



The Ways of Nigerian Folk

Saraba's 6th Poetry Chapbook (Translated Folklore)

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An Isoko Folktale

Anote Ajeluorou

Ogbei avo ukoko'yogbe ereghe!

Itayeeee!

Iyeeee!

Omo vra nobe ravre, te'ero uvu me te'ero aso!
Kene, marie warie; uje t'edejo, Ogbei ote wo'no obi
nya'eze ireghe evao obo awho igheghe. Oje'ru no, ote
fi'ereghe ho evao ukoko oyegbe ulogbo o te muho enyavre
be nya ze ereghe.

No o nya tha'abo no evao edhere, ote to oria no
urhe'ulogbo jo ukie fiho gberedhere na. Ogbei oteje
gwolo epano ore ro eza urhe na zre, reki yo orie epano ore
rue he. Avo ukoko'oyegbe rie no okru ho'obho, ateje rova
fikino obesai gadie urhe ulogbo na vre he. Oteke rova gaga.
Ote gadie, ove kie avo ukoko'oyogbe rie.

Ko'ere Ogbei avo ukoko'oyogbe rie aje rova, Ogbei no
obe'nya nyai ze ereghe!

Koyeho, omovra jo no obe ravre oye ruere Ogbei no obe
rova begwolo epano orero gadie opkure fiho abobe kere
orue edhere nyavre nyai ze ereghe.

Omovra na ote nwruo'to ze ote se ogbei, no'no ko, gbove
whe'obe nya kpoho no whojebe rova epano who'be ro
gadie urhere na?

Ogbei ote dime gaga, ote warie take omovra na no, 'Ima
oniovo; mebe gwolo kpoho obo'awho no iwho'ereghehe
nya ze ireghe kai. Reko, okpo'ure nana ute kie gberedhere
no me nya. Ko'ure na mebe gwolo gadie fiho abo'obe re
mesa nya vre'.

Omovra na ote kie fiho oto, ote whe owhe gaga.

Ute gbe Ogbei uno, no fiki em omovra na obe ro whe me
owhe? Oje zunu, Omovra na ote teke Ogbei no, 'Ko fiki
eme who gbe fi ukoko'yogbe ra fiho enu'o ure na re wh o
mara kake gadie ruo abo'be tao re who tete tolo
ukoko'yogbe ra ha?'

Uyo no Omovra na yo ke Ogbei ute gbei unu gaga! Ogbei,
ote gine fio ukoko'yogbe na fiho enu ure na rene oye
omarie otete gadie fiho abo'be rene otete tolo ukoko'yogbe
rie. Onya rie ote vere gaga. Oma ote loho Ogbei gaga. Ote
bo no, 'Uzeme, owho'vo no'wo ereghe reno evao akpo na
oro'ho!'

Ete Ogbei oje siobo no ukoko'yogbe rie fiho oto, te zihe
kpo, no eki ereghe no oje nya na u who'toho, keme na
owho'vo no owo ereghereno orie he!

Tortoise and the Calabash of Wisdom

Itayeeee!

Iyeeee!

Bird flying by, tell your tale at noonday so I can tell mine at night, if the story-telling session is at night. Or, tell your tale at night while I tell mine at noonday!

So it was that men, women and all living beings lived together.

One day, Tortoise set out to go and sell wisdom in the land of foolishness. He filled a big calabash with wisdom and corked it tight, to go and sell, and then he started on his journey.

After walking a while, he came upon a huge tree that had fallen across the path, on his way to sell wisdom. Tortoise would have to climb over to go on with his journey, but he could not as he held tightly onto his calabash of precious wisdom. He would climb and fall back, flat, on the same side he was when he started the climb. Tortoise struggled for the better part of the day, trying to climb over the fallen tree and get on his way to sell wisdom.

That was the case with Tortoise and his calabash of wisdom, as he struggled to get over the tree to the other side to sell his calabash of wisdom!

Then at that moment, after Tortoise had struggled without success, a certain bird passing by saw him toiling to climb to the other side of the huge tree across his path with his calabash of wisdom, to go and sell wisdom but failing.

The bird then came down and hailed Tortoise, called out to him saying, 'Where are you going that you are struggling to climb this tree across your path with this big calabash?'

Tortoise heaved a sigh of frustration and said to the bird, 'The trouble in this life, my brother. I am on my way to the land of foolishness with this calabash of wisdom to go and sell wisdom to them. But this tree fell and has blocked my path, so it is this tree I am trying to climb over, to get to my destination.

The bird fell to the ground and laughed heartily. The bird's laughter puzzled Tortoise a great deal as he wondered at it.

When he recovered from his mirth, the bird said, 'Why not put your calabash on top of the tree and climb over first? Then you can pick up your calabash and go your way!'

The bird's solution to Tortoise's toiling, almost all day long, silenced him to the point of wonderment. Then Tortoise put his calabash on top of the tree and climbed over and picked up his calabash. It became so simple a task to him. He simply sat down, exhausted.

He then exclaimed, 'Indeed, there is no single one that has all the wisdom in this world!'

Tortoise then left his calabash of wisdom and turned round and went back home from his mission to sell wisdom in the land of foolishness, even before he got there, because he realised that no one has all the wisdom in the world!

An Emai Myth

Ronald P. Schaefer and Francis O. Egbokhare

éghé li oiselébuá ré kpao má okposo bí ómohe,
íghíghé lí ó nwú ukoko bí úkpegele ó. oiselébuá gázé
khi ekpén í i zezé e vbí ó vbí ááin. emidí khi
okposo bí ómohe yán a mití za vbí oéé mehen vbí
úseeé. yan kha ghé fí óbo gánó égbé vbi urun,
úkpegélé ísi ómohe ghée yi ré ó vbí úkókó ísi okposo.
yan á ghé mehen éé. oiselébuá zá déló íyain húa
ó vbi egein. ó ré é íyáin vbá se méhén
fee ghóó. yán zá banno á dé méhén vbi otoi,
yán kpé míti méhén. oiselébuá ré é ói
'ehéen, iná lí ó zá humé léé.' ona lí
ó zé khi ukoko bí úkpegele, egein lí ó ké ri éena,
lí ó gbó zé chí éto ó ó ze vbí íghíghé. ó ó ze
vbí ááin emidí khi oiselébuá í i lie ói shoo vbí
ááin re.

The Origin of Hair under the Armpit

When God first created woman and man, it was in the armpit that he placed the vagina and penis. God discovered that there was no respect in this at all because woman and man were able to have sex in public view. If they just threw their arms around each other's neck, man's penis would push out and enter the vagina of the woman. They would just have sex easily. So God changed this and put the vagina and penis at the crotch. He said, 'You can still have sex, try it.' So they got naked and lay on the ground before they were able to have sex. God said, 'Okay, this way it is certainly better.' This is the reason why the vagina and penis are located at the crotch today; it is also the reason why hair grows in the armpit. It grows there because God did not gather it up and remove it.

Nupe Proverbs and Sayings

I. B. Ibrahim

Soko gá de nyana wuzhi è wa na ò, wizhi de nyana Soko è wa na à.

Bishe má gán nangi, ama nangi ga è la jin suna ò.

Boci èmìtacin wun è kun à yé à.

Ndace dan égó è gbe shelu, ebezhi ma fi lati ò e ban eyi.

Kabo wo à mu mungoro à, wo à tobo dzu dzu ù bo wo gá mungoro fe.

Nyacinda è kàn egima à.

Ejegi ga è gi zo, e gan egan zo à, sayi de a la wun à ka efondoci.

Eshigi gan: 'wo gá gbinya mi à gbinya; edzó gá má nyi dzó.'

Translation

Only God has what His slaves want; the slaves do not have what God wants.

Chicken is sweeter than sheep, but sheep is preferable for a naming ceremony.

A herbalist at home is often underrated.

A hunter is in the bush hunting guinea fowls while monkeys are busy in the farm destroying grains.

Even if one does not want a mango, one plucks it because of its ripened attraction.

When eyes meet, love deepens.

When a woman refuses early to stay in her matrimonial home, she will end up sleeping around.

Committing fornication cannot halt childbirth.

Only eating ends, talking does not. It can only be postponed.

A dog says, 'If you fall down and I do same, our play will be enjoyable.'



Epie Folksongs

Abasi Tortivie

ìvìjìn odóngìlì

òtìomọ! sọbọ kìmẹ
diè, suẹsẹ ki mẹ
onu eni mu kì mẹ
ni taata mu ọtọrọ
mu ìyìnì
taata gbẹni ẹyì nì bìnì ぼ
ẹyì go viẹ wọ
onu mẹ gbẹni mẹ kì ẹyì
nì mẹ go kì ẹyì wọ
ìfaan ẹyì go díumu wọ
za ẹyì mu elelemu yẹ
kpọọsọ gba ぼo
ni ẹfiẹni yẹ go kuekue wọ
kìmẹ mu ibafu, mẹ vese ẹyi wọ
kìmẹ mu ìtitalì, ẹyi mo wu
kìmẹ mu ìkpala, mẹ ti ẹyi yaa wọ
ẹfiẹni gbẹli mẹ!
wọ suẹ nì
mẹ kpasì wọ fianì bidasa
ta mu etìnì wọ ta bodi wọ

Odongili Song

Brother, please help
Look, stop it from dying
Mama caught it for Taata and I
on the farm today
Taata said he is the only owner
He cried for it
Mama forced me to let him hold it
so I had to
He became happy
but I saw his fingers were too firm on the bird's neck
It cried for help and was dying
Get me a basin, I want to cover it
Get me titali grass, it must not die
Get me a stick, let me drum it awake
My little bird!
If you come back to life
I shall fly with you
to that place you wish to go

Epie Folksongs

Abasi Tortivie

Translation

ìvìjìn ìwu

ze'm aganagha nì pegele wó
ze'm aganagha nì pegele wó
baayo baayo baayo

Death Song

Swaying at the oracle
stumbling at the oracle
farewell, farewell, farewell

Translation

ìvìjìn egili

oya e oya e oya e
oyon nì isili ya ze
ze bida mu azi a?
oya nì o

Work Song

Poverty, poverty, poverty
does a wealthy man
go to the bush?
It is poverty

Idoma Proverbs and Sayings

Oluma Ngbede John

Ewu mochi luwa je me ena hehe ton.

Abuh do noho je le, ondunu ge cho waje a.

Aklea lo likpo eyea ge bo gonu month oleno.

Oda onyachuche le ma eko no yaje, oyipe ma glaun nana no yancho.

Ao loda h'oma leko echo.

Abo enkpo ge ikple me efu glan.

Odo kpo tabo lewa chego gbei mlabo ancha.

Adeyi yei, iju ikweyin.

Onye jefu no i ibiola gbochi?

Translation

The goat does not see the stick used in killing the sheep and laugh.

No matter how tall an okra tree grows, it is the owner that will cut it down.

A cricket that has only one leg begins to dig its hole long before night falls.

What an elder sees sitting down, a child will not see standing.

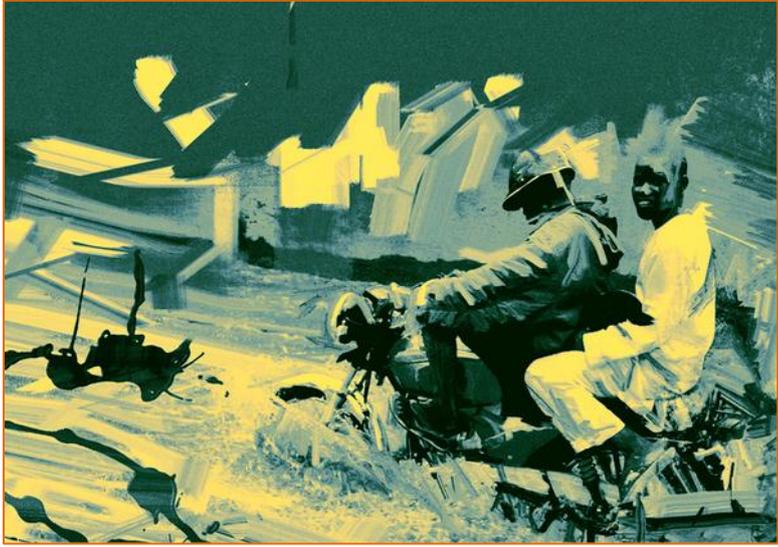
People who have money call salt a stone.

One finger cannot remove a louse from the head without help from another finger.

A jack of all trades is master of none.

When the owner of an eye is alive, no fly will touch that eye.

Who knows what wood will retain fire till morning?



A Kakanda Folksong

Gimba Kakanda

Ani mi Gogo Layi

Ma ige be

Ma ige ke

Ma ige po ji Gogo Layi

Aganza e ri ige, e la ivo la

Esobi ni ifo e dan e ayegbon

Aba na kyu 'du, wa gan 'za!

Translation

Song of Aunt Layi

I prepared a meal

I dished out a meal

I offered a dish to Aunt Layi

A visitor who ate must carry the dish

O behold a kid gawking

Storm is coming, vanish!

Ibibio Proverbs and Sayings

Nsikan Williams

Ndiong isi daagha ke ube mmon-mmon ikong.

Otoro uduang mben idim, edem ete imi'nwongo, edem eka eya enwong.

Idang imi-toogho iwuod unam, itoogho isim.

Imam akpo-usung ayada ke afang ke edet akedia.

Akam owo utom, anye ase utin.

Uduk ebote ama anyoong akan ebote, ase awo-wod.

Asanga ikpoong asen owo isi-nama ada usung mkpo.

Ikwo abighi' nem, ese ekop ke inuugh!

Okoyo akpagma, ayak ukuud ano ikpa amo.

Mmiaka mmiaka usung afon akan mkpetre-tre.

Mbop iso okpo ebote ikpana uyama.

Nnyin unen akid ndidion etim, asanga ado.

There is no water-log in a waterleaf farm.

If one shits in the stream, a member of one's family will drink from that stream.

The arrow that misses the head of an animal will not hit its tail.

Laughing in public will reveal what vegetable the teeth ate.

He who accepts a duty should also watch the weather.

When the rope is too long for the goat, it kills the goat.

A stranger does not harm the one who shows him the way.

A sweet song is known from its humming!

When the hippopotamus dies, its skin suffers.

Very soft eba is better than nothing.

The headiness of the he-goat does not stop its being sold.

A chick follows the trail of ants to its death.

Hyam Folksongs

Ayuba D. Makadi and Emmanuel-Abdalmasih Samson

Mi Kpeny Nda?

A mi kneny ngu nda ngu gbang di mi?

Hywee-ri-hywee.

Gaa nyeny ngu pom-pom ka bidom kpob ku.

Hywee-ri-hywee.

Gaa nyi ngu maar ra ka mo wum ngu di yang ku.

Hywee-ri-hywee.

Gaa khi ngu gbing-gbing ka kpo kyaar kpob ku.

Hywee-ri-hywee.

What Did I Do to You?

What did I do to you that you hate me?

Hywee-ri-hywee*.

Your belly is as big as the bag of a juju king.

Hywee-ri-hywee.

Your mouth is expanding as if you are being burnt with juju fire.

Hywee-ri-hywee.

Your head is as big as the stone of a juju king.

Hywee-ri-hywee.

*A satirical chant in Hyam.

Hyam Folksongs

Ayuba D. Makadi and Emmanuel-Abdalmasih Samson

O Di Reel!

O di reel!
Waar gaan waar ra
Oh ooo...

O di reel! Oh ooo...

O di reel!
Shakhak gbang ho yeer noo!
Oh ooo...

O di reel! Oh ooo...

O di reel!
Shakhak gbang ba shazhi noo
Oh ooo...

O di reel! Oh ooo...

Translation

O Today!

O today!
One surpasses the other
Oh ooo...

O today! Oh ooo...

O today!
Men meet on a battlefield
Oh ooo...

O today! Oh ooo...

O today!
Men and women meet on the
battlefield
Oh ooo...

O today! Oh ooo...



Hyam Proverbs

Ayuba D. Makadi and Emmanuel-Abdalmasih Samson

Ngyan Ham

Gwab ryat, kpocu.

Wemar ka ba go syem.

Na ba ni gigyeny fye rituk shu gya hwyang.

Mo ka ba cek mgbyong syet ryat.

Mo ka ba khwet cerce ka mwoos sheky.

Nyi ba shis, bwak gha ka ba geri.

Nyeng suur ka ba cek nyeny bek.

Titaan ka ba khwin ndan feri.

Kyaar titaan ba tsek hwyo nwom.

We sii fyek ba cek gyet gaar.

Ham Proverbs

A wicked person always meets his/her match when infected with smallpox.

A pampered child does not accept advice.

The brightness of the moon cannot make the night less dangerous.

No one knows the weapon that will kill an evil spirit.

One does not beat drums while hunting rabbits.

What the mouth has promised, the hand cannot withdraw.

A satisfied stomach does not know what starvation is.

Water does not boil twice.

A stone at the bottom of the river does not know how hot the sun is.

A child carried on the shoulder cannot tell the length of the journey.

Legbo Proverbs and Sayings

Elizabeth Paulinus Enya and Adewunmi Adediji

Enorkonglykpa lekpaga gu leja.
Veh ku Inor gileko ka ele teme asi.
Asi geh etorenor won gi etewo.
Ekeza enor le-ke wawe ekelor enorwa lekuwe gi-ewe.
Gelih gekomor geke.
Ese elogo-elopor esi eseh ka pina.
Ekpoka azel berkakpu gileha.
Eti ekpali-etomi ka eheaye etomi.

The egg shell is important for incantation.

What chokes the chicken is what makes the chicken swim
in water.

Rain does not fall on only one roof.

Childhood is good, but it is not good for a person to remain
a child.

Poverty is not a crime.

You should not try the patience of an angry lion.

Secret issues should not be discussed in public.

The one who seeks trouble must bear the load.

Legbo Children's Songs

Elizabeth Paulinus Enya and Adewunmi Adediji

Mama oh, forma-o oh kelizuvomo
oh, fue ba-normeo – oh azorgo, azorgo kpelema

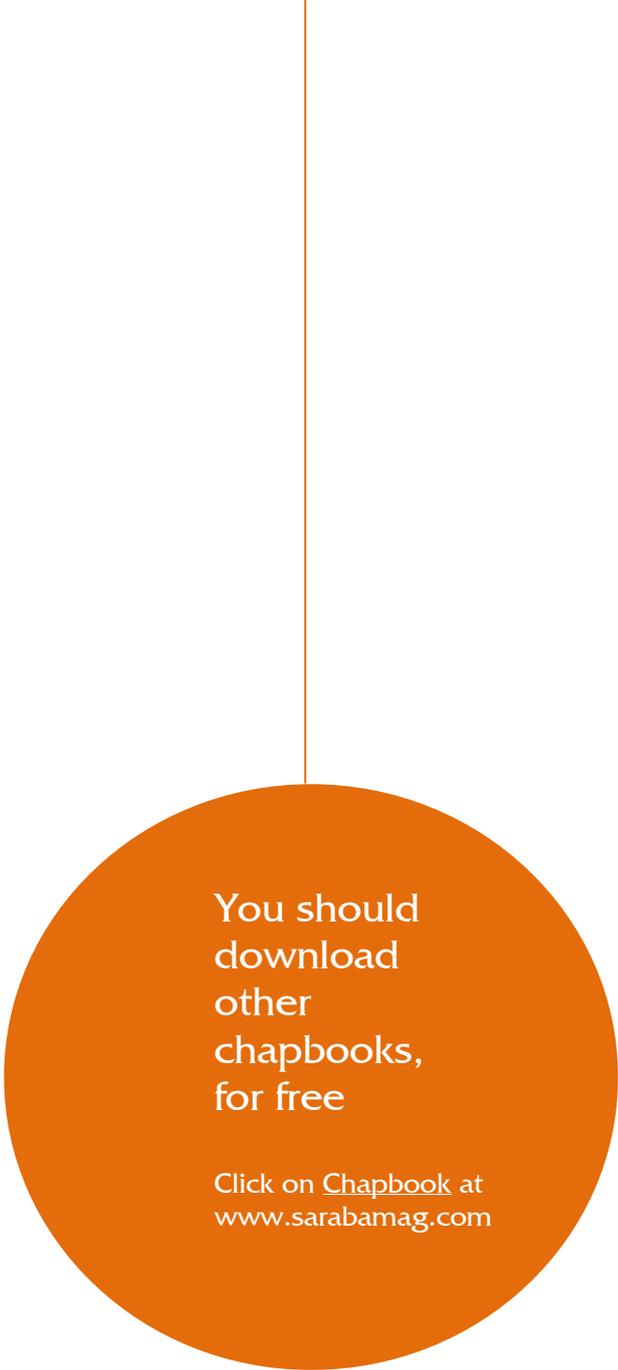
Translation

Mama oh, come back oh,
If you forgot anything, you will collect it tomorrow

Liho-won ekuki lize
edalelelor pkogolopkopko, eleweli ngiye
elize kpolanha pkogolo pko pko

Translation

There was a bird. When he ate with others, he
would eat and swallow the plate, but when
he ate his own food, he would eat with his
back to others.



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Notes on the Languages

The **Isoko** majorly occupy two local government areas in Delta State– Isoko North and Isoko South– with a large number of them also found in Ndokwa East and Ndokwa West local government areas. Some Isoko communities can be found in Rivers State. Their language is Isoko, an offshoot of the Edo, Benin language, having migrated from the famous Benin Empire a few centuries back to settle in their current location.

Emai is spoken by approximately 30,000-40,000 members of the Emai clan on the plateau between the Edion and Owan rivers of Edo State. It is used across 12 villages, and as a linguistic entity, it is a distinct unit within Edoid.

Nupe is the language of the Nupe people. It is spoken in Niger, Kogi, Kwara, Benue and Plateau States and in the Federal Capital Territory.

Epie is spoken by the Epie-Atissa people who live in twenty-nine independent towns and villages in the Yenagoa L.G.A. of Bayelsa. Linguistically, the Epie language is identified with the Delta Edoid languages. Every year, the people celebrate the Adiafaa and Obunem festivals.

Idoma is the second largest ethnic group in Benue State. Linguistically, Idoma is a heterogeneous entity composed of various dialects. The Agatu dialect is spoken in Apa L.G.A and Agatu L.G.A.

The **Kakanda** are a riverine people largely found on the banks of River Niger in Niger and Kogi States. Although often classified by historians as a sub-tribe of the sister ethnic group, Nupe, Kakanda is a linguistically distinct member of the Niger-Congo family. Accounts of Kakanda life and culture are featured in the narratives of early explorers like Captain William Allen, William Balfour Baikie and Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther.

Ibibios, numbering about 10 million people, live predominantly in modern day Akwa Ibom State. The language is also understood by close relatives, Annang, Oron, Eki and Ibeno peoples in Akwa Ibom State, and Efiks of Cross River State, Bakassi and parts of South-western Cameroon, where closely related varieties are spoken.

The Ham (or Jaba) people are found in the southern region of Kaduna State. The Ham ethnic group is one of the largest in Southern Kaduna. They occupy the larger part of two local government areas— Jaba and Kachia. The Ham people speak the Hyam language.

The collective name for languages spoken in the Ekureku region of Abi L.G.A., Cross Rivers State is **Legbo**.

Translators & Illustrator

Anote Ajeluorou was born in Ibedeni in Ndokwa East L.G.A., Delta State. The Ozoro, Isoko North Local Government, native attended Edeni Primary School and Ibedeni Secondary School, Ibedeni and then University of Benin, Benin City, where he studied Educational Administration, majoring in English and Literature, graduating with a B.A. Ed. He has been in journalism since graduating in 1995. He worked briefly with *The Comet*, *Punch* and *The Nation* before joining *The Guardian* in 2009.

Ronald P. Schaefer is Director of the Centre for International Programs at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. He is also professor of English Language and Literature, joining SIUE in 1986. From 1981-1985, he taught at the University of Benin, Nigeria, where he began linguistic investigation of the Edoid group of languages. He received his doctoral degree in linguistics from the University of Kansas in Lawrence, where he was a direct exchange scholar to Johannes Gutenberg Universität, Mainz, Germany from 1978-1979. Before graduate school, he served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Afghanistan from 1971-1973. His undergraduate degree in English is from the University of Minnesota.

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Abasi Tortivie hails from Ogu in Yenagoa L.G.A. of Bayelsa State. He holds a degree in English and Education from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. As one who bears a burning commitment to the development of his native language in his heart, he is a member of the Epie Dictionary Committee. He has a collection of short stories, *The Stray Snake and Other Stories*, to his credit. He has also been published in *Ogele* and *Crown Literary Journal*. He is currently working on his first novel, *The Son of a Gun*.

Oluma Ngbede John is a native of Oiji in Apa L.G.A. of Benue State. He has a degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Agriculture, Makurdi. He loves reading and travelling.

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David Osagie is an Abuja based graphic designer who specializes in Illustration, Photo Manipulation, Photography and much more. His works have been featured on African Digital Art and he has a creative portfolio on Behance. He defines his work as “digital art and illustration with an African grunge style.” His works prominently feature mixed media, watercolour and pencil etching.

Editor's Note

Let us take nothing for ourselves; let us leave every good thing for our children.

**A.O.
2012**



“The success of websites such as...Saraba underscore the depth of talent on offer. By bypassing economic and geographic restrictions, they help to promote an enthusiasm for storytelling and for narratives firmly rooted in the present.”

AKIN AJAYI
Guardian UK