

Contemporary Ghanaian Writers Series
Issue II

*How
to
Write
My
Country's
Name*

A Collection of
Poems and Short Stories

How to Write My Country's Name

Published by **Contemporary Ghanaian Writers Series**

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Cover art by **Awo Twumwaah**

Contents

Foreword

—a gymnasium of no bodybuilding.	Abeiku Arhin Tsiwah	5
Recourse for the Dying	Akua Antwiwaa	6
Homemakers	jflongdon	7
Caterpillar Days	Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo	9
Before the Sunrise...	Jasmine Assan	10
Silence of the sheep	s. Asamoah	11
Manifesto	Jay Kophy	13
.of guts.	.moshood	14
The Ghanaian Dream	Abeiku Hammond	16
However Long the Night	Fui Can Tamakloe	17
A Means to An End	Nana Obeng-Koranteng	20
This Week, I Forgot My Name	Joewackle J. Kusi	22
The Unsettling Settles...	Richie O	29
Night life	Kwaku Quansah	31
Set her house on fire. And she will serve you with water.	Invictus K. Sedoame	32
She Shall Be Called	Afua Awo Twumwaah	33
The Revolution Will Not Be Televised	Karen Donkor	35
Scorching Moon	Kofi Konadu Berko	37
Who Do You Confess as God?	Sandra Hyde	40
Ehen na yere ko yi	Abena Awuku	42
Painful Peace	Sena Cobblah	45
red means run	Raphaela Rockson	47
Internalizing Pain	Afi Koasi	50
Clenched Fist	K.K. Mensah	52
Indelible mark	Victory Osarumwense	53

I am not a tribe, I am human.	Yayra Bassah	56
Intersectionality	Sena Frost	57
A-mask	Ann Fesu	59
The charcoal child	Henneh Kyereh Kwaku	60
Ɔman wei	Ama Benewaa T.	61
I Still Call It Home	Kennetha Brown	63
Contributors' Bio		

Foreword

There is an idea that Kofi Anyidoho presents in his poems. He uses ‘dance’ and ‘cloth’ to illustrate the point of continuity - tradition. A woven cloth grows taller because a piece is added to the old half. Dance, on the other hand, connotes dialogue.

These metaphors are offerings on how we should think. That there can never be the present without the past. That we can never go ahead without dialoguing.

Take this as a matter of contemplation. The BBC radio producer Henry Swanzy left London for Accra in 1954. Acclaimed as the producer of the BBC’s Caribbean Voices, he was seconded as the head of programmes to the Ghana Broadcasting System where he worked till 1958. In the Gold Coast, later Ghana, he produced *The Singing Net*. The programme introduced many members of Ghana’s first generation of writers to a wider listenership.

Less than a century earlier, radio as a technology had been used to rally the Gold Coasters’ support for the British Allied Forces in the World Wars. But Swanzy ushered in a new path, of what public memory could be. The contributions to the radio programme became a print anthology called *Voices of Ghana (1958)*, ably edited by Swanzy himself.

The writers you will find in this anthology are markedly different from those that Swanzy published, both on radio and in print. The former comes from a generation that grew up on the internet and are receptive to myriad of tendencies as to the form of a literary genre.

we ask google, who are we?

google says how to marry us. how not to marry us.

If you are from an earlier generation, you will most likely be at loss with the above lines from Awo Twumwaah’s *She Shall Be Called*. It is a true attribute to contemporaneity.

Fui Can Tamakloe’s short story *However Long the Night* is written entirely in pidgin. Hitherto, whether reading Ayi Kwei Armah’s novel *Fragments* or Amu Djoletto’s *Money Galore*, you find that pidgin, or broken English, are spoken by men of Northern extraction and are occupants of

menial jobs in urban Accra. In this sense, language, the brokenness of English, becomes an aspirational marker.

In Tamakloe's short story, the protagonist is a university graduate but is expressive in pidgin. Across generations, with the inventiveness of language, characters come to share the same fate of poverty, notwithstanding their diverse origins.

You will find that almost all the poems are prosaic. Their politics transcends a nationalist notion. Rather, even as they are firmly rooted in the local, they branch into a sense of American-favoured globalism.

This is best seen in Jay Kophy's poem *Manifesto*. The poem seems to be about the death of a black boy. For a poet based in Ghana, it will seem that it is an over-reach to talk about racial politics in America and possibly, Europe. Suffice to say, it plays out differently in Ghana. This is how the poet chooses to (un)say what he wants.

The politics is the personal, even in love. Victory Osas's short story is a delightful read. It is witty and when you are done reading, you will scold yourself for the taking the story seriously. Love unburdens you. It sets you free.

I approach contemporaneity with skepticism. Because it only affords immediacy. But sometimes the facility of immediacy is an illusion. It is myopic. It does not give us the space to assess happenings in their totality.

Primarily, I am relying on the Akan proverb which translates that you do not fight ants while standing in them. Regardless, here is my hope. My hope is that this work is not only read on its strength. But also, on its vision and promise.

Here is to the many voices that we have been waiting on. And this arrival in itself is not of being. It is of becoming, of the things to come.

Kwabena Agyare Yeboah

Nowhere cool, sister, ain't nowhere cool
Therefore, let me hide here among the thorns, while I dine on wild desert grain
And if they should ask you of me, tell them the name of the game was life and I never learnt the
rules.

—Ama Ata Aidoo

—a gymnasium of no bodybuilding.

Abeiku Arhin Tsiwah

. . . sandstones have no monikers//wear the flag of your country//like a quipster

what is a country, a bile of waterfall
oozing from your father's mistakes?

here in this country, when it rains — it rains bloodstones —
tiny pebbles of cape coast wasting your skin

what is a country, a cousin's fear
gathered under a bludgeon,

a poet's emotions crawling under a
tomato plant on a sandy field?

within a rock, fire doesn't borrow its
name—it is transitory
on this thatch land, rainfall is a
catchphrase

what is a country, a moving train
from high inflation to high taxes?

Recourse for the Dying

(After Robyn Schiff's *Dawn of the Dead*)

Akua Antwiwaa

Once upon a time

When I thought I knew everything

My mama took me outside

And showed me all the

Ways to die while shopping

For vegetables at the mall

After that I learned that everything is

A tinkering for some kind of death:

marigolds rambling on front steps

soft kisses under the sun

whispering careless things onto winds

I started to ask all these questions:

How to get some poetic justice? To be unafraid of your zombified self?

To love a still heart?

And in this way

I emerged from the mystery loop

Seeking a boorish thirst

That loves everything in magnitudes

Homemakers

jflongdon

I watch my dad pass the bowl of soup around

I feel a surge of gratitude

I'm thankful

Which is weird

I watch my little family

My mom with the grouchy face

Being picky and grumpy as usual

Tired of life

Tired of love

Shackled by society's definition of

what a mother and wife should be

My dad with the patient demeanor

Living to the fullest

Loving to the fullest

Living thoroughly

I watch my sister with the love of her life

A mini-her whose biggest achievement in life

at the moment was yelling 'Mama' all day

With great enthusiasm

I watched this tiny human with love, in love

How could his daddy not stick around to fall in love too?

Fuck that ugly ass nigga

I watch my brother pass the bowl of soup around

Proud of him and the man he's becoming

A black man steadily building his empire

The Lord help him

I watch my little family

And breathe in

I feel a surge of gratitude

And I am thankful

Caterpillar Days

Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo

you think about nine
and it's one big compound
the water tank and night stars
your grandma's voice
attributing the sudden power outage
to a sitting president

you think about ten
and all you hear are
6AM radio jingles
6:30AM morning news;
good morning in seven different languages
half of which you can't verify
and 7:00AM school bells

eleven brings call cards and
phone booths
noon queues and
prank calls

twelve comes with the wishes the
desire to belong
some consciousness that envelopes like
you've never experienced before

thirteen marks the beginning of
your caterpillar days.

Before the Sunrise...

Jasmine Assan

It's on one of these days that I miss it,
The long-standing tradition of mom's yelling,
My consistent alarm clock that never fails.
The silent eye roll; the only rebellious act that protects my sanity.
Mind clouded from sleep,
Taking seconds to ponder,
"What was I supposed to do this morning?"
I chuckle to myself knowing that her
sing song octaves would answer the riddle presented,
An itinerary already journeyed; a call long answered.

Her scorching rage battling with my own,
Tumbling limbs and sheets scream my frustration.
It's inevitable, the countless losses encountered
in this battle only add to the scars of generations past.
Daughters that had to follow the same beaten road,
Balancing the notion of respect from the old world and the exploration of the new.
Curious minds contemplate the unbending directive.

Steps fashioned from habit put an end to the medley sounding.
Performing roles established by culture,
Enraging my modern soul.
Yet there I stand, in the dawning of the day,
Adhering to the notions of the old world,
My ascribed pre-birth womanly qualities.
Brooms hit the dirt floor picking up a different song.
Initializing the start to the rising of another day, and an end to the battle of wills.

Silence of the sheep

s. Asamoah

A septuagenarian once said, "be sheep and not spectators"

They teach sheep pale magic is more magical than the dark arts.
In a true story; two sorcerers; one like them, the other pale, die.
Yet Boasiako receives NO hallelujah nor book deal
Nor likes nor follows.

In this story, they teach lamb;
The goodness of austere pale men
And how to be sheepish of our own wool.

The shepherd trots his sceptre
Or to the lamb— murder weapon
pilgrimed with the silence of the sheep
On this Animal farm where lambs learn [to graze] under trees.
Spare the lamb, spoil the meat.

In this story, "Silence is golden"
More golden than a Gold Coast?

In this story, Ananse's Coast teaches you white by hiding black,
explains blue by showing you red.

At the slaughter— Examiner:

Baa baa black sheep

have you any wool?

Sheep chew, and pour:

Yes sir, Master, three bags full

One for the Wester

One for the States

One for the little Reds who live down the 'A'.

Manifesto

Jay Kophy

look / another dead black boy / certificate in hand / is walking out of the classroom more
empty / than a forest with no tree it can call its own / more map-less than smoke / from a fire
that is hungry enough to consume / whatever it attracts to its light / without leaving a name for
remembrance / as if the dead only die to be remembered / as if all the dead boys / who are
casualties of hunger / remembered to die but chose to forget their names / and when I say
names / I mean the muscles that swell in your chest / when your voice is not ashamed of its
nakedness like a full moon / or an open sky / that shows us how faithlessness is eating into us /
but today in the news / a man told us he's the only one / who can bring the dead boys back to
life / and we believed him / enough / to forget that the living / are too selfish to help direct a
ghost back into its body when it is lost / he told us / how he was going to breathe air / into the
lungs of the dead boys / and reshape them into the sound of rain falling on dry land / so they
don't keep filling their mouths with namelessness / he told us / how he was going to fill their
hands with water / to cure the hollowness in their palms / how he was going to return softness
to their tongues / how he was going to bury in their throats a laughter / so thick / it could
never decay / he told us all this / while his belly / was heavy with the dead boys' dreams

.of guts.

.moshood

years of transporting load on his shoulders gave birth to the permanent hunch in his posture. perhaps they gave him his big, strong muscles, too; for he barely ever did any intentional exercising. woman did his work as a carrier at the Dome Market and lived in a kiosk, some fifty metres away. on a typical day, he spent his mornings - and afternoons - ferrying sacksful of goods - normally foodstuff - to and from the market. in the evenings, he would meet up with friends at their base, and they would smoke, eat, play music from their phones, all while they chitchatted. later, at night, he would retire to his place of residence, to sleep.

on nights when his carnal desires were too oppressive to be resisted, woman leapt to the closest brothel to buy his loins some freedom. on other nights, when his financial situation wouldn't allow, he would lock himself up in his kiosk, watch porn, and rub himself to ejaculation. all climax be climax, of course. but then again, woman acknowledged that there was no other alternative that came even an inch's close to being as exhilarating as the flesh-against-flesh thing itself. he says to his friends every other time they talk sex, how he misses fucking – raw - with a romantic partner.

the last time he had one, when he was in a relationship, was some three years ago. the relationship had ended quite badly. he was left depressed; even contemplated suicide for a long while afterwards. that was the third time being heartbroken by a woman he loved. he swore, after recovering from it all, to live by the words of a popular West African note of caution: *fear woman...* if they were feeling extra generous, the giver of this rather silly piece of advice would add, for good measure: *...and save your life*. woman had decided that he was going to live; and therefore, those were the words he was going to live by. whenever he told his story of heartbreaks and of survival thenceforth, he would end it with his new life partners, the two words: fear, woman. that became his nickname. over time, people just called him 'woman' and he would respond with 'fear am.' and that was how he got his name, woman.

it was mid-morning and the weather was still very cold; the result of a downpour at dawn. woman had planned when he woke up in the morning, that the end of the day was going to see him make a trip to the brothel.

he was at work now, and had just completed his first transaction for the day. he was returning to the main entrance of the market where there was, every workday, an invariably benign tussle for prospective customers, between him and his colleagues. as he walked back, he fetched the only paper money on him - a 50GHS denomination - out of his pocket and made to fold it together with the 5GHS note he'd just received for his service.

somehow, his grasp faltered and the 50GHS note was whizzed away by the breeze. woman gave chase but wasn't quite fast enough to save his money from the jaws of the visibly pregnant goat whose meal of plain papers had been garnished with a golden-brown one, by the kind wind.

when he realized that his 50GHS could not be salvaged – for, the goat was almost done chewing it up when woman got to it - he landed a vicious kick onto the goat's bump; which delivered the poor animal, a piercing squeal erupting from its insides, right in the middle of the street. the front wheel of an oncoming vehicle which was travelling at a speed that was criminal for a back street, crushed the goat into a bloody, intestinal flatness. the driver did not stop.

woman went down on all fours and burst into wailing. but what was he crying for? his money? the dead goat and the unborn kid that was in her stomach? or, was woman shedding all those tears for something else koraa?

The Ghanaian Dream

Abeiku Hammond

No other place succeeds in milking me of all emotions and feelings simultaneously. The anger, the happiness, the pain, the pleasure, the pessimism, the peace and the pride. From the silent street corners to the loud blaring horns in the city centers. I walk around this land with mixed feelings of pent up hope, sometimes exploding as hopelessness; other times, imploding as indifference and no matter how different we may be, we always find common ground. We've all had aspirations of being engaged in a host of exotic professions but the harsh reality of our terrain bursts our tyres...sorry, our bubbles.

Now shut up and fix the knot of your tie because you will not have time for that during the next 8 hours, as you deplete your energy to fill up the pockets of others.

Under the impression that your pocket is being filled, oblivious of that rat sized hole underneath.

Maybe the ideal situation would be to pick myself out of this 'rat hole' of an economy and economy class myself into a utopia of sorts. But my mission of marching out of this maze may never manifest because even for that, I'll need money first. The consular officer just handed me my passport; visa page still empty. I cry till my lacrimal glands are empty five bank accounts. All empty. Zoom lion just visited, trash can is empty. I last ate at 8am. It's now 8pm. Stomach empty.

To many, the Ghanaian dream is having a green card and sending down postcards. To others, it is a family, a car, a three-bedroom house and a garden in the backyard. To some, it is just finding the next meal. But for whichever group, the ultimate Ghanaian dream is to survive.

However Long the Night

Fui Can-Tamakloe

“However long the night, the dawn will surely break” - Hausa proverb

The bus inside make cold.

I sit inside VIP buses most of my university years, and the few years wey come after that, but today, for the first time, I no fit sleep for inside. I no fit sleep sekof I dey think. That be the thing nobody dey tell you as you dey grow. Adulthood all be thinking. If you wake up you dey think about how your day go start. If e start, you dey think about how e go end. You dey bed inside, you dey think of job. You dey job side, you dey think of bed. All be thinking. Life be thinking.

Right now, we just commot from Suhum. We dey road top dey go Kumasi. I dey think of my last ten cedi e dey my body. As I giddop this morning-t, the money all e dey me be fifty-five cedis. Forty-five cedis for VIP bus ticket, ten cedis for taxi make I take catch house. That one sef ebi Lanky wey take give me sekof I tell am sey I finish plus Accra, I dey go back to Kumasi. I tell am sey small time I go take send am. I go force take send am. This be time wey I no go fit burn any bridge. Sekof ebi the small small help I dey get wey fit make I survive till now. I no chop since yestee gbeke but I no sheda dey hong too. How you go think of your stomach if you dey bleed?

Yestee, as Lanky dey give me the dough, then e dey tell me say I lose vim too early. I for hold on small. God’s time be the best. I tell am sey I hold on two full years with no support, I no get any strength hold on again. Check like we dey gym wey I dey do pull-ups. My fingers all taya dey hold on. Where I no send my CV go? Wey tweet I no follow-up on? I no dey sleep, I dey use bundle on LinkedIn every minute like I be fraud boy. Wey job agency for Accra here no chop my fifty cedis for registration fee? I taya chale.

Lanky get job wey dey help am small small, but ein sef that no be where he dey get money chop from. As we dey uni dey fool, Lanky always get plan. He learn photography wey rydee ebi the Saturday wedding photos e dey cot wey dey sustain am. But Lanky then me no be the same. I no

know how them dey cot photo. I be organised, wey I get Political Science degree, but I no get any talent I fit take make money. So I dey Accra dey bleed nonstop for two years.

Some man dey snore for the back of the bus make we all turn dey watch am. The driver dey play Daddy Lumba ein music. I want tell am sey make he increase the volume sekof I taya the noise. The noise dey commot my head inside. The noise dey my head inside sekof the thinking be too much. I dey sit inside VIP wey make cold pass Kumasi as Harmattan season dey, but I dey sweat like goat wey see aboki ein knife. All sekof I dey think about what I go tell oldgirl. Sey I no fit find anything do for Accra? Sey I try but life just no dey go on better for me? Sey I taya? I sure sey she go ask me how I fit taya? How I go fit taya as she no see the benefits of ein struggles? I no dey do this thing for myself, I dey do for am. The job I dey go job, ebi sekof I want make she relax for Benz inside as she dey go town. I want make she move from the house wey we rent to wona own place. I want make ein mates see am dey shy sekof she dey hold pass them. But I dey inside VIP bus dey think sekof I chop twenty-seven wey I no get one cedi sef for my bank account inside. All I get be dreams. My dreams sef I take some dash. As I start dey search job, if somebody ask me sey what my salary expectations be, I dey tell them 4k after tax. Of course e dey make sense. I be young guy, Political Science degree, this be normal market price. First three months I no dey get call back, I start dey reduce am. 3k after tax. E catch some point them ask me then I want tell them say anything for dema heart them want take give me I go take. Sekof the up-and-down start dey taya me.

E no keep wey we reach Linda Dor. Everybody e dey go Kumasi regularly know Linda Dor. Ebi highway rest-stop. If your bus stop for there e mean sey you finish half the journey. People dey get down from the bus dey buy food then drinks. Some of them too dey go piss. I no comot from the bus, sekof today I no get anything do for Linda Dor. What if I comot wey the bus lef? I never hear sey this thing happen before but I no want test am. I no get money too sey I go buy meatpie or something, so here nor I go sit for.

Fifteen minutes the bus start move again. This driver dey like speed too much. I sure sey we go reach Kumasi before the time wey them talk me sef. I want tell the driver sey make he slow down, some of us no dey in a hurry like that. I get sef I no go go house. I go go base for my paddies

demma there. I no want watch oldgirl ein face tell am sey I fail. I no want watch oldboy ein face tell am sey I be useless. I dey think wey I start fall asleep.

I open my eyes then we dey station already. Some passengers already giddown for road top before we reach. The ones wey e lef dey comot one one. I comot wey I go the side of the car. The driver show me the bags e lef. I see my bags wey I take them. I dey hold them wey I hear my name. As I turn I see sey my oldboy dey stand there dey watch me. I no understand sef. Ebi my sister p3 know sey I dey come Kumasi. I tell am sey make she no tell anybody I dey come. But be like she tell my old boy sekof e come plus ein old Opel Astra sey e dey come pick me. I put my bag for boot wey I sit down. As my old boy start the engine, I dey watch outside. More people dey enter bus dey lef Kumasi. The hawker women dey try sell them drinks then other things for the journey. My oldboy tap my thigh wey I turn watch am. E no watch me, e dey watch the road sekof e dey drive. He ask me how the journey dey, wey I tell am sey ebi cool.

How things for Accra dey? I no fit answer sef.

Why e no dey hear from me? I no know what I go tell am.

My whole life my oldboy dey tell me sey by the time e chop fifteen then e dey watch ein siblings all. How I go fit tell am sey I chop twenty-something years, but I no fit watch myself sef? How I go find way talk my oldboy sey e born son wey no be man?

We reach Asafo traffic light wey e turn red. Oldboy turn dey watch me proper. He smile wey e tell me sey my oldgirl prepare soup put down. Everybody for house make happy sey I dey come sekof fufu dey wey I for pound. He take ein hands pass my hair inside like I be kiddie. He laugh small wey e tell me sey, he know sey Accra hard. Life too had. But make I no worry. As for life dee e always go hard. But as we no die, morrow always go be another day for trying.

The light turn green wey my old boy start accelerate. I turn my face watch the window.

I no want make e see sey I dey cry.

A Means to An End

Nana Obeng-Koranteng

For the love I have for my life, I am ready to wage war by all and any means. Before you judge me know that I only do what I do as a means to an end. They say all is fair in love and war and that means only the end justifies the means. If my options are by hook or by crook and I have no bait to hook, then surely my path is crooked. And more often than not, success is measured in currency so I am on some Mobile Money schemes. Call it greed but the seven deadly sins form a rainbow and that's my best path to a pot of gold.

Poverty is violence and that is the truth; Whoever says the best things in life are free is a liar. Life is an uneven ladder and I'm trying to climb my way to the top one way or the other. Education is the long way but this life is short so a typical 9 - 5 job till I'm 60 is not an option. Watched my parents' slave away their whole lives and have nothing to show for it at the end. I'd probably never land a job at a bank but I did hack a bank or two to make my withdrawal. Call it greed but I broke the long cycle of poverty and generations after me will be set for life.

Sometimes I feel bad but seeing all my people happy makes me feel good so I guess it cancels out. And best believe I look good too, the drip is truly forever regardless of whose credit card was charged. The colonizers invaded our lands with religious fraud and gentrified our people which is identity fraud. We all create narratives to justify what we do and the way I see it this is payback for our ancestors. Our ancestors built pyramids but they robbed all the artifacts so we are rebuilding pyramid schemes. Call me a villain but this unsung hero is hungry so I eat the rich like a modern-day black Robin Hood. They say not having money is the root of all evil so writing a bad cheque is my attempt at being pious. As soon as the client confirms the transfer, I pay a tenth as tithes so I know I am good with God. Money makes the world go around and I'm no square peg so I set up a dummy company. Sorry if you become a victim but consider it as a contribution towards a worthy-cause. Call me a sinner but I know I'll probably not make it to heaven so I am making my paradise on Earth.

This world is a stage and we are all actors or whatever it is the English teacher said that dead guy said. Before you point a finger, know we are all frauds in one way or the other at one point or the other. Something to get in the door like a little lie on the CV. Do you really work well under pressure? A little something for validation or a veil to hide who we really are from ourselves or the world. We all really are in this together so don't blame me just because I am more enterprising with it. Call me a hypocrite for walking this path but you walk the same path with silencers on your feet.

Eventually, hero or villain, one day we must return to the dust from which we all came. But before I am dead and gone, I hope I can look back at my life with some sort of contentment. I hope those who come after me know that I did all I did just to put silver spoons in their mouths. I hope fond memories of me live on in the hearts and minds of the people I love. May food and drink abound at my funeral. May the mourners feast on the sweat of my victims. Call me vain but all I have been through, burying me in anything but a gold coffin sounds fraudulent.

This Week, I Forgot My Name

Joewackle J. Kusi

A Mother's Journey.

She has been thinking of death a lot lately. Her own death to be precise. This has kept her up for the most nights; the fear of dying in her sleep. And she always prays that if it happens, it should happen in the land where her umbilical cord was buried, not a land where she's a stranger.

Her fear is so strong she could smell it in the room. It's always that distinct smell that came with this feeling. The old butterfly sewing machine took her back to how the smell found its way through her nostrils, into her head, her brains, and had finally stayed there only to manifest when this fear crept in. It was in 1977 or 1978, she can't remember the exact year but it was in April, and the butterflies were more visible that year. Her Ga teacher had taught the class a rhyme about a fragile homeless butterfly, and had made the entire class memorize it. She was reciting this poem on her way from school with her friends with their unspoken rule; they started the poem all over again whenever one person's voice came in earlier, or later. They sang in perfect unison, her voice the lowest:

abɛi ji mi

ehe waaa

ni egbaaa mɔ naa

eke enaa wooo mɔ sane mli

ƒɔƒi abe anaami ye...

First, two of her friends stopped the recital abruptly, then three ran off with the poem, and she swallowed the next word as a strong smell hit her. The friends disengage towards the small crowd that had started gathering around the barren avocado tree opposite the kenkey house. The smell grew stronger with each step she took closer to the scene. She saw legs of an unidentified figure lying on empty Pepsi crates. The legs were blackened from dust, sweat, the rains, grease, and the absence of bathing. She forced her way through the crowd to have a better view of what was Danlad's lifeless body. Rumours had it Danlad was born mad. He wandered about all day in a dirty tight denim shorts, smelling of dried urine, human excreta, sweat, grease,

and slept anywhere he found himself at night. Usually in front of closed stores. Most storeowners saw him as security for their stores at night. Everyone had their own stories of how Danlad would compose songs with their names, or spelt the most complex of words unasked. Her first encounter with him, he had come to their house to take her elder brother's dead rabbit. Her brother played a game with Danlad where all he had to do was just mention an alphabet and Danlad mentioned all the African countries starting with that alphabet. Her brother started; A, and he came in; Algeria, Angola, next. B; Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, next. C; Cameroon, Canary Islands...and it went on until Z; Zambia, Zimbabwe and he ran out of the compound swinging the lifeless rabbit in his hand down the road.

The owner of one of the shops he often slept in front threw an African print cloth with colourful floral patterns over him, covering his face and a larger part of his body, leaving his feet hanging out. His soles were dirty and cracked like the bark of the barren avocado tree from all the years they slapped every corner of the neighbourhood. A butterfly sat on his left toe, flapping its wings which were the same colour of the cloth; orange, black, yellow, green and blue. This created an illusion of the homeless butterfly in a garden of beautiful flowers in her head, but, instead of the sweet smells of nectars, she was choking on the pungent from Danlad as she watched the butterfly make home of his dirty cracked toe.

She dreamed of thousands of butterflies flapping their wings in utter unison, and the light rays hitting their velvety wings when they opened on the flowers in this garden. Her room was the garden. And when the gardener turned to face her, it was Danlad. He stretched towards her a wreath he had made with some flowers from this garden, and gradually, like diffusion, with every step he took towards her, his smell got stronger in her head. She rolled over to the side of the bed touching the wall, and with her legs to the headrest for support, she found herself pushing the wall back for fear of it hugging the other three walls that make the room, crushing her to death.

When she woke, she had no enthusiasm for anything. Not even for her morning ritual of just lying in bed, facing the wall, silently praying. She had no desire to open her eyes. She found

peace in the darkness that she saw with her eyes shut tightly; the darkness gradually created light and finally led her into a vast space of nothingness.

Lagbaja's afro-soul *Never Far Away* fills the room, every line of the song telling her story. Her Nigerian neighbor hanged the old wireless radio with USB port in the narrow hallway so that the apartment is never awfully quiet. But at this moment, as she reads the text for the third time, she'd appreciate complete quietness to hear all the voices in her head. She remembers the first time she opened her passport and saw the visa in it. Her husband drove them to pick it up that July afternoon. He was denied his on grounds that didn't make sense all three times he applied. Firstly, they said he didn't have strong ties in Ghana to make him want to return home. They both knew that was some bullshit! And then, they said he didn't have strong financial statements when he tried again. For the third time, the consular just flipped through his documents nonchalantly from the other side of the glass that separated them, and returned it to him through the small opening at the bottom just like the first two times. She suggested they use a travel agent whenever he was ready to reapply. That night, they went out to celebrate her visa with beer, khebab and live band music at the Club House in Accra Central. The smell of that night was something that has always stayed with her - petrichor stemmed from the rains that beat up the dry earth as it ushered that year into a late rainy season. That's the same smell that influenced her pica cravings and her ravenous appetite for clay.

Sitting on a table in this small room on the third floor of an apartment she shared with three other women when she first moved here, she's looking out and basking in the streets rising with people. Reading her rosary and looking at the people navigate through a pool of other people with so much urgency reminded her of all the dreams she had to give up on. The cool breeze brought the song from Alphonso's acoustic guitar up her window and she follows the music with her eyes to where he sells old magazines and vinyl records from his tricycle. Alphonso shared his mother's jerk chicken recipe with her the first time she invited him over into this room. That's how they became friends before finding out that he's Jamaican, his tricycle is his most priceless possession, and he's homeless.

The second time she read the text, something about it took her back home to Kokomlele. Where she had a husband, who loved her without stopping. Where their three children had a father, who was there for them without fail. The text read; *“My sight is getting worse, and seeing you will mean the world to me before I go blind. The doctor said I don’t have much time. If I’m lucky, this won’t be the year I die.”* She died that year. Her mother died that year, and she couldn’t go home for the funeral.

She feels a sting of tears in her throat, a knot in her chest, and wipes the warm tears that had started crawling to the corner of her lips. Her eyes cloud with tears and this distorts her vision, making the people walking down the street look somehow dreamy, reminding her of that dream. The last dream she shared with her pastor before giving up on the church, or God. In the dream, where everything happened in slow motion, she stabbed her mother with a dagger several times, and with that same dagger, she stabbed her husband in the back. She sat, and watched him bleed to death. Meanwhile, in reality, and in Accra, he was deeply buried in hope, working hard, and working his way to join her here. Gradually, that hope was replaced with unnerving realities when he fell sick, gave up on all hopes, gave up on life totally, and then he died. She couldn’t go for his funeral too. They sent her pictures and brochure from his funeral.

Sitting behind her butterfly sewing machine, with tears in her eyes, she wipes the dust off her husband’s funeral brochure on the skirt she’s wearing and flips through the pages. A picture caught her attention. It was taken on the day she learnt to love herself. She was struggling with closing the corset she intended wearing under her dress. Holding her breath, standing on her toes, and tucking her tummy in, but still not able to close the corset. Her husband’s calm baritone voice broke through the room; *“You’re beautiful.”* That picture was taken at the Roxy cinema and she wore a different dress that flattered her figure. In the picture, the lit ROXY cinema signage towers above them with the red light flooding their face. His lips were caught saying something funny probably from how heartily she was caught laughing. The laughter was so infectious, it made her smile. They were both wearing their wedding rings. They went to see a movie at the cinema for their seventh wedding anniversary.

He wore his ring every day for all the sixteen years that she's been away. When his health got worse, about two months before his death, he'd stare into the clouds from his window all day eager that one day, his wife Dufie Agyemang will be in one of the airplanes landing at the Kotoka International Airport. When their two daughters got married, she couldn't attend the weddings. And when their son graduated from the university, she couldn't go home for the graduation.

The clicks of a key in a keyhole from the next room jerks her back to consciousness. She closes the brochure, wipes her face with a faded t-shirt on her sewing machine, and makes a mental note to get extra kente fabric from the African shop to finish the dresses she's working on. She picks her phone again, and dials her son's number, puts the phone to her ear listening to the call go through.

Her Son's Dream.

Last week, two Nigerians were arrested, detained and later deported for working with fake documents at her son's work place. It wasn't uncommon to find illegal immigrants working with other people's documents in these factories that according to their white bosses; *required more manpower than actual brains*. It was difficult for these White supervisors to tell the difference between people from Africa, especially, West Africa. In their eyes, they all have short nappy hair, thick lips, broad nose, bushy eyebrows that almost touch when they squint, and other strong features that intimidate them. The only luck her son had was a Hiring Manager who was flexible about paperwork. The Manager knew the face on the permit wasn't his, but he desperately needed workers and knew he could overwork anyone desperate enough to work with someone else's identity.

At his first job, the owner of the permit he worked with took up to 40% of his pay check until he was fired for "giving more excuses than results." Those were the Human Resource Manager's last words on the day he was fired. He bargained from 40% to 33% when he got a less paying job with the same permit. Washing his hands in the sink in the work's washroom, he held his gaze in the broken mirror, and almost couldn't recognize his reflection. In the broken mirror, his full beard has grown beyond the sharp boundaries his barber created for him less

than two weeks ago. His moustache creeping into the corners of his mouth. His exciting eyes were coming to terms with his reality; instead of the reassurance they always carried, these were burdened and exhausted from screaming hope. The man in that mirror isn't the same young man who entered this country with a visa he won in a lottery. When his visa expired, his mother did not advise him against overstaying. And as it stands, just like his mother, he won't be allowed entry into this country if he exits. She did that out of love; a love that is breaking her heart. A love that made her forget his name yesterday for the second time in one week.

Early on, his mother called the office line when she couldn't reach him and asked to speak with Papa Yaw, and went ahead to give a vivid description of him when it was obvious no one knew any Papa Yaw. What she didn't know was that, all the young men who worked at CREST; North America's leading distributor of shipping, packaging and industrial supplies fit his description.

He shifts his gaze from his reflection in the mirror, to the name tag on the breast pocket of his oversized khaki long-sleeved shirt. The black faded letters on the tiny shiny silver plate on his chest are all capitalized and inconveniently spaced – K. B O A T E N G. That's the identity he's been living as even though he looks nothing like Boateng, except for their visible diastema when they smiled. He changes into a denim jacket, over denim pants. He picks an envelope, from his locker and secures it in the pocket of his jacket, and steps out for this urgent appointment.

His appointment with Denise is by far the biggest risk he's taking after overstaying his visa. Denise is the African American girl who has agreed to marry him for twice the six thousand dollars in his jacket. Their contract will be updated, and fee renegotiated on how this faux marriage rolls out. As part of the contract, she'll help him secure his work permit at an extra fee, and eventually a permanent residency depending on how their contract ends.

Walking pass the phone shop between the barbering shop and the tattoo parlour, he remembered to return his mother's calls but decides against it. He'll tell her about how he parted ways with his entire savings so that she; his mother will be able to call him by the name she gave him during his outdoorings; Papa Yaw Agyemang, without holding back her tongue. He'll finally

introduce Denise; the girl with the butterfly tattoo on her wrist to his mother as his American wife, and he won't forget his name again.

The Unsettling Settles...

Richie O

It will start off as war.

The war with self, the war we curate for others, especially the passing stranger.

You fight with love, with both arms stretched to curse the very existence of it.

But God, we all need a dose of it, yet deny and spit it out on the doors of a neighbor
because we are imprisoned, poisoned to the peace of this life.

They say, "Life is hard" like an anthem the government produces as a survival kit.

Some days, we try to pick our dreams stuck in the sky, begging to make love to us and

Lo we burn our wings mid-flight to climax it all.

Mostly we are just tired of running when our feet are an armor of grace.

But the carousel settles, doesn't it?

Let's bring the matter to the table.

You either win or praise the victors.

You are at war with the system.

You are at war with everything concerning progress, mostly your progress,
mostly our tendency to lean on anything.

But the uneven sits graciously beneath the streams,
doesn't it in the midst of the rocks and particles?

We scout, we cry, we take risk even with strings attached to this tumultuous affair.

We break the unbreakable and cry in awe for utmost clemency.

We deserve this much air in heaven, it's for free,

something we earned groping through the dirt now we are here laughing with our teeth
as a full display of possibilities and our feet shining in good shoes.

Don't call us an unruly bunch when we appreciate art in peace.

Hurt no one, live by good poems from God's own handpicked lovers for us who serenades best.

Don't step on our torso and call it a fragment of nothingness.

Darling, these feet have thrived, darling these hearts have died
and ultimately came back from doom alive.

Night life

Kwaku Quansah

In love with the emission of nature's quite sonic,
deep in love with the sound wave of the music
Eyes closed; and ears filled with a distant voice echoing to the soul
You must have lost yourself in the middle of the moment
So, find your way to the conscious space of your mind, same as the night
Still in motion and soon everybody either passes you by or comes and go
But the night keeps telling the skies to fall with beautiful people just like you
Love in the eyes and glass filled with wine
The chill is out of this world with the wind blowing over your porous skin.
The clouds waving at you to show their presence
The grey moon and the star keep you entertained by crossing each other
Such beauties! Fulfilled as the mood syncs perfectly with the last drop in the bottle
The serenity is from within the mine, out of which you get a 'peace' of the gold.
The night promises one thing and it tenders the real you, your last soul
All the pain and misery you go through the day
As long as your heart is in the right place, write?
So if this is not love, then get her to join you on this journey
Long walks on the beach through the night
These tired waves need your presence as they fall and cover the shores
Whispers from the ocean, cold whirlwind hidden in the shadows
Like a dream living in a city that never sleeps, that never folds
And when you say it's worth – You will realise that
after any pain, there's love.....In the night!

Set her house on fire. And she will serve you with water.

Invictus K. Sedoame

On the bleak river

Over which the sea has no power.

Here is what she no more wishes for

A heaven with a god who has got an ear to hear

And a hand to stretch

A sky that writes with lightening and speaks upon thunders

A land with a quiet sea

Music that reorder the bones to get in shape

A rod that must strike only to disintegrate

She will start to run

Not seeking for eternal salvation

But for a garden

Where a piece of her could lie down shiftless

There's no curse without recourse

She begs to be nailed on the cross.

She moans, the urgency that follows...

Take me as an unrepentant sinner and Nail Me on the cross.

That's a waste as to what she must use her magic for

That's why sometimes she begs for phosphene

To fuel her lungs

So that when she finds herself in a comatose state

The smell of death would be a faithful sign of existence

On the dark river

Over which the sea has no power.

Here is what she no more wishes for

A heaven with a god who has got an ear to hear

And a hand to stretch

She Shall Be Called

Afua Awo Twumwaah

we. sit on the stool
our hairs on our fingertips, hers in hers in hers
we ask how far has time travelled to bring us here?
some skin of coal, some skin of cashew, some skin
of ripened tomatoes, some of skin blinding the sun.

we. take out our eyes
balls in our palms, hers in hers in hers
we ask google, who are we?
google says how to marry us. how not to marry us.
how tender we like our male homo sapiens. how we are eaten by them.
what we have made of our world. what our world has made of us, us being willing accomplices.

i do not touch our collective shame
there is no river named after it

we. are the air our people live on
we. resurrect the dead with our oils. the honey drips from our steps.
what is the language of love if we are not speaking it?
the stars lie in our shade.
we, the open skies.

we. see the ad on YouTube. Take. The. Leave.
we. stay put on the floor
tongues in our palms, hers in hers in hers
we cannot leave. we must not leave. we do not
Leave
is a synonym for genocide - how we kill our people swimming in our collective blood.

and they say thank you. thank us. thank we.

they, didn't they? thank us? we

bend the skies. we.

stretch it taut in our palms. we.

laugh at abdomens, maps of where nations hid in a body. we

listen to the sun turn

our feet in our palms. hers in hers in hers

we hurry to who we are nonetheless and do it with love

our collective survival. we call this love. if we

do not call this love we know there will be genocide

and we would wield the guns.

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

Karen Donkor

You are only a boy and you pace the streets of Accra - disheveled, distraught, eyes scurrying towards the dipping sun and into the fading sunset, distracted so much that you don't see what came before you were even a boy:

Your grandmother, Okonore Yaa, frail. Two deft scars sailing across her left cheek with angst, body puppeteering forward with want - a woman who has given much of herself and accepted little in return. Your mother, stroking her bump robotically, daring Okonore to look, to live up to the sharpness of her name. But she doesn't. You don't glimpse the fear jump in your mother's eyes at the sounds of Okonore's fading footsteps and shortly after, of her reechoing walks, of belt in hand. They waltz around the room, your mother slithering away, your grandmother pirouetting towards her. When your mother dies giving birth to you - pupils meandering towards an unknown place, your grandmother's defeated gait treading the halls, your father quaffing akpeteshie while counting his mistakes with one hand - your mother the index finger and you the thumb - your breastbones nestle the pain of being born into a time of relentless pain and insatiable men.

You will be 17 when you have held forgiveness by the nape of its neck, kept it patiently in your palms like ripe berries and harvested it like it will give you eternal life. And so, when your father is absent for majority of your childhood you will forgive him. And, when he shows up at Okonore Yaa's door on the morning of the coup panting aggressively, almost five years since you last saw him, you will feel forgiveness jump in the creases of your palms. He will look almost like a father as his fingers struggle with the keys of the typewriter. From the radio, Rawlings' voice will bounce around the room - he has seized control of the nation and controls the army. You will watch the fear twirl in your father's eyes. He, a prolific writer. He, an avid supporter of the Busia government. He, now crippling. When your eyes meet, you will watch love and fear take each by the hands and dance between you. You will remember this, and when you fall in love for the first time, you will study her pupils and associate the excitement bouncing in your belly to loss, to your mother's last, ragged breath.

You will feel that loss again and again: the first time you're inside her, the first time you hit her, when she says "I love you, but I cannot take this any longer". In all of these moments you realize that you have never been handed such naked love, it marinates your lips with want. You'll beg her to stay. You'll cry, kneel and scream at her to stay. But, she won't. And it is the last time you will ever see her. Forgiveness, and you will learn this each time you conjure her up in your mind's eye, is inadequate in the furnace of sacrilege.

But for now, you are only a boy and you pace the streets of Accra - disheveled, distraught, eyes scurrying towards the dipping sun and into the fading sunset. The smell of kelewele drifting in and out of your being like a whisper, like a song. You're not looking back into the past or forward into the future, you simply dash to and fro, your curls making love to the fresh moonlight.

Scorching Moon

Kofi Konadu Berko

Animals and Things

Your father isn't a dog he shouldn't bark
Your father isn't flames he shouldn't burn

Ephesians

Our father who art on earth
Do not anger thy sons or daughters

Hands

In the beginning, he was faceless, a pair of hands that came when your mother was tired
'Kokromoti' that came with biscuits and toffees
'Show the way' that came with hugs, squeezes
'Middle' that you sucked on
'Ring' that you wrapped around your fingers
'Hen will lay' that tickled your armpits
In time, he became the hand that came with the punishment – belt, cane, shouts

Man

Father cradles a furnace in her chest
Father wears her hair in shiny braids
Her breasts are still huge and full
Birth after birth has left her stomach thick and flabby
You lay on it when you are scared.
You prefer your mother's chest but hers is too hard. Too solid. No heart beat

Househusband

His nails are long and curved and brightly colored so he can't clean, he can't hug, he can't help.
The only thing he can do is drive.

Head of the family

The head is a God

To be worshipped, revered, fellated

The eyeballs should be cleaned each day, but always keep them away from looking at you. Don't
let them see you in sin.

Father shouldn't see.

The ears should be cleaned and oiled each second. Yes, it will hear you but it won't listen. Your
voice is an odorless gas.

Father shouldn't listen

The nose should be kissed each day. Each strand of wild hair plucked out with silvery tweezers.

The Nose shouldn't recognize the scent of your troubles.

Father shouldn't smell.

The mouth, the voice from this cave must be the only one you hear, your own holy spirit. Allow
it to move your limbs. Allow it to wash over you. Draining your life and turning you into a
zombie.

Safe Space

Dada's chest is a safe place

Dada's approval is a lifesaving tonic

Dada's tears are a safety zone

Dada's breaths are where your problems disappear

Dada's arms are where sleep feels longest

I sing of a longing

Knock. Knock

Who's there?

It's me

You who?

Me. Me. I am looking for my daddy

Who?

My daddy

What does he look like?

I don't know

What does he smell like?

I don't know

What does he preach like?

I don't know

I don't know

Little one, your daddy doesn't know you well enough to exist.

Weaver

Your father's body is a shield made of stories, cobwebs and cotton. Penetrably Impenetrable

Daddy dearest

Daddy comes as a dream

Assembling like wisps of smoke until his furrowed forehead appears

Then his voice leaves his body, translating into Amakye Dede music

He stretches his hand and you stretch yours too. But each time they slip through each other

But you dance anyway,

And you laugh, you twirl and stumble through his body

He, dispersing and materializing so you can dance inside him

Live inside him. Feel inside him

My first Copy book

Your father's tongue is your book

You learn to write on his tongue. Each morning you pick up your pencils and ask him to open
up for you.

Then you sink its pointed lead edge into his spongy red wet tongue drawing blood and mouth
water

You throw your head back in ecstasy as drops appear and fall from his lips onto the carpet,
forming images of your mother's thighs, your brother's spectacles, your sister's fingers, your
face.

Who Do You Confess as God?

Sandra Hyde

Does the world fold your tongue to proclaim?

Do the songs of myths,

Birthered by its queens and kings,

Cloud your thoughts,

Leaving you unsteady in circles?

Slowly and steadily,

When you reclaim,

A sanity long gone with the wind,

Washed away by the rain at night,

Who do you confess as God?

How do you know?

How do you know your God?

Do the whispers at dawn

And the waves of the sea,

Dance to your God's direction?

And when in the morning the dew comes,

Does it cleanse your heart,

Assuring you of truth,

Conceived in your spirit

And only chosen by you?

Who do you confess as God,

When you kneel and weep,

Praying the preacher

To stop your pounding heart,

Racing from all these questions
Slowly wiping out your breath...

Who do you confess as God?

Ehen na yere ko yi

Abena Awuku

ben na yere ko yi?

Agyenkwa, wo nko na wo nyim o!

Se ebesi yie

Agyenkwa, wo nko na wo nyim o!

Sɔ me nsa, dzi me kan, edwo Nyame

Sɔ me nsa, dzi me kan, na m'annyira

Her uncle had awoken the household at 3:30AM for a prayer session, as part of the send-off for her.

“As you’re going abroad, I want you to remember this hymn. You do not know where you are going, but God does, and He will guide you along the way if you trust in Him.”

“Amen!”, her cousins chorused. She kept silent throughout the prayer session, which was not unusual for her since she returned from boarding school. She strongly doubted life out there was going to be good to her if she depended on a Being who had basically neglected her most of her life.

They said their farewells, with the standard promises of staying in touch via Facebook so the distance would not have much of an impact on their relationship.

She was sad and nervous throughout the ride to the airport. It was one of the few moments on the streets of Accra with absolutely zero traffic. She would no longer get to soak in the character of the city, so took it all in one last time. Bus conductors wittingly drawing in passengers to their buses; hawkers aggressively selling their wares to the point of it being borderline street harassment - now, that part she was not going to miss. She wouldn’t even be able to snack on a boiled egg or two with hot pepper while seated in the back of a *trotro*, stuck in traffic.

They arrived at the airport in half the time it usually takes. Her uncle could only go as far as the immigration checkpoint with her, and then she was truly alone.

Se ebesi yie

Agyenkwa, wo nko na wo nyim o!

She wondered how much her life was going to change as she disembarked during her transit at Casablanca. It was the way the security guy scrutinized her passport and repeatedly questioned her about her destination and purpose of stay. That's when it dawned on her that she would have to be careful; she was headed to a place where she did not belong especially if she was already being othered at the Northern point of the continent she called home.

Carrying the brief moment of discomfort at the airport in Casablanca with her, she realised, upon arrival, that the western young adult movies and novels she had seen and read growing up which had touted college as the best experience ever had been more or less part of the American cultural diplomacy campaign.

The European reality was not that much different but it was nothing like she had anticipated. She had prepared herself for the culture shock yet was overwhelmed by it. There were moments she was absolutely certain she had to return home to Ghana. The weather alone was enough reason to repatriate but she knew her family would refuse to hear that as an excuse. She did not know how to explain to them the impact the seasons had on her mentally. It was pointless to even try with the people who had not acknowledged her bouts of depression while at home. Coupled with the frequent micro aggression she had to endure, a regular being her classmates asking her how dangerous and poverty stricken her homeland was, heightened the levels of homesickness she endured daily.

On the one hand, she was lucky to be living in a Ghanaian community but she was more like a sore thumb, or as the aunties said, because “*ɔnnka twi*”. Never mind that Fante was her mother tongue. Somehow Twi was the lingua franca of Ghanaian communities abroad and if you didn't speak it, you were denying your roots. She was tagged an *asala*, someone who had recently relocated from home, by her peers in the Ghanaian community when she attempted to make friends, and no one wanted to be associated with a greenhorn who was yet to integrate in the country.

Sɔ me nsa, dɔzi me kan, edwo Nyame.

There was also the guilt that wrecked her occasionally when she thought of her family and friends back home. Once you resided in a country with a relatively healthier economy, there was

an unspoken rule to financially support and provide gifts for your dear ones. And shame on you if this had to be reiterated in the form of a request; because it meant you did not care enough about them until they were destitute.

She was often ashamed for not being able to do this which made her grow distant and limit her interactions with people back home. She was aware of the comments being made about her. An ingrate who had forgotten her roots after experiencing the ways of the *obroni*. The few moments of joy she experienced and shared on social media attracted comments with judgemental undertones a *takaba* could decipher.

Sɔ me nsa, dʒi me kan, na m'annyira

She experienced the highs which were fast and exciting, and the lows gloomy and maudlin. Either way she kept herself grounded with waakye and high-life playlists; lightly tapping her feet from the heat of the shito coursing through her and dancing to the rhythms of her home.

Painful Peace

Sena Cobblah

I'd like to get to a time
Where peace is as still as the airless night
The hurricane of some words
Reach fever pitch around the ears
Limbs hang loosely
Bobbing
Right
Left
Rhythmically a lot like the water station
The fiery waves lap at my stomach in comfort
The burning throat a soothing balm to my uncoiled box
Wax wedged underneath the door

I like to think of
The fires of my rage quenched
The couch bobbing on this surface
Until it reaches the stage
The disdain,
Little red-hot tongues
Only dances on the surface of the torrents
As on July 3rd
Burns the backs of the unfortunate
And just below the surface is calm

I think of a place
Where my demons have been drowned
Their corpses washed to the shore

Down another hole
Cover them wholly in gasoline and neem
Swallowed by the fire
Consumed and lost

Torturous waves become soft songs
Painfully peaceful

red means run

Raphaela Rockson

mama calls me blessed
and daddy's never been around
couldn't care less
ups and downs
but it could have been a lot worse,
mama says
so i thank goodness
for the days she chooses me
and sometimes it's almost easy
sometimes i'm a different me
skin not peeling,
slippers on my feet

today i wear my mother's cloth and it matters not
whether it covers my legs the way god intended
the broken stitches on the hem and the holes in the middle
don't bother me because underneath this fraying covering,
i am clothed by the guilt of my existence
i am taken aback
by the audacity of this life growing inside me
has it not seen my home? how many times must i scream that there is no life here?
i feel it curse me as i lay down, it claws at the lining of my guts desperately
i'm sorry
i barely had enough for myself
what kind of mother can one be in this place?
what do i have to offer?
but mama never hisses
she rubs my belly and tells me she knows

i wish i didn't

i look at the women sitting on the sidewalk

every woman here was a mother by the time they were 12, Maadjoa says

it's wrong to say i want better for myself

and for them

mother says not every woman has this gift

she calls me blessed

but i only feel inconvenienced

Red

Red doesn't care how i feel

or what i do with the life he forced on me

he says i like what he did to me

as he pushed me onto his mat, he told me

that i want it but i just don't know it yet

yet mama smiles

almost as if we have a home that is more than flattened cardboard boxes

almost as if we have food in our bellies

i helped a school-girl carry her chop-box to the car today

she paid me in advice

“don't allow these men to use you”, she said

all the girls here look the same

we always see red

we see him in every man

security guard, driver, police man, lawyer

red

i guess it's a good thing we wear no slippers on our feet

we spend most of our lives running

Internalizing Pain

Afi Koasi

(Day 265)

I have witnessed my soul
Crawl out of my body yet again
Fear has plunged a knife into my chest
Deflating air out of my lungs
But I dare not bleed
Nor suffocate to death

Outside this body
I cannot be anything weak and needy
Not at anybody's mercy
I must walk on water
Always floating and never drowning

"Cover up

You dare not display your scars

You cannot be perfect

But you can't be this you

Soft and feeble

You dare not show your other side"

That cursed side of me
I must keep hidden under my skin
Those silent tears begging to
Spill from my eyes
The thorns growing inside me
Tearing my innards apart
That I'm forbidden to speak about

I have mourned my own death
Two hundred and sixty-five times
Every night sleep escapes from my eyes
It's the only way I know how
To numb the pain of not being this me
Flesh, blood and bones
Weak and needy

So again
I will smile to your face
You will envy my joy
But I wish you knew about
The cracks in my soul that need sealing
The voids in my spirit that need filling
The many times I have suffered, was tormented
And buried by my own hands

I wish when you look at me
You can also see
How gradually I am wasting away
Concealing all the hurt draining life out of me
That I am not fine

Clenched Fist

K.K. Mensah

I wrote letters to myself when I was but a girl
To the woman I'll become tomorrow
That I do not only become a pretty face known to society
Because my mother told me that her mother taught her how to bow her head in silence before
men
To nod in acceptance even when it hurts
Do you not see the fiery in her eyes
Or would you rather have her tongue to suppress her strength
You cannot say you all are equal
When you give her only half of the freedom you freely enjoy
And gag her mouth so she dares not open it
So you can raise your voice and beat your chest in smugness
Even though she births you every night
Yet didn't become an heir to her mother's meekness
She has also learnt to make decisions in her observations
While you adorn her with praises of her beauty and leniency
When you're yet to take a walk through her mind
A whole landscape of originality
She learnt to alter the already existing traditions of gone before
Added in time today's own of tomorrow's future
And created for us a beautiful time to come
So if you ever hear a voice in unison
The voice of revolution
That would be the voice of a woman
Who learnt how to take her power

Indelible mark

Victory Osarumwense

Rotimi stared at her lips. He silently thanked God that his spittle had not gone any further by a mini-inch. It would have entered her mouth.

Her stoic expression made it impossible to determine if she had noticed. Why on earth wouldn't she? If she had, and was pretending not to have, she was doing a great job.

At first, he was elated at the idea. The idea that finally, he would look the girl he loved in the eye and say in the most passionate voice possible "Nkem, I am in love with you" he would continue as he stared deep into her eyes, "I have loved you since I set my eyes on you. You are unique".

Unique?

Seriously?

'You are beautiful' should just have been okay...but what if she wanted to be more than just beautiful. What if she wanted to be called "smart, funny, intelligent"

After tossing the idea round the cracks of his mind, he concluded that what of a cliché the word "beautiful" was.

He should be different. He should stand out. He should make an indelible mark on her memory. He should be unforgettable.

That was how the idea came about. The idea to tell her how deeply he loved her in her native language; Igbo.

Nnamdi had laughed at first.

"Mr. man, you don't stand a chance" were the words he said bluntly, but after much pleading, he gave in.

"Before you say I was the one that ruined your chance with this girl, 'I love you' in Igbo is 'Ahurum gi n'anya'."

"Anum gi..."

"Ei, wrong, wrong, wrong!!!...I said 'A-hurum-gi-n'anya'. At least say it right if you are going to say it at all"

"Ahurum gi n'anya?"

‘Correct! You are a sharp learner. See the way love has turned you into my disciple’.

They laughed.

Nnamdi could make you laugh. There was no dull moment with him. How they ended up becoming friends after that embarrassing public joke, he had made of him the first time they met is still a surprise.

Rotimi spent the rest of the week practicing ‘Ahurum gi n’anya’ before the mirror. He was out to make an impression. He found himself day-dreaming about the smile that would be planted on her face after he was done with his speech. In this dream, she would lean closer and whisper softly, tell me more as they stared into each other’s eyes.

If he said he heard any word uttered during the sermon, it would be right to call him a humongous liar. He had his eyes on her throughout the service. She was looking extra-ordinarily elegant today.

When service ended, he tailed her, following her every move as the crowd increased in front of him. He got to her.

‘Good afternoon Sister Nkem’ he said, trying to hide the nervousness in his voice.

‘Good afternoon, Rotimi’

‘Erm, please can you give me some of your precious time. Er...er...ur...’

‘Yes... I am all ears’

He chuckled nervously, feeling the sweat trickle down his armpit.

‘Yes, yes...er...there is something I have been meaning to tell you.

Errrh, you see, errrh... let us have a seat’ pointing to the chairs in the parking lot.

‘Oh, I am fine just here’

‘Okay, the thing is that...’

And then he forgot.

He forgot the words he had spent his entire week practicing.

No, this can't be happening. God, how can you do this to me?

He sought to calm his stomach which had gone haywire.

Then he seemed to remember.

With a deep sigh and excitement in his eyes, he said “Nkem, Ahurum ya anya”

‘What?’

Rotimi, thinking that the expression was one of excitement continued.

He continued...

‘See Nkem, Ahurum ya anya...ever since I set my eyes on you...’ he rambled on.

It was during this process of uncontrolled emotional spilling that the idiotic saliva landed on her lips.

He stopped himself.

She started talking.

He was still staring at the saliva close to the demarcation on her upper lip when he remembered the right words. Ahurum gi n’anya. Rotimi, it is Ahurum gi n’anya. Jesus, what was it I said?

God, he almost hated himself, this idea and his salivary gland.

He had succeeded in making a memory, an indelible mark... in his own words.

I am not a tribe, I am human.

Yayra Bassah

Who made us believe that ethnicity is where we find home?

Today

A girl is running from something

She runs home to tell her mother that it happened again

That she got bullied for what she was.

She cries not because she is hurt

but that she does not understand

The color of her skin is the same

The same kinky hair and brown eyes

But somehow,

Somehow, she is different.

That in her own country her language is foreign

At school they spit her name in a tongue so strange

And laugh at how she pronounces words.

You do not belong here, they say.

You

do not

belong here,

they say

Intersectionality

Sena Frost

I am a son of the soil
Born of my fathers and mothers before me
I bear their names

I am a son of the soil
Born between the Tropic of Cancer and the equator
In the port city the prime meridian runs through
I bear a Macedonian name
Of a conqueror king who died in his prime
Leader of men
Who do I lead but myself

I live in a world where the clothes on my back come from Asia
The beverage I drink is South American
And I use North American technology
The Africa in me
Is in the tongue of my fathers and mothers
Which is condemned as Vernacular

I am a son of the soil
A soil eroded by white faced lies to get at the wealth it hides
I am proud of where I am from
But who am I?
That I risk high seas and the deaths of my friends
Only to be told I am not wanted here
But to go back to till a soil stripped bare by you

I intersect

Imbibing knowledge of everything but what is most important

A convergence of ideas and ideologies and wars

My little slice of earth is prey

That the new powers must colonise once and for all

I have what you want

Yet you tell me

“This video is not available in your location.”

A-mask

Ann Fesu

Masquerading in different hues

In the eyes of the beholder; they say

If society has similar views

then it is not independent. if I may

Beg to deviate

Finding myself in this place, others mocking, others returning, others staying “Please be good to me” we cry out from the moment we are born,

But we also join in the fun making just to belong

How many more “black is beautiful” poems do we have to memorize in kindergarten, before we become kinder guardians of our own galaxy

Why is this legal? This remnant of colonization that makes us doubt ourselves.

None of us can judge, for we are all complicit

Our fetishes manifesting like little elves

Crawling all over, more than we care to admit

But I have hope ... do I? Yes, I do, (I say to myself shakily as I ask myself this question)

Hopefully the trend of body positivity does not become a fad,

I would be really mad

The charcoal child

Henneh Kyereh Kwaku

A woman tells my mother—*wo ba tantane yei ne wɔɔbe wo no a, w'ama payini ke anyini yi?* The pain can't be translated in any sense but the question also is a statement—*this child is ugly! This your child is ugly!!* When insulted in Bono, it sounds more painful than in English or Asante Twi—Akuapem would come close if not the fact that, even with the insult comes with some dignity, *please you're stupid*. Insults in Bono come like freefalls, no stop signs, the stop sign is the fall—ends only when satisfied, like the way smoke engulfs a room before the fire cuts through. I was the colour of freshly unlit charcoal at birth. I can't imagine mother's pain after hearing this but I know how she felt on the day she smiled & said to the woman—*this is my ugly son*. Even the haters know I am nothing close to ugly now.

Ɔman wei

Ama Benewaa T.

Ɔman wei

makes you proud one day
and makes you wish you weren't one
of its own thirty other days

Ɔman wei

constantly proves it's meant for a select few
spits out its own every chance it gets

Ɔman wei

you thought you would live and die for
Like many others several years before you did

Ɔman wei

Deep down you know there is so much more to this country
You know this country is capable of paying teachers and health care givers
You know this country is capable of improving conditions in deprived communities
You know this country is capable of being just
You know this country is capable of looking out for its own, capable of choosing its own
You know this country is capable of giving all who are hers comfort
But this country, it does not do any of the things you know it is capable of
It does not show in any way that it wants to

And so you are battle with yourself.

Doing your best for this country in spite of constantly waking up to news of shady and insensitive deals, misappropriation of funds and unfortunate incidences that could have been avoided is really hard.

Ɔman wei

It makes you want to go away and build elsewhere
And it isn't doing much to make sure
you do not do that.

I Still Call It Home

Kennetha Brown

Waves crashing angrily onto the shores and
Cursing the fisherfolk for dishonoring the waters
Early birds awakening with the slow dawn
Telling the men, “wake, praise the Lord”

City roads suffer blaring miles of commuters
And anxious mothers offering painful prayers
Hoping the hospital isn't too much further
Counting every contraction, one pothole, another

Daddy's girl is staying home; no school today
She sees him toiling for other men daily
But for some reason, her school still says
Her thirst for knowledge doesn't meet his wage

Daavi's waakye queue isn't moving this morning
Young graduates breaking out in beads of sweat
Reciting six of their colleagues' breakfast orders
Their backs burning from other costumers staring

Dusk brings little respite, but what can we do
The sun decides humbly to show a little mercy
She goes home to roost, the birds do too
To rise yet again, bright and early

Contributors' Bio

Abeiku Arhin Tsiwah is a Ghanaian Smartphone Enthusiast //& Content Critic. He's the Senior Poetry Editor at Lunaris Review (a Journal of Arts & the Literary, Nigeria) & the Creative Director at The Village Thinkers (a Creative Writing & Arts Society, Ghana). The 2018 Shortlisted Poet for both African Writers Awards /& West Africa Citizens Awards has had his works published in Afridiaspora, VisualVerse, Peeking Cat Poetry, Expound, Whispers, Novel Masters, African Writer, Agbówó, Tuck Magazine, Liberian Literary Magazine, Parousia, Face2FaceAfrica & elsewhere.

Akua Antwiwaa is a writer and Phd student based in Providence, Rhode Island. She has been published in the Killens Review of Arts and Letters, Brittle Paper and Okay Africa.

jflongdon is The Girl With The Long Legs. She skillfully tells tales through poems, prose or short films. The author of the current book TGWTLL hopes to write more, if the gods will it. Fletcher, as she's affectionately known within creative spaces wears many hats - tgwtll doesn't fit into one box and does not conform. She prays you do not also. Hopefully she also gets to be a Polaroid creative artist sometime soon.

Victoria Naa Takia Nunoo is a Ghanaian writer and poet. Her works of fiction and/or poetry have appeared in various online literary magazines and anthologies. Her poetry collection, "Yellow Tulips", was shortlisted in the 2017 RL Poetry Award. '[Brass Neck](#)' is her debut book.

Jasmine Assan is an aspiring Business Analyst. She started writing as an outlet to her thoughts. Now she hopes they are a medium through which silent souls can communicate.

s. Asamoah writes from Accra-Ghana, his poems have been published by Praxis online Magazine, Tampered Press Magazine, The Writers and Readers Network – Ghana's The GBV Project and has poems in the debut issues of Gumbo Press Magazine due February 2020.

Jay Kophy is a Ghanaian poet and writer. His poems are forthcoming and have been featured in literary magazines such as Glass Poetry, Agbówó, Shore Poetry, Hellebore, Praxis Magazine, Kalahari Review, Tampered Press and many others. His poem *If the Body Could Speak* appeared in the second issue of 20.35 Africa's Anthology of Contemporary Poetry. He is also the curator of the anthology, *to grow in two bodies*.

.moshood lives in Accra, Ghana, from where he writes across genres. his scribblings have been published in a number of publications, both online and in print.

Abeiku Hammond is a writer, poet and spoken word artiste. He is a member of Scribes Poetry, and the Co-Founder of Pearple Read, an organization with the aim of cultivating heightened reading interest among children.

Fui Can-Tamakloe is a Literature tutor with a little over eight years experience in writing short fiction. He writes in English and Ghanaian pidgin. He likes for his stories to highlight daily struggles or experiences of everyday Ghanaians. When he isn't writing or teaching, he's most

likely tweeting something ridiculous, or enjoying a cold beer somewhere in the warm Accra night.

Nana Obeng-Koranteng is a poet who lives in Accra, Ghana. He also writes under the penname Nannz. He is currently working on his first collection of poems which are scheduled for release in August 2020 and he is also working on some poems to be featured in other anthologies. You can find more of his writing on his Instagram via @nanaobengkoranteng and more about his personality on his twitter via @i_swear_down. Alternatively, you can email him via nanaobengkoranteng@gmail.com to receive poems and articles for critique.

Joewackle J. Kusi is a Ghanaian Writer and Filmmaker. His medium for storytelling has been shifting over the years from short stories, stage plays and films. His focus is on telling stories that have soul, humanity, and addressing relevant themes that are often left in the blind spot of the Ghanaian society. His stories challenge and start crucial but uncomfortable conversations. His feature film *LUCKY* captured the essence of the lifestyle and culture of the average Ghanaian millennial in the university. *BOYS NO DEY CRY*, his last short film sparked uncomfortable but crucial conversation.

Richie O is a Ghanaian writer. Avid reader, one who lives for poetry and other aspects of art that completes life. He has been writing for as long as he remembers. He believes writing is a firm of intently healing and a process of surviving any harsh situations life presents.

Kwaku Quansah is a lover of art and a reserved thinker. He is a podcast fanatic and loves having basic interaction with individuals with the aim of understanding various human behaviour. Just like any other average human he loves the concept of emotional living and thus normally focus on writing sentimental poems. He loves going to skating events and has always had a taste to get out his comfort zone.

Invictus K. Sedoame is the native name. He likes to be called Invictus K. When he writes poetry or lyrics, He is inspired by gothic stories and romanticism of the 19th century. He loves the works of Rumi and Hafiz and that's what makes him try out sufism. Allan Poe makes him try out gothic stories. And Sydney Sheldon's writing is what keeps him alive when he isn't in the mood for poetry.

Afua Awo Twumwaa lives in Accra, Ghana. She works in the accounting field, is a writer and has keen interest in the performing arts, currently with a company called BIGstep. Her works have appeared in Kalahari Review, Tampered Press Magazine, AFREADA and in some anthologies. Find her on her blog and social media platforms.

Karen Donkor likes to think that writing is one of the only ways she manages to stay sane. Within the depths of her blog - theandromedancapricorn.wordpress.com - you will circumnavigate her thoughts and piece together bits and pieces of her - the eventual conclusion though, is always insufficient. That blog is her baby, something she has singlehandedly nurtured since she was fifteen - a baby herself. She hopes to see you there soon, she hopes you find her.

Kofi Konadu Berko's short story 'The Sun Is White' appears in the historic Afroyoungadult anthology titled 'Waterbirds On the Lakeshore' which contains stories from different countries across Africa. He has writings in Adabraka: Stories from the center of the world, Writers Space Africa and Tampered press. His writing desk is named obolokofi.wordpress.com

Sandra Hyde received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the Ghana Institute of Journalism, where she majored in Communication Studies. Her research interests include the use of communication as a tool for social change.

Born in Takoradi, **Abena Awuku** was raised between Accra and Takoradi and currently resides in Amsterdam, attempting to make sense of the world a day at a time.

Sena Cobblah is a Ghanaian writer and customer experience enthusiast. Partial to poetry and storytelling, her work has been in Anthologies for Tampered Press, Independent publishers like Jay Kophy and one piece for the Ama Ataa Aidoo Centre for Creative Writing. You can follow her failed attempts at rebellion on twitter @sena_cobblah

Raphaella Rockson is a feminist. She writes, sings and can't ride a bicycle.

Afi Koasi is a Ghanaian writer whose journey started not long ago. It used to be just a secret hobby that developed in to something she's quite passionate about now. Poetry has become a part of her and she's still trying to discover what more she can do with this gift. Leisurely she loves to read and listen to music.

K.K Mensah is a Ghanaian female writer who loves to read and listen to music. She's a storyteller and a poet.

Victory Osarumwense is a financial analyst and a performance poet. She is the author of "Keeping Faith"-a hilarious faith-based collection; and "Breathe"- a spoken word EP (collection) 2017. She occasionally writes short stories, poems, keeping faith articles and also publishes real stories of people that have overcome challenges on her website victoryosas.com. You will most likely find her sitting by the window, staring out and creating stories in her head from the ordinary moments.

Yayra Bassah is Ghanaian poet and writer. She enjoys sharing her life through her work and loves to sing. She also dreams of traveling the world.

Sena Frost has been a creative writer for 12 years. He believes in the magic of words and the technical quality each word lends to the weaving of a story. When he is not writing he's practicing photography and seeing the flamboyant transience of life archived for posterity.

Ann Fesu is the Finance and Admin Manager of African Science Academy, an all-girls charity school nurturing the next generation of scientists. With a background in telecom engineering and project management, Ann has previously worked as a product analyst in one of Ghana's leading telcos. She also provides mentorship and career counseling to young people who face

challenges in charting their career paths especially in science-related fields. Ann is a strong STEM advocate as well as a creative, her work often inspired by African culture. Aside work interests, she loves fashion, choral music, dancing salsa and writing poetry.

Henneh Kyereh Kwaku is a poet. He's from Gonasua in the Bono Region of Ghana. His chapbook *Revolution of the Scavengers*, was selected by Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani as part of the 2020 New-Generation African Poets Series Boxset.

Ama Benewaa T. lives in Accra and is currently reliving some of her childhood every chance she gets. She is fascinated by the rationale behind, as well as the making of art. One of her favourite things to do is observe people interact with and react to art.

Kennetha Brown is an avid word lover, and an enthusiast of all things language, communication and expression. A graduate of B. A. (Hons) French & Linguistics from the University of Manchester, this Ghanaian-British diasporan loves all the 6 languages she speaks, and blogs at truecoaster.wordpress.com.