

**"Vibrant...lush narratives. Each city blessed by the sensitivities of these young writers comes alive. An unusual collection. What a concept...talking back to home."
IKHIDE R. IKHELOA**

ENTER NAIJA

The Book of Places

Akintunde Aiki	Chidinma Nwabueze	Iduade A. Udom	Nzube Ifechukwu
Aluka Igbokwe	Chimdianna Okoronkwo	Ifloka Abasi Okop	Olanrewaju Tajudeen
Amaka Jovita Ezeuchu	Chigaeemezu Ernest Ohla John	"Lighthouse" Oyewale	Olisaemeka Gerald
Amatesio Dore	Chisom Okafor	Joseph Bilabi	Olutayo Anuoluwapo Alna
Arinze Ifeakandu	Chizaram Ilodlanya	Kasiemobi Ibeh	Omoya Yinka Simult
Basit Jamlu	D. E. Benson	Kelechi Ezeigwo	Osinachi
Bura-Bari Nwilo	Ebenezer Agu	Michael Umoh	Socrates Mbamalu
Chibulke Ogbonnaya	Henry U. Ikonna	Nonso Anyanwu	Sotonye Dan
	Okafor Ugochi Winnie	Daniel C. Ulonnam	

Edited by Otuorleze Obi-Young

**ENTER NAIJA:
THE BOOK
OF
PLACES**

A publication of the *ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES* Team in partnership
with *Brittle Paper*.

The authors have asserted their moral rights under the Copyright, Design and
Patent Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of this work.

Individual Contributions Copyright © 2016 by The Authors.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval
system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written
permission of the copyright owners.

Cover concept and design: Otosirieze Obi-Young.

Cover typeset: Otosirieze Obi-Young and Osinachi Prince Jacon.

Cover photo: Otosirieze Obi-Young.

“A gathering of unsung, young but vibrant new writers . . . lush narratives. Each city blessed by the sensitivities of these young writers comes alive. This is an unusual collection . . . retro-experimental. What a concept. A new generation of storytellers talking back to home.”

IKHIDE R. IKHELOA, *Introduction.*

CONTENTS

9 EDITORIAL

“There Is a Country”

by *Otosirieze Obi-Young*

12 INTRODUCTION

“Of Home, Exile, and Those Places in
the Heart”

by *Ikhide R. Ikheloa*

THE NORTH

15 “New City” · Kano

by *Arinze Ifeakandu*

19 “Jos”

by *Socrates Mbamalu*

22 “Abuja”

by *Joseph Bilabi*

23 *Amongst the Dunes* · Sokoto

by *Osinachi*

24 “Of Experience” · Jigawa State

by *Amaka Jovita Ezeuchu*

28 “Unrequited Lust” · Zuma Rock,

Abuja

by *D.E. Benson*

29 “Grumi Player” · Northern Music

by *Osinachi*

30 “Someplace Safe” · Sabon Gari, Kano

by *Nonso Anyanwu*

THE SOUTH

34 “Auchi”

by *Joseph Bilabi*

36 “About What Was” · Port-Harcourt

by *Sotonye Dan*

40 *The Road Protects Its Own* · Bori,

Rivers State

by *Bura-Bari Nwilo*

44 “Ring Road” · Benin City

by *Joseph Bilabi*

47 “Oyigbo, or: The City of Swollen
Beauties” ·

by *Chigaemezu Ernest Ohia*

48 “Two Cities” · Uyo and Ikot Ekpene

by *IfiokAbasi Okop*

51 “The Mad Man and the City” · Port-

Harcourt

by *Chigaemezu Ernest Ohia*

52 *We Are Eating Bole* · Food in Port-

Harcourt

by *Bura-Bari Nwilo* and

Otosirieze Obi-Young

54 “Scars on the Other Side of Beauty”

· Ukanafun LGA, Akwa Ibom State

by *Iduehe A. Udom*

56 “After Oroworukwu Street” · Port-

Harcourt

by *Daniel C. Ulonnam*

58 “Warri”

by *Amatesiro Dore*

**WHEN IT NO LONGER
MATTERS WHERE YOU
LIVE**

62 *Fulani Herdsman*

by *Osinachi*

63 “My Heart Bleeds”

by *Olutayo Anuoluwapo Aina*

68 “This Is Home” · Uyo to Lagos

by *Okafor Ugochi Winnie*

THE EAST

73 “Nwañgene” · Nwañgene, Onitsha

by *Nzube Ifechukwu*

76 “Like Ants, When It Rains” · Ogbete

Market, Enugu

by *Chisom Okafor*

- 78** “A Home Tomorrow” · Kent Road,
Aba
by *Osinachi*
- 85** “Akwata, Enugu”
by *Olisaemeka Gerald*
- 86** *Rust and Dust: The View from Ogige
Market* · Nsukka
by *Bura-Bari Nwilo, Michael E.
Umoh and Otosirizee Obi-Young*
- 90** “Brooklyn in Naija” · Aba
by *Chizaram Ilodiana*
- 93** “Places That Claim Me” · Onitsha
by *Ebenezer Peters*
- 98** “Umuahia North”
by *Michael Umoh*
- 103** *Unoka’s Company* · Achebean
Igboland
by *Osinachi*
- 104** “Nwa Aba, or: A Brief, Traumatic
History of Gworo Pit”
by *Otosirizee Obi-Young*
- 111** “Destination: Nsukka”
by *Chigaemezu Ernest Ohia*
- 112** “City of Resilience” · Aba
by *Chidinma Okoronkwo*
- 115** “Streamside Reveries” · Egwuiyi
Stream, Uzi, Imo State
by *Chigaemezu Ernest Ohia*
- 117** “Abakiliki”
by *Chibuike Ogbonnaya*
- 119** “A Tiny Place of Hope” · Nsukka
by *Henry U. Ikenna*
- 123** “Aba Story”
by *Aluka Igbokwe*
- 126** “Onitsha: Retrospection”
by *Chidimma Nwabueze*

- 129** “What It Takes to Survive” · Aba
by *Kasiemobi Ibeh*
- 149** “Ibadan”
by *Olanrewaju Tajudeen*
- THE WEST**
- 132** “Ibadan”
by *Akintunde Aiki*
- 136** “Ado-Ekiti”
by *Olanrewaju Tajudeen*
- 137** “Iworoko: A Life in Words” ·
Iworoko, Ekiti State
by *Basit Jamiu*
- 140** “The People Born Here Are Lovers
to the Land” · Lagos
by *Kelechi Ezeigwe*
- 142** *Looking Through Lumia* · Akure
by *Otosirize Obi-Young*
- 151** “Campus Solitaire” · Obafemi
Awolowo University, Ile-Ife
by *John “Lighthouse” Oyewale*
- 155** “Lady Blue” · Lagos-Ibadan
Expressway
by *Omoya Yinka Simult*
- 159** *Sisi Eko* · Lagos
by *Osinachi*
- 160** “Iseyin I and II” · Iseyin, Oyo State
by *Olanrewaju Tajudeen*
- 162** *Over Obalende, Linking Lekki* ·
Lagos
by *Bura-Bari Nwilo*
and *Otosirize Obi-Young*
- 166** NOTES ON
CONTRIBUTORS

THERE IS A COUNTRY

THE IDEA OF a book about places came to me in March, during my National Youth Service in Akure. While there, I was struck by the topography of Ondo State, its edible beauty: the coal-dark rocks and orgasmic-green hills, the clinical neatness of the slender roads of Ikare-Akoko where we'd camped, the sprawling serenity of small Akure. My one year there was an *experience*, and so I began thinking of collecting the experiences of others, the range of different places that we all feel strongly about. That we read about and feel transported to. Places like the Igboland of **Chinua Achebe's** *Things Fall Apart*. The Abeokuta of **Wole Soyinka's** *Ake: The Years of Childhood*. The Nsukka of **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's** *Purple Hibiscus*. The Lagos of **Teju Cole's** *Every Day Is for the Thief*. The Port-Harcourt of **Kaine Agary's** *Yellow-Yellow*. The Ajegunle of **Helon Habila's** "Beautiful". The Niger Delta of **Chinelo Okparanta's** "America". The Aba of **Akwaeke Emezi's** "Sometimes The Fire Is Not Fire". The Northern Nigeria of **Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's** *Season of Crimson Blossoms*.

Because I often think of places as people, with layers of distinctness never to be known until known, always retaining their capacity to startle, my hope was for eclectic interpretations, full, rounded contemplations of physical features and population characteristics of places, and the thirty-five contributors here arrest this, expand this in varying ways that show that, like people, places can be unpredictable, can resist easy categorization and flout stereotypes. In the creative non-fiction, poetry, memoirs, commentary, fiction, photography and visual art collected here, there is an interrogation of identity, of how living in a place alters other people's perception of a person; there is a romanticization of places admittedly imperfect; there are remarkable observations of physical detail; there are personal stories simmering with power, odes to survival tied to places. Grouped under five headers—*The North, The South, The East, The West, and It No Longer Matters Where You Live*, which borrows its title from **Tanure Ojaide's** poem about exile and explores experiences that cut across regions to affect us all—it is my hope that this arrangement offers the reader a Collective Feel, that it ensures undistracted participation in the life of each region, region after region, each immersion with its own distinct effect.

In helming this, I have had to defend the decision to not monetize it. Ours is a continent with a rising—but still relatively un-solid—publishing industry, where more books are heard about and read about than actually seen, where because book prices dictate readers' preferences local writers suffer a lack of lay audiences, their works in traditional publishing outlets—books, magazines, journals—rarely followed by people outside literary circles, their surest, most efficacious route to visibility being blogs and social media: Twitter, Facebook. Especially Facebook. While on top of their game in this anthology, the contributors—like other young writers of similar visibility and means—have, on Facebook and on blogs, works that rival or excel their contributions here. Promising work of resonant skill and resilient will which very few readers actually see when not shared on Facebook. They represent a group that **Ikhide R. Ikheloa** has referred to as "The Fuck You! Generation": a nascent choir of voices who, partly because of a lack of access to magazines and journals, persist in pushing their often-daring, often-experimental work out there on Facebook, for comments and Likes, for public appreciation that often grants small validations, populist criticism that mostly doesn't help in craft development. But despite these, energetic talent breathes in the contributors here, and slowly but surely, some of them are breaking through: one won a 2015 Emerging Writer Fellowship with A

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

Public Space magazine and was shortlisted for the 2015 BN Poetry Award; one was shortlisted for the Awele Short Story Prize; two are currently shortlisted for the 2016 *Saraba* Nonfiction Manuscript Prize, one of whom was a 2015 Fellow of Ebedi International Writers Residency; one was nominated for a 2015 Pushcart Prize and has a story in *The Threepenny Review*; three are alumni of Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop; one came Third in the Nigerian Students' Poetry Prize; one edited an online anthology last year; and two have published two books each. And so while their work is thick enough to be put up only for sale, making this downloadable for free is an attempt to reach lay readers, to invite them to engage, as they would on social media, this compendium that encompasses the places in their lives. And this is the first in a series of anthologies I plan to create that would explore different aspects of Nigerianness.

Without **Osinachi Prince Jacon**, this project would not have come about as half as efficient as it is; without him and **Henry Ugwu** and **Daniel Ulonnam**, I would have burned out in creating this: I am grateful to them for everything. **Sotonye Dan**, for outlining how this would work from the beginning; **Arinze Ifeakandu**, for saying, "Do it, start now"; **Ebenezer Agu**, for always following up: thank you, guys, for *being*. **Nonso Anyanwu**, for *Gossamer: Valentine Stories, 2016*, a forerunner to this, and for the solid help and suggestions; **Akintunde Aiki**; **Socrates Mbamalu**; **TJ Benson**; **John "Lighthouse" Oyewale**, for that **Aminatta Forna** quote; **David Ishaya Osu**, for suggesting a shuffle of the title's syntax; **Bura-Bari Nwilo**, for the very useful information; **Amatesiro Dore**, for the *political advice*; and everybody else who took interest in this, who made submissions: thank you! I am grateful to **Ikhide R. Ikheloa** for agreeing to write the Introduction. I am grateful to **Ainehi Egoro** of *Brittle Paper* for endorsing this, and to **Nancy Adimora** of *Afreada* for the quick response. And, most of all, I am grateful to the contributors because of whom this is.

It is Naija's 56th Independence anniversary, our country in chaos beloved by its young tens of millions, people defiant in sidelining the question of whether or not their country loves them back, because what matters, should matter, is that there is a country they love and feel strongly about, period. Twenty-nine places rendered in fifty-one pieces, fifty-one photographs and five visual art images spread across thirty-six thousand words: it is my hope that the reader, in gliding through these one hundred and seventy pages, encounters an *experience*.

Enter Naija and see where we've been.

Otosirieze Obi-Young,

1 October, 2016.

INTRODUCTION

OF HOME, EXILE, AND THOSE PLACES IN THE HEART

MY PARENTS LEFT our ancestral home when they were merely teenagers. I can only imagine the range of emotions that coursed through them as they traveled to Lagos. They settled in Lagos where they met and started careers and our family in this new place among the Yoruba, these strange people who spoke a strange new language, had interesting ways of cooking their food and had a way with music. My mother never really spoke to me much about exile away from home a few hundred miles away in Esanland. My dad was more expressive and he spoke of longing, a haunting alienation from all that he was familiar with. He spoke of learning to work for the white man in colonial Nigeria, cooking, cleaning and gardening for the white man, while as a young teenager praying for that day he would return home to his family. He was Kunta Kinte, rejecting the peach of Babylon even as he ate it because he was hungry and pining for the salt-earth of our village.

My dad looked for home everywhere he went in Lagos and it was not hard. There were fellow townspeople who, looking for home, formed “town” unions and they met on weekends in each other’s homes, ate, drank and danced in the grand tradition of the clans they had left behind. My father thus never really left home. For as long as I knew him, it seemed like he was always going back home, away from the places that life, love and work had willed him to stay. Here, there was a paradox because he had learned to love the ways of the white people he served and he was to later tell me about how he prayed to end up in England. He pined for the imagined pleasures of exile. He claimed that just when he finally figured a way to go overseas as he called England, my mother announced that she was pregnant with me. And, in supreme irony, on occasion, after a good glass of Star Lager beer my dad would assure me that I was the one responsible for his fate; he stayed at home because I came along to interrupt his dream of fleeing home. So, even as he was pining for home in our village, the boundaries of his “home” were constantly expanding.

This collection of narratives further expands the definition of the notion of home. It is coming at a time when calls are coming for a renegotiation of terms of engagement among the nations that live within the Nigeria millions call home. It is great that this generation of writers steeped in the three dimensional ways of storytelling on the Internet (YouTube, social media, blogs) have chosen to talk about home in their own inimitable way. This volume is a gathering of unsung, young but vibrant new writers, a worthy proxy for that army of storytellers who make social media reading an addictive pastime. This they do in song, in prose, poetry and video. They have killed the book as we know it and resurrected it in a three-dimensional form with authentic to-die-for narratives. Many of these names are regulars on Facebook, Twitter and the numerous blogs and journals that populate the Internet. It is a great time to be alive if you love the stories of Africa.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

Read **Arinze Ifeakandu, Chisom Okafor, Otosirize Obi-Young, Amatesiro Dore, Olanrewaju Tajudeen** and dozens of others fan out across the four cardinal points of Nigeria and tell their stories, lush narratives brilliantly broken up by the art of **Osinachi**. Each city blessed by the sensitivities of these young writers comes alive, regardless of the canvas chosen. This is an unusual collection: In the age of the Internet, there is no Diaspora writer here, this is retro-experimental; all the writers are based in Nigeria. What a concept. This is not Chinua Achebe's *Home and Exile*, this is a new generation of storytellers talking back to home. This is not Wole Soyinka's poem, "Telephone Conversation", there are new poems here musing about that space we call home. The walls are constantly shifting, falling, collapsing and rearranging themselves around our hopes and anxieties. There were the big ships of sea and land that brought the world to us and took us away to new homes. There was the radio, television and print, newspapers and books that showed us how small our world was. And now there is the Internet and our world is now at once small and infinite. Reading the *vibrant prose* of these young writers many of whom read to the world through their social media timelines, I am reminded of my own sense of despair upon coming to America and finding out immediately that I wanted to go back home. This was three and a half decades ago. I am still here but the hole in the heart's wall is always there. For me, that nation-space called Nigeria is home. I can't explain it; the food, the music, the way we say the things we say, our anxieties, our songs, our dance, once you are steeped in it, it never leaves you.

Exile doesn't hurt as much as it used to. In 1982, when I left home for the United States, there was no Internet, no smartphones, I simply got into this huge ship and sailed into the dark night. It took weeks before my family could confirm that I had arrived alive. The winters made me weep for Nigeria, the summers made me weep for Nigeria and each time I tasted the food I remembered my mother and died inside. In 1994, Nigeria's national soccer team came to the United States to play in the World Cup. I remember looking forward to seeing them play each time. When they eventually had to go home, it was as if my siblings were returning home. I was so homesick I wrote one of the cheesiest poems I have ever written. I am still here, the world has changed and thanks to social media, home is with me in my pocket and in my heart all the time. Whenever I look into my cellphone, home is waiting on Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and the various other watering holes that allow us to reach out and talk to each other. Once, I was in a meeting when my brother texted me to tell me that a train in my community here had crashed and he was wondering if I was safe. The train had just crashed and I had not known until Home came knocking on my e-door hoping I was safe. Home is real, physical, and spiritual. I see home. Home sees me. I see home. I see you.

Ikhide R. Ikheloa.

Each neighbourhood...appeared to be made of a different substance, each seemed to have a different air pressure, a different psychic weight.

—TEJU COLE, *Open City*.

THE NORTH

New City

KANO

Arinze Ifeakandu

Non-fiction

IF KANO WERE my child, I'd name her Blue, after her perfect sky. Morning brings the egrets, their cries filling the dogonyaro tree in front of Oga Ali's compound, their whites splashed all over the greenness, an indifferent tribute. By afternoon they are gone, to return at twilight when they share the sky with bats. Unlike the bats, the egrets seem to have a singular purpose: to glide to that tree and settle in for the night. The bats, on the other hand, do not seem to be in a hurry: they have all night to be alive.

The humans who share the city with the egrets and the bats do not have all night—they have spent the day building dreams and fighting to stay alive, and like the egrets they must settle in for the night. But they, too, must be alive. It doesn't matter that the bats have slept all day and can now stay wide awake for the night. Humans are not altogether popular for their respect of biological limitations, which is why sometimes an aeroplane growls through the sky. And so at dusk a group of friends find themselves in Burma Road where their church is located. They begin with a brief prayer, and then spend the rest of the evening trying to sing in key.

Other humans have other ways of burning the night, many other ways, all of which seem to involve being with other humans. It seems odd, really. Having spent the day interacting with others, misunderstanding others, haggling with others, isn't the temptation to curl into oneself? This instinct to always gravitate towards one another must spring from a certain loneliness.

And so.

Beside the church on Burma Road Street, a woman is singing with synthetic shrillness, her voice piercing over loud speakers. The Hausa words have taken on a Bollywood tinge, and it is easy to imagine this singer, perhaps a petite Hausa lady with a ring in her nose, in a sari.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

Beside the church on Burma Road Street, a woman is singing with synthetic shrillness, her voice piercing over loud speakers. The Hausa words have taken on a Bollywood tinge, and it is easy to imagine this singer, perhaps a petite Hausa lady with a ring in her nose, in a sari. A million motorcycles are parked in front of the motel and a million men are smoking and laughing

There is Sabon Gari, and then there is the rest of Kano. The sky in Sabon Gari is blue and high... beautiful so long as your eyes remain on the heavens. Everything else strives.

and moving their hips. It is a bedlam down here, whereas in the sky there is an infinity of stars. The partiers belong there but they do not belong *here*. Which brings us to our point of contradictions.

THERE IS SABON Gari, and then there is the rest of Kano. The sky in Sabon Gari is blue and high, like all of Kano's skies. It is beautiful so long as your eyes remain on the heavens. Everything else strives. The houses are built with shrewd pragmatism, bungalows fading gradually, interposed as they are between tall blocks of flats. Many rooms in these flats have not seen sunlight in so many years: when one window opens, it shakes hands with another. On a good Saturday morning a group of teenage boys will convert a minor road into a football field, grouped in sets: four-, five-, six-man teams. On a corner, beyond a gutter choked by grass and sand, littler children will be rolling tyres, playing Ten-Ten or Police-and-Thief.

It is difficult to place Sabon Gari, especially for those who live in it. It lacks the coherence of identity that characterizes towns, and whereas it is large and sprawling, its night lights do not gleam with the tender sublimity of a city's. It is the dumping ground of the unwanted and the saving grace of the sons of the soil, and in that way it is a place of elegant contradictions.

THE PEOPLE WHO come to the motel beside the church to be alive do not live in Sabon Gari. They have come from Bompai and Yankaba and Kano City, from all the places in Kano that smell of freshly brewed coffee. They wear jeans and outrageously colourful sneakers. One evening, I share a keke with one of the men who have come to be alive. He is handsome and smells nice. We are both coming from Bompai of sweet coffee smells and bright lights, and are now heading the same way, but for directly conflicting reasons: I am an egret, and he a bat.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

In Bompai, the keke glides, and when I look outside I see the lights of the city. The houses look primed, like eclectic Afropolitans posing for a picture. There is an intentionality to the streets, an organization. I do not doubt that the houses will be full of sunlight.

France Road, and we are in Sabon Gari. After that, the keke begins to dance through the road. The driver complains—he does not normally come here, he says, but. The hole on the road around Ibadan Road has not yet been filled, and so the driver has to go all the way around the main road. The man beside me says something in Hausa, and when I stare at him he asks, “Are you too going to the party?”

“No, no,” I say, and hope that he can see my smile in the dimness of the keke. I want to keep talking to him. Did he know, I want to say, how ironic it is that my friends and I had gone to Bompai to have a nice quiet time in a nice quiet place whereas he was coming to Sabon Gari to have a bombastic time in a place that never shuts up?

1. A certain governor of Kano State asked Igbo businessmen to fix the road around Emir Road, after all.
2. A friend who lives somewhere else once said to me, “Sabon Gari is very *corrupt*.”
3. Beer and prostitution are prohibited in Kano. In 2015, Kano’s religious police, Hisbah, destroyed 326,151 bottles of beer. They had been seized upon entrance to the state. Beer parlours are only found in Sabon Gari.

TO BE IN a city is to be lost in the midst of inanimate things, to be swallowed up by brick giants and bright lights, by the magnificent works of man towering under God’s blue sky. Sabon Gari can be translated loosely as The New Place or The New City or The New Town. The friends who spend the evening trying

It is difficult to place Sabon Gari...It lacks the coherence of identity that characterizes towns...It is the dumping ground of the unwanted and the saving grace of the sons of the soil, and in that way it is a place of elegant contradictions.

Beer and prostitution are prohibited in Kano. In 2015, Kano’s religious police, Hisbah, destroyed 326,151 bottles of beer. They had been seized upon entrance to the state. Beer parlours are only found in Sabon Gari.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

to sing in key have all gone away, scattered to the east by ambition and longing. When they come home, for that is what Kano is, they must embrace their city whose roads remain the same death-traps but whose sky is as beautiful as any.

Jos

Socrates Mbamalu

Non-fiction

THERE ARE TWO ways to see Jos: from air and from land. 2011, we relocate to Jos and take an Arik flight that we've pleaded the blood on Jesus upon so that our own blood would not be shed instead. No drinks served. It's just like taking a BRT; only, this time, by air. I think some planes should be categorized as maruas. Others as BRTs. Most as definite molues. Only that they fly. An hour later, this is my first flight within Nigeria after coming from Kenya in 2007. The pilot circles the airport awaiting clearance to land and for once I gasp: Jos the beautiful. Beneath us is a lush greenness that comes from agricultural produce. The land looks tilled and the rows of soil and green vegetables are like plaited hair. The fog is a deceptive cloud and, as we land, the coldness of Jos welcomes us.

Jos in the harmattan is like being enclosed in a freezer with the sound of a revving engine. The wind is so strong. The air is so dry it cracks your lips open and takes a painful bite.

Jos, from land, is approaching a battle field. Soldiers and helmets and sirens. Check points with warnings emblazoned on metal containers painted in military colour. Bags of sand strategically placed left and right and right and left, so that when the bus moves it's like the slither of a snake, bodies inside bumping against each other, heads bobbing as if to music. Army. Navy. Air Force. MoPol. Almost twenty checkpoints and, still, a bomb just went off yesterday. This isn't Jos the beautiful. Still, bombs don't stop humans from moving to Jos even if they blow up human bodies. Bombs don't stop us from jogging. Bombs don't stop Jos from being Jos.

JOS IN THE harmattan is like being enclosed in a freezer with the sound of a revving engine. The wind whistles, then fans itself up and roars and beats the iron roofing sheet like it's a witch that's practicing her voodoo on top of the house. It sweeps the compound clean of every paper

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

and clears the sand. Sometimes the wind is so strong you'd think you'd wake up and see your car gone from where it's parked. The air is so dry it cracks your lips open and takes a painful bite, that's why my younger brother smears Vaseline on his lips like it's a warm coat. The sun doesn't come out and suddenly Jos becomes Nairobi. Outside, people walk with jackets and gloves and socks and hoodies and scarfs and trousers and tie wrappers and you see nothing but wool wool wool. The cold has started a war and we are prepared. Beside her fire, the woman selling akara is covered too. Head to toe. The customers wait in tow. Their hands folded at their armpits.

"Ina kwana."

"Ina geja."

And the streets are deserted not because of bombs but because of cold as bombastic as bombs.

Ramadan has just ended and the road to the Air Force base is filled with young boys and men and women carrying their prayer mats. This is a city of prayers too. When the bombs go quiet, when the killings go down, when the villages are not attacked.

Outside, people walk with jackets and gloves and socks and hoodies and scarfs and trousers and tie wrappers and you see nothing but wool wool wool.

THE CITY OF Jos wakes up to the claps of early morning joggers. Close to the governor's lodge there is a multitude of joggers. Boys. Girls. Men. Women. They fill the streets like it's a crusade. My coach and I jog from Sparkling Junction, close to NASCO, all the way to the stadium at Ahmadu Bello Way, past Terminus. The city is slow to wake up. It is like a body that's recovering from taking sleeping pills. And that's how Jos is. After the bombs and killings have hit the city in successive years, there's a languor to its movement. Some buildings are partially burnt. Some

partially built. The city is partially divided; Muslims here, Christians there. And you wonder if this city will ever be whole again. Jos will never be the bird with multi-coloured plumes. The sun

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

is up and blazing and you wonder if this is the same Jos that was cold at a different time in the year.

ON SATURDAY, A bomb exploded around Terminus. On Sunday, the church was nearly empty. Soldiers were everywhere. Okadas were banned. Then the chorister sang a hymn: *In the hollow of his hands, I am safe....* The mood is sombre. The church prays for safety. Prays for the governor. Prays for the bombs not to kill Christians. Ramadan has just ended and the road to the Air Force base is filled with young boys and men and women carrying their prayer mats. This is a city of prayers too. When the bombs go quiet, when the killings go down, when the villages are not attacked, Jos becomes a free bird but only for some time, hoping the hunter won't shoot it down with its catapult.

Abuja

Joseph Ofejiro Bilabi

Poetry

MUSING MINARETS POIGNANT

poised

as Maitama spills her miracles on our
dreams

of a painless paradise

she trickles her corona of light on the
shadows of October until she fades

and my shadow too

wears a tunic of reluctance

before her haven of cunning terraces

her rocks padded across asphalt

emblazoned and dry

Magic museum

mild, marred, mad...

madam

warm and whirring, a whirling parachute

Aso Lady

smiling at the sobriety of trees

Carry cold coal tar on crisp corona of gold

you who made midnight mushrooms muse
through

moonlit minarets

**Musing
minarets...Maitama
...Magic museum mild,
marred, mad...madam...
...you who made midnight
mushrooms muse through
moonlit minarets**

I FIRST GOT to Abuja through a religious organization to which I belonged. We had a convention there and we camped in the house of a generous wealthy man in Wuse. During this time, I toured Abuja and frequented Maitama because we attended the Catholic Church there. Abuja made me hold my breath! The beauty it

harboured in large parts of her land mass made me gaze in awe, my mouth agape.

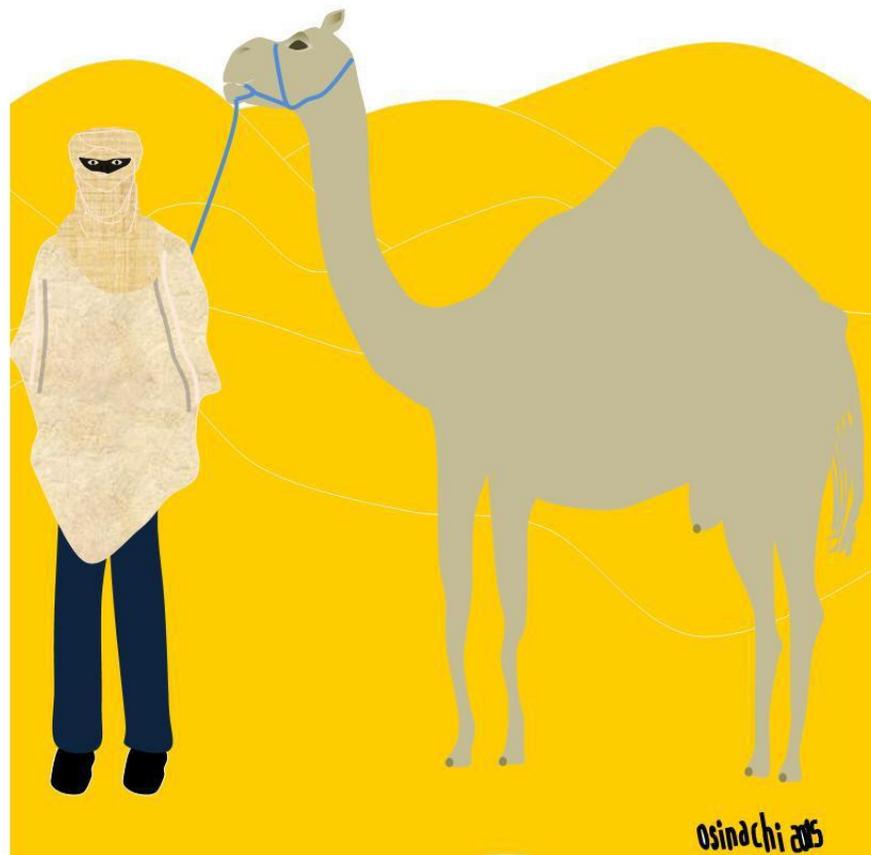
Amongst the Dunes

SOKOTO

Osinachi

Visual Art

2015



Of Experience

JIGAWA STATE

Amaka Jovita Ezeuchu

Non-fiction



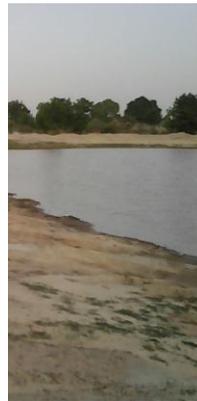
I had never envisioned anywhere like this: a semi-arid state loaming in non-marshy soil and situated somewhere in the north-western part of the country.

LIFE IS PICTURESQUE, a collection of art works that often arouse our subconscious to appreciating its exquisiteness. Sometimes, its art is a sketch of our grotesque existence. Here in Jigawa state, there is beauty everywhere. There is art waiting to be sketched out clearly in the piles of waste and tons of pruned branches people dump at the edge of the town. There are sights before me seen every day by most but waiting to be appreciated by a few. There are children on the streets, all flowing with life even in cheap clothing and scuffed black shoes, even with grimy plastic bowls in their knobby hands as their pastel eyes exhume their untold stories. Beauty illuminates here, even in the deepest paths.



ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

The first three weeks I arrived here for NYSC, I would choose the word *regret*. It felt as if I was stuck in a place as each passing month rolled in a circle of days, creeping and crawling. I had never envisioned anywhere like this: a semi-arid state loaming in non-marshy soil and situated somewhere in the north-western part of the country. My dream had been of a host state close to me, a place with magnificent structures and vast development. But these hopes were seemingly snatched away, and then snatched to these beauties I have come to appreciate now: the bicycle practices I've shared with my new family, the pungent smell of swamps, the swelling sound of the river close to my house.



The NYSC has done its best to send me as far away as possible from home. Most days would see me sitting on the strong feet of these trees whose branches are like arms wrapped tightly around me, and its roots buried deep beneath Mother Earth. Sitting there habitually permits me to travel and get lost in the scent of leaves, newly-picked strawberry. Guests like the

...the pungent smell of swamps...the swelling sound of the river close to my house.

wind will arrive to tickle the stem in a rush, unsettling its branches, and finally allowing the trees to breathe down yellow leaves graciously to the red earth without much effort. In the twirl and colorless leaves abound memories of beautiful things that breath the essence of life in this town. I realize each of the leaf holds a part of my own story. Perhaps it might even be something beyond that.

Some days I feel like travelling into the distance like birds. Yes, there is this surge of jealousy in me about these birds tugging graciously on the trees. I'm jealous, jealous of them

migrating down to the places I so much love and wanted to be—a home, a place where an empty stomach rumbles and the face still gleams in delight.

Every day I find myself overwhelmed in this beautified stream. No longer do I need to feel disturbed about home because there is this aura of enduring feeling that pulls me to it. The kind of emotion that heals my perturbed heart and incites a rush of excitement inside me. I would sit on the sand to stare at the stream being stroked by the sun. I feel like a jigsaw puzzle that fits perfectly in the town. Sundown would see me firmly engrossed in the sky. And all I usually see is a blob, an emanation of blurred darkness hovering above me. Everywhere is silent when I walk outside, down the street, and I get to see the length of it by the aid of the whitish cotton bud above me which throws its light upon us in strides of golden yellow.



Few stores that stretch out in the area are red-earth and the thick threads that cover the bulbs and the line poles along the expanse seems as though they have taken a permanent rest. One they may never wake up from again. Most times, I would sit on the red sand to stare intently as the sky eludes the moon making its return to this side of the earth once more. I can't help but smile at the brightness of it, knowing fully well that the day has brought its excited life to us. This is something I cannot pretend about anymore. The essence of this beautiful nature

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

captivates my life into a different guide. And I'm ready, ready to give anything another chance just to experience this beauty once more.



PHOTOS BY: Amaka Jovita Ezeulu and Charles Seun Philips.

Unrequited Lust

ZUMA ROCK, ABUJA

D.E. Benson.

Poetry

why do you stick in the face of an impotent sky
the majestic enchantment of your black breast. . .
while i pine and ogle, hoping
(for a moment)
you'd see the hunger in my eyes

it is true,
nature is an endless horizon of lusts
and you, dear maiden,
are a beauty wasted
in the indifference of the midday sun

I WROTE THIS one afternoon, on a ride past Zuma Rock.

Grumi Player

NORTHERN MUSIC

Osinachi

Visual Art

2015



Someplace Safe

From a novel in progress.

SABON GARI, KANO

Nonso Franklyn Anyanwu

Fiction

WHAT SOMTO FELT, the first time in Sabon Gari, was a delicious air of familiarity. She liked the busy streets filled with children and teens playing different games; men sitting in small groups outside their compounds, laughing and discussing over bottles of beer and plates of pepper-soup; women chatting and breastfeeding their babies, not minding their visible breasts. The noise was sweet, and the sunshine mild. Even the frail-looking buildings looked happy. The potholed roads, the streets without streetlights and drainages, the trees, all looked happy, as if

...busy streets filled with children and teens playing different games; men sitting in small groups outside their compounds, laughing and discussing over bottles of beer and plates of pepper-soup; women chatting and breastfeeding their babies.

isolated from the rest of the world. The reason for their happiness, Somto thought, must have been tied to the solid hope that one day, through their life struggles, their future would be better than their past.

It was a time when old houses were bought and demolished by Igbo businessmen who raised three- and four-storey buildings within one month so that from a good distance, all you saw were tall buildings crammed together like brick toys.

But Somto didn't live in a brick toy. They lived in an old house. She could tell the year the compound was built from the *1976* which was boldly carved on the floor of the entrance to the three toilets and bathrooms at the extreme end of the compound. Their apartment was the third in a row of ten doors facing each other. At night, portable Tiger generators were the source of power. Healthy and smoky generators. Neighbours dragged it persistently, with their faces and chests and backs and armpits soaked with sweat. As the air

became stuffier, Somto's eyes ached. She coughed. She would soon get used to it, she thought. She would get used to the songs blaring from barber shops and beer-parlours and churches and hotels till late at night. She would get used to the shorter days and longer nights with bulbs of different colours illuminating the streets so that one could hardly tell when it was mid-night.

She would get used to neighbours walking in and out of her apartment to ask her, “How body?” or “How far?” She would get used to greeting them as if her life depended on it. There was a mind-your-business impression at Murtaala Avenue where she came from. But here, she knew that no matter how private she thought she lived her life, her joys and pains were always open for gossip.



“From a good distance, all you saw were tall buildings crammed together like brick toys.”
Photo Credit: Joshua Christopher.

The potholed roads, the streets without streetlights and drainages, the trees....

Last night, their neighbours, Iyawo and her husband, hurled sharp words at each other, after which their door slammed close, followed by sounds of hot slaps and things scattering.

“Abeg, e don do o!” Sisi banged their door.

“Oko Iyawo, oti to o, ema binu!” Mama Yinka pleaded.

But the door did not open. The cry lingered.

As early as six in the morning, Somto was shocked to see Iyawo on the veranda, whistling and singing a joyful Yoruba song as she heated her leftover stew in the wooden movable box in the veranda which contained just one stove and maybe two pots and a few plates.

“Iyawo, how body?” Sisi asked.

“Fine o jare,” she responded, her face radiant with smiles.

There were aggressive voices from the toilets and bathrooms that sounded like a quarrel over who had spent the most time in the toilet or bathroom without minding the queue outside. It later occurred to Somto that it was a quarrel over whose turn it was to wash the toilets and bathrooms.

It amazed Somto how, after such early morning quarrels, they still greeted and welcomed each other with laughter in the evening as if they hadn't swapped insults earlier. These, too, were what she would get used to. By now, Kano was alarmingly calm, people went about their businesses and returned before two p.m. As days passed, everything continued as they were, as if nothing tragic had just happened.

The compound was always quietest at nine in the morning when the neighbours had gone out for the day. Only the faint chattering of pupils from nearby schools and the “ole!” screams whenever another pickpocket was caught and beaten on the street reached Somto's room.

THE SOUTH

Auchi

AUCHI, EDO STATE

Joseph Ofejiro Bilabi

Poetry

I HAVE KNOWN you as a crystal crust of
dusty gold in an immaculate

turban of turbulence

cuddled in the bright announcements of a
noon that has become

a town crier on the hills you worship

your kettle kerfuffle and purple

and careful strands of huts scattered

in brittle threads of indifference

I see your colouration of red monuments,
wraith

of the Imam that calls on you for breakfast

gazelle

Parsee or patriot?

Pastor of dialects

With rosary beads and your rotary

Of a lonesome forgetfulness of

Fruitful future

You remind me of silts and the tuneful
music of Hausa

your hawser sailing like minarets above the
sky

How did you swallow Auchi people,

make them gnaw joylessly

with joy as joysticks for infants

to your cattle of blessings and golden Etsako

how did u marry Imam and priest

and disappear with the red sands of thatch
and cough?

This beauty of gold radiating as cloaks of
riches and hunger,

Why does it recline to the tunic behind your
ugly face?

Are you not Auchi,

the deep gold valley of resonant dreams?
How did you cry, with a diamond smile?

MY ROMANCE WITH Auchi in Edo State began in February of 2015, and ended around September of the same year. That February, I had gone to stay with someone who has been a true father to me, my erstwhile lecturer Rev Fr Dr Gregory Ebalu Ogbenika. He was then Parish Priest of a Catholic church in Fugar, a little town in Etsako Central of Edo State. Auchi was frequented by those of us who lived in little Fugar because of its importance in commerce and trade. My frequent visits to Auchi were a treat. Its unique landscape, of roads overlooking roads and the cluster of houses scattered amongst themselves and the roads, kept me wondering. Her people are predominantly Muslim and most of her Christians are Catholics. The air in Auchi is scented like hard work as traders were always found everywhere, and the town moved fast like the vehicles on her roads. Auchi had small and ancient buildings that reminded me of the hills and plains, making the town look like it's suspended above a hill at some point and descending down a plain at another. Its untidy streets and roads were enviable in an uncommon grace that spread over it like a cloak of many colours. And its striking resemblance to the northern part of Nigeria without forgetting its southern finesse, valour and accent was magical. When Fr Gregory was finally transferred from Fugar, I picked up a pen on my last visit to Auchi. I had to write about the place.

About What Was

PORT-HARCOURT

Sotonye Dan

Memoir

THE GENERAL OUTLOOK is chaotic, the human and vehicular traffic thick—a chokehold.

From the sidewalks, pedestrians spill into the road. In this season, in this ugly-beautiful part of the city, rain pours with mood swings, and when it reduces to a drizzle or begins with one, it does so as if reminiscing of snow. Car wipers are on a constant swish-swoosh, the faces behind the windscreens a plethora of expressions.

I'm in a Mile 3-bound bus. Today, like yesterday, like tomorrow, it is raining. I'm annoyed. Not because it has been raining for well over two hours, not because I'm stuck in traffic, but because it is raining on me. Big brown drops, tap-tap-tap, from the roof of this old Volkswagen.

Port-Harcourt, my beautiful city. The roads are wider now, urbanization still spreading like wild fire. But the influx of people over the years has somewhat dented the city's pride.

When I was a child, this place was Heaven. I've never been to Heaven, but I'm sure Heaven will be no too different from the GRA of my childhood. The only difference, I think, will be the gold-paved streets.

This woman sitting next to me unties her wrapper; she flips it left covering my right thigh. I am disgusted. Even more because I know she won't notice my disgust and so won't be apologizing. She is rummaging through an ankara pouch wound around her waist, atop her second wrapper. She brings out a rough small ball of newspaper, opens it, and begins to eat this cold smelly suya. She picks the meat one after the other, carefully avoiding the pieces of sliced

onions as though they are specimens of the Ebola virus. Done, she folds it back into a ball, a

smaller ball this time, and throws it out the window in a projectile that passes under my nose. I watch it land creating a small ripple, then float away, disappearing under another car. It would join the many garbage people pour into the drains when it rains in Port-Harcourt. I frown at her action.

Port-Harcourt, my beautiful city. The roads are wider now, urbanization still spreading like a wild fire. But the influx of people over the years has somewhat dented the city's pride. When I was a child, this place was Heaven. Even this ugly-beautiful area was beautiful. There were no layers of marched garbage by the road. Traffic was sparse. The buildings were low, rusting roofs absorbing the heat of the sun. It was as dreamy as J.P. Clark's "Ibadan". But toggling now to eighteen-to-twenty years later, everything has changed. The banks are here, many of them. Walking distances are shorter because the bushes are gone, because the roads are lined with houses and shops and more and more pedestrians. In its busyness, loneliness scurries, so you arrive your trekking destination quicker, as it seems, but in the same duration of time as you would have before development came.

**And when we heard the
kpa-kpa-kpa, the sound of
wood on wood, we knew the
groundnut boy was passing.
And we raced to the gate,
watched him through the
bars as he walked, a
wooden crate of groundnut
and popcorn on his head.**

I GREW UP in the beautiful-beautiful part of the city. Childhood was sunny, lit with beautiful memories. A year in Presidential Housing Estate, GRA, and twelve years in Rumuibekwe Housing Estate. I've never been to Heaven, but I'm sure Heaven will not be too different from the GRA of my childhood. The only difference, I think, will be the gold-paved streets. Ours hadn't gold, but the memories are golden. It was a quiet and beautiful neighbourhood. An architectural bliss. The asphalt was black, the gutters dry. I think it somehow rained less there, because I can remember my siblings and I playing outside almost every time. And when we heard the *kpa-kpa-kpa*, the sound of wood on wood, we knew the groundnut boy was passing. And we raced to the gate, watched him through the bars as he walked, a wooden crate of groundnut and popcorn on his head, his hand working the lever that gives off the sound.

The day I was told we would be leaving GRA, I didn't cry. I didn't think I was going to miss the apartment with its huge living-room, the red black-and-white TV on a stool in the far end of the hall, the wooden seats with ox-blood cushions, this place of peace, of music.

Rumuibekwe Housing Estate smelled of nature. Of whistling pines, citrus and freshly cut lawns. It was an estate of big powers: the Ogboni and the Free Mason; of big names: Saro-Wiwa, Banigo, Nwuche, Ajumogobia and Spiff. On our street, the apartments on the right were bungalows, while the ones on the left were duplexes, all with similar plans. Our compound was on the right. It was a park, with its many trees, flowers and pebbles on the lawn. Home was a place to look forward to even more everyday at school. I became friends with the Spiff grandchildren with whom I had some of my greatest moments—playing Nintendo and Game Boy Advanced, riding their scooter up and

I am here trying to make peace with what has become of this city, resolving to forget what it used to be.

down the street and jumping the very few potholes with it, playing table tennis in the their garage.

Rumuibekwe Housing Estate smelled of nature. Of whistling pines, citrus and freshly cut lawns. It was an estate of big powers: the Ogboni and the Free Mason; of big names: Saro-Wiwa, Banigo, Nwuche, Ajumogobia and Spiff. On our street, the apartments on the right were bungalows, while the ones on the left were duplexes, all with similar plans.

“THE KINGDOM OF God is not meat and drink,” the preacher is saying.

I am drawn back; I wonder how long my mind has wandered.

This woman beside me is asleep, head bent, drooling. The preacher is telling the Parable of the Talents now, and I'm wondering: If Earth were a talent given us, how would we rate our stewardship? Perhaps with how religious we are, if we aren't Christians or Muslims or Traditionalists, if we were Pantheists who

believed in the existence of God in *everything*, then we would have been better custodians of our environment.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

The bus's engine comes alive. It moves a few metres forward. The engine dies again. I am here trying to make peace with what has become of this city, resolving to forget what it used to be.

The Road Protects Its Own

BORI, RIVERS STATE

Bura-Bari Nwilo

Album



Tomorrow's-Tales: An Overview of Bori from a Hill.

Do you think you were made for something big, something huge and terrifying? Don't you think you were made for the simple things too? Is that ungodly, unlike society's wish? What's huge? How do you find out? Don't you think it is better to assume you were made for something really big and end up with something not so big so you may have flesh for tomorrow's-*tales*? I mean, we may not all be so great but let it be that we tried our hands at it.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES



Bending Grass: A Shot from a Hill.



The Road Protects Its Own. A road in Bori, Rivers State.



Birabi Memorial Grammar School, Bori. Photographed in October, 2015.



Road Alone. Many things are beautiful in black and white.



Market in Bori: People Hugging. In Bori, the people are not camera-shy.

Ring Road

BENIN CITY

Joseph Ofejiro Bilabi

Poetry

BENIN CANNOT SWALLOW her diamond ring

Unfurling on a famished street of

Tar and tears

Cannot shudder at the bypass of crowds and clouds

And directions

Lost in a motorcade

She reminds these people of an identical twirl of

turrets

towering in a tinted tear

that soaks ring road in ambivalence

remind traders of the museum and market materials

marred in marine margins

she makes as gifts for little children

she consults the heat with a wand of magic people

and the air she swallows with pride

when eavesdropping on our hopes with a silent grin

she gasps in awe at the clouds she could shelter

with a single yawn

she reminds me that night does not scare witches

when they know she is immortal until

they stand at the mercy of the moving vehicle full of light

ring road

tire of trails turquoise and true

to the tale of Oba land

brimming with uncertainty as she pursues these clowns

she befriends as vehicles

you alight on a Sunday morning

to serve souls and soles

the gospel of an end time in your belly of traffic

even ring road is a basket of water

generous as fertilizers

until I find songs for destinations

in my traffic of life.

I GOT FASCINATED by the wild welcome I received on my first visit to Ring Road in Benin City. Then I had just gained admission to the University of Benin and Ring Road

I don't know if it was called "Ring road" because of the big roundabout in the centre of the road which looked like a big diamond ring on the smallest finger of an almighty God.

was a compulsory route to Ugbowo town where the school is situated. It reminded me of a busy road in Lagos. It replicated the behaviour of other roads in Benin; roads with drivers that sped away undermining vehicles and traffic, and busy crowds, only it was wilder. Even the name of the road is awe inspiring. I don't know if it was called "Ring Road" because of the big roundabout in the centre of the road which looked like a big diamond ring on the smallest

finger of an Almighty God. Or if it was so called because it shrunk beneath the multitude of people, the pedestrians and students of the University of Benin that came to buy and sell. Or if it was because it made people rigmarole about it, like an angry twirl in a whirlwind. I only realized that Ring Road was unarguably the most popular road in Benin with an enviable wealth of people and markets and vehicles and stores that made it invincible, made it certain of an unbreakable record of popularity in the great land presided over by the Oba.

Oyigbo, or: The City of Swollen Beauties

Chigaemezu Ernest Ohia

Poetry

DAWN HAS COME serenading to me
in this strong slanting rain
that beats so furiously against my
windowpanes
I rise in my wakefulness to stare out my
window
to behold this land; the land of my teenage
years
brimming with overripe calmness.

Here,
the mornings dance with colours
over rusty rooftops and green bushes
to reveal this land of thickened memories.
The mid-days melt away
with the hubbubs of noisy market women

and the nights here are slices of
Moonlight gleaming on silvery sheets.

Oyigbo: a city fairly drawn away from life,
pregnant with the reveries of her town folks.

**Oyigbo: A burst of frothy hopes on
flickering realities.**

**O! Oyigbo, these rain-fed streets,
these roads lined with rubbish, these
crammed stalls
are they your choked silence?**

At a distance, I hear the cries of the skinny
shop owner
announcing the scudding clouds.

Two Cities

UYO

IfiokAbasi Okop

Non-fiction

MY FAMILY MOVED to Uyo when it was the only green pasture in Akwa Ibom State. I watched Uyo grow from a crawling toddler to a young adult in the eight years the new government was in charge. It made a change from being just a state capital to a hub of businesses. The new government surprised Uyo, perhaps because it wanted more and opened up for more. It gave up houses and shops for good roads, gave up land for Ibom Tropicana, the cinema, the E-library and the International Stadium. Uyo began to smelt new. The feel of a poor man who knew he was going to get rich one day and when he became rich, made everything about him tastefully exquisite.

I watched Uyo grow from a crawling toddler to a young adult in the eight years the new government was in charge...from being just a state capital to a hub of businesses.

Uyo's roads reeked of bright headlights and streetlights the first night I returned from Nsukka. I

Uyo began to smelt new. The feel of a poor man who knew he was going to get rich one day and when he became rich, made everything about him tastefully exquisite.

smiled and closed my eyes to bask in the warm welcome. It smelt of home; it *was* home. The streetlights and headlights shone from the flyover to IBB Avenue. The lights in E-library glowed and I made sure I stared at it for the entire time the keke was going to pass by.

Uyo had major roads which had been there since the early days of the town but Aka Etinan was a growing child with a bright future. It was the road that

led to the famous Ibom International Stadium. The road that had the most supermarkets I have ever seen. There were ten of them—or were there twelve? And an important trivia: They were all owned by the Igbo, at least all the ones I have entered.

I looked around Akpan Andem Market again and knew I'd chosen the wrong entrance. The other entrance had traders who did not care if you entered their shop; they were doing very well, I supposed. But the traders at this entrance I'd chosen could throng you if that would make you buy from them.

I looked at the ground as I walked into the market, making sure I stepped on neat places because it had rained earlier that day and the ground was muddy with market dirt. Most traders did not call out to me today and I felt denied of my market rights. I walked a long way, a woman's shouting, "E dey kill mosquito well well, e dey kill bedbug, e dey kill rat, e dey kill ant; oya come see as e take dey work!" A woman with Afang leaves asked me to buy from her and I walked away. I entered the meat section of the market and heard a man preaching. I wondered which one was louder, the sound of the knives hitting meat on the wooden tables or the preacher asking the traders to give their lives to Christ. One trader called out over the noise in the market, "Mbakara, fine girl. Come buy meat," and I turned and walked to the front of his stall.

Ikot-Ekpene... was a small unplanned town with a population that seemed to be more than the town could carry. The roads always seemed to have more cars than they were meant for.

The Raffia City, the city's alias, is seen in a small section of the town where almost everything is made with raffia: chairs, purses, slippers and even a lawyer's wig.

As I walked out of the market, I made a mental note to enter the first keke whose driver would be the first to shout "Aka Etinan!" The day two keke drivers fought over which keke I would enter, my bag had been knocked down and I'd left some foodstuff on the ground.

Uyo once had motorcycles as the cheapest means of transportation until the crime rate increased and the government banned motorcycles

and introduced kekes. Because of their own nuisance, kekes have since been banned from some places like the Wellington Bassey Way and the right axis of Plaza. I passed by Ikot Ekpene Road one day and heard a man shout, “Plasta, plasta, one chanch!” I turned to look at him and realized he did not care if he really meant, “Plaza, Plaza one chance!”

IKOT EKPENE, the other town in Akwa-Ibom that is almost as famous as Uyo, never really fascinated me at first. It was a small unplanned town with a population that seemed to be more than the town could carry. The roads always seemed to have more cars than they were meant for. For one moment, I smiled to myself while wondering how the air got around; I imagined breathing the air used by the person close to me and breathing it out for the next person. The only fascinating thing the town had was the Plaza that young people hung out in. It intrigued me because, unlike Uyo's Plaza, nobody sells, takes passports or parks their car there. It is strictly for relaxation. The Raffia City, the city's alias, is seen in a small section of the town where almost everything is made with raffia: chairs, purses, slippers and even a lawyer's wig. Aside the Four Points Sheraton Hotel, my favorite development in Ikot-Ekpene is the Ikot Ekpene-Abak road, which is long, windy and lonely. A ride on it gives one the feeling of being Vin Diesel in the *Fast and Furious* films. My family lived in Ikot-Ekpene for a while but I was so little that all I could remember was the GRA where we lived. It was the coolest place to live in Ikot Ekpene at that time, but now it lives in its past glory, holding only the remnants of Ikot Ekpene's early development.

I NOW LOVE Ikot Ekpene because it has never tried to be like any other town. It has never envied Uyo and has somehow reveled in its own history. Uyo, on the other hand, has reveled in being the major tourist site in Akwa Ibom State. On Instagram, one user wrote a post and asked people the places they would love to live in. I thought about India, Cuba, Paris and London but I realized home is really where love is and that place is Akwa Ibom for me.

The Mad Man and the City

PORT-HARCOURT

Chigaemezu Ernest Ohia

Poetry

WHEN THE NIGHT goes away
and shadows begin to lengthen,
he would rise, to wander blindly amongst
boulevards
in search of the sun.

The dry breeze, racing with light rain,
would lead him
along jutting houses in layouts,
into filthy markets and abattoirs,
amongst people in mismatched colours,
across winding lanes and flyovers
and would set him on a pedestrian bridge.
He (awestruck) would gaze at the city: **Port
Harcourt,**

**A city of spiced buoyancy,
and of bright streets and storeyed
buildings and traffic.**

A city where well-heeled men compete for
identity

and the paupers, piteous paupers with
scabies,

would bend to kiss the ground where
fortunate men tread.

A place open to the embrace

of settlers and of silhouettes in draped
anticipations.

Dropping his gaze (of affluent puzzlement)

he would trudge homewards as the wind
sighs by

and would catch the last bleak streaks of a
retiring sun.

We Are Eating Bole

FOOD IN PORT-HARCOURT

Bura-Bari Nwilo · Otosirieze Obi-Young

Album



See *Bole*. Roast plantain, ripe and uripe. Fish. Oil. There is a rumour, a claim, that Port-Harcourt has the best bole in the business. Photo Credit: Bura-Bari Nwilo.



Bole Woman, Customer Man. Photo: Otosirieze Obi-Young.



We Are Eating Bole. Two men visit the bole seller in Rumuokoro, Port-Harcourt.

Scars on the Other Side of Beauty, or: The Neglected Facts of Ukanafun People

UKANAFUN LGA, AKWA-IBOM STATE

Iduehe A. Udom

Non-fiction

AS THE BUS left Aba Main Park, the driver injected some soft tones into the air. Since the bus was not wide enough for a dancing ground, many people in the bus sang along, clapping hands when necessary. The music lasted through Umugene, Ukwa East LGA, and finally dropped at the thin boundary between Iwoukem and Azumini communities. A passenger indicated interest to alight and the driver pulled over at the next bus stop to avoid the eagle-eyed combined army and police patrol team who seemed to be praying for defaulters. In less than five minutes, the bus was on the road again. Seeing a signboard, someone at the front announced that we were already in Etim Ekpo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, and then all discussions shifted. Praises were showered on the Akwa Ibom State Government for the developmental gestures visible at the entrance of the state from Igboland. “Akwa Abasi Ibom has really stood by the land named after Him,” a passenger chipped in, activating sparks of smiles and pride from Akwa Ibomites.

The journey continued, and we were soon on the South-South-Eastern Niger Delta fringes. The drained land of the prestigious Qua Iboe River and the community of the famous Blue River, an Annang-dominated space. 127,033 human beings inhabit this land shared by 92 communities in harmony. Soon, a colourful signboard welcomed us into Ukanafun Local Government Area—one of the eight Annang communities in Akwa Ibom State—a place where the traditional marriage that had attracted more than half of the passengers in the bus was being held. Time continued to count down on the main event as the bus finally arrived Ikot Akpa Nkuk, the Ukanafun Local Government Council, where the passengers opted to tour the city first, to explore her priceless interests.

We met with the wise grey Mmarak Ibekwe, a living witness to the history of Ukanafun. With smiles, he told us about the creation of Ukanafun in 1977 from the former Abak and Opobo Divisions of the then Cross-River State (Calabar Kingdom). He pointed towards the West, specifying the boundary of Ukanafun with Oruk Anam. Like a typical traditional dancer, he pointed again towards the South and mentioned another boundary of the land with Abak.

Ukanafun: “Ukana - a fonno”—Ukana has finally appeared after swimming across the river.

Akwaowo Ibekwe announced that the land holds 67,968 beautiful, energetic women and 62,065 wonderful men. “You men should take legal chances; won’t this ladies wished to be married by Ukanafun men?” he added playfully, as excitement ruled both men and women in the group while he moved on to sit on his double armchair covered with spotted brown animal skin. Discussing the culture and traditions of the Ukanafun people, he mentioned Ekpo, Ekong, Ekpe, Utu-ekpe, Akoko, Ekon, Ewa-Ikang Udukghé, Usoro Afa Edia, Usoro Afa Isua, Usoro Ndo and Enin as the most interesting events. He mentioned that trading, fishing, hunting, farming, sculpturing and palm produce hold significant contributions to the slowed-down economy of the town since the Civil War depopulated the area and kept it in a situation many governments have made no efforts to help her recover from. The land is one of the oil producing communities in Akwa Ibom State, although her looks do not bear such evidence. One past governor and the present one were groomed in this land, too. As he finished speaking, a big silence engulfed the compound, the hooting of an owl echoed miles away. The sleepy night pulled together the dark clouds to cover itself in a mixed ambience.

After Oroworukwu Street

PORT-HARCOURT

Daniel C. Ulonnam

Non-fiction

CALL PORT-HARCOURT a watered-down city. Looking out my window every morning the streets are laid bare; people talking, hurrying, screaming in different directions. In Oroworukwu Street, somewhere in the heart of the city, everybody seems to know everybody else. This is perhaps unsurprising as the houses here sometimes share single demarcating walls, and sometimes face each other too closely, and mostly, the children in this neighborhood attend the same schools, worship in the same church.

This particular part of the city appears to have lost touch with nature because of the numerous buildings and cemented compounds and coal tar. The little available spaces are used as parking lots for occupants and visitors at noon, the air thick with dust and fumes from vehicles, generators. An ambience which lingers late into the evening. People playing jams from their stereos, cooking, relaxing while they discussed the day, mostly men and a few pro-active women arguing politics. Occasionally on this street, cars race past, thieves chased by policemen in pick-up vans, pellets released into the air as people take to their heels.

Unlike Lagos where there is a rivalry between dwellers on Mainland and The Island, Port-Harcourt allows for easier inter-class coexistence.

The oil city wears a different look on Sundays, a more solemn look. People going to church in colourful attires, smiling. Others at home playing music from stereos. Because everybody knows everybody else, on some special days like Christmas, food—rice—is exchanged between families.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

Inside Town, the malls are packed with people, their counters filled with often overpriced commodities. Garrison is also filled with people, people fixing their phone and laptops. Taxis and buses, coloured blue with white bands, are everywhere.

In the city of Port Harcourt, there is no big man or small man. Everybody is a big man because they say they are. Unlike Lagos where there is a rivalry between dwellers on Mainland and The Island, Port-Harcourt allows for easier inter-class coexistence.

Warri

Amatesiro Dore

Memoir

THIS IS WHERE I began. Warri. First memories of me: four years old at my maternal grandfather's house opposite the Olu's Palace. My first school, Model Nursery and Primary School, was across the field used for coronation anniversaries.

My grandfather was the only man in the house. I was raised by my grandmother and aunties. I walked and talked like them and was called woman-wrapper in nursery school. I wasn't ashamed. My mouth terrorised bullies. I lived across the field and my aunts were ready to fight for me. Auntie Toju and Auntie Rita were my guardian angels. God was something my grandparents rediscovered after my birth.

At first, it was ulcer—or so they thought. But by the time my grandmother was diagnosed with kidney failure, it was almost too late. Her journeys to Life Support in Maryland, Lagos, were my first memories of doctors. I remember our journeys from church to church, the morning

devotions, and how my grandfather rededicated his life to God. That was how we began to attend Foursquare Gospel Church at the Olu's Palace. Despite prayers and dialysis, my grandmother died. She was fifty-nine, looking hundred.

Pain is what I chose to remember. Pain was where I lived. My pain was a lie. My mother tried her best but I was a budding writer in search of a difficult childhood.

While my grandmother battled kidney failure, I wrestled with nocturnal enuresis, a.k.a. bedwetting. During my graduation into Primary One, I dosed off in a chair and soiled my graduation gown with urine. Just as my

grandmother's health made a Christian out of my Granddad, bedwetting drove me to church. I

peed on everything I ever slept on. From chairs to mats, to mackintosh-clad mattresses; I was sleeping and waking up in hell. At first we thought it would go away like my addiction to sucking my thumb.

At four I woke up with tiny cuts on my favourite thumb. I switched to the left one. I was beaten and both thumbs were bandaged but I found solace at the tip where the bandage could not

cover up. My parents played no role in my upbringing.

Not for the first four years of my life. I knew of their existence and heard about them as though they were my distant cousins.

Warri is where I returned.

I remember when my father visited. He had a car and his office wasn't far away. Our relationship became financial. Father became a man who paid your school fees and visited in different cars. I was proud of him the way one is proud of an uncle in America. I felt no emotional connection to them. My parents were just names: *Rowland* and *Kate*. And I heard their gist from family members and visiting gossip.

I remember my mother's wedding. It was 1991 and she was pregnant with my first sibling. She married a good man. I felt safe with him as he discussed with my mother. He was never Joe to me. He was always Daddy, my mother's husband who called me his son. That was the beginning of my travels to Lagos: to visit my grandmother at the home of my aunt at Ago Palace Way and to spend school holidays with mother at Agege.

I was auditioning for a school play in Primary Two when my mother visited Warri. I was six years old and she wanted me to live with her in Lagos. My grandmother was on her deathbed and my stepdad pledged to raise me as a son. I continued to bed-wet like a fish and was as feminine as my aunties. I spent four years with my mother. Four years of us trying to bond and understand each other. Four years of beatings and a few joys. Pain is what I chose to remember.

I was too young to do anything for Warri when the Crisis erupted. My Itsekiri people were engaged in mortal combat with other neighbouring tribes. My father was in the middle of a divorce and our lives were endangered on every side. We fled to Sapele....

Pain was where I lived. My pain was a lie. My mother tried her best but I was a budding writer in search of a difficult childhood.

Warri is where I returned. My mother's family had moved into the former home of my Aunt at Ago Palace Way. The beatings were getting too much. And my father was getting richer. I was ten in JSS One when we visited Warri to collect my living allowance. I decided to stay back, to remain with my biological father and break my mother's heart. She wept and promised never to beat me again but my eyes were set on greener pastures. At the court of my grandfather, my will prevailed and my father won custody.

My father was enduring the last year of his first marriage when I came to live with him in Warri. I was a thorn on the bed of his childless marriage and I knew not. I enjoyed the luxury that his wealth provided. I loved my chauffeured rides to school and the lovely anthem of my new school in Warri: *John F. Kennedy International School / In Nigeria, we hail and adore thee dearly...* It was the very song of neo-colonialism but what did I know? Our worship of the late American President was redeemed by the school's motto: *ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.*

I was too young to do anything for Warri when the Crisis erupted. My Itsekiri people were engaged in mortal combat with other neighbouring tribes. My father was in the middle of a divorce and our lives were endangered on every side. We fled to Sapele, before settling in Benin, while my father's commercial enterprises remained in Warri, Escravos and environs. However, I did not leave my mother's house to return to the horrors of bedwetting at a Nigerian boarding house. So when my father decided to enrol and forget me in a boarding house in Benin, I sent word to my mother: *abeg come and rescue me.*

Five years later, my father invited me to my hometown. To see the showpiece home he built opposite the private residence of the Olu of Warri. Ten years later, that house was where the Olu-Elect prepared for his coronation.

At the end of my last days, I shall return to Warri, the burial ground of my umbilical cord.

**WHEN IT NO LONGER
MATTERS WHERE
YOU LIVE**

When it no longer matters where you live.

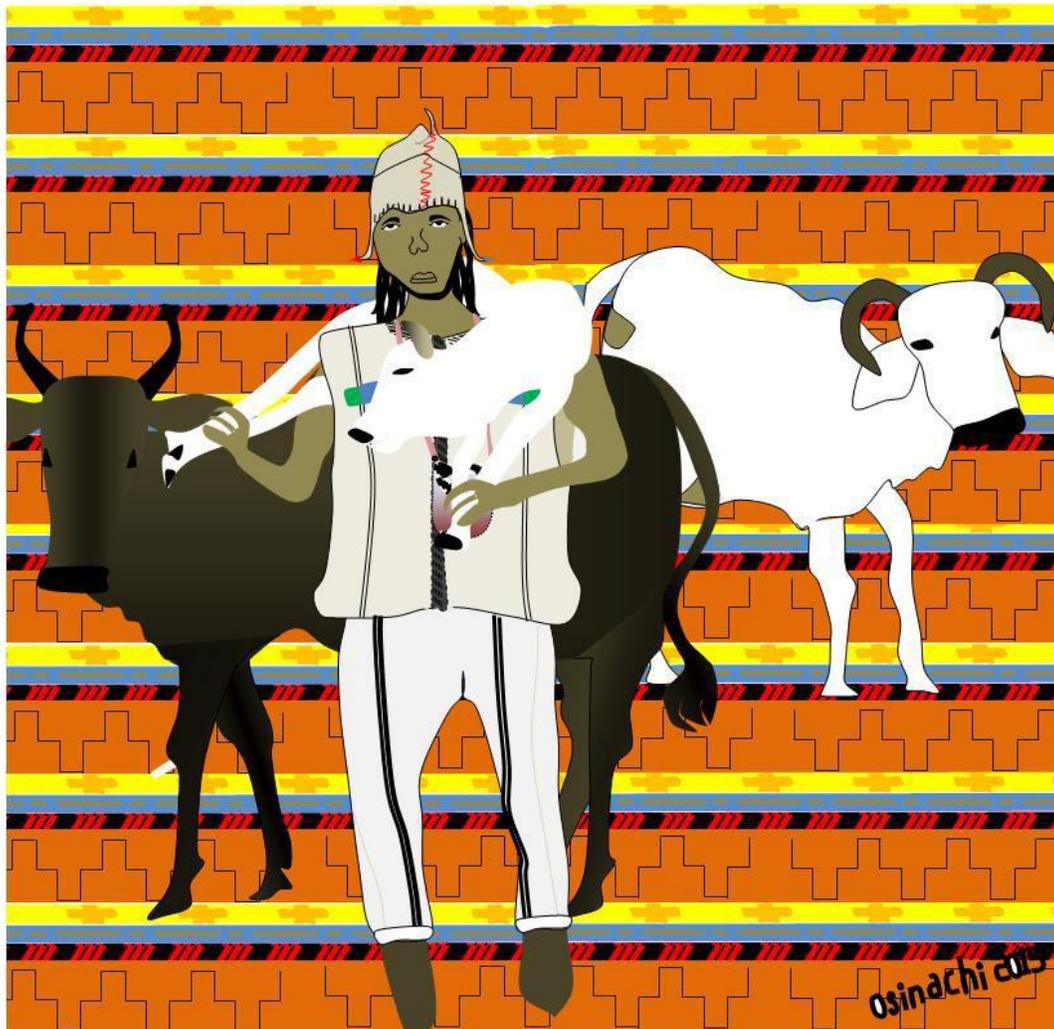
—TANURE OJAIDE

Fulani Herdsman

Osinachi

Visual Art

2015



My Heart Bleeds

Olutayo Anuoluwapo Aina

Poetry

MY HEART BLEEDS,
at the sound of cries,
from the deepest parts in the dark.
Of voices from bitter hearts,
hearts that are wounded.
But are not left alone,
with their enough troubles.

At faces that stare,
emptily into space,
with lines of wrinkles.
covered with a web of fear.

And eyes wide open,
that rarely blink,
as one seems like
a thousand years.
The eyes are red with blood shots,
from endless tears,
whose sources,
have broken loose.

My heart bleeds,
from the wailing of mothers,
at the abduction of children,
with hands in the air,
as they watch,
their children scream for help,
and wriggle to wage war,
wars which they end up losing.

From the shivers of men,
at mutilation of sons,
who at the sight of their helpless
fathers
humbly surrender.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

From cries of pain,
of girls that are raped,
whose struggles only end in vain,
and make life throw
brimstones from all directions,
that hit them on foreheads,
and burn with marks in their memories.
That fall on their long term wounds,
which bleed freshly.

My heart bleeds,
at the burdened voice of infants,
from hunger for breast milk,
breasts that are nowhere to be found,
with milk that have gone sour,
as the sources are spread,
under sun and in open air.

At children that anticipate,
looking unto confused faces,
even in the midst of wrinkles,
searching for images,
of their mothers,
who in turn have turned
their faces on the lookout,
for their children.

My heart bleeds,
at the sight of women,
with shreds of rags,
Made from grabs by hooks,
that drag as far as they can,
leaving the hooks with pieces,
hanging loosely on their tips,
pieces that form a guide,
for husbands to trail,
in search of their women.

Rags,
that hang loosely on their tired bodies,
out of narrow escape from gunshots,
with no hope for the next moment,
with the emptiness of what tomorrow holds.
They run without thought,
of which way the monster
invades through.
All they want is to steer clear
of the reach of its cold hands.
But many tow the path to its trap,
and fall blindly in it,
leaving no one,
to return to tell stories,
nor anyone to stand as a signpost,
directing others to the right path.

My heart bleeds,
at voices,
that shriek even in their depths.
whose strength to fight,
have drowned in the ocean of fear,
at sound of gunshots,
the sight of guns and hefty figures.
whose voices send their brains,
releasing multiple impulses,
with their knees shaking,
and their legs twitching .

**My heart bleeds,
at the deep ditches,
that are dug,
by fingers of time,
on the skins and in necks,
of the aged.
From the worries
for their children,**
of what awaits them in next moment.
From the fake smile
they put on at the sight
of death that approaches,
and leads them away,
into a land of no return.

That saves them from the gruesome situation of the present.

They do not think twice,
to withhold their hands behind them,
in rejection of death's offer,
as he lends a hand of help in disguise.
But they gladly oblige,
while looking back,
wanting to stay with their children,
**wanting to catch a last glimpse,
of the sight of the city,
with all its beauty,
with a greater cloud of horror
ready to burst loose.**
They turn their eyes,
wishing their children victory,
which seems not approaching,
even in a long while.

**My heart bleeds,
at the worry
that scribbles itself like an ancient writing,
on the faces of children ,**
who have been thrown,
into their world,
to wallow all alone,
in their inexperienced thoughts .

**My heart bleeds,
at the febrile look of many ,
by the hands of hunger,
that now dwells with them,**
with an aim to devour them all,
and take with him their carcasses.

My heart bleeds,
at the helpless voices of girls,
from the marks on their faces,
made by hands bigger than theirs,
that struggle with them,
and rob them of their independence.

My heart bleeds,
at the bodies,
that have fallen ,
and lie fallow,
from fear,
from pain,
from hunger,
from bullets,
from blasts.

My heart bleeds,
when with all the tears,
with all the cries,
with all the fear,
help is in view,
but not within reach.
Where the help lies,
ears are blocked,
walls of resistance,
to worrisome voices,
have been built.
Even with stores of help,
they seem not ready:
yesterday we will help,
tomorrow is late,
are what they say.

My heart bleeds,
at the troubles that loom in the air,
like hanging webs,
weaved to trap many,
and waiting to befall them.

This Is Home

UYO TO LAGOS

Okafor Ugochi Winnie

Non-fiction

THE AKTC BUS conductor screamed my name over and over and then petulantly handed me my bus ticket, wearing a malicious look on his face as though I had wronged him that morning. I humbly found my way into the twelve-seater AC bus where other passengers sat, balancing my petite self on the seat in the middle row, next to the window. I was going home, to Lagos, for the holidays.

The Ibibio Christian music blaring from the unseen stereo in the bus terminal was quite deafening to me: I could not understand a single word being sung. Hawkers stood around the buses, at the windows and doors, selling their wares, switching to Pidgin when they

realized a customer did

not

understand Ibibio. The new AKTC bus terminal at Itam was quite spacious, well-painted, neat and orderly. Soon, we left the terminal and its loud Ibibio songs behind.

We passed through the first-class hospital built during Akpabio's administration, slowly moving past the crowd—sellers, buyers, students, workers, displaced persons—who filled the roads at Itam, hustling or going to hustle for their daily bread. As usual, some of the kekes drove recklessly through the

We were welcomed to Abia State by potholes which waltzed with our bus tyres, leading us through the semi-tarred roads the government had blessed it with. It was a bumpy ride almost all through, and our driver comforted us with the latest hit songs that played on the stereo.

Hawkers stood around the buses, at the windows and doors, selling their wares, switching to Pidgin when they realized a customer did not understand Ibibio.

crowded roads, the drivers being blessed with insults in the dialects of the offended persons. People flocked into Itam Market to buy, sell, to steal. The market seemed too small for all of them, and the previously swept tarred roads were being littered by them.

We passed through the roundabout at Ikot-Ekpene, then Umuahia road which was also filled with people who came to buy and sell: this time, mostly Igbos. We were welcomed to Abia State by the potholes which waltzed with our bus tires, leading us through the semi-tarred roads the government had blessed it with. It was a bumpy ride almost all through, and our driver comforted us with the latest hit songs that played on the stereo. I glanced at the unattractive houses—most of which were uncompleted—on the roadside, the trees and shrubs which struggled to grow together, the wooden shops that seemed to house expired goods in them, and persons who were going to their farms or other people's farms, wearing dusty pairs of slippers. Their hands held hoes, cutlasses and other farming tools that seemed borrowed, that they did not look like they could afford, their malnourished-looking family members or friends tagging along. The towns here were underdeveloped and I blamed the government. I closed my eyes to sleep, consciously ignoring the song playing on the stereo, and basked in my thoughts of home and the friends I was hoping to see there, falling asleep eventually. I was jolted back to reality when the bus got into a ditch, which we got out from with the aid of passersby. The place smelt of cigarettes and looked like a kidnappers den. Fortunately, we got out of Abia state alive.

I glanced at the unattractive houses—most of which were uncompleted—on the roadside, the trees and shrubs which struggled to grow together, the wooden shops that seemed to house expired goods in them, and persons going to their farms, wearing dusty pairs of slippers. Their hands held hoes, cutlasses, that seemed borrowed.

Anambra had cool scenery: it was worth looking at. The tall palm trees danced as the swirling wind passed through them, their leaves standing high. The strong leaves were not swayed by their dancing trees and the wind they danced to. The weak ones however got knocked out of the dance by the wind, falling away silently. Anambra smelt of nature, it displayed nature, and at a point I thought I tasted nature just from feasting my eyes on it. It was serene, full of life, even when the road was deserted. It was African.

Getting to Onitsha market and coming out victorious was another Super Story. Our driver manoeuvred through the crowded road filled with people coming to buy and sell goods, most of which were made in Aba. The sweet-mouthed seller became

The place smelt of cigarettes and looked like a kidnappers den.

Anambra smelt of nature, it displayed nature, and at a point I thought I tasted nature just from feasting my eyes on it.

insulting in the twinkling of an eye. Everything seemed to be sold here, everyone pretended to speak and understand Igbo. I sat in the bus, enjoying the disorderliness in this market filled with people, and it smelt of sweat, dust, anger, joy, and insults. The bus headed for the River Niger Bridge in Onitsha which linked us to Asaba and, soon, the great River was no longer in sight. After our stop in Delta State, one of the states blessed with good roads, I fell asleep till we got to Ore. The air there was mixed with dust, anger, sweat, and blood. We were held in traffic for a while and got out of Ondo two hours later. The ambience of Edo and Ore were not hospitable; even the trees that stood at the roadsides spoke against them. Ondo reminded me of Anambra with its serenity.

We survived the traffic on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, the most dangerous highway in Nigeria, and made it to Ojuelegba later that night: the final bus stop. We all found our way back to our

We survived the traffic on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, the most dangerous highway in Nigeria.

After our stop in Delta State, one of the states blessed with good roads, I fell asleep till we got to Ore.

homes amidst the noise which filled the air from the quarrels of okada men and their female passengers, the reckless driving of damfo drivers, the loud cries of young children, the blare of different stereos from bars around, and the insults from angry traders who vented it on unfortunate Lagosians who seemed oblivious to the fact that business had not been good that day. And through these frightening—but not unusual—every-night situations in Lagos, I made it home to Ajegunle, in the mainland of Lagos.

The ogogoro-smelly-mouth driver I managed to get dropped me off at the gates of my house, talking to himself as he drove off, maybe to drink again. I was greeted with the shouts of “goal!” from football match viewers and I chuckled to myself. This was home, a place I want to be, and I headed upstairs to hear my mom scream my name.

THE EAST

Nwañgene

NWAÑGENE, ONITSHA

Nzube Ifechukwu

Non-fiction

CREEK ROAD IS a long tarred street in Fegge, the tar dust-brown with a thin overlay of sand from decades of trampling by variegated soles. Fegge is a district in the south of Onitsha—the headquarters of Onitsha South LGA—known for laissez-faire parents who raise streetwise children. Onitsha is a city of dwellers most of whom call “room” *loom* and say *chop* when they mean “shop”.

...a shack bursting with boys in their teens and early twenties, reeking of Benson and St Moritz cigarettes, of weed, *kai-kai*.

Nwañgene, a creek of the Niger River across Creek Road, is a collage by many artists. The centre, morphed into a pigsty and a tip by necessity, is a rank expanse of murky puddles, garbage, and fresh and decaying pig turds, sometimes human turds. It is a sprawling mountain, rearing up against the sky. Staking out a part of an edge of the creek is a vast clearing: Qhanugo Field of the rust-freckled forward-tipping white goal. On the right of this field is a shack bursting with boys in their teens and early twenties, reeking of Benson and St Moritz cigarettes, of weed, *kai-kai*. Ringing this shack in a jagged circle are motorcycles and one or two teal Peugeot 504 saloon. People come to learn to ride—one of the boys behind on the pillion seat steering the learner’s knuckles steering the handlebars—and drive, Qhanugo serving as a nurturing ground. On another part of the edge is a hoarding displaying colourful adverts.

In the mornings, Nwañgene is a lull of men—as pitch-dark as my penis—on their hunkers pissing, shitting, farting, each grimacing visage a peculiar pattern of scarification drawn from a handful of options.

In the mornings, Nwañgene is a lull of men—as pitch-dark as my penis—on their hunkers pissing, shitting, farting, each grimacing visage a peculiar pattern of scarification drawn from a handful of options. Pure white egrets swarm over the creek, hovering lowly over the verdant sward across the

**In the leaden light of dusk,
the white of the egrets glide
through the slate-grey of
the sky, away from the
creek, their spread wings
steady in the air**

centre
which is
believed to
overlay a
brook,

sometimes perching on the sward—webbed-feet birds don't drown. In the afternoons, scruffy herdsmen goad their white and black and brindle cattle to the sward—four-legged creatures don't drown, but how

about the herdsmen? In the evenings, juvenile heads carrying waste bins—jerry cans cut open at their tops—pick their way through the bog of a tip, with alimi men—some seated on their heaps of scrap smoking, others scrutinizing with the aid of their knobby staves a newly emptied dune of garbage, all of them mechanic-like in their sooty rags—scowling at them: “Carry it to the furthest inside; don't empty that bin there; if you empty that bin there you'd pack it with your bare hands.” Or, when, by glancing up at it, they've sensed that a bin has prospects: “Empty it here, just empty it here,” pointing at once on the ground just before their feet. And the oink of fat taupe swine, the gurgle of their wet snout inside the algae-coloured puddles, flies rising in dense black clouds. In the leaden light of dusk, the white of the egrets glide through the slate-grey of the sky, away from the creek, their spread wings steady in the air, little kids flapping their hands ferociously in the manner of birds and singing out their lungs: “Chekereke nye m 'bọ ọcha k' i were oji! Egrets give me white nails to take black!”

**Pure white egrets swarm
over the creek, hovering
lowly over the verdant
sward across the centre
which is believed to overlay
a brook, sometimes
perching on the sward –
webbed-feet birds don't
drown.**

Years later, when the blessing Mr Peter Obi happens to Anambra state, Nwañgene would be dredged, and the problem of flood in Onitsha during heavy rains would be solved. Then, even the intimidating mountain would go; only the verdant sward, with the egrets and cattle that come

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

and go, and Qhanugo Field, with the shack and one goal removed, would be contributors to this abiding collage.

Like Ants, When It Rains

OGBETE MARKET, ENUGU

Chisom Okafor

Poetry

scurrying soldier ants are best
seen

when

the clouds turn into tearful paleness

because then, **the raindrops at Ogbete
Market**

would roll down roofs of stalls

to make boundaries, the way

a tigress demarcates

her territory with her urine,

and the stalls would take on the

picture of

many long lines of soldier ants.

at other times,

at other market places,

the air may smell of the freshness of
packaged clothes

or voices of traders

and their customers

tell of the orderliness of choristers

but here, the underwear seller is

the minstrel, who could make the deaf hear

with a crescendo of

bells and vocal invitations.

The truck-pusher is the carrier of many
fortunes

that maneuvers his way through a mass of
moving bodies

like fish in a crowded aquarium

**and the butcher, smelling of yesterday's
sweat,**

is the tired gambler

who'd vow to go home

when one more sale is made, yet

break his vow each time.

I once met a veteran salesman

who, in the middle of dusting brown shoes
and

sipping fermented palm wine, said:

in this market,

this is how you'd sell sandals in 1967,

you'd let the customer pull out the

Biafran pounds

**then you snatch the notes quickly, in time
to escape enemy mortar and bomber jets
and this is how you buy
rice today:**

**you start from an outrageous six-times-
lower price**

to bargain
because bags of rice now cost
six to seven times more than
they did in 1967.

Again, he said:
this is how hawkers protect their
wares when it rains -
they conceal them
with unused garbage bags,
then
dash into any empty stall
like a marching procession
of soldier ants
caught in a sudden rainstorm.

Ogbete is a major market in Enugu State, where only ete—raffia ropes tied to form circles and used by palm wine tappers for keeping balance when climbing palm trees—were once sold, hence the name “Ogbo-ete”—*a market square for raffia ropes*. Before it gradually turned into the major and complete market it is today. The writer once worked in one of the many stalls of the market.

A Home Tomorrow

First published on *facesofthenight.wordpress.com*, in 2014

KENT ROAD, ABA

Osinachi

Non-fiction

AROUND 7 P.M. It is Kent road, close to Ekeoha Shopping Centre in Aba. I am a bit afraid. One can never tell what their reaction can be. For that, I walk past them. By my right where these homeless ones have made their nests for the night are shops locked up, facing the main road. Here, the smell of urine is strong. I walk up a bit and then make up my mind to do this. I turn around and walk leisurely to one of them, a woman, seated in front of the tarpaulin covers, my pen and notepad drawn out.

“Good evening,” I say to her. An expectant smile hits her face. She nods. I slowly wade into shallow Nigerian pidgin with a bit of broken English. “I am a blogger. I go around collecting the stories of the homeless in our society so that I can put them on the Internet for people to come and help out. I would like to ask you some questions, if you’d grant me your time.”

Her smile grows bigger and she says, “Me *ba* English. *Ba* English.”

“Oh.” She does not understand English. I feel like asking her why she allowed me say all those things before revealing this to me but instead I pull myself together and think what gestures I can make to get her to take me to someone who speaks English among them. I point to a group of the homeless behind me, across the road, gesturing, saying, “English? Anybody, English?”

Kent road, close to Ekeoha Shopping Centre. By my right where these homeless ones have made their nests for the night are shops locked up, facing the main road. Here, the smell of urine is strong.

She understands. “Hausa. French,” she says to me. At this moment I wish I knew the basics in these languages. I am almost about to give up when she looks at the group across the road as though she has seen something strange. She gets up and beckons on me to follow her, saying, “English.”

“For how long have you been staying here?”...

“83 years.”

I follow her across the road to where about three men are seated on mats on the floor. One of them has a plate of food in front of him. It looks like supper time.

The woman talks to the first man there who wears a white caftan. I stand at her back as they converse. When they are done, she gestures for me to go to him as she stands there, looking at us.

I delve into Nigerian Pidgin with a bit of Broken English again.

“Okay,” he says. And I draw nearer to her, my phone recorder active.

“What is your name?”

“Musa.”

Musa may not truly be his name. He had said it with discernible hesitation. Like a child learning his alphabet. As he takes these questions he has a kind of mixed reception. I think he does not trust me. To have someone who is not one of them be among them must be an unusual thing. I press on. “It looks like you have a kind of group here. All of you have come together.”

“Hm. It’s a group. Yes.” His Broken English is good.

“For how long have you been staying here?”

Musa may not truly be his name. I think he does not trust me. To have someone who is not one of them be among them must be an unusual thing.

A bit of his warm side surfaces now. “Really, it’s been long.” He looks out into the dark night, humming and I know that he is thinking. I am patient but this patience does not prepare me for the answer he gives. “83 years.” He adds a nod to it to seal the certainty.

“Hm?” I ask, about to ask him if he means to say “Since ’83”.

He repeats, “83 years.”

“83 years?” I ask, my voice slightly raised.

“Hm,” he affirms.

“Okay.” At this moment, the woman who has brought me says something in Hausa. For the second time tonight, I wish I could speak that language. I don’t want to ask Musa what she said.

“How many women are there here?”

“The women are... eight.”

That came out like “ten”. My ears are still getting used to how his Hausa accent weaves itself around his Broken. “Ten?” I ask to confirm.

“Eight,” he repeats.

“The men make up how much?”

“Men are...” He cuts off and asks the man busy with supper by his side. It is in Hausa language. They seem to be debating. The elderly woman keys in. When it seems they have made up their minds he turns to me: “Women are eight. Fifteen men. Others, children.”

“Okay. Where are you all from?”

“You can come from any place. Kano. Sokoto. Jigawa. Any place... Kaduna is even here. We are not all from one place.”

“Okay. You are all Hausas.”

“Yes. We are Hausa-Hausa. But it is not the same Hausa even though we speak Hausa.” I understand perfectly as he tries to explain that they are Hausas from different parts of the country.

“Where are you from?”

“Me?” he straightens up, his face turning fully to me.

“I’m from Bauchi.”

“Anybody who comes from anywhere can join you,”

“Yes.”

“Nobody can do that,” Musa cuts in. “Nobody can do this thing you’re saying.” He is shaking his head.

I breeze into the next question. “What do you people feed on? How do you feed?”

“We go out and we beg.”

“Where do you beg?”

“Eh?”

“Where do you stay to beg? Which side?”

“That filling station side. Tonimas.” He points to his right into the night.

“This Tonimas filling station here?” I point with him.

“And that filling station close to CKC. And Ngwa Road too.”

“Can I talk to any of the children?”

He keeps quiet, his head sways to his left like a man looking for something under a car. He is deep in thoughts, but this time there is no humming.

I try to help him make up his mind. “I want to get their own stories too and add them up.”

The silence lingers.

I press on. “Can I call them so that you’ll help me translate?”

“These children like that small boy, what do they know that they have to say?” He hesitates.

“He must have something to say. There must be something he wants to be tomorrow. He may want to be the president or a governor. We’re looking for a way to help them. They may start attending school tomorrow. Someone can come here and offer that help tomorrow. You understand?”

“That small boy cannot talk.” He has his mind made up. I give up, wishing again that I can speak Hausa.

“Can I take photos of you?”

“Eh?” he asks.

“I said, can I take photos that I can put together in the publication?” I put my BlackBerry on and Musa flinches at the light flooding my face from the phone screen. He is silent again. That long silence that says neither Yes nor No.

“So, if someone, as it is now, finds a house and takes you people to live there with something for you to be doing as handiwork which is not begging...”

“Can I take photos of you?”

He is silent again. That long silence that says neither Yes nor No.

“Nobody can do that,” Musa cuts in. “Nobody can do this thing you’re saying.” He is shaking his head.

“Somebody can do it. That is why I’m doing this.”

It is almost like a quarrel now. Musa insists, “Nobody can do that. For how many years have we been here? Nobody can do that.” He is angry, maybe at the world.

I do not give up here. “But if someone comes with all these, will you people accept?”

“Yes. We will. Yes na!”

“Okay.” I stand up, my BlackBerry positioned. “So, let me take the photos.” I take the first shot, showering them with the camera flash. Musa throws his face away as though a violent and dusty wind has blown towards him.

“No. No.” He protests, indicating with his hand.

“Another shot.”

“No.”

The man by his side says to me, “Go.” I do not take offence, because I know that what he means to say is, “Please, go.”

I walk out with the woman whose teeth shines through the night as she smiles. Back across the road to where they have made their own tarpaulin covers for the night. I take photos of her, another woman and the two children I could see. I move to the next cover and try to talk the occupant, an elderly woman, into allowing me take her photo. She continues to talk in Hausa, smiling. I do not understand what it is she is saying but I make out the word “passport” and I

“So, if someone, as it is now, finds a house and takes you people to live there with something for you to be doing as handiwork which is not begging...”

**“Nobody can do that,”
Musa cuts in.**

He is angry, maybe at the world.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

understand from her gestures that she does not want me to take a photo of her. I smile and say Saanu to her.

As I'm leaving, I say Saanu to the woman who received me. She smiles and tells me "Tomorrow". I don't understand what she means by that. Something moves me to say to her, "Yes. Tomorrow." It must be that same something that says to me that this woman hopes that a home for her and these other ones comes tomorrow.

Akwata, Enugu

Olisaemeka Gerald

Poetry



IN THE LIGHT of your day,
The calloused feet of adversity
And the clammy hands of overburdened
carts
Are one.
A melting pot of exuberant sweats,
truancy, drudgery, and borrowed dreams
dampened by a cacophony of detached
horns.

In your evenings,
Wine, weed, and wretched claws
Grasp whatever evanescent keenings
dank, seedy corners can offer,

and make denied men rabid labradors
Between the thighs of nubile schoolgirls.

Yet the dream is much alive at the next
dawn,
When you yawn and arise and throw open
your gates
To all merchants and pilgrims
For the jaded rains you bring.

Akwata!
You, indeed, are the soul of commercial
Enugu.

Akwata, the subject of the poem, is located in a busy part of Enugu, close to the the popular Ogbete Main Market and Coal Camp area. Photo: Olisaemeka Gerald.

Rust and Dust: The View from Ogige Market

NSUKKA

Bura-Bari Nwilo · Michael E. Umoh · Otosirieze Obi-Young

Album



The View from Ogige Market.

Photo: Bura-Bari Nwilo.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES



On Enugu Road.

Photo: Bura-Bari Nwilo.



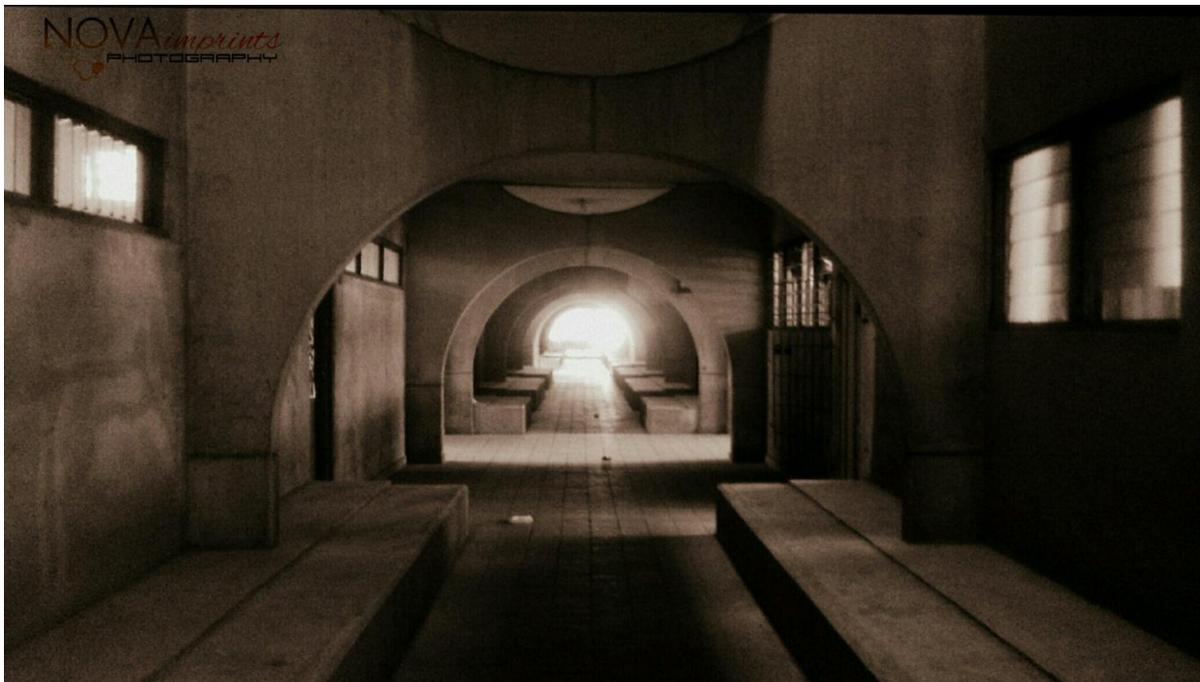
Ogige: A Spread of Brown Rust and Dust.

Photo: Bura-Bari Nwilo.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES



A Student, a Walk. A long vacation late morning in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus. Photo: Otosirize Obi-Young.



These Are No Tombs. An Evening shot of the hallway of Faculty of Arts, Block A, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Photo: Michael Umoh.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES



From the Sky. The view from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
Photo: Michael Umoh.

Brooklyn in Naija

ABA

Chizaram Ilodianya

Non-fiction

ABA SMELT OF bursting hopes and shriveled dreams. On Monday mornings, the sky is stark blue with a sprinkling of white. Emenike, the roadside mechanic, is already sniffing the gallons of engine oil to decide the one he would adulterate.

Mama Akara's shop is tinged with the sizzling feel of hot oil on akara, potatoes, plantain, yam. Mr Orji, the poorly paid civil servant, checks up the newspaper, hoping for another strike and bracing himself it. Nna-Mehn, the motor park tout, is already at the gym, his muscles simmering to be flexed on any bus driver who has decided *not to hear word*. Adaku, the student at

Abia State Polytechnic, knows there would be no lecture today because of unpaid lecturers' salaries. Obioma, the IPOB member, is seriously reconsidering the essence of all the energy he has expended on carrying placards and screaming GIVE US B-NATION. Alaribe, the bus

conductor, is stuffing Tom-Tom and Vicks Blue into his pockets; it massaged the throat from all the shouting. Chijioke, the hustling apprentice at Ariaria Market, is bemoaning how the sixth girl he bought a Samsung Galaxy for left him and called him a Bush Boy.

Trust me, the *Aba Boy* label was just like being black in the USA. So, I would be defensive and say, "I'm not originally from Aba". Or, "Our family house is in Enugu". Or, "I don't really spend my holidays there."

This is Aba and it is all about the hustle. If Lagos is our New York City, then Aba is the Brooklyn in Naija. It is tough-tough and rugged. The pot-holed

streets are always crammed with fast-walking people wearing gloomy faces, bumping into each other and mumbling incoherent *sorrys*. It is a chaotic paradigm of movement but at the same

time there exists a subtle directiveness. Everybody seems to know the next bend, the next gutter to jump and when to dodge an over-sabi car-owner who wants to splash water mingled with algae on your starched shirt.

I love Aba because I was born there. I would often walk pass the Teaching Hospital and imagine how my infant cries must have disturbed the serene neighborhood years ago. But sometimes I feel shame for living in Aba. I went to a boarding school in Okigwe where students who flouted school rules were automatically assumed to live in Aba. Trust me, the *Aba Boy* label was just like being black in the USA. So, I would be defensive and say, “I’m not originally from Aba”. Or, “Our family house is in Enugu”. Or, “I don’t really spend my holidays there.” These lies reeled off my tongue without getting stuck. Finally, I flung the defensiveness coat and embraced Aba in its entirety. I began to walk around with my head held high: I was the Aba boy who was a school prefect and also on the Academic Honor Roll.

When I read Ifeoma Okoye's *Chimere*, which is set in Aba and Nsukka, I was surprised and ecstatic. The places described in the novel are so real because I have been there. Because of this, I re-decided to write about Aba.

Fast forward, years later, I got into the University of Nigeria, Nsukka to study Economics. The rollicking hills of this place that, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie terms “a dry patch of red earth” made me discover writing. My inferiority complex crept in again. I felt Aba was too *unposh* to exist in literature. As a result of this, I wrote stories about Nsukka, Lagos, Manhattan, New Delhi, places people liked to write about.

When I read Ifeoma Okoye's *Chimere*, which is set in Aba and Nsukka, I was surprised and ecstatic. The places described in the novel are so real because I have been there. Because of this, I re-decided to write about Aba. I wanted to write the untold stories of the hawker with rheumy eyes and a nose encrusted by mucus who dangled his pure-water at Brass Junction, the fishmonger who constantly chased away flies from her wares at Ekeakpara, the sweaty boys playing deflated football at Osusu, the scavengers who mounted the garbage heap at Osisioma. I wanted the world to know of the never-say-die doggedness of people who live in Aba.

Aba could be described as a not so haggard old woman who retired without a pension but receives paltry allowances from her children. So that in certain places, she is either tidy, in-between, or untidy. Tidy are those Aba people who live in brick bungalows and duplexes with gleaming walls at Ogbor Hill, GRA and Calabar Street. Well paved streets, correct numbering, manicured hedges and trained Rottweilers. Whose children attend schools with fancy names: Living Word, Intellectual Giants, Dorothy, Early Learning; where they carry Echolaac boxes to school instead of schoolbags, know the anatomy of a horse and can spell *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*. In-between Aba People are folks like me living at Faulks and Okigwe Roads, who boast of ample sunshine, irksome electric power supply and mild serenity. Clothes worn here are exclusively okirika. Here, your Versace and D&G na for your own pocket. The schools are swarmed with half-baked teachers. Your child will probably end up speaking,

Clothes worn here are exclusively okirika. Here, your Versace and D&G na for your own pocket.

“My Aunty say me to say you if you do not send him to a good secondary school outside the area.” Untidy Aba is the ghettos and slums of Degema, Ohanku and Obohia. Houses here are so tightly packed, you could watch your neighbor's television through your open window. Each morning starts with the lynching of a man who stole Maggi cubes, sugar or salt. A benevolent Nigerian would always donate his tyre to complete the

process of flesh charring. The children here do not always go to school because there is no point in it. School makes you too soft for the street. To survive you have join a gang or, in an extreme case, a cult where you snatch bankers' suitcases and cut ladies handbag.

Aba is surrounded by big industrial plants. They line up on the expressway and bid you welcome or farewell with their smoky chimneys.

Night is fast approaching. The Catholic church down the street just rang the bell for Angelus, and Gbararie, the cobbler, is rolling down his batcher. Mama Adigwe is worried that her children's school bus is late. But darkness will come. It would smother us and relief our bone.

Life continues tomorrow.

Places That Claim Me

ONITSHA

Ebenezer Agu

Non-fiction

PLACES CLAIM US in quite dynamic ways and they are always tied to the idea of home:



Isiokpo at 7 a.m.

This is a view of my street, Isiokpo, Awada. Exactly at 7 am, before people start spilling out of their flats. It is the only time you can have it free as it bustles with people till way into the night. Photo: Ebenezer Agu.

where the lives of our parents started, where we travel to for traditional festivals or at the end of the year, where we've spent the most period of our lives, where we feel most sure of ourselves and our right to stand and say we belong. My sense of home differs in this sense, tentative at most, and committed to memories scattered across locations that I've once lived in, memories that exist like dreams had in the same night but at different hours. Sometimes I wonder which part would claim me.

Enugu is the state of my ancestral home, a place that comes to mind when I think of traditional weddings and funerals. It holds a secondary feeling and the idea of retirement; a place of such high civil behavior that I can't help being drawn to it. The un-wrestled orderliness, the street and traffic lights, the corporate behavior of the people which makes them trade in open markets as if they are shopping through

supermarkets. You would somehow long to witness a bit of animation, that they would rather haggle and quarrel or even shout insults on people who would sell at high prices or those who price too cheaply. This sort of controlled attitude makes the city so endearing. But it has never been a primary place for me.

Onitsha has been my place of residence. The beauty is wild and it brews energy and endless opportunities, somewhere you can build a big life from scratch, bit by bit, and a place where little attention is

Onitsha...brews energy and endless opportunities, somewhere you can build a big life from scratch, bit by bit....

given to too much academics and books. The best knowledge is of calculation—plus, minus, times, and division. The night is always not so long because you need to wake up early, throw on your clothes, and follow your mates off to any of the many markets straggling the place. Onitsha is a place where you wake up in the morning hopeful because the sky is so bright and the cloud is as plain as a blank canvas, inviting you

to paint your own day over its surface. And what you know of relaxation is a weekend outing to an event centre or a local joint.

What you may know as Onitsha is really an attitude, endemic and widespread, a centripetal force that sweeps people from different towns to come and answer to one orientation. Nobody cares, whether from Obosi, Nkpor, Ogbaru or any of the neighboring towns that came closer than they should; the city sneaks up behind you, a touch is all that it needs to make you one of its own. Commerce is not restricted to the big locations—Main Market, Relief Market, Ochanja, Mgbuka, Head Bridge, Ogbo Efele—trade happens right in front of your compound. It gives you the feel that you live in the midst of teeming activities and lucky that you are hardly in total lack of money. And there are the things that may seem to make you go mad, the abundant radicalism that awaits you at almost every turn of the way.

My sense of home differs in this sense, tentative at most, and committed to memories scattered across locations that I've once lived in.

What you may know as Onitsha is really an attitude, endemic and widespread, a centripetal force.

You know you are at Upper Iweka when you come upon the flyover that joins Onitsha/Enugu express way with Owerri and Iweka road, a giant octopus stretching out six tentacles; that is for the structure. And there are the cars, the people, and the noise, the offences,

Commerce is not restricted to the big locations—Main Market, Relief Market, Ochanja, Mgbuka, Head Bridge, Ogbo Efele—trade happens right in front of your compound.

a theatre of crime and apprehension. Owerri-Ihiala-Mgbidi-Awor, Enamel-Site, Nnewi-Oba-Old Road—songs of bus conductors calling out their destinations, sometimes dragging you to their buses if you don't know how to beat them off and make your own choice. There are the boys you may call Iyoo, young blood and rough looks, wielding sticks, throwing thickets into Kekes, buses, every vehicle that is not private, and collecting dues. You may witness one testing his fists

on a defaulter's face, while a police officer stands beside his Hilux, a part of the audience. Only a new person stands and looks, the old ones know there are germane opportunities for pickpockets. And somehow this is one of the things about life that you can't explain how you live with; you just see it as what it is, a circus show, and you hurry on. You have a customer to catch.

Everywhere is a suburb. There is no utopia or dystopia, it is steadfastly something in-between. Nothing claims excesses but just enough energy to keep it going.

5 Boundary Avenue, Fegge, Onitsha South. Growing between two estates, sometimes my elder brother and I would wonder into either of them, mostly Phase I where our school and friends were. That was the only time and place I could think of people living civil and in specious compounds. Afternoon was always the ghost time when the road was lonely and the chirping birds made you realize how quiet the place was. It smelt like a place for rich people, a blend of rotten fruits and fresh flowers, a hibiscus tree growing beside an almond and an ixora hedge right behind the fence. The sign on some of the gates, the head of a dog clenching a human arm between bared teeth, BEWARE OF DOGS! It tells you that you are in a place where too much interaction is not expected.

This imperial status lasted as long as it was dry season. The rain always came with much trouble, it found its own way into peoples' houses since there was no drainage system. Things climbed whatever would prop them above the water level until it receded, and the rich did not

care, it seemed like something they must share with the general environment, this indifference towards perfection.

There are Awada and Okpoko, two siblings living side by side, on both ends of the busy Onitsha/Owerri Road. One errant and juvenile, the other cool and evolving, but neither could exist independent of the other. Awada of bad roads and evenly apportioned spaces, a plot of land per building, spreads out on the hill overlooking Okpoko which is ensconced resignedly in the valley, accepting all the liquid waste into its swampy slum, rather helplessly. Somehow living at Awada gives you that sense of entitlement found among people who are aware of their superiority over others, and you don't consider Okpoko part of the places worth visiting. But then something happens and you realize that what you need can only be found down there, like the night my sister-in-law went into labor for her last child.

We found ourselves driving through dark narrow streets, no light except the one from the headlamps. The tension from the coming baby, and the sense of foreboding that something might be lurking in one corner, made that drive seem like a scene from a horror movie. Standing at the balcony of the local maternity, the only thing in the sky was the red light blinking from a network mast kilometers away from where I stood, nothing blocking the view. The storey buildings were all remarkable because they were few, and for the first time, I noticed the big difference that searchlights would have made in this black-black place. We were looking out for the car parked in front of the building even when vigilante men were around. I realized it was never so at home where searchlights were always glowing from the top of three-, four-, five storey buildings, snuggling close, an inanimate romance. Here, it was only zinc roofs, rusted brown during the day, heaving under a heavy mass of darkness.

It smelt like a place for rich people, a blend of rotten fruits and fresh flowers, a hibiscus tree growing beside an almond and an ixora hedge right behind the fence. The sign on some of the gates, the head of a dog clenching a human arm between bared teeth, BEWARE OF DOGS!

Her kids would come the next morning, staring around, at the bleak houses, at the sky, at the kids that maybe looked differently, as if searching for the tall houses they were used to and wondering whether I had driven too fast and suddenly taken them far away from home.

Every city is endearing, even the crazy ones, and so is Onitsha. It knows my beginning and this light dialect that seems to find an easy exit through my lips; it is fricative, like pure liquid, tasteless, colorless, and odorless. And it makes my speech stand out, that is the basic identity the city gives you, what my friend calls “un-wrestled liberality of spirit” that grants you a leeway in almost everything.

**Every city is endearing,
even the crazy ones, and so
is Onitsha.**

Umuahia North

Michael Umoh

Non-fiction

IT'S MORNING.



Keke at the Tower. A Keke makes a turn at the City Tower in Umuahia.

I am uncertain of the time because it's raining and I can't check the time on my phone. Lately, my phone has developed the habit of reacting negatively to drops of water. While I try to find shade in any shop, I realise that the rain has done more than soak my clothes, it has also watered my fears. I do not understand this town that most people call a city.

As I shiver, a man with an umbrella consoles me. "Sorry o, Corper," I'm told. "Rain dey fall wella for Umuahia". And the man continues moving. It is Adamu, selling Gala and La Casera, who guides me to a shop hidden between two large supermarkets.

I have no shelter weeks later when the rain assaults me at Paulicon Junction. I find it very funny, this emerging pattern, so I laugh. An old woman sweeping raises her head, regards me for a moment before asking, "Why are you chuckling?" Her perfect English accent, if such a thing exists, surprises me as does the specific manner with which she poses this question. I do not know

what to say, so I run off.

The rain does not stop.

AFTERNOON COMES.

The driver of the keke I'm in tells me to focus on the good things here. "Abia has good things o. Just be patient". But I realize this is Umuhahia, not *Abia*, when I'm charged two hundred naira for a distance I could have walked.

The first time I walk to a mini market close to my home, the woman selling pepper and noodles is delighted by my clumsy attempt at Igbo. She laughs, showing off white teeth and urges me to continue. "Very soon, you'll learn big enough to find wife here".



Nothing Is Free. An office box in Umuhahia.

I smile and buy more pepper than I need.

It takes me a while to take a walk from my house but when I do, I notice the irony of Aba Road being flooded two days after my landlord informed me that Umuahia's drainage is, among other things, superb.

I am thinking of hunger, and not pepper, the day I go to a random restaurant along Bank Road. I pause outside the restaurant and consider its emptiness. It is neat but somehow lacking. Its owner, a woman of over fifty, mistakes my reluctance for shyness and tells me, "Sit down. We are the ones serving you."

I saw a woman driving a bus yesterday along Bank Road. It was filled with crates of eggs and she looked wonderful in that seat. The man standing beside me had allowed Umuahia's cold to freeze his brain and so had asked me, "Wetin concern woman with bus, biko?"

I saw a woman driving a bus yesterday along Bank Road. The man standing beside me had allowed Umuahia's cold to freeze his brain and so had asked me, "Wetin concern woman with bus, biko?"

And because life should be simple, I said nothing.



The Train. People walk by as an old cargo train survives time.

And because life should be simple, I said nothing.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

The same way I didn't say anything when a man went through my phone's gallery and told me I was crazy for not dating most of the girls he saw. "It's the trend o. Try and be current."

But life isn't simple.

Weeks later, when I'm crossing Finbarr's Road to get a keke, a car crashes into a shop. I am later told the driver died instantly. I remember Judith, a girl at CDS who will become more, telling me not to bother with a keke to Azikiwe junction.

"Corpers trek."

The sun above me hates with its light and the khaki I wear is a prison of heat, but my head is up.



After the Rain. At BCA Roundabout, in Umuahia, A statue of Jesus Christ stands alone after a thunderstorm.

My head isn't up two weeks later when I watch as two kids break their mother's heart. I and my friend, intent on exploring Umuahia, have walked from Bank Road to Okpara Square. Stopping to eat at a restaurant, we watch as two boys—kids—walk in with us. Their mother, confused at their returning so late, launches into a stream of angry Igbo. The kids, very

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

adventurous, had found another use for their bus fare. She's clearly pained and, although I cannot understand Igbo, I understand her. The mother, unable to express her pain, settles for repeating the words, "I gave you money. I gave you money." She's trying to convince herself and everyone that she's a good mother. It is sad and unnecessary.

I look away.

It's night now.

I sleep.

Unoka's Company

ACHEBEAN IGBOLAND

Osinachi

Visual Art

2015



Nwa Aba, or: A Brief, Traumatic History of Gworo Pit

ABA

Otosirieze Obi-Young

Non-fiction



Ala-Oji Pond. Port-Harcourt Road, a major entrance into Aba.

ON NGWA ROAD, the neighbourhood in Aba where I grew up, there is a decrepit three-storey building with washed-up white walls and faded drawings of red Royco cubes, a jarred structure from whose torn, rusty zinc roof schools of bats glided into the evening sky, in formations so striking that, as children, we often argued whether the bats knew we were watching, whether they had organized themselves to impress us. Aside bats, the other animals pre-eminent in my

childhood were vultures: bald black birds gathering on zinc roofs like elegant elders arriving for an umunna meeting, hovering around the boiling junction where Royco House is, where we used to live, where Ngwa and Asa and Cemetery and Port-Harcourt Roads meet, where—when no vehicle is in sight—they descend and peck. Peck and peck.

What usually brought them constitutes one of my earliest memories: My small palm being clutched tightly by an uncle, being pulled quickly, of being told “Gashike, gashike,” because I was three or four and naturally toddling, because before us, across the full gutter thick with black refuse, human bodies were on fire, were each coiled on a tyre, oozing whorls of black smoke. It is a lucid memory—blackened bodies that were once thieves, broken skulls of armed robbers, pinkish-grey brain pouring out onto the coal tar, visceral vestiges of people often only accused. As the coterie of *udele* pecked in coming days, we often simply covered our noses, children hurling stones at them, adults going about their businesses, until a good citizen paid to get the bodies disposed in Gworo Pit. *Borrow* pit. As children, we’d miscalled it *Gworo*, which sounded more hallow and suited the mythology that had been woven around it: the yawning, burning, valley-like refuse pit filled with thick smoke along the expressway.

**...across the full gutter
thick with black refuse,
human bodies were on fire,
were each coiled on a tyre,
oozing whorls of black
smoke. It is a lucid
memory—blackened bodies
that were once thieves,
broken skulls of armed
robbers, pinkish-grey brain
pouring out onto the coal
tar, visceral vestiges of
people often only accused.**

To grow up in Aba and not have a version of this story, of the Bakassi Boys’ wildly popular executions, might just be to not have grown up in Aba at all.



The structural violence that ravages this city is a loud kind. It is visual, is bitter, in the air, can be felt. The roads here bear potholes like birth scars: in the dry season, they yawn in mocking boredom; in the rains, they swarm with small floods, collect miniature mud pools here and there

Keke on Mud. On Port-Harcourt Road, Aba.

OWNED BY ABIA State's Ngwa people, but populated mostly by Imo and Anambra landlords and tenants, the collection of the three million here is confident of one thing: that things may not change soonest.

On an enclave hemmed by Asa, Obohia and Ehi Roads, sits Christ the King Cathedral (CKC), an architectural perfection of Catholicism, its tower with its glowing cross an Eiffel reigning over the city. On the busyness of Aba-Owerri Road is Abia State Polytechnic. On the expressway is an underwhelming entrance to Ariaria International Market, the biggest market in West Africa, often un-navigable in the rains. And on the road to Ogbor Hill is Waterside, known in maps as Aba River.

The structural violence that ravages this city—the areas outside Planned Aba, particularly—is a loud kind. It is visual, is bitter, in the air, can be felt. The roads here bear potholes like birth scars: in the dry season, they yawn in mocking boredom; in the rains, they swarm with small floods, collect miniature mud pools here and there, are ponds, rivers, are black, red, mud. Often they become lakes, rising and rising until, in places like Cemetery Road or Faulks Road, people had to wade through with their clothes pulled up to waist level, their foot wears in their hands. Often filled with refuse, stagnant gutters foul the air, and, in the rains, wash

back refuse onto roads—a torn basket here, a slit bucket there, lumps of liquid filth afloat. The interminable chatter, the endless honking and honking: mornings here are rude introductions, and afternoons coherent assaults on the senses, and evenings the untenable frenzy of vehicles locked in traffic, of young men and boys pushing vehicles stuck in the ponds, of steady trains of people hurrying, standing like jilted lovers, waving down buses and kekes that never stop. Aba is overpopulated.

YOU'D HAVE TO remember 2003. Enyimba FC of blue jerseys. That epic 2-0 final first leg defeat of Egypt's Ismaily FC right here in our backyard, in our stadium swathed on all sides by stalls and shops of Ahia Ohuru market. We were Kings of Africa. Again, in 2004: that shoot-out triumph over Etoile du Sahel of Tunisia. Successive CAF Champions' League wins, seven Nigerian Premier League titles, four Nigerian Federation Cups: we are the most successful Nigerian football club in history. Aba is Enyimba City, as blue as passion.

You'd have to remember 2010. The year of Osisikankwu: kidnap kingpin, lord, god.

You'd have to remember that kidnapping never felt so much like war: schools invaded, children carted away, adults murdered in their homes, in their cars, businesses closed, never to return, until the Army came and cleansed all.

**1929. The Women's War.
Ten thousand mothers and
wives from all over Eastern
Nigeria gathering to take a
peaceful stand against
British taxation and the
Authorities opened fire:
fifty, hundred died,
unnamed.**

You'd have to think thick pasts, through thickets of suppression.

You'd have to remember 1929. The Women's War. Ten thousand mothers and wives from all over Eastern Nigeria gathering to take a peaceful stand against British taxation and the Authorities opened fire: fifty, hundred died, unnamed. In colonial records, that event that shook them to their core was a *riot*. Westerners had wars and revolutions; Africans had clashes, skirmishes, uprisings, *riots*.

You'd have to relive 2015, 2016. Nnamdi Kanu. Processions unprecedented for a young man who the young cry speak for them. And how his detention leads to prayer gathering. And prayer gathering to military massacre. Stuff of history.

IN 2004, RUFF Coin's song "Nwa Aba" gave voice to the definitive self-perception of Aba brought-ups. The bridge summarizes it: *Umu Eko want to guy Nwa Aba, ha akugokwa aka na tipper bu aja/Lagos boys want to cheat Aba boy, they're knocking a tipper filled with sand.* And the chorus—*A bu m Nwa Aba, Aba, Aba oo, Aba/I am a child of Aba, Aba oo, Aba*—stamps the unimpeachability of that identity.

To be a Nwa Aba is to behave with—to naturally embody—aggression, subtly or overtly. To sell the conviction that you can't be bullied, cheated, overlooked, pushed around. It's a stereotype—positive in a field of trouble, negative in a field of curiosity when you've been found wanting, when you are told with suspicion: "But you don't behave like them." Because

To be a Nwa Aba is to behave with, to naturally embody, aggression—subtly, overtly. To sell the conviction that you can't be bullied, cheated, overlooked, pushed around. It's a stereotype.

Roughrider, swaying swagger, a microcosm of a country's failure: Aba is the Bad Boy of the East.

Umu Aba ought to flaunt ruggedness like wealth, are supposed to perform unprovoked agility. Should also have "Street OT smarts", as an Ibadan friend explained to me.

Roughrider, swaying swagger, a microcosm of a country's failure: Aba is the Bad Boy of the East. If Nsukka, squatting in its dusty, cold smallness, is the intelligent but timid nerd, and Onitsha's collage of three-, four-, five-storeys jam-packed like a tight broom makes her the stereotypically money-conscious Igbo trader, and Enugu's elite ambience makes her the Classy Babe with new skirts and polished high heels, and Owerri's hotels and enticing shops make her the Runs Babe playing catch-up, and Port-Harcourt's grandness makes it the pretentious, impolite cultist born into old, oil money, then Aba is the

badly-dressed class bully who actually knows too much Book, his itchy hands hovering on everything practical. It is often forgotten, overlooked, that Aba is the biggest city in Igboland, the most different city in the East, the most confident. Clothes, leather-works, bags, shoes, electronics, with Made-in-Italy, Made-in-USA engravings: Aba is the Japan of Africa, of Nigeria, perhaps the only other innovative hub with the potential to rival Lagos' monopoly. That Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* is the novel that, in Adichiean syntax, "gave me permission to write" is partly because it is partly set in Aba. Because in it I see where I am, where I have been, would still like to be: I feel it, smell it. Aba is under-storified when the thickest stories breathe on its streets.

In 2013, *The Sun* ran a report: "Aba: A Rotten City". In *The Nation*: "Aba: A City under Siege". On *Nairaland*: "Aba: A City in Ruins".

Aba is in a Gworo Pit of its own, on its own, burnt, rotting, rotten.



Brown Pools: Ala-Oji.

I HAVE SPENT the last six years mostly outside Aba, but without her reality leaving my psyche, her spirit—my inner *Abaness*—is slowly drifting from me. And because I am desperate to not lose communion with it, my need to hold on is a quiet obsession. Recently, a friend, an Aba

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

writer and musician whose rootedness emanates unforced, sent me a song, “Obohia”, about Obohia Road. *Have you been there*, it begins, *I’ve been there!*

Sometimes I feel like I haven’t and it hurts.

I am losing touch of the city of my birth.

Destination: Nsukka

Chigaemezu Ernest Ohia

Poetry

AT THAT TIME of the year
when men bite their nails in deep thoughts
about harvest,
we were glad to set out
to a land of ancient mores:
A far-flung city on pebbled crust.

Atop domed and flat-topped hills

**reddish-brown buildings stood freely in
world-weariness.**

Down the green lowlands

settling dewdrops whistled by.

In the street

Un-perfumed folks paced under the
blistering heat,

their bodies glistening with sweat.

In the alley

a blind beggar screamed in his dream,

his arms outstretched in fright.

In the air

the smell of dust and musty grasses.

In weather-beaten farms

Yam tendrils on parched red knolls.

Our admiration remained unshaken at
Nsukka's horizons—

sublime in hazy sundown flickers.

And as we watched the sun set,

the whole scenery bathed in translucent aura

paled away to a stilled mauve evening

attached with rough breezes.

Then, night came with the bustles of night-
time sellers

and the flights of bikers speeding home to
their waiting folks.

City of Resilience

ABA

Chidinma Okoronkwo

Non-fiction

THE CITY OF Aba has always sparked negative reaction when mentioned. From tales of the creativity and ingenuity of its craftsmen who replicate products, to crime and bad infrastructure and environmental pollution. One thing that has always struck me is the resilient spirit of its residents.

Lying on the banks of the Aba River, the city's strategic location at an intersection of roads leading to Port Harcourt, Owerri, Umuahia, Ikot Abasi and Ikot Ekpene made it a hive of commercial activities right from the colonial era. Production of footwear, clothes, cosmetics, household items, are carried out here. Markets like the famous Ariaria International Market, Ahia Ohuru (meaning *New Market*), Ekeoha Shopping Centre, Cemetery Market and Alaoji Spare Parts Market are places where these commercial activities

Lying on the banks of the Aba River, the city's strategic location at an intersection of roads leading to Port Harcourt, Owerri, Umuahia, Ikot-Abasi and Ikot-Ekpene made it a hive of commercial activities right from the colonial era.

happen.

...the famous Ariaria International Market, Ahia Ohuru (New Market), Ekeoha Shopping Centre, Cemetery Market and Alaoji Spare Parts Market.

A tour of Aba presents you with startling contrasts. The quiet streets of Eziama, Aba North—sprinkled with fenced bungalows and storey buildings with an occasional “public yard”—differ from the densely populated areas in Aba South, which has closely built houses with improper sewage systems along tiny streets that do not allow for simultaneous

use by vehicles moving at opposite directions pass at a time. A “Face Me I Face You” Public Yard in Aba could house more than five families, all sharing the same toilet and bathroom. Both the school bordered by a busy road and market and the church adjacent to the brothel make you wonder how these institutions daily live side by side.

The calm flowing waters of the Aba River, popularly known as Waterside, with its serene environment, keeps you in touch with nature. The lush green vegetation, the cackle of birds flying around, the insects chirping, and the tiny canoes floating lazily from one bank of the river to the other: they give you a sense of ease and quiet.

You could get lost in nature as you take in this scenery which has not been tainted by urbanization. At Ogbor-Hill, the scene on the bridge above Waterside contrasts sharply with the scene below. The bustle of traffic, the keke-napeps, buses, private vehicles, the occasional trailer or long vehicles carrying goods, moving to and fro, are a common sight. Hawkers can be seen chanting the names of their wares, conductors religiously calling the destination of their various vehicles, agberos demanding for their cuts, and you might witness a conductor involved in a

Areas such as Waterside, Over-Rail and York Street are places that serve as rendezvous points for drug users and peddlers—Ndi Nnuru Ihe.

heated fight with his passenger over incomplete fare, amidst a rapidly increasing crowd gathered to settle the dispute.

Living in Aba presents its challenges daily. Commuting within the city is a herculean task. Drivers swerve right and left to avoid potholes, lurching so violently that the contents of your stomach could be tasted in your mouth. It takes a turn for worse during the rainy season because of the water puddles. Pedestrians are not spared as they traipse about, in and out of pools, avoiding mud and splashes of water from vehicles. On a closer look you would discover that the footwear worn here consists mostly of those made from rubber as leather cannot survive in this clime during the wet season. Port Harcourt Road, Omuma Road, Ohanku Road and Faulks Road all have vehicle terminals—Ishimmiri: *the beginning of water*—where you are required to fold your clothes to your knees, remove your shoes and wade in to dark brown mini-stream as the bus may not survive the pond with the weight of passengers. This journey through

It is not wrong to say that Aba is the city with the most resilient people in Nigeria.

dirty water is made slowly, avoiding particles and parcels sailing atop the water especially the black polythene which could contain faeces. A foot is tentatively placed in front of the other, as a safety measure to avoid tumbling in the often knee-deep water, to avoid the big open gutters which are covered by the water. The log sticking out in the water with a piece of red cloth tied

Drivers swerve right and left to avoid potholes, lurching so violently the contents of your stomach could be tasted in your mouth.

round it could alert the passer-by of a gutter but caution is required while moving because there have been instances of persons who fell into these gutters and never lived to tell their story. On getting to the other end of the water, you wash up, board a vehicle at this end and continue to your destination. Moving past an incinerator bin is pure torture, the stench can guarantee a pass out. Drainage systems whose construction is unfinished have been turned to

dumping grounds for refuse. Mosquitoes and rats have also decided to live in these places. Crime is a major conundrum. Areas such as Waterside, Over-Rail and York Street are places that serve as rendezvous points for drug users and peddlers—Ndi Nnuru Ihe. Crossing on foot in these places after eight p.m. casts fear and dread in the hearts of men because of the activities of the men of the underworld—humorously referred to as “Ndi Nwe Obodo”: *owners of the land*. Walking around busy areas such as the Main Park requires alertness in order not to be a victim of pickpockets on the prowl looking for pockets to bless themselves with.

These challenges do not browbeat the inhabitants of this city. That trait of defiance resident in the Igbo is doubled in these people. It does not deter the creative minds of the shoemakers at A-Line Ariaria, or the ingenuity of tailors in the Ngwa Road area, or the petty food stuff seller who peddles her wares under the rain at Ahia Ohuru market, or the hawkers running after vehicles in order to make sales. It is not wrong to say that Aba is the city with the most resilient people in Nigeria. There is a reason why Aba is called Enyimba City, after the African elephant who, when moving through the jungle, clears every obstacle from its way.

Streamside Reveries

EGWUIYI STREAM, UZII, IMO STATE

Chigaemezu Ernest Ohia

Fiction

DOWN THE FORESTED valley, the one behind the King's Palace, is the Egwuiyi, a stream that ferries leaves and twigs in its current. The sun is a fiery ball of fire in the cloudless azure sky, the forest alive with the whistling of birds, when Nnedi walks unsteadily down the slope of the hill to Egwuiyi stream in muted soberness as she thinks of Kenemba. She still thinks of him: his peering eyes that seemed to have unrestrained curiosity in them, his muscled arms, his perfectly-shaped head that made her think his Creator had spent a considerable amount of time shaping it, his black lustrous skin that shone each time he rubbed the skin oil she made him. His memories, all of them entangled in a jumble of reliving order, seems clearer to her now as she steps up the bank of the stream.

She sits soulfully under the shade of an old oil-bean tree and stares at the stream that had witnessed her togetherness with Kenemba. She has not come to fetch water from the stream—nobody does—she has come to sit idly under this tree, to watch the silvery current of the water, to listen to the melodies which the woods ring with, to capture the beautiful scenery of the environment. Previously, she had thought that the stream possessed a mystical power that united couples and that had always made her want to spend time with Kenemba here, with it. It was here, at the bank of the stream that she first met Kenemba years ago; here, under the same oil-bean tree. It was here that she spent most of her time with him, often detaching herself from the scrutiny of her family. Here, they took deep breaths together because the air was fresher and they basked in the warm sunshine. Most times, they swam naked in the stream and splashed water at each other, giggling. Other times, they would sit side by side, their arms crossing over each other's back, and watch the sun set with the echoes of night time creatures and the flight of birds. One evening, while they made

**She has not come to fetch
water from the stream—
nobody does—she has come
to sit idly under this tree, to
watch the silvery current of
the water**

love on the bank of the stream, moaning and gasping for air, she swore they had a brighter future ahead.

Now she sits in a demeanour that speaks of misery and rage. She likens her soul to the ashes of the hearth in her kitchen, a stiffened soul caged in her body like a wild bird afraid to fly. Deep down in her, something perturbing rings so clearly to her now: the fact that her affair with

**This time, only the stream
sings along with her, its
voice hidden in the splashes
of the current.**

Kenemba was merely what the gods had ordained would last for a short time. She thinks the stream is narrow than how it used to be, maybe because of the dry season. She begins to hum a song, the song which Kenemba, the valley and the stream sang with her at times. This time, only the stream sings along with her, its voice hidden in the splashes of the current. She feels

the gathering force of dusk approaching but she is unwilling to leave. She wonders if ghosts were real and if he would appear to her now, beside this stream. If he would, she would tell him how her craving for him had eaten deep into her. As she finally stands to go home, a feeling of warmth grows within her—she feels it rising from her belly. At the foot of the hill, she turns to get a last glimpse of the stream. Perhaps it is this feeling of gratification in her. A bird calls at a distance. She sighs.

Abakaliki

Chibuike Ogbonnaya

Non-fiction

ABAKALIKI IS a small business town where some streets smell of refuse dumps and roads smell of exhaust fumes. Unlike other towns in Ebonyi State where people still live in mud



A busy street of Abakaliki cluttered with shops at roadside.

houses, where children go to community schools that are poorly built, without windows or doors, where the major occupations of the people are mostly farming and trading. Abakaliki is full of business people with busy lives. On the busy Water Works Road, shops clutter the road side with signboards: provisions stores, beer parlour, pharmacy shops, barbing saloon, depending on how long the street is.

Every morning, the roads are full of okada, Ebonyi State University (EBSU) buses, private cars, blue and yellow Keke Napeps. Morning noises are full of *pee pee pee* of cars honking. Sometimes, a car would knock down a bike, or a careless Keke Napep driver will

bash a car,
and a fight

Abakaliki...some streets smell of refuse dumps, and roads smell of exhaust fumes.

will start. There was a time a car knocked down a bike carrying a passenger, and people had gathered from nowhere, watching as the bike man and car driver argued and exchanged blows. The passenger was busy

narrating to people how the accident happened, complaining about the price she bought her garri that had spilled on the road. In the afternoons, the roads become quieter, and school children

return from school, making noises and chasing each other around. Meat Market becomes the busiest place, with noise from loudspeakers. The evening is filled with singing and preaching from churches. It seems God knows the activities of these people: he holds the rain in the day time and releases it in the night.

Abakaliki is always calm on Sundays, as the only thing one hears is singing from churches in Igbo and English language. In the mornings, Neighbours greet: "I ga-aga ulo uka taa?" *Will you go to church today?* In evenings, it becomes: "I ga kwara ulo uka taa?" *Did you go to church today?* The dusty town becomes dustier during harmattan. It becomes calmer during the week of Christmas, when people travel to their villages and return two days after Christmas to continue their business. Abakaliki is an ancient town full of houses with rusted roofs lining up on streets divided by roads that interlink, but it is getting more beautiful with new houses with corrugated roofs. Kpiri Kpiri Road is full with people in the mornings, people with basins, shovels, diggers, waiting for someone to hire them for labour.

Abakaliki is always calm on Sundays, as the only thing one hears is singing from churches in Igbo and English.

A Tiny Place of Hope

NSUKKA

Henry U. Ikenna

Non-fiction

I HAVE HEARD many stories about Nsukka, most of them from my mother who would always break into them, *gisting* the latest to any relative who came around. During long vacation, my cousins would come over to spend the holiday with us. We would talk about Nsukka and everything about it—the university, our house, our lives, the weather. The weather in Nsukka is unpredictable, always turns up surprises, sometimes excessively. Its wetness can suddenly become dryness, making things crisp, dusty even, as

Students would all troop out early in the morning to buy okpa in Ejima Junction. Some took their okpa along with a bottle of Coke before hastening down to school.

though they had never felt water before.

She would say that the students who lived in Odenigwe and Hilltop had bad shoes because every corner of those areas was carpeted with stones and rocks that reached down to the school gate.

Ifunanya, my favourite cousin who we called Ify, had filled me with descriptions of the University of Nigeria. She had said that it nestled gracefully atop the hills, surrounded by rich vegetation like a carefully cultivated garden. She would say that the students who lived in Odenigwe and Hilltop had bad shoes because every corner of those areas was carpeted with stones and rocks that reached down to the school gate. Some were even caught polishing their shoes on reaching the school gate. These students hardly had time for any other thing other than school. I did not ask but Ifunanya also said that there were more fine boys in Hilltop than Odenigwe and very few girls stayed in both places. Girls would rather stay in the campus hostels to be safe from robbery, rape or any other attack. She remembered that, at some point, Hilltop was a citadel of robbery. With the

theatrics of a newscaster she would inform me of a new robbery, would begin to outline the victims' losses: home theatre, fridge, laptop, phones and gas cylinders. "All were taken at gun point," she said once and shook her head, explaining that the victim did not resist the armed robbers because if he did his head would have been axed or his throat slit, depending on the kindness of the robbers or how *high* they were. "They could just shoot you in the head."

Soaked in Nsukka's story, Ify would never give me the chance to make a sound as short as her name. She loved to own the words. I even suspected that she also loved to own the reaction which those words brought about. I was not done digesting Hilltop when she began to say that Odenigwe had mostly bad boys and good boys at once. But one thing brought these two groups together, and that was okpa, the staple food. Students would all troop out early in the morning to buy okpa in Ejima Junction. Some took their okpa along with a bottle of Coke before hastening down to school. Ejima Junction was surrounded by shops and the indigenes had a way of increasing the chains of stores all the time. She counted about ten shops providing provisions, food and fast food, and alcohol, with a scatter of okada-men lined up like pieces on a chess board, waiting for patrons. Added to the luxury of okpa, those in Hilltop had other options as echicha, ayaraya-oka, ayara-ji, igbangwu-oka and mishai—a census of food that could be seen all the way from Hilltop Gate.

Beach Junction...was dirty with red earth, immobile vehicles by the road side, gaping potholes that lay proudly on the road as though part of an #OccupyBeach movement. In the rainy season, these potholes would house dirty-brown water and the kids around Onuyi Junction would jump in them and smile.

Ifunanya slapped my shoulder and said, "Beach." Before I could tell her that I was thinking of an actual beach, a serene atmosphere with the tail of an ocean and the expanse of white sand, she began to say that Beach Junction had pockets of relaxation joints where students could fight the day's stress. According to her, the school boasts of a healthy religious life. "If the amount of prayers done at the lawn tennis court of the university could be converted into sand, it would fill the Bermuda Triangle." Back then, it was a posh word, *Bermuda*, but before I could

tell her that she had begun to go over how students would be seen trooping to various meeting places for religious fellowship and then for *emotional fellowship* in corners laced with darkness.

On matters of boys and girls, Ify revealed that Isa-Kaita Hostel had the big girls, and Akpabio and Awolowo hostels had girls that dated men that matter in Enugu State, and possibly the whole of Nigeria. Others were Aja Nwachukwu, Balewa, Eyo Ita—hostels that fenced out boys with the stench of urine. She said that the stench was the kind that reminded her of her first day in a warehouse full of drugs. Yet, somehow, boys flooded all the hostels, silently battling each other to have a girl.

A few years after Ify's stories, I was in Nsukka, my bag over my shoulders, my admission letter in hand. I did not waste time to confirm all that I had heard from Ifunanya. I

Contrary to what it is said to be, Nsukka is not tucked away from the rest of the world.

ventured out only to discover that the Beach Junction that I had so romanticized was chaotic, full of life, crowded, a large space that each body there made small. The junction was dirty with red earth, immobile vehicles by the road side, gaping potholes that lay proudly on the road as though part of an #OccupyBeach movement. In the rainy season, these potholes would house dirty-brown water and the kids

around Onuiyi Junction would jump in them and smile.

In the same fashion, most streets in Nsukka were filled with dirty-brown gullies. Once, I ventured into Aku Road and noticed that vehicles avoided the road as though there was a group of road marshals asking for documents they did not have. It was the gaping potholes and murky-brown water and the tendency of having one's tyres held up by the teeth of the potholes that made them stop and turn around. Those who walked on feet folded their trousers, bags on their heads, and swam across the water. It was said that a primary school student once drowned there.

Aku Road leads to Ogige Market, Nsukka's central market, with an entrance clustered with sellers and their trays and their wheelbarrows and their umbrellas and their stores. Sellers of herbal medicine stationed across the road, screaming repeatedly, "Staphylococcus aureus! Staphylococcus aureus! Candidiasis! Gonorrhoea! Fibroid! Warm ori nwa!"

Contrary to what it is said to be, Nsukka is not tucked away from the rest of the world. It still hears the world outside, like the case of Uzo-Uwani, from where people ran to Nsukka when Fulani herders raided the town and slaughtered its people.

There are things I wish I could change about Nsukka. I am hopeful that the town steps up from the way it is at the moment, that Nsukka indigenes take the lead in developing their town, that they begin to take control of their town from non-indigenes who have so far only marginalized them on their own land. It is puzzling, for instance, that no Nsukka indigene has ever been Vice Chancellor in the University of Nigeria, and this is not because of a lack of qualification on their part. And I hope that soon this tendency for surprise spreads to other aspects of this town which hosts the Den of Lions.

There are things I wish I could change about Nsukka, and I am hopeful that the town steps up from the way it is at the moment, that Nsukka indigenes take the lead in developing their town....

Aba Story

Aluka Igbokwe

Commentary

I WAS BORN and bred in Aba, and had always seen Aba simply as a commercial city filled with energetic, hardworking men and women and children. I grew up knowing places like Hospital Road and Park Road and Ogbor Hill. I also went to the markets: Ahia Udele and Ahia Ohuru and Shopping Centre. But sometime in 2014, when I was about leaving for university, my family tried to change my view of Aba. They made me understand that Aba isn't just any city, that it is a city cloaked in garbage and heavy preconceived misconceptions, ugly stereotypes.

**...it is a city cloaked in
garbage and heavy
preconceived
misconceptions, ugly
stereotypes.**

My brother Chuks, said to me, “Ekwukwana na-ibi n'Aba.”

Do not say you live in Aba.

Say you live in places like Port-Harcourt and Abuja and Lagos.

I was livid with resentment. It did not even occur to him that I hadn't even visited the places he mentioned.

What Ada Nnem said was different: “Alus, shine your eyes o! You know you're from Aba.”

I did not understand her. She made it sound as though one from Aba had mystical powers. As though Aba is light and I am its kaleidoscope.

One day, in school, our discussion was about where we lived. Blessing said she lived in Lagos and she was hailed—“Eko Babe! Big chick!” As though living in Lagos was a feat

My brother Chuks, said to me, “Ekwukwana na-ibi n'Aba.”

Do not say you live in Aba.

deserving praise and reverence. Kelechi said he lived in Abuja and, immediately, I shot darting eyes in his direction and he winked. But I was not riled, because Kelechi lied often. His lies are harmless, floating atop his stories like froth on freshly tapped wine.

“Aluka, where do you live?”

The asker of that question was Ifeanyi. My eyes were pleading. Begging him to refrain from asking that question. I wanted to say Port-Harcourt, just like my brother Chuks advised. But what if I was asked where in Port-Harcourt? Of course, I did not know places like Rumuokoro and Rukpokwu and Rumuola then. Certainly, I thought, the scowls of laughter were better than the veil of embarrassment.

“Aba. I live in Aba,” I said.

And then fiery eyes of disappointment and disapproval settled on me. Even Kelechi joined in this visual injustice.

Each time phones disappeared from the comfort of table tops into the discomfort of breast pockets, each time bulging wallets found their ways into back pockets, I was flustered with shame even though it had nothing to do with me. My friends made it look as though someone from Aba was naturally a criminal.

People from Aba are seen as thieves, as morally dirty. It is unfair how a person's place of living creates presumptions about their character.

That incident made me understand what my siblings were saying. I came to understand that people from Aba are seen as thieves, as morally dirty. As kidnappers and irresponsible. It is unfair how a person's place of living creates presumptions about their character.

Still, I did not lie about where I lived. I made a conscientious effort to change the notions my friends had about Aba and her people. I told them that Aba could be a place of garbage and touts but it is also a place of energetic people. Of talented and intelligent people who could make

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

identical designs of designer's handbags and cloths and shoes. Of people who, amidst the government's negligence, eke out a living through responsible and crime-free means. Of hopeful and optimistic people.

Onitsha: Retrospection

Chidimma Nwabueze

Memoir

WHEN I WAS a child, I never knew serenity in its strict sense. We lived in constant fear because of the daily robberies that took place in our neighborhood in Onitsha. The armed robbers raided houses one after the other so that each day was a battle with uncertainty, with “Who’s Next?”

They were not like the biblical thieves who came when no one least expected: they wrote letters to citizens before hand, stating the date you were to expect them and the specific amount of money they expected from you. Failure to meet up, or any attempt to run away, could cost you your life. So people stayed back to know what cruelty fate would toss at them.

We lived in constant fear because of the daily robberies that took place in our neighborhood in Onitsha.

Again: Where were the police men?

Where were the police? I always tried to ask the adults same question but it seemed they had the same questions, too. Looking at it now, the whole thing looked like a conspiracy.

The memory that would remain etched in my heart was the night they visited a house close to ours, and something remarkable happened: our landlord’s wife, who lived on the next floor, switched on the light in their kitchen to get something, and they shot at her, and we heard the shattering of window panes. The bullet didn’t hit anybody but it automatically made our the house next in line, or so we thought. Each day, we waited for the letter which never came. Thinking of it now, it might have been my first real-life experience of the *deux ex machina*.

Many months or a year later—I can’t really remember—we moved to a new place: Awada. A developing suburb in Onitsha where my father had built a house. We were happy. The

horror was over. But we were wrong; the menace started again. A supermarket, a large one, in my street was the target. Always. Steve's Supermarket, that's the name. They robbed the man blind and robbed us of sleep. In such nights, we were always in a fearful embrace in the living room. The first one I witnessed was when they came the third time. We hid in the balcony to catch a glimpse of the ugly scene. I can never forget the woman among them. She was the most vicious. Screaming obscenities as they loaded their van with loot. Again: Where were the police men?

The house owners on every street called a meeting. It wouldn't be long before they started a house-to-house raid. If the government wasn't ready to protect them, they would protect themselves. My father had a licensed double barrel which he only used during burials in the village. The robbers came again and all the house owners, including my father, shot indiscriminately in the air. We were all clustered in one room. One man was more daring: Atuegwu was his name. Coincidentally, it means "not afraid". His house was adjacent to the supermarket. It worked. They drove away. Same scenario played out a second time. Unknown to us, the robbers had an informant taking notes of the people shooting at them.

One afternoon, Atuegwu was driving into his house when a car suddenly blocked him. A group of vicious men alighted, put him in their car trunk, and drove away. The whole street was in turmoil. They kept the man for close to three days after which he was released and pushed out of a moving vehicle somewhere in GRA. They had warned him to tell his fellow land owners to stop disturbing their operation; if not, they would start coming for us. They stopped; the robbery continued. You can ask about the police again. Luckily, we were never invaded.

In 1999, Mbadinuju became governor and introduced the Bakassi Boys—a group of boys from Aba who could use juju to detect a thief by simply placing their machete on the person's chest. They would chop off a person's head, put a tyre round their neck and burn them.

In 1999, Mbadinuju became governor and introduced the savages called the Bakassi Boys—a group of boys from Aba who could use juju to detect a thief by simply placing their machete on the person’s chest. If the machete turned red, that meant the person was a thief or a murderer. They would put a charm-necklace across the person’s neck, which would make the person confess his evil deeds, after which they would chop off the person’s head, put a tyre round their neck and burn them. Now, you see why I called them savages. Imagine waking up

Now, Onitsha has one of the tightest securities in the whole federation. Police patrol vehicle are always at strategic places.

each morning to see a fire-mangled body across the road. Robbery was reduced, though. The high point of it all was the killing of Derico, the most notorious armed robber in Onitsha then. It was a moment of celebration. Movies were even made about his killing. Once, my mother told us how they were once accosted by the Bakassi Boys in traffic. Father was driving. One placed his machete on my dad’s chest. I could remember my mother describing how scared she was about the machete turning red. It wasn’t that she didn’t trust her husband; it was that news making round was about them being contracted as assassins to kill innocent people. I tried imagining my father with his head chopped off and a tyre round his neck. I dismissed the thought as soon as it came. The Bakassi Boys, to our relief, were later removed at the end of the administration. Even though it reduced the menace of armed robbery, I still believe it was a barbaric outfit.

These horrors make me shudder when I think of them. Now, Onitsha has one of the tightest securities in the whole federation. Police patrol vehicles are always at strategic places. Even the famous Upper Iweka which was known for pick-pocketing is now used as the “sample” of security, as it is said now that even if your iPhone 7 dropped on the ground without your knowledge, a tout would pick it up, run up and give it to you. Things are way better than they were. Onitsha is now a peaceful environment.

What It Takes to Survive

ABA

Kasiemobi Ibeh

Non-fiction

GOING BACK TO the city of Aba was a remarkable thing. The roads and the atmosphere are partly why. The hawkers rushing to press their wares against the windows of the vehicle—“Bro, buy plantain chips”; “Aki na ukwa”; “I have gala here.” Conductors shouting, “Port! Port! Port-Harcourt, one chance!” And bumpy roads trying to let you know that you've entered Osisoma. Osisoma leaves me with so many sad memories; I came to school one day to the news that I will never have the privilege of having a full life with Nzube my friend. The previous night, Nzube had been crushed by an oncoming vehicle, had lost his life with his wares on his head. Each time I see hawkers around Osisoma, memories of Nzube flowed in. Why should a child of nine be the one struggling for his survival?

From 2009 to 2010, the sounds of gun drained the wailing of Aba people. So many of the families who had buildings around Osisoma—Tonimas, Umungasi, Oberete, Powerline, Faulks Road—left their houses for the new kidnapping sheriff in town: a gang-leader called Osisikankwu. Death and rumours of death formed majority of the discussions that period. “Mama Kasie, inukwara na-egburu that man bi ebe Umule road?” Mama Ngozi once asked my mother. *Did you hear that they killed that man living at Umule?* After Mama Ngozi's visit to our house, weeks became months, and one day came news of their relocation from Aba to Owerri. Papa Ngozi was

one those shoemakers at Imo Avenue—Aba's popular shoemakers were concentrated on Imo Avenue, through Samek, to Powerline, to Bakassi Line. It was these people who had formed the dreaded Bakassi Boys group which rose to fight the criminals ravaging Aba in the late '90s. It

was these areas that gave me the horrible experience of seeing an alleged criminal struggle in fire, with tyre on his neck, while people stood around with planks, hurling stones and pieces of block at the guy, cheering on as he burnt to death. Because this was Abia State, the job description of the official security agencies might have been limited to chasing after okada-men to obtain twenty naira, and so jungle justice thrived. So I wondered if Papa Ngozi would continue his shoemaking business at Owerri.

After dropping Port-Harcourt-bound passengers, the next place our vehicle would make a stop was at MCC junction, which is close to Ngwa High School—one of those schools which our governor “rebuilt” by only painting the fence (We had a great governor! If God fails to reward the man in heaven, we will boycott the rapture!). Another stop was made at Brass Junction for Abia Poly students and people going to places like Ekenna Street, Immaculate, Eziama, Ama Ikonne. Once, in Brass Junction, an alleged thief had been immolated and when the police came searching for his gun, the gun has already been stolen by one of the people who killed the guy. A thief not caught is a sharp guy: street creed.

As we made the final stop at Peace Park situated at Asa road, I crossed over to St. Michaels Road, named after the Anglican Communion cathedral. It's notable for its business environment. It's a line of phone dealers. Electrical and electronics dealers used to be there, also, before the government drove them away. On getting there, the atmosphere looked tense with an *upandan* movement of people, and there was a small circle of people standing close to a floor carpeted with broken bottles. There was a fight between two guys. Planted on the faces of the crowd was a great deal of excitement. They were happy to see a fight. To survive in Aba you must have to fight it out. No room for cowardice or too much grammar.

THE WEST

Ibadan

Akintunde Aiki

Non-fiction

THE FIRST TIME I saw a sleepy Ibadan was in 2011 when I returned from my Service Year in Borno and stepped off The Young Shall Grow park at Alakia at almost four in the morning. My parents, with my little sister, were at the park to pick me up. At Iwo Road, about ten minutes later, I began to feel a dream-like fascination with the city; it seemed at once familiar and different after one year away. There was a new huge LED billboard mounted on massive steel columns that towered above the bridge at Iwo Road roundabout. The quiet technology flashing a video advert of Guinness beer gave a wonderland-esque quality to a landscape that had never attracted more than a passing glance. A roaring fuel tanker obviously broke the hushed magic of the moment. Seeing the roundabout without its signature heavy traffic aggravated my

At Iwo Road, about ten minutes later, I began to feel a dream-like fascination with the city; it seemed at once familiar and different after one year away. I recall vaguely wondering if in the coming days I'd be needing directions around the city I'd lived in for nearly two decades.

sense of unfamiliarity. Ibadan is a beautiful city when it is quiet.

EVERYDAY, IN AT least one way, Ibadan is an insane irony. The city is a mild-mannered man and the popular double-blue-stripped white commercial Nissan Micra cabs with the horde of Bajaj okada is mad blood running through him.

Home was at Ojoo, off the unrepaired stretch of the Ibadan-Oyo Expressway (just at the point where the then newly constructed stretch begins) with its many wide potholes which my dad, a poor night time driver, seemed drawn to in a way I found magnetic.

Just before we turned off the expressway to the familiar stretch of road that led home, dad told me in a

flat tone of the three new "big roundabouts" and the bridge at Ojoo. I recall vaguely wondering if in the coming days I'd be needing directions around the city I'd lived in for nearly two decades.

EVERYDAY, IN AT least one way, Ibadan is an insane irony. The city is a mild-mannered man and the popular double-blue-stripped white commercial Nissan Micra cabs with the horde of Bajaj okada is mad blood running through him. In Ibadan, the driver of the Micra cab makes ways where none should exist; he's a god who is above traffic rules and for whom the brake is that servant he has little use for. In the moving puny contraption that is his domain, he quietly listens as his passengers go on about the matters that bother them for that day, occasionally egging the discussion on with low

I find it amusing when I come across another post on Facebook or a blog or a tweet or a meme that calls Ibadan "the ancient city".

Fuji music,
and when it's

the government, he breaks his usual silence with a curse. An "owa o" separates his more urbane passenger from his lesser counterpart in the beat-up Toyota Liteace bus who uses the Ibadan dialect, "In be o" as his stop call.

My friend manages a Facebook page, Awa Ti Ibadan (loosely translated as "We People of Ibadan") and recently began the campaign, #ShowYourRoof, apparently to show how little of brown rooftops are in Ibadan.

MY FRIEND MANAGES a Facebook page, Awa Ti Ibadan (loosely translated as "We People of Ibadan") and recently began the campaign, #ShowYourRoof, apparently to show how little of brown rooftops are in Ibadan. I find it amusing when I come across another post on Facebook or a blog or a tweet or a meme that calls Ibadan "the ancient city". I imagine the poster seeing Ibadan as a big place filled with ancient buildings with rusty rooftops and it's people having never seen a modern structure, like a skyscraper or a sprawling mall complex. Once, I had to comment on what should be the billionth Facebook update showing "the ancient city" and its rusty rooftops. It was of course a non-resident of Ibadan, whose encounter with the city could have been a paraphrase of J.P. Clark's immortal lines in "Ibadan" or at best a passing-through and who most likely never saw the rust conglomeration himself. I have two grown Ibadan-born-

and-bred siblings. One is rounding off his arts degree and the younger is moving to his third year, both schooling in the state and have lived through the four changes of residence with the family around different parts of the city; neither of them has physically seen the phenomenal rust rooftop conglomeration in that Facebook update.

A FEW MONTHS ago, our neighbors living two houses away were robbed at about two in the morning. Theirs was the only house with a really high fence; and with two huge security dogs

I barely spared a glance as our bus spewed out its road-wearied passengers in full view of the display. Maybe beauty is noticed when warm food and a warmer bed are not the only things on the mind.

and a live-in guard, no one visited their house for neighborhood camaraderie. That morning, after the robbers left with their jeep amidst gunshots, the entire neighborhood converged in their compound. The police came at the call of the father of the house, after the incident, and left to trace the robbers; none of the sympathizers left till a muezzin made a call for early morning prayers from one of the mosques in the neighborhood. Later that week, while watching two women—one draping a white shawl over her

shoulder—yelling abuses and curses at each other after alighting from a Keke at the bus stop where I was waiting for a cab, I remembered feeling amused by a recollection of the general reaction of the sympathizers at the robbery scene. It was largely one of cursing the robbers and hurling abuses at the police when they had left. My mom had said later, while reflecting on the incident and the reaction: “Ibadan o ni cupboard aso, a fi cupboard eebu” (loosely meaning: an Ibadan person does not have a wardrobe of clothes, but he has an arsenal of abuses/curses).

THE SECOND TIME I saw a sleepy Ibadan was the night I returned from my final year roommate's wedding in Lagos. The bus I was in got to the defunct Ibadan Toll Gate at a few minutes to eight in the

An Ibadan person does not have a wardrobe of clothes, but he has an arsenal of abuses/curses.

evening, expecting to be at Iwo Road by quarter past eight and at home by nine. We spent the next five hours inching through a traffic logjam. This time, three years after my transfixing

moment with the LED billboard at Iwo Road, I barely spared a glance as our bus spewed out its road-wearied passengers in full view of the display. Maybe beauty is noticed when warm food and a warmer bed are not the only things on the mind. As I turned in my bed, a weary mind, finding sleep, I wondered where the magic of that first night went to.

Ado-Ekiti

Olanrewaju Tajudeen

Poetry

You're the old woman
with widely opened arms,
waiting,
always ready,
eager, to embrace me.

& I,
a wandering soul
often assuredly tired
from sojourn-
your smile unburdens me

**I found peace, ease
& release
in your hilly bosom.**

Ado-Ekiti was where I was schooled.

Iworoko: A Life in Words

IWOROKO, EKITI STATE

Basit Jamiu

Memoir

IN MY MANY years in Iworoko, as a passerby, I have witnessed two marriage ceremonies, countless burial ceremonies (it seems people mostly come home to bury the dead here) and over a dozen naming ceremonies. These three peculiar ceremonies, as unusual as this may sound, are celebrated the same way or with striking similarities. In all, you find happy and excited people eating, women dancing to the staged songs, and the men sitting under a large canopy, drinking local brew in a calabash, all in traditional attires. I have come to see each day as a celebration of life and death, a kind of subtle nirvana.

In Iworoko... marriage ceremonies...burial ceremonies...naming ceremonies... are celebrated the same way or with striking similarities. In all, you find happy and excited people.

If you ever care to look at Iworoko with a calculated eye, this is what you will see: a picture almost like the sepia of a still life.

fragile with bony frailty. Iworoko—as this old woman in her young life—must have lived through it with all of its complexities that, at some point, the cost of survival was so hard it cut through her ever-smiling

If you ever cared to look at Iworoko with a calculated eye, this is what you will see: a picture almost like the sepia of a still life. Sometimes this picture, viewed from a personified angle, will clearly exhibit an old woman with a full smile,

In a vivid, sparkling memory I remember this: the ease with which people smile. No greeting...No reply ever comes without that same smile.

face, and still her smile was the only thing that connected her with other things. This smile was the only thing that made life, as unhappy as she had lived it, metaphorically enduring. Iworoko, to me, in that same calculated eye is like a flower that blooms in stages and withers in stages but never loses its purity.

In a vivid, sparkling memory I remember this: the ease with which people smile. Greetings that come in full concerned tones that make you wonder if you've

Iworoko, at early night, is of party and of DJs with crazy mix; the strong smell of suya is everywhere like a known fact that passes through so many processes, once a lie, once a rumour, and now this same fact, fully realized, is everywhere, circulating in the form that is true.

met this person who is greeting you

...if sadness was ever part of this place's attribute, it hides it well.

before. No greeting ever comes without a smile. No reply ever comes without that same smile. It is overwhelming; it is exciting, this show of love. This ease with which people live in harmony that is borne of happiness, genuine conviviality, that if sadness was ever part of this place's attribute, it hides it well. This heightened excitement, especially at Iworoko Market, is the center where strangers bond like distanced childhood friends meeting for the first time after so

many years. Where a seller in the local market raises the buyer to the height of a king or queen, connecting on a level so intimate it could pass for another form of love.

Forgive my floweriness, but in my most ecstatic moments, this is what Iworoko feels like in all of its picturesqueness: the air of calm mornings, tender like the soft hand of a child. Of warm afternoons with overwhelming clarity, brightness that beautifies its beatific presence. Of evenings, serene like the unexplained calmness that a first-time kiss from a crush who will soon turn a lover gives. Iworoko, at early night, is of party and of DJs with crazy mix; the strong smell of suya is everywhere like a known fact that passes through so many processes, once a lie, once a rumour, and now this same fact, fully realized, is everywhere, circulating in the form that is true. Deep silence punctuated with the sound of creepy creatures is what it is when you wake up in the middle of the night perhaps to ease yourself.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

This is what Iworoko left inside me: to smile always, to never think about my stay without a sense of renewed joy. The knowledge of many great minds: reading J. M. Coetzee, Chimamanda Adichie, Yaa Gyasi, V. S. Naipaul and others under its light and deep through its nights. A better lover. A future and more refined husband.

The People Born Here Are Lovers to the Land

LAGOS

Kelechi Ezeigwe

Poetry

THIS PLACE WAS my natal home

And I felt it first from the first breath of its air

Opened my eye to find me sculpted into its face

We chose to be lovers

Our bond witnessed by the muscles

Of its own coastal lines

The firm planes of its landscape

Running down to the marshes of its slum

And the magnificence of its tree-plants nurtured in the little places

And spaces of lakesides

So I grew, fostered by a place that knew and bred my desire

We loved deep into each other

Finding the widest ways and surest spaces to cast

Our sweats and dampness, our moans and groans

Places through the island of Lekki and Ikoyi

Where the surrounding waters are the breaths of our gentility and whispers

Places called Ajegunle and Mushin

Where its firm thighs like the panther of the leopard collides into me

Breaking into pieces of noises and hysteria that bear the sounds

Of exuberance and ecstasy

Years will pass on

And it will call me the queer femme fatale

And I will retell it its own bitter history

Of the rusted fetters left on its shore of Badagry

I will call it the philanderer, whose beauty sold

It out to the colony of a queen

I will spite the loudness of its scenery

Downtown the island of Banana Estate

**With its crystal-like scrappers fashioned
alongside towering trees**

To the rustic aura of its endless slums

Like sparse painting of clay huts perched
across shores of

White waters and terrific lagoons

Over-time the scent of you will overwhelm
me

With nostalgia and memories

Memories of your budding civilization and
wealth

Of fountains and streetlights, bridges and
highways

And there in-between the opening of minds
and the re-union of man and place

*The conjugation of lovers, me yearning to be
thrust by your rigid splendor*

I come, your prodigal man-lover to feel once
more

The passing of air from your wideness,
largeness and warmness

**The silence that reigns in the wide water
of your third mainland bridge**

Your cosmopolitan dust and smell, whirling
in the breeze, filling my breathe

Your agility, enwrapped in the bustling and
hustling of towns and streets

Crafted in the sphere of your metropolis

Then once more you will gather your
territorial heart and tender yourself

And I will sing you a song with your name
all over it

While you fall helplessly into the mirage of
my desire

And I, I will worship the handsomeness and
vivacity of your geography

Looking Through Lumia

AKURE

Otosirize Obi-Young

Album



The Gathering Rain. On Oyemekun Road, Akure, the sky darkens in preparation for rain.



Hilux Rock. A government vehicle parks near a small rock on Igbatoro Road.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES



Overarching Galaxy. Streetlights hang and shine on Oyemekun Road.



The Park. A shot captures the ambitious beauty opposite the Governor's Office.



Manhandled. With bare fists on an odd afternoon, a drunk, unhinged man attacks his debtor's car on Oyemekun Road.



Mama. A woman brings her children to the Grotto of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sacred Heart Cathedral. In Akure, church compounds are locked early, in evenings, often for security.



Bare Street. On Clean-Up Saturdays, Akure looks deserted.



On Fiwasaye Road, Rocks on Green Carpet. Ondo State is filled with beautiful rocks and sloping green hills.



On a Night Stroll on Ondo Road.



Akure Taxi.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES



Smoke, Unnecessary. A worrying case of air pollution.



To Chat Away Time. Traffic Hold-up at SUB Junction, Oba Adesida Road.



Araromi Junction, Akure.

Ibadan

Olanrewaju Tajudeen

Poetry

you are that woman
adorned in woven clothes—
wrappers of history;
history of hills,
of yam- flour,
and
of rusty roofing sheets

Apata, Ibadan

Rocks
arrest your gaze—
entrap your mind,
& take hold of your eyes
like the burst-line
of a well-endowed
woman.

The feeling one gets
is like taking a stroll
in the garden of rocks—

& not of flowers—
with your woman under slight
rain showers—the both of you—
neither wetted nor drenched,
but lost to the magic
the mesmerism of shapes
of those rocks:
natures' finely carved
masterpieces.

There is so much rock

that tall buildings
do not require
escalators,
and
the not-so-tall ones, stairs.

Apata is like the shadow of the past—
a suburb—
of what presently exists
in the city—metropolitan Challenge.

**At Apata, rocks lines roads
like naked trees
without branches or leaves.
There is no need for flowers
rocks are enough adornment;
natural aesthetics.**

**In Apata,
rocks are like beautiful brides
waiting to steal your breath away,**
they are the ever present damsels
waiting as gift for every visitor
that planned to stay
for more than
a night.

The shape of this poem-
of each stanza,
seating atop
one another,
is like
the shape of the rocks
found there.

My NYSC Place of Primary Assignment is Apata, Ibadan. This place touches me in a special way, almost indescribable.

Campus Solitaire

OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE

John “Lighthouse” Oyewale

Fiction

AT ABOUT MIDNIGHT, when students are retiring to their rooms after study group discussions or post-religious-meeting small talk, or heading to the Academics area for all-night study (ostensibly or genuinely, as the case may be), or sitting on stone steps in the dark exchanging sweet nothings, a young man in a blazer, head bowed, hands pocketed, neck muffled, is making his way into a long and solitary night, alone.

He came into the university in Ile-Ife as a wanderer through a nightmare. So, although he arrived late in the evening, to his eyes it was dawn, long-awaited dawn. Here’s the place with this line in its anthem: *Africa’s most beautiful campus*. It is heaven, to this fresher’s mind, its citizens fortunate escapees from the restless nights of meaninglessness. Its streets are golden with light. A choral group is rehearsing in the open basement of what he will learn is called Yellow House, and he imagines this group a choir of angels.

Here’s the place with this line in its anthem: “Africa’s most beautiful campus.”

Still much later, reading Meghan O’Gieblyn’s *Dispatch from Flyover Country*, he will learn that “buildings can be arguments”, that “everything you see is an argument”.

He will later learn that Israeli architects built the campus. There is a preponderance of short flights of outdoor steps, as the lie of the land appears mostly unaltered. Form first, function next—witness buildings named Spider and Rotunda. (Much later, a new one is built for Environmental Design and Management Department, and the young man calls it Noah’s Ark. Still much later, reading Meghan O’Gieblyn’s *Dispatch from Flyover Country*, he will

learn that “buildings can be arguments”, that “everything you see is an argument”). He misses his way often in buildings, especially in the hostel blocks, where the basement of a block is on a level with the ground floor of an adjoining block.

The floor on which he lives is with a view. Sometimes, leaning on the balustrade just outside his room, he stares at the hills. The sun, whenever it rises, rises from their end of the campus, peeping over the grey eminences. In the daytime he may see the ant-size figures of rambunctious students scaling the heights; at night the lights of religious townspeople holding vigils on the summits.

He had missed out on hill-walking with his set during the orientation exercise organized by hostel student executives, as he had travelled on short notice.

Someday, he, too, will climb those hills, he thinks.

**“What will you miss the most about this university when you’re gone?”
“The electricity, the internet,” he replied, although, at the time, even these had become erratic. Later, it strikes him that he has left something out of his reply: the solo night-walking on the beautiful campus with buildings that are arguments.**

It is here that his distrust of herds is sharpened as he discovers afresh the necessity of listening to the voices within, of conversing, debating with himself and the environment. For it is here that he finds it a rare sight, someone walking alone—a female walking alone in the evenings is an even rarer sight, a rayadito. Nearly everyone, it seems, belongs to some group.

Once, as he walks with a few friends up to the point where they could either veer off the pavement and join the hypotenuse-like well-beaten path just across the road from Mòremí Hall or keep following the pavement (an option so few take as the path is quicker), one of the friends says, “Let’s take the Postgraduate route”—that is, the latter option.

In that suggestion the young man glimpses a metaphor. To follow the route less taken must require a certain maturity of mind and independence of thought, a certain degree of

mindfulness, and, on a university campus, a postgraduate student is seen as the personification of these traits (whether they actually always are is a different kettle of fish).

Thenceforth, he finds himself taking that route, when retiring to his room or striding grimly through the night to his laboratory, to drudgery.

It is at night that his sense of solitude peaks. In the day, he is aware of the chattering herds and feels distinct, and sometimes catches himself wishing they will feel the distinction. But in the small hours of the night, he is alone with the elements, with the buildings, under the night sky. Once, as he nears the intersection opposite the daytime business hub that is the Student Union Building, the quiet enraptures him, and the urge to fall on his knees and cry for awe is overmastering.

He has a similar experience when he finally goes hill-walking, alone, just before dawn, following a relatively less travelled, dark path, taking each step with the awe and dread of one who recognises they are strangers, trespassers even, in nature's territory, and must brace themselves for the unexpected (footfalls, a hiss, a roar, a bite); full of wonder on emerging from the dark bushes onto the naked rock and as he looks down the sheer drop and ahead at the roof of his hostel block and the toys that are vehicles. His greatest regret: he is without a camera. But he's finally done it, and that without having to deal with the chatter of some group.

Once, as he nears the intersection opposite the daytime business hub that is the Student Union Building, the quiet enraptures him, and the urge to fall on his knees and cry for awe is overmastering.

At long last, he leaves, disillusioned with *Africa's most beautiful campus*, just as, torn to shreds by schisms and a much-talked-about rot, it finally drifts down through the air into confusion and darkness, into hell.

"What will you miss the most about this university when you're gone?" a good friend asked him months before his flight.

"The electricity, the Internet," he replied, although, at the time, even these had become erratic.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

Later, it strikes him that he has left something out of his reply: the solo night-walking on the beautiful campus with buildings that are arguments.

Lady Blue

LAGOS-IBADAN EXPRESSWAY

Omoya Yinka Simult

Fiction

THIRTY MINUTES AFTER we eased out of Oshodi, out of the bustle of Lagos and the certified madness of her traffic, we were finally about to hit the road proper. Our eighteen-seater bus that had been tottering could now gather speed and move at a faster pace, faster only because it was better than what obtained within Lagos metropolis and nothing more. The journey, a distance of 120 km or thereabout, which should take an hour and half or less, was going to take two and half hours, and we would be thankful to God Almighty if we arrived Ibadan in one piece.

**Transparent kegs of red oil,
suspended bush meat on
bloodstained stakes, layers
of yam tubers fastidiously
superimposed on one
another in fives—these
were the things my eyes
caught as I looked out
through the window.**

As we got closer to the toll gate, a crowd of hawkers descended upon us, offering for sale all sorts of snacks and drinks. Teenagers so nimble in their prime, fuelled by a determination to earn a living, jostled for the passengers' attention. They clung to the windows and kept up with the bus on foot, shouting at the top of their voices their wares. "Buy bread!" "Plantain, plantain!" "Dodo ikire wa!" "Eyin sise re o!" "La Casera wa, bottled water wa..."

The bus dallied for some seconds, then it picked up after a significant number of the passengers had purchased one thing or the other. To while away time, I tried striking up a conversation with the lady in a blue baseball cap beside me, but she seemed rather uninterested in chatters.

-Have you seen The CEO?

-Yes.

-Oh, really? What do you think about it?

-Nothing.

-Nothing? Like nothing?

-Yes.

She never raised her head for once, nor did she look into my eyes as she dished out the laconic responses. I let her be and sought for other means by which I might engage my mind. We were after all in a bus traversing the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, and on this route, nobody owes anyone many obligations. Beyond the reciprocative sympathy in being equal partakers in the intermittent jolts that leave your butt sore every time the bus runs into pothole, beyond offering a helping hand in passing purchased commodities to a buyer in the bus, there are indeed no other obligations.

At the sight of such madness, a loaded bus zooming towards them with suicidal speed, the armed robbers fled for their lives, vamoosing the road for the bushes on adjacent sides.

Now, we approached that vast expanse of land whose outlook keeps getting more pleasing as the years pass. Mowe-Ibafo in Ogun state is a refreshing break from the monotony of forests that has come to be associated with roadsides of expressways in Nigeria. Many thanks to the numerous religious and tertiary institutions that have been situated there, prominent among which are Redemption Camp, MFM Prayer City and their respective universities. This locality testifies to the organized presence and impacts that human activities can establish on any given environment within a short time.

Transparent kegs of red oil, suspended bush meat on bloodstained stakes, layers of yam tubers fastidiously superimposed on one another in fives—these were the things my eyes caught as I looked out through the window. They lined the sides of the road in scattered clusters. We dashed past them too, hoping to see more. More speed, then less speed as our bus approached a bend.

Then we saw it, a silhouette of a person at the centre of the road flagging us down. The bus decelerated some more, but it was not just a silhouette of a person anymore. Five men there were now, pointing guns at our bus from a distance, shouting. Heads turned, with eyes taking sweeping looks. Panic registered: *thieves!* The cacophony, an alloy of the passengers' screams and the armed men's urgent bellows, must have made the driver's adrenaline run high, because he stepped on the gas pedal so hard the bus surged. We were heading for the bandits at the speed of death.

The thieves fired at our bus. *Rat-a-tat-tat.* Windscreen shattered. Passengers cowered, burying their faces in their laps, screeching. The driver changed gears, stepped on the gas pedal harder. At the sight of such madness, a loaded bus zooming towards them with a suicidal speed, the armed robbers fled for their lives, vamoosing the road for the bushes on adjacent sides.

We didn't stop. Our bus maintained a uniform speed for the next five minutes, an effort to ensure we were out of harm's way. We looked back in terror, wanting to ascertain that we were not being followed. All my eyes saw was a stretch of greens, herbage and trees, intercalated as far as the horizon by another stretch of granite and bitumen. Then the silence that had earlier pervaded the bus just after the screams and gunshots started fading, as some passengers began to thank God while others passed comments on the exceptional courage and agility of the driver in getting past the thieves. For the first time, there was a discourse everyone partook in. Even the lady in blue baseball cap asked if I saw the masks the robbers wore.

-Yes, they wore black masks, I answered.

-Nah, it wasn't black. They wore red masks, she said, irritated.

I wanted to say I was certain it was black, that I could bet my left testicle on it, but I let it pass. There was more I could get out of the lady than the colour of masks.

Now, we approached another one of those checkpoints manned by uniformed men, a makeshift of sand-filled drums and planks that formed a bottleneck. The soldiers looked bored. Their eyes were on our driver, as though they expected him to do something silly.

“Power baba! Power...,” our driver hailed from afar, waving a hand in salute.

“Park, Mr. Man, park,” one of them commanded, pissed.

“Ahn-ahn, oga, e never reach that one na,” our driver said, offering the shouting soldier a clumsy handshake. The soldier clenched his fist after the handshake and dipped it straight into his bulging pocket. He didn't look at the passengers' faces or check the trunk as he waved us away. He didn't ask about our shattered windscreen either. Our driver muttered imprecations under his breath and zoomed off.

Two hours had passed now, and as we drew closer to Ibadan, passengers started making calls, informing their loved ones how lucky they were to have survived a robbery in broad daylight, and requesting that they come pick them at some agreed location. The driver announced in a sad but grateful tone that Iwo Road was going to be his last bus stop. He was sad because he had a shattered windscreen to mend, an unpremeditated strain on his finances, and he was grateful because he was alive after another harrowing experience on Lagos-Ibadan expressway. I turned to the lady in the blue baseball cap and requested for her number; the Lord hath need of it.

I actually experienced the robbery incident depicted in the above story, a gorier one for that matter.

Sisi Eko

LAGOS

Osinachi

Visual Art



Iseyin I and II

ISEYIN

Olanrewaju Tajudeen

Poetry



Iseyin Town. Captured from the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Orientation Camp-ground, Iseyin. Photo: Olanrewaju Tajudeen.

ISEYIN I

I

You're the tale of contrasting colours;
your sky is blue and your fields green,
whites are of cows and cassava flakes.

II

I can hear song birds
in my mind's ear—
see the remains of rusted zincs—

spill from Ibadan—

on roofs of buildings planted
in the belly
of your undulating valley.

III

You wear the radiant smile of nature,
beauty exudes from the lips of your hills.
Bare earth is a living brown: trees, seeds,
shrubs & greenery on your dusty chest,

are always alive.

IV

The drowning sun is

a sign of contentment.

My soul, spirit & body-

for now- are at peace, here.

ISEYIN II

1

You're the horizon
that is seldom gazed at,
graced only by a few visitors;
men of valour.

**Your hills and mounds
are breath-taking views
witnessed, only
by courageous few.**

2

Your cave is like home
there warmth of embrace float—
gives active life to the near-dead
& frozen hearts.

Your fragrance though
is, a reminder to all and sundry

that, all roads, especially this road—
that lead to and away from you;
away from your core
filled with litters of repercussion.

4

I await dawn and not the rise of sun
with as much apprehension
as the fallen trees, it will come soon.

5

Like souls of men
I do not belong to, or with you
I am only identified with you-
through time.
Like a lost soul in an empty body.
In you, I found a lost part of me.

Iseyin was where we were camped for
the three-week NYSC Orientation.

Over Obalende, Linking Lekki

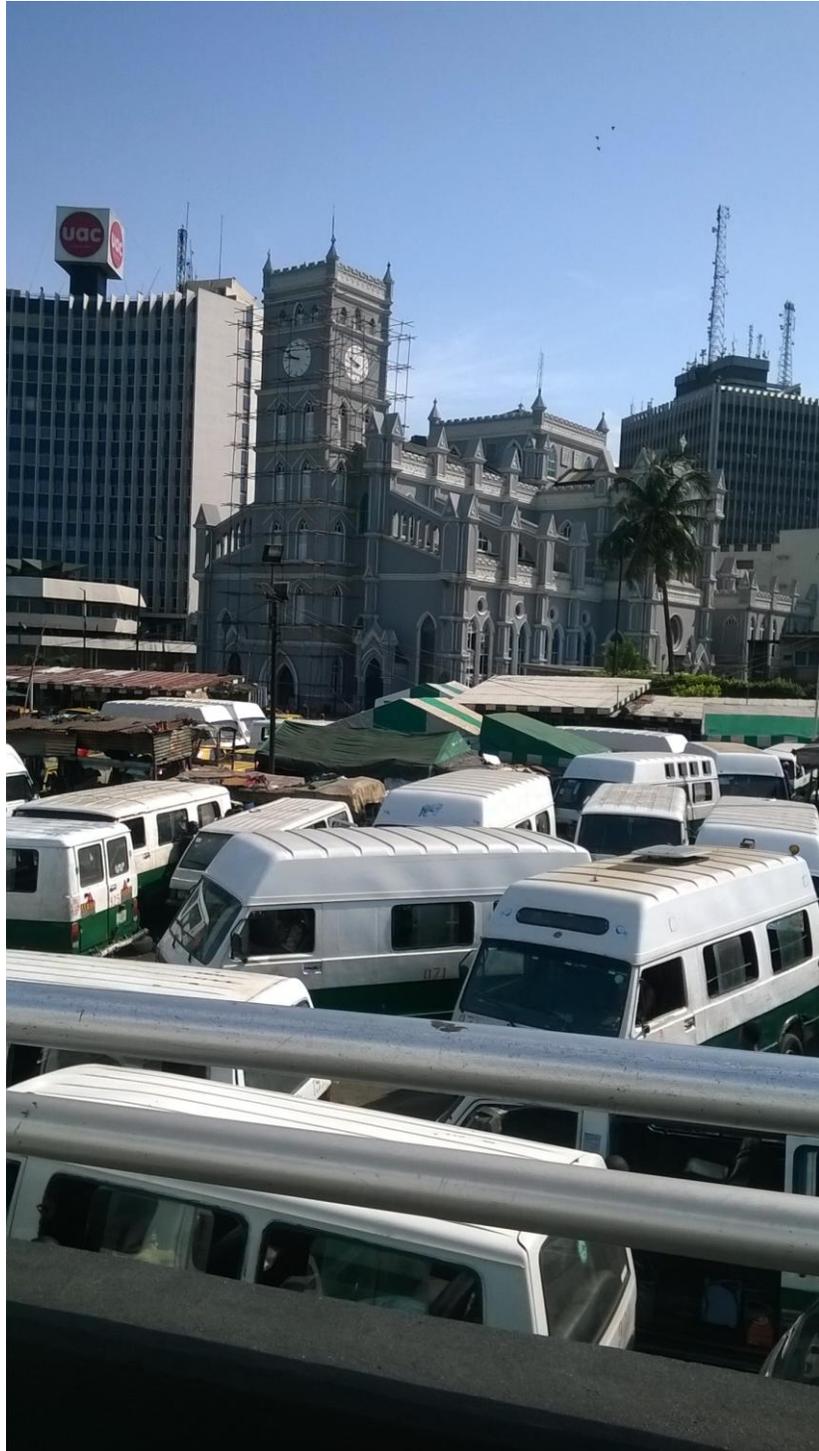
LAGOS

Bura-Bari Nwilo · Otosirieze Obi-Young

Album



Over Obalende. Credit: Bura-Bari Nwilo.



Vehicles and a Cathedral. The Cathedral Church of Christ in Marina, Lagos is the oldest Anglican cathedral in Nigeria. It is also said to be among the finest cathedral structures in Africa. Credit: Otosirieze Obi-Young.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES



Serene Ocean. Lekki Beach. Credit: Otosirieze Obi-Young.



Children on the Beach. Credit: Otosirieze Obi-Young.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

AKINTUNDE AIKI studied Engineering in the University of Ibadan. A Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop alum, he believes words should take you where your feet go. He's working on a collection of essays. He blogs at *koroba.wordpress.com*.

ALUKA IGBOKWE was born and bred in Aba. He writes short stories and memoirs. He believes that life is filled with struggles and, as inhabitants of Earth, we must struggle to attain success. You can follow him on Twitter: @Sir_Alus.

AMAKA JOVITA EZEUCHU is a graduate of Mass Communication from Anambra State University. She did her National Youth Service in Yayarin Tukur, Jigawa State. She lives and writes in Anambra State.

AMATESIRO DORE is a 2009 alumnus of Farafina Trust Creative Writing Workshop; former Managing Editor of *Vanguard Spark*, an imprint of *Vanguard Newspapers*; and 2015 Fellow of the Ebedi International Writers Residency. After studying Law at the Igbinedion University Okada and the Nigerian Law School, his work has appeared or are forthcoming in *Afreada*, *Arts and Africa*, *Afridiaspora*, *Bakwa Magazine*, *Brittle Paper*, *Chimurenga*, *Expound*, *Farafina Magazine*, *Kalahari Review*, *Kwani?*, *Munyori Literary Journal*, *Naija Stories*, *Omenana*, *Queer Africa II*, *Saraba*, *The Ofi Press*, *The ScoopNG*, *Vanguard* newspaper and *YNaija*. He was shortlisted and currently under consideration for the *Saraba* Manuscript (Nonfiction) Prize. He is one of the winners of the Reimagined Folktale Contest.

ARINZE IFEAKANDU was born in Kano and studied Literature in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he was editor of *The Muse* No.44. He is a 2013 alumnus of the Farafina Creative Writing Workshop. His short stories have appeared in a Farafina Trust anthology and in *A Public Space* magazine where he was an Emerging Writer Fellow in 2015. He was shortlisted for the 2015 BN Poetry Award.

BASIT JAMIU Writer. Critic. Òkò Nafí. Reader. @IamBasitt on Twitter.

BURA-BARI NWILO was born in Port-Harcourt and educated in Nsukka. He is a photography enthusiast. He is the author of *Diary of a Stupid Boyfriend* and a book of short stories entitled *A Tiny Place Called Happiness*.

CHIBUIKE OGBONNAYA is currently studying English and Literary Studies/ History at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He enjoys his holidays writing short stories and spends hours reading and practicing singing. He believes that one day the world will dance to the tunes of his writing. He lives in Abakaliki.

CHIDIMMA NWABUEZE is an English and Literary Studies graduate of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. But know that she doesn't write because she studied English: she writes because she loves writing. It has a cathartic effect on her. She is a scriptwriter, a blogger and a fiction-writer with several short stories yet unpublished.

CHIGAEMEZU ERNEST OHIA was born in Port Harcourt. He hails from Uzii in Ideato North L.G.A of Imo State. Parts of his childhood were spent at Diobu in Port Harcourt. An introvert, he has a keen interest in music, fine arts and photography. He enjoys Solitude and appreciates life's cultural values. Currently, he is an undergraduate of English and Literary Studies/ History and International Studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He is also an active member of The Writers Community (TWC), UNN. He lives in Oyigbo, Rivers State.

CHIMDINMA OKORONKWO was born in Aba. She had her primary and secondary school education there before proceeding to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A graduate of History and International Studies, her hobbies include reading, travelling and meeting new people. This is her first published essay.

CHISOM OKAFOR is finishing his Nutrition and Dietetics degree programme at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His works have been published in *Indian Journal of Literature and Aesthetics*, *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*, *Kalahari Review*, *Expound*, *dwartsonline*, among numerous other online journals. His poetry won Third Place in the Nigerian Students Poetry Prize, as well as Second Place in the Literary Arts Festival Poetry Prize in his school.

CHIZARAM INNOCENT ILODIANYA is a writer and blogger. He lives in Aba and is currently a final year student at the University of Nigeria Nsukka. He loves laughing and dabbles into sarcasm.

DANIEL C. ULONNAM studied Education/ English and Literary Studies in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He lives in Port-Harcourt.

D. E. BENSON is an undergraduate at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he studies English and Literature and is Poetry Editor of *The Muse*, the department's journal of creative and critical writing. He loves to commune with nature and his contribution here is one of the few unpublished poems in his *abuja chronicles*, the result of one such communion on a visit to Abuja a year ago.

EBENEZER AGU was born in the market city of Onitsha. He recently completed a degree program in English and Literary Studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Alongside his liking for photography, he is pursuing a career in creative writing, taking out time to write essays on things that interest and provoke him.

HENRY U. IKENNA is an On-Air Personality, writer, social media consultant, and programmes producer. He lives in Nsukka where he attended university.

IDUEHE A. UDOM is a graduate of Library and Information Science/ English and Literary Studies from the University of Nigeria Nsukka. A technologist, computer analyst, software manager, applications expert, technical diplomat and graphic designer, he is a regular columnist with *Vantage Point* magazine and a writer of all genres featured by many online publishers. He is a native of Ikot Inyang Udo in Ukanafun Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. As a way of continuously contributing to the larger world, this man of many creative interests is currently working on multiple projects in different locations.

IFIOKABASI OKOP is a student of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where she is studying English and Literary Studies. She is from Akwa Ibom State and resides there as well. She writes poems for *voicesnet.com* and *poetfreak*.

JOHN "LIGHTHOUSE" OYEWALE's short stories, poems, opinion pieces and a book review have appeared in *Short Story Day Africa*, *Sankofa*, *What's On Africa*, *This Is Africa*, and *Itch*, among others. He is an alumnus of creative writing workshops run by the British Council, Ake Arts and Books Festival, and Goethe-Institut.

JOSEPH OFEJIRO BILABI writes fiction and poetry. He writes from Ughelli in Delta State. He currently studies English and Literature at the University of Benin. He has many unpublished works of fiction and poetry and has won a few local awards, the most recent being Second Runner-up Prize in the prose category of the University of Benin's Festus Iyayi Award for Excellence. He is at work on his debut novel.

KASIEMOBI IBEH is a graduate of Law and a writer with so many unpublished works. He was born and bred in Aba and has an undying passion for the arts.

KELECHI EZEIGWE is a queer feminist and poet. At the University of Nigeria, Nsukka's Literary Arts Festival, his poetry won First Prize in 2015 and Third Prize in 2016. His work has appeared in *The Best New African Poets, 2015* anthology edited by Tendai R. Mwanaka and Daniel da Purifacacao, as well as in *The Muse*, reputed to be the longest surviving student journal in West Africa (since 1963). They are also forthcoming in *Experimental Writing Volume 1: Africa vs Latin America*, where for the first time they would be translated into a foreign language. He believes in Individualism and has a burning ferocity for effeminate men to powerfully embrace the way they are. For him, effeminacy is positive.

MICHAEL E. UMOH is a graduate of Mass Communication from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A fan of rock music and most things written, he believes his friends are right when they call him "weird". He is currently a National Youth Service Corps member in Umuhia North, Abia State.

NONSO ANYANWU was born in Kano State. He left for Port-Harcourt during the Sharia Law riot of 1999 and returned eight years later to reclaim his place in Sabon Gari. He was educated at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he earned a degree in Literature-in-English. His work has appeared in various publications including *Sunday Sun Review*, *Africa Book Club* and *Afreada*, and is forthcoming in *New Contrast* and *Open Pen* magazines. He edited the e-anthology *Gossamer: Valentine Stories, 2016*. He lives in Abuja where he divides his time writing and working. Sabon Gari has become a longing, a visiting memory for him.

NZUBE IFECHUKWU studied Electrical Engineering at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He lives in Ichi and teaches Mathematics in a secondary school in Oba, both towns in Anambra State. He blogs at nzubeifechukwu.blogspot.com.ng.

OKAFOR UGOCHI WINNIE is an undergraduate of English and Literary Studies in the University of Uyo. She is an unofficial editor, a freelance writer, and a football lover. She hails from Imo State.

OLANREWAJU TAJUDEEN is a poet. Because we burn daily and nightly like candles that illuminate, our waxes are the words left behind, even if the light becomes dimmed after our passing, and he, Olanrewaju, would want to leave enough wax behind. He writes in from Ibadan.

OLISAEMEKA GERALD studied Linguistics at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He writes short stories and poetry. He has published two books: *Folkstories Retold for Children and Teenagers* and *Nestfruits (An Anthology of Verses)*. He is currently working on a new anthology of poems.

OLUTAYO ANUOLUWAPO AINA is a native of Ekiti State. She studies Pharmacy in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Her poems are underlined by a desire to reach out, to motivate people around her, especially youths, to diligently seek to be better versions of themselves. She loves reading. Her inspiration comes from God, her personal experiences and nature. She holds her family and her Christian faith very dear. She is a cool lady, with a jovial personality, and she loves being around children and teenagers. She loves Nigeria and looks toward seeing a better Nigeria.

OMOYA YINKA SIMULT is a medical student at the University of Ibadan. He loves nature and fruit salad, and *Omoyasimult.com* is where he allows people to take a peep into his thinking room.

OSINACHI is an Aba-born poet, playwright, short-story-writer, essayist and visual artist. His works have appeared in various literary outlets within the African continent, the United States and Italy. You can reach him on Twitter @prince_jacon or Instagram @princejacon_osinachi.

OTOSIRIEZE OBI-YOUNG's *Transition* story, "A Tenderer Blessing", was nominated for a Pushcart Prize last year. His fiction has also appeared in *The Threepenny Review*, and his essays in *Interdisciplinary Academic Essays* and *Brittle Paper*. He grew up in Aba and blogs pop culture at *naijakulture.blogspot.com*. He is an art enthusiast—drawing, nature photography, painting—who thinks of places as human beings, who wishes someone would teach him physics and math. *Enter Naija: The Book of Places* is the first in a series of anthologies he plans to create which all focus on different aspects of Nigerianness.

SOCRATES MBAMALU's works have appeared in *Saraba* magazine, *Deyu African*, *Kalahari Review*, *African Writer*, *Sankofa Mag*, alongside other magazines. He has participated in two editions of the Writivism workshop and was recently shortlisted for the *Saraba* Nonfiction Manuscript Prize. He is a book reviewer for *Olisa TV* and has written a couple of articles for *Waza Africa*. To him, words are magical, the very foundation upon which the world stands. He seeks to keep outdoing himself with every work he produces. He lived in Jos for three years.

ENTER NAIJA: THE BOOK OF PLACES

SOTONYE DAN is a writer and liberal philosopher who lives in Port-Harcourt. His flash fiction, “Rumuokoro”, recently appeared on *Brittle Paper*. He contributed an essay to the compendium *Philosophy and Logic: An Introductory Study*. He loves brown leather shoes.