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BACK TO THE  
ROOTS  
ROOTS  
TOP 30 POEMS  
OF THE BRIGITTE  
POIRSON POETRY  
CONTEST (BPPC)  
AUGUST 2019  
TS

(editors)

BRIGITTE POIRSON  
KUKOGHO IRUESIRI SAMSON

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# BACK TO THE ROOTS

TOP 30 POEMS OF THE BRIGITTE POIRSON POETRY  
CONTEST (BPPC) AUGUST 2019

Edited by

Brigitte Poirson  
Kukogho Iruesi Samson



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“

When a tradition  
gathers enough strength  
to go on for centuries,  
you don't just turn it off  
one day.

– Chinua Achebe

## BPPC AUGUST 2019: BACK TO THE ROOTS

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## INTRODUCTION

The August contest has been an opportunity for the poets to explore many routes to their roots. They have travelled back to the good old days as an idyllic refuge, or revisited the past to gauge the distance between then and now with regrets or relief. They have retraced the painful paths to the present to highlight the roots of their nation's problems, at times using a wealth of experience to delineate possible futures.

Their poetic prowesses have been manifold and form a rich tapestry of emotions and stakes.

BRIGITTE POIRSON



AUGUST 2019 TOP 10 FINALISTS

**MY WORLD**

***Ogunmolu Ebunoluwa Esther***

**GENESIS**

*Oluwatomiwa Ajeigbe*

**POTPOURRI OF MEMORIES**

*Akor Agada Nathaniel*

**SHALL WE RETURN**

*Daniel Olatunbosun*

**TELL MUFASA TO RETURN HOME**

*Thomas Afolabi Emmanuel*

**TRADE OF THE DARK AGES**

*Ayobami Oluwatosin Joseph*

**THE PLACE I ONCE CALLED HOME**

*Izuchukwu Saviour Otubelu*

**IN DAYS LIKE THIS**

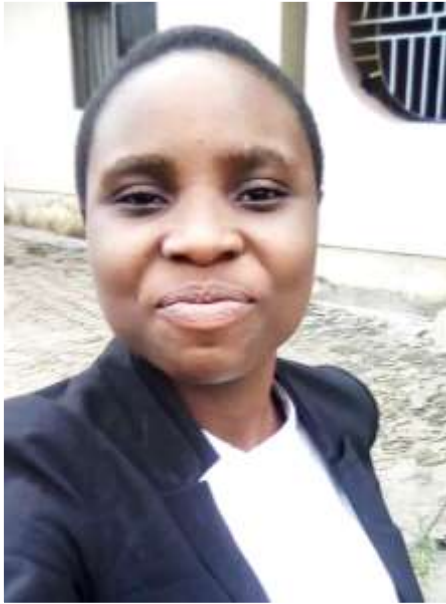
*Ayotunde Oyeniran*

**SAILING**

*Oni Tomiwa*

MY WORLD

OGUNMOLU EBUNOLUWA ESTHER (August 2019 WINNER)



OGUNMOLU EBUNOLUWA ESTHER a linguist and writer from the historic Idanre town, Ondo state, Nigeria.

She studied English and Literary Studies at the Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State and is currently serving the nation as a member of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

*As I dive down memory lane,  
I ponder on the syzygy of "MY WORLD"  
Where Forty children and Five wives  
Roam in archaic abode.*

*As I pass, I hear the cacophony of my ancient mortals  
pounding a soft, stainless starch...  
Oh! It's moon time!  
"Papa", tell me more about  
The Inquisitiveness of Tortoise  
and the fury of "Ogun",  
Or the monarchical tyranny  
and reigns of egocentric juggernauts...*

*I recall  
the "Soro" and "Buba" flirting*

## BPPC AUGUST 2019: BACK TO THE ROOTS

*towards "Bata" dance.  
The ups and downs of  
Unified ways.*

*Hmm! What a world,  
a two-sided coin  
bringing pain and gain  
And a lasting fortress!.*

---

*MY WORLD: A movie*

*Soro and Buba: Yoruba men's clothing*

*Ogun: Yoruba god of Iron*

*Bata: Yoruba drum*

*Fortress: a Hymn*

GENESIS

OLUWATOMIWA AJEIGBE

The past is a fractured mirror.  
It holds a thousand horrors  
And retells stories of forgotten pains  
Reminding our limbs of the feel of chains.

I dream of my ancestors on slave ships,  
And that I could erase their hardships  
With a poem written in the future,  
Another way to offer them rapture.

In some ways, I am enslaved still.  
Whenever I swallow that colourful pill,  
I send my mind to the past  
And pray that the suffering of my fathers will not last.

My history is a mosaic of contradiction.  
I return to my roots with my imagination  
And search for pieces of myself between history pages.  
I search in vain, though I have wandered through the ages.

Sometimes, I dream of tales by the moonlight  
And the games we played at night,  
I dream of masquerades in a festive dance  
And watch a procession of Ifa priests—the order of balance.

My lineage has undergone metamorphosis.  
We cannot return to our idyllic genesis.  
We cannot erase the scars whips left on our hearts,  
And cannot forget the way we were uprooted from the earth.

My mother says we carry our roots within us.  
Our future are fruits waiting to ripen.  
The genesis comes after the revelations.

POTPOURRIS OF MEMORIES

AKOR AGADA NATHANIEL

Edumoga is an eagle from a far age,  
A playground of wrinkled lines on an ancient page  
Whose words carried alluring aroma that mauled mother's pottage,  
Housing tales that harvest taste that no tongue could gauge.

He has seen so many moons come and gone  
And endured horrid harvests of burning blood and broken bones,  
Wondering how the world has morphed into a wandering cyclone  
From the calm breeze she once was crawling on supple stones!

His potpourris of memories rising like a rendition of rhythmic cords  
Took me back to the time when magic mated with words  
On the bed of river Okpokwu sprouting herbs from many worlds  
For our forefathers to preserve their lives from enemies swords.

Sacrifices were rendered to Omanchala to appease its usual bouts of  
cough,  
Which was never ever enough, even when things were rough.  
Alekwu's altar resting in the heavens of the sacred Ogbadibo lough  
Also fed fat from the hands that leaned on his bough

By eating those that danced Ugada instead of Oglinya on Eke day,  
For desecrating Okoho soup and pounded yams that littered his  
pathway,  
Hosting soured existence in the huts of hearts built on wet clay  
Too sticky for a trapped prey to stand up and pray.

I finally came back to myself as Edumoga's snore slapped my ears,  
Happy to have travelled through the ocean of tainted years  
On the tales of an old man with Otukpo's bushy beards,  
As tears of relief dissolved the debris of my present fears.

TELL MUFASA TO RETURN HOME

THOMAS AFOLABI EMMANUEL

Call the hunter, call the bush meat.  
Pull the goat by its ears and tell the farmer  
To tarry from tending tuber tendrils.

Slide down the palm tree, O wine tapper.  
Child, arise from prostrating before your father.  
At council, Mufasa called ignorance a liar.

Tell him his historian has spoken:  
“The hunter may flaunt the glory of the hunt.”  
Tell him he is a king hunted by ignorance.

Her hacky headlamp has heightened his darkness.  
Her arrows are in the dermis of his history,  
So he claws for enlightenment, at his skin.

Mane weavers, he told to make him another's kin.  
This searing savanna sun upon Ani,  
And the ghosts of warriors that fell in Jalumi

Are witnesses to the tolls the liar's truth took.  
Now a stranger in his land, the king is in her hooks.  
His fathers lived at peace and war by the brook,

But he has left desolate the rivers and lakes  
Where upon the waters' face he himself embraced.  
His gods: forsaken. His source: forgotten.

Like the proverbial stream  
Acculturated by distant cultures on screens,  
He tells fables no more to the cobs at night,

No more, the cripple longs for walk at moonlight.  
Next moon is the festival of tie and dye:  
Tell Mufasa to return home.

## BPPC AUGUST 2019: BACK TO THE ROOTS

### TRADE OF THE DARK AGES

AYOBAMI OLUWATOSIN JOSEPH

*(To commemorate the remembrance of slave trade and its abolition every 23rd of August)*

1

(Captured) We are goods on ships; black is our trademark.  
We bear skin stickers thicker than our father's tribal marks.  
Buyers at the coast await us in their empty caravans  
To pile us like tubers heading for the barns.

We flew on floating tombs across the salty seas.  
Our very eyes witnessed the phagocytosis of dead bodies.  
United we stood in fetters, holding our peace.  
Divided we went astray to rivers, gasping for breath.

Our backs are bent knees sworn to sugarcanes.  
Our women are nests of restless crows  
Flying around at night to peck a virgin seed coat; (sniffles)

2

(Flashback) We were like they that dream,  
Hearing feet hustling between bellows and screams.  
I was with my lover under the lime tree  
When the shades of shackles crawled over my wrists.  
I tried to fight... Hurried canes!  
This manmade disaster pelted my skin, leaving stickers of stripes.  
By the stripes I am ill... weakened...  
My lover... Myself... hulled to a sea...  
I fainted... I woke... I saw us among others.

THE PLACE I ONCE CALLED HOME

IZUCHUKWU SAVIOUR OTUBELU

Lost in shadows, I can't find myself.  
Like tattered pages on a forgotten shelf,  
I am a flower fading into nothingness.  
Who am I? I cannot say- I'm nameless.

Caught in Europeanization's spider web,  
How long have I waited for the tide to ebb?  
Now the fragments of my ancestry  
Lie scattered across distant valleys.

My father called me 'Adebukola'.  
Any other name I shall not answer.  
Mother, teach me the tongue my fathers spoke,  
For my identity lies buried in smoke.

Look! Buba and Sokoto fit me fine.  
Why then am I a slave to collar and tie?  
What a sweet relief akpu is down the throat!  
Oh, sweet home! Thy tenderness keeps me afloat.

For years, I've been a wanderer on alien soils,  
But the sweet scent of home has curled me into wire coils.  
The aroma of Mother's soup beckons to me: 'come'.  
Pray, take me back to the place I once called home!



IN DAYS LIKE THIS

AYOTUNDE OYENIRAN

In days when seeds of roaming drop in my fertile mind  
and nostalgia germinates, I don't nip it in the bud.  
In days when I have a patriotic urine  
that decides to turn to a yellowish green,  
and I ingest all sorts of nauseous relief,  
I just want to go back to the roots  
that once almost hurt papa's left foot,  
but were condiments for a potent concoction.

In days when my stomach grumbles audibly  
and pleads not to be fed any more foreign grains,  
I just crave seeing "eja abo" swim in mama's "ikokore"  
and deliberately devouring the delicate delicacy.

Grandma was a wonder with wits of wonderful worth.  
Her intelligence lit up the prospects of being old;  
she was indeed a witty wonder to behold,  
and in days when I'm in an arcade of shattered emotions,  
I just want to sit at her feet one more time,  
deciphering riddles and listening to folklores  
that were both amusement rides of fantasy  
and guidelines for the throes of reality.

Each memory, each lesson, each way of life,  
each superstition, whether believed or not,  
is a knot tied firmly to my stem of thoughts,  
and in days like this, I untie a needed knot,  
sieve its clot and bring to nought the rot  
that the advent of modernisation has wrought.  
Then I pause and move forward by going back.

---

*Eja abo: A kind of fish.*  
*Ikokore: A native dish.*

SAILING

ONI TOMIWA

Follow this poem to the bedding of waters:  
To Nile, to Niger, to Zambezi, to Zaire, to Volta, to Victoria  
And to my mother's heathen pot in the corner  
of the room. In its rumbles, water speaks many languages:  
Yoruba, Ashanti, Igbo, Zulu, Xhosa, Hausa, Swahili,  
And many black tongues concealed in ripples.  
Because rivers were here yesterday, they know where I flow from.  
I once asked the Niger what my name was. She said  
In majestic whispers that I am a pharaoh from the pyramids,  
Reaching down to the temple of Osiris. I am an Oasis  
In the world's desert. I am a bronze casting of black depths.

We start from the earth, from the loamy soil of a black place.  
Our ancestors, they say, were seeds: baobabs, mahoganies, oaks...  
And they have grown with black strength in centuries of vigour.  
But we were broken off, tired branches of civilization  
And the new day rhapsodies of forgetting where we come from,  
And where we must go. My withering self I cast on the sedating stream.  
Let it ferry me home to my sacred roots, where I would be grafted  
To my beloved mother's side in African embrace.

BEAUTY OF ROOT

Ogedengbe Tolulope Impact

*(A call to fellow brothers on ancestral soil)*

Come, let's take a journey back into time,  
Back into the genesis of our aged earth,  
And uphold the pillars of our existence  
Rooted beneath the shores of our soil.

Come, let's journey back to our source,  
Back into the cradle of a primitive culture  
Where babies are nurtured with dexterity  
And maidens are trained into dignified brides.

Come, let's travel back to our place of origin,  
Back to the rock shields, home of the wise ones,  
Where our forefathers fraternized with the gods  
To soothe their children with a python's head.

Come, let's journey through the terraced hills,  
Through the breast of the enchanted forest  
Where our fathers hunted beasts for feasts  
And made music from the animal's skins.

Let's journey back to the temple of our history,  
To the sacred shrine adorned with cowries,  
Where sacrifices were offered to the gods  
To break the shadowy arms of discomfort.

Come, let's take a journey back into time,  
Back into the genesis of our aged earth,  
And uphold the pillars of our existence  
Rooted beneath the shores of our soil.

ORISUN

OLAJUWON JOSEPH OLUMIDE

"A stream that ignores its root dries up in no time",  
The ambience of refrained rhythm on the lips of Agidigbo.

Here I am , a weeping rivulet, running out of tears.  
I streamed abroad, disdained the Nile to mix up  
With the Pacific and Atlantic. I bloated in the glory  
Of Western wisdom, bereft of the peace and joy Osun bestows.

When my streaming was young, I unfriended the Nile.  
Who would understand my plight now? I'm running dry!

Behind the facade of Western costume,  
With feminist eye-strokes mocking bridal tears  
Accompanying Ewatomi to Akanmu's conjugal home,  
I forgot Moremi's feat gotten in Odua's undiluted lore.

I bartered the night beauty on my skin for a rainbow  
Of horror on my lost face. Its suppleness garners  
Wrinkles, though the sun still prances on the horizon.  
And I yet blabbed in tongues of Briton-phonics...

...A forever debtor to the diction-bank of Anglo-Saxon  
When the wealth of my deep dialect is lying oblivion  
In Odua's shrine at home. I'd rather tag it incantation  
When Talabi's poetics frolic on local depth and colour.

Sacrilege! I saw faces etched with tribal marks  
As leprous beings sequestered in the forbidden forest.  
I forgot the origin of my beauty and lost identity.  
See me, wife of Odua, snatched by civilization!

Before I drown in the belly of Bermuda Triangle this hour,  
I'd voyage home on this Atlantic of no future to worship Olokun.

MY FATHER GREW UP AROUND THESE BEAUTIFUL TREES

JOHN CHIZOBA VINCENT

My father grew up around these beautiful trees in a space  
between history and the timeline of a country purged into colonial  
corruption.  
He was born when this land was amalgamated.  
When Lugard gathered the Emirs and Obas to whisper lies into their ears,  
he was a boy.  
When Mugo Park said he discovered a river, his father's second wife met  
Flora Shaw.  
When Aba women ran naked in the street,  
father watched his Mother's nipples harden.  
They became the victims of bigotry and favouritism of indirect rules.  
He witnessed a laughter that was not of Richard's  
stretch into the Constitutions of our doom.  
When MacPherson muted his worries to import loots to grow into our  
new hunger,  
father was 37;  
The 1953 London conference and Lyttleton's gave them a forged  
federation.  
The summer my mother gave birth to my brother, Nigeria became a  
republic.  
The day Ojukwu declared Biafra,  
he watched Gowon swollen with the heat of confusion.  
When the shadows of the Civil war wore storms, booking blood to the  
opened grave,  
his words hit Awolowo like that of the Warrant chiefs on Britons.  
He watched boys being slaughtered under the sun,  
girls at war, to settle the cause of their fathers.  
This was when we lost our accent and new clothes of tongues were  
sewn.  
I'm not opening these pages of memories to mend the witful weight of  
our past,  
but these stains are still painted on the bodies of our leaders, from Zik to  
Buhari.  
Father grew along with no greed between his ribs,  
but here is more corrupt than I can remember.

## BPPC AUGUST 2019: BACK TO THE ROOTS

This land still wears her old clothes of tears dated back to the root of her amalgamation.

IF NOT FOR POETRY

BLESSING OMEIZA OJO

That I hide my head under the wings of FCT  
does not make me a city boy.  
I am a full-bodied village boy.

In my native home, peace talks are for the dead  
and killing is a way of settling every misunderstanding;  
even women caution men to traipse carefully.

While I was growing, I did not have the tongue  
to say where I come from for fear I wouldn't be welcomed.  
Even now, I stammer to tell people my origin.

Do not say I am unveiling the ugly face of my home.  
I do love the dimple masquerade festival creates on our faces  
every end of the year, even though it is like a mist.

I no longer go home because what bonds us together for a day  
separates us for a year without leaving a pinch of its adhesive.  
When people talk about Ebira land, the accent is on anger and battle.

In strange lands even, an Ebira man boasts of his origin,  
and when drunk with pride, he counts the number of his victims.  
I am not of this heritage, maybe because I fled to a hideout.

I am not ashamed of my native home, but of my inheritance.  
This is why you can never see me brag about our arrogance.  
What will I gain for beating fear into my contemporaries?

I may not have spoken about my native land today,  
but I am no bastard. If you ever think I am one,  
then this poem just set me free from your cage.

---

*FCT: Federal Capital Territory*

*Ebira: A tribe in Okene, Kogi State, Nigeria*

WHAT DIASPORA REMINDS ME OF

OLOLADE AKINLABI IGE

Diaspora reminds me of home  
where men sipped palm-wine from a calabash  
and played ayò-olópón beneath the shades of a tree.  
Home where children listened to folklores at night.  
But now, folklores are black ink on the spines of paper  
and ayò-olópón is a game on phone.

Diaspora reminds me of home  
where Sàngó did strike like thunder  
and Ògún would not spare any falsehood sayer.  
But now, I heard holy books wash away sins  
and everyone is now a sinful saint.

Diaspora reminds me of home  
where an oracle reviewed tomorrow from today.  
Home, where kánàkò shortened the length of the journey  
and incantation diffused human into space.  
But now, African science is said to lead to hell.

Diaspora reminds me of egúngùn festival  
where we danced out our sweat  
and women dangled their waists to the voices of the drums.  
But now, children carry legs up and dance zhanku.

Diaspora reminds me of warriors living in memory:  
Ogúnmólá, Ibikunlé, Efúnsetán, Ògèdèñgbé, Basorun,  
We are never people of cowardice.

Diaspora reminds me of myself  
that my father is Africa, somewhere in Nigeria, called Ibadan.  
Who then said I have no root?

---

*Ayò-olópón: a traditional wooden made game*



## BPPC AUGUST 2019: BACK TO THE ROOTS

*Sàngó: one of the Yoruba gods that strikes by thunder*

*Ògún: one of the Yoruba gods that operates by iron*

*Kánàkò: a means of shortening longer journey before the advent of cars in Yoruba land*

*Àláàfin of Òyo, Òjájá of Ilé-Ife, Olú'bàdàn of Ìbàdàn: kings in Yoruba land*

*Ogúnmólá, Ibikunlé, Efúnsetán, Ògèdèngbé: heroes/warriors in Yoruba land.*

TELL THEM, SON

SAMUEL ADEGOKE SIJUADE

Son, hear my words  
And bead them into garlands,  
For times and memories fade  
As civilization takes on our shade  
And no more the twilight stories  
Told under the giant oaks.  
It is said that when a child misses the story,  
He should not be denied the history

When you see men ride on the arms of modern technology,  
Tell them our fathers speak to the air to appear and disappear on the arts  
of orology\*

(nta ba wi f'ogbo l'ogbo ngbo\*).

When you see men drink table water and feel like kings,

Tell them we drank water from natural springs.

When you see women shaking buttocks in bum shorts,

Tell them our mothers wore proudly aso ovi in long shots

(orente, duduosu,... \*).

When you hear of the cowardice of Boko Haram,

Tell them of the valiance of the warlike woman, Moremi

`(Omo akaaba).

When you see misfits and tribal bigots who now rule our land

Tell them of Oodudwa, Oba Lanikoro... sages who harmonized their  
hams.

When things fall apart and the centre cannot hold,

Tell them we had worthy elders who were capable and bold

(agba ko k'nsile kori omo tuntun wo\*).

When you see all these and more,

All you have to do is tell them of our traditional lore

HOME IS WHERE I BELONG

OPARA MOSES CHIBUEZE

I come from a place where umunna bu ike  
And kolanut is a sign of welcome.  
I come from the eastern heartland, home of the Okigwe hills  
And the Imo and Orashi river.

I come from a cultural alike place  
Very rich in cultural ancestry,  
Where iri iji is a sign of fertility  
Where festivals are held in totality,  
As the Nnorie dancers are lost in the ogene drums.

I come from a place with dainty food,  
Where ofe Owerri is taken with awe,  
As akpu smiles at the sight of ofe Ora and ugba  
Leaving hearts with a touch of love.  
I come from a place with different beliefs,  
With different deities and ways of worship.

I come from a place where culture is valued,  
Men and women dress in beautiful, cultural attire  
To herald the August meeting.  
At times we disagree, but as one we stand.  
Oh, I miss the warmth that home gives!

The road is long without my root,  
For I am the reality of my root;  
My root is the foundation of my future.  
It is a permanent part of me to nurture.

---

*Ummuna bu ike: Igbo phrase meaning 'brotherhood is strength'*

*iri Ji: Igbo new yam festival.*

*Nnorie: name of poet's home town*

*Ofe Owerri and ofe Ugba: popular Igbo delicacies*

WHEN WE WERE RAW

PAUL ABIOLA OKU-OLA

I search for myself in every child.

That child who erected a mansion of many flats  
for his parents and siblings  
out of mud and clay.

That child who adorned his father's shoe  
on the playground –  
a father figure he took  
with his playmate as his offspring.

That child whose car had no speed limit,  
who covered miles in seconds  
without fear of a crash;  
his car was carved with his mouth,  
not the likes that grace our roads.

I miss the hide and seek chronicles,  
the hunch-back screens :  
they taught us patience  
cum fighting spirit.

I miss the days we were raw:  
They fashioned us for this ripe age.

BACK IN THIS PLACE

SAMUEL AMAZING AYOADE

I am back in this place where the moon rejoices  
At the hearing of melodious lullabies  
Sung into the auditory meatus of cry-babies  
Who are stuck to mothers' backs at even tide.

This place where stones were currencies of exchange,  
Where we displayed our goods by the quiet road paths  
And birds were sales representatives  
Till buyers came from the cleft of the hills.

This place where all spirits were gods  
Except 'Àlùjàànú' - the one with evil gut  
That ate our 'mangoes' figs, our gold,  
Under the huge Iroko in the horrible 'Irumole' forests.

This place where pestles pound the heart of mortars  
And the thistles from this blessed ground  
Become sweeteners to hearts of mortals  
As the birth of a daughter is marked by the slaughter of an old bull.

This place where babies are not thrown in 'kitten sacks'  
But on caring backs that are blessed by 'Elédùwà.'  
A place where there is no food for lazy fools.  
Fools who sit on the labour of the masses have no place at home.

Home is not blocks and walls, bricks and clays.  
Home is not strife and delicacies, but dry morsels with peace.  
I am back to my roots - I am back home  
Where honey is a feeling and not a nick.

---

*Àlùjàànú: Monster in Yoruba language*  
*Elédùwà: name for God in Yoruba language*

HOW I WISHED I ENJOYED THE PRIVILEGE OF THOSE DAYS

OPADEJI SAMUEL OLUMIDE

How I wished I enjoyed the privilege of those days,  
When stereotype was not a prejudiced attitude of one's race,  
When young kids gathered to listen to beautiful tales.  
How I wished I enjoyed the privilege of those days.

How I wished I enjoyed the privilege of those days,  
When our cultural value was like a passport to hold the mace,  
When the captains of each ship knew how to fight the storms at its face.  
How I wished I enjoyed the privilege of those days.

How I wished I enjoyed the privilege of those days,  
When the shards of broken souls were gathered together with grace,  
When the secrets of every hidden act was shown at the tips of the  
culprit's nails.  
How I wished I enjoyed the privilege of those days.

How I wished I enjoyed the privilege of those days,  
When the shackles of insurgencies were tackled like an attack to slow  
walking snails,  
When the love of humanity was shown at the heads and not at the tails.  
How I wished I enjoyed the privilege of those days.

IN HER SECRET PLACE

PRAISE EBIRIM

Take me between the thighs of my motherland.  
Beneath the laced wrapper on her till, I melt in her secret beyond.  
She would taste of milk and honey,  
She would taste of pain and disgrace.

Take me to the lips of 1966,  
Where fury saddled her horses  
And guns coveted *Musa's* belly.  
IMO had lost her virginity,  
Her purity tainted by the blood of an innocent.

Take me to the bosom of an *Osu*.  
Let me lie with her and kiss her fears away,  
For her mother land had rejected her.  
As she was wedded to *Amadioha*.

Take me between the breasts of *Orlū*  
Where men suckle promises  
Of fresh *pami* that deals with *Ekwensù*.  
Drunkards having an affair with delusion.

Take me to her,  
For she was war and peace.  
She was smiles and frowns  
She was the stories not said.

She was all you knew...  
And did not.  
Take me to her falsehood.  
Take me to her truth.  
For everyone is without secret,  
But in her secret place lies beauty and sin.

---

*Musa: Popular Northern name*

## BPPC AUGUST 2019: BACK TO THE ROOTS

*Amadioha: a god in Igbo land*

*Orlu: a place in IMO state*

*Pami: palm wine*

*Ekwensù: Devil in Igbo language*



THE MEN WE BECAME

KOLADE OLAWALE KABIR

We are not birds  
whose first flight became the verb that made their mothers childless.  
We are not ghosts  
whose fists could neither knock nor open the lock  
that leads to their fathers' homes.  
We are no oasis  
who got divorced by rainfall.  
We are rivers.

We are rivers that keep flowing because they never lose their source.  
We are boys of yesterday who grew to become men of today,  
Men whose future became the game they hunt,  
men whose future made a sleep in their fathers' arms forbidden for  
them,  
because no man breathes oxygen to fill his tommy.

We grew and grow into men who are real men,  
men who now see love in the heart and not only in the eyes,  
men who struggle even at the tip of trouble,  
men whose success story never become the horror tale  
where we are lost and cannot go back home.  
We are men with origin,  
and now is the time to go back to where we belong.

TRIBUTARY

AYONMIKE AJUYAH

Being engulfed in a vacuum of natural air  
Taken for granted due to an unshakable, conceived faith  
In its everlasting availability,  
An indebtedness synonymous with a time wasted that cannot be paid  
for,  
Imagining the mind being the eye of the soul  
And the continuing shower of this beauty on my muscular protoplasm  
An acquired immune deficiency syndrome,  
Talking about this irresistible characteristic of natural air  
And the journey back to the roots,  
I must admit I am a tributary.

SWEET MAMA OKOHO

ABAH, ABAH OYAGABA

The morning I will never forget for troubles and rumbles  
in my intestines was my first morning in Ikoyi.

It was my first indomie morning  
which I couldn't escape but to savour  
as my large intestines grumbled in despair  
and my small intestines rumbled in response  
when my aunt introduced me to indomie.

In seconds of retrospective thoughts,  
I remembered sweet mama far away in Okpoga,  
As I beheld the worm-like organism arranged  
like carpet grass in that breakable plate before me.

In closed-opened eyes, I could see the union of okpehe and ikpeche  
in the charcoal earthen pot which wore the okoho a jacket of aroma  
that made it stand out above every continental dish.

Sweet mama okoho –  
when garnished with ikpoho and furnished with ifu -  
makes my oesophagus dance ogirinya  
without the beating of okanga.

Though still in Ikoyi,  
My eyes were sternly fixed on the round bowl of the okoho,  
As the balls of abahi and the chunks of dried fish  
ran round the bowl cyclically.

Oh! Sweet mama okoho,  
ever elastic and gentle moving soup  
that gives executive escorts to any size of ona !

Sweet mama okoho, the African soup capable  
of crucifying my stubborn hunger with its aroma ,  
The aroma that attracts foreigners to Okpoga!

## BPPC AUGUST 2019: BACK TO THE ROOTS

Though still in Ikoyi, I will never forget  
my sweet mama okoho in Okpoga.

---

Abahi: Melon

Ifu: Mushroom

Ikpeche: Pepper fruit (spice)

Ikpoho: Okra

MY MOTHER WAS A DANCER AND HER BODY WAS THE MOON

ANTHONY OKPUNOR

And flutes only carried the night  
Back into our palms.  
We got used to the horse's haste.  
Each time the earth frothed its naked body in a river,  
We prayed to the god of antilogwu  
And drums to shepherd drunk men  
Into their huts before a firefly  
Could bite their eyes into the morning.  
Before six o'clock, all the stars are drunk and stale.  
Market days are also full of sun. A hissing man lies lifeless  
Beside a jar of newly tapped wine.  
Today my father is a quick lover.  
When you look left, you see women  
Hurting the wind with their bodies,  
My mother leading the world with her chest  
And waist and beads and bare feet.  
The jungle sings of trees every nine months.  
We say the body needs more music to live.  
The story goes that every bird knows  
What Nkwa Umu-Agbogho is.  
A reaping of gongs. The maiden dance.  
But to pull off a trick, a goddess will ruin the night,  
And no one will notice a thing,  
Not even my father falling in love with the moon.

SOMEWHERE

KHALID LUKMAN

While I was a kid in my town,  
A town in the middle of the sea,  
The sea was surrounded by a forest  
Housing nothing but superstitions.

I was nurtured to worship the sun,  
Dread the night, curse the moon and stars.  
I was raised with stories of sombre cries of owls  
And the ominous presence of cats.  
I was warned of the repercussions  
Of defying my elders, for they converse with gods.

Now, I am an adult  
With these beliefs flowing in his blood.  
I am an adult weary of the night,  
Though I adore its silence.  
I find the owl a ravishing view,  
Yet its cry petrifies me.

I love the tenderness of a cat,  
But don't want to see it lurking around me.  
I'm a jumble of beliefs: mine and my elders',  
But the later have been engraved into my bones.

To extricate myself from the bondage,  
I brook through osteogenesis, somewhere  
Where there is no sea nor forest,  
Where rotten fruits don't force their ways  
On seedlings, somewhere far from home,  
Where I am at liberty to use the mind I have.

“

A nation's culture resides  
in the hearts and in the soul  
of its people.

– Mahatma Gandhi

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading this chapbook.

The [Brigitte Poirson Poetry contest \(BPPC\)](#) is a monthly writing contest aimed at rewarding the under-appreciated talent of young nigerian poets. It was instituted in February 2015 in honor of [Brigitte Poirson](#), a French poet, editor, and lecturer, who has over the years worked assiduously to promote and support of African poetry. You too can be a part of the BPPC initiative by [entering your poems for any of the monthly editions](#).

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