HomeGrown Joy

An Anthology of Festive African Writing

Edited by Tahzeeb Akram

brittle paper

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Editor's Note

Dear Brittle Paperians,

The holidays are a period of celebration and cheerful gathering. Some of you are travelling long distances to meet loved ones. You will be gathered around the dinner table, eating and sharing stories. And in the moments of finding some quiet time, you'll need something to read, like a collection by African writers reflecting on what makes festive periods memorable. *HomeGrown Joy* is the first in an annual series of anthologies that we hope can capture the diverse stories and ideas that shape the experience of holiday festivity.

The collection features fiction, poetry, and essay. It is divided into four parts titled Food, Family, Faith, and Festivity. The experiences of these four elements culminates in what we are calling, **HomeGrown Joy**. The collection both celebrates and questions the idea of home. Festive periods often make us reconsider, rebuild, and review what we consider home, homely, and homegrown. As we all know, the festive period has an underhanded way of making us sometimes feel homesick even when at 'home' or making us feel joy at recreating what we call 'home'. The pieces in the collection reflect on the complexities of feelings evoked in the idea of home: be it excitement to spend time with family, angst at having to be back home, or the nervous anticipation of building new traditions in our chosen homes with chosen families.

The writers featured in the collection are from Nigeria, Cameroon, Ethiopia, and South Africa, and the festivities range from religious holidays to cultural festivals. Muti'ah Badruddeen's "Three Days of Eid" and Lesley Chacha's "Feliz Navidad" tackle the complex feelings and emotional toll of the holidays. But holiday festivity is not limited to Christianity and Islam. Grace and Gloria Ubi write about Leboku New Yam Festival in the village of Idomi. And Francis Ukpevie's essay explores the political significance of The Obunem-Epie Festival held in the Epie community in Yenagoa. Mihret Adal Gidi reflects on the celebration of the birth of Mary in her Ethiopian orthodox Christian family. This is but a small peak into the collection to entice you even more.

The poetry, essays, and short stories celebrate all of you through the food you share, with the families you chose, through faith-based traditions, all over the course of these festive days. I hope this collection helps bring more festive cheer and that you find yourself within these stories.

Let's raise a glass
To those we hold dear
In the name of
Joyous days ahead

Tahzeeb Akram

Part I: Let's Raise A Glass

"There was unusual activity in the kitchen, and the unmistakable, mingled aromas of a feast." – Abdulrazak Gurnah, Paradise

The New Yam Festival – Iri Ji Ofulu, Iwa-ji

Leonard Ugwu Jr. | Poetry

Today is the birthday of yams
Freshly harvested from farms
Stored safely in barns
The reason for this season has come.

Ashes from hearth of roasted yams
'Ezenmuo' snuggles out sprinkling ashes of dust
Singing incantations to our gods
Dancing to the rhythms of '*onye oja'*.

'Eze' feeds his eyes
As '*mmuo'* sings his praise
And sprouts his naked jaconet
Dancing like drunk god.

In celebration of '*Ji'*
Roasted and burnt with
Fresh oil from our palms.

The '*igba, ogene, ndi egwu na Adamma,'* have come
To dance and entertain us
The crowd is filled with choruses of joy.

Eating yams slaughtered on plantain leafs.
With wooden plates of oil
And a calabash of '*nkwu ocha'*
I'm chilling with my people.

Clans, villagers and kindreds gather
In jubilation of a fresh food
In honour of nature
And its fruitful relationship with man.

Bring all sizes,
Big, small, large and tiny
Yam is yam and we shall thank our gods
For making it so.

'N'ala igbo,' this is our day
A sacrificial abolition to our deity
Appreciating all they have done;
New yams for new borns.

Like birthdays are celebrated with cakes
So are our culture-day celebrated with yam.

Do not kill our celebrations with bakes and cakes.
Rather rekindle our sacred festival with yams and '*oji'*
That gives hope to the living.
The new yam festival is our pride
Do not kill it.

Glossary

Ezemmuo – chief priest of the Igbo people

Onye oja – a flutist

Eze – king

Mmuo – masquerade

Ji – yam

Igba – local African drum

Ogene – metal gong

Ndi egwu – dancers

Adamma – a beautiful feminine masquerade of the Igbo people

Nkwu ocha – palm wine

N'ala Igbo – in Igbo Land

Oji – colanut

Ginbot & Harmony

Mihret Adal Gidi | Essay

A day is much more than simply another number added to our age. It is made up of everything that comes with it: a scent; light that emits colours; the sense of emotion that it evokes in us; and everyone and everything involved in the construction of a sensation in oneself.

I recall how much I loved Christmas as a youngster; that sensation still lingers in my heart. Perhaps it was because of the unexpected gifts and new clothes, but there was another contagious emotion that I now associate with Christmas that used to make my heart flutter, making it my favourite holiday. I used to adore how the colour pink is linked with femininity, which led me to enjoy anything from pink to red, and for Christmas, well, there's Santa Claus, a prominent figure in red and white. That was one of them, along with the scent of pine trees. After all, the pine tree's woodsy fragrance still sweeps my spirit back to Christmas.

Yes, indeed, I loved Christmas as one of my favourite holidays, but it has changed as I grew. I grew up to discover many things I didn't understand about myself. The strange thing about discovering oneself is that you fall in love with and connect with the sentiments you instinctively suppress. I assumed I liked pink since my other friends felt it was a colour for females... well, pretty girls, if I had to be precise. Christmas, like the colour pink, was influenced by several other factors that led me to consider it my favourite, just as the colour choice was influenced by the majority of my friends' assumptions. Aside from other activities done by adults, the gifts, lights on the tree, music, and the fact that it is a birthday and how good we tried to be all year to earn gifts from Santa made it feel like it was our day. It feels like Christmas is designed for children.

I still love Christmas, but it's no longer my favourite. As an Ethiopian, I may attend numerous festivals and holidays and say many things about them, but what could be more lovely than writing about the one commemoration day that means the most to you? In the Ethiopian Calendar and on thirty Orthodox days, every day is

assigned to archangels and saints that have a place in the Bible. The celebrations take place once a month or once a year. On Ginbot 1, the first day of the ninth month is commemorated by Lideta Mariam, the day when Mary, mother of Jesus, was born. Saint Anne, according to the holy books that contain the story of Mary, was a woman who gave birth to Mary, mother of Jesus, on the mountain of Lebanon, past the proper age a female can give birth, after long prayers and while they were fleeing from those who used to envy the prophecy.

I recall, as a youngster, hating the commotion of everyone at home rushing about preparing food and beverages for the celebration. The one time I used to look forward to was when we would relax and enjoy the day. With the passage of time, I began connecting with my inner self to the point that I grew up to even enjoy the hard effort that we, as a family, put into it to rejoice. After all, everything that makes sense in our lives revolves around our efforts. Every memory is constructed on nuances, and it is the details that make it all worthwhile at the end of the day.

On this day, the early morning is spent at church, and after returning home, everyone would do what they normally do. At six o'clock after lunch, every Orthodox Christian family member in a household would make coffee out in the open, in their compound; some would celebrate with the entire neighborhood gathering on the road for a coffee ceremony and more; others with friends and family invited over to their compound. The notion is that this celebration will be held outside. The procedure is to commemorate Mary's birth scenario, which occurred on a mountain in Lebanon under a tree.

I come from a huge family where the fun can be loud and louder. In my experience, any celebratory day is generally the busiest at home. From what I recall, there's never a simple celebration; there's always a huge list of invitations: friends, neighbors, and family members. Everything is done at home, and the enjoyable parts are cooking, cleaning, and setting the table or performing the coffee ceremony. "You can't barricade the main gate and host a commemorative celebration," Mom always said. On these days, the main gate is always kept open for anybody passing by to come in and receive some food and beverages. There will be no prejudice; whatever we do for our visitors will also be shown to outsiders.

We used to live in this tree-lined home. It's a miniature heaven in a concrete fence, as I usually remark. There, the celebration feels more mystical. I'll never forget how every room was set up when we lived in that house. It's difficult to let go of a memory that can awaken all four senses: the beautiful view of the compound's greenness, all kinds of trees and grass fields with well-kept flower gardens, the smell emanating from the nature surrounding the old architectural house, how everything feels to the sense of touch, and the taste of fresh fruits from the giving trees. It was everything, all at once.

We created a little mud stage five inches off the grass field, facing the house and under lines of eucalyptus trees, as we entered the complex through the main gate. It was my mother's idea to prepare the area for an outdoor family gathering, but it turned out to be an ideal location for Ginbot Lideta Day. When we arrive home from church, we all race to get back on track to do our bit in preparing for the six o'clock celebration. Because we are a larger group, it is normal to have more food than usual. It is traditional to consume boiled barley, also known as Nifro, with coffee. Whether we have more or not, Nifro is inescapable since it represents what Saint Anne offered to all her guests who came to check on her after she gave birth.

My mother makes the best coffee, and we all prefer her to handle the coffee ceremony, which she is in charge of, among other things. Also, when cooking, the best part of her culinary practice is the way she lets us test her exquisite cuisine with her stick spatula beforehand, and the fun begins with the race to get near her so we may be the first to try it. We'd completed cleaning two hours earlier, so we'd dress up in habesha dresses or chiffon habesha dresses, adorning us with the most acceptable figures. Until our visitors came on schedule, we would prepare all the utensils we would need to serve them. Plates with soft papers, tables, seats, and every material for the coffee ceremony; little cups with saucers; green coffee, and the iron plate to roast it with; frankincense, incense sticks; everything will begin to take place, and soon the time we calculated ahead feels like it's never enough. Tension would mount as we strained against the clock.

The entire "we're not going to make it on time" notion would dissolve as soon as our guests stepped through the door, and everything would miraculously begin to fall into place. We always had someone over to bless everything, someone we referred to as "the father of the soul," who would not only represent us in our daily prayers but also bless and sprinkle holy water all over our home. Many would pray to God and promise to do something in the name of the day to get what they wished for. Some who got what they asked for would give their thanks. After a beautiful prayer and gratitude for all the miracles in our lives, it means that the fun part has begun.

While the boys worked on the grill, preparing a nice tibs, we'd all be lined up to serve; some with hand washes, walking from one guest to the next, and some with plates (the sheep siga tibs). To make everything fresh, the 'dulet', a delicacy created from the sheep's different parts of meat, would also be cooking while our guests are arriving.

My mother would have already taken her seat when the coffee ceremony began. The aroma of roasted coffee beans mixed with the smoke of Frankincense in the open air would start to lighten the mood. The smell of tella, a drink made from gesho leaves (Rhamnus prinoides) and Tej from honey, and different types of Areky, traditional alcoholic drinks, would play their roles to change the mood. The smell of the tibs would arouse the need to eat even more. Not only would the smell in the compound have changed by this point, but so would the sense of comprehension. Even if the loudly played tunes overrun the chats, it appears that no one is annoyed by the background. It's almost as if the world has gone quiet for a while and peace has settled among us; as if the world is a sense of peace that a mother experiences the first time she locks gaze with her infant. I always wonder if heaven is this: the sense of relishing thoughts that can be found in unification.

The music volume will grow, the number of attendees will increase, the inebriated will begin to dance, and things will spiral out of control from here on out. There would be no discrimination or judgement; everyone would be fun, and fun would be incarnated. Then, before I'd had enough of my favourite day, it'd be another day, another adventure.

Writing about oneself, a personal experience, is really tough. It's tough to know where to begin or to find the appropriate term to hook you onto an event or a sensation. Even though this is true, I hope I was able to guide you through my experience. I still couldn't come up with a suitable explanation, but I hope this is plenty to get you started.

When Food=Love

Sophia Obianamma Gabriel | Poetry

my first instinct was to scribble [food]—
Christmas
what other holiday have i?
my second was Easter
bless edible eggs and the Messiah
i'm writing about Eid el-kabir

hands dusted in henna
chopping lamb & onions
spices dancing in the air
pollen of laughter ringing
from teenage rooms
and the sighs of the aged

abaya, jalabiya, sequined and pressed
like palms in prayer
hoop earrings, my sisters' endless joy
music to be breathed & lived
generations drenched in colour
curry and thyme, dye and kohl
spirit of freedom
purity the ram

this is not ethereal
i could as well be talking about
Christmas
with my phone autocorrecting
'meat' to 'lamb' because she likes
specifics
'regalia' to 'abaya'

my breath is taken away
& returned purified
for i do not celebrate Eid
my hands remain unstained
& my trousers cleave tighter to my limbs
but every Eid i am sent [food]
goodwill packages
cakes and pies
every Eid i am remembered & considered
included
[sister]

it is not the food either [sometimes it is]
when [food] is
[love]
but the wink of unity
vine on vine twisting to live
i get a glimpse—
a sniff of a world
unburdened by religious bias

this warmth does not demur
however
for time begins— clocks tick
the world moves her limbs
it is Christmas
and in the spirit of Christmas/[food]
i cook and share
because that is what the festivities
mean to me
[food]

Part II: To Those We Hold Dear

"She wanted this feeling of home to settle inside her until it gave her the sweetest of dreams." – Leila Aboulela, Lyrics Alley

Three Hours

Igbokwe Roseline | Fiction

I sat on the edge of my bed. Legs crossed. Arms folded. My eyes were fixed on the transparent glass window. I stared at the full moon hung up high in the gray coloured heavens, like an orange fruit dangling from the branch of its giant mother tree. The atmosphere was a mixture of cold and warmth – lukewarm. The night seemed extremely long, and it felt like dawn was never going to show its face again. I tightened the grip on my arms as I reminisced about those special moments the moon reminded me of. All the serene nights when everything seemed just right. Those nights were magical.

The night tarried, taking long strides behind the evening chills; the thought of akuko ifo- moonlight stories, told by Onye Guy, my now very aged granny, occupied every nook and cranny of my mind. I was eight then. Our compound was one of the largest in the Uhuekenta clan. My granny's self-contained apartment was located at the far left corner of the compound, behind the main building. During the Christmas holidays, we would travel to the village and spend close to two weeks there. Those were the days of romping, scampering, laughing and squealing, under the ever-watchful eyes of Onye Guy.

As the sun began to set, everyone – my five cousins, my two brothers and I – would rush through our evening chores so that we would not be late for her captivating stories. Mine was to do the evening dishes. I could remember breaking one of my mother's favourite ceramic cups while I was trying to beat time. Those ceramic cups were only used during special occasions. I got the beating of my life for that.

We would troop into her wide room furnished with a red Parisian rug, a narrow spring bed, a wall clock, and a large wardrobe filled with clothes and all sorts of old junky belongings. We once played hide and seek in her room; I hid in one of her large food thermo coolers she always lent out for Igbotonmas – retirement ceremonies. I was never found. It was only when I started shouting and hitting the covered lid, out of intense sweating and breathlessness, that I was finally rescued.

We would always scramble for our favourite spots in her room. Sometimes, a little fight would break out among my cousins. The fight would end abruptly once she threatened to keep mum that night. We would surround her like chicks would to the mother hen. Along with my siblings, I felt that the best storyteller of all time was my beloved, peculiar and mysterious old Onye Guy. With her hair beautifully braided with attachments, face deeply wrinkled, skin chocolate coloured, and her "high target" branded wrapper tied tightly around her waist over her favourite red t-shirt – Onye Guy would settle herself with a unique elegance on her squeaky bouncy bed. Though she acted mean most of the time, we all knew she loved us deeply.

Very well surrounded by her "chicks", she would clear her throat and say, "Once upon a time." "Time time!" We would chorus in high spirits. And she would start off her storytelling in the same way all Igbere storytellers would, "There lived a man/woman/boy/girl, in a certain town, at a certain time..."

Her voice penetrated the fast-gathering darkness, colliding with those of the weaver birds over the rooftop, twittering their way home, filling the room, and settling in our innocent hearts, bringing a certain kind of calmness to our systems. Many times, she told us folklores about Mbe, the tortoise and his tricky ways. Or about the orphan who was being maltreated by his stepmother – she bought udara fruits for her children, excluding him. So, he picked up the udara seeds that were thrown away and planted them. Every day, he would sing a magical song causing the rapid growth of the udara tree.

"Udara mu too. My udara tree grow."
Chorus, "Nda. Too too too. Grow, grow, grow"

We would always sing the chorus in loud voices while she sang the solo part in a calm melodious voice. The tree grew and he had more than enough fruit to spare. I remember always looking out of the window and catching the moon staring down at us. It was like a guardian angel watching over its assigned humans. After the tale, she would pass round a bottle of groundnuts, and everyone would have a little portion of the tasty treats. Moments like those kept us bonded and happy together.

I stared at my phone, and it was 3am. I had been awake and reminiscing for three hours straight.

Mt. Kupe

Yassay Masango | Essay

Two streams spring from Mt. Kupe in Cameroon. The smaller stream connects to the larger one, forming a gush which races down the inactive volcano. During the rainy season, which lasts from May till October, the gushing boasts with the downpour, echoing through the mountain's tropical forests, and crashing through a path of igneous boulders. In the dry season, the stones ignore the giant frogs and bottles in the muddy stream bed, thinking only of nature's transfigurations. Frog meat is sweet.

The first Bakossi people to settle in the Kupe's shadow were hunters. To them, the mountain's forests, game, and fresh water were a gift from the ancestors, or benyame. With reverence, they named the larger stream, N'nya, meaning 'mother,' and the smaller stream 'soso,'which means "little". Their settlement would be eponymously named Nyasoso. They worshipped Diob, an all-powerful God that is Nyam'e which means spirit. Then the Germans came and knocked their shrines down. This is the origin story my father told me. His father had told him the same.

I visited Nyasoso for the first time in December of 1984. I was with my parents, my sisters, and my brother, and we were glad to leave the humidity of Douala with its legions of mosquitoes for a cooler place that promised less aggression. I remember my parents had shopped: blankets, bags of rice, palm oil, canned tomatoes, corned beef, sardines, Ovaltine, canned milk, shaving cream, blades, socks, and singlets. My dad also bought whiskey (The Johnny Walker Red label), and snuff, that brown dust he snorted with his father and brothers.

After loading up in a white single cabin Peugeot 404, my father put in a Makossa mix tape and our journey began. With one hand on the steering wheel and the other working the gears, he translated the lovelorn lyrics that came through the speakers, while my mother questioned the soundness of their mellifluous arguments. My big sister threw in her five francs, her way of letting my surly big brother know she, too, was a grownup—though barely twelve, three years older than him, five years older than me. My baby sister suckled. I, on the other hand, remained captivated by the goings of the city we were leaving. The businesses, the bars, the children in an

assortment of uniforms walking home from different schools, the children who didn't go to school carrying food trays on their heads, the children playing football in the streets, the women selling puff-puff and beans, the well-dressed civil servants with briefcases, the muscular men who loaded bags on trucks, the Toyota Corolla taxis stopping and starting and creating a mostly yellow millipede of polluting traffic, stray dogs in amplexus, and potholes that followed cars. Then I saw the sign that said, "Goodbye Douala," and my excitement bubbled.

There was a different cadence outside the city, and it was not just the festive air. A lot more people sat in front of their homes, single story dust colored cement houses with glassless windows and tattered blinds. Most of the men had slung machetes and carried a bag of yams or a bunch of plantains, anything to sell to travellers. Souza was the first town we drove through and there, my father pointed to a white two-story concrete structure surrounded by a black iron fence on a small grassy plateau off the highway that would take us through Mbanga, Penja, and Njoumbe, to Loum. The Chief of this town lives there, he said. Does Nyasoso have a chief, I asked. The English murdered Nyasoso's great chief, Ntoko, years back he replied. Why, I asked. Because he would never yield. To what, I countered but got distracted as we drove past a man holding a giant dead porcupine for sale.

Then we stopped in Penja to buy fruits, a cornucopia of color threatened with juicy sweetness: mangoes, watermelons, tangerines, oranges, grapefruits, bananas, plums, pears, pineapples, papayas, passionfruit, apples, guava, and coconuts. There were also piles of cocoyams, yams, plantains, cassava, and dried fish. Palm wine bubbled in green translucent jugs. Roosters taller than toddlers, mean-eyed birds flushed like meadows, cackled nearby waiting to be sold. Goats and sheep bleeted about knives and the skill of butchers. We left after drinking Fantas, after my father loaded the back of the truck with fruit and four angry roosters.

We got to Nyasoso after dusk had hidden the mountain, but my grandfather could be seen in front of his house as we pulled up, a bright moon above him. He was a tree of a man with one eye, dark as the star speckled Alkebulan night in which he stood. His silver stubble tickled our cheeks when we hugged and our giggling made him laugh like a rolling drum. Most of the village came out, kinsmen excited to have us home—where you are *sons of the soil*, they said. I didn't know what that meant but I knew it was important, especially because my father kept a jar filled with soil from

my grandmother's grave. Still, I accepted it as an honor, becoming one with place and people from the profundity of this feeling. The glow of many bush lamps danced off eyes already sparkling with welcome, and smiles moved the shadows to make space for the light. I heard the pounding of fufu and smelt bushmeat cooking. Hungry but happy, I waited for the meal with the joy of homecoming.

When grandfather stood up and gave the recently arrived bottle of Johnny Walker to my father's cousin, Big Jake, a renowned shaman and community leader, everyone shut up. When the stout medium walked to the entrance of my grandfather's house and put his left palm in air, the night followed suit. Then he saw only those he could see and opened the bottle of whiskey to beckon them.

Ngu a Masango me N'due
He's calling on the spirit of Masango of N'due, your great grandfather and his father, my father whispered.

Ngu a Nzelle Ekeh
He's calling on the spirit of your great-grandmother, Nzelle.

Ngu a Emade Ebong
He's calling on the spirit of Emade Ebong, your grandmother.

With each name, he dribbled some liquor on the floor, and after his invocation, he poured some into a glass I thought was too small for my father. Then my mother. The bottle was then passed around and when a quarter of its contents remained, Big Jake gave it back to my grandfather to enjoy on his own accord. The welcoming bottle is special because the ancestors have drunk from it, he said. But the clan was special too, so more bottles were opened and the speakers blared and a revelry began.

I fell asleep in a crowd of cousins but woke alone to beating wings and a loud crow. Then more crows. Then a chorus. Then in my heart was joy because I knew the sun had cleared the blot of night and I could finally see my mountain. Everyone was already awake and I could hear them slurping tea, smacking loudly, talking with food in their mouths, arguing, cursing each other out only to say I love you sixteen long seconds later. Your family is a rowdy bunch, my mother would joke. Robust, my father would reply. They were both rowdy and robust and I knew they were going to pass me around like a baby when I said good morning or asange, and each of them

would ask c'han e kuneh? or e kuneh bwam? which means how did you sleep or did you sleep well, all in an effort to delay my adventures. To avoid this, I ran through the living room of my grandfather's caraboat house kicking up dust from its earth floors screaming 'asange' till I was outside.

Everyone erupted in laughter, but I heard mostly the vision in front of me, the verdant rocky rise of the Kupe, crowned with a pulsing mist.

Ududua Market Day

Okoro Celine | Poetry

It is that time of the year
A once in twelve months market day
A period of giving and merriment
When travellers returned from their voyages.

It is that time
When the old and young dine
Through mouth watering dishes washed down by palm wines
A time marked on the calendar as Divine

It is that time
When we neither wake nor slumber
When we neither fight nor grumble
It is the season of forgiveness and giving
Not anyone is going to ruin this merry mood before planting season

It is that time
When we sing and dance in great numbers
When the maidens adorn themselves in beautiful hairdos and beads
Adorning every skin from their elbows to their wrists and on their ankles
Preparing to be confined.

It is that time
When young men gird their loins
Adorning themselves in colourful regalias
Allowing themselves to be hypnotized by the twists and turns
Of waist beads of the maidens… Aha yes their waist beads

"Afterall," their elders say "To know what is inside
you must first observe the surface."

This is that time
Before the planting season
Just after the harvest of Oruko
The Ududa market day
A time for wrestling matches and masquerade displays
Melodic Musicals and Nkugho parades

It is that time of the year
That paves way to wedding bells
Visitors troupe in and out with smiles on their faces
Mothers drape their daughters in their best wrappers
While fathers long for the visit of their soon coming in-laws
It indeed was in this time that I met your father
This day marked the beginning of every blessing that followed after.

Feliz Navidad

Lesley Chacha | Fiction

23rd December 2016

High-class “relatives" from Nairobi are supposed to arrive today. I have to clean up and make the compound appealing for them. I have to pick all sorts of plastics all around the compound. I resent this chore of all. Washing dishes? I am cool with that, given that I have music. Or what I thought was music. Willy Paul. Bahati. Diamond Platnumz. Bongo. And some Octopizzo. And enough soap. And water. Not that we lacked water but fetching water from the well was not as fun as opening the tap from the tank. I think I miss the tiresome endeavor. Oh, what I could do to roll water up to the ground. Often, the water was warm, as if it was from the top shelf in the depths of the upper echelons of hell. Mopping? I fancy mopping nowadays, preferably because I don’t have two or five people walking all over wet floors. Making me repeat the entire process. Over and over. I hate repeating myself. More so, I hate mopping the same square again because one can’t be patient enough to wait until I’m done. Wiping windows? Do I have music? Then that isn’t a chore at all. Picking trash all over the compound? Now that’s where we have a little predicament. The action wasn’t a hindrance as much as the motive behind it. The pretentiousness. The hypocrisy. The utter insolence.

The Nairobi people have to see a beautiful compound so that they’ll believe everything at home is fine. So that they’ll leave more money. So that they’ll have fun ushago. Their ushago, but my full-time residence. So much for equality. Are they better than us just because they live in the city? Granted, I can throw stones further than any of them ever will. I can pull up a hundred liters from the well in a couple of hours. I can milk Nyamalo and all the other cows. Can they? Heck, I can sell milk. I know math. I can cut Napier and feed the cows. Can they even clean up the chicken coop? I doubt!! But who is making the compound clean for their visual pleasure? Me. All this for ostentation? Oh, I have to rearrange the rooms to accommodate them too. I also have to get new sheets and make the beds for them. Could their visit bring me any more profound joy? My glass is looking half full right now.

24th December 2021

Tomorrow is Christmas. It doesn't look so or even feel so. We bought Christmas decorations a week ago. We set them up yesterday. A huge bunch of them that is. We'll set up his gift tonight. I've been tasked with wrapping it. Our future resident YouTuber is going to love it. It is a car track set. The gift is already stacked in one of my drawers – a place he has no business looking. My entire room is out of bounds for him. A lot of the time. Not that I erected a sign or anything, it's just the order of things. People don't come into my room every hour. Maybe when calling me every so often, but they have to knock. I brought the whole knocking thing to this household from day one. I knock, they knock. Regardless of age. I'll wrap the gift before I sleep and place it under the Christmas tree before anyone wakes up. This is a nasty business – the sneaking around, not the gift premise. But it has to be done. Tomorrow we'll probably order out and spend the entire day listening to old-school songs. We'll play with the track for a couple of minutes, which, after a week, he'll stash in the closet and only bring out to show his, our, cousins. Tomorrow, local Mr. Beast will be happy. His mother will be happy. I will find some semblance of happiness somewhere during the day. I might even forget my solitude for a moment.

That's what I love about this family. The simplicity. No need for illusions of grandeur. The three of us are content with the bare essentials. For all I know, I appreciate the simple things in life – food, music, and memories—all of which will be in abundance tomorrow. We'll make some calls, wish some wishes, watch a movie or two, and call it a day. It might be a stretch, but there are pretty redeemable odds of going out next week to Garden City. I like the food there and the minute driving chances I get. I never let it bother me – I am not even a quarter through life, and I'll get many more chances to drive. It's only a matter of time. This Christmas is going to be a peaceful one. Not much for memories, but I will appreciate the simplicity of it. We won't talk much, but we'll enjoy ourselves. I could get used to this. Oh, and the several reruns of *Bob's Burgers*. It was fun the first two or five times, but when I can confidently say I've mastered every dialogue, the fun will remain a thing of the past. Small sacrifices to make for the greater good, no?

25th December 2025

I live alone. I have a job. I no longer feel the need to belong to any family. I am my own family. I feed myself adequately. I can take care of myself properly without

batting an eyelid. I am adulting. I called my aunts a couple of days ago to check up on them and turn down their proposals for me to visit. I'll say I have work stuff and promise to spend the next one with them. I am still on good terms with them, but I also want my space away from them. I appreciate their care for me, but I sometimes feel they do so for their self-validation. I'll be eternally grateful to them for everything, but this time, I'll say no to them. I'll engage in a kind conversation, and I'll ask how their kids are doing. I'll invite them over to visit next year, but this year, I want to spend it alone, not by my lonesome. I'll send them a thousand shillings for "Merry Christmas" and tell them I'm thinking about them. I'll use the phrase, "let's drink to a good year and a proper Christmas. Not much, but honest work". I'll tell them I love them and then hang up.

I'll return to the sitting room and tell my friend that we have the rest of the day to ourselves. First, I'll need to have invited a friend over. I'll spend the day with a friend. We'll have cost-shared shopping and everything in between. We'll have made sure to have a lot of snacks, food, drinks, and ice cream. Like poles repel, but I'll have found a friend who doesn't want to travel over for Christmas, a friend like me, so in our case, like poles attract. We'll play several games. We'll watch a lot of movies. We'll exchange gifts. We'll increase YouTube's traffic that day – content creators have to make money, right? We'll get high. We'll get drunk. We'll mix both. We'll have heart-to-heart conversations. We'll have a blast!! We'll enjoy that Christmas. It will be the second loudest Christmas I'll be a part of. We'll have simple Christmases later, but for that day, it will be grand. Who knows? I might like them enough to make it our tradition. I think I am a sucker for traditions. And I hold them sacred.

26th December 2019

We had our first Christmas together. My new family. It wasn't as grand as I was used to, but it was better. The chores were minimal. The chores today are minimal. We have leftover food, which I will warm for lunch. I am still getting used to a small family—our local Godzilla expert, his mother, and I. Just the three of us. So far, I treasure them. We watched *Hotel Transylvania* yesterday and a lot of *Boomerang*. And that other cartoon channel that had a lot of DC shows. We all loved *Zig and Sharko*. And *Mr. Bean*, the animated series. I am still tense around the house. I've heard many stories about her, and I don't know how to react yet. I am constantly

compared to my brother and other cousins. Tony doesn't do this. You do this. You don't do this; Tony does this. She always says she would rather Tony be out of her house than in. Granted, Tony was always favored in my other family, but in this one, I am the poster nephew. It isn't by luck; it is by design. Korra broke her blender. I am always careful around any kitchen appliance. Selena stole her clothes and some jewellery. I always refrain from entering her bedroom. I make it look like I'm afraid of touching her things, and I make sure she notices. On days she wasn't around, I ensured I returned everything to where it was. I am the nephew who takes care of things. I am the nephew who is responsible. I am the nephew who accounts for everything; she always reminds me.

If only she knew it was my terrifying fear of abandonment making me extra careful. Making me tread on eggshells every single day. We had no gifts this year. Our resident Godzilla fan enjoyed the TV, and that was gift enough. On the other hand, I got my first phone. I was overjoyed though I tried not to show it. I'll read a book and feign disinterest in technology. I'll build up a façade that I can live without a phone. That a phone will not be my distraction. God knows it is. I am grateful for her. I am grateful she took me out of that other family and made me her family. I can and will do anything for her. I am going to be her prodigy. She will be proud of me. Now, I have to warm lunch and wash the dishes immediately after, even though she says they can wait. I want to be punctual and maintain that image until I get my place. I'll cry in bed in two months. Today, I am safe. Or rather, I feel safe.

27th December 2006

We were continuing our festivities. I drank a lot of coke today. Some came out of my nose, or so I am told. I went back to my mother through it all, and she wiped my nose clean and said something along the lines of "drink soda polepole" or "you're okay now. Cheza games kwa simu". I played with her flip phone, not as much a flip as a sliding phone. My love for Samsung started here. I ate. I was full. I was happy. I was loved. I had everything.

28th December 2017

The euphoria brought by the Nairobi people has died down. They are still here, but

their glitter has been washed away. Their glow has faded. Some have started helping out. Fancy Shoes joked with me while I was washing dishes. I like her. In another world, we'd have a perfect aunt-nephew relationship. She isn't arrogant. She makes me feel good. She is compassionate. She is empathetic. She is fun to be around. We have been eating for the past three days, and now the dish load is so massive that it takes two people to wash them at any moment. My cousin, Padre, and I. Or rather, my uncle my age and me. His father and my grandfather are brothers. He is the one who introduced me to Octopizzo, Willy Paul, and Bahati. I am way more intelligent than him though he has the necessary people skills I lack. We always joke about how once we get our breaks, we'll never return here. I hope I get mine before his – he can live with this family for a little longer, but I can't. Not with how I am being treated. Tony talks a lot but does minimal chores. Padre joins. I am left with an entire basin of dirty utensils, and I can't help but feel angry. Betrayed even. Some form of resentment towards both of them is building. Padre will make it up to me, but Tony feels like he is better than all of us. Just wait; I'll grow up and show him!! He will be the one begging. I have to bid my time.

Once I'm done here, I am going to sleep until five. Or watch some TV. Though the Nairobi people will be hogging it. Judgy McJudgypants most of all. She isn't any better than any of us, but she parades herself like she is. And she always over-sends me every time. She thinks it is time to close the curtains? She calls me. She wants water? She calls me. She wants someone to send to the market? She calls me. She wants someone to cook? My name is best. She wants someone to massage her feet? She calls me. She wants someone to eat snacks with? She doesn't know my name. She wants to show someone a meme or joke? The Nairobi people sound sweet on her tongue. She wants someone to watch a movie with? A Nairobi person fits the bill. She wants someone to share her money with? I am invincible. In as much as I don't like her, she is the first person to take me out on my birthday- that could cut her just enough slack not to throw her in the 'people I despise' pile. However, I think she is trying too hard to fit in with the Nairobi people even though she doesn't. Or she equally hates this place as much as I do. Her being the last born, she has to take care of her parents. It sucks to be her, so she is probably projecting. I guess we don't like each other in equal measure. I think of sweeping the front of the house and I feel tired. So much for the festive season, right?

29th December 2020

I help with the day's chores. I volunteer to wash dishes and cook some more. I like my aunt Bey's place. She is one of the few people who make me feel heard. She is warm, calm, and even sweet. She has been described as compassionate, the glue that holds this other family together by my cousins. She is one of the few people I can be open with. Everyone likes her. When I grow up, I want to be her. Or even be remotely close to her personality. Right here and now, when I start earning, I will always send her money just because. No reason at all. Or rather, one reason. She never made me feel like an outcaste. Not even once. So, I'll willingly help out in her kitchen and with any chore available. She needn't say anything. I'll do it. She has a big family – she's the mother of four of my cousins, and I believe taking care of that many children takes its toll on anyone. If I'd look up to anyone in this family, it'd be her. When it comes down to it, I'll always have a love for her. She deserves the world, and while I do not have the world yet, I'm going to help her out with her house. Celebrations died down; we danced, ate, drank, and were happy for a moment—all of us. Tony was missing from the picture. He stayed with the other family.

This time around, I was part of the Nairobi delegation: resident dinosaur enthusiast, his mother, and I. I remember how I felt when the Nairobi people came, and I have no intention of making anyone feel that way ever again. It is not a good feeling. I was in the shadows throughout the festivities, but I was behind the scenes. I was responsible in the kitchen, with the kids, and everything else. Bey didn't have to overwork because she was entertaining us. She deserved some rest, and that is what I gave her. The positive wild card with helping out was that I missed the small talk. I am content with living out my days without small talk. I am content here. I hope that will always be the case whenever I visit.

The Obunem-Epie Festival

Francis Ukpevie | Essay

I fondly refer to myself as an 'Obunem-Epie' baby with the excitement that people born on Christmas day usually exude when they talk about it. I think mine is deeper though because Christmas birthdays are shared by people all over the world but my own will remain special to me forever. No other child was born in my community on our Obunem-Epie Day in 1997.

The Obunem-Epie is a general festival celebrated by the Epie People of Yenagoa, in Bayelsa State. Every community in the Epie clan takes turns in celebrating this festival. In their lifetime, an individual is rarely privileged to witness the celebration more than twice in their home community. The festival is celebrated once a year in one community and it could take twenty to forty years for it to return. But I might be lucky enough to witness it three times in my lifetime.

Bayelsa was created in 1996 and celebrated their first Obunem epie in 1997, and I was born on the very day. The festivities were wild as it is the normal character of the Ijaw people to throw parties for everything. Although an average Epie man hates to be referred to as an Ijaw man, he believes being called an Ijaw man drowns his cultural heritage. Even though he shares the same dress code with the Ijaw people and even has similar words in their dialect and shares direct boundaries with them, he likes to insist that he is not an Ijaw man. He generally refers to Ijaw people as 'gua mi ni' which is translated as 'water people'

Apart from being the only child in my community born on that special day, I love the festival because its history is tied around a solidarity movement that was led by women, fought by women, and won by women.

This is not a very popular story because people like my late grandmother, Jenny Francis Nwakpaliba, did not get the chance to tell the story to the world. But I heard the story so many times that now when I tell the it, it is as though I am there chanting the songs with the women and marching barefoot on the only one-lane road that connected Yenagoa to the outside world.

It started when the warrant chiefs instructed the women traders to start paying tax for selling in the local markets. This new law was unacceptable and ridiculous to the women, and one enraged woman, Oruma, rallied the others in the market and instigated them to fight the warrant chiefs.

We barely have enough to feed our children at home and they still want to take the little money we make!

They assembled themselves and did Jazz on their bodies which means they did juju on their body like the popular Egbesu cult group, and they became invincible to bullets. Afterward, they matched in the old, rugged way, stamping their feet angrily and chanting war songs with strong fists punching the air in preparation for the real contact. Their voices continued to rise till it reached a deafening crescendo.

Eni mho mhe mhe, eni mho mhe mhe
Gui policey yor yi wo o
Eni mho mhe mhe, eni mho mhe mhe
We no go gree, we no go gree
The police dey come but we no go gree.

I was told that as the warrant chiefs shot at the crowd of incoming women, the juju they had done catapulted them into the sky and the bullets were unable to touch them. When they came back to the ground, they attacked the few warrant chiefs that were left. None of the women died during the faceoff except one man that had followed the women, he was the only casualty there.

The fight had happened almost a hundred years ago, but my heart swells with pride whenever I tell this story because my grandmother was part of those courageous women. But I am equally sad that I was born when her hair was completely grey, and she was already close to her grave. In my clan, there is no position for a queen or a princess or a prince, only a male and female chief who often serves as the general leader of the community. The male chief has a committee that he works with, and an election is done every five years to determine who takes over to sit on the stool. But the stool of the Female Chief is for life. Once she is crowned the Female Chief, she remains the Chief till she dies. She is only burdened by one person which is her Deputy Chief.

During the festival, the male chief is seen as the general ruler but the female chief is the center of attention, the festival is like a celebration to drench her in praises for the victory that has led to the celebration of the biggest festival in my clan. My mother's mother, Her Royal Highness Lt. Chief Belema Nelson Dugo, at the time of my birth till she died in August 2022, reigned as the *Obenake-Ifina 1 of Edepie* (First Female Chief).

Whenever I tell this story, I am overcome by a priceless feeling of peculiarity because my father's mother was part of the women that went to the fight and my mother's mother became the first Female Chief of my community after decades of absolute male domination. I like to tell people that my blood is a combination of war and royalty.

Three Days of Eid

Muti'ah Badruddeen | Fiction

The first day of Eid, I was in Lagos – with Tunde Gbadamosi and his family. Along with an army of domestic workers, he and his wife lived in a ginormous Lekki edifice surrounded by the obligatory towering fences to best keep the outside world out. The gathering shadow of dusk I drove in meant I did not appreciate the beauty of their property. Not until after fajr the next morning when I slipped away from the downstairs guest room for a leisurely tour of the grounds.

Trying to stay out of the way of the workers going about their morning chores unobtrusively, I spent over an hour absently meandering. Barely registering anything beyond the chirping of birds, the fleeting dance of butterflies and the spectra of colors in the flora as day slowly unfurled over the inspiring canvas of nature. It is almost unbelievable that this idyllic, carefully nurtured tribute to nature is in Lagos. I am surprised at how at ease I felt here.

It was also a bit disconcerting becoming an aunt to adult nephews and nieces, at this juncture in my life. More unexpectedly, to bond quite effortlessly with a nephew whose existence had never registered in my consciousness before. Wale Gbadamosi, Tunde's youngest, was twenty-one years and the only one still at home, such as it were – he was in the country for an Eid break from his final year studies at a North Carolina University. He'd been quick to inform me, "Ileya is not the same unless you are in Naija o. Getting to meet my newly discovered Aunt is simply an awesome bonus. To be honest, when I learned about you – after you took the Abuja finance world by storm – I thought those family whispers were just wishful gossip!" His joie de vivre, that dismissive summary of how the Gbadamosis must have viewed my existence prior, set the tone for the evening. He didn't elaborate and I did not ask, choosing to leave whatever rancor the family peddled in their aggravation buried in the past. And Wale's easy acceptance blunted the awkwardness of mine and his parents' initial exchange of pleasantries.

I understood his proclamation about ileya the next day. This family celebrated the "bigger" Eid with a zest that, surely, should have waned over the years. Waking

up, at his mum's prodding at an ungodly hour, we got dressed and drove all the way to the National Stadium, just to join thousands of other gaily dressed and joyous Lagosians for the Eid prayers. Apparently, Tunde Gbadamosi – as had been our father before him – was an important member of the national board, or whatever, of the Ansar-ud-Deen society of Nigeria. There was no missing that he was 'Somebody' on those grounds; every other footstep we took was interrupted by groups of people hailing and greeting him.

Even with my unconventional upbringing, I was no stranger to Ansar-ud-Deen. They were legendary in the context of resistance to the British legacy of forced conversion of the Muslim children before enrolment in school, pioneering the establishment of Muslim schools in southwest Nigeria. And while their activities were a lot less visible and circumspect in recent times, they still held undeniable clout in the Yoruba-majority states. Witnessing my family's deep involvement with such a historic movement, even by way of the late father who never acknowledged me, and his son and heir who only recently did, was as surreal as looking through Alice's window.

Rather than dwell on the sinkhole of the past, I gazed around me. Witnessing the mass of people, the festivity of their attire and their demeanor as we all gathered on this expansive national monument, I concluded that this experience was worth it. Worth leaving so early and driving the considerable distance to another part of the state, more than likely bypassing many other prayer grounds in the process. This feeling of belonging that existed just for being part of and praying in such a large, joyful congregation. This was the Ileya I'd heard about, but never been part of. I could easily picture my father, after arriving from Abuja a few days earlier, shepherding his family in their finery, he in his billowing signature agbada, towards the unofficially reserved portion at the front, ahead of waiting congregants – under the auspicious and effusive greetings from the alfas. I wondered what it was like for young Tunde Gbadamosi, probably dressed as a miniature of the man in matching fabric and style, knowing even then that all this would be his, someday. I imagined his mum, smiling and accepting her dues as The Wife, like Tunde's wife did now sitting beside me; even as the older woman must have prayed that this time, something would be enough to make her husband stay. Then I pictured myself somehow in that picture. It ends with someone in tears. Every time.

When we returned to the house, everyone retreated into their individual spaces, and I caught up on my sleep, until the first batch of meat was ready. We had an unorthodox breakfast of fried meat and whatever caught your fancy from the array of food served buffet style. I went with pancakes and orange juice to accompany my ileya meat, laughing with astonishment as Wale packed away an impossible amount of everything available, much to his mother's consternation. Soon, guests started dropping in, and the second part of Eid began. Greetings, good wishes, eating, and sharing of ileya meat.

I couldn't help but sigh in relief as I drove away early the next morning. Every one of the Gbadamosis had gone out of their way to be welcoming and nice, including Wale's two elder sisters and their husbands who popped in for a short visit just to meet me. But there was only so much family togetherness I could handle. Hopefully, over time, and when I meet them in more manageable chunks, it'll get easier. They all had reasons to come to Abuja several times a year, and we'd promised to keep in touch, exchanging numbers and what not.

Enjoying the pleasantly light traffic on Lagos-Ibadan expressway, I could finally admit to myself that the trip had gone better than I dared hope for. The ambush by Tunde Gbadamosi that I'd been convinced was behind this sudden quest for sibling bonding never came. After our father's will, I'd been sure his invitation was a ploy to lull me into a false sense of familial spirit before he sprung an attack. But other than a curiosity over what my life was like growing up as an only child, we did not talk about the past at all. Nor of the present. No one brought up our father: his death, his will, our new circumstances. Just like he promised, my brother and I were starting over. There had been one awkward moment when Wale let it slip that his grandmother had been less than happy about my being invited, refusing to come to her son for Eid as was her custom, until the next day – when I would be gone. But that didn't bother me.

I am building a family of my own from scratch, made up of people who value me. Those who want to be in my life and vice versa. If that did not include my late father's wife, for whom he abandoned my mother and I, it was no hair off my back!

*

I arrived at the farm before the sun's heat caught up with its light. It had become the de-facto venue for Sanusi family gatherings, a fact that had made me hesitate over the invitation to spend Eid there. But Z was a pro at disregarding my excuses and at thrusting me into the midst of her family, so here I am. Again.

Like the bygone Sanusi family gathering of our girlhood, this one, too, was relaxed, segregated, and had only grown louder with the addition of almost a dozen kids. The men gathered at Prof's newly claimed place, one of the guest chalets a few meters from the five bedroom home his son's family occupies, where the women held fort. Jummai and Brother Isa's home was lovely; its simplicity belied its size. Spacious and airy, with an abundance of light from huge windows covered by only the sheerest lace for curtains. In this stretch of land that was their farm, even the fence that demarcated the house yard from the rest of the farm was superfluous. There were no peeping toms or neighbors to be concerned about here. And the house radiated that kind of joyful warmth that comes only to those who take for granted that no one was watching.

It was the kind of day that just… passed. We nibbled on Eid meat, chatted about how we'd spent our respective first day of Eid and other insignificant nothings. Jummai and Z monitored the staff and ensured food was sent to the men at somewhat regular intervals. They played hostesses to the few visitors that braved the distance to the farm from Ibadan, and even Lagos. We, as available adults at various times, were called upon to settle the invariable quibbles between the kids. I was cornered by more than one Sanusi-affiliated child, regaling me with how they spent their Eid; displaying their new clothes, eating an inordinate amount of meat, and being gifted with money by adults seemed to be the universal highlights of the experience. All activities were suspended, at the appointed times, for salaah. By maghrib, I'd had enough. Of Eid, of meat, and family, and people. *Being alone is such an underrated experience!*

I sat down on the praying mat, watching the other women finish their nawaafil and duas and leave, pondering the sad realization that this year was my first family-type Eid celebration. As a child, I never understood why my father was never around for the festivities. I'm not even sure if I noticed those particular absences as peculiar until much later. And my mother, with her customary indifference to anything once he wasn't around, never got into the celebration beyond the obligatory ram that was

slaughtered and invariably eaten by her friends in a party-like atmosphere I quickly learned I wasn't welcomed at. My earliest memories of Eid were playing alone in my room with my dolls, and the meat the staff snuck in. The few times I attended the Eid salaah had been in the company of the domestic staff when I wore my mother down enough to give in, and I stopped doing even that after she remarried. In her new Christian household, it would have been yet another reminder of how I did not belong.

So, although I enjoyed this Eid with the Gbadamosis and the Sanusis, I was essentially alone. Yet again questioning where I fit into the dynamics of these families that I called mine – but weren't.

*

"It sounds like it was a good Eid," Dr Aisha's inflection goes up at the end, and I hear the question.

"Yes, it was." I admit. I knew, even then, that I would not get away with that prevarication. Not after calling her emergency line in tears, the moment I was safely ensconced behind the wall of my apartment. Gripping the phone while still in the festive Emirati Abaya I had shipped in for the occasion, my matching cases just on the inside of the door.

"Yet you didn't have a good Eid." This time, it wasn't a question.

"I did. I did! It was just… I just…" I sigh. Inhale. Exhale. Aim for clarity. "It was a good celebration. And I did have a good time. I met my brother's family, and we took the first tentative steps toward building a relationship I'm cautiously optimistic about. I spent time with the Sanusis and realized that while they have multiplied in the decade since I was last there, I am still as welcome within their fold as I've always been," I pause. "But it also made me sad."

I knew the next question before she asked. "Why?"

This answer is not quite as pat. "Emmm, I think I'm sad for all the Eids I never got to have as a child. For the family togetherness that never shaped my life experiences. I mourn the years I missed out on, even as an adult, because I had isolated myself, choosing to simply exist rather than to deal with all that life threw at me. I despair that I would ever have what they all so blithely take for granted, the Sanusis and the Gbadamosis of this world: a sense of rightness that comes from

knowing that someone, some people, think you matter."

The expected silence is much shorter than it used to be months ago, when we first started. "You know what I'm about to ask you to do now, don't you?"

I smile wryly at the dry sense of humor audible over the phone I clutched like a lifeline. "Yeah, I do. You are going to ask me to re-examine all that I have just said. To deconstruct it with the objectiveness and clarity that I have gained so far. And yes, I realize that the peculiarities of my upbringing were not of my doing. That while my parents may have made mistakes, they did the best they knew how. It is now up to me to take control of my narrative from here on out, to quit letting their inadequacies define me. I am not the little girl they abandoned all those years ago, not anymore. I am a smart, educated, and an independently successful woman who can choose to make her own way through life, on her terms."

"Go on," she prodded at my pause, her voice carefully neutral.

"I appreciate that things that have happened to me in the past have not always been good, nor within my power. And that, as a result, I have sometimes made choices, including sometimes refusing to choose, that led to an unhealthy pattern of living. It is, however, up to me to decide where I go from now. And I choose to live. Freely and unashamed, unencumbered by regrets over the past and unlimited by fears of the future. I am more than all that happened to me. I choose to be grateful for what I have now – my Deen, my career, my life, including the families I have, or am making. I choose to position myself to be ready for the future, whatever that is and whenever it shows up."

"Now," there's an unusual teasing quality to the question this time, "how much of that do you really believe?"

I am floored for a moment, then I hear myself bellow out a peal of joyful laughter. "Everything!"

It's true. It has taken us months. Hours of therapy over the phone and several office visits whenever I was in Lagos. A regimen of assignments, recommended texts, and encouraging acts of ibaadaat. Deconstructing my father's abandonment, my mother's emotional unavailability, my own complex and deep-seated responses to a lifetime of psychological and physical trauma. Of cultivating my relationships, taking long walks, and talking to perfect strangers. I did not realize it until this moment, but I had been learning to live again. Learning to be open, vulnerable, flawed. Human.

"Thank you," I say now, tremulously.

"No, thank you," she says, and the silence is a moment of glory.

I could not know this then, of course. But on that fateful third day of Eid, sitting on the floor of my apartment, decrying my sadness and loneliness at the most memorable festivities I'd ever celebrated, I'd turned the most important corner of my recovery.

Part III: In the Name Of

"Religion touches us at the place where imagination blends into the divine." – Ben Okri, A Way of Being Free

In this House

Aisha Kabiru Mohammed | Poetry

In this house, holidays are an oxymoron.
We eat Christmas rice with leftover ram meat.
We listen to gospel tunes while we prepare for Eid prayers.
The adhan filters into the house while we take polaroids for Easter.
We kiss ourselves on the cheek before we walk to the buildings
that house our celebrations.

In this house, memories are the only thing
marked with crosses or crescents.
The scent of chicken and ram meat knows
no religion. Fried rice doesn't know if it is eaten
by men with prayer marks or crosses against their chests.

In this house, we dress up, dance and give gifts
when work is not woven into our day.
We dress up, dance and give gifts
when we hear that the markets are busy
and our neighbours are cooking a feast.
We dress up, dance, and give gifts when our
holy books tell us that the day
is for celebration. For wine and laughter.

For the Pride of Eyo

Chimamaka Adeniyi | Fiction

"Akesan aagbé was! Remo asuwon oh!"

The sound of the Gbesu and Koranga drums filled the open air as women clad in colorful aso oke attire and men in danshikis and bare feet, danced around the white Iga Eyo masquerades of Lagos. It was incredible.

Folorunsho couldn't take his eyes off it. The masquerades were extremely tall, all white with non-traditional hats on their heads that made them look like ghost detectives. They were the spiritual symbol of the Yoruba people of Lagos, the most populated city in Nigeria. Folorunsho was from Lagos – well, as far as his grandmother had told his five-year-old self before she died. He lived with his upper middle class African parents and almost never stepped out of his house if it wasn't school or church.

That month, Folorunsho's father had received a call from someone, someone the boy didn't know, someone who changed his life forever. A few days after that call, Folorunsho's father had told them that they would be going to Lagos Island – their village.

That one person had brought Folorunsho to his first encounter with his heritage. He couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the tall things dancing mindlessly, spinning around with their long staffs, while the traditional dancers around them swirled undisturbed, smiling, and not minding to duck their heads from a potential blow to the head from one of those staffs. Never had he seen a love cultural display like that. He'd only seen images of them in videos.

He lived in Zurich, Switzerland, which is arguably the quietest place ever, so he couldn't ever be opportune to see such on a normal day. Even his cultural days at school were nothing close to this. Their choreographed dances were not as energetic, enchanting, or as calculated and mesmerizing as this one. Watching the undead detectives once more, he began to wonder who exactly was in the white, overflowing garment that made sure to show no human skin. He had been told that they were

spirits and not human, but he was quite convinced that people were in those costumes!

It was the first time his parents had ever left him to be in such a crowd. In fact, it was the first time they'd ever let him a breath of fresh air. And this… this was simply surreal and intoxicatingly exciting. He felt like he was in a dream, the kind that made your head feel light on your pillow. To think this was his root, his own culture, his home. Why had he never been here before?

That evening he and his family didn't go home, they stayed at the Island, in the interesting palace of the Oba, at Iga Idunganran. After his dad had a long talk with the King, he came over to sit by him where he was scrolling through pictures of that day on his phone, trying to relive the excitement in his head. His father looked at him and smiled, and took a look at some of the pictures, and relaxed again.

"My father – your grandfather – used to be an Eyo. He was the Adamu Orisha."

"The…?" Funsho echoed.

"The Adamu. The senior Iga Eyo, the one with a wide black hat. He was the first to go public when the Eyo was to be announced. This Oba, the one who inhabits this palace, is the direct son of the Oba who was there when my father was alive. We were good friends." Funsho stayed put and quiet. He knew his father had more to say. "One day, I don't know what my father had done with the oracle, but he died in his shrine. Mysteriously… just like that. I believed it was his rituals that killed him, so I vowed to have nothing to do with our traditions or culture anymore, from then on." There was a pause.

"So, why are we here?" Funsho asked, curious.

"This Oba called me a few weeks ago. I told you we were friends – and we had lost contact for a long time till somehow, he managed to get mine. We were so happy to hear from each other after all the years, and he informed me of today's festival, and compelled me to come, so we could meet again – for old time's sake. The Adamu Orisha play – the Eyo festival – is done to commemorate the life of an Oba. This one was done in honor of his father. My father always wanted to live to see this day and be a part of it."

Funsho picked up a horsewhip from the table beside him and his father picked up an antique, wooden miniature sculpture, crafted in the form of a traditional king. He breathed comfortably.

"I'm still not comfortable with our traditional rituals; but I admit that I have missed the color and music of our culture. Seeing the Eyo today, after ten years, gave me a pride I haven't had in a long time. I was wrong to have shut this heritage out of our lives completely – I was especially wrong to have shut you out and left you ignorant of your own culture."

The sound of the canoes filled with young teenage boys fishing late that night captured Funsho and he ran out to see. The stars twinkled over the water of the island while the boys chanted some songs about life, in Yoruba, and laughed as they splashed into the water, fighting for dominance. "E sunrunkunrun, we ma jagbon die!"

His father graced him to the door and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Funsho, this is your home."

Festive Days

Adesope Ogunlade | Poetry

Christmas smells like new clothes, new shoes, and plastics gobbles
Because our mother would take us Home, where we would see our
Uncles and aunties, their daughters and sons, some of whom are
Our mates and pals, and our aging grandfather on his sofa grinning
At his television, at the news of the new season. We would help
Chase geese and cocks, turn the beams in the tripod. Tripod that
Cultures flames and fill our eyes with smoke. We would buy
Fireworks and bombard the crossover night with sporadic sounds.
Mother would hand to us, pairs of sparklers in the mornings of
Easter, and light them. We would marvel at the sparkling lights,
Chant rhyme and match more matchsticks. So when the night
Reeks of woodsmokes and sulfur, when fireworks light the ash sky
And our eyes spark in all the fluorescence, when winter set this
Memory I relish, my grandfather would stand in the middle, open
The old psalms and flip the brown hymnal papers, he would pray
For warmth, blessing for this new season; for favour, the oil for
Our heads, and sing. His voice would climax. And the intonation
Would fall like dew. In David's voice: *The Lord has set us by the stream,*
Our trees yield fruits and green leaves. Now, His people would succeed.
Amen. *

*The italicized words are words modified from Psalm 1 vs 3

Part IV: Joyous Days Ahead

“of unseasonal but nonetheless good tidings.” – Wole Soyinka, Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth: A Novel

The Feast That Carries Our Vibe

Uchechukwu Onyedikam | Poetry

On this side of glory and honour
where today is that mark of our
heritage, to cut off, and rejuvenate
the mind clustered with material needs
and lay at ease all that is strife-ridden.
And here we set free…
downed shackles, loosen the body, and
the feet doing the Òrìṣà dance
to rhythm of thrumming melody
down by the Riverside…
chanting of Oríkì to the talking-drum
in tune with the tap-tap! of the shekere
echoes the tonality of the sounds —
water spirit and prayers transcends
the height of human knowings as
all adherents from afar and near
gathers in demonstration of faith.
Arugbo Odo Yemọja — hail grace hail!

Oh, Ancient Mother of the waters
we give thanks and come with
offerings in calabash, and to feast
for another season of merry — with
songs of praise in our bellies and
vast richness in our body and soul.
On this day we lift our feet forward
to the waters in blue-white adornment
having our necks, wrists, ankles all
glittering in ornaments of crystal beads
and elekes —
the luminary that purges the
atmosphere
and consecrates the path we seek.

Kwanzaa

Sello Huma | Poetry

It's a revival of the ancient celebrations of harvest
street parading, offerings and spiritual slaughterings
we giving back to orphans and have-nots.
Festival of the first fruits, we never forget the roots
and the riches from the soil.
We breaking bread for a new season
sharing Embe and Kola nuts with reason,
traditional colours of dashikis and all that jazz of togetherness.
The vibe is Coltrane blues and a mix of Lucky
dube.

Ubuntu is the game of the day and love is the talk of the day.
Different rhythms of drums and dance moves reawakening
the black dream, rhythm in sound, rhythm in movement
and rhythm in light.
As different speakers, musicians, poets and pastors
communicate with the spirits to breastfeed our souls.

The spirit of African renaissance is far from being over.
Down here in Yeoville, spirit energy of Nyama and Modjadji
flowing through the feast.
As we quench our pride with ripe palm wine,
thanking the gods for a great market and harvest.

Ubi Family Festivities in Idomi

Grace and Gloria Ubi | Essay

Grace and Gloria Ubi share their historical and personal memories of their village, Idomi's, Leboku New Yam Festival.

In my hometown, we celebrate a lot of festivals yearly, including Christmas, Easter, and New Year. Among these festivals, the most colorful and beautiful is the Leboku New Yam Festival. It involves traditional attires, dancing, awards, games, and new yam, as the name implies. This festival takes place in most tribes in Nigeria but is celebrated differently in each one. In my village, Idomi of the Yakurr local government area in Cross-river state, Nigeria, we celebrate the Idomi New Yam Festival. It celebrates the fresh harvest and gives awards to the person with the biggest yam. Though this festival always takes place in August and mostly occurs on a Saturday, there's no set date for this festival because it varies and happens after a lot of conditions are met.

Weeks before the Idomi new yam festival begins, the four main chiefs of the community pay courtesy visits to the sub-chiefs. These are the ten chiefs of the ten compounds: Mfut, Kekomkukuli, Egbizum, Kekomkolo, Utalosi, Lekpankom, Okom, Kekowa, Lebolkom, and Epone. The visits take place at the town halls belonging to the various compounds every market day, called Koke, which is every four days. They talk about the Leboku festival and decide on the necessary issues and come to an amicable conclusion after the visitation of the ten compounds is concluded.

After weeks of planning, the festival begins and lasts for four days, making sure the primary day of the celebration falls a day before the Koke market day. The first day of the celebration starts with a ban. Members of the community, except a few, are made to stay away from Lukpal, the playground, and if caught, is made to pay a fine. This ban lasts from morning till noon. During this time, the four chiefs and few individuals drink as an offer of sacrifices to appease the gods. This day is called Obekupom, meaning the morning of the festival. The second day is more festive. The women go to

harvest their yams in the morning and are welcomed back by the four main chiefs who perform a dance called Mgbelimgbe. The dance is colorful and complex, but performed with skill and style by the chiefs. The evening ceremony is carried out by the four chiefs: Obol Lopon (the head chief), Okpebili (the second in command, the executor and the one that declares war), Omenka (the initiator of new chiefs), and Obol Leboku (the chief in charge of festivals). There is also a deity Kezidom that's represented by a priest. They all carry Kezidom in turns round the major routes of the village. This day is called Zanenbeku, meaning women's festival.

Ledembeku, men's festival, is the last day of the festival. The men go to the farm to harvest their yam. They give the person with the biggest yam an award of money or land. All traditional dances are performed by the appropriate groups and include Etambi (war dance) and Etangala (dance for everybody, whether young or old). In this performance the members of the community sing praise for people that have done good and chant shame to people that have done bad. There is also the Koze (hunters dance) and Obam (men and women).

On the evening of Ledembeku, a pageant is held for the title of Miss Leboku. The contestants dress up in Leman (literally meaning money, a traditional wear) comprising of bangles worn from the knee to the ankle, and beads worn on the waist, neck and hands, and tying a two-piece wrapper as a top and base. But I am sure Gloria will tell you all about this.

Seven days after Ledembeku, the chiefs declare a day of peace, closing the new yam festival. Anyone who fights or causes trouble to another is fined an enormous sum of money. With this, the festival ends and happens the same way the next year and beyond. The Leboku new yam festival brings the community together and forms a kinship between members of the community, so everyone takes it seriously. One needs to witness this festival personally because words aren't enough to describe its glory or how captivating it is. Leboku is also a way for business owners to make money because many people from far and wide attend. I always look forward to this colorful celebration every year.

Grace Ubi

One Friday after school in the middle of September, my dad told us to pack a few things because we were taking a weekend trip to the village. It wasn't December and nothing out of the ordinary had warranted our trip. When I asked why, he told me we were visiting the village to enjoy the New Yam Festival. Before this, I had heard several stories about this festival and had seen a special broadcast on TV about it but had never witnessed it first-hand. To top it all off, I was going to see my cousins and it wasn't even Christmas.

We packed our bags and 2 hours later, we were in the village. The festival had already begun a day before, but the real fun was to begin the next day. I waited impatiently for Saturday and when it finally arrived, it was more than I could have imagined. Everything was colorful and beautiful, including the people and some parts of the village were decorated to reflect the time. The veritable festival began on Saturday, a day my village people called Ledembuku meaning men's festival, with the festival for women, Zanenbuku, having happened the day before, all of which Grace already told you.

The highlight of my day was when a family friend visited and asked me to take part in the pageant competition for women in the community. It was an opportunity to do something fun and showcase my knowledge of my culture. My parents were hesitant as there was a lot to prepare and not enough time, but finally gave in when my grandmother volunteered to help. They dressed me in a two-piece colorful wrapper owned by my grandmother with beads on my wrists, waist and neck and my legs adorned with a jewelry my people called leman. I was nervous, but I had never felt excitement like this before.

The competition didn't last long, and I ended up coming in third place out of ten contestants each representing a compound in the village (Mfut, Kekomkukuli, Egbizum, Kekomkolo, Utalosi, Lekpankom, Okom, Kekowa, Lebolkom, and Epone) with me representing Kekomkukuli. My parents were very proud because I won a scholarship for a full year and a beautiful bicycle, but I was more thrilled at how much fun I had in being a part of this festival.

We retired to my grandfather's house, and packed to leave the next day, even though the festival wasn't going to fully end till the next week. I tried not to show my disappointment in leaving so soon, but I couldn't. My mood lifted when my

grandfather let me help him tie out new yams in the barn alongside my cousins, uncles, and siblings. It was the second most enjoyable part of the festival. But when the day to leave came, I couldn't stop my tears. My dad promised that we would come back the next year and I would also be back for Christmas, but it didn't stop me. I must have known it wouldn't happen because even though I go for Christmas regularly, I still haven't been able to attend another festival. I hope to be back soon, but I plan to cherish my experience in my heart till then.

Gloria Ubi

That Every Christmas Is the Onset of Magic

Chukwuma-Eke Pacella | Poetry

"let there be love; yule was thrown inside the world..."

When the air becomes intoxicating with the green season,
I am compelled to inhale
the memories that were conceived by the Christmas tree.

"*butterflies and sparks..."*

My first kiss was the first offspring of sorcery. Believe me;
the mistletoe was that white witch who ignited the flames.

Ask the snowman, he too was present
when the tree lit a stick and a teenager's lips became wildfire.

"my memories have become an unending bliss..."

It's August, but my skin has begun to detonate into
four pieces; each partition mapping out the months left
before Christ is tossed into the world, again.

I fold my heart and favourite socks into a parcel for my niece.
This season is a generous giver. My body dares not go
against yule's tradition.

"Come, taste our mood..."

Here, feelings morph into red chocolates and twinkle lights,
snowflakes and jingle bells, Santa Claus and optimistic souls,
and a spark, then another.

This green month is a collection of the festive lifestyles
my family can never sweep away. Come, sit by the fire,

and hear mother tell the story of my conception;
of how I am also an offspring of the tree's potion.

Deepavali

Savani Naidoo | Fiction

Carefully detangling the hem of her skirt from around the legs of her chair, she stood up and walked over to the window.

She watched her sister light the clay lamps in the front garden. They were all laid out already, along the footpath and the edges of the veranda, on the outside windowsills and along the top of the boundary wall. But the gusty wind that always seemed to plague this day was puffing out one lamp as soon as the next one was lit. A breath of stillness sent her sister flurrying to see all the lamps aglow in their splendour, even for a second, before the wind gusted them out.

She heard her mother call her from the kitchen. The kitchen table was covered with containers filled with vada, bhajia, gulgula, gulab jamun. The stove top was covered with pots of dhal, rice, spinach, pumpkin, sweet rice and kadhla. Her mother was probably putting together the last of the trays to be delivered to their neighbours.

She stood still, watching her dad place a tube in the middle of the tarmac road in front of their house, light the fuse and step away. She grimaced at the bang but admired the glittering flower constellation that exploded into being. She smiled as her mother brought out a tray of tea mugs and her father, with lamp light reflecting in his glasses, laughed at her sister who was twirling a sparkler halo above her head.

She heard her name called again. Turning from the window, she stepped away from home and walked to the student at the far end of the classroom, asking him a question to help him answer his.

December

Uwa Aguta | Poetry

It is December. The air is humid, the sun is angry and the
earth slowly forgets the touch of rain. The trees,
adorned with ornaments as bright as the sun. The fever,
rising higher than the dust spread on our grungy plains.
The food. The drinks. The company. The trips to the river
banks that leave our eyes red as the blood in our veins.

It is December. The laughs. The joy. The stool that holds
grandma's frail bones. The children, gathered around her
feet hidden by the shadows. The new stories as told
under the watchful gaze of the moon and of the stars.
The voices. The melodies. The harmonies. The sounds we
echo to remind us of our culture, our heritage, our identity.

It is December. The glee. The gathering. The festivals,
where the spirits hide under masks. The pain. The anger. The
heavy strokes of cane landing on bare backs that let eyes see
iniquity. The tours. The visits. The tired metatarsals
from visiting families. The love bonds felt amongst all and
sundry. The always full stomachs and never empty hands.

It is December. The weapons. The long battles. The war
between the mind and the body. The mind, fighting for
January. The body, for December. My holidays at home
are the only things I keep reminiscing on even as the season
comes upon us. Memories I always hold on to, believing
soon, I will not feel my Decembers from another time zone.

About the Authors

Adesope Ogunlade is a young writer and poet from Ibadan, Nigeria. His works appear in FIFWA's bimonthly anthology—Issue 1, PIJAlance Inaugural Issue, and OneBlackBoyLikeThatReview.

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Chukwuma-Eke Pacella, NGP Xv is a young Nigerian poet. She is the winner of the Cradle Poetry contest and The Feast of Words, a two-time BKPW finalist, and Hiasfest's 2022 most valuable female contestant. Her manuscript, *Love In its Bliss and Sins*, was the poetry runner-up for the Nigerian Prize for Teen Authors. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Eunoia Magazine, The International Human Rights Arts Festival, Last Leaves, Kalahari Review, Rigorous, and elsewhere. She is a proud member of the Hilltop Creative Arts Foundation and tweets @dancing_poet and @hcaf_abuja.

Leonard Ifeanyi Ugwu, Jr. is a lecturer at the Institute of African Studies and post graduate diplomat in English and Literary Studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He has authored two poetry collections, *Echoes of the Invisible* (2017) and *Echoes of Bullets* (2021). He compiled the Anthology of Peace for the World Union of Poets, a World Nations Writers Union laureate, and former coordinator of the Creative Writers Association of Nigeria Enugu state chapter. His debut play, *Babel and Boys,* will be out December 2022.

Francis Ukpevie is a medical laboratory scientist, a writer of stories, poems and articles, a CSR project onsite planner and executer, a youth group coordinator, and an advocate for a better society.

Gloria Ubi is a young writer from Nigeria with a passion for creative fiction. She loves to read novels, watch k-dramas, and listen to music. In her free time, she takes long walks and fulfils her role as a true Army. As a 3rd year linguistics and communication student at the University of Calabar, she hopes to one day be a published writer and a skilled lawyer. You can find her on Twitter @glowrya_.

Grace Ubi is a civil engineer student at the Cross River University of Technology from Calabar, Nigeria. She writes creative fiction, loves to sleep, listen to music, and watch her favorite series. Her lifelong goal is becoming a published writer and a skilled structural engineer. You can find her on Twitter @kokolor_.

Igbokwe Roseline is a medical student, creative writer, graphic designer, tutor, spoken word artiste/orator, and volunteer. She has been published in Moveee, Kalahari Review, Original Talku Talku's podcast, and elsewhere. She is a first-place winner of the New Cheese Academy and Hera Marketing writing contests, among others. You can find her on Instagram @igbokweroses and Twitter @IgbokweRose.

Kangsen "Yassay" Masango is a MFA candidate (Fiction) of Cameroonian heritage. He has an undergraduate degree in English Studies (Magna Cum Laude) from Fitchburg State University, an Industrial Technology degree from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and is a member of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society. Before becoming a writer, he served as a tactical intel analyst and paratrooper in the U.S. Army. His writing has an Afrocentric focus, ever dissecting the dynamics of race, colonialism, patriarchy, and power, be it political or societal.

Lesley Chacha is a young writer who believes in seeing the world through the old school way – penning words on paper. In as much as life is beautiful through sight, it unlocks new levels of grandeur though the art of writing. Some of Lesley's previous works can be found on his website.

Mihret Adal Gidi is an East African writer from Ethiopia. She is well-known among her friends and family for her ability to tell stories and realised her ambition with the release of her debut novel, *Bleeding Hearts of a Butterfly*, which led to her second, *Hell Again,* and third, *What Just Happened.* She is well-known for her tireless work ethic and desire to grow as an author. She is now working on a follow-up to her debut novel.

Morwamphaka Sello Huma is a South African poet and social entrepreneur. His debut poetry anthology, Country Bard Blues, was released in 2016. He also founded the Down Second Avenue Poetry Sessions and Conversations for E'skia in partnership with Arts Culture Trust. Alongside his stage performances, his work can be found in the Sol Plaatjie European Union Poetry Anthology, Ons Klyntji, Afritondo, Agbowó, New Coin, and elsewhere.

Chimamaka Adeniyi is a young Nigerian creative writer, screenwriter, slam poet, and aspiring film producer who loves representing her African culture in her work. She mostly dabbles in Afro-fiction, such as Afro-sci fi, thrillers, comedy, and African - mostly Nigerian - satire. Her poetry is mostly protest and satirical poems, and she loves Black Panther to a fault.

Muti'ah Badruddeen is a Nigerian health worker and homeschooling mom who writes contemporary women's fiction that centers Nigerian Muslim women. She was a finalist for the 2022 TLC Pen Factor competition for pitching her debut novel, Rekiya & Z, which was also recently shortlisted for the 2022 Spring Women Author Prize. When she is not tackling her different roles, Muti'ah is usually catching up on years of sleep deprivation. Find her on Twitter and Instagram @/deenprogress.

Okoro Celine Chinonye is a young Nigerian writer hoping to make a change in her society and enjoys taking part in slam poetry sessions. You can find her poetry in magazines and online platforms such as Correct Connect Africa Foundation.

Savani Naidoo has recently completed her Master's in Creative Writing at Rhodes University. She has worked as an English and History teacher since 2008 in South Korea, the United Arab Emirates and Sudan. She was born in Johannesburg but currently resides in Bothas Hill, Kwa Zulu Natal.

Sophia Obianamma Gabriel is a Nigerian writer who lets her ink flow when she is not too busy being a Midwifery student. She aims to bring hope to people through either profession and is currently perfecting the art of balancing both passions.

Uchechukwu Onyedikam, also known as Mystic Poet, is a creative artist based in Lagos, Nigeria. His work has appeared in Amsterdam Quarterly, Poetic Africa, Hood Communist, and elsewhere. He is keen to further his intense love for poetry by working with creatives from around the world, and now you can enjoy his poem, 'Ten Years'.

Uwa Aguta is a Nigerian poet who finds expression in poetry and beyond. With a constantly busy mind, he always looks for the story in every scenario and looks to tell it in the best way he can. He seeks to inspire and entertain whenever he puts pen to paper, an art he has been honing since his pre-teen years.

About the Editor

Tahzeeb Akram is a South African literary editor and curator. She has an MA in contemporary queer Nigerian literary where she focused on anthologies published by Brittle Paper. Now, she is publishing literary works and anthologies under Brittle Paper and loving every minute.

About Brittle Paper

Brittle Paper is an online literary magazine for readers of African Literature. Brittle Paper is Africa's premier online literary brand inspiring readers to explore and celebrate African literary experiences in all its diversity.

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