

a collection of poems from Sierra Leone

# What the Seashell Said to Me

Bee James





An anthology of poems by  
Sierra Leonean graduates  
and emerging poets  
compiled by Bridgette O James  
edited by Kayode A Robbin-Coker

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## **FOREWORD**

ON BEING A SIERRA LEONEAN WRITER

By Oumar Farouk Sesay

Creative writing is a migration from our most private realm to the public space using language and literary devices already in the public domain. Poetry tells our emotions in the open, hoping our writing will resonate with the public and effect positive change. The literary landscape is littered with work that have impacted the world with their lofty themes, elevated language, and ability to speak to all ages. Some of those work is fiction yet tell lies of permanent truth to humankind.

As writers, we hope that our writing intervenes in someone's life or alter a nation's epic narrative toward the path of social cohesion. Among other things, writing extends our being beyond physicality; it takes us to places we could never physically be. We are yet to perfect a means to evaluate our work's impact on the public accurately. I started writing plays while in high school, and the plays were performed at our City Hall. In a theatre like ours, one could gauge the audience's emotions as they hung on every line. Sometimes plays were written in Krio, the lingua franca of Sierra Leone, making the message more accessible to the audience; the impact was palpable. The potency of theatre in combining spectacle and voice impacted the audience. It heralded a mindset change in our history when the word change was a bad word and could even be extended to mean a treasonable word.

However, with a genre like poetry, the impact is not as immediate and dramatic as the theatre. Writing is, most times, if not all of the time, scarred by the mood and event of the

epoch that gave birth to it. In my case and several other writers of our time. The war erupted in 1991 and lasted till 2002 and was a significant intervention in my writing. The shattering impact of the war on my psyche then reshaped my thinking and realigned my focus as a writer.



I did not experience the war from the war front like Erich Maria Remarque, whose experience in the trenches of the first world war gave us that great classic war novel, ***All Quiet on the Western Front***. Or the great British poet Wilfred Owen whose poetry about the war that killed him still haunts us today. Or the great Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo who died in the Biafran war of secession in Nigeria in the 1960s.

Other eminent Sierra Leonean poets and I (including the compiler of this anthology, Bridgette James) experienced the war on the run; metaphors scavenged as we sprinted from one hiding place to another with fellow compatriots. We deployed right into the trenches of human anxiety and fear. We saw humanity at its most vulnerable state and witnessed the insanity of war with all its lethal force unleashed on the innocent. We saw the bodies of women transformed into battlefields and weapons forged in their wombs used against them to decapitate their spirits and stigmatize them for a lifetime. Together with other writers residing in relatively safe areas of the city unaffected by daily combat, we established a poetry club called Falui Poetry Society and gathered in safe places like libraries and museums to recite our poems to each other. We later graduated to bigger auditoriums in the city before the war consumed every inch of the country.

During that period, we witnessed a flourishing of poetry, theatre, and many more in retelling the tale of the war. Poets and audiences flooded our poetry evenings and overwhelmed

our capacity to host them. Later, when the poet and writer Kirsten Rain and her team from the United States visited us, and they were using poetry to heal, we nodded our knowing it; our poetry evenings were healing places. They were hallowed grounds of humanity, a pathway to remembering and forging a return to our commonality. The brutal war

fought in Sierra Leone for over a decade maimed the language's capacity to capture the enormity of the war.

It seemed the language was paralyzed by the grotesque; the syntax, semantics, morphology, and metaphors developed centuries ago suddenly could not accommodate the new ugliness. The numbing of the soul took its toll; the victims of our war were stunned, unable to speak the unspeakable. They hoisted a look of hollowness on their faces that told a tale of doom. We saw relatives running into our hiding places and heard the horror in their beings even when they said nothing. It was a telepathic conversation, and we comforted them telepathically, for, at that time, the spoken word might be too mean to do the work; it would have, as they say, added salt unto injury; it would have debased all of us in narratives of shame, covered us with the soot of burnt moralities, the beast mark of the arson ravaging our land.

How do we use words to convey our experiences without further denigrating our humanity? The words in vogue then were words of war, words on the ascending then were the words of men and the (few) women of war, the words the villains of our tragedy used, military jargon connoting evil. In the dazed recovery of speech, our people used such military jargon as attack, retreat, surrender, and disarm to tell the tale of the war, a twisted linguistic rendition of the Stockholm syndrome –the victim in love with the language of the villain.

A fluent nation with rich oral literature stuttered. One of our poets, the late Tatafway Tumoe, advised that in times of war, go for love. But even the language of love later became infested with war words with extended meanings; words like attack now denote wooing, ambush meant outwitting a rival, and bullets meant gifts. Slowly, however, we freed the words from their violent etymologies. We poets were pivotal to the reversal of

meanings, this displacement of the jargon of war, and this retelling of our stories in words that reclaim dignity.

Two decades after the war, the retelling of our stories continues with a new generation of poets, different themes, styles, and languages. Yet, the motif of the retelling continues. The poets in this anthology crossed paths with Bridgette James on Facebook and forged a relationship that culminated in this book. They are primarily young poets investing in reclaiming the soul of our country, becoming ministers of the retelling, and being the witnesses of our pursuit of happiness as a nation.

Art challenges the nihilistic logic of war; from the nothingness created by the war, we were able to produce a body of literature that carved a pathway to the healing of a nation. Nearly all the poets of the Falui poetry society are now established poets whose poems are now a standard text in several schools and colleges.

This anthology is one of the many projects involving a member of the erstwhile Falui poetry group established during a dark era of our country's history yet holding a torch to future generations of poets. I recommend this book to anyone eager to listen to the emerging voices in Sierra Leonean poetry as they leave their sonic footprint on social media, for savvy media editors like Bridgette James to follow like Ulysses followed the stars to seek, to find, and never to yield.

### *About the writer*

Mr Oumar Farouk Sesay is a renowned Sierra Leonean writer whose career spans 20 years. His books have been used in the

West African Examination Council syllabus. He has been published in many anthologies of Sierra Leonean poets; *Lice in the Lion's Mane*, ***Songs That Pour the Heart***, ***Kalashnikov in the Sun*** and ***AFRIKA IM GEDICHT***.

He has also written short stories; *The Price*, published by Sierra Leone writers Series and ***CLOSURE*** published by Sierra Arts publishers. His first volume of poems, ***Salute to the Remains of a Peasant*** was published in 2007 in America, followed by three more collections of poems; ***The Edge of a Cry***, ***Broken Metaphor*** and ***Before the Twisted Rib***.

Mr Farouk Sesay's novel ***Landscape of Memories*** was first published in 2015 and republished in 2018 by Sierra Leone Writer's Series.

# Epigraph

“I have forever been a seashell, an introverted poet  
harbouring society’s indecipherable noises in a cavity of  
creativity and reprocessing them as what might be perceived  
as insightful sounds heard by rare seashell-lovers who listen  
intently”

*Bridgette James*

## Poems by Bridgette James

Bridgette O. James, the author of ***Sierra Leone in The Diaspora*** (Kindle Direct Publishing, 2021) was a Metropolitan Police Special Constable. She often writes about her lived experiences in Sierra Leone. Her poem *African Mimosa* was in the longlist for the 2022 Aurora National Prize for Writing. Two poems will be featured in the print edition of ***Dreich*** Magazine, Scotland; her work has also appeared in the *Fib Review*, USA, ***Gutter Magazine***, Scotland and *Wildfire Words*, UK. Her next book is to be published by LR Price, UK. She lives in England.

### 1. What the seashell said to me

As far back as age eight was when I would crawl under a chair for privacy press a seashell close to my ear eagerly listening to its resonance unperturbed by the busyness around me, my mum's endless chores my sisters' chattering. Roadside noise from diesel engines were faded out as I became entranced by mollusc magic. Interpreting the rushing sound as seashell speech – secrets from the shell's past life - it sneaked covertly into my home when frivolously snatched up by my younger self from its cosy home the shores of Lumley Beach during a seaside trip. I would recreate scenarios when it might be telling off the cheeky sand for filling up its hollow core; how it might be berating the ferocious sea for splashing it with water. Cursing at strolling beach goers who trod on it nonchalantly; showering the unpredictable tide with abuse as it came in and dislodged it. Ranting when the cold December breeze of Harmattan meant it had to burrow deeper. The humming noise might be it crying out when cruelly hit by a hard rock or yelling *watch out* as it dodged bigger sea creatures. I have forever been a seashell, an introverted poet harbouring society's indecipherable noises in a cavity of creativity and reprocessing them as what might be perceived as insightful sounds, heard by rare seashell-lovers who listen intently.

## **2. Stand back and see Sierra Leone**

Stand back and take in our landscape  
Rolling from the rural north rippling Rokel  
baths Kabala's mountains in oceans of national pride  
Cascading into southern Pujehun's Mano River  
where boundaries greet our neighbours with our friendly smile  
In the east the inquisitive Moa River outstretches tributaries  
Into rambling seas of rich diversity in Koidu, Kailahun, Pendembu  
Westerly wisdom encapsulates Freetown where Goderich whispers  
To Banana Island salacious secrets of how Sierra Leone  
Has stood the test of time, from slavery to independence  
Our centrepiece is the Sewa River stirring the current of patriotism  
referencing the history of the defiant Madam Yoko- our women  
embodied

Stand back and hear our people  
Temne tongue twisters conceal wisdom of unspoken words  
Passed down by generations unmasked in stunning ornamental  
masks  
Mendes dishes brewed in a concoction of mouth-watering potions  
Served with a slice of spice our sense of humour tickles  
visitors in the beating of our Limba drums of farmers, hunters  
indigenous Sierra Leone the fabric of an unconquered nation  
shipped off as slaves indomitable- re-emerging as Creoles  
Our lawyers, doctors, writers, a haberdashery of traditions  
In Maroon churches, Oku mosques, Black Loyalists  
Fula intertwined in our commerce bought and mis- sold  
But elegance and beauty glows in our skin: dignified.

Stand back and see diversity  
Madingo clans knotted in kinship of strong familial ties  
In the intricate patterns of defining features: statuesque  
Kono is our emblem of wealth tattooed into our black diamonds  
the moral of togetherness, cohesion the gems of unity after the  
civil war  
Loko, Kissy, Vai, Kru smaller but fierce and thriving in  
intermarriages



Families blended in tribes of rich ancestral descent from Malian Kingdoms

Kuranko, Susu, Yalunka fingers on holes in our calabash preserving the mixture of flavours intact in the fragile vessel of ethnic diversity

woven into our straw baskets an eclectic fusion, vibrant, resourceful people

intriguing tales of perils overcome concealed by regal figures clad in \*ronkos, \*garas, \*kabbaslots.

Stand back and revere Sierra Leone.

### 3. My Country went to war over nothing

*No winner here* Mercutio yells, peacekeeping  
citizen-carcasses laid where a free city once stood  
Another dispute same story: storm in a teacup:  
Capulet's tantrum erupts over Montague's chiefdom

Off with their chief's head chanted Juliet stroking her fire  
*burn baby burn up an inferno* stirs partisan Tybalt  
gunpowder imported from Europe: their chief shall burn  
Mercutio forewarns, peacekeeping: *No winner here*

An acrimonious chief belching up expletives in intestinal gunk  
festering with the stench of fermented palm wine  
*Off with her head, insurrectionist*; effeminately mutters lady  
Montague.  
Tribesmen mimed spoiling for a fight: *off with her head*

Civil War engraved in bold by global internet scribes  
Juliet's day of reckoning. A huffing puffing chief bellows:  
*blow her head off* slithering snake  
venomous northern viper contaminating our eastern soil.

*Burn the chief shall burn* quipped Juliet fanning firewood flames  
Two households' long-running tribal feud. Chief Lear engulfed  
in fury

Tyson Fury. Balloons in hot Saharan air expelled in royal fart-  
toxic methane engulfs a tragic Juliet history repeated

*No winner here* Mercutio yells, falling on a sword  
citizen-carcasses laid where a free city once stood  
Capulets and Montagues disturb the quiet in our streets  
By waging war in another African state

#### **4. A puppy at the water well**

Tossed  
copper coin  
glistening underneath  
clear tropical rainwater.  
She pants, thirsty leans over  
prone- to lick water-puppy like  
savouring the metallic taste of stagnant water  
unadulterated by chlorine a flavour of rustic Africa  
a continent flowing with streams where children die of dehydration  
the human who threw that coin in must have forgotten to wish all  
children well.

#### **5. Migrated Trauma**

She landed  
with her screams  
from the forest  
where she was cut

Stuffed  
in a suitcase: broken dreams  
buried in her history:  
her miserable childhood

Skeletons in her closet  
demon skeletons  
leaping out from unzipped trousers  
when she is touched

Reminiscent of recurrent pain  
from the night in the bush  
when she was cut  
transporting airborne trauma

in undocumented particles that settled  
like dust on her pristine Western attire  
that cover up her secret  
of the night she was cut

Perpetual nightmares  
of severed vaginas  
migrating trauma in memories  
of bloodcurdling screams, the night she was cut.

## 6. Alice's seventh Heaven

In my daydream I was transported  
like Alice by my radiating African headdress  
through society's barriers  
into the photosphere  
yanked magically by my afro hair into the  
transition region- outer space- a safe place  
where an evolved featherlight version of myself floats  
a humanoid equivalent: equal to all celestial bodies  
molecular objects of brown dirt  
layers of skin dissolve in sweltering heat  
ethnicity blurred by Linnaeus's myopia  
we are all identical planets circumventing earth's dust  
in the darkened orbit of a blacked-out sun.

## 7. Lawlessness, a partisan acrostic

Lawlessness: The S is a  
Slithery snake symbol sneaking cunningly into media houses  
Siting on sofas besides democracy  
Silently policing journalists' broadcasts  
Saving evidence for when Idi Amin's LAW  
Stretches out its long arm to throttle free speech

Lawlessness: The L is  
Lifted to the stratosphere by presidential guards  
Less freedom equates to all freedoms  
Local regional variance in South-eastern dialects  
Lapse into an 'r' to produce a rawness  
Lingering in the raw pain of law's barbarism

Lawlessness: The P is  
Phonetically emphasised by a political stress on LAW  
Pronounced with lips rounded  
Parted: then spread wide- a lady consenting  
Polished off with the soft syllabic 's'  
Phonetic symbol in Passions' throes' exhausted sleep.

Lawlessness: This P is  
Precariously perched on a windowsill: a 'peeping Tom'  
Poised for an eyeful of the un-brassiere-d opposition's bust  
Printed in bold in the state's dictionary  
Prohibiting citizen's fundamental rights to sneeze  
Pick noses, belch, fart, or protest.

## **8. Dorylus Colonies**

Piercing stings from their mandibles  
Were often what made me jolt awake  
midnight predators in militant colonies  
covering every inch of the linoleum  
in my bedroom floor; orderly lines.  
Safari ants slipping out surreptitiously  
from underneath skirting boards driver ants  
invincible armies of ants half-visible  
in candlelight instilling a life-long phobia  
of phantom bites from imaginary insects  
all types of ants drive me up the wall still  
petrifying: the sight of six-legged creatures.

## **9. Creole women are minnows and herring**

Winking at mum the fishmonger cautioned how Minnows must not be underestimated; miniscule but hazardous tiny lethal bones become lodged in your throat de-bone carefully like herring. Herring hides in fishy flesh minute bones, the strength of which match bulky Barracudas you find in presidential dishes. Minnows and herring are creole women irrespective if pickled, roasted, dried, smoked a poor mix in intertribal marriage; hazardous when unleashed in sauces; their stoic sense of false superiority's tiny bones are lethal to a relationship's longevity.



## 10. Freetown, an oxymoron

Freetown, your name is an oxymoron  
songs sung in childhood in Hill Station  
lyrics about a faraway land of the Queen  
a sovereignty I had never met while President  
Siaka Stevens' photo loomed on mum's closet

Freetown your name is an oxymoron  
paradoxically named after liberated slaves  
while my parents toiled to afford to feed us  
slaves to an acutely unwell economy teetering  
on the brink of collapse in the 1980s when milk  
from the Fula shop was a luxury

the Fula shop where I saw an angelic, brown-eyed girl  
stooping next to a rubbish bin foraging for toys in brown gravel  
while I skipped from my old colonial house to buy bread and milk  
a Creole luxury that drained all the coins in my mother's piggy  
bank. I will not have any change for Sunday's collection  
whatever will my dad a lay preacher, tell the Reverend?

Freetown, your name is an oxymoron  
while I walked all those miles to Wilberforce  
to catch a bus to MGHS that was never on time  
my best Clackson shoes from Boots worn out  
long before I arrived sweaty for assembly.

Freetown for the gentries that drove passed us  
in four by fours, ministers' daughters that  
bragged of foreign holidays to England  
lunch boxes full of food I only ate at Christmas  
or New Year's Day \*Awujoh; my dad's words like tinnitus ringing  
in my ears: *study hard. One day, you will go to England.*

Freetown, an oxymoron  
your name ringing as sirens in my ears, which drove us  
under our beds in fear APC's army hit song *countless coups*.  
Sierra Leone making headlines again.

Freetown an oxymoron  
your name was never given to define you  
a land where few find freedom while most are chained  
in poverty, enslaved in the jungle of corruption.

## **11. The weaker sex**

A compromised identity  
often a nonentity in African cultures  
Eve created or evolved no question  
was without hesitation the first female  
to bow to a male.  
That gesture defined us a species  
that takes second place  
relegated to Africa's picturesque background  
where the image of equality is blurred  
by traditions' ugly stains,  
customs, that compound and discolour  
a woman's pigmented existence.  
The suffragettes' strife could not recompense  
the harm we suffered for generations.  
History shows civilizations have not civilized  
the minds of men who subject women  
to violence  
to rape  
to abuse.  
Gender is the obtuse  
barrier that prevents our escape.  
Femininity eclipses the sun that should radiate  
through an enlightened era. In Africa  
virginity is still bought with a dowry  
teenage girls forced into marriage  
commodities traded to acquire parental wealth.  
Inequality is encroaching with stealth  
on the rights of women's Human Rights.  
Rosa Parks' activism: women still lag behind  
concealed by a dark blind of hateful superiority  
Inferiority synonymous with our sex.  
May the strength of Serena Williams  
sustain us on the arms of Zulu women  
into diversity's new age  
in which African women take centre stage.

## 12. Magainda's metamorphosis

Holding her hand as she laid on her death bed  
my grandmother, Magainda.  
Her sunken eyes still glowed as she drifted away floating  
away free of a life that had been tough.

Born a girl she had carried her societal load  
Magainda's future had been foretold  
the property rights to her own body owned by others  
reading like chapters of a Sierra Leonean girl's story.

Her existence shaped by deep seated patriarchal traditions  
when the fortune teller foretold a girl would be born  
proud parents had planned her life to the smallest detail  
she would be circumcised, married off, impregnated.

Her high hopes for a high education slaughtered  
like a \*Pray day goat. Society's only expectation  
was that she procreated the seed sown in her mother's  
womb germinated in hers that bore her daughter, my  
mother.

Her baby's cradle had been Magainda's tomb  
her innocence died a gruesome death as she laboured.  
Magainda had worn motherhood with sullen pride  
bravely merging with other mothers in her tribe  
a statistic in Sierra Leone from infancy to her grave.

### **13. Land that we love**

Our resilience  
shone through in the Hut Tax War  
defeating oppression  
our valiance  
came out conquering our conqueror  
resistance  
is the current streaming in our Rivers  
our tribes  
enchanted by ancestral mystical powers  
our courage  
came through a deadly civil war  
our stamina  
steered peace back onshore  
diverse tribes  
one purpose  
one plan  
that inscribes our love  
all over our song  
we compose  
as brothers.  
diverse cultures  
one clan  
watched over from above  
by our founding fathers.  
one passion  
united in our determination to strengthen,  
rebuild our nation  
kinsmen  
who are better understood  
talking Together.  
walking beside each other  
shoulder to shoulder  
as Sierra Leone once stood  
solid, steadfast, and strong in 1961  
heads held high with Milton Margai  
when our independence was born

**14. Lumley Beach sunset**

Huge saucers  
her eyes  
mirroring the rainbow skies  
she watched the African sun  
daylight bidding farewell  
as evening had begun  
descending in majestic red  
the sun kissed the seabed softly  
mixing and matching with water  
gently scattering translucent amber rays  
across the sea; spilling out into the waves  
spiralling out in a colourful haze  
where the beach greeted Freetown's swimmers.  
Day dreamers staring into its opulence  
cannot make sense of how such beauty  
in Sierra Leone is masked by the ugliness of poverty  
we own what others want but lack what others own.

## 15. Our Palm Tree

Some are swaying  
from your branches  
trying to pluck your fruit  
    some have staked life's chances  
by harnessing up your stem  
some have chased your palm leaves  
    selfishly in hot pursuit  
some gleefully tapped your wine  
mostly elected thieves  
    who have only come to nick your gem  
the rest hungrily queued in poverty's breadline  
others are crouching at your base miserably  
    collecting inequality's falling fruits  
hitting them as hardship's coconut  
chopped up selfishly by others  
    scrambling ahead in Sierra Leone's unfair race  
refereed by corruption, the old chestnut-  
that has been sapping up your richness.

## **16. The evolution of Mice in African Politics**

Resting on our oars until  
rodents became men nibbling on excrement  
coprophagy became an Ebola epidemic

Condescending as paws cast votes  
ballot boxes infested with mice droppings  
corruption a COVID epidemic

Ignorantly fed minerals to omnivores  
thinking they exclusively ate rancid cheese  
brainwashed we are trapped in a mouse trap



**17. Her soul will not rest in peace**

Freetown's vultures' beaks gaping wide  
salivating over corpses-tender meat  
in the sewage-altar a child: dead  
prematurely. Eight months after  
a tumultuous birth  
yanked into MUDDY water  
soiled by unrepentant lawlessness.  
Sucked into flood water  
the state's sacrificial lamb  
from parasites festering like flies on profits  
from rotten land- structures upheld by greed.  
Erected in MUD that crushed a girl  
a girl entombed in MUD- eight months of life  
entwined in rigors of poverty  
buried in inadequacy's gaping hole:  
a waterway pumping blood under rocks  
stoic with economic malaise habiting  
Freetown's vultures: beaks gawking  
salivating over corpses- a landslide  
win of Mudslide victims.

## 18. A Pakoh\*

Plaited cornrows of neat head-contouring braids  
couriered me along a tumultuous childhood

*Come I plait your hair school tomorrow*  
visions of caterpillars woven into my scalp

exposing an occipital defect -a pakoh\*  
that preceded me into the classroom

high-pitched squeals of *her pakoh\**  
girl-bullies revelling at its revelation

scalp: braid-flattened by caterpillar plaits  
an extension of a conspicuous furry bun

the urge to pull out hair follicles  
trichotillomania: braids itching

pruritus- infestation of driver ants  
itchy strands of hair colonising my head.

## **19. Flip Flops on Sani Abacha Street**

Submerged  
in sweltering tarmac  
soles entrenched in debris-Freetown's garbage  
soaked in sweat in the midday scorching sun  
straps pulling unwilling heavy feet reluctantly along  
side-stepping potholes  
treading cautiously - the unpaved footpath  
treacherous sewage lurking in mucky gutter water  
flowing untaxed in the filthy underbelly of office buildings  
flirts with her flip flop: flip flop  
embedded in their sound a tale of how Kissy Street  
renamed Abacha Street  
christened in the aftermath of war  
still characterizes a city  
entombed in potholes of economic malaise  
dragging along postcolonial litter-eternally  
in the stench of corruption's painful bunions

*Poems by Kayode Adesimi Robbin-Coker*

Dr Kayode Adesimi Robbin-Coker is a graduate from Balliol College, Oxford, St John's College, Cambridge and Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. He now lives in England.

## 20. No through road for Poets

You have reached your destination –  
the shrine and dwelling place of  
Oya, the future wife of Obatala,  
as yet a child, radiant in child-light.  
Mind the gap as you approach.  
It is good that you bend your knee to her:  
touch once only, the brim of her calabash  
and wait for the miracles to enter your muse.  
As you leave, leave something behind  
because the takers of this world will  
never get given enough in one lifetime  
and another lifetime is not yet guaranteed.

The train now approaching does not stop here  
but you have everything you need to find your way  
back home, cocooned in the language you cried in.

## 21. An African abroad

(To the memory of Pius Adesanmi—Teacher, Writer,  
Patriot, Friend:

*“So brief [his] presence—  
Match-flare in wind’s breath -  
so brief, with mirrors around me.”*

- Christopher Okigbo, **Heavensgate**)

Wood powder, sand, a hen with five toes,  
five chameleons, five hundred chains ...

for us, exiled,  
waiting is a torturing  
isolated note, drumbeat repeating itself  
so many times, in a minute that  
the mind screams out for a context.

Such sadness, too – sadness which lurks  
irresolutely, like a blind vulture on the  
outer edge of an unfenced memory.  
This twilight screen at least is mercy: it fronts  
a greying motif of cryptic embellishments,  
tribal marks on my panic-stricken conscience.

There is something to fight for here, mind.  
And we are better prepared for it now. Some will be  
sent to flatter the old messiahs, persuade  
them, perhaps, to crouch for group portraits.  
I am to address the students.  
Soyinka is, these days, a friend of my unsettled  
affections: he is to guide me through the  
First lacklustre phases –

fifteen days in the world  
fifteen days in heaven.

(The secret, it appears, is to listen in sleep)

We are all invited to a love feast  
down by the riverside, 16.30 BMT. I slip  
into a vacant illusion, hoping to stay out  
of truth's way till nightfall. But Mokewure,  
Priest of goats knew exactly where to find me.  
*You should be gone, he chided. It is not right  
that destinies like yours and a star-crossed moon's  
should be sighing in tandem here, whilst across  
those waters, in a medley of strange terrors  
they are even now doing your people in.*

*Concede*, a guilty heart suggests.

Instead, I try my safety dance –

Sango did not hang himself.

Reality here is porous, like the clay of life.

Consciousness sleeps through it.

What one needs is not truth but an alibi.

My dreams have gone down with the measles  
tell-tale specks of black anguish which  
illustrate the futility of regret.

All I can do is brace myself for a crude  
awakening and the onset of even darker blues.

## *Poems by Ibrahim A. Kamara*

Ibrahim Abass Kamara was born in Freetown. He has completed his WASSCE (West African Senior School Certificate Examination). He lives in Sierra Leone.



## **22. I remember**

I remember the morning madness of yesterday  
filled with dreams to rise through chores  
for everyone. A home though, falls short of peace  
worth enough to keep for good.

I remember the days demands  
from every home under the light  
a longing to make ends meet.

Each with their trade  
each returning with their gain.

I remember the nights with no light  
except the moon to put a smile on one's face.

The children sitting around listening to elders  
or just hooping around till each was summoned to bed.

I remember the rain pouring on our old roof at night  
and mother adjusting her stuff, asking me to lay on the other end  
where it was less cold.  
Sometimes to wake up feeling sick  
an embrace of love to regain my breath.

I remember the lamp filled with oil-beaming-through the night  
as I kept close to it, reading on my own.  
Dancing with the flames of might  
a sight that made mum smile:  
the norm back then that nurtured my light.

### **23. Close by the stream**

We live close by the stream  
surrounded by trees of life.  
When it pours, our home  
barely stood the storm.  
The earth: left muddy and cold  
our roof leaked here and there  
the threat of fever high as the  
chances of dying.

We live close by the stream  
that makes it easier to  
fill our buckets.  
More so when it ceases to pour  
ss water still ran all the way from  
the hills, through the trees.  
The rain returns to refill the streams-  
we witness a rebirth.

We live close by the stream  
the sound of running water a  
song to our ears.  
In the dry season snakes are visitors  
who end up being knocked down by men,  
while we sit and stare from a distance.

We live close by the stream  
covered by the forest just a mile  
from our home. With fruits  
we sometimes reach out to pluck  
from trees against our parents' wishes.  
Who rather let us be with host of games  
to keep us safe.

We live close by the stream.  
The rising sun from the east  
and cockerels, summon us

at the dawn of the day  
and the call to pray.  
The birds chirping nearby a  
delight to see.

## **24. The war**

It came  
at the height of our despair  
raged on till every home got a taste of death.  
It was hell and seemed not to end. Even the land robbed  
of its peace. We lost on every front. Forgot we were one,  
from a land of gold to sowing seeds of greed.  
War: brought us to our knees

## **25.Spare us the tears**

Don't let us die shamefully  
Striving to return again to

our dreams. mocked at will  
our hearts beating out of tune

adding salt to our wounds.  
Poisoning our patriotism

inside the walls of reasons  
where truth must stand.

Freedom felt  
is just word on paper.

A blow to our democracy  
a step back from the path of life.

How broken to feel as if  
our gods are choosing not to see...

Spare us the tears  
to swim out of despair.

## *Poems by Osman Emmanuel Kargbo*

Osman Emanuel Kargbo is a graduate from Milton Margai Technical University and presently teaches English at a school in Sierra Leone.

### **26. Papa's Kitchen**

All seasons gone,  
near and afar  
the bam of pestle  
in assonance with mortar  
resonating in Papa's kitchen  
where there is  
never a serene twilight  
with clanging of utensils  
dancing with sumptuous recipes.

In papa's kitchen  
a sanctuary in which  
a craftsman plying his craft  
makes every ingredient come alive  
with the tiki-taka of wooden spoons  
seasoning seasons through the seasoning.  
Taste that savours my soul.

Like the affluents, Papa's kitchen  
is my restaurant  
where the best always comes alive  
meeting the gluts  
even in my grey years to come  
I will desire the more.

There is no denial  
I have grown in bond  
with the familiar flavour  
from the corner of suavity  
where a man could  
eat a mountain of foo-foo  
feeling like a possessed being  
on an errand of satisfying the belly-bag  
always in need of more.

The aroma is in harmony

wrestling with ingredients in earthenware  
like a 'crucified saint'  
journeying the abyss of hungriness  
to meet a bountiful harvest  
when mornings' chameleon into nights.

My soul has grown in bond  
sating the craving for food  
that nourishes my soul beyond  
recipe after recipe.  
I have eaten the whole world's meal  
in the nook of sumptuous creativeness  
enveloping a rainbow of aromas.

## **27.Chained Freedom**



From the cradle of affluence  
Rises empires that stood time  
History sewn in shades of melanin  
Enveloping a nation of  
great conquerors  
With its twilight in the morning.

I was born in greatness  
Raised in history intertwined  
with great kings and conquerors  
In the confluence of bountiful  
Deep in the Nile and Euphrates  
The Congo tributaries and of the great Niger.

I was here  
Before Mungo Park came.  
I saw it all  
History written in blood  
In struggles of dominance  
When Mansa came  
Lumumba vexed the plunderers  
Garvey amplified Africanism  
Dr King saw the vision of victory.

Alkebulan discarded  
Our unity divided  
In shades of flawed colonialism  
Religion announced  
Neo-colonialism at the helm  
Africa dancing to the drums  
Colonists beating the drums of influence  
In rhythm to sit-tight African elites.

Black is every colour

Africa is home to every life  
Our sphere rich in history  
Its waters filled with heroes' cries  
Who for hundreds of years  
Voyaged across the Mediterranean  
To light the dreams of plunderers.

My colour speaks my identity  
I am black and proud  
Haven walked tall in pace  
From Kemet to Songhai  
and Timbuktu and Sudan  
Standing time eternal  
I am Africa.

## **28. Life at a glance**

Life's a precious gift; value it  
like a race; run it  
life is a bit of everything: bittersweet  
served hot or cold  
embrace it whether young or old.

Life is beautiful; live it  
like a treasure hunt; pursue it  
turns and curves  
highs and lows  
enjoy all- borrowed or owned.

Life's an adventure; explore it  
like the constant  
air; breathe it  
served ice-cold; rough or smooth  
ins and out; here and there  
enjoy it - joy or fear.

Life's a dream; realize it  
like the dreams you dreams  
dare and do; truth and lies  
believe in opportunities.

Life's opportunity- seize it  
like the seasons long and thorough  
live free whether sinner or saint  
life itself is not sugar sweet  
but a bit of every taste; savour it  
enjoy life.

## **29. Taking Chances**

Start today -  
there's no better time than now  
persevere to the lane of success  
climb to the apex of the ladder  
in tireless combat with an enterprising world-  
a chance, is all you need.

Plan today -  
tomorrow never comes  
yesterday was the only easy day.  
The instinct to survive is evident  
to them that take up the mantle  
grab your chances.

Dream today -  
live for today; envision tomorrow  
life's no *bed of roses*  
but with hard work 'bread' is assured.  
No food for the lazy- motivate yourself-  
grab your chances.

Welcome each day -  
though the struggle is tough  
the routes unknown;  
find it in you to struggle for something  
aim beyond the sky  
embrace your chances.

Conquer each day -  
tomorrow will be fine  
make no excuse for incompetence  
leave no space for mediocrity

never retreating in doubt  
Conquering hurdles to reach success.  
Greet your chances.

Endure today –

*Where there is life;* hope is evident  
with honesty keep your tenets  
in readiness to meet with destiny.  
Appreciate chances; embrace goodness.

### 30. Scarred heart

Like fluids in the vein  
running down the stream of my arteries  
Carrying along the pains of believing again  
Unrhythmical palpitations: my weakened heart  
played 'keepie-uppies' so well.

the unfavourable storms in my summer  
crisscrossed my feelings beyond repair  
adding salt to my wounded heart.

Cupid's arrow shot in the right direction-  
an apron: tailored by your stone-cold fingers-  
stabbed my feeble heart.

I felt like the world was ending  
my heart, drenched in fear  
I lost the coordinates to return home  
when you left me with an emaciated heart.

Scars of pain  
unseen like love itself  
I felt a thousand blows from stabs  
when all I had done was run into your open hands  
you, stabbed love's heart.

When you realized you were all I ever had  
you danced with my emotions  
I, was lost like the shoes you wore, when  
dancing the \*Zaminaminas and the \*Makossas.

### **31. Beauty personified: Mama Salone**

Once I met a woman; a lonely soul  
gloriously adorned; love at first sight  
my very last like the widow's mite.  
I could wrestle the jealous moon in a fight.  
I have given myself to this woman.

Her rich history tells it all  
like the Nile, her aura flows endlessly  
cloaked in beauty serene  
her hair of lion-sculptured mountains  
her feet of beautiful beaches  
I think I love this woman.

A vintage old soul  
crowned in past glory  
she can rival the sun for a shine.  
Blessed with beautiful children  
her enviable unity is the mat she lays on.  
I've given myself to this woman.

A steel-hardened heart  
had left her weary; older than her years;  
she had seen the unspeakable  
her children fought each other  
for a decade and more  
they pillaged her uniformed skin  
leaving a thousand broken smiles.  
I wept with this woman.

She gave all she had  
enough to fill and spare  
all she got in return was a divided home  
draining away the nutrients that sweeten the sauce  
an unpatriotic leadership at the helm.  
I pitied this beautiful soul.

This woman  
a distraught emerald widow  
crying day after day for unity  
wailing for a united generation  
that will embrace a glorious dawn  
unseat despoilers of public confines  
share the national cake with all.

Even with a broken image  
she possesses abundant love  
wrinkles tell of her glorious age  
vibrant colour illuminates her posture.  
I love this defiant soul.

As a parting gift she said  
*I will be strong for you.*  
I doubted her crooked smile  
the mischievous look in her eyes

All she wanted was a peaceful land to call home.  
A home to rest till the years unfold  
Against the unfriendliness of visiting seasons  
enveloped by her fourteen children  
Through thick and thin  
united as one.  
I love this woman.



## *Poems by Ibrahim Sorie Mansaray*

Ibrahim Sorie Kamara is a linguistics graduate from Fourah Bay College; he is currently studying for his Law exams. He lives with his family in Sierra Leone.

### **32. Ensnaring**

Then the rain came  
Battling the ground for supremacy  
To win over infinite dust  
Ensnaring our days  
Secretly exhausting our nights  
Once again  
Against the odds of leaking roofs  
Homeless souls, with bittersweet feelings  
I pause in resignation  
To feel the warmth of the rain  
As it drowns us into tomorrow.

### **33. It Shines Again**

Above the Himalayas a shadow sings  
of heavenly beings mewling above  
a thousand leagues beneath the seas  
Melancholy of drums dragging bones to sing.

Shaping succulent swings seeking-  
by these rivers, slaves were known to cry  
while their tears travelled the world  
reaching lands where freedom is waiting  
On the other side of the isles of oppression.

The fountain of hope shatters countless times  
brave men and women almost at the helm  
walking unknown roads with only hope  
becoming ghosts; becoming hosts; becoming-  
preparing the lands for the freedom coming  
and generations of laughter under the sun  
as it shines again.

## *Poems by Ibrahim Khalil Sesay*

Ibrahim Khalil Sesay studied History and Sociology at Fourah Bay College and graduated in 2021 with a Division One. He currently lives in Sierra Leone.

### **34. TELL**

Tell Joe A.D Alie that Sierra Leone since independence is a hunting ground  
Where the mouse runs to the lion's den to seek refuge—the comedy of errors.  
The looters of then and now assume they have undergone the Pauline conversion.  
Yet, they are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow—a totem of comic relief.

Tell Karamoh Kabba that poverty amidst gold and diamonds is the tragedy of our lives  
Mama Salone: the richest yet, her children are among the poorest—the paradox of her life.  
Hunger and starvation invade our impoverished homes like a lion on a killing spree.  
Struggle for existence and survival of the fittest—a day-to-day emblem.

Tell Syl Cheney-Coker that myopia is becoming an incurable disease.  
The skeleton of stillborn promises has dried up in the catacombs.  
We screamed and wept yet, there is still deafening silence  
They are the saviours of the people yet; they lack the foresight of a Jewish prophet.

Tell Gbanabom Hallowell that the lust of Cain is becoming their Achilles' heel.  
In their quest for affluence and influence they have become blood-sucking creatures.  
The politicians and their cohorts are like bunch of crabs in the bucket.  
Political witch hunts and propaganda—their national creed.

Tell Lucilda Hunter that Joy came in the morning but left when  
the evening came,  
So, we have become accustomed to the pleasure pain, hardship,  
and misery.  
Tell it to her that the road to freedom is full of thorns, scorpions,  
and serpents  
And the experience of treading on that path is bittersweet.

### 35. Alkebulan: mother of mankind

Her name in her prime was Alkebulan -mother of mankind: A  
mother of 54 children

from her, life, and human civilization pre-existed.

She was metaphorically, a garden of Eden'—*Land of Heart's  
Desire*

In her belly, the earth's hidden treasures were kept and  
preserved.

Once upon a time, she was a symbol of strength and pride  
Enrobed with amazing greatness, glorious like *Morning yet on  
Creation Day*

Her physical and cultural make-up were embodiments of  
wondrous beauty

The kingdoms of men rose and fell, conquerors carved  
New fiefdoms and parts of her were named and renamed as  
humans squabbled

Coexisting in her bounty.

Then a new visitor came quietly from afar with his greed for her  
riches,

Disguising himself as *A Man of the People*

a friendly enemy: pharisee of her days; whited sepulchre

a dreaded conqueror who renamed her Africa

and imposed a strange system of ruling on her called: *divide and  
rule*.

Her hospitality soon turned out to be her unforeseen catastrophe  
For she was robbed of her name, culture, language, and even her  
mind.

Day turned into night; she became *No Longer at Ease* with herself  
as she was left to suffer the sling and *Arrow of God*.

The *mother of mankind* soon became devoid of the *Joys of  
Motherhood*

as her 54 children became disorderly disordered

Like it was the time of *The Second Coming*.

She became confined like a *Caged Bird*

who dared to fly though void of wings and feet.

Her sorrow and grief turned to *An Unexpected Joy at Dawn* when the caged door was opened, and she could escape she eventually saw the way to her *Long Walk of Freedom*. But was made to *Look Back in Anger* and frustration as she found herself standing on skeletons of dead dreams. The becoming was becoming unbecoming for her Yet she survived, called by many names, and nurtured the world.



## *Poems by Chernor Abubakarr Jalloh*

Chernor Abubakarr Jalloh holds a bachelor's degree in Public Health. He's from Kambia District, northern Sierra Leone.

### **36. How do we wake up this generation?**

Woke up from this unsettling dream  
a world slowly drifting into chaos.  
The scale of right and wrong becoming blurry.  
Morals and morality drifting into the void.  
A generation seemingly trapped in a deep unsettling dream.

How do we wake up this generation  
from the Abyss threatening to engulf our very existence?  
Societies slowly losing their stand-  
the bonds holding us as societies- falling apart.  
Morals abandoned for the illusion of choice  
the lines of black and white becoming obscure.  
What is happening to our societal values?  
We pretend to be woke but have lost our identity  
societies no more unified in humanity.  
Differences in beliefs and opinions breeding calamity.  
Wars and poverty ravaging our societies  
yet we pretend as if nothing is happening.

How do we wake up this generation?  
Families riddled with internal strife  
parents and children fighting vigorously  
siblings in constant disagreement and killing one another.  
Blood no longer thicker than water.  
An institution of peace it was  
yet now an institution of jealousy, hatred, and war.  
A noble institution lost its peace:  
how did we get here?

How do we wake up this generation?  
Our youths trapped in a matrix of their own  
Lost their sense of identity for validation  
morality and spirituality reserved for the elderly  
shouting freedom and choice but forgetting about  
responsibility.  
Pursuing societal acceptance and Facebook likes

yet neglect the pursuit of their dreams.

What is wrong with this generation?

How did we sink so deep into this unsettling dream?

A dream so realistic yet threatening the very existence of society.

How do we wake up this generation to reality?

## *Poems by Samuella Conteh*

Samuella Conteh is an award-winning Poet from Sierra Leone and author of her own anthologies: ***The Unsung Song*** (published by Sierra Leone Writers' Series, 2020) and ***Love Colours*** (published by Poetry Planet Publishing House; 2020).

**37. Peeping through the cracks**

Peeping through the cracks on the wall  
I saw the world moving on – without me  
The sun was still shining in spite of my gloom

The mountains stood still, while I ran on the spot  
Life was still life no matter what's anyone's taste  
I wondered how the world could leave me behind  
While I rocked my cares like a mother her baby

Bathing my worry-stained face with unshed tears  
Only to mask my lashes with a falsehood of joy  
A self-slap awakened me to life's realities  
The windows of my heart, I flung wide open  
What a rush of sweet perfume of flowers wild

On sunshine rays I dipped my troubled brows  
To this song in my heart  
I'll lift my heavy heels  
With my hands in the air, a praise to render

### **38. Women Like Us**

Women like us  
Who salt their dough with tears of anguish  
On gritted teeth, they're hauled into the furnace  
To chew the hardest crust through the years  
Their blistered tongues hold a sad tale or two

Women like us  
Who plant seeds of hope on parched fields  
And pray for respite in the droughts of March  
Toiling from sunrise to its setting in emptiness  
Yet harvest time find them rotting in lack

Woman like us  
Whose bare feet beat the path to the stream  
Yet, evening find them fanning dying embers  
Hoping tomorrow's light will lure fish to their nets  
On long necks, they eat aroma from another's kitchen

Women like us  
Like slaves, they squirm under the branding iron  
Which label them cursed for joys they cannot share  
Extracting their teeth of happiness to kill their mirth  
So they learn to flash tight-lipped smiles to the day

It's women like us who float on life's torrents  
Chew sawdust, yet pick their teeth like one who has had  
meat  
They bend over to bear the brunt of love and life  
Yet they shake off taunts to steady their crowns

## *Poems by Cecilia Thomas*

Celia Thomas is a final year student studying Mass Communications at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

### **39. Decisions**

State of dilemma  
Not knowing what to do  
With so many things in mind

Everybody gives their opinion  
Some even conclude  
And give judgement

Parents make decisions  
Abides because of love  
Even though it's against my wish

On the fence I stand  
Regretfully or not  
I make the decision



#### 40. Salone Market

Saturdays are domestically driven  
a non-working day for majority  
women hasten to the market  
to buy and prepare food for the family.

At the entrance of the market  
crowded and noisy  
like the bats at the cotton tree  
barely enough room for fresh air

Sellers wanting the attention of the customer  
battle: megaphones versus voices  
singing and dancing  
*a Drizilik frenzy the mamie e money for \*komot*

*\*Peppeh, \*yabas, salt*  
*\*Plasas, \*ogiri, fish*  
*You don buy? they shout*  
*Maggi for make you soup taste sweet*

Wheelbarrow pushers and load carriers  
racing at customers like brute  
thieves in sheep clothing  
with five fingers but only two usable  
sweaty and unpleasant body odour

Exhausted and tired  
you hurriedly find your way home  
empty your bag  
and hastily prepare a delicious meal

## *A Poem by Kemurl Fofanah*

Kemurl Fofanah is a Free Lance writer from Sierra Leone. He works as a Communications Associate. His poems were featured in ***We All Are Persons: Why Gender Discrimination?*** Published by Poets Unite Worldwide and ***Contemporary Firestone Poems*** by Sierra Leonean Writers Series

## **41. A Woman in Africa**

In the region of the west  
the lofty plains of Africa's Sahara  
a mother lays beautifully untangled  
like the other mothers of her continent  
greeting the Atlantic wide with her charms.  
Pedro and others called her Sierra Leone  
but I call her beautiful mama-  
just like the others in our mama Africa.

In her bosom, you will see this full-time:  
a swam of streams, blessed with fishes-  
all sizes; running like lightening  
acrobat-like. The finest gymnast  
you will see the Mina: a special kind of fish  
taunting you from shallow waters and plates.

You will see the beaches, emancipating nature  
gracing your every day with elegance.  
Pampering light skins, thick skins  
mesmerizing every colour with its different shades  
blessing you with this woman's beauty.

You will see the mountains, standing firmly  
waving as you ride the roads in her life.  
You will see the trees gently humbled  
bending to feed you sufficient oxygen  
Telling you to be quiet. Life will be exciting here.

Gracious roaming souls  
seeking after perfect destinations.  
You will see wildlife itself, in its roughness  
as you scale her uncut jungles.

Animals darting into your presence  
flipping about in delight.  
Birds chirping, snakes hissing  
heavy-sounding baboons, frogs bawling  
and the rest like choirs singing this song of  
appreciation  
welcoming you to this woman in Africa.

## *Poems by Abu Bakarr Kamara*

Abu Bakarr Kamara hails from Kambia District, Sierra Leone. He holds a bachelor's degree in Physics at Fourah Bay College.

## 42. Next time I go home

When next I go home  
I would love to see  
the women of my land come  
from their sweaty and tireless toil  
answering to the call of the *\*tabule* to put on  
their *docket* and *\*lappas* and *\*kabbaslots*  
and look like lanterns in glamorous glow.  
Either fast or slow; I would love to see them  
dance in delight with steps exact  
to the chanted rhythms of the *\*Gumbe*.

I would love to see the men  
the young and the old,  
not in jeans and tops or shirts  
but in *\*ronkos* and raffias; clapping  
and tapping their feet to hump and bump  
arm in arm and shoulder to shoulder  
in the joy of being alive  
whether in sorrow or happiness.

For the girls, I would love to  
watch them do the mambo  
with bells on their anklets  
shake their hips like how the leaves of trees  
sway to the gentle breeze.  
I would love to see them dance  
in the moon light with stars in sight  
like butterflies tangoing to petal bulbs.

If at all for the sake of modernity  
then I would love to see  
a choreography of *\*tekneh* and *\*tonga*  
for the pleasure of short-cutting  
to happiness or ecstasy.

And to buoy the spirits of our land in traditions  
I would love to see a slaughter of sacrifice  
offered in their names and hands raised  
in prayers for every ancestral soul  
to be appeased.

### **43. I refuse to remain silent**

I refuse to remain silent  
for the tears of a thousand eyes  
I see in the blurry eyes of a man  
sitting on the roadside  
In streets not paved in gold  
holding a begging bowl  
with wrinkled hands; pale face  
wrought with pain.

His grief gnaws the regions of my mind  
each time his eyes meet mine,  
even though, no words were spoken  
I feel as if our souls are entwined.

So, I refuse to remain silent  
because I feel his misery and pain  
coming back to claim  
those hearts of steel that never ever  
throb, to offer a shoulder on which to cry.

*God forbid.*  
I refuse to remain silent.  
His endless pain

I see growing like grain-  
how it feels to be homeless.

I refuse to remain silent  
with these puddles of tears eroding  
every joy of my soul; that I feel  
duty bound to write about such misery.



In fact, the more I think about  
the cold grips of poverty ruling  
his world with no hand stretching  
out to give a morsel of love  
the more I refuse to remain silent.

I refuse to remain silent  
because my token cannot build him a house.  
I refuse to remain silent  
because my hug cannot numb his pain.  
I refuse to remain silent  
because I cannot taste his bitterness

I refuse to remain silent  
because I cannot take away the hunger  
that sucks him dry  
with no roof over his head.

I refuse to remain silent  
because each time I reach home  
I feel so bad that he cannot go home too.  
If at all there is nothing else  
I can do, I would rather refuse  
to remain silent.

#### **44. There is more to be told**

There is more to be told  
than what has been told  
in memoirs and pieces of poetry left  
unread in libraries across the land.

There is more to be told  
than what has been told  
by the poet whose poetry  
was born where his heart  
sighed for his country's brokenness.

There is more to be told  
than what has been told  
about the child who lost a limb  
that made her a symbol of a catastrophe  
that scorched her land.  
How she became a collateral damage  
for a greater course she knows  
only by what she was told.

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There is more to be told  
than what the passing years  
brought to their doorstep:  
the fright it etched into the depths  
of souls; the scars its left in hearts  
and minds it has left haunted  
by its memories of how men were turned  
into killing machines to shatter a nation's pride  
and blow apart dreams.

There is more to be told  
than the stories we have heard.  
There is more to be told  
than what has been told.

\*\*\*

How the youth conditioned  
to fight for their right but returned  
broken and so mad that they hate  
the society that did this to them?

There is more to be told  
than what has been told  
How about the orphans created?  
Another generation  
that have learnt how to hate?

There is more to be told  
than what has been told.  
How about the man whose wife  
was raped before his eyes and  
left lying in her blood, dead?

Each time he hears about rape,  
his eyes would well up with tears?  
The shock and how he begged them to stop  
instead cut off his hands?

There is more to be told  
than what has been told.  
How about the little girl with  
imprints of sad memories of the day  
She laid beside her dead parents  
Who did not get a proper burial?

There is more to what we have read.  
What if her blood still boils with rage  
for the day when she will fight for revenge?  
There is certainly more to be told.  
More than what we have  
not even come to know.

When I think of the young boy  
who saw his father, a statesman being  
killed in cold blood; their home burnt down  
he, left to wander the streets anxiously

seeking shelter.

There is more to be told than  
than what has been told.

## *Poems by David Manley*

David Manley has worked for the United States Marines. He previously studied at The University of Newcastle, Australia and Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. He lives and works in Sierra Leone as a scientist.

**45. My love for her**

My love for her  
as big as the heart in her  
when she shows me times without number  
her love for me should be trumped by one other: my love for me

**46. I left my poem at home**

I left my poem at home  
took along a muse for a change  
    each mile apart a kiss to atone  
the reunion sparkling heat in close enclaves

**47. A haiku: I love apples, full stop**

My love of apples  
will one day kill me  
those apple bottoms

*Poem by Festus Gabriel Luseni*

Festus Gabriel Luseni is a graduate from Fourah Bay College and presently works as a Research Officer in the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) in Sierra Leone.

## 48. African Identity

I am African within me are my artifacts  
painted with the knowledge of a new name  
dark skin, brown skin, bright skin; shows my aestheticism:  
peopling different tribes and nationalities, the home of tourism.

Battling the odds of life. Named and shamed by strangers, but  
never shrouded from progressing, making headlines-  
the world knows my effect. I am always the talking point on the  
global stage.

Welcome to my continent where loyalty make sense, racism and  
tribalism made no sense.

People live in culture of decency, proud to call this our home

Welcome to my continent, where religion is a choice

I know my identity, I am African -  
bold as a lion

I am the voice of the people like the Messiah who redeems.

My hands: always open to strangers to rest in my vineyard;  
without me the world doesn't make sense.

Those days of mental slavery are over, a new Africa is on our  
shoulders; awakened to our enablement as we embrace our  
continent.

Like sounds of triumphant echoes: my cry. I am up and running  
neighbours who saw me were amazed; my story enticed them to  
stay.

They danced to the beat of culture- my beautiful culture.

Today I made history- free from the thought of negativity now  
progressing far beyond racism.

The lion of the tribe of Judah beckons me.



*A poem by Emmanuel Nyakeh Momoh*

Emmanuel Nyakeh Momoh is a part-time Lecturer at Njala University, Freetown Campus, Sierra Leone where he teaches English and Communication Skills.

## 49. Childhood

From the womb lingered minds of childhood  
Clothed with the spirit of resilience  
I couldn't give up.

Even when I heard the sounds of the bullet  
amidst dead bodies outside  
Just about time for Foday Sankoh  
and his men to take off.

At the place where Johnny Paul kissed the rifle.  
Nine months in one small room  
then I started kicking.

I couldn't speak  
but heard when the rebels spoke.

Was ever young and strong  
with grit and supernatural wisdom.

Suddenly she felt sharp pains  
that spectacular day.

Then I came out with swift speed  
faster than Usain Bolt.

The sky was my limit.  
The battle started-  
it was in this very labour room  
the flute of AK 47 couldn't stop me.

In that beautiful place called Lion Mountain.  
About forty-two hours to the birth of Christ.

Wondrous child I was  
more than Beah's boy soldier.

Like Camara Laye's African Child  
so, I won.

Like Senghor's black Women  
so was my mother's face.

*Push push*  
then she did.

It was harmattan.  
The wind whistled; trees sang.

Then I was a baby- carved with wit.  
Holding this antique pen of Negritude- I write.

*A poem by Abu Bakarr Meek Sesay*

Abu Bakarr Meek Sesay is a twenty-one-year-old emerging Sierra Leonean Poet. He has completed his West African Senior Secondary School Examination/WASSEK.

## 50. Child's plea

She pounds on me  
with a broom, pestle, or spoon  
whatever her hand picks up.  
*Let me hear you cry, fem!*

She tells the teary me with a finger  
placed across her lips  
she warns me with slaps  
bites and punches  
she batters me HARD.

To the pleading stranger, she says  
*never mind, Madam*  
*he is not human*  
*just a bloody goat on heels.*  
The tailless me continues to sob in pains  
wailing to her brutal cane.

At a quarter past noon she says:  
*sorry boy, would you like to take this dough ?*  
Making her wrapper rub my face  
to clean away my tears and mucus  
*puff, puff* -to chase my sorrow away.

When darkness illuminates the day  
she brings the lamp and a wrapper  
ordering me to come closer  
she presses my wounds with  
a hot fabric while snubbing my face  
I yell, till she melts my lips with it again.

Let me fake sickness a minute  
and see her go off sick a week  
let me fake faint  
watch her lose her wrappers  
jumping up and down in pain.

I spent my childhood broken-hearted  
my parents didn't treat me as they should.  
I wish they could have seen my tears  
now I'm grownup and still feel the pain.

*A Poem by Stephen Yaya Mansaray*

Stephen Yaya Mansaray is a lawyer, former Master and Registrar of the High Court of Sierra Leone, a loving father, poet, and an aspiring philosopher.

**51. DON'T LET THEM TELL YOU DIFFERENTLY:** (a mini epic)

**W**hen promises unfulfilled remain  
falling in and out of seasons like rain  
So that even that which is possible  
is justified as not plausible  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen bread and butter  
come in sputters and mutter  
kind words you hardly utter  
pronouncements in language of the gutter  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen crabs in trumpet blow  
now all shine and glow  
more than in dribs and drabs  
a misdirection of mihrabs  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

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**W**hen all is honour  
but mean in demeanour  
critics and materials you do not need  
hungry mouths you do not feed  
*don't let them tell you differently.*



**W**hen rumours and lies spread  
by means we all dread  
only more promises of prosperity ahead  
doubt of possibility of things misread  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen trust is lost  
the bastion is as good as dust  
maybe an overhaul-  
both corridors and wall  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen mistrust is massive  
the active is passive.  
The masses are dismissive  
coded speech less than persuasive.  
*Don't let them tell you differently.*



**W**hen from oblivion you became a donor  
food security you ignore.  
Do we have to wait for you to feed?  
We will all die indeed  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen the seed to sprout  
choked by known weeds stout,  
know it was meant to die  
like an ostrich that cannot fly.  
*Don't let them tell you differently*

.....

**W**hen a fight you feign  
the chase is in vain  
the credit you must disdain  
someday it will all be plain  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen the need is to pore  
environment, insufficient to spur.  
Your depth only superficial  
this lamb is not sacrificial.  
*Don't let them tell you differently*

\*\*\*\*\*

**W**hen you itch to preach  
words and actions do not match.  
Attempts way over the arch  
your goals you cannot reach  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen your life and the fox are cognate  
as though there is none Most High.  
Experts in being sly-  
a device ready to detonate.  
*Don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen the environment is lip-service  
just to please with ease  
so, destruction is perennial.  
when you are definitely in denial  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen all in all time will tell  
in the midst of the quell and yell  
the spell of the shed of the shell  
remember the Lord, in whom we dwell.  
*Don't let them tell you differently.*



**W**hen the right to life we pause  
taken without just cause  
further sanctioned with loud applause  
all you hear is “*because, because*”  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen the status quo you impeach  
sustenance and joy you leach  
basic rights you blatantly breach  
a job you switch, to ditch a snitch.  
*Don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen you beat Drums of War  
disregarding consequences and more.  
Perpetrators brought to book  
none left off the hook  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen munitions are a daily presence  
the problem from the root: the essence  
independent, credible probe  
like it is done around the globe  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen a law to repeal  
was clearly the deal.  
No precondition as a precursor  
there is a sensor in the visor  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen the law loses its awe  
human rights cast blight as part of the plight  
so that the conscience is put to flight.  
The people's plea you ignore  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

**W**hen it is “shoot to kill”  
the Forces are the force  
work barely provides a meal  
leadership, the actions endorse  
*don't let them tell you differently.*

\*\*\*\*\*

**W**hen you are lost in the noise  
veering far from your choice  
pseudo-amnesia drowning the people's voice  
only your kind, rejoice?  
*Don't let them tell you differently.*

# *Glossary*

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- 1.** Awujoh: a celebratory feast in West Africa.
- 2.** Garas: a traditional custom sometimes made from tied-dyed fabric.
- 3.** Kabbaslots: a traditional dress worn by Creole women in Sierra Leone.
- 4.** Tabule: might be a traditional cultural festivity or drama.
- 5.** Lappa: a colourful traditional cloth wrapped around the waist, worn as a skirt.
- 6.** Gumbe: traditional music of the Creole people from Sierra Leone.
- 7.** Tekneh: a variation of the name, Techno music
- 8.** Tongo: assumably a variant of Tango music.
- 9.** Docket: a traditional custom
- 10.** Drizilik: a genre of music named after (and popularised by) a contemporary Sierra Leone artist.

- 11.** Mamie: a Krio term for lady
- 12.** Komot: a Krio word for ‘come away.’
- 13.** Peppeh: translated as ‘pepper.’
- 14.** Yabas: Krio for ‘onions.’
- 15.** Ogiri: a seasoning made from dried Benin seeds.
- 16.** Plasas: Krio term for edible greens cooked in a sauce.
- 17.** *Zaminaminas*: a Cameroonian dance popularised in the 1980s. *Makossas*: a Cameroonian style of urban music.
- 18.** Ronko: a traditional top worn by Sierra Leonean men, perceived to have magical powers.
- 19.** A pakoh is a Krio term for a long head.
- 20.** Pray day goat: goat slaughtered for a celebratory feast at the end of the holy month of Ramadan.
- 21.** Sani Abacha Street is a road in the Eastern part of Freetown, Sierra Leone.

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### *About the Author*

Bridgette O James is the author of **Sierra Leone in the Diaspora** (Kindle Direst Publishing, 2021). She has appeared in Sierra Leonean anthologies: **Lice in the Lion's Mane**, 1995; **Kalashnikov in the Sun**, 2009. She also co-authored **Out of the Slums Came Poetry**, 2022 with Yusuf Kamara. Her poem *African Mimosa* was in the longlist for the 2022 Aurora National Prize for Writing. Her poems will be featured in the print edition of **Dreich** Magazine, Scotland; her work has also appeared in the *Fib Review*, USA, **Gutter Magazine**, Scotland and *Wildfire Words*, UK. Her next book, **Anglo-African Rhymes** is to be published by LR Price, UK.

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