



#BABISHAI2018 SHORTLIST

38 photographs of depression

By Marial Awendit (South Sudan)

1

an old man floating in the sea
searches for his umbilical cord.

2

survival is a mosquito
shaking a spider's web
but suicide is a body's
way of finding final peace.

3

other ways to understand a life
you were not asked to consent.

4

you will find yourself
a room too large
you will only coil at one corner and
try to turn the globe into an apple.

5

endless falling in a black abyss,
you attempt to grab your self
but your hands are too slow.

6

depression is an act of humility;
recognizing the weight
of the globe on your cranium.

7

sometimes the whole world
would fall asleep and you
are just the eye of the night.

8

our fears are so heavy
they would still float
after five bottles of gin.

9

silence turns a body
into night.

10

solitude makes the body pay

1



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attention to its bloodless wounds.

11

the sun will not erase
some shadows.

12

get away from the crowd
to hear the footfalls
of your grief.

13

the night does not drown us
we are only watched to discover the sun.

14

emptiness lets the gourd
hold milk.

15

dead people packed with them
dreams but forgot their worries.

16

the sun's loneliness makes it reach
for the songs in our hearts.

17

sometimes the night has more
heartbeats than a body.

18

the sun unlike the night
has no boats to row us home.

19

our hearts are afraid
to turn into stones.

20

silence is another response
to pain.

21

our hearts have very few locks
to keep the night out.

22

some days the sun fails
to rise.

23

the body has no current



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to carry away solitude.

24

there are more people
inside us to be one.

25

in solitude we ask god
to leave us alone.

26

sometimes we have to mourn
the universe, we may not be there
when the time comes.

27

there is no blade
to cut darkness from marrows.

28

the body will search
for freedom to self-destruct.

29

the mind contemplates burial
of dead memories.

30

knowing is burdensome the mind
will carry only that which it knows.

31

we try to be the things
we lost.

32

trees have no hunger
to suck grief from bones.

33

burial is also air
covering a body.

34

a fall measures the distance
between the earth and the mind.

35

three yellow *diazepam*s
and the universe goes missing.

36

we fear the night
will turn into water.

37



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the mind like a deserted room
longs for stains of breath.

38

the body will name
places that fill it by leaving.



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BECAUSE EVERYTHING WAS BEING SWALLOWED UP BY MEMORY

(for Aunty Ebum)

By Boluwatife Afolabi (Nigeria)

Because I tried to reimagine time
and it became a body of water
and we are fragments of matter
floating in a dismembered torso
but we are not drowning,
only her.

II

Because I thought I had forgotten the
language of loss and I was
a butterfly, gifting myself to the wind
and allium and god and basking
in the song of cuckoos-
softly
slowly,
dancing.

III

But grief does not have a mother tongue.

IV

And her body suddenly dissolved
into memory and I offered hands
to the son and prayed for a miracle:
*the transmutation
of memory
back to body.*

V

But it was not enough.

VI



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And I also tried to pull all her names
I had learnt out of my tongue
and hang them on the open spaces
of my skin
willing them to live again-
the transformation
of names
back to woman.

VII

Still, it was not enough.

VIII

Where did we first learn that
the answer to loss is grief?

IX

I bury my head in seawater
seeking new ways to disremember,
I taste salt
and I forget to forget her, again.

IX

So,
here is a memento-
to all your laughters
that drowned in the songs of loss
to the fragrance of your skin
melting into the wind
to your bones sinking into shadows
to your breath fading into a whisper
to your body becoming a poem.

X

Here is your reincarnation,



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because everything was being swallowed
by memory
and I was too afraid that
my body will become god's acre.



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MY LETTER TO YOU

By Grace Sharra (Malawi)

Because the sun stopped not for me
And now I am stuck in between
Of my maimed past and faith-laden tomorrow,
Because my rival was a ghost
And the bond of death is unbreakable
(or was I to die for him too?)...
And at the confluence of my sanity
Did I wrestle with the ghosts and lost my thigh?
We shall call it Penuel
And gag my yesterdays' shame and cowardice
Until I come back for my pound of flesh
And shade off the skin

So April may be the cruelest month
(I have Rwanda to attest to that)
But O you fool, who said May for all her beauty is any kinder?
It's May again but the kicking hope in my womb is gone
I now must wriggle my beardless waist for a *thayo*
And perform my mourning dance for a dream deferred
Without losing my head in its ghostly echoes
For it has become a world of stillborns;
Of brotherly love, of comradeship
Naked of trust and hope and sacredness
Blossoming in brotherly betrayals
As we try to rinse the thickness of our blood off our hearts
And sup on sorrow (too much stale taste-sense a meal;
We can use a little joy for seasoning)
And until I find me and come back for what's mine
I must sit here and unlearn all my innocences and trustings
And somehow unravel the ageless riddle of the Phoenix.



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HYMNS OF A BROKEN SYMPHONY

By George Gumikiriza (Uganda)

An ocean of words,
Beneath an unmotivated bed of withered lilies,
A thirsty wind for love,
Memories, a frozen lump of cheese
For the bruised emotions the mind bears of a lost family

Echoes of lullabies and bedtime stories in mom's voice,
Hers I still recall,
Like the ringing of a million soft melodious bells
That put all nightmares to sleep,
Ticklish toe pinches on a woollen carpet
And cold floor games, with a man I once called, Father

Once a beautiful song sang by jolly eyes and grin faces,
Now an empty modern cave,
Painted on each wall, a stain of torment and twisted agony
For the thorns I bear at heart as memories
Of those I loved hopelessly but fell asleep too soon

Cracked clay cup,
Clear steamy water,
Heavily burnt lip and red sunken eyes,
I found audience in the hurting silence,
Sobbing voices and a depressed breeze from every house corner
And all they asked was, "What now?"

See I learnt the tree and sky parables
In this silent depression, my heart's loose bay
For they listen to what no man cares about

I sing along with the morning bird
To yet another empty day because I only watch the sunrise,
But lost track of its setting



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And alone I stand against a hungry world
With nothing to offer, but selflessness.



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In my brother I see:

by Mhraf Worku (Ethiopia)

-- --

In my brother I see,
softness, (like woven silk held to the face)
sweetness, (like the sweet suckle from a ripe mango)
tenderness, (like the way a mother holds her newborn)

In my brother I see,
softness, (evolving into calcified indifference)
sweetness, (sucked dry by a ravenous world)
tenderness, (beaten out of him because that is no way to be a man)

| And I told God, 'Kulich' is becoming a man |



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ON SONS WHO HATE THEIR FATHERS

By Stephen Ogunfoworin (Nigeria)

Eleven

There are only a few things you know
But you know enough to fear your father's anger
And the silence that comes with it
The trembling baritone, when he is finally able to speak
And that violent stammer that chokes his words
You know the mad look in his eyes when he is livid
You know the hardness of his thick hands when he strikes your soft face

Twenty-one

You hate his presence
The way he sits in that cane chair, staring into a sea of nothingness
For hours that become eternities
But you also hate his absence and how it feels thick and alive, like a person
As though it had its own existence, separate from its owner, but just as cruel
You hate how it reaches out to you, grabs you by the ear and taunts you

One

Your father likes to punch your pregnant mother in the chest
But this time, he gets her in the gut
Though you are not old enough to understand
You will never forget that metallic smell and all that shimmering red

Thirty-one

He is dead now, but you hate him more than ever



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There are children living in your childhood home
They are not your mother's children, and yet they have your father's face
Sometimes when you squint hard enough through the corner of your eye
You can almost still see your mother rubbing the soft folds of her belly
Speaking to her body, begging it to give him more sons

Forty-one

You see your father in your own eyes
In all that anger and cowardice
In the mornings, you spend more time at the mirror
And as you stare, you cannot tell where your father ends and you begin

Fifty-one

Your son is eleven and there are only a few things he knows
But he knows enough to fear his father's anger
And the silence that comes with it
The trembling baritone, when you are finally able to speak
And the violent stammer that chokes your words
He knows the mad look in your eyes when you are livid
He knows the hardness of your thick hands when you strike his soft face.

.....



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Stones

By Adedayo Adeyemi Agarau (Nigeria)

somewhere after sunset
a mother on her way from work holds her son
like faith, like belief, a boy carries
a bouquet of flower for his lover
daddy shoki sings at the market central
little boys stand by the teeth of the railway
watch as Shawn Michaels switches music into Triple-H's throat
light bokeh flickers
into a pressman's eyeballs, he sees a newswire
as a girl pressing her voice into his ears
sells bean cakes
hot oil unsettled like feet of people rushing
unsettled like the bewildered children watching Triple-H slam Shawn Michael through the
table
god watching this place through a dark glass
does not see a fire coming
does not see the pipe leaking
sees as, within a twinkle, a city-place
becomes a room full of cremated bodies
sees a boy writhing, half dead, the other half
hanging loosely between imitation of water
sees as mouths move, calls his name in language
oluwaaaaaaaaa o
oluwaaaaaaaaa o
but he is off duty on tuedays
the mother's hand melts into her son's
the flower boy needing to love himself more
gives himself flowers even into his own death
embers of bodies badly burnt beat bokehs
into becoming burial ground
fire still limping out of the chest of the pressman
like stones
like memories
fierce people don't burn out quickly -circa 2002, lagos



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Calypso's Song (For men who try to love me while I'm broken)

By Tariro Ndoro (Zimbabwe)

I tell them my arms
Are not a safe place to bury a heart
I tell them my hands are fractions
Fractal, fractured
A broken soil that will yield no good crop
A contaminated microcosm that will choke
Even what it holds dear

I tell them my heart is a bottomless void,
A sea of chaos, abyss of nothingness
Where love has forgotten its own name
I tell them my fury is a fiery tsunami,
A seismic wave of immortal rage
Yet sailor like they bury their trust
In my arms in my hands in my waters

Prideful pirates aim to tame me
They'll break the rage, that is what they claim,
These seafarers - the ones I toss and turn
In swirl, in pain, in maritime storm
I spit them out on foreign ground
Reduce those Crusoes to dull smoke signals
For nearby boats. Still none of them believes
A contaminated microcosm will choke



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Even what it holds dear

Nothing, nothing, nothing grows here



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Unholy Sermon Notes

By Yakeeb (Nigeria)

Beer thirsty in church,
The sermon is like a coward's babble,
I wait for God to strike me dead,
Spill my guts on floor
Because I don't believe

I think about sex in unholy ways
Serial fornication with adulterous wives
In their kitchens I delay their husbands' dinner
Heavenly Father, forgive me
For I have sinned
My lust is self-sufficient

I pray for wisdom, knowledge and understanding
To become a passionate criminal mastermind
I want 1000 strokes of luck and then, a miraculous moment
For repentance, turning over a new leaf and all that crap
My body is the temple of the living God
Nicotine will not be the end of me.



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the music man thinks about Dapchi

by Salawu Olajide (Nigeria)

1.

I do not know how to write a poem
where girls are mathematics we leave
as our values for sorrow. I am still learning
to write about eyes that have forgotten how to cry
and mouths that have forgotten how to smile;
and when you say love, your eyes become a story
where girls are shovelled away and ghosts
of barbecued men are feathered by the wind.

2.

The inside of this poem is the inside of your mother
whose stomach's floor is a dredge of grief
and, at first, you became a cloud of hope when
she told you what men desire when their eyes interlock
with yours, and why flowers are not expensive metaphors;
but now, you are a shadow fiddling inside her heart.

3.

Look at what my poem has become tonight;
feel the elegy in your mouth like ashes
and the heat oozing from this land's quicksand.
See how it burns you every time you mention Chibok,
before Dapchi says,
run, run for your dear life!



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Like Torn Kites In A Hurricane by Rex Omonla (Nigeria)

I cannot speak because my mouth is a grave - 'Departure' -Romeo Oriogun
Out of the depth my cry, give ear and hearken- 'The Passage', Christopher Okigbo

Am here and there, like torn kites in an hurricane,
lift these broken cupids- the memories
of an ephemeral love- off my eyes
and teach me how to be here again.

wake the bones the quills of your departure scythed to shingles
and grinded thoroughly to dusts by those memories of rose-budding and ritzy plastic
asps

touch my heart, lift the phoenix that keep memories and caligraph
in the nucleus of my heart the ways to let go and find love again.

Lift these fingers of song that buried the soporific egret I had been
before the shredding of the sky

Hold my mind away from wandering to the lawns and boulders
on which we had supine and rolled fancying the hovering
clouds, heart frisking heart.

Malandra ! Take me back; pick me away from the lonely
road in this tainted rose-quartz dotting my heart .

Malandra! am gone old with white turfs on my scalp still
counting the days of love , death, kisses , romance
and beads that carried your waist to
the full moon-



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teach me the rhymes of living ,
the song of resuscitation, the dance of reawakening- teach
me how to see you in the eyes of another maiden fair as Malandra ,
slim, quaint Easter Angel. Teach me to love again- that
love isn't what takes us away but keeps us,
that love isn't a parazonium that parts the tongue and hide in its belly
burial grounds defaced by the anguish of burning relatives-
lift away pains of memory- zap the outlines of
death pouring and drenching me
with fluids and grimes of catacombs –
lift the graveyard am becoming and stick in abyss
the twirling mourners roaming my street,
once golden, now jagged, tainted by footprints of
howling ghosts and reeks with the corpse of
the angel cartooning lullabies on heaven's gate.