recognisable to my sub-Saharan ears but a mystery to my Western tongue. I attempted to feign understanding with a series of nods, but the blank stare in my eyes gave me away. Mi o gbo Yoruba. I don't speak Yoruba. I'd learnt to furrow my brows while explaining this as I came to understand it as a personal failing of which I was to be embarrassed.

And often I am; embarrassed by the circumstances that denied me access to my native tongue. Embarrassed by the fact that, despite my endless pursuit of belonging outside the European space in which I don't quite fit, I am similarly out of touch with my African heritage. I am embarrassed that within me, where these nations meet, is a gaping void that I am unable to fill.



Nostalgia

By Ifeolu Olubunmi Oluronbi

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Ranti omo eni to je...

Remember the child of whom you are ...

Remember the ancestry that birthed you,
the thousands of memories that make up your DNA.

Sho ti gba gbe ni?

Did you forget?... the struggles of your ancestors,
the fight for their independence,
The soldiers that laid their lives in solidarity,
the strength that courses through your veins and makes you a formidable force.

I remember hating my own name because it was pronounced wrong, wondering why I didn't have one that
rolled easily off the tongue.

I remember ... the envy of those with names in a foreign language.

Until I understood.

The child of whom I am,
the prosperity that runs in my bloodline.

The minerals that flow beneath the earth I walked on... underneath the scorching sun.

The magic that happened in Africa.

I left home to a foreign land and met my brothers who had never been home, who craved the warmth of
grandma's tales by moonlight.

I remember laughing out loud when my aunt gave my cousin "the look " and he asked her what was wrong.

And I remember the sense of kinship I felt when I heard my language in a foreign land because I knew it'd be
the same as morse code to those who couldn't dare boast of understanding.

Some days, I'm reminded of the sacrifices that got me here, my parent's late nights and early mornings.

On the days my strength fails me... I remind myself of these things,
play some highlife and dance the stress away.

And because I am aware whose child I am, like my mother told me when I left my homeland;

Right now, I'll say ódabó,

A promise that means until we meet again.

3

No Love

By Spencer Bailey

No love for black boys who cry wolf,
hands tucked into heavy pockets.
The fleece is feral when your hood is up
no matter how softly your tears fall.

You taught your father what it means to be a man.
He bled your patience down to poison,
bitter rum straight from the faucet into your cup.
Imagine what it could have been filled with.

You rewrite your mother's dreams
into a language she will never understand.
She hates herself for living in a dutch pot,
so your scars are stained yellow by curry goat
forever lined with the fabric of a pickney
who will never be good enough.

Less love for black boys who call out for home,
stranded under makeshift bungalow turned concrete tower block
stories, told by blue fears painted obsidian
and hearts carved into shields.

You were made for more.



Rooms With(out) Me

By Gloria Kwete Bhiziki

There isn't enough of me in this room.
Only three sets of thick lips, curled into smiles.
Only two covered in midnight, starred with jewellery.
Only one wide nose accumulated by generations of black lovers.

There is too little of me in that room.
Only three icons behind podiums and bus bars.
Few who tick the Black-British African box.
The Wind-Rushing past held back by daunting white ship masts.

There is too much of me in the room.
Loud and angry sounding black tongues on the bus.
Only two swaddled in prism-light shroud us in the darkness of their averted gaze.
Flickers of fixed water-colour eyes on us.

There is enough like me.
Juxtaposing pink hair under scarves.
Brown skin under long sweeping dresses.
Only one's presence is needed to make the dusk shine amongst the deepest darkness.

5

The Crowns We Wear

By Oluwabunmi Adaramola

“Breathe, Kambili. Freaking breathe!” The words I’ve muttered for the past two minutes seem to make no difference, as the more I try to calm my racing heart, the worse my panic rises. I wipe my palms on the skirt of my pencil dress, staring at my reflection in the mirror opposite me. The face that stares back wears an expression of dread and fear, emotions that I would have never attributed to myself two years ago. I release a shaky breath and stare back, barely recognising the person I’ve become.

Every day since starting at Goldstein Whittle—GW for short—two years ago has taken me further away from the person I once was. The no-nonsense, dogged and non-conforming Kambili had quickly been replaced with this people-pleasing, docile and subservient persona that I now embodied. The change wasn’t instantaneous, rather, it developed from days of “of course I can help, I have full capacity,” nights of “it’s no problem at all, I’m more than happy to” and long weekends of “I’m okay with whatever.” Without realising it, I had slowly lost my personality and the spunk that defined me, in a bid to detract attention from the fact that I was the only black woman in my department and therefore more open to intense scrutiny.

It’s the sole reason for my momentary panic brought on by the fact that I’m wearing out my natural hair in an Afro in the office for the first time—no wigs, no braids, no protective style.

Just the standard wash and go up in an afro and bare-faced.

I’d spent the past two nights in turmoil over this decision. Back in uni, it had been easy being me and running with it, but once I got to my third year and began nursing the incessant questions of “what comes next?” I was forced to take many steps back to evaluate. And then I met Chichi at a career fair—Chimaobi to her family. Chichi was who every black diasporan woman aspired to be, because of how success had entwined itself with her that it almost seemed impossible for her to detangle herself from it.

“You’ve got to play the game, Kambili.” She’d argued on the phone the night I called her to review my first internship application. “It’s how I got here. Unfortunately, the system isn’t fair to black migrants, so sometimes it means conforming to get the results you want. If they want white, you give them white until they’re forced to acknowledge that you’ve been black all along.”

She’d been here longer than I had, I’d rationalised. So I followed her advice to the letter. Wore the straightest wigs I could find to make my appearance less jarring to my white counterparts and straightened my hair as much as I could so much that my hair had become permanently damaged. Used my middle name Elizabeth as my first name on my applications until I landed the job I wanted. And slowly, I stripped myself of the person I’d always been until I became a puppet to the whims of colonial acceptance.

Not anymore.

I was tired of pretending to be this person. I wanted—needed—to be me once again. To wear my hair in its natural state the way I'd always done, damn the supposed consequences. It's why I decided to wear my hair out today—this was me reclaiming my identity on my own terms, one step at a time. Chichi had always warned me that it was unprofessional to wear it out that way, but I no longer cared. Besides, who determined what professionalism was? And why should my natural hair determine my capability to work well?

Why did it have to be such a big deal especially when everyone else wore their natural hairs out?

My hair was for me. Not on display for validation from anyone else.

It is with this confidence that I walk out of the bathroom, head held high.

"Kimmy!" A shrill voice calls out as I make my way around the corner. For a split second, I forget it's me she's calling out for. Kimmy. The name turns my insides but I force a resigned smile and will my eyes to stop rolling the way I know they're desperate to.

Courtney was the regular corporate girl fresh out of uni. Brown hair, blue eyes and a condescending tone laced with a never-ending vile passive aggression. We were two of the youngest trainees in our department and I'd remembered her from our internship days, a fact she seemed to always conveniently forget anytime she saw me in our first year here.

"How do you pronounce your name again?" She'd asked me patronisingly looking at the name tag I proudly wore today being induction day. "Is it Kamba—Kimbi—"

"KAM-Bili," I'd responded with a genuine smile, chalking her confusion up to the fact that she was probably not used to traditional non-English names.

"Can I call you Kimmy instead? It's just easier for me to pronounce and remember." Her words had come out as a statement rather than a question and it was easier to let it go than hamper it. It was just one person, after all.

But then one person had become two people from the moment she began introducing me as "Kimmy" around the office. She was friendly enough and had been my first corporate companion at the time, so I just ran with it. Besides, Chichi had said changing my name to something easier to pronounce and playing office politics was the easiest way to get steps up the corporate ladder, especially as a black woman in a predominantly white male-oriented field. Her exact words.

I've been trying to get up the ladder for over two years now. And with each step, the journey only seemed longer and unyielding. It made me question everything—if completely losing my identity was worth this elusive career progression that only seemed to be utopian.

"It's KAM-BILI," I mutter, my words loud enough to my ears, but low enough that she took no offence to them. It's how I've survived in this place for the past two years, by keeping my head down, taking no offence and becoming agreeable even when everything within me revolted against it.

"What was that, sorry?" She asks, pretending not to have heard my words.

I shake my head and plaster another plastic smile on my face but stop myself from responding in the dismissive way I've always done.

Not anymore.

"It's KAM-Bili. Not Kimmy or Kim or whatever you've chosen to call me. It's Kambili." My voice became more assured and confident as it punctuated each word, and slowly, I could feel the shatters of my personality melding together.

It was time to fully embrace the confidence I'd always found in my true identity, albeit two years late.



A British Night Out

By Sanusi Sanusi

The two skinny girls in matching, half-pink, half-purple fringe hairstyles held their almost empty glasses tight in their hands as they tried to sip from while hopping to the music. They were most definitely teenagers. Whether old enough to be there was difficult to tell. They appeared to know what they came for and were doing everything to get it. Alcohol in hand, compulsive-dancing to whatever music was on, desultory glances across the room. They took turns yelling words into each other's ears. It is not a club per se, and there is no DJ in sight. But there's space to dance.

Freed from desire, mind and senses purified

Freed from Desire...

Na-na-na-na-na, na-na, na-na-na, na-na-na

It was his first solo night out. Never mind that he moved here almost a year ago and now know the city from Bowthorpe to Thorpe End and from Cringleford to Catton, thanks to his job, which sent him to different care homes around the city. It was the only one he could find after weeks of sending applications that led nowhere and the looming deadline of his first tuition installment. Still, he learned to love the city almost as much as he despised it. The excitement of residents when they say, "Welcome to Nor-rich!". The cosiness of strangers like the customer care staff who freely call you "my lovely" or "my darling". The unrepentant lateness of the 25 bus and 21 buses. The narrow roads and the little toy-like cars that ply them. Slow walkers, nice talkers, early sleepers. City of Stories.

Que tu cuerpo es pa' darle alegría y cosa buena

Dale a tu cuerpo alegría, Macarena

Hey Macarena, ay

He takes a swig of his pint glass, arms resting on the sticky bar counter. At least they have Guinness, even though not as good as the one back home, but it'll do for the night. Next to him, a guy in a ponytail and garish arm tattoos raises his pint of cider to him. He returns the favour. The man is satisfied and smiles in a way that makes his lips disappear. He smiles back.

So raise your glass if you are wrong

In all the right ways...

"Whereabouts you from, mate?"

"Nigeria"

"Oh. A big change, isn't it?"

"In some ways, yes. What do you know about Nigeria?"

"Not much, if I'm being honest. I know it's in Africa though."

"Yes. But that's not much of a guess, is it?"

"Haha! True. Caught me on that one. And oh yeah, I know you got some really fine players, don't you?"

"Ah. Yes. Like which ones?" "Iwo.. Iwobi? Jay Jay Okocha? Kanu Nwankwo? And there's Mikel Obi and Victor Moses at Chelsea back then."

"Yes! And Iheachio and Nnadi at Leicester City"

"Right. Forgot about those ones. That lovely duo. There is also one that's made the rounds recently in Italy. Osi..." "Osimhen. In Napoli."

"Yes! Brilliant chap, isn't he? Lovely players from Nigeria, I tell you."

"Glad you think so. You seem to know a lot about football. You love it so much, don't you?"

"I'm English ain't I? Can't be a fish and not swim, can you?"

"Fair enough. I've met a few though that don't particularly love it."

"Of course, you do find some of these occasionally."

"So how has it been for you then? How long have you been here?"

"About a year now. Just rounding off my master's. Almost done with my final project now"

"Wow. That's lovely mate. Sounds sophisticated. How's that been?"

"Haha. Not really. It's been nice while it lasted, I guess."

"That's brilliant mate. Never went to uni myself. Wasn't for me. You know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I hear you on that one. Too much stress to go through if don't fancy it."

"So, what are you doing afterward, are you looking to stay back?"

"Uhm... I'm here for a few months until my visa expires just to see what's available, you know? But very likely that I'm going back to Nigeria."

"Oh. You won't try to stay back? Isn't there a way to switch visas or something like that? Another chap at work told me about it. That's possible, isn't it?"

"Oh yeah, there is, it's called the Graduate visa. I can apply for it if I want to but..."

"You miss home then?"

"I mean, yeah. I kinda do but that's not really the point..."

"I reckon it's safe to return now to Nigeria then?"

"What do you mean by 'safe now'?"

"I mean I heard there was a coup or something like that there a few weeks back. And Russia was involved and all that. Didn't pay it too much mind, to be honest. Got my own troubles if you know what I mean."

"That's not Nigeria. That's Niger. It's a different country right next to Nigeria."

"Oh my bad mate. They do sound alike though, don't they?"

"Sure. You could say that." "So, no coups in Nigeria then?"

Why you gotta be so rude?

Don't you know I'm human too?

"No, no coups. Not since '93 anyway. We've been holding elections since '99. Held one earlier this year too."

"I see. Is he any good?" "Who?" "The prime minister of Nigeria" "You mean President." "Ah. Yes. Apologies."

"I guess it depends on who you ask. Personally, I don't expect much from any of them. Doesn't matter who." "I feel you mate. Same with the lots here. Sunak and his mates."

No fucking good at all. Pardon my

French. Labour is no good either. We're screwed, aren't we?"

He takes a last swig of his Guinness. £6.80 is enough for one night out. That's at least 7,000 Naira with the current exchange rate.

"I think I'll take one more pint" said the ponytail man to the bar staff. "For the road", he chuckled. It is his fourth one for the evening.

We're not the same

You and I

Oh, what a shame

Bye-bye



Finding Home

By Namse Peter Udosen

When the heart is restless, how does it find home? It finds solace in the present and makes it its home. Like a snail, it carries its abode on its back, hither and thither until the heart becomes a home for itself. Lagos, Calabar, Uyo, Katsina, Abuja, and Kaduna provided a home until Brighton.

Home is a complicated thing to define within the Nigerian context. Home is your origin. Home is not where you live. That's why after living in a town for 50 years you still have to go home. You have to go home to be buried. That's why my uncle, who has lived in London since the early 70s has come back home. He has come back home at a time I am leaving home. When the heart is restless, how does it find home? This question plagued my mind as I navigated the labyrinthine streets of Brighton, each footstep seeping into its history. I had arrived in the United Kingdom, hoping to find solutions to the problems that burdened my home – that's what the Chevening Scholarship tells us. However, amidst the grandeur of British academia, the reality was stark; the first problem I needed to solve was my aching heart: I am contending not only with my academic pursuits but also with my identity.

"Where are you from?" is the common introductory exchange in the multicultural Sussex community. When it comes from a non-Nigerian, it's easy to answer: Nigeria. Nigerians would probe further, "Where are you from?" This question has put me into a recurring loop all my life. I peel back memory to when Dad took us home that December and I didn't like home. The people at home made fun of the way I spoke the Ibibio language. The children at home didn't understand me. I couldn't play with them. But I must embrace home because that is where my ancestry lies. In my teenage years, I was a Calabar boy. A name people from Akwa Ibom and Cross River wore as their lapels.

At the time I was born, I was an Ibibio boy from Ikot Abasi in Cross River State. In 1986 General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida changed my home to Mkpato Enin in Akwa Ibom state. This did not stop me from being a Calabar boy.

When it was time for University, I could not get admission into universities in Lagos despite living there all my life. I was advised to go home. The University of Calabar was my choice. I packed my bags and my Omo Eko swag to the paradise city of Calabar. The Calabar boy was home! University life immersed me into new social waters. I waded in as a free spirit, bubbling within its depths. Calabar boys are having a get-together, yippee! I am excited. "You are Owo Akwa Ibom." My Calabarness is drained away like starch from rice after parboiling. I am given a lesson on the Efik and Ibibio dichotomy. I am not "Aman Isong," (son of the soil) despite my immersion into Calabar life. I still poured out myself into the city. Calabar was diverse and different cultures thrived in many sectors. I lived there at the time of the Donald Duke revolution. I blended into the entertainment boom the Calabar Festival created. My Lagos boy background provided me with enough colours to blend in.

Just as I was making myself king in Calabar, National Service came calling. I moved to a far-flung end of Nigeria. Katsina hit me like a whirlwind of culture and climate I'd never experienced before. It felt strange to be in Nigeria but still feel alien. I didn't feel a need to blend in, but my spirit of cultural solidarity soared. I was often the duckling among chicks with my jeans and t-shirts at events. I couldn't get my body to adjust to flowing jalabiyas. In the gentle embrace of Katsina, I often danced on tiptoes, wary of ancient customs that whispered tales from a world I scarcely knew. Stereotypes wove shadows in my thoughts, yet my heart found rest in the lingering sunsets and the kind smiles of souls who walked its dusty streets from Kofa Kaura to Kofa Guga. In their simple gestures and warm gazes, time

seemed to stand still, weaving a tapestry of memories I'd forever cherish. That place, with its age-old tales and warm people, kindled a new love within me. My heart, tethered to its rhythms, was reluctant to ever beat elsewhere. I had envisioned many sunsets there, making a mosaic of dreams and plans to stay. Yet, the allure of Abuja whispered, and fate, once again, had other designs.

After the vibrant hustle of Abuja, I found myself relocating to the heart of Kaduna, a place that resonated with its rhythm and tales. Kaduna and I were made for each other. I took a piece of every place I lived and buried my heart in Kaduna. Kaduna, in its vibrant hues and sounds, felt like a reincarnation of Lagos, bustling with a mosaic of souls from every corner. From my initial dwelling in Ungwan Rimi, I set forth, eager to explore every hidden backstreet. The city pulsed beneath my feet, invigorating me, and igniting a spark within me to embark on adventures. From my encounters with street kids to the echoes of laughter in Karji bars, Kaduna unfolded itself to me, chapter by chapter. And with each day, I penned my own story amidst its pages. Within its vibrant streets and countless tales, I discovered the portal that ultimately guided my steps to Brighton. My Kaduna experiences led me to new horizons, like a river to the ocean.

Brighton is a colourful microcosm of our world, interweaving diverse histories, insights, and stories. When encountering those from my roots, I wonder if I can find my rhythm amidst this vast expanse of voices and faces. Is there a corner where my heart feels at home?

The Homeward Journey of a West African TFL-er

By Renee Etokakpan

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Pain

In sharp strands running up the length of her heel, across her calf and burrowing into the base of her knee.

She flexed her toes, pressing toenails against the very tips of cramped, mud-stained boots.

'Move goal achieved! Great work'

She swipes the notification away, tucks the phone deep between her arm and torso, and settles into a light snooze for the rest of her commute.

Pain.

She chuckles.

In her waking hours, in moments restful and not, these sharp pangs had sung her into quiet. She would often find herself sat at her desk, pens spilling from their pen pot and postcards falling off the wall, tapping fingers to the rhythms of their body.

A throb in her hammer toe

A gurgle in their chest

A rattle in her spine

And a metronome in her knee.

Knuckles click and they creak, and the pain sings to them a lullaby sweet.

The train she's on sings to her too. In its quiet rumblings, in the vibration at the tip of her shoe: that unexpected harmony between a boot and a carriage wall. She closes her eyes and she listens; to the hum of bright white, the quiet of passengers neighbouring, the motion of swiping fingers, the fatigue of home-bound commuters.

They paint pictures in her eyes of a future to which she mustn't aspire.

A train terminating in Welwyn Garden City – is that a suburb she would move to one day? Or is it a bustling town with high streets overflowing, the site of a business trip: the expansion of a capitalist empire?

Or would she get off at Southgate, New? Deposit her briefcase on a mantelpiece, glide into the arms of an aproned wife, and dine on eba alongside a beaming child.

Or perhaps at nearby Finsbury Park, round up her day at a home maintained by the labour of those who aren't her?

These are futures to which she needn't aspire, needn't toil, needn't spend every waking moment planning and foreseeing and defending from that persistent sense of foreboding doom.

These are futures to which she isn't beholden.

And so she dreams, and the walls of the carriage sing to her a lullaby sweet, so sweet she can almost quieten the chilling tune of a pain well-known.

'The thing around your neck,' a Winner of Winners had once read to them. A transphobe, once, had sung to her; revealed a world beyond the gates of her Port-Harcourt school. But now she must sing her own song, as the world reveals itself both spiteful and loving. Nurturing and neglectful. Isolating.

When she'd arrived, it was from a plane crossing the Mediterranean. It did not hum. But she did.

She'd buzzed, overflowing with joy at the opportunities opening up before her. In her sandals and camo shacket, she'd arrived at a city burgeoning with plans of its own:

"My love, there is food in the garden
Take of it and eat
I am the garden
Take of my city and see
Walk her curves
Descend into her ditches
As you traverse her paths
Take of my city and live
For I am the garden
The garden of earthly delight."

We're Losing Recipes: A Second Generation Immigrant Horror Story

By Aderayo Adegbite

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Literary Competition

It's 2045. Your doe-eyed children drop their matching school bags at the door and, almost in chorus, in an even more British accent than you, ask a question you thought, or rather hoped, would never leave their mouths; "Mummy, can we have iyan and egusi like we have at Nan and Grandad's house?". (Their friends at school say Nan and Grandad, who are you to say otherwise?) It is asked so innocently that you feel a pang of guilt for the immediate emotional turmoil it evokes, but you can't help it. Here your children are, the same ones you worried were becoming too detached from their culture, actively seeking traditional Nigerian food. You should be overjoyed! But the last time you tried to make it, without being under the loving albeit watchful eye of your mother, everything went wrong. The pounded yam too dense, the egusi soup too runny. Your husband, equally Black British and equally useless in the kitchen, sang its praises while poking the food around (with a fork, the first red flag), an unsung sign of disapproval. Discouraged, you never attempted again, convinced a weekly trip to your parents' would reinforce the bridge between your children's British and Nigerian culture while yours crumbled.

But you would not let it fall. You would not fail. You stop your fingers from lingering before they instinctively dial the number of your own mummy, grabbing your car keys instead. You live far from it now, but you decide to go to your childhood international supermarket in the hopes that walking in the same aisles as your parents did many moons ago would awaken your dormant culinary skills. You haven't been here in a while, but the streets begin to feel familiar, the rich smells and colours of your childhood invading your senses.

Then something else invades.

As you edge closer, lovably clashing yellows and reds dim to agreeable, soulless beiges.

Your old hair shop, now a bakery. The weekend clothes market whose stalls you spent your afternoons leafing through, a reception to a block of precariously positioned residential towers, with a beautiful and lucrative view of the Thames. And your beloved destination, the supermarket where your mum or dad spent hours gisting with friends, much to your annoyance then, an experimental board-game-slash-iced-latte spot.

You wonder what gist they could possibly be having in an experimental board-game-slash-iced-latte spot.

Petrified that the sun-dried, oak-aged air would rewire your brain and trap you in that beige open-air cage forever more, you retreat into your car and drive along the last vaguely familiar streets of your childhood until you come across another supermarket.

The aisles are arranged differently from the one you frequented, the meat section is front and centre instead of on the right-hand side, and it is card only here. But you can still hear the warm sounds of tones rising and falling, voices competing for dominance in the open conversation, arguing amicably about politics, prices, and the meaning of the psalm one had studied that morning. Cultures coming together, never clashing, accents hailing from all across the world fusing to sing the common, underlying hum of the reason that they are all there; missing the food from home. Missing home. Perhaps that was why your parents, your age when they moved to England, immediately connected to the workers, or any other immigrant they happened to come across, regardless of their origin. The familiarity bred in moving to a place unfamiliar. An unspoken solidarity in the face of the alienation felt loud and clear.

Back at home, you spread your ingredients out on the table and get to work. The process is easy enough to remember, whiling away the hours in the kitchen as a child watching and helping your mum or dad prepare to fill your bellies and souls. But much like a dance you know all the steps to, technicality means nothing. You could sense yourself second-guessing the steps, counting the beats in your head, perpetually comparing yourself to and remembering the dancer who executed it perfectly. And perhaps the ingredients could sense this, only releasing their flavours fully to those who could do them justice. And maybe they sensed something was missing. Something would always be missing.

The dish looked visually identical to your parents' this time. But it didn't taste like home. Wherever that was.

You take your children to Nigeria and make it a point to do it without your parents. When they're gone, what is your connection? Blood, a name?

To say where you're from without a clause. To step on soil and know that you're home.

You are no longer the timid child hiding behind your mother at the market, prepped beforehand to remain silent so your conspicuous accent didn't increase prices. You are the mother. So, at the market, you make the effort to speak your language. A language that has aged without you (why did you expect it to stay still?), a language that ages you as you speak it with your agemates. An accent that, your anglicised tongue weathered too sharp, too cold to pronounce the honeyed words like a native, tells on you instantly. Although you had a feeling they knew before you even uttered a word. They could smell it on you, a foreignness, not of blood but of being.

Smile weakened; price doubled.

You give up.

You feel a sweaty squeeze on your hand and look down at your restless child.

"Mummy, I don't like it here. When is our flight home?"

Invisible Threads: Mukaile's Journey

By Tracy Kalinjuna

In Dar's vibrant cadence, where shadows waltzed, unfolded Mukaile, Tanzanian pulse unfroze.
From urban rhythms to Dundee's muted hum, A migration tale began; threads still undone.

Loneliness, a spectre in Dundee's cool embrace,
Silent conversations in unfamiliar grace.

Through the Firth's whispers, past Tay's tranquil flow, a city girl's metamorphosis, both swift and slow.
Concrete stories of Dar dissolved in Scottish mist, Yet Swahili echoes persisted, a nostalgic twist.
In cobblestone dreams where memories are spun A Tanzanian spirit under Scotland's grey sun.

"Mti wenye matunda ndio unaopigwa mawe."
A tree bearing fruit is the one pelted with stones.

Nostalgia, not a relic, but a living stream,
In quiet alleys, where dreams took their gleam.

Five Tanzanian hearts, a diaspora's rhyme, In Dundee's commune, tales weaving through time.
Oh, Dundee, with your ancient granite face, Each narrow lane, a chapter, a sacred space.
From Dar's vivid sprawl to Dundee's serene sway, a Tanzanian soul navigating shades of grey.

Solitude, a silent partner in the Scottish gloom, yet, within shared glances, a Tanzanian bloom.
A circle of five, a community's found sound, In each other's silences, our hearts resound.
So here I stand in Dundee's twilight glow, A city girl's odyssey, an ebb, a flow.
From Dar's vibrant rhythms to Scotland's rhyme,
In this fusion, I found my Dundee time.

In Dundee's fabric, Tanzanian threads intertwine,
A narrative woven, each quiet alley, a line.
Through cobblestone verses, emotions gently rhyme,
Mukaile's journey, a tapestry unfurls, transcending time.



I am Not Black!!!

By Progress Oberiko

BHM2023

Literary Competition

I am not BLACK!!!

This was a reply I got from an acquaintance who recently arrived in the UK from Nigeria. I was having a conversation with this fellow and asked him if he was the only Black student in his class and he retorted: "But I am not Black"

I could feel the resentment in his voice and how much he hated being described as "Black".

Instead of empathizing with him, I burst into laughter, because just like my friend, I also felt the same way, rejecting blackness, when I first arrived in the UK, not because there's anything wrong with being Black (Black don't crack innit?), but because of the labels attached to being Black, and within the context that blackness is often used, which is most often in crime, disruption, poverty. These were the labels I was rejecting!

Furthermore, this young man I was chatting with also didn't believe he was Black because he was actually light-skinned. Obviously in Nigeria, you would not describe someone with his skin colour as Black; which is why I understood his pushback about Blackness.

I was never Black until I arrived in the UK, and the concept of race is something I am still trying to fully unpack even after living in the UK for over 3yrs! I've since launched an inquiry into race after gaining this "new imposed identity" of Blackness!

I also rejected being Black because we're not Black in Nigeria! The concept of race was never a topic in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, I'm just a person! My identity was never based on my skin colour. I would either be described as tall, slim, young, etc. But in the UK, whenever I was described as Black, it was almost as if, my skin colour came before any level of excellence I exude, and my entire persona, talents, skills, and my whole identity seemed to be covered up with just a colour, which often didn't represent something positive. It hits you differently when you watch films about racism (which is the case in Nigeria) and when you get to experience racism firsthand.

- I remember being followed in a shop by the shop security or being stalked by the shopkeepers many times when I went shopping
 - People moving seats or refusing to take a seat beside you on the train or bus just because you are a Black person sitting there
 - People making assumptions and profiling you based on your skin colour
- These experiences, and many more, are the reasons why that fellow exclaimed: "I am not Black"!

However, I have come to attach a new definition to the term Black; for me, being Black reflects excellence, beauty, intelligence, and everything in between.

When you're referring to these qualities, then you can call me Black!

We all have a role to play in breaking these stereotypes and making everyone feel loved and celebrated for who they are; simply because they're humans! And not based on anything else!

And this is part of the reason why we celebrate Black History Month.

Even though the celebration does look dry and somewhat silent in the UK, we all have our individual roles to play privately and publicly in October and beyond!

Happy Black History Month!

PARTNERS

Top 11 Anthology Entries

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