

I WILL NOT DANCE TO YOUR BEAT

**POETRY**

## **Kraftgriots**

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Seyi Adigun: *Kalakini: Songs of Many Colours* (2004)

# I WILL NOT DANCE TO YOUR BEAT

**POETRY**

**Nnimmo Bassey**



**kraftgriots**

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# **Dedication**

... to all who stand  
for  
climate justice  
... for our collective future

**Isaiah 21:11-12 (NLT)** <sup>11</sup>This message came to me concerning Edom: Someone from Edom keeps calling to me, **“Watchman, how much longer until morning? When will the night be over?”** <sup>12</sup>The watchman replies, **“Morning is coming, but night will soon return.** If you wish to ask again, then come back and ask.”

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## **Reclaiming our humanity, our memory**

Everywhere we look we see pain, degradation and acts of man's inhumanity to man. Might has never appeared to be more right than we see in today's unipolar world. Man's greed for natural resources has risen so high that to sate the taste man would need several earths. In order to keep the world thinking that things are not getting to a head, spin-doctors sell the idea that techno-fixes will sort out everything and that we can continue with business as usual.

This profligate bent of man manifests in the drive for genetically modified crops, animals and maybe humans. This also manifests in the rush for agrofuels even when it is clear that the earth's agricultural lands are not enough to feed the insatiable appetites of machines.

Rather than fight climate change, we trade in carbon, sequester carbon and seek to postpone the evil day, placing the burden on generations about to be born. Democracy is now installed through the barrel of the gun. The so-called free market has become our slave marts. The cynicism of man has jaundiced our thinking so much so that the shouts of the watchmen are ignored as the ranting of the discontent.

This collection is a response to the prodigality of today's man. Time is running out. We must see what lies so openly before our eyes.

Every tool must be deployed. A poem may not place food in empty bowls, quench the gas flares of the Niger Delta or halt the downward progress of the Sahara. A poem may not indeed stop a tank or the invasion of our territories. A poem may not stop rampaging market forces in their tracks. But we can. Wielding every cultural weapon at our disposal, let's



raise our fists, our voices and stamp our feet on the earth,  
reclaiming our humanity.

**Nnimmo Bassey,  
Benin City, Nigeria**



## **I will not dance to your beat**

I will not dance to your beat  
If you call plantations forests  
I will not sing with you  
If you privatize my water  
I will confront you with my fists  
If climate change means death to me but business to you  
I will expose your evil greed  
If you don't leave crude oil in the soil  
Coal in the hole and tar sands in the land  
I will confront and denounce you  
If you insist on carbon offsetting and other do-nothing false  
solutions  
I will make you see red  
If you keep talking of REDD and push forest communities  
away from their land  
I will drag you to the Climate Tribunal  
If you pile up ecological debt  
and refuse to pay your climate debt  
I will make you drink your own medicine  
If you endorse genetically modified crops  
And throw dust into the skies to mask the sun  
I will not dance to your beat  
Unless we walk the sustainable path  
And accept real solutions and respect Mother Earth  
Unless you do  
I will not and  
We will not dance to your beat

## **They charged through the mounted troops**

They charged through the mounted troops  
Sniffing vinegar beneath their scarves  
Till the mounted guns dropped and the exalted ones scrambled  
They built synergy and spread energy  
It was time to connect the tyrants, dots on the maps  
Bridge them and abridge their grasps

Time to dust our cardboard armours and tin can caps  
Bounce back their plastic bullets, spit in their grumpy faces  
We've reached the crucial phase when clanging pots and pans  
And flying shoes to boot  
Must stand for what we know they should  
Time to detach their bloodied fangs from of our bleeding veins

Awoken from our nightmares it's time to dream and to act we  
Break the teeth of the blood-sucking vermin to shake off  
collective amnesia  
Today we see the reasonable thing is demand the  
unreasonable  
Recover our memory of proud fighters as we must  
Salute the victors  
And the living and the fallen in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya  
And...

## Watchman, what of the night?

Watchman  
What of the night?  
Watchman  
What of the night?

The morning comes  
But also the night

Watch day  
What of the day?  
Watch day  
What remains of the day?

The night knocks  
But also the day!

Watch night  
What of the time?  
Watch day  
What of the time?

Times and times  
& times and times  
Embrace the web of night and day

And the evening  
& the morning  
Wrapped the first day ...

Watchman

What of the night?  
Watchman  
What of the night?  
The morning comes  
But also the night

Wake up  
Watchman

## **Watchman, how long is your day?**

Empty heads rejoice at  
Calamities postponed and banked  
For none but their generations unborn

Sunk tomorrow yields long hopes  
Of disasters bottled up for trusting kids  
So long as we splash on in luxury and fossil traps

Watch the night and  
The nights are long ... we elongate the nights  
And hide our long swords as we stab at future foetuses

Watchman, how long is your day?  
Determined to cut nothing except throats of future folks

Dreams of business as usual blind waking moments  
Turning on our feathery beds we roll yet go nowhere  
Hinges on castle doors turning creaking turning

Like it was in the days of doom  
Men dined and wined and danced until  
Fireballs of sulphur fell, today acid rains on placid heads

Placid heads loaded  
Tonnes of fantasies of silver bullets  
Waiting to strike back

## What more can you sink?

Try spending the night thinking  
Of the many things you can sink  
Think of the canoe that'd sink  
Think about the stuff in your kitchen sink and  
The hearts that sink at your stretch

Oh but a thousand things sunk  
Nothing compared to carbon sink  
The stuff that dulls to sleep

Turrets hammer the skies in industrial layabouts  
Automobiles, a thousand other polluters  
Load the skies with the choking gas  
Some smart guys dream of do nothing solutions  
Reap billions and con a captured  
While the skies get burnt

Pollute in the city  
Sink in the village  
Capture the carbon while the trees grow  
How long before the trees die and rot?  
Capture the carbon in tombs beneath the seas  
In million years will the tombs hold?

Oh but a thousand things sunk  
You are sunk if you bet on carbon sink!  
Cause you mayn't find space to slink away



## Watchful in the box

Midlife reflections take special colourations  
Viewed from a flat sheet on a *tatami*  
Mid-flight, inflight dissertations raise the bar of  
Expectations  
How many kilometres to our dreamt destination?  
How many metres above sea level  
If the seas are not level, what of the clouds  
How many clouds above and how many below?  
If sodden cumulus weeps in dry seasons  
What songs must we sing mid-flight?

Watch night! On whose side are you?  
Where on earth were you  
When bulls dozed our forests?  
Where in the sky were you  
When men gassed and flared our skies?

Watchful day watch  
What remains of the day?  
Sleepy night watch, what remains of the night?  
The hours slip by, will you redeem the day?  
consume, despoil, chew, spit, vomit  
Gulp your vomit  
Put your knife to your throat  
What's on the plate is for today  
And for tomorrow too  
Watch night! On whose side are you?  
Where on earth were you  
When bulls dozed our forests?

Where in the sky were you  
When men gassed and flared our skies?

When time is cast down  
And you step into the witness box  
What will you witness  
O watch night?  
Those idle seconds and the many idle words  
The horrible fancy thoughts  
All thrown down  
The incantatory cowry shells of  
Pains inflicted  
Environmental crimes  
Mother Earth as punch bag

Silent watch night! On whose side are you?  
Where on earth were you  
When bulls dozed our forests?  
Where in the sky were you  
When men gassed and flared our skies?

## Do watchmen sleep?

Watchmen on watchtowers, do you sleep?  
When the tale bearers come do you  
Spot their steps and read their runs?  
When the dams crack do you announce the deluge?  
What do you watch, the retreating moon  
    or the rising sun?  
Watchman, what is your time  
The time to see  
Or the time to say  
Watchman, what is your task?  
To uncover the climate criminal  
Or to cover the polluting goon?  
Watchmen on watchtowers, do you sleep?  
Arise  
Sound the alarm  
Or would you rather  
Do you climb down and sleep  
Or will you remain at your watch, watchman?  
Why is the whistle hanging limp on your lips?  
Why play dumb, Watchman?

## Hopefully for a season

denied floodplains ... parched  
nutrients drained  
compressed ... trained  
retrained to flow on fancy  
geometric paths ...

for a season

mudplains and denuded mangroves  
blunt toes pointed ... entombed  
in embankments of putrid effluents  
damned in concrete jaws

for a season

meandering snakes  
arrested ... jailed in clamps  
mudskippers sunk in toxic sediments  
until heavens weep torrents  
rainfall falls thousands to watery graves  
global disasters democratized

hopefully for a season

humanity caught napping at a moment's snap  
of nature's revolt at man's mega schemes  
driven by torrents of greed  
and churning streets turned seas

hopefully for a season

## Sequestered carbon

Led by the nose you can't miss the hall of delights  
In this complex hound  
Through labyrinthine lobbies  
Wafting hot air sends unique signals  
Of a security breach in the dungeons of sequestered carbon  
Pipelines diplomacy duct away hidden motives  
Shaking gloved hands shade vulnerabilities  
Fed on dishes of adaptation

*Without foresight perfected by hindsight  
Who can see beyond her nose?*

To every problem a solution  
Sink the world, a billion galaxies beckon  
Red little dwarfs a zillion light years away, black holes beckon  
If the ticket is above your head or  
If the pressure goes out of control  
Masks will hide your stress, and  
We will throw you a life jacket from beneath your roof ...  
Just don't wear it till you are told  
Even if your head is  
already beneath the tides

*Without foresight perfected by hindsight  
Who can see beyond his nose?*

Negotiated weariness weighs down bobbing heads  
Dancing feet beneath tables  
Wireless chats and sundry sneaky peeks

Did you say *no standing in the conference hall?*

What options for a sinking world anchored in sour carbon fossil soup?

Scenario one: not yet cremated by the *cleaner energy* heat, can we push the evil day?

Scenario two: to beat being drowned in freak floods, shall we hop into submarines?

*Without foresight perfected by hindsight*

*How can we see beyond our nose?*

## **mobilize ... resist ... change\***

we are foe ... i  
friends, not foes  
we've a vision and a mission  
to change our world

mobilize  
resist  
transform

The battles not fought alone  
forging alliances  
standing with people  
fighting real battles

we mobilize  
we resist  
we'll transform

the people lead  
we stand as one  
sharing knowledge  
for ever! solidarity

mobilize  
resist  
transform

---

\* For **Friends of the Earth** everywhere

how do you dismantle the monsters?  
ask the ants  
how do you down the giants?  
ask the ants  
the job is done a bite a time

together we mobilize  
together we resist  
together we transform

**Old rio is dead?**



Today's battles were lost yesterday  
Tomorrow's battles must be fought today

Tears rolled down many eyes  
When your speech tumbled down  
Parrots echo talks of failed partnerships  
*Eco-tourists from rich nations*  
*Eco-tourism in poor nations*  
Fossilized ideas revived and up-scaled  
Pipelines  
Knocked out by clean coal ...  
Oil spills, gas flares: do they make you dance?  
Don't you know that carbon sinks will sink the world?

Today's battles were lost yesterday  
Tomorrow's battles must be fought today

Would you use nuclear power to light a stove?  
If clean technologies roast the sky  
Won't you think?  
Be careful people  
Snares are set in the *matrix*  
And this is no movie  
No matter how voluntary,  
Shopping *baskets* work very poorly at the well

Today's battles were lost yesterday  
Tomorrow's battles must be fought today

Tears rolled down many eyes  
From shock, sorrows and agony  
At Rio + 20 or even 40

Should we still crawl?  
Do we fly over the oceans, deserts and forests  
Oh green capitalists  
To insist on *replication* of battles long lost  
You say fossil fuels will last your lifetime  
But what will you do  
If your well runs dry?

Today's battles were lost yesterday

## **Mountains of food ... oceans of hunger**

Mountains of food  
Oceans of hunger  
How can this remain the lot of our peoples?  
From the south and from the north  
From the east and from the west

*When our stomachs rumble*

***We sing the same song  
And dance to the same beat***

Mountains of food  
Oceans of hunger  
Proud people from fertile soils  
We stamped the earth with bouncing steps  
Once the rulers of the world  
Today we are the wretched of the earth  
Hands stretched out with empty bowls

*When our stomachs rumble*

***We sing the same song  
And dance to the same beat***

Mountains of food  
Oceans of hunger  
Diets altered beyond recognition  
How can we know what we are eating?  
A simple question:

What did you have for lunch?  
Becomes a subject for scientific debate!

*When our stomachs rumble*

***We sing the same song  
And dance to the same beat***

Mountains of food  
Oceans of hunger  
Once enslaved with chains  
Today ensnared by our belly  
Shall we eat ... or shall we not  
If we are hungry  
Must we fill our stomachs with poison?  
We have a right which can't be denied  
We must decide what we eat, and when and how

*When our stomachs rumble*

***We sing the same song  
And dance to the same beat***

Mountains of food  
Oceans of hunger  
We stand on mountains of food  
Yet food aid is forced on us  
GE corn ... GE soya and what have you  
Many more still undergoing tests ...  
Where did you see such milk of wickedness?

*When our stomachs rumble*

***We sing the same song  
And dance to the same beat***

Mountains of food  
Oceans of hunger  
Climate change sells us drought  
When it rains we are sent to treetops  
Free trade traders trade us sorrows  
WTO rules, World Bank, IMF  
Neo-liberal power blockers  
Confuse, disunite, fool and bemuse a trusting world

*When our stomachs rumble*

***We sing the same song  
And dance to the same beat***

Mountains of food  
Oceans of hunger  
The secret is out!  
The farmers are awake!  
Consumers arise!  
Vigilance is the word ...  
Grab your night vision goggles  
Surveillance is the key

*When our stomachs rumble*

***We sing the same song  
And dance to the same beat***

Mountains of food

Oceans of hunger  
The suspicion of seeds  
The suspicion of foods  
The suspicion of forced aid  
The even secret AIDS  
That is vital wisdom

*When our stomachs rumble*

***We sing the same song  
And dance to the same beat***

Mountains of food ... Oceans of hunger  
Brave people ... Proud liberators  
We populate the earth  
Farmers, consumers, helpers, environmental warriors  
Inspired by the land ... We raise our fists  
And sound the alarm  
Never again shall we be taken for a ride!

*When our stomachs rumble*

***We sing the same song  
And dance to the same beat***

## Justice now

(for Chubby Williams & to the memory of the Aboriginal poet, Gilbert)

*Justice now!*

*No reconciliation ... without justice*

Roasted skies

Smoked out clouds

Roasted roosters

On second half wings

Distant dreams of the coming doom

Long after the boom had burst

*Justice now!*

*No reconciliation ... without justice*

Machetes slashing

Mangroves dis'pearing

Forests missing

Swamps drying

Machetes swirling

Slashing throats

Maiming hopes

If you think chilli is hot

Slide an inch closer

To Shell's gas flares

*Justice now!*

*No reconciliation ... without justice*

Minerals ... oh minerals

Why must you hide?

Why, beneath lake Cowal?

Uranium, oh uranium  
Why spread out in Papa's land?  
*Justice now!*  
*No reconciliation ... without justice*  
Brown skies  
Smoked out clouds  
Canopies for dialogues with the deaf  
AK47: mouthpiece of extractive industry  
Gunboats & bazookas: their drumbeat  
*Justice now!*  
*No reconciliation ... without justice*  
Drawn into the belly of Tap Gallery  
Warm handshakes  
Explosions of peace  
Echoes of hope from memories lost  
*Justice now!*  
*No reconciliation ... without justice*  
Once a past  
Of proud dancers  
Proud singers  
A proud people  
A noble lot  
Pushed to the brink  
Surviving by will  
*Justice now!*  
*No reconciliation ... without justice*  
Explosions of peace  
Tidal waves of whispering memories  
A time it was when we shared  
Love  
Love for the land  
Love for the seas



Love for the trees  
Love for the birds  
Love for our stones  
Till  
Drillers came  
And miners' axes swung  
*Justice now!*  
*No reconciliation ... without justice*  
This drilling  
This killing  
This stealing  
This maiming  
This raping  
This spilling  
This desecration of Papa's land  
Now we ask as the singer did:  
Who owns Papa's land?  
*Justice now!*  
*No reconciliation ... without justice*  
Brown skies  
Smoked out clouds  
This the stuff of carbon trade  
Stand up, people  
Rise  
Stop the Cowal mines  
Save the lake  
Stop the drillings  
Save our land  
Stop the mine  
Save our mind  
*Justice now!*  
*No reconciliation ... without justice*

Come  
Listen,  
Come to the  
*Tent Embassy*  
Hear us,  
Respect us  
Listen, the land is ours  
*We have been here since the first sunrise*  
*Justice now!*  
*No reconciliation ... without justice*  
*Justice now!*  
*No reconciliation ... without justice*

## The pirates are coming!\*

The pirates are coming!  
Quick, enter the tunnel  
The pirates are coming!  
Quick, enter the tunnel  
Through trapdoors  
Cathedral to cathedral  
The pirates are coming!

Fireflies attracted by our gold  
Fireflies attracted by our silver  
And the stones of our cathedrals  
The pirates are coming!

Today the pirates are coming  
Grabbing at our stomachs  
Today the pirates are coming  
To steal our seeds, our culture, our dreams  
The pirates are coming!

We are the throats  
That connect the head ...  
And the stomach  
We are the bones stuck in your throat  
We refuse your transgenic logic  
We demand our cultural roots

---

\* Inspired by the underground tunnels that connected the cathedrals of Leon, Nicaragua. They were used as escape routes when pirates struck.

To hell with your *promoters*  
To hell with your *vectors*  
To hell with your *silencers*

The pirates are coming?  
We have taken our stand  
You will not overrun our land  
We will *terminate* your evil march

The pirates are coming?  
Wearing insignias of biotech goons  
You who can't tell one *Bt*<sup>§</sup> from another  
You whose *star links* poison our food chains  
This is the land of great heroes  
From Nicaragua, Honduras, Bolivia  
From Guatemala, Costa Rica, Mexico  
From Uruguay and the lands of Africa  
The road is blocked  
Your march must stop

---

<sup>§</sup> Bt – *bacillus thuringiensis* – Bt crops are genetically engineered to kill pests that may attack such crops. The idea is for them to reduce the use of pesticides. This has not happened. Moreover, non-target insects get hit also.

## Walking blind

Climbing the trails of tales  
We glean doubtless transitions  
Folks rising on survival trails  
Seas rising on suicide runs  
Monster monuments to bottomless greed  
Ruins, debts and disappearing wealth  
Fossils  
In the matrix of invisible smokescreens

We walk blind!  
And dance to broken drums

If carbon dioxide had colour  
Would we discriminate ...  
Between our right and left foot

We walk blind!  
And dance to broken drums

The clouds tell discordant tales  
The birds erupt in cracked voices  
Wrapped in mixed signals  
Trusting farmers go for futile harvests  
In planting seasons

We walk blind  
And dance to broken drums

If greenhouse gases

Were coloured red  
Would you be angry enough to pick  
Angry enough to pick up a stone  
And talk?

We walk blind!  
And dance to broken drums

Climate change changes things  
Green to grey; grey to death  
Climate change changes things  
Pond becomes the sea; seas become graves  
Sharing hopes; shaping dreams  
Eyes opened, fists clenched  
We must reclaim *ubuntu*

We must walk with seeing eyes!  
And dance to taut drums

## Square brackets

*Four square brackets in one phrase  
Alt. Delete. Para. Italics. Bold.  
Minefields of ambushed thoughts  
O diplomacy can be a killing field*

Last weekend a structural bracket suspended me  
I hung for dear life, gagged in a major way  
On the floor logic bounced contrariwise  
Booby traps in love tales and jokes  
In deadly horse trading  
Europe whistled *Love in Tokyo*  
Australia backslapped God's own country  
And as time ticked  
The group of three score plus ten and seven  
And the Red Star groped to the path of aggregation

*Four square brackets in one phrase  
Alt. Delete. Para. Italics. Bold.  
Minefields of ambushed thoughts  
O diplomacy can be a killing field*

Last week a structural bracket befuddled me  
As I sat glued to the crossword puzzle negotiations  
The pursuit of energy sapping strength and power  
Of yawning delegates pocket technologies  
And business thoughts saw today and deferred the next  
Not caring if national reserves reverse the path of sustainability  
And who can mitigate the climate crisis  
When we refuse to mitigate exploitation?

*Four, five square brackets in one phrase?  
Alt. Delete. Para. Italics. Bold.  
Minefields of ambushed thoughts  
Ah! Diplomacy is a deadly field*

Last week I saw square brackets knock men down twister  
paths  
Bracketed in undecipherable propositions  
Fingers knocking tired keyboards  
Dizzied by crawling thoughts  
Are we at war?  
Are we partners?  
Are we in a marketplace of deceit?  
Are we aware? Awake?  
Do we care that every compounding bracket  
Sends the earth scuttling the path of no return?

*Alt. Delete. Para. Italics. Bold.  
Realize people, we have one earth  
One man drowned is humanity diminished  
Bury your craft ... solidarity is the way!*



## Shivering in the sun

I

It has been so cold this summer  
And winter has grown warm  
Sweaters in summer  
Swimsuits in winter  
Walking on our heads

II

The world has changed  
Since you woke up...  
Benefits privatized  
Costs socialized

## Ezulwini

In the Valley of Heaven  
We behold the mount  
Green fig leaves  
Skirted mountains of tailings

In the Valley of Heaven  
We brush over cloudy dreams  
Flowers and ribbons on flare stacks  
How beautiful can you make the gallows?  
Or the needle that administers the lethal dose?

Mountains of profit obscure a vision  
Of the land  
Of the people  
Of reality

In the Valley of Heaven  
We raise questions  
How beautiful is the fish from an arsenic sea?  
What besides a new tale of horror do  
so-called free trade pacts announce?

Mountains of profit obscure a vision  
Of the land  
Of the people  
Of reality

De-construction, demolitions  
Billions from reconstruction

Pre-emptive exportation of democracy  
The Dead Sea killed over and over again

In the Valley of Heaven  
Sounds of invisible wings flapping  
Wafts of aromas from inaccessible pots  
We awake and join our fists

## **I will take issues with you**

I will take issues with you  
Unless we walk the same path  
I will take issues with you  
If you step on my trees  
I will take issues with you  
If you gulp up my water  
I will take issues with you  
If climate change makes you smile  
I will take issues with you  
If you can't stop drilling for oil  
If you call dirty development mechanisms clean  
I will take issues with you  
If you burn up my sky  
I will take issues with you  
If you pile up ecological debt  
I will take issues with you  
If you endorse genetically modified crops  
I will take issues with you  
Unless we walk the sustainable path  
... Together

## **Bio ... safe ... tea?**

**We will not give up  
We will not despair  
A people united can never be defeated!**

When you circled the air of Dakar  
Saw the lights and the sea  
When you drove on the unbending road to Mbodiene<sup>††</sup>  
Could you've guessed  
That 48 hours of talk  
drama and mapping & challenging  
+ 24 hours of walking into the field  
Could fly so quickly?

**We will not give up  
We will not despair  
A people united can never be defeated!**

Biosafety Frameworks  
could be fragile  
... watch your steps!!  
Trends, threats, opportunities  
Disrespected Protocols ... precautions discarded  
Caravans of victories  
Caravans of challenges  
Certainties and uncertainties  
Today ... on the sands of *Laguna Beach*

---

<sup>††</sup>A beach community in Senegal

we draw battle plans  
share winsome smiles  
roll up our sleeves ...  
**We will not give up**  
**We will not despair**  
**Standing united ... we can never be defeated!**

Biotech presidents  
Pressed by Weird Food Organizations  
Hawkers of GMOs  
CONTAMINATE ... LEGALISE ... COLONISE  
Still we fight!  
Congratulations stewards of the earth  
Set to go but yet not done  
Together we must stand  
Together we will win  
The fight may be long  
but victory is sure:

**We will not give up**  
**We will not despair**  
**Activists united can never be defeated!**

Two days gone  
A lifetime to go  
Will you drink poison  
just because you're thirsty?  
Huge knowledge gaps  
Yet we must know:  
When we eat papaya is it a vaccine?  
When we feast on chips: are we eating our genes?  
When we *see* a pig: is it a cow?

**We will not despair**  
**Farmers united can never be defeated!**

## Monsanto's song

You may not be your dream team  
Of cowboys  
All we need are mean guys  
Only then can you bank  
On the World Bank  
To back you and keep the pump on  
You'll truly be turned on  
As profits roll and you get conned

*And if you get too stubborn we  
Get you caned*

You think it's easy  
Greater love hath no man  
But to do this hard work  
Spilling blood, sucking the weak  
It is a tough job, eh, to keep  
The cash rolling in

*And if you get too stubborn we  
Get you canned*

What do you mean?  
You can't believe the evil scene?  
This is but a tip of a larger scheme  
Come to the field  
If you pester us  
Don't forget who makes the pesticides  
And who manipulates the seeds of discord

Come to the field  
Let's begin the tour  
Come see how we lovingly  
Crush the poor

*And if you get too stubborn we  
Get you skinned*

Come on, folks  
Smile  
It is not everyday you get to  
Meet your best nightmare



## New moments<sup>⌘</sup>

Each new moment a  
Chance for new movement  
Each new minute another  
Opportunity  
To undo impunity  
Seconds give second chance

To undo obscenities  
Of the stinking rich  
Swimming in the sweat of toiling pawns

Each new moment a  
Chance for new movement  
To undo historic wrongs  
To build future memories  
In futurescapes  
Founded on villagecapes of  
Justice, dignity, peace

To undo obscenities  
Of the stinking rich  
Swimming in the sweat of toiling pawns

Each new moment a  
Chance for new movement  
In the cold shadows of simmering towers  
To march, heads on the ground

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<sup>⌘</sup> A variant of this poem was published with the title the Monsanto cowboy in FoEI's "if this is development you can keep it"

And build by each thoughtful bounce  
Living ways  
Right way up

## Kimi Ryokan

I bend low and stand back at your foyer  
Steps beckoning  
I ponder the descent  
Your brief door blind echoes  
Grandfather's palm fronds  
And I ponder  
Is this entry into a ritual space  
Or sleeping abode?

Shoes off  
Is this holy floor?  
I feel your warmth  
Paved earth of Ikebukuro  
Stretched out on your tatami  
Sips of green tea soothe my  
Throat and soon I am adrift  
Kimono adorned  
Where else could I be today?

## Steamy bowls

Lifting the steamy bowls  
The aromas of herbs assailed my expectant faces  
Between the bowls and the lips  
Rivulets of tears rained on cue  
From eyes and also from noses  
Chopsticks stuck in steamed rice  
My thoughts lingered on the paths of Ekpoma  
Abakaliki and where have you  
Counting the grains epitomes of forlorn individuality  
Discrete grains, fried or boiled, not my beat  
I relish the pull of the crowd stuck  
Together in community of jollof in palaver sauce  
Lifting the steamy bowls to our lips  
Relishing the blessing of wholesome foods  
We make a solemn resolve:  
We must stand on guard and  
Defend the roots that feed us

## Nne<sup>ss</sup>

... on hearing that you slept

Last night in the quiet night breeze  
Brought news to Ezulwini  
The valley of heaven  
That you danced beyond these shores  
And gracefully embraced eternity  
Leaving the cocoons mortals must inhabit  
Your timing belied the assault that all face  
In this age of destructive consumption  
You defied the expectancies of men  
And blessed us, your children, with much love

Waves of emotions lap relentlessly on my spirit  
Memories flood over my soul at noontide  
And I see your face in the old ladies in matatus  
In the raucous throngs in the market square  
I hear the sounds of hoes clashing with the earth  
The drip ... drip of oil squeezed from nuts  
I recollect the signal smells of crayfish and smoked fish  
The merchant that you were in your prime  
And today, waves of emotions hit the mirrors of my heart  
As waves of love raise gentle tsunamis  
And I say it again, Nne  
We love you, dear mother amongst mothers

8.11.07

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<sup>ss</sup> My mother

## **Bottled tears**

*Or Water Poem*

Yesterday I could cry and shed watery tears  
I could labour and freely shoot watery sweat  
But today  
Not so, not so  
Riverbeds turned dustbowls  
Rivers diverted into private throats  
Creeks turned into rivers of salt  
I sweat blood  
And weep dry-eyed

*Our fathers and forefathers and mothers and grandmothers  
say waters from  
Streams and rivers, creeks and lagoons  
In their days  
Were clear, odourless, tasteless, healthy  
In their days*

When we talked of process none guessed we  
Were in the process of privatizing our throats  
Choking our taste buds on caustic soda as  
Process waters from drill pits and fluid effluents  
From eucalyptus paper mills attempt to paper  
Over the pains and deceits of reckless tycoons  
Draped in dark cocoons of international finance plans  
To subjugate and to squeeze and commodify  
Our sweat and tear drops

*Our fathers and forefathers and mothers and*

*grandmothers say waters from  
Streams and rivers, creeks and lagoons  
In their days  
Were clear, odourless, tasteless, healthy  
In their days*

Dreams of sparkling streams evoke surrealistic brushes  
Fishes dancing past steel hooks and reedy traps  
Pebbles and sand dragging divers' plunge for hidden treasure  
Throve centuries saved from prying eyes  
I look deep into your heart and see  
Fossils of forgotten dreams  
Calcified  
Histories like far removed tales  
Crabs long eaten, turtles hurtled  
Into distant lands

*Our fathers and forefathers and mothers and  
grandmothers say waters from  
Streams and rivers, creeks and lagoons  
In their days  
Were clear, odourless, tasteless, healthy  
In their days*

Last night kids danced in acid rain  
Doubly warmed by infernal dragon tongues  
From gas flares  
Empty shells, lifeless sockets, death everywhere  
Forlorn men, backs broken, homes long gone  
Sit on benches of plastic bamboos  
Whistling for fishes from acid lakes  
Craving for mudskippers from tar ponds

*grandmothers say waters from  
Streams and rivers, creeks and lagoons  
In their days  
Were clear, odourless, tasteless, healthy  
In their days*

Once I could cup you in my palms  
Now captive in plastics  
These logos are they your makers?  
Spring waters spring from ubiquitous boreholes  
Polluted waters marketed as life giving fluids  
You spring surprises don't you?  
Who made the robots that rob?  
We demand  
Free our waters  
Jail the water crooks  
Polluters and thieves!

*Our fathers and forefathers and mothers and  
grandmothers say waters from  
Streams and rivers, creeks and lagoons  
In their days  
Were clear, odourless, tasteless, healthy  
In their days*



## **In the wilderness**

*(for Liz)*

Getting lost in the wilderness  
    Is the right thing to do  
Serenaded by songbirds  
Energized by wafting fireflies, butterflies as time flies

Barks echo barks from hounds  
Of busy humanity unhooked  
Fiends chainsaw hectares of pristine bushes  
Grabbing Juggernauts roaring, running amok

Getting lost in thoughts of what could be  
    Is quite right to do

Men denuded, bereft even of dry fig leaves  
Hid behind scarred stumps  
And bits of trunks long gone  
Trunks truncated into a million toothpicks  
Across foaming seas, back into hungry bowls

Getting lost in the wilderness  
    Is not the stuff of dreams

Reality we seek rises through  
Soles planted on mother earth  
Ears pressed to speaking drums  
Vibrations of ancient contemplations  
Honour regained  
Dignity reclaimed

Life relived

Getting lost in the wilderness  
Is the right thing to do

## Banal crowns

On your shores I stand, Karaiba  
Sand between my toes assured  
In this verdant grove  
Between towering pillars a colonnade untouched by human  
hands  
Gaze drawn to beckoning horizons, heralds of distant shores  
I marvel at the cascading waves

On your shores I stand  
Assured in this green grove  
Slanted trunks, bent backs, ramrod trunks  
Rooted and fixated by heavy bunches on your slender necks?  
Or are you rooted by the fibrous limbs you have so  
Determinedly stabbed into the earth?

On your shores I stand  
Gaze truncated by royal palms  
All trunk and leaves bereft of nuts  
Why are you accorded royalty in your fruitlessness?  
I see bent trunks with weighted capes  
Yet you stand fruitless with a banal crown

## Everybody has a body

Though nobody is a body  
Every one has a body  
Suits suited for bouncing on day  
Straining to be with God  
Yet striving to be God  
Limited by our somebodiness  
Thankfully  
Nobody is a nobody

## **He took my umbrella**

*(for Jagoda Munić)*

He took my umbrella on Maxiplein  
And looking not back left me in the rain

Soaked to the bone  
I was so so alone  
Save for a bent pole

Shouting in the rain  
Futile screams in thunder  
Shouting in the rain  
Wondering what was the gain

He took my broken umbrella and sheltered in vain  
Needless to say he left me in the rain

I crawl home alone  
And he is waiting at the door  
Prying open the door for her

## if climate change were little change

many would gather in copenhagen and exchange tips  
tales to offset our elastic earth  
... move movies on big screens with idiotic grins in an  
age of stupidity ... stand at poisoned fires ... daring inconvenient  
truths

negotiators negotiate bends open eyed  
blindfolded ... listening  
with sanity cancelling ear muffs

if climate change were little change  
they would gather in copenhagen and exchange tips  
and tales to upset our elastic earth except they  
see floods under their golden beds  
and storms in their ornate tea cups  
as they gobble ice creams and artic split ice screams  
turning our forests into toothpicks for their absent teeth

but if climate change were little change  
after copenhagen we will still be here

and possibly finish this poem

## Kragero

(for John & Per-Erik)

Dark clouds drift overhead  
Shading a rather shy sun  
Shredding rays send chills  
Down my sweatered chest

I bend over the deck, seems everyone here has a boat  
Peeping into the clear waters of Kragero  
I see the bed  
And recall the crude oil crusted seabeds of the Niger Delta  
I see fingerlings and mother fishes frolic between the webs  
Of paddling toes of sated swans

Dark clouds gather overhead  
Not dark enough to block views of plastic  
Forks, spoons and a chair  
On the bed of this Kragero fjord  
The sun breaks through my thoughts and the wind!  
The wind gets stopped in its tracks ...  
By a row of yearly additions to the merchants block voted  
The ugliest building on the block

Dark clouds drift overhead  
Shading a rather shy sun  
Shredding rays send chills  
Down my sweatered chest

Swans crane their necks at the deck once crowded by teeming  
Tourists and wanderers buying toys, sweets and fast foods

Should I toss ice cubes into the craning throats?  
The clouds disperse, we sail in and out of the bay  
Crude oil defied the booms, smeared the rocks  
But we must thrust something down our throats  
And hop on the bus  
Since the rail tracks have since been unlaid ...

No cheese please  
Everyone loves cheese?  
No cheese please  
Sleepless dreams slip past my mind  
As the hapless cook hands me bread, ham and cabbage  
Sad to say no to cheese  
In a town as pretty as this

“And the world will be as it was in the days of Lot. People



## Yasuni

Yasuni

Sacred land

Flares on the lips of Napo River's rapid ride warn

Silently we watch driftwood from your eroded shoulders bob  
and hide

Steel vampires and vultures, patient, scrawny necks pulsing

Ring your territory eyes the count barrels and billions yet unseen

Yasuni

Sacred land

Your defenders

Link hands across generation gaps

Kids, ancestors, butterflies merge confronting the rage of crude  
addicts

Impotent capital halted by guardians of your treasured space

Still you stand still

Your calm visage shocks me

Your verdant mane, rivers of life

Mother Earth's best patch besieged

Yasuni

Sacred land

Children of the earth bandaging the earth's many bleeding spots

Your blood drained to run the lusts of men

Chains broken, fears dumped, gags burst, your children

Demand the bloodletting has run its day

Despots have made their kill

Humanity captured by plastics and sundry garbage drawn from  
your veins

Yasuni

Sacred land

Today your children follow the bloody fangs of the panting  
vampires  
From Ogoni to Lofoten to Maracaibo to the Karoo and to First  
Nation lands of the North we shout  
Silence the rigs, hang the monster shovels, block the pipes,  
Give *Pachamama* a break  
*Sumak kawsay* is the way  
*Ubuntu* that which ties us together  
*Eti uwem* the good living  
*Buen vivir* is the way  
Good living, excellent in any tongue  
We refuse to fuel the engines of wrath and pains

Yasuni  
Sacred land

## **Kraftgriots**

*Also in the series (POETRY) continued*

- Joe Ushie: *A Reign of Locusts* (2004)  
Paulina Mabayoje: *The Colours of Sunset* (2004)  
Segun Adekoya: *Guinea Bites and Sahel Blues* (2004)  
Ebi Yeibo: *Maiden Lines* (2004)  
Barine Ngaage: *Rhythms of Crisis* (2004)  
Funso Aiyejina: *I, The Supreme & Other Poems* (2004)  
'Lere Oladitan: *Boolekaja: Lagos Poems 1* (2005)  
Seyi Adigun: *Bard on the Shore* (2005)  
Famous Dakolo: *A Letter to Flora* (2005)  
Olawale Durojaiye: *An African Night* (2005)  
G. 'Ebinyo Ogbowei: *let the honey run & other poems* (2005)  
Joe Ushie: *Popular Stand & Other Poems* (2005)  
Gbemisola Adeoti: *Naked Soles* (2005)  
Aj. Dagga Tolar: *This Country is not a Poem* (2005)  
Tunde Adeniran: *Labyrinthine Ways* (2006)  
Sophia Obi: *Tears in a Basket* (2006)  
Tonyo Biriabebe: *Undercurrents* (2006)  
Ademola O. Dasyilva: *Songs of Odamolugbe* (2006), winner, 2006 ANA/Cadbury poetry prize  
George Ehusani: *Flames of Truth* (2006)  
Abubakar Gimba: *This Land of Ours* (2006)  
G. 'Ebinyo Ogbowei: *the heedless ballot box* (2006)  
Hyginus Ekwuazi: *Love Apart* (2006), winner 2007 ANA/Cadbury poetry prize and winner, 2007 ANA/NDDC Gabriel Okara poetry prize  
Abubakar Gimba: *Inner Rumbings* (2006)  
Albert Otto: *Letters from the Earth* (2007)  
Aj. Dagga Tolar: *Darkwaters Drunkard* (2007)  
Idris Okpanachi: *The Eaters of the Living* (2007), winners, 2008 ANA/Cadbury poetry prize  
Tubal-Cain: *Mystery in Our Stream* (2007)  
John Iwuh: *Ashes & Daydreams* (2007)  
Ebi Yeibo: *The Forbidden Tongue* (2007)  
Sola Owonibi: *Chants to the Ancestors* (2007)  
Doutimi Kpakiamama: *Salute to our Mangrove Giants* (2008)  
Halima M. Usman: *Spellbound* (2008)  
Hyginus Ekwuazi: *Dawn Into Moonlight: All Around Me Dawning* (2008), winner (2008) ANA/NDDC Gabriel Okara poetry prize  
Ismail Bala Garba & Abdullahi Ismaila (eds.): *Pyramids: An Anthology of Poems from Northern Nigeria* (2008)  
Denja Abdullahi: *Abuja Nunyi (This is Abuja)* (2008)  
Japhet Adeneye: *Poems for Teenagers* (2008)  
Seyi Hodonu: *A Tale of Two in Time (Letters to Susan)* (2008)  
Ibukun Babarinde: *Running Splash of Rust and Gold* (2008)  
Chris Ngozi Nkoro: *Trails of a Distance* (2008)

(POETRY) *continued*

- Tunde Adeniran: *Beyond Finalities* (2008)  
Abba Abdulkareem: *A Bard's Balderdash* (2008)  
Ifeanyi D. Ogbonnaya: *... And Pigs Shall Become House Cleaners* (2008)  
Ebinyo Ogbowei: *the town crier's song* (2009)  
Ebinyo Ogbowei: *song of a dying river* (2009)  
Sophia Obi-Apoko: *Floating Snags* (2009)  
Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: *Heart Songs* (2009), winner, 2009 ANA/Cadbury poetry prize  
Hyginus Ekwuazi: *The Monkey's Eyes* (2009)  
Seyi Adigun: *Prayer for the Mwalimu* (2009)  
Faith A. Brown: *Endless Season* (2009)  
B.M. Dzukogi: *Midnight Lamp* (2009)  
B.M. Dzukogi: *These Last Tears* (2009)  
Chimezie Ezechukwu: *The Nightingale* (2009)  
Umami Kaltume Abdullahi: *Tiny Fingers* (2009)  
Ismaila Bala & Ahmed Maiwada (eds.): *Fireflies: An Anthology of New Nigerian Poetry* (2009)  
Eugenia Abu: *Don't Look at Me Like That* (2009)  
Data Osa Don-Pedro: *You Are Gold and Other Poems* (2009)  
Sam Omatseye: *Mandela's Bones and Other Poems* (2009)  
Sam Omatseye: *Dear Baby Ramatu* (2009)  
C.O. Iyimoga: *Fragments in the Air* (2010)  
Bose Ayeni-Tsevende: *Streams* (2010)  
Seyi Hodonu: *Songs from my Mother's Heart* (2010), winner ANA/NDDC Gabriel Okara poetry prize, 2010  
Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: *Waiting for Dawn* (2010)  
Hyginus Ekwuazi: *That Other Country* (2010), winner, ANA/Cadbury poetry prize, 2010  
Tosin Otitoju: *Comrade* (2010)  
Arnold Udoka: *Poems Across Borders* (2010)  
Arnold Udoka: *The Gods are so Silent & Other Poems* (2010)  
Abubakar Othman: *The Passions of Cupid* (2010)  
Okinba Launko: *Dream-Seeker on Divining Chain* (2010)  
'kufre ekanem: *the ant eaters* (2010)  
McNezer Fasehun: *Ever Had a Dear Sister* (2010)  
Baba S. Umar: *A Portrait of My People* (2010)  
Gimba Kakanda: *Safari Pants* (2010)  
Ify Omalicha: *Now that Dreams are Born* (2011)  
Sam Omatseye: *Lion Wind and Other Poems* (2011)  
Ify Omalicha: *Now that Dreams are Born* (2011)  
Karo Okokoh: *Souls of a Troubadour* (2011)  
Ada Onyebuanyi, Chris Ngozi Nkoro, Ebere Chukwu (eds); *Uto Nka: An Anthology of Literature for fresh Voices* (2011)  
Mabel Osakwe: *Desert Songs of Bloom* (2011)