

a collection of poems from Sierra Leone

What the Seashell Said to Me

Bee James



An anthology of poems by
Sierra Leonean graduates
and emerging poets
compiled by Bridgette O James
edited by Kayode A Robbin-Coker

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FOREWORD

ON BEING A SIERRA LEONEAN WRITER

By Oumar Farouk Sesay

Creative writing is a migration from our most private realm to the public space using language and literary devices already in the public domain. Poetry tells our emotions in the open, hoping our writing will resonate with the public and effect positive change. The literary landscape is littered with work that have impacted the world with their lofty themes, elevated language, and ability to speak to all ages. Some of those work is fiction yet tell lies of permanent truth to humankind.

As writers, we hope that our writing intervenes in someone's life or alter a nation's epic narrative toward the path of social cohesion. Among other things, writing extends our being beyond physicality; it takes us to places we could never physically be. We are yet to perfect a means to evaluate our work's impact on the public accurately. I started writing plays while in high school, and the plays were performed at our City Hall. In a theatre like ours, one could gauge the audience's emotions as they hung on every line. Sometimes plays were written in Krio, the lingua franca of Sierra Leone, making the message more accessible to the audience; the impact was palpable. The potency of theatre in combining spectacle and voice impacted the audience. It heralded a mindset change in our history when the word change was a bad word and could even be extended to mean a treasonable word.

However, with a genre like poetry, the impact is not as immediate and dramatic as the theatre. Writing is, most times, if not all of the time, scarred by the mood and event of the

epoch that gave birth to it. In my case and several other writers of our time. The war erupted in 1991 and lasted till 2002 and was a significant intervention in my writing. The shattering impact of the war on my psyche then reshaped my thinking and realigned my focus as a writer.

I did not experience the war from the war front like Erich Maria Remarque, whose experience in the trenches of the first world war gave us that great classic war novel, ***All Quiet on the Western Front***. Or the great British poet Wilfred Owen whose poetry about the war that killed him still haunts us today. Or the great Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo who died in the Biafran war of cession in Nigeria in the 1960s.

Other eminent Sierra Leonean poets and I (including the compiler of this anthology, Bridgette James) experienced the war on the run; metaphors scavenged as we sprinted from one hiding place to another with fellow compatriots. We deployed right into the trenches of human anxiety and fear. We saw humanity at its most vulnerable state and witnessed the insanity of war with all its lethal force unleashed on the innocent. We saw the bodies of women transformed into battlefields and weapons forged in their wombs used against them to decapitate their spirits and stigmatize them for a lifetime. Together with other writers residing in relatively safe areas of the city unaffected by daily combat, we established a poetry club called Falui Poetry Society and gathered in safe places like libraries and museums to recite our poems to each other. We later graduated to bigger auditoriums in the city before the war consumed every inch of the country.

During that period, we witnessed a flourishing of poetry, theatre, and many more in retelling the tale of the war. Poets and audiences flooded our poetry evenings and overwhelmed

our capacity to host them. Later, when the poet and writer Kirsten Rain and her team from the United States visited us, and they were using poetry to heal, we nodded our knowing it; our poetry evenings were healing places. They were hallowed grounds of humanity, a pathway to remembering and forging a return to our commonality. The brutal war fought in Sierra Leone for over a decade maimed the language's capacity to capture the enormity of the war.

It seemed the language was paralyzed by the grotesque; the syntax, semantics, morphology, and metaphors developed centuries ago suddenly could not accommodate the new ugliness. The numbing of the soul took its toll; the victims of our war were stunned, unable to speak the unspeakable. They hoisted a look of hollowness on their faces that told a tale of doom. We saw relatives running into our hiding places and heard the horror in their beings even when they said nothing. It was a telepathic conversation, and we comforted them telepathically, for, at that time, the spoken word might be too mean to do the work; it would have, as they say, added salt unto injury; it would have debased all of us in narratives of shame, covered us with the soot of burnt moralities, the beast mark of the arson ravaging our land.

How do we use words to convey our experiences without further denigrating our humanity? The words in vogue then were words of war, words on the ascending then were the words of men and the (few) women of war, the words the villains of our tragedy used, military jargon connoting evil. In the dazed recovery of speech, our people used such military jargon as attack, retreat, surrender, and disarm to tell the tale of the war,

a twisted linguistic rendition of the Stockholm syndrome –the victim in love with the language of the villain.

A fluent nation with rich oral literature stuttered. One of our poets, the late Tatafway Tumoe, advised that in times of war, go for love. But even the language of love later became infested with war words with extended meanings; words like attack now denote wooing, ambush meant outwitting a rival, and bullets meant gifts. Slowly, however, we freed the words from their violent etymologies. We poets were pivotal to the reversal of meanings, this displacement of the jargon of war, and this retelling of our stories in words that reclaim dignity.

Two decades after the war, the retelling of our stories continues with a new generation of poets, different themes, styles, and languages. Yet, the motif of the retelling continues. The poets in this anthology crossed paths with Bridgette James on Facebook and forged a relationship that culminated in this book. They are primarily young poets investing in reclaiming the soul of our country, becoming ministers of the retelling, and being the witnesses of our pursuit of happiness as a nation.

Art challenges the nihilistic logic of war; from the nothingness created by the war, we were able to produce a body of literature that carved a pathway to the healing of a nation. Nearly all the poets of the Falui poetry society are now established poets whose poems are now a standard text in several schools and colleges.

This anthology is one of the many projects involving a member of the erstwhile Falui poetry group established during a dark era of our country's history yet holding a torch to future generations of poets. I recommend this book to anyone eager to listen to the emerging voices in Sierra Leonean poetry as

they leave their sonic footprint on social media, for savvy media editors like Bridgette James to follow like Ulysses followed the stars to seek, to find, and never to yield.

About the writer

Mr Oumar Farouk Sesay is a renowned Sierra Leonean writer whose career spans 20 years. His books have been used in the West African Examination Council syllabus. He has been published in many anthologies of Sierra Leonean poets; *Lice in the Lion's Mane*, ***Songs That Pour the Heart***, ***Kalashnikov in the Sun*** and ***AFRIKA IM GEDICHT***.

He has also written short stories; *The Price*, published by Sierra Leone writers Series and ***CLOSURE*** published by Sierra Arts publishers. His first volume of poems, ***Salute to the Remains of a Peasant*** was published in 2007 in America, followed by three more collections of poems; ***The Edge of a Cry***, ***Broken Metaphor*** and ***Before the Twisted Rib***.

Mr Farouk Sesay's novel ***Landscape of Memories*** was first published in 2015 and republished in 2018 by Sierra Leone Writer's Series.

Epigraph

“I have forever been a seashell, an introverted poet
harbouring society’s indecipherable noises in a cavity of
creativity and reprocessing them as what might be perceived
as insightful sounds heard by rare seashell-lovers who listen
intently”

Bridgette James

Poems by Bridgette James

Bridgette O. James, the author of ***Sierra Leone in The Diaspora*** (Kindle Direct Publishing, 2021) was a Metropolitan Police Special Constable. She often writes about her lived experiences in Sierra Leone. Her poem *African Mimosa* was in the longlist for the 2022 Aurora National Prize for Writing. Two poems will be featured in the print edition of ***Dreich*** Magazine, Scotland; her work has also appeared in the *Fib Review*, USA, ***Gutter Magazine***, Scotland and *Wildfire Words*, UK. Her next book is to be published by LR Price, UK. She lives in England.

1. What the seashell said to me

As far back as age eight was when I would crawl under a chair for privacy press a seashell close to my ear eagerly listening to its resonance unperturbed by the busyness around me, my mum's endless chores my sisters' chattering. Roadside noise from diesel engines were faded out as I became entranced by mollusc magic. Interpreting the rushing sound as seashell speech – secrets from the shell's past life - it sneaked covertly into my home when frivolously snatched up by my younger self from its cosy home the shores of Lumley Beach during a seaside trip. I would recreate scenarios when it might be telling off the cheeky sand for filling up its hollow core; how it might be berating the ferocious sea for splashing it with water. Cursing at strolling beach goers who trod on it nonchalantly; showering the unpredictable tide with abuse as it came in and dislodged it. Ranting when the cold December breeze of Harmattan meant it had to burrow deeper. The humming noise might be it crying out when cruelly hit by a hard rock or yelling *watch out* as it dodged bigger sea creatures. I have forever been a seashell, an introverted poet harbouring society's indecipherable noises in a cavity of creativity and reprocessing them as what might be perceived as insightful sounds, heard by rare seashell-lovers who listen intently.

2. Stand back and see Sierra Leone

Stand back and take in our landscape
Rolling from the rural north rippling Rokel
baths Kabala's mountains in oceans of national pride
Cascading into southern Pujehun's Mano River
where boundaries greet our neighbours with our friendly smile
In the east the inquisitive Moa River outstretches tributaries
Into rambling seas of rich diversity in Koidu, Kailahun, Pendembu
Westerly wisdom encapsulates Freetown where Goderich whispers
To Banana Island salacious secrets of how Sierra Leone
Has stood the test of time, from slavery to independence
Our centrepiece is the Sewa River stirring the current of patriotism
referencing the history of the defiant Madam Yoko- our women
embodied

Stand back and hear our people
Temne tongue twisters conceal wisdom of unspoken words
Passed down by generations unmasked in stunning ornamental
masks
Mendes dishes brewed in a concoction of mouth-watering potions
Served with a slice of spice our sense of humour tickles
visitors in the beating of our Limba drums of farmers, hunters
indigenous Sierra Leone the fabric of an unconquered nation
shipped off as slaves indomitable- re-emerging as Creoles
Our lawyers, doctors, writers, a haberdashery of traditions
In Maroon churches, Oku mosques, Black Loyalists
Fula intertwined in our commerce bought and mis- sold
But elegance and beauty glow in our skin: dignified.

Stand back and see diversity
Madingo clans knotted in kinship of strong familial ties
In the intricate patterns of defining features: statuesque
Kono is our emblem of wealth tattooed into our black diamonds
the moral of togetherness, cohesion the gems of unity after the
civil war
Loko, Kissy, Vai, Kru smaller but fierce and thriving in
intermarriages

Families blended in tribes of rich ancestral descent from Malian
Kingdoms
Kuranko, Susu, Yalunka fingers on holes in our calabash
preserving the mixture of flavours intact in the fragile vessel of
ethnic diversity
woven into our straw baskets an eclectic fusion, vibrant,
resourceful people
intriguing tales of perils overcome concealed by regal figures
clad in *ronkos, *garas, *kabbaslots.
Stand back and revere Sierra Leone.

3. My Country went to war over nothing

No winner here Mercutio yells, peacekeeping
citizen-carcasses laid where a free city once stood
Another dispute same story: storm in a teacup:
Capulet's tantrum erupts over Montague's chiefdom

Off with their chief's head chanted Juliet stroking her fire
burn baby burn up an inferno stirs partisan Tybalt
gunpowder imported from Europe: their chief shall burn
Mercutio forewarns, peacekeeping: *No winner here*

An acrimonious chief belching up expletives in intestinal gunk
festering with the stench of fermented palm wine
Off with her head, insurrectionist; effeminately mutters lady
Montague.
Tribesmen mimed spoiling for a fight: *off with her head*

Civil War engraved in bold by global internet scribes
Juliet's day of reckoning. A huffing puffing chief bellows:
blow her head off slithering snake
venomous northern viper contaminating our eastern soil.

Burn the chief shall burn quipped Juliet fanning firewood flames
Two households' long-running tribal feud. Chief Lear engulfed
in fury

Tyson Fury. Balloons in hot Saharan air expelled in royal fart-
toxic methane engulfs a tragic Juliet history repeated

No winner here Mercutio yells, falling on a sword
citizen-carcasses laid where a free city once stood
Capulets and Montagues disturb the quiet in our streets
By waging war in another African state

4. A puppy at the water well

Tossed
copper coin
glistening underneath
clear tropical rainwater.
She pants, thirsty leans over
prone- to lick water-puppy like
savouring the metallic taste of stagnant water
unadulterated by chlorine a flavour of rustic Africa
a continent flowing with streams where children die of dehydration
the human who threw that coin in must have forgotten to wish all
children well.

5. Migrated Trauma

She landed
with her screams
from the forest
where she was cut

Stuffed
in a suitcase: broken dreams
buried in her history:
her miserable childhood

Skeletons in her closet
demon skeletons
leaping out from unzipped trousers
when she is touched

Reminiscent of recurrent pain
from the night in the bush
when she was cut
transporting airborne trauma

in undocumented particles that settled
like dust on her pristine Western attire
that cover up her secret
of the night she was cut

Perpetual nightmares
of severed vaginas
migrating trauma in memories
of bloodcurdling screams, the night she was cut.

6. Alice's seventh Heaven

In my daydream I was transported
like Alice by my radiating African headdress
through society's barriers
into the photosphere
yanked magically by my afro hair into the
transition region- outer space- a safe place
where an evolved featherlight version of myself floats
a humanoid equivalent: equal to all celestial bodies
molecular objects of brown dirt
layers of skin dissolve in sweltering heat
ethnicity blurred by Linnaeus's myopia
we are all identical planets circumventing earth's dust
in the darkened orbit of a blacked-out sun.

7. Lawlessness, a partisan acrostic

Lawlessness: The S is a
Slithery snake symbol sneaking cunningly into media houses
Siting on sofas besides democracy
Silently policing journalists' broadcasts
Saving evidence for when Idi Amin's LAW
Stretches out its long arm to throttle free speech

Lawlessness: The L is
Lifted to the stratosphere by presidential guards
Less freedom equates to all freedoms
Local regional variance in South-eastern dialects
Lapse into an 'r' to produce a rawness
Lingering in the raw pain of law's barbarism

Lawlessness: The P is
Phonetically emphasised by a political stress on LAW
Pronounced with lips rounded
Parted: then spread wide- a lady consenting
Polished off with the soft syllabic 's'
Phonetic symbol in Passions' throes' exhausted sleep.

Lawlessness: This P is
Precariously perched on a windowsill: a 'peeping Tom'
Poised for an eyeful of the un-brassiere-d opposition's bust
Printed in bold in the state's dictionary
Prohibiting citizen's fundamental rights to sneeze
Pick noses, belch, fart, or protest.

8. Dorylus Colonies

Piercing stings from their mandibles
Were often what made me jolt awake
midnight predators in militant colonies
covering every inch of the linoleum
in my bedroom floor; orderly lines.
Safari ants slipping out surreptitiously
from underneath skirting boards driver ants
invincible armies of ants half-visible
in candlelight instilling a life-long phobia
of phantom bites from imaginary insects
all types of ants drive me up the wall still
petrifying: the sight of six-legged creatures.

9. Creole women are minnows and herring

Winking at mum the fishmonger cautioned how Minnows must not be underestimated; miniscule but hazardous tiny lethal bones become lodged in your throat de-bone carefully like herring. Herring hides in fishy flesh minute bones, the strength of which match bulky Barracudas you find in presidential dishes. Minnows and herring are creole women irrespective if pickled, roasted, dried, smoked a poor mix in intertribal marriage; hazardous when unleashed in sauces; their stoic sense of false superiority's tiny bones are lethal to a relationship's longevity.

10. Freetown, an oxymoron

Freetown, your name is an oxymoron
songs sung in childhood in Hill Station
lyrics about a faraway land of the Queen
a sovereignty I had never met while President
Siaka Stevens' photo loomed on mum's closet

Freetown your name is an oxymoron
paradoxically named after liberated slaves
while my parents toiled to afford to feed us
slaves to an acutely unwell economy teetering
on the brink of collapse in the 1980s when milk
from the Fula shop was a luxury

the Fula shop where I saw an angelic, brown-eyed girl
stooping next to a rubbish bin foraging for toys in brown gravel
while I skipped from my old colonial house to buy bread and milk
a Creole luxury that drained all the coins in my mother's piggy
bank. I will not have any change for Sunday's collection
whatever will my dad a lay preacher, tell the Reverend?

Freetown, your name is an oxymoron
while I walked all those miles to Wilberforce
to catch a bus to MGHS that was never on time
my best Clackson shoes from Boots worn out
long before I arrived sweaty for assembly.

Freetown for the gentries that drove passed us
in four by fours, ministers' daughters that
bragged of foreign holidays to England
lunch boxes full of food I only ate at Christmas
or New Year's Day *Awujoh; my dad's words like tinnitus ringing
in my ears: *study hard. One day, you will go to England.*

Freetown, an oxymoron
your name ringing as sirens in my ears, which drove us
under our beds in fear APC's army hit song *countless coups*.
Sierra Leone making headlines again.

Freetown an oxymoron
your name was never given to define you
a land where few find freedom while most are chained
in poverty, enslaved in the jungle of corruption.

11. The weaker sex

A compromised identity
often a nonentity in African cultures
Eve created or evolved no question
was without hesitation the first female
to bow to a male.
That gesture defined us a species
that takes second place
relegated to Africa's picturesque background
where the image of equality is blurred
by traditions' ugly stains,
customs, that compound and discolour
a woman's pigmented existence.
The suffragettes' strife could not recompense
the harm we suffered for generations.
History shows civilizations have not civilized
the minds of men who subject women
to violence
to rape
to abuse.
Gender is the obtuse
barrier that prevents our escape.
Femininity eclipses the sun that should radiate
through an enlightened era. In Africa
virginity is still bought with a dowry
teenage girls forced into marriage
commodities traded to acquire parental wealth.
Inequality is encroaching with stealth
on the rights of women's Human Rights.
Rosa Parks' activism: women still lag behind
concealed by a dark blind of hateful superiority
Inferiority synonymous with our sex.
May the strength of Serena Williams
sustain us on the arms of Zulu women
into diversity's new age
in which African women take centre stage.

12. Magainda's metamorphosis

Holding her hand as she laid on her death bed
my grandmother, Magainda.
Her sunken eyes still glowed as she drifted away floating
away free of a life that had been tough.

Born a girl she had carried her societal load
Magainda's future had been foretold
the property rights to her own body owned by others
reading like chapters of a Sierra Leonean girl's story.

Her existence shaped by deep seated patriarchal traditions
when the fortune teller foretold a girl would be born
proud parents had planned her life to the smallest detail
she would be circumcised, married off, impregnated.

Her high hopes for a high education slaughtered
like a *Pray day goat. Society's only expectation
was that she procreated the seed sown in her mother's
womb germinated in hers that bore her daughter, my
mother.

Her baby's cradle had been Magainda's tomb
her innocence died a gruesome death as she laboured.
Magainda had worn motherhood with sullen pride
bravely merging with other mothers in her tribe
a statistic in Sierra Leone from infancy to her grave.

13. Land that we love

Our resilience
shone through in the Hut Tax War
defeating oppression
our valiance
came out conquering our conqueror
resistance
is the current streaming in our Rivers
our tribes
enchanted by ancestral mystical powers
our courage
came through a deadly civil war
our stamina
steered peace back onshore
diverse tribes
one purpose
one plan
that inscribes our love
all over our song
we compose
as brothers.
diverse cultures
one clan
watched over from above
by our founding fathers.
one passion
united in our determination to strengthen,
rebuild our nation
kinsmen
who are better understood
talking Together.
walking beside each other
shoulder to shoulder
as Sierra Leone once stood
solid, steadfast, and strong in 1961
heads held high with Milton Margai
when our independence was born

14. Lumley Beach sunset

Huge saucers
her eyes
mirroring the rainbow skies
she watched the African sun
daylight bidding farewell
as evening had begun
descending in majestic red
the sun kissed the seabed softly
mixing and matching with water
gently scattering translucent amber rays
across the sea; spilling out into the waves
spiralling out in a colourful haze
where the beach greeted Freetown's swimmers.
Day dreamers staring into its opulence
cannot make sense of how such beauty
in Sierra Leone is masked by the ugliness of poverty
we own what others want but lack what others own.

15. Our Palm Tree

Some are swaying
from your branches
trying to pluck your fruit
 some have staked life's chances
by harnessing up your stem
some have chased your palm leaves
 selfishly in hot pursuit
some gleefully tapped your wine
mostly elected thieves
 who have only come to nick your gem
the rest hungrily queued in poverty's breadline
others are crouching at your base miserably
 collecting inequality's falling fruits
hitting them as hardship's coconut
chopped up selfishly by others
 scrambling ahead in Sierra Leone's unfair race
refereed by corruption, the old chestnut-
that has been sapping up your richness.

16. The evolution of Mice in African Politics

Resting on our oars until
rodents became men nibbling on excrement
coprophagy became an Ebola epidemic

Condescending as paws cast votes
ballot boxes infested with mice droppings
corruption a COVID epidemic

Ignorantly fed minerals to omnivores
thinking they exclusively ate rancid cheese
brainwashed we are trapped in a mouse trap

17. Her soul will not rest in peace

Freetown's vultures' beaks gaping wide
salivating over corpses-tender meat
in the sewage-altar a child: dead
prematurely. Eight months after
a tumultuous birth
yanked into MUDDY water
soiled by unrepentant lawlessness.
Sucked into flood water
the state's sacrificial lamb
from parasites festering like flies on profits
from rotten land- structures upheld by greed.
Erected in MUD that crushed a girl
a girl entombed in MUD- eight months of life
entwined in rigors of poverty
buried in inadequacy's gaping hole:
a waterway pumping blood under rocks
stoic with economic malaise habiting
Freetown's vultures: beaks gawking
salivating over corpses- a landslide
win of Mudslide victims.

18. A Pakoh*

Plaited cornrows of neat head-contouring braids
couriered me along a tumultuous childhood

Come I plait your hair school tomorrow
visions of caterpillars woven into my scalp

exposing an occipital defect -a pakoh*
that preceded me into the classroom

high-pitched squeals of *her pakoh**
girl-bullies revelling at its revelation

scalp: braid-flattened by caterpillar plaits
an extension of a conspicuous furry bun

the urge to pull out hair follicles
trichotillomania: braids itching

pruritus- infestation of driver ants
itchy strands of hair colonising my head.

19. Flip Flops on Sani Abacha Street

Submerged
in sweltering tarmac
soles entrenched in debris-Freetown's garbage
soaked in sweat in the midday scorching sun
straps pulling unwilling heavy feet reluctantly along
side-stepping potholes
treading cautiously - the unpaved footpath
treacherous sewage lurking in mucky gutter water
flowing untaxed in the filthy underbelly of office buildings
flirts with her flip flop: flip flop
embedded in their sound a tale of how Kissy Street
renamed Abacha Street
christened in the aftermath of war
still characterizes a city
entombed in potholes of economic malaise
dragging along postcolonial litter-eternally
in the stench of corruption's painful bunions

Poems by Kayode Adesimi Robbin-Coker

Dr Kayode Adesimi Robbin-Coker is a graduate from Balliol College, Oxford, St John's College, Cambridge and Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. He now lives in England.

20. No through road for Poets

You have reached your destination –
the shrine and dwelling place of
Oya, the future wife of Obatala,
as yet a child, radiant in child-light.
Mind the gap as you approach.
It is good that you bend your knee to her:
touch once only, the brim of her calabash
and wait for the miracles to enter your muse.
As you leave, leave something behind
because the takers of this world will
never get given enough in one lifetime
and another lifetime is not yet guaranteed.

The train now approaching does not stop here
but you have everything you need to find your way
back home, cocooned in the language you cried in.

21. An African abroad

(To the memory of Pius Adesanmi—Teacher, Writer,
Patriot, Friend:

*“So brief [his] presence—
Match-flare in wind’s breath -
so brief, with mirrors around me.”*

- Christopher Okigbo, **Heavensgate**)

Wood powder, sand, a hen with five toes,
five chameleons, five hundred chains ...

for us, exiled,
waiting is a torturing
isolated note, drumbeat repeating itself
so many times, in a minute that
the mind screams out for a context.

Such sadness, too – sadness which lurks
irresolutely, like a blind vulture on the
outer edge of an unfenced memory.
This twilight screen at least is mercy: it fronts
a greying motif of cryptic embellishments,
tribal marks on my panic-stricken conscience.

There is something to fight for here, mind.
And we are better prepared for it now. Some will be
sent to flatter the old messiahs, persuade
them, perhaps, to crouch for group portraits.
I am to address the students.
Soyinka is, these days, a friend of my unsettled
affections: he is to guide me through the

First lacklustre phases –

fifteen days in the world
fifteen days in heaven.

(The secret, it appears, is to listen in sleep)

We are all invited to a love feast
down by the riverside, 16.30 BMT. I slip
into a vacant illusion, hoping to stay out
of truth's way till nightfall. But Mokewure,
Priest of goats knew exactly where to find me.
You should be gone, he chided. *It is not right
that destinies like yours and a star-crossed moon's
should be sighing in tandem here, whilst across
those waters, in a medley of strange terrors
they are even now doing your people in.*

Concede, a guilty heart suggests.

Instead, I try my safety dance –

Sango did not hang himself.

Reality here is porous, like the clay of life.

Consciousness sleeps through it.

What one needs is not truth but an alibi.

My dreams have gone down with the measles
tell-tale specks of black anguish which
illustrate the futility of regret.

All I can do is brace myself for a crude
awakening and the onset of even darker blues.

Poems by Ibrahim A. Kamara

Ibrahim Abass Kamara was born in Freetown. He has completed his WASSCE (West African Senior School Certificate Examination). He lives in Sierra Leone.

22. I remember

I remember the morning madness of yesterday
filled with dreams to rise through chores
for everyone. A home though, falls short of peace
worth enough to keep for good.

I remember the days demands
from every home under the light
a longing to make ends meet.

Each with their trade
each returning with their gain.

I remember the nights with no light
except the moon to put a smile on one's face.

The children sitting around listening to elders
or just hooping around till each was summoned to bed.

I remember the rain pouring on our old roof at night
and mother adjusting her stuff, asking me to lay on the other end
where it was less cold.

Sometimes to wake up feeling sick
an embrace of love to regain my breath.

I remember the lamp filled with oil-beaming-through the night
as I kept close to it, reading on my own.

Dancing with the flames of might
a sight that made mum smile:
the norm back then that nurtured my light.

23. Close by the stream

We live close by the stream
surrounded by trees of life.
When it pours, our home
barely stood the storm.
The earth: left muddy and cold
our roof leaked here and there
the threat of fever high as the
chances of dying.

We live close by the stream
that makes it easier to
fill our buckets.
More so when it ceases to pour
as water still ran all the way from
the hills, through the trees.
The rain returns to refill the streams-
we witness a rebirth.

We live close by the stream
the sound of running water a
song to our ears.
In the dry season snakes are visitors
who end up being knocked down by men,
while we sit and stare from a distance.

We live close by the stream
covered by the forest just a mile
from our home. With fruits
we sometimes reach out to pluck
from trees against our parents' wishes.
Who rather let us be with host of games
to keep us safe.

We live close by the stream.
The rising sun from the east
and cockerels, summon us

at the dawn of the day
and the call to pray.
The birds chirping nearby a
delight to see.

24. The war

It came
at the height of our despair
raged on till every home got a taste of death.
It was hell and seemed not to end. Even the land robbed
of its peace. We lost on every front. Forgot we were one,
from a land of gold to sowing seeds of greed.
War: brought us to our knees

25.Spare us the tears

Don't let us die shamefully
Striving to return again to

our dreams. mocked at will
our hearts beating out of tune

adding salt to our wounds.
Poisoning our patriotism

inside the walls of reasons
where truth must stand.

Freedom felt
is just word on paper.

A blow to our democracy
a step back from the path of life.

How broken to feel as if
our gods are choosing not to see...

Spare us the tears
to swim out of despair.

Poems by Osman Emmanuel Kargbo

Osman Emanuel Kargbo is a graduate from Milton Margai Technical University and presently teaches English at a school in Sierra Leone.

26. Papa's Kitchen

All seasons gone,
near and afar
the bam of pestle
in assonance with mortar
resonating in Papa's kitchen
where there is
never a serene twilight
with clanging of utensils
dancing with sumptuous recipes.

In papa's kitchen
a sanctuary in which
a craftsman plying his craft
makes every ingredient come alive
with the tiki-taka of wooden spoons
seasoning seasons through the seasoning.
Taste that savours my soul.

Like the affluents, Papa's kitchen
is my restaurant
where the best always comes alive
meeting the gluts
even in my grey years to come
I will desire the more.

There is no denial
I have grown in bond
with the familiar flavour
from the corner of suavity
where a man could
eat a mountain of foo-foo
feeling like a possessed being
on an errand of satisfying the belly-bag
always in need of more.

The aroma is in harmony
wrestling with ingredients in earthenware
like a 'crucified saint'
journeying the abyss of hungriness
to meet a bountiful harvest
when mornings' chameleon into nights.

My soul has grown in bond
sating the craving for food
that nourishes my soul beyond
recipe after recipe.
I have eaten the whole world's meal
in the nook of sumptuous creativeness
enveloping a rainbow of aromas.

27. Chained Freedom

From the cradle of affluence
Rises empires that stood time
History sewn in shades of melanin
Enveloping a nation of
great conquerors
With its twilight in the morning.

I was born in greatness
Raised in history intertwined
with great kings and conquerors
In the confluence of bountiful
Deep in the Nile and Euphrates
The Congo tributaries and of the great Niger.

I was here
Before Mungo Park came.
I saw it all
History written in blood
In struggles of dominance
When Mansa came
Lumumba vexed the plunderers
Garvey amplified Africanism
Dr King saw the vision of victory.

Alkebulan discarded
Our unity divided
In shades of flawed colonialism
Religion announced
Neo-colonialism at the helm
Africa dancing to the drums
Colonists beating the drums of influence
In rhythm to sit-tight African elites.

Black is every colour
Africa is home to every life
Our sphere rich in history
Its waters filled with heroes' cries
Who for hundreds of years
Voyaged across the Mediterranean
To light the dreams of plunderers.

My colour speaks my identity
I am black and proud
Haven walked tall in pace
From Kemet to Songhai
and Timbuktu and Sudan
Standing time eternal
I am Africa.

28. Life at a glance

Life's a precious gift; value it
like a race; run it
life is a bit of everything: bittersweet
served hot or cold
embrace it whether young or old.

Life is beautiful; live it
like a treasure hunt; pursue it
turns and curves
highs and lows
enjoy all- borrowed or owned.

Life's an adventure; explore it
like the constant
air; breathe it
served ice-cold; rough or smooth
ins and out; here and there
enjoy it - joy or fear.

Life's a dream; realize it
like the dreams you dreams
dare and do; truth and lies
believe in opportunities.

Life's opportunity- seize it
like the seasons long and thorough
live free whether sinner or saint
life itself is not sugar sweet
but a bit of every taste; savour it
enjoy life.

29. Taking Chances

Start today -
there's no better time than now
persevere to the lane of success
climb to the apex of the ladder
in tireless combat with an enterprising world-
a chance, is all you need.

Plan today -
tomorrow never comes
yesterday was the only easy day.
The instinct to survive is evident
to them that take up the mantle
grab your chances.

Dream today -
live for today; envision tomorrow
life's no *bed of roses*
but with hard work 'bread' is assured.
No food for the lazy- motivate yourself-
grab your chances.

Welcome each day -
though the struggle is tough
the routes unknown;
find it in you to struggle for something
aim beyond the sky
embrace your chances.

Conquer each day -
tomorrow will be fine
make no excuse for incompetence
leave no space for mediocrity

never retreating in doubt
Conquering hurdles to reach success.
Greet your chances.

Endure today –

Where there is life; hope is evident
with honesty keep your tenets
in readiness to meet with destiny.
Appreciate chances; embrace goodness.

30. Scarred heart

Like fluids in the vein
running down the stream of my arteries
Carrying along the pains of believing again
Unrhythmical palpitations: my weakened heart
played 'keepie-uppies' so well.

the unfavourable storms in my summer
crisscrossed my feelings beyond repair
adding salt to my wounded heart.

Cupid's arrow shot in the right direction-
an apron: tailored by your stone-cold fingers-
stabbed my feeble heart.

I felt like the world was ending
my heart, drenched in fear
I lost the coordinates to return home
when you left me with an emaciated heart.

Scars of pain
unseen like love itself
I felt a thousand blows from stabs
when all I had done was run into your open hands
you, stabbed love's heart.

When you realized you were all I ever had
you danced with my emotions
I, was lost like the shoes you wore, when
dancing the *Zaminaminas and the *Makossas.

31. Beauty personified: Mama Salone

Once I met a woman; a lonely soul
gloriously adorned; love at first sight
my very last like the widow's mite.
I could wrestle the jealous moon in a fight.
I have given myself to this woman.

Her rich history tells it all
like the Nile, her aura flows endlessly
cloaked in beauty serene
her hair of lion-sculptured mountains
her feet of beautiful beaches
I think I love this woman.

A vintage old soul
crowned in past glory
she can rival the sun for a shine.
Blessed with beautiful children
her enviable unity is the mat she lays on.
I've given myself to this woman.

A steel-hardened heart
had left her weary; older than her years;
she had seen the unspeakable
her children fought each other
for a decade and more
they pillaged her uniformed skin
leaving a thousand broken smiles.
I wept with this woman.

She gave all she had
enough to fill and spare
all she got in return was a divided home
draining away the nutrients that sweeten the sauce
an unpatriotic leadership at the helm.
I pitied this beautiful soul.

This woman
a distraught emerald widow
crying day after day for unity
wailing for a united generation
that will embrace a glorious dawn
unseat despoilers of public confines
share the national cake with all.

Even with a broken image
she possesses abundant love
wrinkles tell of her glorious age
vibrant colour illuminates her posture.
I love this defiant soul.

As a parting gift she said
I will be strong for you.
I doubted her crooked smile
the mischievous look in her eyes

All she wanted was a peaceful land to call home.
A home to rest till the years unfold
Against the unfriendliness of visiting seasons
enveloped by her fourteen children
Through thick and thin
united as one.
I love this woman.

Poems by Ibrahim Sorie Mansaray

Ibrahim Sorie Kamara is a linguistics graduate from Fourah Bay College; he is currently studying for his Law exams. He lives with his family in Sierra Leone.

32. Ensnaring

Then the rain came
Battling the ground for supremacy
To win over infinite dust
Ensnaring our days
Secretly exhausting our nights
Once again
Against the odds of leaking roofs
Homeless souls, with bittersweet feelings
I pause in resignation
To feel the warmth of the rain
As it drowns us into tomorrow.

33. It Shines Again

Above the Himalayas a shadow sings
of heavenly beings mewling above
a thousand leagues beneath the seas
Melancholy of drums dragging bones to sing.

Shaping succulent swings seeking-
by these rivers, slaves were known to cry
while their tears travelled the world
reaching lands where freedom is waiting
On the other side of the isles of oppression.

The fountain of hope shatters countless times
brave men and women almost at the helm
walking unknown roads with only hope
becoming ghosts; becoming hosts; becoming-
preparing the lands for the freedom coming
and generations of laughter under the sun
as it shines again.

Poems by Ibrahim Khalil Sesay

Ibrahim Khalil Sesay studied History and Sociology at Fourah Bay College and graduated in 2021 with a Division One. He currently lives in Sierra Leone.

34. TELL

Tell Joe A.D Alie that Sierra Leone since independence is a hunting ground
Where the mouse runs to the lion's den to seek refuge—the comedy of errors.
The looters of then and now assume they have undergone the Pauline conversion.
Yet, they are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow—a totem of comic relief.

Tell Karamoh Kabba that poverty amidst gold and diamonds is the tragedy of our lives
Mama Salone: the richest yet, her children are among the poorest—the paradox of her life.
Hunger and starvation invade our impoverished homes like a lion on a killing spree.
Struggle for existence and survival of the fittest—a day-to-day emblem.

Tell Syl Cheney-Coker that myopia is becoming an incurable disease.
The skeleton of stillborn promises has dried up in the catacombs.
We screamed and wept yet, there is still deafening silence
They are the saviours of the people yet; they lack the foresight of a Jewish prophet.

Tell Gbanabom Hallowell that the lust of Cain is becoming their Achilles' heel.
In their quest for affluence and influence they have become blood-sucking creatures.
The politicians and their cohorts are like bunch of crabs in the bucket.
Political witch hunts and propaganda—their national creed.

Tell Lucilda Hunter that Joy came in the morning but left when
the evening came,
So, we have become accustomed to the pleasure pain, hardship,
and misery.
Tell it to her that the road to freedom is full of thorns, scorpions,
and serpents
And the experience of treading on that path is bittersweet.

35. Alkebulan: mother of mankind

Her name in her prime was Alkebulan -mother of mankind: A
mother of 54 children

from her, life, and human civilization pre-existed.

She was metaphorically, a garden of Eden'—*Land of Heart's
Desire*

In her belly, the earth's hidden treasures were kept and
preserved.

Once upon a time, she was a symbol of strength and pride
Enrobed with amazing greatness, glorious like *Morning yet on
Creation Day*

Her physical and cultural make-up were embodiments of
wondrous beauty

The kingdoms of men rose and fell, conquerors carved
New fiefdoms and parts of her were named and renamed as
humans squabbled

Coexisting in her bounty.

Then a new visitor came quietly from afar with his greed for her
riches,

Disguising himself as *A Man of the People*

a friendly enemy: pharisee of her days; whited sepulchre

a dreaded conqueror who renamed her Africa

and imposed a strange system of ruling on her called: *divide and
rule*.

Her hospitality soon turned out to be her unforeseen catastrophe
For she was robbed of her name, culture, language, and even her
mind.

Day turned into night; she became *No Longer at Ease* with herself
as she was left to suffer the sling and *Arrow of God*.

The *mother of mankind* soon became devoid of the *Joys of
Motherhood*

as her 54 children became disorderly disordered

Like it was the time of *The Second Coming*.

She became confined like a *Caged Bird*

who dared to fly though void of wings and feet.

Her sorrow and grief turned to *An Unexpected Joy at Dawn* when the caged door was opened, and she could escape she eventually saw the way to her *Long Walk of Freedom*. But was made to *Look Back in Anger* and frustration as she found herself standing on skeletons of dead dreams. The becoming was becoming unbecoming for her Yet she survived, called by many names, and nurtured the world.

Poems by Chernor Abubakarr Jalloh

Chernor Abubakarr Jalloh holds a bachelor's degree in Public Health. He's from Kambia District, northern Sierra Leone.

36. How do we wake up this generation?

Woke up from this unsettling dream
a world slowly drifting into chaos.
The scale of right and wrong becoming blurry.
Morals and morality drifting into the void.
A generation seemingly trapped in a deep unsettling dream.

How do we wake up this generation
from the Abyss threatening to engulf our very existence?
Societies slowly losing their stand-
the bonds holding us as societies- falling apart.
Morals abandoned for the illusion of choice
the lines of black and white becoming obscure.
What is happening to our societal values?
We pretend to be woke but have lost our identity
societies no more unified in humanity.
Differences in beliefs and opinions breeding calamity.
Wars and poverty ravaging our societies
yet we pretend as if nothing is happening.

How do we wake up this generation?
Families riddled with internal strife
parents and children fighting vigorously
siblings in constant disagreement and killing one another.
Blood no longer thicker than water.
An institution of peace it was
yet now an institution of jealousy, hatred, and war.
A noble institution lost its peace:
how did we get here?

How do we wake up this generation?
Our youths trapped in a matrix of their own
Lost their sense of identity for validation
morality and spirituality reserved for the elderly
shouting freedom and choice but forgetting about
responsibility.
Pursuing societal acceptance and Facebook likes

yet neglect the pursuit of their dreams.

What is wrong with this generation?

How did we sink so deep into this unsettling dream?

A dream so realistic yet threatening the very existence of society.

How do we wake up this generation to reality?

Poems by Samuella Conteh

Samuella Conteh is an award-winning Poet from Sierra Leone and author of her own anthologies: ***The Unsung Song*** (published by Sierra Leone Writers' Series, 2020) and ***Love Colours*** (published by Poetry Planet Publishing House; 2020).

37. Peeping through the cracks

Peeping through the cracks on the wall
I saw the world moving on – without me
The sun was still shining in spite of my gloom

The mountains stood still, while I ran on the spot
Life was still life no matter what's anyone's taste
I wondered how the world could leave me behind
While I rocked my cares like a mother her baby

Bathing my worry-stained face with unshed tears
Only to mask my lashes with a falsehood of joy
A self-slap awakened me to life's realities
The windows of my heart, I flung wide open
What a rush of sweet perfume of flowers wild

On sunshine rays I dipped my troubled brows
To this song in my heart
I'll lift my heavy heels
With my hands in the air, a praise to render

38. Women Like Us

Women like us
Who salt their dough with tears of anguish
On gritted teeth, they're hauled into the furnace
To chew the hardest crust through the years
Their blistered tongues hold a sad tale or two

Women like us
Who plant seeds of hope on parched fields
And pray for respite in the droughts of March
Toiling from sunrise to its setting in emptiness
Yet harvest time find them rotting in lack

Woman like us
Whose bare feet beat the path to the stream
Yet, evening find them fanning dying embers
Hoping tomorrow's light will lure fish to their nets
On long necks, they eat aroma from another's kitchen

Women like us
Like slaves, they squirm under the branding iron
Which label them cursed for joys they cannot share
Extracting their teeth of happiness to kill their mirth
So they learn to flash tight-lipped smiles to the day

It's women like us who float on life's torrents
Chew sawdust, yet pick their teeth like one who has had
meat
They bend over to bear the brunt of love and life
Yet they shake off taunts to steady their crowns

Poems by Cecilia Thomas

Celia Thomas is a final year student studying Mass Communications at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

39. Decisions

State of dilemma
Not knowing what to do
With so many things in mind

Everybody gives their opinion
Some even conclude
And give judgement

Parents make decisions
Abides because of love
Even though it's against my wish

On the fence I stand
Regretfully or not
I make the decision

40. Salone Market

Saturdays are domestically driven
a non-working day for majority
women hasten to the market
to buy and prepare food for the family.

At the entrance of the market
crowded and noisy
like the bats at the cotton tree
barely enough room for fresh air

Sellers wanting the attention of the customer
battle: megaphones versus voices
singing and dancing
*a Drizilik frenzy the mamie e money for *komot*

**Peppeh, *yabas, salt*
**Plasas, *ogiri, fish*
You don buy? they shout
Maggi for make you soup taste sweet

Wheelbarrow pushers and load carriers
racing at customers like brute
thieves in sheep clothing
with five fingers but only two usable
sweaty and unpleasant body odour

Exhausted and tired
you hurriedly find your way home
empty your bag
and hastily prepare a delicious meal

A Poem by Kemurl Fofanah

Kemurl Fofanah is a Free Lance writer from Sierra Leone. He works as a Communications Associate. His poems were featured in ***We All Are Persons: Why Gender Discrimination?*** Published by Poets Unite Worldwide and ***Contemporary Firestone Poems*** by Sierra Leonean Writers Series

41. A Woman in Africa

In the region of the west
the lofty plains of Africa's Sahara
a mother lays beautifully untangled
like the other mothers of her continent
greeting the Atlantic wide with her charms.
Pedro and others called her Sierra Leone
but I call her beautiful mama-
just like the others in our mama Africa.

In her bosom, you will see this full-time:
a swam of streams, blessed with fishes-
all sizes; running like lightening
acrobat-like. The finest gymnast
you will see the Mina: a special kind of fish
taunting you from shallow waters and plates.

You will see the beaches, emancipating nature
gracing your every day with elegance.
Pampering light skins, thick skins
mesmerizing every colour with its different shades
blessing you with this woman's beauty.

You will see the mountains, standing firmly
waving as you ride the roads in her life.
You will see the trees gently humbled
bending to feed you sufficient oxygen
Telling you to be quiet. Life will be exciting here.

Gracious roaming souls
seeking after perfect destinations.
You will see wildlife itself, in its roughness
as you scale her uncut jungles.

Animals darting into your presence
flipping about in delight.
Birds chirping, snakes hissing
heavy-sounding baboons, frogs bawling
and the rest like choirs singing this song of
appreciation
welcoming you to this woman in Africa.

Poems by Abu Bakarr Kamara

Abu Bakarr Kamara hails from Kambia District, Sierra Leone. He holds a bachelor's degree in Physics at Fourah Bay College.

42. Next time I go home

When next I go home
I would love to see
the women of my land come
from their sweaty and tireless toil
answering to the call of the **tabule* to put on
their *docket* and **lappas* and **kabbaslots*
and look like lanterns in glamorous glow.
Either fast or slow; I would love to see them
dance in delight with steps exact
to the chanted rhythms of the **Gumbe*.

I would love to see the men
the young and the old,
not in jeans and tops or shirts
but in **ronkos* and raffias; clapping
and tapping their feet to hump and bump
arm in arm and shoulder to shoulder
in the joy of being alive
whether in sorrow or happiness.

For the girls, I would love to
watch them do the mambo
with bells on their anklets
shake their hips like how the leaves of trees
sway to the gentle breeze.
I would love to see them dance
in the moon light with stars in sight
like butterflies tangoing to petal bulbs.

If at all for the sake of modernity
then I would love to see
a choreography of **tekneh* and **tonga*
for the pleasure of short-cutting
to happiness or ecstasy.

And to buoy the spirits of our land in traditions
I would love to see a slaughter of sacrifice
offered in their names and hands raised
in prayers for every ancestral soul
to be appeased.

43. I refuse to remain silent

I refuse to remain silent
for the tears of a thousand eyes
I see in the blurry eyes of a man
sitting on the roadside
In streets not paved in gold
holding a begging bowl
with wrinkled hands; pale face
wrought with pain.

His grief gnaws the regions of my mind
each time his eyes meet mine,
even though, no words were spoken
I feel as if our souls are entwined.

So, I refuse to remain silent
because I feel his misery and pain
coming back to claim
those hearts of steel that never ever
throb, to offer a shoulder on which to cry.

God forbid.
I refuse to remain silent.
His endless pain

I see growing like grain-
how it feels to be homeless.

I refuse to remain silent
with these puddles of tears eroding
every joy of my soul; that I feel
duty bound to write about such misery.

In fact, the more I think about
the cold grips of poverty ruling
his world with no hand stretching
out to give a morsel of love
the more I refuse to remain silent.

I refuse to remain silent
because my token cannot build him a house.
I refuse to remain silent
because my hug cannot numb his pain.
I refuse to remain silent
because I cannot taste his bitterness

I refuse to remain silent
because I cannot take away the hunger
that sucks him dry
with no roof over his head.

I refuse to remain silent
because each time I reach home
I feel so bad that he cannot go home too.
If at all there is nothing else
I can do, I would rather refuse
to remain silent.

44. There is more to be told

There is more to be told
than what has been told
in memoirs and pieces of poetry left
unread in libraries across the land.

There is more to be told
than what has been told
by the poet whose poetry
was born where his heart
sighed for his country's brokenness.

There is more to be told
than what has been told
about the child who lost a limb
that made her a symbol of a catastrophe
that scorched her land.
How she became a collateral damage
for a greater course she knows
only by what she was told.

There is more to be told
than what the passing years
brought to their doorstep:
the fright it etched into the depths
of souls; the scars its left in hearts
and minds it has left haunted
by its memories of how men were turned
into killing machines to shatter a nation's pride
and blow apart dreams.

There is more to be told
than the stories we have heard.
There is more to be told
than what has been told.

How the youth conditioned
to fight for their right but returned
broken and so mad that they hate
the society that did this to them?

There is more to be told
than what has been told
How about the orphans created?
Another generation
that have learnt how to hate?

There is more to be told
than what has been told.
How about the man whose wife
was raped before his eyes and
left lying in her blood, dead?

Each time he hears about rape,
his eyes would well up with tears?
The shock and how he begged them to stop
instead cut off his hands?

There is more to be told
than what has been told.
How about the little girl with
imprints of sad memories of the day
She laid beside her dead parents
Who did not get a proper burial?

There is more to what we have read.
What if her blood still boils with rage
for the day when she will fight for revenge?
There is certainly more to be told.
More than what we have
not even come to know.

When I think of the young boy
who saw his father, a statesman being
killed in cold blood; their home burnt down
he, left to wander the streets anxiously

seeking shelter.

There is more to be told than
than what has been told.

Poems by David Manley

David Manley has worked for the United States Marines. He previously studied at The University of Newcastle, Australia and Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. He lives and works in Sierra Leone as a scientist.

45. My love for her

My love for her
as big as the heart in her
when she shows me times without number
her love for me should be trumped by one other: my love for me

46. I left my poem at home

I left my poem at home
took along a muse for a change
 each mile apart a kiss to atone
the reunion sparkling heat in close enclaves

47. A haiku: I love apples, full stop

My love of apples
will one day kill me
those apple bottoms

Poem by Festus Gabriel Luseni

Festus Gabriel Luseni is a graduate from Fourah Bay College and presently works as a Research Officer in the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) in Sierra Leone.

48. African Identity

I am African within me are my artifacts
painted with the knowledge of a new name
dark skin, brown skin, bright skin; shows my aestheticism:
peopling different tribes and nationalities, the home of tourism.

Battling the odds of life. Named and shamed by strangers, but
never shrouded from progressing, making headlines-
the world knows my effect. I am always the talking point on the
global stage.

Welcome to my continent where loyalty make sense, racism and
tribalism made no sense.

People live in culture of decency, proud to call this our home

Welcome to my continent, where religion is a choice

I know my identity, I am African -
bold as a lion

I am the voice of the people like the Messiah who redeems.

My hands: always open to strangers to rest in my vineyard;
without me the world doesn't make sense.

Those days of mental slavery are over, a new Africa is on our
shoulders; awakened to our enablement as we embrace our
continent.

Like sounds of triumphant echoes: my cry. I am up and running
neighbours who saw me were amazed; my story enticed them to
stay.

They danced to the beat of culture- my beautiful culture.

Today I made history- free from the thought of negativity now
progressing far beyond racism.

The lion of the tribe of Judah beckons me.

A poem by Emmanuel Nyakeh Momoh

Emmanuel Nyakeh Momoh is a part-time Lecturer at Njala University, Freetown Campus, Sierra Leone where he teaches English and Communication Skills.

49. Childhood

From the womb lingered minds of childhood
Clothed with the spirit of resilience
I couldn't give up.

Even when I heard the sounds of the bullet
amidst dead bodies outside
Just about time for Foday Sankoh
and his men to take off.

At the place where Johnny Paul kissed the rifle.
Nine months in one small room
then I started kicking.

I couldn't speak
but heard when the rebels spoke.

Was ever young and strong
with grit and supernatural wisdom.

Suddenly she felt sharp pains
that spectacular day.

Then I came out with swift speed
faster than Usain Bolt.

The sky was my limit.
The battle started-
it was in this very labour room
the flute of AK 47 couldn't stop me.

In that beautiful place called Lion Mountain.
About forty-two hours to the birth of Christ.

Wondrous child I was
more than Beah's boy soldier.

Like Camara Laye's African Child
so, I won.

Like Senghor's black Women
so was my mother's face.

Push push
then she did.

It was harmattan.
The wind whistled; trees sang.

Then I was a baby- carved with wit.
Holding this antique pen of Negritude- I write.

A poem by Abu Bakarr Meek Sesay

Abu Bakarr Meek Sesay is a twenty-one-year-old emerging Sierra Leonean Poet. He has completed his West African Senior Secondary School Examination/WASSEK.

50. Child's plea

She pounds on me
with a broom, pestle, or spoon
whatever her hand picks up.
Let me hear you cry, fem!

She tells the teary me with a finger
placed across her lips
she warns me with slaps
bites and punches
she batters me HARD.

To the pleading stranger, she says
never mind, Madam
he is not human
just a bloody goat on heels.
The tailless me continues to sob in pains
wailing to her brutal cane.

At a quarter past noon she says:
sorry boy, would you like to take this dough ?
Making her wrapper rub my face
to clean away my tears and mucus
puff, puff -to chase my sorrow away.

When darkness illuminates the day
she brings the lamp and a wrapper
ordering me to come closer
she presses my wounds with
a hot fabric while snubbing my face
I yell, till she melts my lips with it again.

Let me fake sickness a minute
and see her go off sick a week
let me fake faint
watch her lose her wrappers
jumping up and down in pain.

I spent my childhood broken-hearted
my parents didn't treat me as they should.
I wish they could have seen my tears
now I'm grownup and still feel the pain.

A Poem by Stephen Yaya Mansaray

Stephen Yaya Mansaray is a lawyer, former Master and Registrar of the High Court of Sierra Leone, a loving father, poet, and an aspiring philosopher.

51. DON'T LET THEM TELL YOU DIFFERENTLY: (a mini epic)

When promises unfulfilled remain
falling in and out of seasons like rain
So that even that which is possible
is justified as not plausible
don't let them tell you differently.

When bread and butter
come in sputters and mutter
kind words you hardly utter
pronouncements in language of the gutter
don't let them tell you differently.

When crabs in trumpet blow
now all shine and glow
more than in dribs and drabs
a misdirection of mihrabs
don't let them tell you differently.

When all is honour
but mean in demeanour
critics and materials you do not need
hungry mouths you do not feed
don't let them tell you differently.

When rumours and lies spread
by means we all dread
only more promises of prosperity ahead
doubt of possibility of things misread
don't let them tell you differently.

When trust is lost
the bastion is as good as dust
maybe an overhaul-
both corridors and wall
don't let them tell you differently.

When mistrust is massive
the active is passive.
The masses are dismissive
coded speech less than persuasive.
Don't let them tell you differently.



When from oblivion you became a donor
food security you ignore.
Do we have to wait for you to feed?
We will all die indeed
don't let them tell you differently.

When the seed to sprout
choked by known weeds stout,
know it was meant to die
like an ostrich that cannot fly.
Don't let them tell you differently

.....

When a fight you feign
the chase is in vain
the credit you must disdain
someday it will all be plain
don't let them tell you differently.

When the need is to pore
environment, insufficient to spur.
Your depth only superficial
this lamb is not sacrificial.
Don't let them tell you differently

When you itch to preach
words and actions do not match.
Attempts way over the arch
your goals you cannot reach
don't let them tell you differently.

When your life and the fox are cognate
as though there is none Most High.
Experts in being sly-
a device ready to detonate.
Don't let them tell you differently.

When the environment is lip-service
just to please with ease
so, destruction is perennial.
when you are definitely in denial
don't let them tell you differently.

When all in all time will tell
in the midst of the quell and yell
the spell of the shed of the shell
remember the Lord, in whom we dwell.
Don't let them tell you differently.



When the right to life we pause
taken without just cause
further sanctioned with loud applause
all you hear is “*because, because*”
don't let them tell you differently.

When the status quo you impeach
sustenance and joy you leach
basic rights you blatantly breach
a job you switch, to ditch a snitch.
Don't let them tell you differently.

When you beat Drums of War
disregarding consequences and more.
Perpetrators brought to book
none left off the hook
don't let them tell you differently.

When munitions are a daily presence
the problem from the root: the essence
independent, credible probe
like it is done around the globe
don't let them tell you differently.

When a law to repeal
was clearly the deal.
No precondition as a precursor
there is a sensor in the visor
don't let them tell you differently.

When the law loses its awe
human rights cast blight as part of the plight
so that the conscience is put to flight.
The people's plea you ignore
don't let them tell you differently.

When it is “shoot to kill”
the Forces are the force
work barely provides a meal
leadership, the actions endorse
don't let them tell you differently.

When you are lost in the noise
veering far from your choice
pseudo-amnesia drowning the people's voice
only your kind, rejoice?
Don't let them tell you differently.

Glossary

- 1.** Awujoh: a celebratory feast in West Africa.
- 2.** Garas: a traditional custom sometimes made from tied-dyed fabric.
- 3.** Kabbaslots: a traditional dress worn by Creole women in Sierra Leone.
- 4.** Tabule: might be a traditional cultural festivity or drama.
- 5.** Lappa: a colourful traditional cloth wrapped around the waist, worn as a skirt.
- 6.** Gumbe: traditional music of the Creole people from Sierra Leone.
- 7.** Tekneh: a variation of the name, Techno music
- 8.** Tongo: assumably a variant of Tango music.
- 9.** Docket: a traditional custom
- 10.** Drizilik: a genre of music named after (and popularised by) a contemporary Sierra Leone artist.

- 11.** Mamie: a Krio term for lady
- 12.** Komot: a Krio word for ‘come away.’
- 13.** Peppeh: translated as ‘pepper.’
- 14.** Yabas: Krio for ‘onions.’
- 15.** Ogiri: a seasoning made from dried Benin seeds.
- 16.** Plasas: Krio term for edible greens cooked in a sauce.
- 17.** *Zaminaminas*: a Cameroonian dance popularised in the 1980s. *Makossas*: a Cameroonian style of urban music.
- 18.** Ronko: a traditional top worn by Sierra Leonean men, perceived to have magical powers.
- 19.** A pakoh is a Krio term for a long head.
- 20.** Pray day goat: goat slaughtered for a celebratory feast at the end of the holy month of Ramadan.
- 21.** Sani Abacha Street is a road in the Eastern part of Freetown, Sierra Leone.

About the Author

Bridgette O James is the author of **Sierra Leone in the Diaspora** (Kindle Direst Publishing, 2021). She has appeared in Sierra Leonean anthologies: **Lice in the Lion's Mane**, 1995; **Kalashnikov in the Sun**, 2009. She also co-authored **Out of the Slums Came Poetry**, 2022 with Yusuf Kamara. Her poem *African Mimosa* was in the longlist for the 2022 Aurora National Prize for Writing. Her poems will be featured in the print edition of **Dreich** Magazine, Scotland; her work has also appeared in the *Fib Review*, USA, **Gutter Magazine**, Scotland and *Wildfire Words*, UK. Her next book, **Anglo-African Rhymes** is to be published by LR Price, UK.
