

of rhythm
and reason

SARABA'S 2ND POETRY CHAPBOOK



of rhythm and reason

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With an introduction by NIRAN OKEWOLE

-

November 2009

"...what can we do except try to create a work in which we can let our eyes linger on each other without hate."

HEDDY MAALEM

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Saraba publishes works by emerging writers, and has since February 2009 published a free electronic literary magazine and poetry chapbooks.

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Numero Unoma

Essentially

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Introduction

Among the dusty shelves of the University of Ibadan library, I stumbled on a book which pretty much revolutionised the way I thought about poetry. It was a book of essays by Ezra Pound. In it I came across for the first time that unrivalled definition of what an image is – ‘an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time’. There was also a piece in which Pound described three types of poetic expression. First is *phanopoeia* – throwing of visual images upon the mind. This is exemplified by much Chinese poetry. Then there is *melopoeia*, emphasising musicality and rhythm. It was the third word that sent me sauntering out of Kenneth Dike library with joyous abandon – *logopoeia*, referring to the verbal impact of poetic language, or, as he put it, ‘the dance of the intellect among words and ideas’. No wonder Eliot called him *il migliore fabbro* – the better craftsman. *Logopoeia* became for me the essence of what poetry should be, a contrarian view from the intense lyricism – *melopoeia* – of much African poetry.

What the young – and not so young – Turks in this collection have attempted is nothing less than a fusion of *melos* and *logos*. Isoje Chou – wonderful poet of place - masterfully evokes in racy lines the fast pace of Bamako life. And surely Samuel Beckett would be proud of Chou’s drama-poem, *Brooklyn*.

I have long admired the multi-talented Kole Odotola, whose *In Your Arms* provides a grim slant on love. Ibukun Babarinde’s *The Response*, with some of his other poems that I have come across, is a valuable addition to the growing corpus of poems on the Niger Delta.

I got a big kick reading Numero Unoma’s *Waltzing with Matrimoney*. Akeem Akinniyi’s *Trader* is a gem I found myself going back to. Wirndzerem G. Barfee’s poems have the eerie appeal of Stephen King. As a trainee shrink, this is one writer I would surely like to meet!

Ernest Hemingway once said that for a writer, each work is like a new beginning, where he strives for something beyond attainment. Then, with luck, sometimes he may succeed. The poets in this collection have engaged themselves in the ageless quest of poets to capture the elusive. It is nice to note that some of them have been lucky enough to succeed, and those who did not show a lot of promise.

NIRAN OKEWOLE

AKEEM AKINNIYI

Pendulum

Deserted on the table
ink and sheets lay apart, lifeless,
the hand, their soul is withdrawn.
Blood must touch blood.

Gone and back, with ink and paper,
from where the winds blow forth.
Letting the wind do the journey
while the mind navigates.

A passionate preacher on the pages
the chapter may end.
Die, an ink and paper love, because of a poor purse.
I Will: I Can: I Shall: I Must: Find Love.
With my head, with my smiles,
a lady's heart must beat by my words.
A crack of the whip is still left in me.

It is time to journey into a heaven of dreams;
break the old moon into new stars for a lady;
throw it over her like confetti.
I desire but can't promise to stay till eyelashes are grey.
When the last word shall be said, no one knows.

Bored, yes, bored,
though unwritten these words;
this mind hasn't left the table.



Wait

/WHEN THE LAST WORD SHALL BE SAID, NO ONE KNOWS/

AKEEM AKINNIYI

Trader

The star's presence, not just a darkened sky,
tells her it's time to run the bath.

In the mirror's eyes, she examines the dress-to-kill,
the weapon that will make infidels empty their pockets.

Without worry, she goes into the night that is her day;
a progression of perfumes follows her.

When others chatter to the sun,
she is tired, snoring

AWI OLUFISAYO

Behold our Artistry

Ta rah!

The conjuror has done it.
The shackles have teleported,
From the rightful owner to the innocent,
The criminal is walking free.

Bravo!

The artist has surpassed himself:
Severed limbs, eviscerations, wounds, still bodies,
And bold strokes of blood red.
Razor sharp machetes, and guns-his tools;
Senseless bloodbaths have taken our loved ones.

Dance!

The musician is playing.
The drunken sway to its intoxicating cadence,
It is pleasant to their ears.
The sober sit in dust,
And mourn-
For them it is but a dirge.

AWI OLUFISAYO

My Slum

Houses a disorderly spread,
Color, size, design-unique different,
Rusted roofing and dinginess excepting;
But for the few here and there-
Solitary baobabs in the Savannah,
Tall and regal; resplendent in the surrounding decay,
What are they doing here?

Streets are the dunghills,
Adorned with domestic waste-
Leftovers, sanitary pads, paper,
And putrefying matter you can't identify,
Garnished with human offal,
Spilling from black nylons ripped open by car tires,
Issuing forth an awful mélange of smells;
A whiff is enough to knock you out.

Generators sing their cacophony,
Different keys but the same discordant tune,
Loud, irritating, insomnia precipitating,
Acrid smoke emanates-a stinging haze.

Stressed mothers curse their offspring
And each other,
Their voices loud and threatening;
Young women strut in their tawdry attires-
A piteous parody;
Old men play draught and get drunk,
Young men dream, get drunk and fight-
Over women, respect, money;
The very young imitate.

Violence

Force him to the ground,
Pummel him into submission,
Plunder his freedom,
Take away his pride,
Make him cower in fright.

Their freedom is paramount,
All they had was looted.
Now is the time to take everything back;
Aggression, insurrection, war-
Any means would suffice.

II

The woman cries till her wells dry up,
Everything is gone:
Her children-her pride,
Her dignity is taken roughly.
Shame is her new companion,
Bitterness and sorrow plague her.

The weak are trampled upon,
The powerful duel eternally;
One has to be on top;
The battlefield: the weak,
Alarming is the death toll,
Blood keeps on flowing;
It is a colossal red river.

>>

III

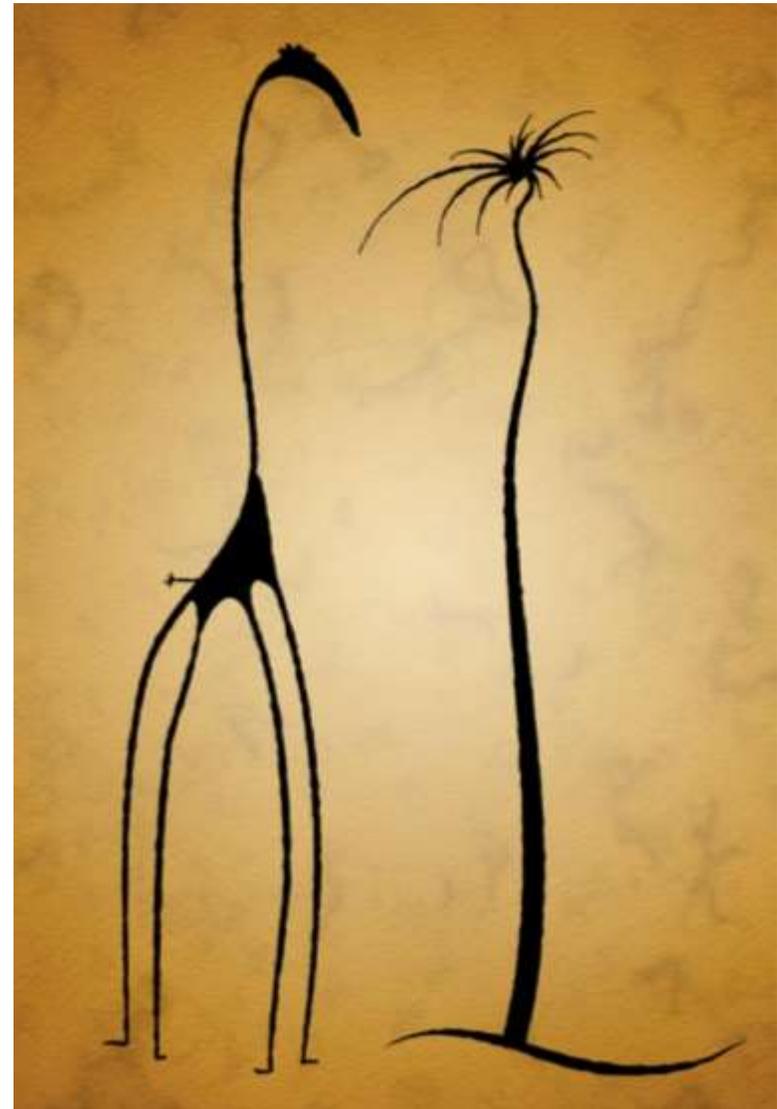
It is naught but senseless,
Death, acrimony, vengeance-its offspring,
All consequences are evil,
The good and bad alike suffer,
Robbed of what they hold dear.
Paranoia, insanity-the subsequent phenomena,
Magnify this anathema.

Our wounds are deep,
Would time really heal us?

DZEKASHU MACVIBAN

A Woman of the People

A fine f- she was, they said
From Bakweri land to Ngoundal
Where did she not have a tryst?
Her radiance challenged the sun
And her serpentine-locks, its rays--
Presidents bowed to her
Who didn't?
Her Lethe-filled lips enslaved many a one
From coast to coast -- they were never the same
On their return from cloud nine
Walking spectres they were,
She was the loom that spun their lives
That spun their lives...
Beauty of beauties, fairest of them all
I ask --
Why do you sit on this stone
At the world's end, looking cadaverous
Could it be that you are enslaved
The way you enslaved nations?



Giraffe

/TODAY I REPAY HER FOR ALL THAT GIVING/

DZEKASHU MACVIBAN

Elsewhere

Often, I dream of a place beyond Utopia
With, possibly, a sweeter nectar
Nay, the Utopian bliss does not suffice
Such undertoned escapism.
I can't tell them about this place—
They'd never fathom its distant bliss.

With only you and I here
The time is still in this place.
Quietude flows, spiced by my poetic whisper.
Is it surprising that I find comfort
In the sacred symphony of this place
And in the luster of your eyes?

IBUKUN BABARINDE

The Call

Leaning, on the threshold of the future
Longing for the next minute's air to breathe
Leaning and longing, life's extension
To the leathery of the executioners rope
Blinded from further sights!
And, yet seeing life
from my side of the dark hood
Waiting, yet un-waning,
For the winds of the last flight...
Winging,
on the airs of a noon made so darkly
With the company of the sorrowful winds
waddling, on the heap of life's refuse
Death's failure in the home search
Assures a liberal romance of the wayfarer
You the children of the waters
Guard your gills to catch more breathes
Stay afloat,
Resist the terrible currents.
This time is the end of a future
A dream is hibernating,
A land is in the gullet of greed
And, soon, ascended to the hostile belly of powers
Do not wait for the nights
They may not come in a jiffy
Catch this sun,
Before it sinks into the delta.

Life comes in pages
Paged, in the history book of existence.

The Response

In Oloibiri, the primordial voice is heard
Your absence is
Like the long shadow of my tired days,
And
like the thick darkness of my spent night
Made real and glare
as the image of my diurnal view
born in the still waters of my village pond
Your face is
Now hidden in the harbor of distant waters
Mirrored, by the long sail ahead of my journey
The rivers lay in silent pain and pity
for the desolation and devastation
That now wears the identity of a land born free among the earths

Near the rising waters of Brass
my lonely canoe row with stings of sorrow
I got a company of the stands of riverside palm
They raised their frond in anguish of every morning
And drooped in a downward mood,
stooping in hope
Of a morning; in resurrection's path.
Echoes of the roaring waves
Sing of thy departure, a dirge...
Row
low,
lonely
canoe

Row,
row,
and
row
low
row low,
my lonely canoe
row
we all sing for you in pain.



Snow Leopard

/DO NOT WAIT FOR THE NIGHTS/THEY MAY NOT COME IN A JIFFY/

IFEH AGBONMIRE

DROUGHT OF WORDS

For a great while,
Thoughts took great flight,
Like those migratory flights birds do.
My writings fall flatly,
The crashed parts never found.
My muse never lands,
Dancing *garlala* in my mind,
Never leaving something concrete,
It never ends like an Indian love dance,
With the pretty girl in her lovers arms,
It ends with a hide and seeks game.
Leaving me desolate and bare,
Nothing good to deposit on my writing pad,
So I embarked on an odyssey,
To find my missing muse,
It was a stormy voyage,
Fought many hydra-headed monsters,
Lost a number of my crewmen,
To the vicissitudes of life,
But I berthed in fine land,
Saw my muse in a spring,
She gave me fresh words to drink,
Good songs to sing,
Now I set out on a fresh course,
To spread my gospel of words.

IFEH AGBONMIRE

LOVE GONE

Is there a safe landing?
For a damaged flight called love,
Is there a way for the passengers?
To escape unhurt,
Does it depend on pilots?
Or the hands of cupid,
Why does it tumble and fall,
Fire and death feeding on it,
Causing loss of lives,
Of dreams and aspirations,
Of good times, of good memories,
All gone to naught,
Drifting to abyss with a dirge,
Of crying and mourning,
Why can't it land safely?
With no tears and loss.

ISOJE CHOU

Bamako

is Bambara is
grey dust motorbike fumes
reddened roads in bits the busyness of
solemn men in taut skins racing
ah, those speeding ladies in head gear
over the Niger the flood of taxi-motos,
the quick din of
quicker horns

ISOJE CHOU

BROOKLYN (A Play in Three Parts)

i sunday morning

strange black fantasies
glimmers of dreaming of
white shoes and brighter Sunday
dresses; a little girl screams
laughing step step puddle splash
and out the church door comes old men in worn hats turning
at women in laced steps turning
sideways to smile
her white-shoe lady pumps
her high back straights
see, see her American face.

ii the previous evening

"strange black fantasies" cries the jazz cult
against blasts of hip hopping puff diddying
white diamonds and shit
white suits white hats
a thousand jewels on a limp wrist
limos and fur

n n n n n n

is the rhyMMMMming from big cars with bigger tires
like a jewel on a tooth
like a letter on a chest

iii into the night

strange black bodies
moaning at beats
crotch and cunt
foxies and dogs
like missy on a chain
her fur and her lace
her pubic and her face
"give me a call and I shave my whatcha"

iv into the dreamless dreaming

strange black fur
slippery and hued
into the dreamless night we go
these histories of pain



Quiet Night

/ INTO THE NIGHT /

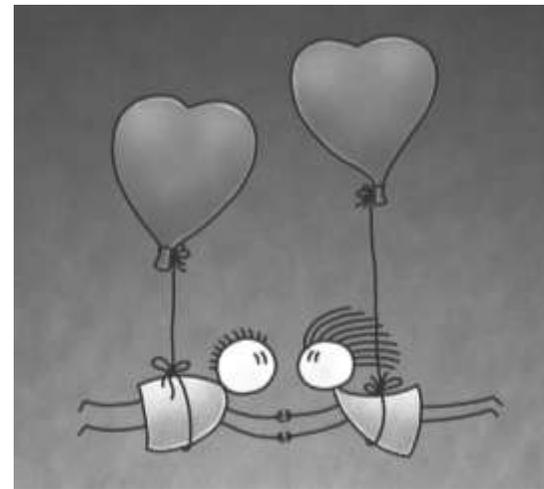
KOLE ODUTOLA

IN YOUR ARMS

We shall be in your arms
armed with psalms
of unscented love.
Can pains dissolve with passage of time
and paint the face with remnant rays?
The race is in your face
and laced voices
ready to raise our race from rot
*"lost is our legacy
Our search for survival and
bread drains our strength.
But for how long shall
we sulk before we reap the gain...."*

Shall we again sing into ears
and make melody for wary
hearts?

>>



To you misty eyes, these 'verses' written on the fly
this sunny month of July
when lovers roam the parks
and children hidden in camps, we commit.

Take wings sisters, the gods are awake
What we have at stake is bigger than pans & cakes.
You must open up to reason before wrath comes forth,
talk to the connectors of the past
Rock in groups to create images true and full.
We shall be in your arms
armed with psalms
of love that may kill their urge for war.
*lost is our legacy
Our search for survival and
bread drains our strength.
But for how long shall
we sulk before we reap the gain...."*

KOLE ODUTOLA

Without Thinking

Slip on the purple vest,
the people on the field are waiting
It is time to harvest toes
of idiots since sweet potatoes
have taken after peace
and violence the new piece
the farmland sews with.

Slip on the ripped vest,
harvest time is long past.
To the seas where fast ripples
shame fisher-folks
whose nets catch toads
never big enough for supper

>>

Slip on the Army-supplied vest
It is time to harvest death
known to bullets from bayonets
when hot speeding pellets
met broad chests
The messenger met an open door.
The farmland is dull
because of bright lights
of flaring gas and firing gals

In this new land
torture takes the turn
of culture, and rupture
of lives the 'dance' in halls.
When notion of nation falls
apart, the state cannot hold
and mere anarchy is loose
without our rights ?
Slip off the ring from the right
it belongs to the left.
Is it not the symbol of our social contract
with a nation adrift?

NUMERO UNOMA

Ad-Vantage

a.k.a. Sonnet of the Breadseller's Baby

My vantage point, upon the tender petals
Of my young soul did indelibly mark,
Like heifer's flesh branded with red-hot metal,
A sense of business, value, clear and stark.
While peers in Europe's pushchairs had a vista
Broad with horizons of great means,
We Africans - me, my brother, my sister -
Beheld from mother's back our glorious scenes.
More than just knees, buttocks and belts
From up there we saw customers assist
Her tray to the ground, pay, and duly help
It back upon her head as she'd persist
In pursuing for us a better living.
Today I repay her for all that giving.

NUMERO UNOMA

Essentially

What shall I speak of: love or fortitude or pain
Glorious sunshine, maybe revitalising rain
Compassion, kindness, money-grabbing and gain?
Throughout this life and its complex terrain
I channel positive energy my thoughts to train
To overcome a logical and sceptical brain
And to transport me up to the highest plane
Where all my dreams in slumber never can have lain
And only one thing – the possible – supremely reigns.



Hummingbird

/AND TO TRANSPORT ME UP TO THE HIGHEST PLANE/
/WITH, POSSIBLY, A SWEETER NECTAR/

CULT HYMNS FOR MEN

Distance rolls, closing in, with late night drums:
Sacred instruments that gong restricted pockets
Of nocturnal societies awake;
While the village sleeps within
And that male trance without –
The ceremony of death wisped
In the smoke of this nightsong.

Rain has just faded out –
Its own music seeped down wet;
While dry skins over hollowed wood
Roll clearer with peremptory beat now:
They call in the potent night –
A tall patch of sacred forest
In a low and open savannah,
All bushes brushed in nocturne motif,
Theatres of occult initiations and sizings:

*Bowels of concealed crafts,
Necromantic rivalries:
Shards of glass and razor for meal,
Tongues of fire for thirst quenchers!*

>>

The cult breathes a patriarchal soul;
Womankind lies within roused
By the stridulation of forbidden song –
And indeed heed –
Interdiction and malediction admonished:
*O woman,
Lunacy looms without!*

She who squats to ease the vessels
Dares not traverse that threshold,
The dark world without, mysterious and male:
Sacred night club of the circumcised phalluses –
The occult philharmonic plays tonight:
*O Mother of children
Your womb is no sacrifice tonight!*

Session men in the keg rattle dancers in the gourd
And spirits breathe wind and bleed keen music
Out of bladed violins...
The tongues of birds are heard only by catchers:
Let the initiated unravel their own riddle, now!
*O woman beware: apocryphal orchestrations!
Stick to your harem,
The curse sings around your eaves tonight.*

DayScare

Why am I always afraid of day
Reduced, flattened, to furtive shapes
Forever stalking from smoke to smoke,
Cowed in shades of night on streets of the sleepless?

I'm still sitting under invented lights,
Sitting on high stools swilling seas of poison
Packaged in beautiful casks irresistible to the moribund.
I'm waiting for skeletal supermodels parading in swinging coffins,
As you paint me, posing, calling out my name thru loud music.

I'm snuffing out my life afraid of the sun—
Irrigating my shriveled veins and shrunken vessels
With hemlock in search of blood long needled out;
Rocking with hallucinating trajectories, this hammock,
I'm waiting for angels too, I'm waiting for you.

Let's make love tonight, shug!

But how long am I going to wait in this rain
Dancing, wading in its toxic pools unshod?
Have I not with forbidden foods fed this flesh long enough?
Have I not with illicit substances drugged this soul nights enough?

Is this love gonna last till day, babe?

>>

The dying of the sound machine scares.
The emptying of the hot halls scares.
The dying of feet on vacant floors scares.
The fading of night to light really scares.

But I must stand up and leave.
Sweepers are ready with brooms,
Cleaners with buckets and rags.
They tell me I must go home.

How will I creep home?
How will I crawl, what reptile?
What will they call me, shadow of the iguana?
Stranger from the night, phantom against walls?

The cobwebs on my front door
Interprete ghost days of my death,
I live in the moist graves of the night;
I pay gravediggers faithfully; they know me.

Warm tombs, permanent addictions,
Permanent afflictions, torn wombs –
Fibers persistently torn from my flesh,
Fires I'll never quell, cusps I'll never fill.

A thousand nights, a thousand jugs,
Crowds of bodies, bands of songs –
My refuge is a thin and fading veil
Trembling at the handshake of dawn.



Dream Holiday

/IS THIS LOVE GONNA LAST TILL DAY, BABE?/

He Visits my Fireplace



Captive in pens of patriarchs and chameleons, here now I am
Freed by the mat on the streets of shadows and dim lamps
Where on my doorstep stall,
I'm your fruit of irresistible passions,
Veiled bundle of joy that sits waiting for your furtive feet.

You, shade in the anonymous file of buyers
You have seen the dim lamp on my door,
And the moth flies to my illuminated globe searching promises;
I'll take you in my palm and fold you up,
What warmth, what new incarcerations will you live?

What did you come searching after? Warm baths?
Do you recognize these eyes, these breasts?
Are you saved by the warmth of my darkness?
Don't you recognize these hands, these hips?
My husband, these hills, these valleys, these plains
Don't they re-carve the topography of your past pastime?

Dip your body into the sources of my rivers
Dip your fingers into the pots of my broth-and tell-
Don't you remember the taste of my treat?
What warmth do you feel around the stones of your rejected
hearth?

You've come crawling home, a lizard safe
In the in the interstices of my breast and hips;
I, helot and odalisque of your seraglio,
Whom you lapidated fixed, a still intaglio
Minted on the heels of your man-boots

Tonight I levitate, leviathan from deep and heavy seas.
Will I, with my body, like python mangle my prey?
Or will I, with my jaws, like shark, maim mine?
Or will I, with my teats, like whale, suckle him?

Husband, night has brought you to my stall, to my hearth.
What would you want, me to parcel for you at dawn
When my veil would've fallen with the night's smoke?
What will our children ask when they learn of the offerer of these
gifts?

Waltz With Matrimoney

Lagos welcomed me with open arms,
Invited me in to dance to the rhythm
Of a thousand married men and their charms.
Lagos rolled out a bright red carpet
And as he ushered me in to his sanctum,
He sought to steer me into his debt.
He wooed and primed me with food and wine,
Offered to take me in his car to the gym,
Convinced that I'd give myself up with time.
But then the situation was altered when
He realised I really meant what I said:
"I'm sorry, but I don't do married men"
Then Lagos turned sour, cruel and unkind
And when soon, he began putting me down,
I looked at him plainly and just didn't mind.
Don't mistake me for one of your cheap playthings;
One who fills your life with thrills while your wife
Does for you all of those everyday things.
Did Lagos think a plane ticket and a dinner
Is a price tag that a whole woman like me

>>

Would put on herself just because she's a sinner?
So, once Lagos realised it was not going to happen,
That his money just wouldn't beguile me,
That was when Lagos now changed his pattern.
Did you think if you managed to break my spirit
With manoeuvring, put-downs and bullying,
That somehow, good sex is what it would merit?
Lagos thought I'd fall for lame chat-up libretto
Or the money he splashes around as bait.
Seems what you need is some poor thing from the ghetto.
Yet Lagos is a man who, when he was young,
Knew that one day, he would get married.
But he knew full well he'd end up doing this wrong.
Now he's a man who goes to church every Sunday
Having spent Saturday doing family things;
Then he's back to work at philandering on Monday.
Lagos is a man whom I once much admired
His wit, his grit, charisma and allure.
But now Lagos is a hypocrite of whom I am tired.



Sketchbook Self Portrait

/LIFE COMES IN PAGES/

ISOJE CHOU

When in BRUSSELS What the KINSHASHA

I had just gotten off the thalys, sweating on a hot first day of August, famished and dizzying sleepless still from nights flying across geographies and oceans and worries when, in a sudden vehement turn, right there in Matongé district, right in the heart of downtown Brussels, inside a Congolese bar where women done wigs softening their skins and men shake waists seating down eating from plates of copious food enjoying the music, a middle-aged woman of Flanders came towards me in that sudden heat. Look, said the vehemently turning woman in the careful English of Continental Europe, look, do you want to see some pictures? Pictures? I repeated. Yes, she nodded, looking hard at me.

And she brought out of her small European handbag smaller photolab prints with white borders. Pictures of a blue tropical house and a steel get-up and an African style passenger-bicycle. See? She said. We built you people lots and lots of things but you couldn't even keep them!

What things, what people? I asked. We Belgians. We are nice people. We don't give a damn about this or that. There are lots of poor Belgians. We have not funding! We gave the Congolese 47000km of railways, buildings and things, and what did the people of Kinshasha do? They don't even know how to take care of it! I looked at her and, for some reason, nodded. There are histories after all. Histories of co-dependency, of love that never took on, of smaller truths bigger forgetfulness...that scant line of railways not 47000km...the brutalities of scantier hastier structures built solely for 'getting the goods out'. All technical knowledge withheld...*these the areas of darkness...* But I said, Hey, lady, I've just flown 4700miles The plane could have crashed.

>>



Credit

BIOS

› › › *Akeem Akinniyi*, a journalist, resides in Lagos.

› › › *Awi Oluwafisayo* is a student of Medicine Obafemi Awolowo University

› › › Dzekashu MacViban was born in 1985 and has a degree in Bilingual Letters from the University of Buea, Cameroon.
His poems have appeared in Palapala Magazine.

› › › *Ibukun Babarinde* is a social advocate and public speaker, poet and essayist.
He has a poetry volume *Running Splash of Rust and Gold* (KraftBooks, Ibadan, 2008)
and his poems have appeared in literary journals and dailies.
His recent poems are forthcoming in his new collection, *The Siege*.
Ibukun lives and writes in Ibadan.

› › › *Ifeh Agbonmire* is an engineer by day and writer and blogger by night.
He is currently working on his first novel.

› › › *Isoje Iyi-Eweka Chou* was born and raised in Nigeria to parents of Nigerian and Chinese backgrounds respectively.
She currently lives in Canada and is often in Lagos, Brooklyn and elsewhere.

› › › *Kole Ade Odutola* is also a photographer, environment and culture activist, videographer, communicator, radio show presenter and producer, photo-journalist. He graduated in 1984 with a Botany degree, he recently concluded a Doctorate (P.hD) in media studies from Rutgers University, NJ, USA. Kole has Masters Degrees from Ithaca, NY and University of Reading, UK, England. He was in Germany as a guest of The Goethe Institute learning the Germany language. Kole is the author of *The Poets Fled and The Poet Bled*. He has had papers and poems published in cross-continental journals and anthologies.

› › › *Numero Unoma* is a writer and photographer, who is often involved with charity.

› › › *Wirndzerem G. Barfee*, born on August 1, 1975 in Cameroon, studied in Nigeria and Cameroon. A former participant in of the Crossing Borders program (2004/2006) and in the BBC /British Council Environmental Writing Workshop in 1996, he has published *Bird of the Oracular Verb* (Iroko Publishers, 2008) and his short-story, *Jury of the Corrupt* included in *The Spirit Machine and Other Stories* (CCCPress, UK, 2009)

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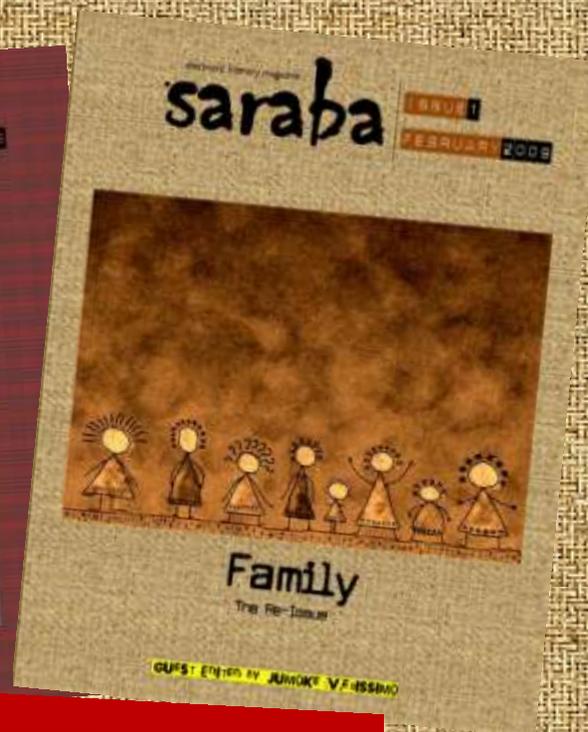
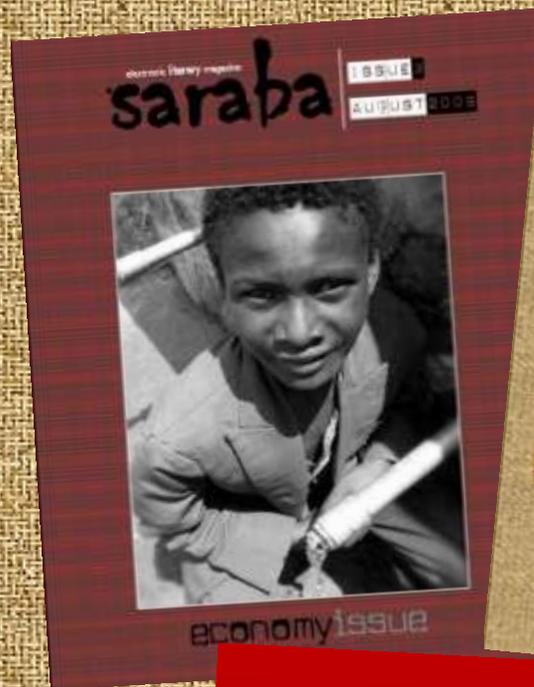
ILLUSTRATIONS

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Cover, Pages 12, 20, 29

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