

# We Are **NOT** small pieces

*African Politics*

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# WE ARE NOT SMALL PIECES

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## FOREWORD

A surge of protests erupted across the African continent in recent years. From the 2020 #ENDSARS protest against police brutality in Nigeria to the 2021 Burkinabes' protest demanding their government tackle insurgency in Burkina Faso to the 2022 anti-Saied protest in Tunisia rebuking President Kais Saied's undemocratic governance. According to Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly's book "Africa Uprising: Popular Protests and Political Change", these protests fall under an ongoing third wave of protest in Africa which began early 21st century. The first wave occurred during the late colonial period and led to the end of colonial rule while the second wave rippled through late 1980s to early 1990s, resulting in the advent of a multi-party system of democracy. A singular collective political impact of the unfolding third wave of protest is however unknown yet. But it is conspicuous that it is creating a kind of political consciousness awakening in African citizens. The protests inspire erstwhile politically inert masses towards demanding a homogeneous dream from their government. The protests seed in the people's mind their capacity to unite for a cause and influence government. The protests lead to the emergence of what Zachariah Mampilly in an interview with Ritimo called "Protest Democracy", "a democracy that is moving away from a state-centric technocratic approach towards one grounded in the views and actions of ordinary people." This anthology you are about to read is a collection of voices contributing to this emergence.

The frequency of protests and insurgencies can be a parameter for determining the effectiveness of a government. Therefore, in the light of the aforementioned explosion

of protests raging through the Africa continent, plus the incessant insecurity issues, it is evident that African politics is generally in shambles. This collection is a portrait of this political dysfunction. The pieces within recount and reimagine protests, wars, and political crimes, painting boldly the current state of African politics.

Moreover, change often requires emotions as springboards for its execution. The unpleasant realities of African politics depicted in the poems, stories and artworks in this anthology are evocative of all the feelings that can be channeled into revolutionizing African politics. In other words, this collection of angry, dissatisfied, and solemn voices inspires the need for political evolution and a Pan-African patriotism towards achieving it.

In conclusion, protests come in different forms: oral and performative such as chanting during marches or written and visual such as banners, poetry, and storytelling. This anthology is a protest on its own, belonging to the latter form. The pieces therein hold plaques and public address systems and scream about a desire for a more effective governance in Africa. The pieces stand fearless and resilient against counter pressures and countermeasures disguised as empty promises, unyielding in their timelessness and uncompromising in their bluntness. I invite you to experience it all.

*Ishola Abdulwasii Ayodele*

**Residence Director, ARTmosterrific**

# INTRODUCTION

## *Indeed, We Are Not Small Pieces*

Dear African,

We live in a dismal period, and it seems like we can do nothing to change it. The ones who have plunged us into this period have rendered us powerless. They always take us for granted. They think we are small. For the most part, we are dormant, not because we have chosen to be, but because our leaders have conditioned us to be.

There is something tragic about the voiceless. Something invisible — almost dehumanising — about scrambling for a voice. Those who have no voice are powerless. They answer to the oppressors who yoke them.

Let us go back to the colonial period when the Europeans caged our people. Remember how they muffled our people, how they forced them to comply. They coerced our people to work on farms, appropriated our land, and exploited them. Remember what the Europeans did to strip them of their languages, how they forced them to adopt a new culture, how they made them forget.

But, remember the nationalists who showed Europeans that Africans had a voice. Can you recall their dissident nature: the boycotts, the warfare, the rallies, the strikes, the demands? They employed the voices of the people and through that, our countries

gained independence. Regrettably, most nationalists mirrored the behaviour of the colonialists. And this behaviour cascaded into the present political class.

Our political world speaks of tyranny, not democracy. As Africans, we are accustomed to news that shows our backwardness, dependence, and helplessness. Now, when we complain, the leaders ignore it. When we protest, they disrupt it. When we persist, they kill us. And so it has been after nationalists used the voice of the masses — an underestimated tool — to expel the colonial masters.

It is easy to silence people, but inexplicably hard to break away. Nonetheless, regaining our voice is possible. To restore this voice, we must start regardless of where we find ourselves.

No matter what country you are from, you know what it feels like to have everything ruined by a government and have them plunder your resources. Your struggles are relatable. That is why we have curated this chapbook, titled *We Are Not Small Pieces*. We recognise the need for a medley of voices capable of speaking against our political atmosphere. So, we present you with a set of conversation starters, of voices. From *My Country, A Trope for Here is Bub* by Eniola Abdulroqeeb Arówólò, to *Nothing Will Happen* by Shedrack Opeyemi Akanbi, to *Fusca* by Martins Deep, all pieces recognise that change begins by acknowledging the root problem and acting on it. The artists invoke their voices because art is potent. The voice originates from art. Without this power, there is nothing we can do.

*We Are Not Small Pieces* is filled with the experiences and perceptions of different African creatives because we know what it is like to be affected by African Politics. Here, you will find that you are not alone.

*Funmilayo Obasa & Oyekunle Iyinoluwa Toluwanimi*

**Curators**

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*Abu Bakr Sadiq*

*Isaac Mendez*

*Jamiu Ahmed*

*Mohammed U. Yusuf*

*Sihle Ntuli*

*Nicholas Odunayo*

*Muiz Opeyemi Ajayi*

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# WE ARE NOT SMALL PIECES

*African politics*

## POETRY

*“when war torches a place, it gives birth to flames  
like Syria, like Yemen, like Iran, like my country.”*

— *MY COUNTRY, A TROPE FOR HERE IS BUB, Eniola Abdulroqeeb Arówólò*

MY COUNTRY, A TROPE FOR HERE IS BUB | *Eniola Abdulroqeeb*

*Arówólò*

when war torches a place, it gives birth to flames  
like Syria, like Yemen, like Iran, like my country.  
i am on the rooftop this evening with sun in its redness  
as the blood spattered as libation by men garbed with extremism  
gazes at my body — this body whose alter ego too reads grief.  
it's true that here is a cornucopia of gunshots  
& we gilt ourselves with it like a hunch sited on the back of a man.  
my mother visited the market & returned  
  
with a bullet pitched on her forehead.  
this is how we die on the asphalts, wretched.  
i am broken like a faucet, like this poem encompassing miseries.  
i christen here apocalypse, Eden shedding her beauty and grace.  
another news of school girls filched by terrorists  
rings out like a disturbing metronome.  
if ever you must mention this country, let it be with withering joy.  
there is one thing certain as the rainbow that comes headlong after rain  
which is to say my country never runs out of grief.  
everywhere i go i adorn myself wariness, otherwise i may be another  
saline water trooping out of my father's eyes.  
i break open the Qur'an & keep munching salam. salam. salam.

Salam—an Arabic term for PEACE.

## BIOGRAPHY

ENIOLA ABDULROQEEB ARÓWÓLÒ is an emerging writer and a student of Mass Communication. He is a social activist who is passionate about inequality, politics, domestic violence, and child rights. His works have appeared on Brittle Paper, Rough Cut Press, Poetry Column ND, Rigorous Magazine, Salamander Ink, Eremite Poetry, Mixed Mag, Ninsha Arts, Arts Lounge, Ngiga Review, Nanty Greens, and African Magazine. He is the August winner of PIN-10 DAY POETRY and has been shortlisted in BPPC's June/July Anthology. In his leisure time, he is either writing, reading, or binge-watching cartoons.

## THE TUNISIAN GUN | *ML Kejera*

brrrrraap!

In the summer of 2013, Tunis was laid siege by the brotherhood of the traveling gun. Two assassinations. Both leftist politicians. Unknown gunmen on motorbikes.

brrraaaaap! brrrap!

My friends and I, super rich children of East and West African diplomats, lost in hash-clouds and rap and R'n'B and "Sidi Mansour", surmised that the same gun birthed all three bullets. Tunisia was a land without guns, unlike Libya where the Colonel died with shock frozen on his face by the flash of a gun. Even as he died, he was incapable of comprehending why people he called sons were killing him.

brrraaaaap! brrrap! brrraaaaap!

Chokri Belaid.

Mohamed Brahmi.

brrrap! brrrap! brrrap! brrrap! brrrap! brrrap! brrraap!

Though the DJ proper, Mr. Bong, let us suggest songs, we knew he was in control of the speaker. With a twist of a knob here, a flick of a switch there, he masterfully undulated beats that captured, wholly, those smoke sessions. Around 6:30 pm, he

would even phase wine-colored sunsets into light-polluted, hazy bluish nights. Atop my rooftop-veranda, the Babylonian skyline bumped to Kanye, Kendrick, Earl, Tyler, Frank, Push, Abel, Chance, and Donald. Still, the sandy wind raged and fear ran along our bones through the chill.

brrraaaaap! brrap! brrraaaaap! brrap!

Puff, puff, pass to the right as we might, no amount of Momo's Moroccan hash mixed with loose Marlboro tobacco was able to lift us out of fear. All black ears were pricked awaiting that mythic gunshot and discerning whether summer's marital fireworks were gunpowder booms.

brrraap!

But Mr. Bong knew how to ease us. He put the "I Don't Like (Remix) [Pusha T verse Extended]" through the speaker, crescendoing it till the bass drum replaced our heartbeats around the 00:47 minute mark. Push went grrrrraaaaa and the Tunisian gun fired itself out of our minds and existence.

brrap! brrap! Brrraaaaap!

The song ended. Mr. Bong scrambled for another life-saving tune. The more useful among us rolled another spliff or packed another bowl.

## BIOGRAPHY

ML KEJERA is a Gambian writer based in Illinois who was raised in Senegal, Saudi Arabia, and Tunis. He was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize in 2020. A story of his was nominated for the Caine Prize for African Writing. His work has previously appeared in Lolwe, Adda, The Nation, Strange Horizons, and The AV Club. Please tweet him images of your favorite pizzas at [@KejeraL](https://twitter.com/KejeraL).

## BHABI & I | *Abu Bakr Sadiq*

*after Ananya Kanai Shah*

the year is ending the same way it did last year & yes, bhabi & i still watch the news with the tv on mute & yes, everyone knows why democracy would never save the people & yes, it is my fault the nation is morphing into a hellhole & no, it is not my fault if the people feel oppressed by the government & no, freedom of speech is a fat lie & yes, everyone i know fakes patriotism when they sing the national anthem & yes, bhabi & i kiss in the bathroom while unknown gunmen set fire to the country & yes, we cry when we hear about them being named national heroes & yes, we go days talking about the state of things til' it feels like the rejuvenation of myths & yes, we touch our bodies with a tenderness alien to our leaders' hearts & yes, bhabi & i come from towns where no one believes in politics anymore & no, it is not unusual that we don't feel at home in our country & yes, sometimes we whisper prayers for the nation until our mouths leave our bodies & yes, we stand by our window to watch youths ask for good governance & no, it is not death that keeps us from joining them & yes, only their placards are left on our street by morning & yes, the whole world knows everything that happened

## BIOGRAPHY

ABU BAKR SADIQ is a Nigerian poet. His work has been nominated for the Rhysling and Igynte Awards for Best Speculative Poetry and is published or forthcoming in *Uncanny Magazine*, *Augur Magazine*, *FIYAH Literary Magazine*, *Zone 3 Press Magazine*,

*Palette Poetry, Mizna, The Lit Quarterly, Rockvale Review* and elsewhere. He writes from Minna. Find him on Twitter [@bakronline](#).

## THE GODFATHER | *Jamiu Ahmed*

a wealthy father, whose son is an armoury  
where love is parcelled out in live rounds.  
such a son listens to his father.

we are cigarettes in the hands of this demigod —  
burning like sackcloth ashes at one end,  
dying like incense at the other.

in ecstasy, he puffs out the chain-smokes,  
the fumes; an unrequited invocation that  
beclouds his room — smokescreen.

he's a blind bat fluttering in astronavigation, too  
blind to see a horde of shrieking winds in plea —  
howling hymns like cubs with oxidized lungs.

the winds: an amputated limb flying, a bodiless leg  
running home, a boy with ripped guts — holding  
a bloodstained flag, a daring tape recording the

penetrating sounds of slugs smooching bodies,  
a girl dissolving into formalin to save her  
brother from kissing the blood-smearred earth.

his table is a chessboard of alternating  
dark & light. the king — ordering the  
pawns into the death-traps of the knights.

at the chamber — an orgy of power-drunk  
lords, a conspiracy of silence is an oath;  
a language spoken of the dead. in the father's

house, freedom is a slave in gold chains.  
yesterday is a national tv saying; winds don't die.  
today is a rhetoric asking; who gave the order?

## BIOGRAPHY

JAMIU AHMED is a Lagos based Nigerian Writer and Blogger. He has several works featured and forthcoming on digital literary platforms such as Eboquills, Poemify, The Quills, The Consio Magazine, The Mexodus & elsewhere. His writings have also performed well in competitions organised by Poets in Nigeria (PIN) and Word Rhymes and Rhythm.

THE EVE OF DEFEAT BY THE FEDERAL | *Mohammed U. Yusuf*

the night they gunned down my armourer,  
boxes fed with thumbed sheets slipped in

through the checkpoints within Kagunle.  
our dogs were hunted by men in fatigues

& boots unleashed by the federal,  
sniffed our bases for sleeper cells.

9pm it was & at the other end of a lame  
phone call, a subdued officer whispered

his apologies with a muffled voice  
& bumps of defeat grew on my skin.

an outburst trapped within my throat  
smudged one last strategy that whirled

in my head. I could only train my focus on  
the cigarette smoke snaking up the ceiling.

## BIOGRAPHY

MOHAMMED U. YUSUF is a young African poet who lives and writes from somewhere in Nigeria. He explores themes around humanity, memory and the socio-political. Some of his works have recently appeared — or are forthcoming — in *Olongo Africa Journal*, *Writers Space Africa - WSA*, *Lunaris Review*, *The Shallow Tales Review*, *Frontier Poetry*, *RoseyRavelston Books*, *Salamander Ink*, *Best New African Poets Anthology (2021)*, among others.

## THE LANGUAGE | *Sihle Ntuli*

*“For a black writer, the language is very racist; you have to have harrowing fights and hair-raising panga duels with the language before you can make it do all that you want it to do.”*

*– Dambudzo Marechera*

in the Caribbean, this language  
was modified in what would end up  
being commonly referred to as creole  
and similarly, in Nigeria

this language would end up being adapted  
into pidgin, activist Ken Saro Wiwa  
famously produced an entire novel  
in so-called ‘broken English’

uncommon and unheard of at the time  
pejorative Mongoose  
isibhindi, the nerve, the audacity  
conceited, cocky dictator of

the language, style, diction  
stick to fiction and closer to home  
die poppe sal dans  
uzowukhomba umuzi onotshwala

with that said  
while I tend to keep my head down  
do not confuse me for an easy target  
as a matter of fact I warn you kind sir

that you kindly don't fuck with me

## BIOGRAPHY

SIHLE NTULI is a Poet and Classicist from Durban, South Africa, he has had poetry published in The Rumpus, SAND Journal, Lolwe & Puerto Del Sol amongst others. He is the author of the chapbook Rumbin (uHlanga 2020) alongside being poetry co-editor at instagram based zine Wild Pine Poetry.

PORTRAIT OF SCALE OF JUSTICE WITH GUNWOUNDS &  
GRENADES | *Muiz Opeyemi Ajayi*

i barge into this poem like unknown gunmen  
bullets nesting a home in my kinsmen skull. these days

october makes me picture blood. or  
flood. or mother's tears dissolving into father's

glass of liquor. my perverted hands  
sculpting figurines of girls up north, incarcerated

in the dungeon of the fear of brothers detonating  
into fleshy flames. painting

portraits of flayed bodies documented into mere  
statistics. kano kids mutilated into silent

chrysanthemums on the graveyard of mother's tongue. lord,  
my tongue lay cold as a metaphor for

uwaila's body. sweet sweet girl's fire extinguished  
right at god's feet. little boy pilfering garri

in the market. quick. shelter yourself in this poem. i promise  
it won't garland you with car tyres. anoint you

with locomotive oil. boy, i curse the tree  
that fell. that made the wood. that birthed

the match. that lit the flame. that torched  
the skin. that charred your bones. that

smoked the air. that sang your screams.  
that...

## BIOGRAPHY

MUIZ OPEYEMI AJAYI, Frontier XVIII, studies Law at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. He writes on identity and uncertainties. He's an editor at The Nigeria Review, and has works featuring/forthcoming on Rough Cut Press, Nigerian News Direct, Kissing Dynamite, Ice Floe Press, The Aurora Journal, Brittle Paper and elsewhere. He was second runner-up in the 2021 PROFWIC Poetry Contest, and an ARTmosterrific Writer-in-Residence. He tweets [@ependites](https://twitter.com/ependites).

20 10 2020 | *Isaac Mendez*

#1

On the radio,

they told us to stay safe:

“There are no stray bullets around Lekki  
toll-gate”

The hairs at the nape of my neck stood up,  
applauding to the trembling of a nation.

I had begun to realize people were dead  
with the national anthem bleeding  
from their mouths & holding on to the flag for their dear life.

Legs & torso affixed, eyes glued to my  
screen. I witnessed a boy saying:

“Let them know I died for my country.”

Body riddled with bullets.

He shook like a leaf as light  
as our constitutional rights.

I have learnt that these rights exist only  
when they are high up on cardboards  
& on torn banners wielded by broken hearts.

nobody hears you unless you stop breathing.

& your father's cries echoes around your brother who was stripped  
naked and slapped for his right.

"We are the owners of the road, and he is  
too young to drive on it."

I finally understand what the dead boy  
never said:

"patriotism here means to die."

#2

In today's political class, we were taught  
ways to kill a bird.

If it sings,

plunge your fist through its throat

& pluck out its song. Cut the wings,

never again will it flock

and leave or peck on words

to assemble a rabble or a desperate tweet.

In today's class, we saw first-hand

that chess games are for the brilliant & politics are for those

who walk around with no hearts.

## BIOGRAPHY

ISAAC MENDEZ is a graduate of creative writing, Liverpool John Moore University. He is from Bayelsa State, Nigeria. He is 26 years old and currently away at sea working. He finds it important to say that it's because of the increasing need and love for the betterment of his country that he began writing. He believes that if any change is to come, people need to start talking about things.

FATHERLAND | *Nicholas Odunayo*

I come from a place  
where we proudly hoist our flags  
when others achieve feats in diaspora  
that our fatherland won't let us on our home soil.

Our fatherland  
is a deadbeat that  
abuses and scars his offspring  
by wrapping his thick, oil-stained hands  
around his children's throats  
squeezing out their dreams.

How do you hearken to a father's call  
who seems to think  
that 6 feet under is the highest you should go.

His weapons of choice are:  
the broom and umbrella.

We are made to choose that which beats us  
in turn after turn.

How do you serve him?

Heroes' past would be turning in their graves  
as the villains rule the day.

Their sly tongues are shaped in the ways  
of lies and gaslighting.

Hell! some of the 'heroes'  
were decorated villains.

All hail our abusive fatherland!

## BIOGRAPHY

NICHOLAS ODUNAYO is a young writer residing in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. He writes poems and short stories, some of which he posts on Instagram. When he is not writing, he enjoys watching anime, movies and listening to a variety of music. You may reach him on Instagram [@nicholasodunayo](https://www.instagram.com/nicholasodunayo).

## FICTION

*“Saturday’s election is still inconclusive. Every newspaper masthead is filled with speculations. At my stand are the regular men who come to read but never buy. My stand has become their office, and their job is to debate the politics of our dear country. Only on rare occasions do they keep their voices down. They are annoying. But I love that they are always here. We are all broken men searching for redemption in our shared inadequacies.”*

— *NOTHING WILL HAPPEN*, Shedrack Opeyemi Akanbi

## NOTHING WILL HAPPEN | *Shedrack Opeyemi Akanbi*

*Monday, November 18th, 2019.*

As I arrange today's newspaper on the stand, I see how the faces crisscrossing the junction give the man varying looks. Some of the faces urge him to speak on. Most say, 'My brother, what more can we do?'

Regardless of the expressions, I know beneath it all is a common feeling: fear. Everyone is afraid for the man as he wails, undistracted by the traffic around him.

Today, private cars and taxis that always seem to be in a race with themselves, acknowledge traffic regulations. It is obvious that the drivers have their eyes on the man at the junction — not the traffic lights. Passengers toss their head out of kekes in the direction of the man. The okada riders, remain true to their reputation today, but they only move on reasonably high speed, not the reckless death-speed we know them for. Everything else looks normal. Who in this city cares for elections or their outcomes anyway?

Saturday's election is still inconclusive. Every newspaper masthead is filled with speculations. At my stand are the regular men who come to read but never buy. My stand has become their office, and their job is to debate the politics of our dear country. Only on rare occasions do they keep their voices down. They are

annoying. But I love that they are always here. We are all broken men searching for redemption in our shared inadequacies.

For these men, the stand is the place where they get some political education. It is where they realize that the country has a minister for the FCT and not a governor. It is where they learn the names of the ECOWAS member states. It is where they attempt crossword puzzles, even though they dare not scribble a pen on any paper. It is where they learn to have their own thoughts.

‘Na why me like this TIMES kini. Dem tok am clear say police put hand for the dabaru,’ Baba Ibeji says.

‘Abegi, Na CDD tok am. TIMES just dey report wetin dem tok,’ says Adejoh. He always tries to tell everyone that he is a ND holder. Every word that he utters here is to that defence.

‘But, na only dem use am as headline na.’

‘See ehn, if na for country wey korret, dem suppose cancel this election,’ the Messiful says. We call him Messiful because he always wants to talk about Messi’s latest goals and achievements.

‘See this one o. Who go cancel am?’ I ask. ‘No be the counting wey dem stop on Saturday na him SUN say dem go continue today so?’

A man with thick locs sighs. He is not a regular, but I have seen him around a few times. He goes from one paper to another, clicking his tongue. But, aside from the basic greetings and the occasional soliloquy, he says nothing.

A corps member in full uniform joins us. By this time, the man at the junction is only repeating a phrase: ‘Blood Election! Blood Election!!’

‘Good morning,’ the corper says. ‘Please, who is that man at the junction?’

‘Kopa, the way you see am, na so we take see am too,’ Baba Ibeji says before turning to me. ‘Burnt-Offering, dem say na since yesterday the guy dey here, na true?’

The regulars started calling me Burnt-Offering the day I told Adejoh I was sick of his I-sabi-book syndrome. ‘You this burnt offering,’ he said to spite me.

Everyone laughed and the name stuck. But, I wasn’t shaken by the name. As a church boy, I knew only the purest of creatures were considered for burnt offerings. Burnt offerings were for atonement. So, I told Adejoh that my skin might be very dark but my teeth are brighter than his future. The men laughed harder.

‘Me, I no know o,’ I say to Baba Ibeji. ‘Even church I no go yesterday. I hear say bullets still dey fly up and down. People wey I meet for junction this morning tok say dem come meet am here.’

‘Na wa o.’

‘But, why the guy come carry the matter for head?’ Messiful snorts.

‘You no come early, you for hear wetin this election do the guy. My brother, e reach to turn person mad,’ Adejoh says.

‘Please, what exactly did he say?’ the corper asks, looking around.

I wanted to answer him, but a Camry parked before the stand and requested for The Vanguard.

\*\*\*

Earlier, there was an argument. Baba Ibeji and Messiful said that the Saturday election was an unprecedented catastrophe. Adejoh thought that it wasn’t anything to be surprised about, and for the first time, someone supported him. The guy who concurred with Adejoh was suited up with a white shirt and an orange tie. He probably works for GTBank. The man with locs kept hissing intermittently. His eyes were squinting, close to the newspaper, so I felt that he’d been struggling with the tiny lettering of the print. He didn’t support any side.

‘You don forget 2007 general election?’ Adejoh asked. ‘For this very state, dem use bullet scatter one PPP guy. Ehm...’

‘Isah Yohanna,’ the suited guy said, filling the blanks for Adejoh.

‘God bless you, your head dey there,’ Adejoh said. ‘The next day na so gunshots full everywhere, so tey dem kill one DCP sef. Abeg this year own na play.’

‘See, wetin me dey tell you no be dem-say dem-say. On Saturday everywhere skata!’ Baba Ibeji threw his hands sideways.

‘Leave the guy, you no hear say thirty INEC pipu loss? Now, dem don see dem again. Na plan jare. No election rubbish reach dis wan.’ Messiful insisted.

‘Na because una no know history,’ Adejoh said, clearing his throat. ‘This thing no new at all. Burnt-Offering, shebi you get android phone?’

I nodded.

‘Oya, help us check 2004 election for google, dem kill one INEC oga, dem follow kill one big politician too like that. E dey pain me say I don forget their names. Wetin una know?’

When he turned to the suited guy for support, he was already docking into a keke.

‘Adejoh, leave story. Make we face wetin dey happen now. I even hear say them kill one woman leader this morning, but as paper never carry that one, no be me talk am o.’

We all eyed Baba Ibeji. He always hears. Fair enough, most of his hear-ings turn out to be true.

Silence spread through the stand, but it was filled up with a mix of hooting and the man in the middle of the junction screaming, ‘Blood Election! Blood Election!’

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Coming back from the Camry I hear Baba Ibeji saying, ‘Oga kopa, no be una join do election on Saturday?’

‘No, I wasn’t mobilised as an INEC ad-hoc official.’

‘Na English you come speak?’ Adejoh says. ‘You see, the man at the Junction is protesting because his brother was killed at a polling unit, and on that account, his mother had a heart attack.’

We are smiling mischievously at how Adejoh pronounced his English words — one by one — but it doesn’t mean we aren’t proud of him. The man with locs looks away from The Punch as if distracted.

‘You see, that is the main issue,’ the man with locs says to no one in particular.

We all turn to him, lips sealed, somewhat startled that he could actually speak clean-crisp English.

‘Check all the headlines,’ he continues. ‘The people who are the real sufferers are reduced to vague approximations. Police Officers and Others Feared Dead, Casualties as Thugs Disrupt Election, and other nonsense!’

Then he points the paper in his hand towards Adejoh.

‘In your arguments, you tried so hard to name popular people that were affected by the history of electoral violence, as if the madness isn’t perpetrated by their ilk. But, what about the nameless young boy that was shot in the leg? What about the woman who is now nothing but a number on the front pages of mainstream newspapers? That man at the junction is one out of the many that these bloody elections have given an indelible scar, but nothing will happen. Tomorrow, when the winner is announced, your governor will appear on our screens and say: “I want to thank God for the victory, and the good people of the state for their support.” Nonsense! That man at the junction is doing what all of us are supposed to be doing, tomorrow it might be—’

His speech is interrupted by the loud screech of tyres, prompting us to turn our collective gaze from the man with the locs to the action that was starting to unfold at the junction. Within seconds, we were among many others, stretching to look at a police van disappearing northward. The man that has been at the junction is now at the back of the van, constrained, surrounded by policemen. He doesn’t struggle with them, he only kept wailing: ‘Bloody election!’

We shake our heads and drag ourselves back to the stand as if what we witnessed was a commercial in a TV show, something to be forgotten. But the man with the locs persisted.

‘Can you see?’ he says. ‘I will be here tomorrow, and I will show you that nothing about this will appear in the papers. Nothing will happen, I assure you.’

## BIOGRAPHY

SHDRACK OPEYEMI AKANBI (He/Him/His) is a Nigerian, believer, and dreamer. He studied History and International Studies at the University of Ilorin. His writings appear in The Roadrunner Review, Kalahari Review, Olongo Africa, Salamander Ink, and elsewhere. He was shortlisted for the 2020 Eriata Oribhabor Prize for Poetry (EOPP) and won the 2021 PIN Poetically Written Prose Contest. His short story 'Mr. Tunde's Moments' was second runner-up in The Bolaji Abdullahi Prize for Literature, 2021. He reads fiction for CRAFT Literary and Little Patuxent Review. Find him on Twitter [@ShedrackAkanbi](https://twitter.com/ShedrackAkanbi).

## IN A TIME OF LOVE AND MONEY | *Mhembuter Jeremiah Orhamba*

Today, you have decided to raise your head above your natural height. To actually see the sky for the first time, and not just to regard it fleetingly, as you usually did; to watch milk stars dot the sky, to name each in numbers, to marvel at each drifting glories. You want to be able to look back and remember the colour of the clouds: white? dark? indecisive?

To anyone who doesn't know you, who hasn't truded up tough mountains in your shoes, you're probably crazy. But that's all you can do to push yourself forward. You're as light as a dry leaf but your legs are heavy, as if caked in mud, but you're moving, taking turns around bends, humming, cowering once in a while to dodge approaching vehicles and passers-by. This is what you've been reduced to: an entity dragging itself through the dark alleys, through the studs of light high up in the night sky, trying without success to smother guilt, trying without success to clamp down the voices raving and throbbing in your head, in your heart, between your fingers, between your eyes:

You're...

Evil.

You're... evil.

You. Are...

You. Are. Evil—

Dragging yourself through the alleys. Marvelling at the glories of nature that have been around since you heaved your first breath. Avoiding everything living, everything breathing. That's all you can do to swipe off the memories you created with Nenge. You told him. You were sincere. You were serious. A teardrop ran down your cheek and plopped on the tiled floor. You were serious when you said the words to him.

Nenge, I can't do anything without you.

Nenge, you're life to my bones.

Nenge, I'll never leave you for nothing in this life.

But here you are, leaving him, dodging away. The guilt is thick and gooey, but your mind manages to stay resolute: this is the best you are doing amidst the circumstances, telling Nenge the truth — rather than ghosting and betraying him — that someone else at home has shown interest in you, and because he is rich, your mother has advised that you don't be a fool and choose this rich boy over Nenge.

“Don't you want a secured future ehn?” Her eyes were wrung shut in disgust and rebuke. You sat on the floor, your hands on your head, and whimpered endlessly about how much Nenge meant to you. Of course, your mother didn't understand. She'll not understand. She hissed and turned her lower lip downward. “Look at this foolish boy!

Can't you see how stuffed the kitchen is now, thanks to Ortsega? Look at these new pots! Look, original stainless! Or you've not even seen the parlour yet! You better decide o. You better decide before he looks elsewhere!"

Your guilt retrieves your memories, each screenshot of you jabbering about your unwavering love for Nenge with a pride certain of itself. In another memory you burst out on your mother: "How could you be this crude and selfish, mummy? See, as far as I am concerned it is 2034 and not the 19<sup>th</sup> century! And parents no longer force suitors on their children."

Guilt heaves a shoulder and snaps its fingers, facial features contorted. It cannot believe that mere words, ordinary mere words hit at you again and again has washed you into its waters. It snorts.

This evening, the moon is a dusty crescent. A star sits beside it; it pries more memories open, like it's peeling scabs and revealing blood-red injuries. This onslaught brings you bliss, and not soil. Makes you sigh with relief that a shred of humanity still breathes in you. In these memories, you are a little boy, and your siblings are singing wishes to the sky one by one. "Your turn," they prod, but you refute in a small voice that you do not know how. "Just look at the star and make a wish. And be quick before another star appears," they say.

A high-pitched cry draws your attention. Ahead, a car approaches, its silver body a sharp gleam. The road is narrow, and so you withdraw to the side of the road to let it pass. A horn goes off, and you wave, fingers trembling as your whole body because

instead of someone else, it is Nenge you see. You blink to dispel any illusory state you might be in, but when you open them, the car is ahead and turning around a bend. And because you have come loose, your guilt returns. This time as a looming beast. It roars, claws at your chest, knocks air out of your lungs. It has you opening your mouth to breathe because your nostrils have been blocked. You look over your shoulder and discover the wall of a fence behind you. You lean against it, shivering as guilt paints images of you, suit-clad, saying yes to Ortsega and his riches before the altar. It replays your promises to Nenge again. “No, no,” you say, sliding down to the ground. “I can’t do this. I just can’t, mummy.” You wheeze, wheeze, wheeze. And wheeze.

## BIOGRAPHY

MHEMBEUTER JEREMIAH ORHEMBA is Nigerian. A 2021 ARTmosterrific artist-in-residence and first runner-up for the 2021 Kreative Diadem contest (fiction), his works have found home or are forthcoming in FictionWrit Magazine, The Shallow Tales Review, Arts Lounge, Eboquills, The Muse Journal, and Agapanthus Collective. He is an Editor at FictionWrit Magazine, wishes to attain the peaceful serenity of water, enjoys watching TK and Carlos kiss, and tweets [@son\\_of\\_faya](https://twitter.com/son_of_faya).

## VISUAL ARTS

*Fuscation: (noun) A darkening; obscurity; obfuscation*

— Wiktionary

FUSCA | *Martins Deep*



## BIOGRAPHY

MARTINS DEEP [he/him] is an Urhobo poet based in Kaduna, Nigeria. He is a photographer, digital artist, and currently a student of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He is a Best of The Net finalist, '22. His most recent works have appeared—or are forthcoming— in Magma Poetry, Strange Horizons, FIYAH, Barren Magazine, Lolwe, 20.35 Africa: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry, and elsewhere. He says hi [@martinsdeep1](https://www.instagram.com/martinsdeep1).