



# GRIEF

ON PAINTED SHEETS

. POETS REACT TO BENUE KILLINGS .

Edited by  
ADEDAYO ADEYEMI AGARAU



GRIEF ON PAINTED SHEETS

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*(poets react to Benue killings)*

*Edited by*  
Adedayo Adeyemi Agarau



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## GRIEF ON PAINTED SHEETS

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## INTRODUCTION

Here in our Land, cows are carnivores!

And home is a trap where you wake to cries of mothers who lost children, brothers, husbands and sisters to bloodthirsty herdsmen claiming heads as trophies. At the dawn of 2018, Benue was hit by a pungent wave of violence; a thick shadow was cast on humanity. The world woke to pictures of coffins and grieving souls; the feelings of anger and sadness induced by the mass burial spurred certain poets to stab their pains with pens and let the ink of grief flow onto sheets.

“**Grief on painted sheets**” is a reaction of poets to the Benue killing of the seventy-three (73) accounted for and perhaps several others who were just pieces of flesh, unidentified. Words came to life in vivid lines and veracious verses and truncated the silent injustice – lyrics became tissues to dab sorrow-laden faces. Poetry sought to become lullabies for eyes scared of sleep and dirges on the bedhead of those laid to eternal sleep.

How ironic, in the face of human cruelty to fellow humans, voices unify in strong condemnation. Songs spill from the lips of bards to reaffirm the values of family and friendship. This collection of poems restores some hint of hope for humanity – love is not dead! Hurt to a part of the body causes distress for the whole body.

The collection opened with lines that transmitted the feeling of being trapped in one’s home. *ON BEING TRAPPED* amplifies the footsteps of assailants in the

dark and the fear that races the heartbeat of one who is cornered and has nowhere to run.

*“Because home and everything familiar*

*To our feet...is a trap...*

*And the night is no longer a safe place to dream”*

Home should be sanctuary where fears and worries are laid on soft pillows but when locked doors feel like open space and daybreak offers no solace, men’s lips split into bleeding rhetoric as painted by another poet:

***WHAT HAPPENS NEXT*** *“when our farms are being wet with blood? And our homes become traps?”*

Benue was badly hit by one of the worst flood in Nigeria in 2017. The people who are yet recovering from such calamity and loss were forced to witness this nature of unspeakable evil. Thus the flood of words contained on these pages is rich in nature and pain-induced imagery, painting vivid graphics of flood, blood and tears. Wickedness, fear and death are succinctly transmitted through images of bullets, rivers, graves in the midst of witty play on words. Grief could not gag the creativity of the pens; likewise, the beauty of poetic expressions couldn’t dull the pain or relegate the tears. Instead, the pain-propelled train of thoughts launches the reader into the center of mourning – keeps the screams of the victims echoing in their ears.

*“The flood first washed*

*Us away from home. Then*

*We are at the mercy of*



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Ingrate nomads..." [*HOW DO YOU TELL A CHILD*]

"This is the height of ills

*We are drowned by our blood's flood*" [*FOR BENUÉ*]

The perpetrators of this heinous acts are not spared neither are the leaders who remain indifferent the plight of its people. They are cowards, yes, according to a poet:

"O, cowherd! Has your vein's blood run dry?" [*RED BASKET OF BENUÉ*]

The poems in this book seek to console the bereaved, immortalize the deceased and remind the world that we are one big family.

"The world may choose silence to keep

*While we lose sleep*

*But as the wind blows, every man shall breathe this pain*"  
[*THIS IS OUR LAND*]

**Jide Badmus**

(Author, There is a Storm in my Head)

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once a soul, to death, is sent  
breath returns, wasted, to God  
and earth drinks sour blood  
to what gain is it to repent?

— KIS

**on being trapped in coffin**

*(for benue)*

trap

/trap/

verb

past tense: trapped; past participle: trapped

catch (an animal) in a trap.

synonyms: confine, catch, cut off, corner,  
pin down, drive into a corner, pen, hem in,  
close in, shut in, hedge in, imprison, hold captive

"because home & everywhere familiar to our feet  
is on fire, & the spread of hectares, the language of  
country-men colouring their tongue with songs, the  
wild chest of young boys dreaming of owning their  
fathers' lands, & everything that is made shadows  
when the rippers come asking for throats, is a trap].

&, nothing else is as powerful as our names, [void]  
& a boy looks into the empty body of his father, as  
he falls into mud water, & with his eyes, he asks the  
ground to split. [a flower is trapped] by gunpowder  
a mother runs with her child strapped to her back &  
upon  
safety, a dynamite explodes to her face -the girl she  
carries

has a bullet [trapped] in the back of her head & this  
is the place  
she calls home & the river pushes her back to the  
bank each time  
she tries to run. & coffin too is a [trap]house for  
bodies with evaporated  
souls. & the night is longer a safe place to dream. the  
night is no longer  
a toy that people enjoy. the night at home is no  
longer a room loud with  
singing children, & mothers calling them for dinner.  
now, a marketplace  
for knives harvesting breathes, for suns [trapped] like  
bullets in the chest  
of natives."

©Adedayo Agarau

**RIP**

*(To the victims of Benue Massacre)*

Your story is gory  
If I write it, I fear my sight will get blurry  
From tears.

I hope you rest well while we are mourning:  
I hope angels will rise,  
When your souls are calling.

©OluwaSewa Kayode

## SEASON OF RED

The land adorns green.  
Red, its body;  
Yells of vengeance tear its belly apart.

The sky blossom in blue.  
But, its wall smoky with tears,  
Tears of agony,  
Tears of vengeance.

It's the season of red;  
The festival of bloodshed.

©Paul Abiola Oku-ola



**BASKET OF BITTER RED WINE**

*(for the Benue Massacre victims)*

Like the Niger,  
Tears flooded the flesh of my mind  
When I saw 73 dark skinned star-lights  
Served as dish in brown coffins to the greedy earth.

It is a pity, the green land  
In my country has become a red sea  
Drowning innocent souls like  
The Egyptians that went & never returned.

"Water doesn't full baskets," my teacher said.  
But how come the nation's food basket  
Is brimmed with blood of the knifed,  
Like sacrifices offered to gods?

With bent knees, in a river of grief,  
I hope the spirits of the slain find  
Rest in the golden-white land of eternity.

©Poroye Ezekiel Tobiloba  
(POET)

## **ECLIPSE**

I have been branded with cold metal  
Bled, then fed with my own blood  
And my clothes have been stripped off  
By many lashes that fell on my barely covered back.

I am the stomach that has turned into a sepulchre,  
A well-nourished land still forced to receive manure,  
And my oesophagus is filled with so much that I choke  
On the flesh of the children from my womb

I am a flood made of tears,  
The thunderings made from loud wailing,  
The eclipsed sun at noon,  
And the mother with heavy breasts  
Fastening a lifeless child to her bosom.

I am like the castaway treated like a plague,  
The house whose door has been stolen,  
The crier whose pleas fall on deaf ears,  
And the beauty being gradually washed away by  
relentless grief

I am the black and white in the Tiv culture;  
I offered peace and lost bliss,  
I am the red and black in the Idoma nation  
That is now covered with darkness and innocent  
blood.

©Ewuola Michael  
bleeding\_pen1

## FOR 73 OR MORE MEN LOST

Last night some heads eating men  
came and shot my father, and  
some elders-  
they abused their gods

we cried, and still went on  
with our daily ritual  
of digging the ground and  
immersing gold in it

their gods like it when they  
sniff out the cotyledons  
of these gold themselves

and so it happened that we caught  
their gods sniffing out our rituals  
and we abused-  
like our fathers did

they went tacitly but came again  
and said  
their gods demand  
our heads and blood to  
produce some white charm  
from which they preserve traditions

©WhyteDaniel

## **BLOODY LIBATIONS ON CASKETS OF WOES**

No more should we tell of this gory tales  
That our sons and daughters saw hell  
Machetes and guns were in frenzy jubilation  
As bloody libations, they poured laden with gory tales.

Where have we gone wrong this time?  
Is this the peace turned piss talked about a long time?  
Where do we sing this threnody and sleep?  
There's a danger in the land, and the gods are asleep.

How do we live as one when you kill us?  
How do we pray together when your love fights us.  
To the dead who will sing no more  
I pray for justice to bring these hemoclysms no more.

For the 73 who passed on without a word  
I speak peace on Benue without a sword  
For all who believe in bloody Libations,  
We will not stop until we drown in healthy  
celebrations.

For Caskets of woes were harvested  
Bucket of tears dampened the earth  
Peace amidst bloody Libations will reign unabated  
again  
As our prayers work as one to heal Benue of her pain.

**©Opia-Enwemuche Maxwell Onyemaechi**

## RED BASKET OF BENUE

Our heavy hearts are full of agony  
flown at half flag mast; so minute  
to show sadness of their felony

O, cowherd! Has your vein's blood runs dry?  
could you vomit to clean your dispute?  
Control stick turns killing gun, why?

You've callously turned our food basket  
to misery pot where we sip tribute  
You gun our future and kill in gauntlet

On soil, cows fed and trampled our toil  
forgotten you owe six feet with brute  
oh Lord, revert peace for this turmoil.

©Gbadamosi Ridwan Abiola  
GRA

## **have me Benue**

Anytime, i hear death  
i enter the spirit of Benue  
how it chops them whole  
and their bones dig through veins  
to pick true holes of blood.

Anytime, i remember butchers  
i enter the spirit of Benue  
that i may remind of heads in chops  
blood for gobs - for unconcerned kings  
& how ghost carrying shadows of shades  
travel here and there on their street.

When you see Benue  
tell her, i have with me her spirit  
that her soul has my core  
how i grieve for her at grid with my head  
all the giddy - with tears -specimen A  
and blood - specimen B,  
all that i see in blank, by dim heart.  
Benue, you have me; you have my spirit,  
have me Benue, have me!

**©Oluwaseun Shedrack Akodu**

## WIND OF SORROW

As Benue News blew wind of sorrow  
I ran to surf and saw:  
The 73 slain for eternal darkness,  
Blood dripping from mouth of hot daggers,  
Bodies packed inside cars of underworld,  
For a shady voyage to rest.

My eyes were clouded to red  
And later rained in my heart,  
My body flooded a sweat of grief,  
My bones cracked to shiver,  
My lips vibrated like rumbles of thunder,  
Courage failed to restore my calmness.

To the slain 73 of eternal rest!  
On this land that swallows justice  
My condolence as sacrifice, I offer:  
My heart soaked by rain of tears is dug,  
The picture of your death is buried for history,  
For this land that turned your blood to mud,  
Through the claws of "hard'men" won't be apt,  
Besides, it will soon blow breeze,  
And shade your bloody death from scenes,  
Farewell 73.

©Yemi Osadiya

## LETTER TO BENUE

Son, the sky has torn us apart  
Teaching us how we can decide our fate in a  
beautiful shining coffin.

Son, if you feel like shedding tears  
Please don't let out the river of Benue for it is  
harmful to your health.

Look far to river Niger and don't be eroded to Benue  
emerging point for it will turn you into a river.

I've learnt of some words too big to say in a golden  
circle or in world of unwanted smile and aborted joy.

Son, never walk toward the east  
For nothing in there is easy,  
Your sleep will be in horror  
And being awake will lead to sorrow.

Son, if you need feathers to fly  
Do not take comfort where my body and your  
brother's own lies.

If you see a cow before man, run  
If you see a man before cow, flee  
None is palatable for sight  
For it might trick you into blindness.



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Let my letter be a warning not comfort to the  
morning mourning state you are now and will be  
later.

GOOD

E

P

A

R

T

I

N

G.

©CHOSEN STAR

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Now that our peace has been buried  
And our hospitality has been betrayed  
Now that humanity has lost its virtue  
And our farms are being wet with our blood  
Now that our harvest is being reaped by animals  
And brotherhood is at the mercy of the dagger  
Now that our wails no longer evoke sympathy  
And our homes have become traps  
...though the crops are ripe  
But all that's left for harvest are the remains of loved  
ones... what's next?

©Ogundare Abosede

## LOVE AND HATE

We underestimated the power of hate  
See how much sorrow it brings to our gate  
Every single day is another death  
Our sons and daughters murdered by gunshot

Only God knows the depth of our hate  
Religion is taken as a bait  
Around me, adversaries have gathered  
They tried to take my life, but it's too late

I wondered if the lord can take the pain out  
If He will ever forgive us of this insanity  
How can we bury our grievance  
When a little child is afraid to sleep

If you are not careful, you may be next  
Do not let them Fool you, that it is alright  
Everyone is a victim, for the society is lost  
Our leaders have gone mad

With tears in my heart  
I prayed for love to be shared  
Here and now, so we can be one indeed  
For there to be peace, love is all we need

© Akan Udofia 2018

## Four songs for Benue

#The news

The birds scoop the dirges into the day with beaks  
their feathers heavy with terror the eyes of an eclipse  
and the dead resurrect in their psalms into the  
clouds.

Dirges are the opposite of old songs. Birds are old  
sculptors.

engraving the names of the fallen into the tablets of  
times.

- That men have swallowed the pregnant ashes of  
hatred

-That a group of herdsmen stuff stones into their  
hearts

And what falls is a spell with blood in its first  
syllables.

#The loss

here's a boy in a street of ruins, highlighted by the  
sun,

clogged with dust. Crawling in the grey of a battered  
day.

This way we know his heart is a newly nailed coffin.

Vultures perch upon a corner in his body to  
soliloquise

the making of dark sarcophagi. *-what are tragedies  
made of?*

Boy bleeds on short nights; his heart, a window  
pulled off its hinges.

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#The Audience

We'll name this city after a fallen ship; after the glow  
of rust.

-what is the shortest rail to

healing?

-how do we teach a bloody country the rhapsodies of  
love?

-which is the fastest,

to save a life or end it?

-why do stones breathe through the hearts of men?

-when do we break

our backs into escape routes?

We'll name this city after a child withering at the  
birth of his grave.

We'll name this city after a dying spark overcome by  
darkness

#The Goons

History is a bastard. Time is a scam. Future is a joke.

We know because we live in a city that breaks  
dreams.

We spread our bodies into bridges. Break our homes  
into canoes.

Make our children into fragile oars; our blood to  
sighing rivers.

Hold up our breaths a wall of fortress traipsing  
towards God.

We tossed the coins: erected a Noah built an ark. Yet

the Lions make our dreams into leaves dried up with  
ages.

We will proclaim this: This country  
has its soul

in a geyser

Here is the truth: This is not a country  
but the blood  
on the knife of Brutus

We will proclaim this: Our dreams are yells  
coming from the  
other side of a burning city.

© Nome Paht

**Benue BESIEGED**

Are we humans or Animals?  
Maybe both, but I may choose the latter  
for with drought eyes swollen from a marathon tears  
I wear,  
and thorned a flesh, can you not behold tearfully?  
And what joy again to dwell longer with knived  
ancestry,  
forever pieced by pasturers who rips fiercely with the  
black charm,  
blades and other death arsenals,  
Carnivores!

Peace, long afar from us  
and slaves, we are remade by 'bororo, muturu,  
bunaji...  
and void of any dignity we are slaughtered worse off  
Cows.

Where are they who would speak us out of shatters?  
How long silent captives shall Bloods roost?  
How long a bondman should our fury be when upon  
us war They declared and busy our ears with war  
tunes  
days and nights long?  
Perhaps, seraphs we ought to live eternally  
while we become aliens to ancestry or root out  
from our land of Nativity.

Black horrible times yet in sight for with us are  
'brood of vipers', those who sit and do little,

and more, chickening out precious World joints  
and ever more, trample our joy, the joy  
of black Greenland.

Peace we hope,  
this peace, a mirage  
But sweet tales of old Agatu, Logo, Guma,  
The Igbudu Taraka, Akor, Bakin Kwata...  
and a million before long faded  
with requiems, now a dark companion of all and no  
longer native to grey casualties.

Who should salvage, Nigerians?  
Ortom, Buhari, both, or threesome?  
APC, PDP... or 'Change?  
Nigeria. No.  
A nation of abattoir we behold!

Beware!  
Our blood is unioned with our farmlands,  
Our tears, the juice of your vegetables and fruits  
and our basket, food full for the Nation and mixed  
with  
our cracked flesh and red-Hot blood.  
Eat, drink, and say or do nothing  
In my ears, I hear the mournful cry for vengeance.

Peace upon us,  
Heaven, I pray Thee.

©**Igiri Victor**



**FOR BENUE**

Take heart was all we heard  
For us, taking heard is now hard  
Again and again, they besiege our land  
This time around, we have to stand

Stand to say enough of the spills  
The river is now bathed with blood  
This is the height of ills  
We are drowned by our blood's flood

Enough of this bloody festival  
Humans we are, not animals  
How long will this river flow  
How long will our blood continue to roar

For vengeance  
Should we take up arms for vengeance  
Or will the head protect us from his brutal kin  
This pain is deep in the skin

Oh Lord of the dead, console the living  
Accept the soul of my mother, murdered with her  
daughter  
And my father whose pregnant wife was taken from  
the land of the living  
I pray and patiently wait for an answer

© **The Evangel**

## THE VICTIMS & THE DECEASED

Our nation bends on all fours  
At the mercy of the beasts  
Whose only care is their beast.  
Enter the Commander-In-Tears,  
Mute as a monk sworn to silence;  
Accomplice of anarchy and bloody fields  
Where his kiths killed our kids and future.  
Benue laments in blood-drained bodies  
Our food basket carrying lifeless bodies.

Who will tend the yam that feeds the South,  
Or nurse the corn that feeds the youth?  
Dead men! And women! And children,  
Lost to the beasts who herd their beasts  
Harbingers of ignoble death;  
That plays its sorrowful flute  
Across the grazing troughs of our fertile Benue  
Here, we have the victims and the deceased;

Nigeria is a woman raped of her morrow  
Who shall feed the remaining victims?  
The Commander-In-Tears or his comrades;  
The ones swimming in the chambers of opulent  
thievery.  
Sing our departed kins a keen dirge.

©Opeyemi Oso

## LULLABY

*(for Benue)*

I came to sing you a lullaby  
But found you tucked in bed  
Of earth & blood.

The nights are cloaked  
In tension & apprehension is  
The sound beneath the silence

The days are swallowed  
In the gloom of grief  
As the sun wallows in a sea of tears.

I've come to lull your sighs  
Into catatonic slumber  
& send fear deep into an abyss of numbness.

I've come to lay your grief  
& anger under the blanket of earth -  
To serenade deep wounds

& dab vengeful pools.  
I've come to sing lullaby  
For those who boarded death's train -

Sleep well - you're awake in our hearts.  
I've come to prey on your pain  
& pray this darkness away!

©Jide Badmus

**SAVE US!**

Oh, mother earth!  
Why sleep at this hour  
When rivers turn red  
And your cover turns ash

My people are dying  
Slaughtered without mercy  
Running from death to death  
Fleeing from sword to fire

Wake up Mother Earth!  
Wake up and save us  
Our brothers are killing us  
For the land you bestowed us

We have no help!  
Our leaders are snoring  
The land is perishing  
The hate has festered so long

Wake up!  
Save us from this massacre  
Send help to us we pray  
Let peace reign again!

©**Bola Funmi**

## THE 73

When you tell of our story, do not jump to the very  
end,  
do not begin with the tears that filled the River  
Benue,  
do not tell of how weak we were in the face of death,  
do not tell of the eagerness of the earth to embrace  
our bodies,  
do not praise the men who bore our coffins with  
grief in their hearts,  
do not reduce us to numbers,  
Tell of our names.  
On that very day, we had names,  
names our people called with affection.  
Before the owl cried, we mattered,  
until death visited us in its fury,  
leaving us no room to defend ourselves,  
And all that is left of us are numbers,  
the 73, even though we had names.  
Remember our inability to fly higher beyond the  
clouds,  
Remember how we were deceived by the niceties of  
the hunter,  
Remember how we trusted them with our lands,  
Remember how the world was silent, while they  
reduced us to numbers,  
Remember how we lost it all,  
How they stripped us of everything, including our  
names.

©Mide

## FOR BENUE

We were love and peace  
We were grace at its peak  
Food basket of Nigeria  
We were crops that blossomed

We were young and vibrant  
We were happy living our lives  
Independent and striving

We were cut short  
By the President's clan  
We were caught unaware  
With war waging on us for years

We were lost in battle  
One we never expected  
We lost our young  
They butchered our old

We cry out loud now  
As the heaven hears our voice  
We lie in state.  
May the soil accept our flesh

We will fight back  
With physical  
And our souls won't rest  
Till we bring back peace  
To our beautiful Benue

©Kola Onifoto

**our people**

*(for Benue people)*

no amount of dirges are enough to show the sight of  
these sorrows buried in our veins.

a minute silence and endless cries cannot  
return your lives, but your soul remains our  
people-our men.

our fates are in the venue, yes in Benue.

But

should we call this world or what? where blood  
become a sample and bait to taste and catch the state  
where a mind belongs and to build wealth.  
coffins, grounds have eaten souls, we buried glories.

they forget to remember the weight of blood and  
what it worth.

they killed to step a step forward menacingly.

for Benue where our fates reside, we've surrendered  
to our black skins to leave our black shadows and  
find a better way, here is not a home but a hole, hole  
where they kill men with their ambitions.

for Benue.

our tears are not enough to say these condolences,  
we believe the death of our men would be a lost to  
our land.

©GMA

## I PLEAD REDEMPTION

(for Benue)

Seventy-two guns salute  
Seventy two standing candles  
Seventy-two beautiful coffins  
For seventy-two sleeping souls.

This is not a poem  
It is a song of lamentation  
For the skin of Benue  
Nailed to the cross of violence.

They fed lands with their owners  
After feeding the owners with weapon of mass  
destruction.  
Killing is bliss at the market for freedom  
Death was birth in the forest of hatred.

Waking after nightmare is divine  
Waking and walking into nightmares is what?  
Is the capital of Nigeria herdsmen?  
Are we its citizen or we lost our identity?

I will not loathe the cowards and their cows  
I will not muse for the statue in ass-old rock  
Don't give me that fool-and-ill look  
Statue doesn't enfold MR-NIGER, they are only  
proud of D.

Seventy-two guns salute  
Seventy two standing candles



GRIEF ON PAINTED SHEETS

Seventy-two beautiful coffins  
For seventy-two sleeping souls.

This is not a poem  
It is a song of redemption  
For the skin of Benue  
Nailed to the cross of violence.

I pray for your torn soul  
I pray for your pierce soul

I pray for your butchered soul  
I pray for your lost soul.

This is all my allegiance  
Could incoherently utter,  
My voice has lost its way  
To the dwindling waters of my heart.

I can't preach healing  
I am not a prophet of doom,  
I only wish fortitude boom  
As you dwell in mourning.

For the sake of bones broken recklessly  
For the sake of blood running endlessly  
For the sake of the soul tore inhumanly  
Benue, for the sake of seventy-two martyrs, I plead  
redemption.

Redemption is the salvation from lamentation  
that can steal our hearts

and burn it into flames of revenge,  
that will bleed strong aversion.

I plead redemption  
Let's bleed green hope,  
I plead salvation  
Let's bleed green healings.

**©Ojo Adewale Iyanda**

## DARK STREET

In the terrain of cold war showered by  
morrow's stinking breeze;  
are boys painting their father's name  
an illiterate population of letters written by  
common sense of creativity~in god's eyes.

Who thought of how a father could spread his  
fingers: beneath the stream of fear  
after measuring the spaces of a literary canal  
pushing boys & girls into their last breath;  
of what they never knew life call home;  
even when they hold touches to find  
warm skulls of their mother in a cemetery  
of brown sugar when darkness would still  
welcome them a school of dead students &  
ghost teachers~  
who pint portion of pooling red words  
into the throat of sunless father & moonless  
mothers.

Look how they cut our tongues with burnt pencils of  
history,  
which our father used in term of voting;  
maybe we are just papers for their pencils  
cos their homes are expensive bullets running  
through the fingers in our chests,  
so when they call us bastard:  
we laugh in ignorance like it's bliss of redemption.

See through the womb of the sky, how its

hands sway that way & the other side;  
cos the movement is like a gathering of water  
covering the surface of the sky's doom  
So when we beat with actions,  
we father our jargons like  
years of solitude are satires in our mother's thighs.

©Adeniran Joseph

## MAYHEM HEADS-MEN

My eyes are empty & drained of tears,  
Now blood dripping from my nose,  
Couldn't breath, for my mouth holds  
Blazing hot water like an electric kettle.

I can feel the smoke escaping through  
The opening pores of my melting body,  
May be I just got burnt like a thick bush  
Whose trees are hindrance to the rustic.

I am that Christmas chicken, goat & cow,  
That got beheaded and die prematurely,  
In the hands of my brute & inhuman lovers,  
For my lovers love are acute-edged swords,  
That tears my flesh apart with sensual touches.

I am that arable farmer with a shepherd lover,  
Whose love is to watch me grope in darkness,  
Combing for the death that killed my ancestors  
On the farm, despite we are one "farm-meal-ly".

How do I separate my shadow from darkness  
Without the sun as the ultimate source of light?  
When my phantom is my death that wears the  
Body of a manslaughter chopping my head off.

I know of a farm that turned abattoir overnight,  
Where herdsmen turned "Heads-men" at dawn,  
For they now see every farmer as a cattle, worthy  
To be butchered into pieces like sacrificial meats.

©Jamiu Ahmed

## THIS IS OUR LAND

We tilled with our hands before the hoe was made  
We love her rich bosom that feeds and gives us a  
name  
Nomads from up the foot of jalon  
Sought with us a cup of water  
For themselves and their herd  
We offered respite and even a bite  
For their kith, cows and bulls  
They went and came every season  
We saw their plight and grant them pasture  
For they go and come as was their nature  
The time changed yesterday, and their herdsmen  
wield barrel  
Threatening to unleash hell if we fail to let their herd  
make a spoil of our toil  
Hoof of their herd hardened the earth  
We toiled harder to plough her bosom  
We told their head it saddened our heart  
But our cool voice couldn't soften a hardened heart  
We fended for ourselves and sent the cattle away  
Their lord is now a king and requests we bequeath  
our land  
And at the dead of the night, the visitors came to  
butcher the host  
Who had complained of a hardened earth  
They flooded our land with the blood of our own  
Our seas of tears have dried, and our surging ocean  
of care has vanished  
For whom do we cry, for who should we care  
Pregnant mothers hacked to death

GRIEF ON PAINTED SHEETS

Or crying babies silenced with bullet?  
The world may choose silence to keep  
While we lose our sleep  
But as the wind blows, every man shall breathe this  
pain  
That has become our gain because we care for a  
wanderer on our land

©Yinka Ojo

**mass funeral**

*(for the wasted souls in Benue)*

wait till it gets dark  
bend your body to carry sands  
mix them with your spit  
rub the paste on your face  
the Bartolomeo in you would see  
how clumsy the road to hell is.

cold-blooded souls  
don't often make heaven  
the place is an abode of peace  
& ghosts of abridged lives  
roam about walls, trample on  
everyone present at their funeral  
smell the roses, pull clothes, scream  
& wonder why the world goes deaf

why won't the world feign deafness?  
why would silence not saturate  
the air in a mass funeral?  
when the colour of grief is  
the colour of water  
nothingness.

if I was there in Benue  
I would have insisted that the  
dead not be buried yet.  
why don't we all wait till  
we get our own share of the massacre



GRIEF ON PAINTED SHEETS

we don't know who follows tomorrow  
& if we all go, holding hands  
then that is indeed a  
mass funeral.

©Micheal Ace

## FEAR FALLS

A pale page carrying questions floats  
Across Nile, in search of grief  
Planted on fertile famine  
Before our sons sang  
Sour songs along the pathway  
While they walk with their ears and  
Dumb their anxiety on the bank of  
Benue, where their cutlasses eat  
The life that runs in its stretch marks

While their hearts grow through  
Their necks- as they seek freedom  
In the womb of fears,  
Answers to their questions fall  
Like harmattan rains

Upon this land where grief grows  
Goats chase lions, lions eat grass,  
Lions cast cracks on creeks  
With cranks and crafts of still crick  
While some bodies lie in the rain  
Like logs of woods

We grew here;  
Where herbs hurt herds and  
Cure only the sins of our  
Ancestral sciences. As we  
Became slaves digging  
Our old graves and  
Grievance seems

GRIEF ON PAINTED SHEETS

To spread it's mat of harshness  
Upon our roofs. And we,  
Proud lions bowing to goats became.

©ODU ODE (PoetiQue)

## BLOOD THIRSTY DEMONS

The sun arose sleepily from its own place.  
So arose the people from their sleeping place.  
Some happy, others sad, some were bright and gay.  
Hardly could they tell this was a gory day.

Axes, bows, arrows and knives all sharpened  
By blood thirsty demons in human faces, saddened.  
They cut down lives in their prime, these monsters-in-  
waiting.  
In place of celebrations, they whipped up mourning.

January 2018, doom loomed over Benue State.  
While her people en mass laid in state.  
Why?! Would the children's future be but shattered,  
As their parents' bodies were littered, all but butchered.

Is this the first time; shall this be the end?  
Will the killers be brought to book; will they be  
condemned?  
What happens afterwards; what must be done?  
Will justice prevail; should this crime be condoned?

Questions without answers, evil without end.  
Killers like mosquitoes, still wandering without end.  
Dry your tears, oh mourning lot, the day shall be here,  
When the killers who live by the sword shall die like a  
flea.

©Princess Okolie

PROPHECY OF TURNS AND WEIRD APPETITES

there was a massacre in my neighbour's,  
last night but I didn't see the blood.  
or maybe I did. do not fault me.  
you should know how blood and water  
mix well. here our gods don't drink water.

last harmattan night, the men came,  
a herd of them. it was my neighbour's turn.  
the dust had requested for human blood.  
it's easier to sleep with our soles wet  
and here water and blood mix so well

this morning we awoke to familiar dirges  
and faces and bellies swollen from eating  
suya. here we wear our pain with grace,  
in white and black; in the cadavers, now memories  
and the earth that feeds and clothes our soul.

in this place where I call home,  
you either eat or be eaten. and my people  
love suya, but they love their daggers better.  
last night, it was my neighbour's turn  
to appease the gods on the rock. and mine?

©Wisdom Nemi Otikor

## I MOURNED

Papa with his  
Old gossiping machine  
"They have started"  
He narrates  
"From the gods  
Of Fura da Nono  
Death arises from its quiet cave  
Tearing every soul  
As machetes pierces every throat  
And blood sprinkled on earth like wasted wine."

Benue!  
An Eden-like home  
A scary shrine becomes it  
Where the herdsmen  
Becomes deadly priest that offers heads and bloods  
as sacrifice.

I mourned with  
Tears laughing in my eyes as it beholds  
Blood paints every gossiping papers  
Farm lands-New abattoirs  
Farmers-Cow meats on their land  
Fathers-Scary homes  
When will machetes stop raising their hands on this  
home?

©Yusuf BM

**How do you tell a child:**

your father is the maimed  
body lying across the street.  
How do you paint water to a child  
without her mother's severed  
head recurring like the central motif.

A metropolis becomes  
a necropolis in Benue.

The flood first washed  
us away from home. Then  
we are at the mercies of  
ingrate nomads now.

©Salako O'Pelumi Francis

**parenthesis**

scripting our divisions is a movie no one gets to  
finish.  
the land reeks of dreams buried into the voice of  
dawn  
and on this sunrise are war stories we weave as  
histories

on the scalp of our sons and daughters. maybe  
because  
we aren't part of the story, our conscience swims  
back  
and forth the Benue with a stroke parting the city  
into

gory scenes. in this city, the story begins with the  
ruins  
of a brother calling for the sanity of blades and  
gladiators.  
his future glides him into the soil. into the ears of  
the grave,

say, the land is full of evil and he shouldn't be a part  
of it.  
say, he carries the daffodil in his palms and wave the  
city  
into bloom. say, we are the evil we detest. say, we  
own

ourselves.  
[Insert Title/ Benue, Nigeria]



GRIEF ON PAINTED SHEETS

Scene 11: [Exterior: Market, City Square]  
a slaughter, as  
herds in the abattoir.  
the shiver in the gallery -the  
feet lining the city  
into air and running windows.  
open. close. open.  
a galleon appears in the voices of herdsmen.

Scene 2018: [Exterior: Internet]  
we wear the figures as madness  
in our thumbs are the lives we cannot give,  
the spoils,  
an inheritance.

...  
we have mastered this script a couple of times, first  
- when the location was  
born. the script cradles the city into sleeps and  
bloods  
and war.

© Wale Ayinla

## RUSTS AND ROSES

*(for Benue & cities painting metals)*

to loop loss on one's voice  
when another body of silence is a flitting hymn  
finding the face of God amidst risen bodies  
is to arrange a city's bones in the beak  
of a song miming an anthem with flesh  
gapping its incisors, it's to remember your mother  
is a reshuffled song/ a hushed lyric/ a shrunk silence  
holding oratorios in an orchestra of ashes,  
it is to trace a boy's dreams in cursed pints  
on a knife, as if to draw his blood with your finger  
is a way to reviving his absence into a life painting,  
it is to see a cattle & wish to drown under your  
toenails,  
it is to see a herdsman holding a stick on his  
shoulder  
& mistake it for a gun & mistake his smiles as a new  
sharpened axe with an urge of tasting a forbidden  
soul,  
see, the greatest war is the silence which drills the  
wounds  
of country men oozing green poems/ dark themes/  
& gone breaths caged forever in headlines  
of breaking news & the sighs that follow the shards  
of water our eyes now carry to become, like Pishon,  
like waters foaming our shadows with fresh  
mushrooms  
walking back in tremors to our eyes to shout  
hallelujah

## GRIEF ON PAINTED SHEETS

after years of ending a prayer of thrusts/  
of dripping proverbs from the ribs a man  
who is now a canon of chronicled elegies,  
& now, I want to remember men breeding Carmel  
behind their eyes while gods wearing a shoe of light  
stamps their body with wreckages, wreckages showing  
them  
how a woman sails on a wave of coffin fanning her  
breaths  
with pictures of his burnt children growing on her  
tongue,  
this city is a graph of thistles/ an incorrect equation/  
whose answer equals gunpowder, maybe until  
everywhere  
becomes an abattoir where we are rusts & fallen  
roses,  
we can then be the solved, maybe... just maybe

©Mesioye Affable Johnson

**how to spell b.e.n.u.e**

b is for bodies  
shot into eternal comatose  
their blood spilt like red milk  
on the green carpet in the middle belt

e is for empathy  
for the ones who didn't survive  
the plague of the herdsmen  
whose father forsook their funeral

n is for niger(ia)  
by whose rivers we sat  
& wept for our lost sons & sisters

u is for unity  
in the midst of diversity  
before the fulani brothers became judases  
betraying their own with a bullet kiss

e is for equity  
justice for the heads slain like herds

©Nduka Ekeh

**On the fringes of pain**

*(for the Benue and Niger area)*

On the fringes of nightmares, we endure pain  
They let commando herders  
to harvest our souls as they milk blood  
letting cows trample acres of planted hope

We welcome the herald of a new Christ  
Singing Hosanna - and others say Baba! -  
At this second coming  
Long denied by vultures and bats  
Wizards and witches riding on umbrellas  
Who swiftly change their ships to brooms  
We welcome our Messiah to clean these Augean  
stables  
The Niger and Benue available to flush out all filth

Reality turns its face  
Our horses lose their strength; our eagle, its flight  
And the stork becomes our national emblem...

In the ashes of fallen fathers  
Twenty children rise, waiting to be dropped  
By shots that should have saved them

In this darkness, the lords of the Arsehole Rock look  
on, awaiting trophies  
But light hides in dawn, a few hours away.

©Su'eddie Vershima

**cows in benue**

cows lay dead in *Ortoms* land  
old, young and sinless fetus too  
wombed and tombed in darkness –  
sacrificed to a horned god

i do not see their horns  
nor hear moos in their moans

but their blood flows fast  
en-route the banks of *River Benue*  
not to drink, like thirsty cows  
urged through green farms and yam barns  
en-route the banks of *River Benue*

©Kukogho Iruesiri Samson, KIS

## BLOOD IN THE BASKET

*(for Benue )*

.  
the sky is filled with jingles of gyre  
as they go round & round with fuels  
of blood poured from the food basket  
of Benue. I hear its rumbling sounds as  
it ran into my eyes like a piece of palm fronds  
on the lips of a gourd. & now, the tears left  
in my eyes are laced with blood, as the pyres  
from the trees meant to bloom have watered the  
flames  
on bodies into an inferno & the eyes of children  
have  
sunk into their mothers' breasts when they saw  
their fathers dancing in the ballroom of fire,  
& how their heads ran uphill into the air  
at the inciting hisses of daggers & swords.

Benue, how do I call your name amidst  
these sores on my lips? I hear how the snores  
sprouting  
in the fields of the nights were silenced by weeds of  
bullets  
as they sailed into your lands. now, the lid of my  
mouth is  
heavy. it stood agape & dragged its feet into hiccups  
as the blood of fathers became a liquor intoxicating  
the  
tears of mothers into rivers where sons & daughter  
swam to the shores of nothingness.

your people have ran into the river  
in search of shelter, for it is better to  
drown than to bleed. I thought the dungs  
from the droppings of cattle were meant  
to serve as manure for the soil, but they could  
only grow tears out of the land, with a bountiful  
harvest of blood into the baskets where we all fed  
from. the sky is red. & clad in the skin  
people & the night is now a shelf where the  
harbinger counts it's trophies, as carrion  
birds are hovering with pieces of our flesh  
in their mouth.

.  
©Joshua O. Aire



## GRIEF ON PAINTED SHEETS