

# Creators of Justice Awards 2023

## HONORABLE MENTION

### Poetry

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#### **Southern Kaduna**

by Michael Imossan

My quest for answers has led me here.

In a sacked village in Southern Kaduna,  
empty houses sit beside dead bodies  
wishing for the soft push of their laughter,  
dreaming of infant hands running over them,  
staining their walls with joy.

It is the curse of all that survive tragedy.

The burden of a funeral is for the living.  
The weight of grief is never on a dead man's  
shoulder so we, poet and living, are left to  
sing the world's end, to point to the place  
where a knife passed through a village and  
stripped it naked.

Who do we surrender our sorrows to?

No amount of tears can disinfect the wounds,  
still the body's response to ruin will always be  
sympathy.

The policemen, complicit by their nonchalance,  
have now arrived to take a statement. An eye  
witness says he saw them. Crouched in the cover  
of an abandoned building, he watched as their  
guns moved through the houses, creating ruin  
upon ruin. Like me, his eyes have borne witness  
to terror.

I did not choose this path. The curse of my art is  
that I cannot do anything other than witness  
terror, other than sing the creation of horror  
into a poem.

When I leave, a question mark will still hang on  
my lips. The ruin will not be washed away. The houses,  
tired of wishing, will take off their roofs and run into  
the abundance of weeds while the newspapers will either  
go blind or slice the toll in half—all those dead people  
tossed inside politics.

It wasn't always like this. It wasn't always like this.

## A Postcard From Nigeria

by Tunmise Adebawale

In my country, the sky is always saffron  
and the mothers are always bleeding.

The earth is always lush  
and the children are always hungry.

In my country, dreams are white and green,  
and some girls go from womb to stove to a husband.

In the land of talented minds  
someone is always praying,

with life and death dressing each other  
on a pavement under a leaking roof.

But in my country, *siddiq abubakar* was a king  
and *sanusi dantata* was a rich man, and *tolulope arotile*  
was the pilot men followed.

Here, we bathe in our history every morning  
and cook our *akara* with the words

of *molara ogundipe* and *nana asma'u*.

We drink from a fountain of names lost in  
the pages of our freedom but we never lose the pride

in our veins when *bukayo saka* walks onto the field  
or *ese brume* on the track.

In my country, we light the *abela*, but we pick up pitchforks  
to stake prayers that aren't in our language.

My dreams makes me a fool for I let passion drown me but  
I will yearn and fight for hearts, hearts so much bigger than colonised maps.

For a tomorrow not shackled by hate or burdened by disgrace,  
a tomorrow free of fear.

## **Introduction in Korean**

by Grace Yu

In my introduction, I forgot  
all the Korean  
in my words. At the age of seven, I  
was struck  
by the lack of lightness  
in my bones. What was  
this weight striking my  
muscles? Was it  
the trauma, the way my flesh  
gaped after hearing  
racial slurs? Or was it  
the way my rib cage  
felt shattered  
after the man in the subway  
grabbed my arm, whispered  
exotic words, hissed  
his bruised perceptions. And after  
my sinew shivered,  
cracked in the open, what identity  
did I hold? Instead,  
I ran my fingers through  
crippled poems, found  
my voice in someone else's  
wounds. And from then on, I savored every verse, crushed  
slivers of orange  
in my faded mouth  
still learning, still dreaming of  
their paper silhouettes.  
For twelve years, I sought  
to find myself, reached  
through my shoulders into my spine, held  
myself  
until I broke  
feeble marrow, so that  
when my bones were all hollowed out  
I flew  
stitched my joints together  
with old poetry  
and covered myself in the lightest down.

## How I Got My Stage Fright

by Chiwenite Onyekwelu

*[with actual comments from  
an unnamed reader]*

I have never been in the blinding light  
of a foreign audience. I like to keep

my hands small. Occupy a space I can  
walk out of unnoticed. Once, I sat

continents away & watched an editor  
hang my poetry on their wall.

It was an anti-racism poem. Annoying,  
maybe, but all I really wanted was

to call the spade. Afterwards, this guy  
I don't know says something about

my pain, the way it's unrhythmic, the way  
he didn't get how something meaningless

was called a poem. I was barely twenty  
at the time. I'd always thought

my hands too soft to wield a blade, yet  
here I was, in a room more white

than I'd ever been. I was grateful to  
be heard. But that steel voice shouting

*why his poem* at the back row made me  
shrink. For months I couldn't write

any new work. I thought there must be  
something wrong with the color black.

How, when I raise my hands a cuff  
is thrown to keep it down. How the only

time my voice is loved is when I'm silent.  
Mortified. Six-feet under gasping for

breath. I've been thinking about that  
experience. His voice in the background

a nail I cannot pull. In my head, the  
wound is widest. I tell editors *sorry I'm*

*unable to send audio recording of my*  
*poem* when in fact what I mean is, *I don't*

*want your readers hurting me.* Is it not  
scary? The way one wound creates space

for more. At twenty-three, I've lived so  
long in a forced absence, now I just

want to escape the void. Should the poem  
I read be blade-sharp, let it be. It's in this

starkness that I see myself. If the audience  
finds me talented when I give a good

laugh, shouldn't they, also, be willing to  
hear me cry?