



# Our Stories, Ourselves:

*Narratives from Black Women*  
**IN AFRICA AND AMERICA**

February 2021



The International Women's Writing Guild is a network for the personal and professional empowerment of women through writing. Our mission is to encourage women to tell their stories, provide support and instruction as they seek to improve their craft, open avenues for them to bring their writing into the world, and build their confidence.

Our quarterly newsletter, *Network*, features writing and publication announcements from our members. We hope you enjoy this special edition: *Our Stories, Ourselves: Narratives from Black Women in Africa and America*. A special thanks to IWWG member, Morgan Lett, who suggested this edition during her final months serving on our board of directors.

With abundant gratitude to the IWWG board of directors, members and faculty, and our production and design team, Kelsey Day and Alexandra Chilikina for their work on this issue. We are honored to bring women together from all over the world, so we can learn from one another and write together.

Michelle Miller  
Executive Director, IWWG

Our editors, Dr. Mya Vaughan and Wanjira Muthoni.



**Dr. Mya Vaughan**

Dr. Mya Vaughn is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and a Licensed Professional Counselor. She created The Sexuality & Disability Institute, LLC to provide affordable online psychological services to individuals with disabilities who identify as LGBTQIA. Her book, *Transgender Youth*, was published in 2016 and addresses the challenges trans youth face. She is presently a lecturer at California State University, Fresno. She considers herself a social justice advocate, educator, and mental health professional for underrepresented populations.



**Wanjira Muthoni , Ph.D.**

Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni is a creative writer from Kenya with a PhD in Women and Social Issues in African and Caribbean Literature. She lectured at Kenyatta University for twenty years and later worked in humanitarian settings as a Gender and Education specialist. Wanjira's skills have enabled her to advocate for disadvantaged youth. She has published poetry and short stories aimed at sensitizing youth on various issues of importance to African societies including gender issues and positive cultural practices. Wanjira has children and grandchildren whom she loves with all her heart. Recently retired, her dream is to write for her grandchildren about days gone by.



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# Introduction

I am A Black Woman was inspired by Morgan Lett's journey as a young black artist and mother. Constantly facing adversity, both within and without, writing has been her strength.



## I am A Black Woman Morgan Lett

Radiant and regal,  
Black and beautiful is she.

Adorned with fresh flowers on her elevated crown,  
To the many lives etched in the stories of her melanin feet.

For I am a black woman,  
I bend,  
I dance,  
I glide,  
I do not break.

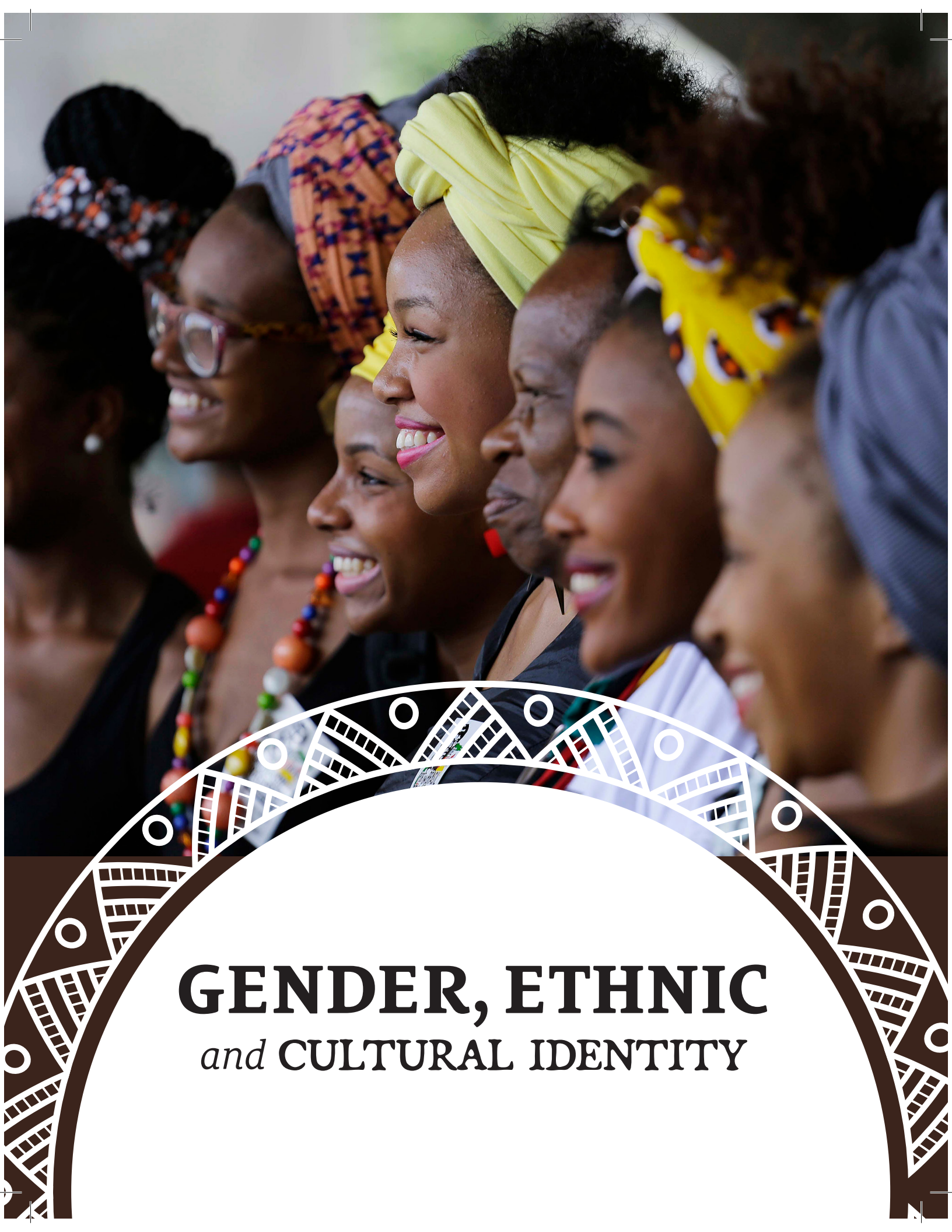
I honor my sacred boundaries,  
I release its weights.

For my children and my children's children,  
Have long earned their place.

We are one people,  
One face.

For I am a black woman,  
Radiant and regal is she.

Through my pen,  
Through my voice,  
Through my song,  
I am free.



**GENDER, ETHNIC**  
*and* **CULTURAL IDENTITY**



## **This, Is America** **Christie Cruise, Ph.D.**

The immigrant yells, “Go back where you came from!”

The descendant of slaves responds, “Where I came from?”

I came from the womb of a Black woman,

A sacred, hallowed space

with power and energy vibrating

on a level parallel to The Creator,

fashioned as the carrier of endless possibilities.

I came from the Garden of Eden

naked, natural, created in His image, the first woman.

I came from the heavens,

the firmament swathed in stars, planets, and the moon.

I came from love songs, soulful,

with melodies and chords and strings on lutes.

I came from the elements—fire, wind, water, earth, space, and time,

explosive as volcanic eruptions, overpowering as tsunamis,

entwined to the universe like the moon to the tides.

“Go back where I came from?”

I AM where I came from.”



## **I Am Not... I Will Not** **Susan Mwangi**

My words barely mean much to you,  
but I will speak up, anyway.  
I have acted deaf, dumb and numb for far too long.  
I have turned the other cheek, one too many times.  
Seeing myself through your eyes  
has seen me shut my own  
the weight of your contempt has pounded heavily on me.  
I have lied to us just so that I can be with you.  
I have re-created myself in your image  
and I hate what I see.  
I shudder at the sight of the woman  
I have allowed myself to become.  
For my truth to breathe, live and have its day,  
...this is where I get off!



## Who are You? Rev. Greta Sesheta

Aren't you the one who gave birth to the babe?  
The one who locked the child in a cage?  
Aren't you the one who crucified him?

Aren't you the one who freed the slave?  
Who came here in chains?  
Who drank the Kool Aid?

Weren't you the one who was first  
to shine,  
to sin,  
to surrender,  
to serve (time)?

Weren't you the one who was last  
to pardon,  
to condemn,  
to love to hate,  
embrace to rape?

Weren't you the one  
who was first and last  
to curse,  
to bless,  
to take the best  
and leave the rest?

To save the day,  
to sing the blues,  
and break the rules?

Ain't you the one  
who was lost, then found,  
and laid in the ground?

The one who parted the sea,  
raised the banner,  
and burned their village down?

Tell the truth!  
Ain't you the one  
who cut a deal with the devil,  
found a cure for the virus?  
Ain't you the One?

To steal, to heal,  
to sing, to shout  
to let peace out  
of the bag?

Aren't you the one to shine,  
to fall  
and blame it all  
on fate?  
I think  
you are the One!





## Witch Fiske Nyirongo

My grandmother was accused of practicing witchcraft (the hurt people kind of witchcraft) when she was on her death bed. She was in her eighties.

Ozone Tamara Nhlema was born in 1930. She was the daughter of a Presbyterian Reverend and a housewife. She was the second last child in a big nuclear family. When she was nineteen years old, a man came to ask for her hand in marriage, and although she had never met this man, she still moved across a country's border. She had lived in Mzuzu, Malawi since her birth. This man, Manasseh Kaonga, promised her family a better future because of his job as a civil servant in the British Colonial Government in Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia.

She left everything she was familiar with for an arranged marriage. From the stories my mother tells us about her parents, I have come to realise that my grandparents had a marriage that was anything but peaceful.

"She never used to sit with him, even during mealtimes," my mother said to me years ago. "They couldn't sit without him bullying her. How she sat, how she chewed, there was always something wrong with her."

Having known my grandmother for myself for twenty years of my life, I could not place the mild mannered and quiet woman with the woman my grandfather despised.

"She was uneducated," my mother said, giving a reason as to why my grandfather did not like her. "But he chose her," I replied. He took a train, a long journey between pre-independent Zambia and Malawi in those days. He could not find a suitable wife in his own country, so why choose a wife from another country who did not meet his standards? I wondered silently. I know the answer now. It is an uncomfortable truth, but it is there, in stories of women stranded in foreign countries with abusive men or harsh living conditions because they made a fatal mistake to trust a man in love.

My grandmother left my grandfather when she was sixty-eight years old, almost fifty years after marriage. She left him as soon as her last child was old enough. She lived a hard life. I sometimes wish she had been allowed to follow her own heart; I think it hurts less when your own choices come back to bite you.

When she was in her late 70s, my grandmother fell ill, she suddenly could not move her legs. She became dependent on a nurse and family members in the last years of her life. Some family members saw this as a perfect time to accuse an old woman of witchcraft. I often wonder if witch is a synonym for a 'no bullshit taker' woman. A woman who plans. A woman who follows her heart even decades later. If my grandmother was a witch, then I am a witch in training. I will be graduating soon.



## Untitled NyarSimba Simba

Some of us are looking back at past or present occurrences,  
To look at what is lost or seems lost,  
Looking at the dark skies,  
Like bird-watching but only galaxy watching.  
Hundreds and thousands of stars shining and glittering, the bright and the big and the starry scape  
An adventure in the sciences, in a season to learn something new  
To learning there's no end.  
A lot of what to look and learn – and even re-learn  
An odyssey,  
The Atmosphere all around, above, and below  
The visible, invisible, and all the business of life going on,  
amid the uncertainty,  
To the farmer, rain is the big ingredient to make the harvest.  
To the fisher-folk, weather and the best climate,  
Builders, planters, care-givers, shepherds, teachers, family  
In the face of family, amid a different situation of a pandemic,  
Message and messages, of a new nature, keeping the distance,  
the prevention is better than cure mantra for all  
Healthwise related news and happenings.  
Sanitizing, disinfecting, isolating, and more information, especially since most don't know what it is about. To an extent.  
So, there have been instances of what looks like pandemic previously,  
seasons of famines, floods, El-Nino heavy rains, diseases, and others that have caused havoc at drought times for example: folk long for water, greenery, green grass for animals/livestock.

Dry leaves and soft and dry grass for chicken.  
Millers long for bumper harvests so they work, or mill,  
and traders too, so they trade in their harvests.  
Priorities and areas of priority touch (ed) on the very young, the elderly, the sick, and the young adults.  
They are out of school, and have been for sometime now.  
They are going through some unrest in a way - the change in their routine, and routine life before the pandemic season overtook things, their school work, life and play balance.  
School goers need a double portion of resuming studies and gaining the lost study time.  
Priority mostly is given to education and health (of the family)  
During a recent time earlier on in the year, there was no congregating and church service.  
Religion or congregating and religious service is important. It's of priority to people.  
Has always been of priority to the society since of old.  
When church was not very near, and going to a service, (for years gone by) was a journey. Several folks packed few clothes and warm covers, walked as a group to the nearest place which was far, and stayed at that place waiting for their service, they went one day or two before the main meeting and they also boarded there and after the religious festival (mostly it was for the festive season) and also for the turn of the century/millennium, then they started their journey back home. In order of priority, they prioritized that journey and their time for observing that feast season  
and they held that in regard, and in some instances, their families kept the same tradition even though such circumstances are not there nowadays.



## In Search of Writing Ideas

### Marcella S. Meeks

Writers are always in search of good writing ideas. The Internet is a storehouse of ideas and writing prompts but sometimes, the best stories told come from the writer him/her self. You just have to dig 'way down' deep and pull it out, shape it, pen it and add your own seasoning to it. It's there but you alone have to get it out. Your own life is a storehouse of ideas and stories, but they're yours to tell. No one else's.

Every experience, memory, dream or life event, everyone you know personally, or an acquaintance at work, school or church, has 'story idea' stamped to their foreheads. The story is there in front of you, waiting for that right moment when you can pen it. You look at these people everyday, you see them in front of you, but you overlook a good story everyday.

Look beyond that person standing in front of you. For instance, didn't Bob from Marketing say his wife was diagnosed with breast cancer and had only three or four months to live? Why is he still at work, and not spending every moment with his dying wife? Why was she at the office party on Friday acting as if nothing was wrong? How were they coping with that? How were their children handling it? Why does he seem happy and not crying for his wife? How does he manage to work and not worry that she might die before he gets home? Questions, and more questions.

But here's the real story since it's yours. If your husband or wife was dying from cancer, how would 'you' be? Would you go to work everyday or stay home and spend every moment with that person? How would you handle this situation? What would you tell your children? How would you tell them? What plans would you make?

Get the idea? The story is yours for the telling. You might wish to talk to 'Bob' and ask him if can you write his story. Or keep it personal and write it from your standpoint.

You are human. Being human grants you the permission to feel anger, empathy, or just feel whatever you're feeling. It's your story to tell so pen it. Claim that story because chances are, some other writer already sees a story in the making and write it before you even get the first sentence down.

Story ideas may come from other people but the writing has to come from you. Dig deep, pull it out, and pen it. The story is yours for the telling and the world is waiting for it.



## The Joys of Motherhood

### Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni

I try to think with my brain but can't make sense of anything  
To speak with my mouth but my tongue keeps rolling in all directions  
My heart keeps beating ceaselessly in my chest  
My eyes full of mist just can't make sense of what they see

I try to taste with my tongue but my taste buds have gone numb  
All confused, they just won't communicate with my brain what they taste  
Fearing the sweetness will turn sour, fearing it's all just a dream  
Just a dream that I am experiencing the sweetest of all sensations that ever existed

I try to make my heart beat less fast by biting my lips until they bleed  
As I look at you, my two-week-old baby, the magic of all life known and unknown  
Oh, so beautiful, so captivating, how possible is it that you are part of me?  
My heart just won't stop beating nor my teeth grating as my bladder fills up

I try to make my heart beat less fast by dancing on the spot  
But it says the marathon of love is on and a Kenyan heart has never failed  
So I submit and let it go on beating, beating as the

world champion I feel I am  
Even though somewhere I fear it will break into a thousand little pieces

I try to steady my arms as I hold you in a tight embrace, my lovely one  
As I insert one of my nipples in your tiny little mouth, that nature opens by miracle  
Ready to suckle life and love mixed with the milk now flowing in plenty  
Droplets of milk flowing down my chest to my abdomen on the side not being suckled

I try to steady my feet as I walk with you in my arms for the very first time  
The distance from the changing table to my bed suddenly seems really long  
Feels like a hundred kilometre run for a beginner athlete with no training  
My legs feel like they'll soon give way and cause disaster to you and me and the whole family

I try to steady my thoughts in order to understand this magic that is motherhood  
But they run in all directions, singing love songs from all generations  
Reciting poetry in my grandmother's and mother's jargon now becoming mine  
Poetry sending me messages from my ancestors, saying that now at last I matter.



## ...and the Music Stopped! Susan Mwangi

This story kicks off with an excerpt of a popular Kenyan Benga tune. The song was released by Daudi Kabaka in 1963 and since then, an untold number of Swahili speakers have been twisting to its beat.

*Ona watoto wa nyuma yako  
wameolewa wamekuacha ukihangaika*

*Msichana wa sura nzuri  
Kitu gani kinakufanya usiolewe  
Elimu unayo ya kutosha  
Hata ng'ambo ukaenda ukarudi*

*Ooh baby  
Miaka yaenda mbio sana  
Na sura yako yaenda ikichuchuka*

Loosely translated the singer wants to know from the good looking, well-educated 'old maid' why she is still not married.

"Look, all your younger sisters are married and you are still on the shelf," he educates her.

"Why? ...do you not realize that the years are passing by very quickly and your looks are fading away just as fast?"

It is as though women start out as these beautiful Persian rugs which must be possessed before time ravages and renders them unsightly and thread-bare.

I must confess that as a young girl, I swiveled my hips, flapped my arms and twisted my head off in ignorant bliss. I paid no attention to the lyricized cultural world-view that I was so joyously gyrating to and soaking in.

Back then, my heart went out to the 'suffering woman'. I could not figure out why she had blown away her shot at happiness and fulfillment by missing this crucial rite of passage?

Somehow, I believed the twisted narrative about the hollowness of her spinster existence. As I sang along, it never once occurred to me that she did not owe me or anyone else an explanation about her life choices. It was beyond the realm of possibility to imagine that she could have been living her best life.

It was only as a full-blown adult that I woke up to the reality of my blissful naivety. I had been perpetuating a repressive agenda that had snuck up on me draped in song and dance..., all this, without my knowledge or consent.

Feminism was the consciousness that hit me when I understood the disharmony between the nuances of art, culture and the meaning of everyday life. My new-found revelation forced me to press the eject button and stop twisting my way to subjugation.

As the light of this awakening continues to dawn on me, I am lovingly raising the bar of social expectations and pointing out the thickly twisted cultural wool that has been pulled over our eyes for centuries. While on this enlightenment mission, I am finding that there is a multitude that still lives in the deep deception I called home for years.

There is emerging a throng of men, women and children who are tuning out the old ballad and dancing to a new beat. Thankfully, our new song is quickly gaining tempo among all who believe that female lives matter... because they do!



## Burning the House Down

### Eisha A. Mason

My words set my world ablaze!  
their sound piercing the sky,  
the air bursting into flame,  
every piece of my life consumed in fire's wake!

Incendiary words!  
A golden torch dashing illusions  
the falsehoods I'd been living,  
snapping the ties of all that bound me.

My words were Truth ignited!  
A laser slashing through my dreams.  
Words burning down my house.  
Fire lighting a path through the black night.

In the midst of structures burning.  
I found my Love aflame and shining.  
Love seeding charred earth within me.  
Tears watering seeds buried deep in my heart.

Ashes dancing in the air  
Floating gently down to earth  
Starry night wraps itself around me  
What will remain of me when daylight comes?

Something real and true, I hope.  
Pure Love, I pray.

Fire in my heart burning bright.  
My soul's radiance lights my way.



## The Plight of an African Girl Benuyenah Patricia Akosua Rejoice

I was born a twin, with a twin brother  
Not by desire, but by supreme design  
That fateful day dozens of people trooped to my  
father's house  
Many held my twin brother's wrist and said to  
my father,  
Congratulations!!! "Wodzi ame na wo" "Woanya nipa"  
Simply put, 'You've gotten a human being'  
But they turned and peeped at me in apprehension  
And I heard their giggles and whispers saying,  
'It is a girl'

My brother and I suckled from the same  
mother's breasts  
We played and fought as kids as we were  
I grew up with my brother in the hut of straws  
We hurt ourselves, each other and got hurt by others  
To express our pain and anguish in emotions we  
resorted to crying  
But my brother was told again and again,

"Nutsu mefana avi o" "Burima nso"  
"Men don't cry"  
I was rather encouraged to weep my heart out as a  
weaker cell  
For, I am a girl!

Then the bell of going to school started tolling  
My brother and I jumped up high with zeal and said,  
'Father and Mother, 'we want to go to school'  
Though first to say, 'We'll go to school' was last


to step my feet in there.  
I was sacrificed for my brother due to my  
feminine status  
My mother tried to speak for me, but was muzzled

because she is a woman  
And I am made-up to stay at home with her to  
do the chores  
While my brother geared up for school to learn  
Just because I am a girl!

Then, I found myself in school, trailing behind my  
twin brother,

two years later  
In class I shone and glowed my intellect among my  
peers as the FIRST  
I played football, hockey, rugby and.... all the  
"rough games"

with boys  
I championed the course of success and victory as I  
led my groups  
Yet, my peers would constantly say, "She is still  
a girl"  
I wanted to be a calculator, a moving calculator  
But even my teachers turned to damp my dreams  
They deliberately poured cold water on my shoulders.  
They chorused to me, teasingly "but you are a girl"  
Yet, the old rugged cloth, my mother!  
Yes, she cushioned me with the CAN DO SPIRIT.  
Who never dampened my dreams.  
I will achieve my goals!!!



In town, both the young and old gaze at me  
As new shepherd at the chief's palace  
They giggle sarcastically at each of my steps  
But I walk with the brisk and smartest move  
As I move with gallantry and the gorgeousness  
naturally abounds in me  
They murmur among themselves  
And continue to remind me of my  
feminine status  
"Look ...you're still a girl"  
Damn it!!!!  
Excuse me.  
I don't need such reminders please.

In church some unscrupulous opportunists want  
to lure me  
They tried to seal me up with cash and car  
The worse of it is this: even the women push me  
to engage

in such filthy acts  
With the so called 'eyes' of the church  
Tangled in the thorn of men and women with  
frail conscience  
I ran to the Bishop.....Prophet.....Pastor Man of  
God for help  
But .... I went from the frying pan into fire  
The pastor used me as prey  
Just because I'm a girl

I dreamt of driving and flying a plane, but I was  
not allowed

to ride a bike.  
I am told by all, "You are a girl"  
Through the beads and turns, the threats, pains  
that

rolled down my tears,  
The trying moments, unintended, purposeless  
fasting

and soap-less baths  
I got my academic certificate out of conscious  
effort and

sleepless nights  
The job I applied for was mine because I was placed  
second to none  
But for that unscrupulous boss, I was denied.  
Just because I failed to exchange my womanhood,  
my virtue,

my pride for a job  
Yet, I don't have the voice to shout it out  
When I complained, I'm told, "But you're a girl"

Now I see the silenced voice of girls and women  
slapping me

all around.  
Hunting me in my dreams like the cheetah and the  
tiger chasing

the poor helpless rat.  
At home, school, church, work, in marriage, policy  
and politics.  
In professional and vocational endeavours.  
Even in decisions that affect them directly.  
Their voices are MISSING... as they cannot speak  
nor write right.  
That VOICE needn't be missing!  
The silence must be broken!!!





## Sleep

### Edith Adhiambo Osiro

#### *Insomnia*

Existence, funneled through Fallopian tubes, to the uterus. The amazing warmth therein insulates me from the shocks, goals and beings. My heart shares her beat and a dream whose language I wade in like a dolphin. The dream responds to my kicks and beats, she delights despite the heartburn that makes her an insomniac with naps to spare only in the blistering of sunlight. I sleep through the foreign flavours swimming in my sea, later I understand this sensation as December with all its festivities.

In January, when sleep was heavy on her eyes, I was pushed out. The dreamers named me one born of evening, howling through my first interruption of sleep. My sedative was her second colostrum, from night I grew to night I come. I was bundled between arms of mother, father and another dreamer. The gurgles, howls and smells punctuated the end of their sleep. One night, two nights, a fortnight- my eyes lulled to the rocking and lullabies. I found light to see, sights to master, memories to form, thoughts to mention and words to act on. The struggle to return to sleep weighs on the burdens of my dreamless world.

#### *Alarms*

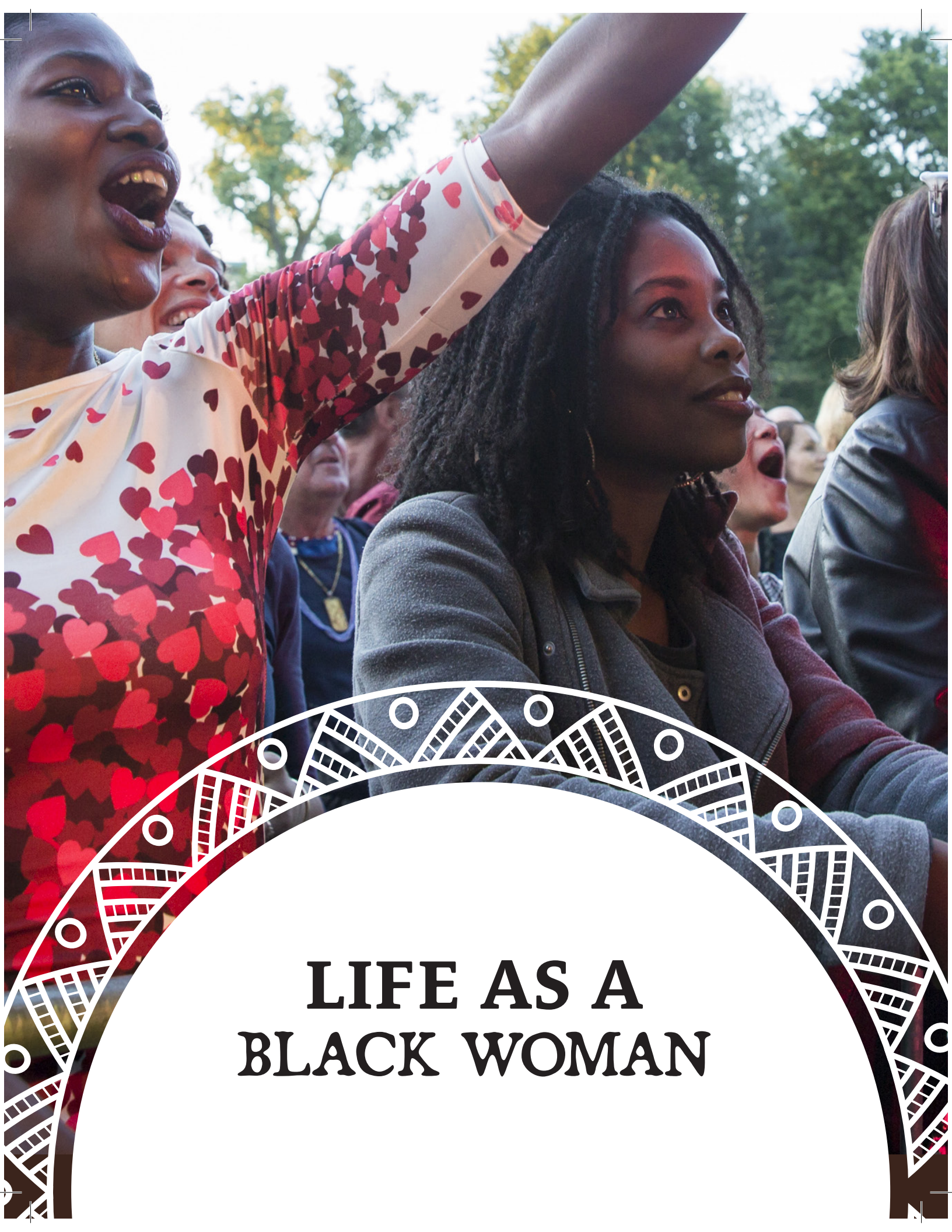
The lanes are marked, the roles are being defined. I play with dolls whose skin pales mine. Ring the alarm. I love racing my brother's milk-carton trucks or missing a kick of the polythene football. Snooze the alarm. Laundry is to her as slashing the grass is to him? Reset the alarm. She is a he smothered in submission to worldly expectations, an Eden from which Eve was cursed. A Sheba I must be reminded of subtly, as I watch my parent's marriage pivot between their alarms. A Nziga I delight to chance upon as my mother sets all our alarms when father works afar off. A Mekatilili whose shrill war cry against the chokehold was welcomed by her kind

Like a matriarch elephant guiding the herd to a memory of paths long ago traversed, mother awakens me to an age where I can respond to alarms of school and games, of work and banks, of prayer and courts. The mythical sand that lulls to sleep, whirls a dust devil of femi- versus masci-; an the alarm that distorts the sleep from which a rib was borrowed to form a whole.

#### *Dreams*

Deja vu has rekindled my wanderlust for a world mirrored past. Shut eyes give me a stone slab that I can etch on my drawings in the subconscious. Here the impossible gets a home. Like a barren woman who mothers a step-grandchild that speaks freedom to Martin Luther's dreams. The mischievous too gets a home. Like a damsel aspiring to the chiselled bountiful chest of a warrior.

The allure of dowry, pregnancy, aprons, and salaries lately seems to have ripped open the belly of a maggot-filled carcass that I cannot stand. Every choice is a debate that leads to war and all I want is to dream sweetly.



**LIFE AS A  
BLACK WOMAN**



## She Reigns in Glory Ashla C. Hill Roseboro, Ph.D.



Alabama State University  
Raised in a town of “haves and have nots”  
Life for her was no crystal stair  
If fact, there were holes in the floors  
That had to be tiptoed around with care.  
Domestic terror, violence and hate  
Fiery sermons in churches that were founded for the people  
Raised voices that taught the importance of love  
Instruments, stumping feet and voices billowed from the steeple.  
Courage to see her destiny beyond a small world  
Like the tortoise that moved slowly along  
In her mother, she found tenacity that spoke “do it or else”  
From bachelor’s to master’s to doctorate, meeting each rung.  
Home ownership glimmered within reach  
But life for her was no crystal stair  
Only to be laid off in a weak economy  
She surrendered to a higher calling without despair.  
Trees toppled the structure in a hurricane  
Resilience to rebuild, despite devastation  
Displaced for months while trying to remain sane  
Life was teaching her that it was not all fun.  
Through the storm, highs and lows  
Her hope never diminished in murky places  
She found a sisterhood of seasoned, intellectual women  
They said you have much to contribute across spaces.  
First there was love, then marriage, then babies  
From deep ancestral roots we arise  
Power, strength, knowledge, fortitude, creativity  
Even when the qualities have been disguised.  
Women carry and nurture generations  
In the midst, unexpected events will undoubtedly come  
From illness to migration to loss of loved ones  
But put on the whole armor, not to succumb.  
And she rises to every challenge time and time again  
Black girl magic others can see  
Though life for her was no crystal stair  
She reigns in glory.



## The Black Woman Rozerth Rosemary Mensah

A cat pulls human train on a wire  
A baby walks out of the Mother's womb carrying his house  
A dog snatches the moon away at noon  
So the out of the question Black Woman wants the impracticable to occur  
The day dreamers still dream on  
Born never to lead  
Can never do anything persons  
Anything anything the Black Woman can never do anything  
So they think!  
See! The Black Woman can do anything  
The anything is what had made you who you are  
We laboured to the hardest level to bring you up  
We have power Black Women, we have power  
Power to rule and rule our Nations to the greatest  
Power to guide and guide our families to success  
All the bad stuff you jot to destroy us will not break us down  
Will not break us down, will not break us down, your bad stuff will not break us down  
Black Women will rule, will rule and rule to the max  
We can't afford to lose our dreams any more  
The time for us to rule is now  
No one thought a COVID pandemic was at its heels to destroy the world  
How are we waiting any longer?  
No one knows when the world will end  
We will not let you push our stupendous ideas

behind bars any more  
We shared our bodies with you sucking us dry and you never called us names for that time you needed our milk to grow  
Now a thirty-two sword and a certificate and never wants to go halves on with any beauty  
A Black Woman dare to stand for Power and she's the call girl  
She dares reply and she is a witch  
We denied ourselves and pushed you to the top of the tree to get some fruits for all to share  
You got to the top, ate the fruits and threw the waste at us  
We didn't react because we protected your cherry farm goings  
We were your muscles when you were babies  
Now you're six packs and you are calling us weakling without helping us  
You are father Christmas to the world but in your family it's each one for himself and God for us all  
We shall also put everything behind us and rule  
Are you mystified because we say we are going to rule?  
Then keep your mouth open and open it wider because certainly we shall rule  
You will see a cat pulling a human train on a wire  
And a baby coming out his mother's womb carrying his own house  
Then a dog will surely snatch the moon at noon  
For all we care  
There's no limit for Black Women  
Black Women we shall rule  
Definitely we shall rule Black Women!



## Queen Regina Greathouse

The melanin queen wears her crown  
Dominating the burdens that fill her life  
Letting the light within her soul shine  
Maintaining peace when chaos is around  
Knowing she's needed in a world of demands  
Where others find comfort in her strength  
Not knowing her struggles, not knowing her pain  
Not knowing what battles lie within  
Yes, she gets burdened, tired and weary  
Heavy the crown feels upon her head  
She could give up and fall to the ground to the ground  
But she lifts her head instead  
For she is a Nubian queen  
Melanin flowing throughout her veins  
Willing to cross rivers for all those she loves  
Letting her faith and wisdom guide her through inner strain  
Knowing her presence is a gift Inspires her to stand  
Demanding respect while showing dignity  
Her crown gives her a purpose of 'I Am'  
For she is strong, she is brave  
She is willing to speak her mind  
Saluting the incomparable black woman  
For she is one of a kind



## Black Bedtime Stories Achieng Nyar Duro

*Who are you?*

Soot and crows too,  
charcoal and carbon blues,  
ants and ink blot news,  
gorillas watching the night sky soot.

Asphalt and tar on tarmac,  
Pupils and a lick of shoe polish,  
Charred food and don't forget olives too,  
These are the things I consider black and not YOU!

*A Folk Song*

Tar little baby don't you cry,  
or the popos gonna put you to sleep tonight,  
and if you cry or try to fight,  
then their grips gonna get a bit more tight,  
and just as you sip into the light,  
Its gonna dawn on them that you had rights,  
So my tar little baby please don't cry,  
So mummy may have just one more night.



## Letting Go Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni

The day I realised that I was not a garbage truck  
To carry around anger and hurt from everyone and everywhere  
Just because someone had hurt me intentionally or unintentionally  
That was the day I started to let go

The day I realised that societal expectations  
Were not always in my best interest  
But were more often than not created to benefit a specific  
interest group  
That was the day I started to let go

The day I realised that I was not Jesus Christ  
To perform miracles for crowds  
Feed multitudes then wait to be crucified for it  
That was the day I started to let go

On that day, I bought myself a set of sieves  
To sift every request for its validity  
I pinned the set of sieves tightly inside my brain and inside my heart  
To make sure no manipulative requests passed through

On that day, I invited God to head my assessment committee  
To help me differentiate need from want  
To help me distinguish friends from foes  
And to let go of the latter.



## Mama Africa Christine A Nyotta

Mama, African woman  
Black and beautiful  
Strength of a woman you possess  
Zeal and drive is in you, Mama  
I envy you with great admiration.  
Mama, African woman  
Burdens you carry on your shoulder  
Great expectations from the society  
Many dreams you yearn to accomplish  
You still hope, trust and believe, Mama.  
Mama, African woman  
You carry a child in you for 9 months  
No single day do you ever complain  
You feed us, raise us and are proud  
Mama, what great sacrifices you make.  
Mama, African woman,  
How do you balance the scale, Mama?  
Your family's a priority, your work as well  
In power you rule with diligence and dignity  
You never give up keeping it together, Mama.  
Mama, African woman,  
You smile even in pain, hiding wounds  
You fight your battle on your knees  
You always provide with a pure heart  
Our hand you hold firmly, Mama.  
Mama, African woman,  
A role model you are to this generation  
Leaders you build with great confidence  
I am proud of you Mother of Africa  
I want to be a better version of you Mama.





## Who is Jane? Betty Pierre

You know Jane, that girl from  
Dick and Jane of those kiddy books.  
She's Normal  
Not mouthy and ambitious  
Straight forward not demurely contriving for  
Prince Charming

She is beautiful, straight haired not  
a kinky curl in sight,  
skinny size, exercising weekly so  
The critique will insure her and not say  
you did this to yourself oh gluttony.

You know Jane, the virgin, Tarzan's woman.  
A British damsel on High Street and a jungle  
queen in make believe Africa.

Jane crossing state lines for an new life to  
be a wife and end to life that wasn't there yet  
for forfeit to save her life from the rape of life  
the chain gang knife wheeling strive that  
Almost ended Jane's life.

That unknown girl with the pearl earring and  
swirling hips who chanted and chatted with  
gaslight tricks when she could have had her  
pick of the nice boys next door

Jane Doe who everyone saw but no one  
knew where she hid the truth until  
we found her on St. Andrews Avenue.



## Blades

### Candace Arthuria Williams

It's time for spring clean-up. Someone with an accent will be calling any day now. There they are. The truck just pulled up. I guess the owner is anxious to start the new season.

Four fellows—Mexican, Dominican, Guatemalan—I can't be sure—hop out, dragging rakes, a gas mower, and biodegradable bags. Interestingly, the name emblazoned on the truck is Limerick Landscape. I wonder if they even know what that means. Probably not.

For some reason, I step outside my air conditioning to petition the two who are closest to the porch. I ask their names. They stop to talk, losing precious work time to finally be acknowledged. Their English is remarkably clear. Not at all what I expected.

“Carlos. My name is Carlos Rodriguez. And this is Julio Santana.” *Funny, I never stopped to think they might have last names.*

‘Good morning. I’m pleased to meet you. I’m not usually up this early, but I wanted to say hello.’ *Before today, I had sometimes, but rarely, waved from the window.*

‘Where are you from?’

“New York City.”

‘No, where were you born?’

“**New....York....City.**” I was making it worse with every word I said.

*Stupid Gringo, he must have been thinking.*

I’ll try a different tack. ‘My name is Mrs. Rivers.’

“I know that. Your name is on the list. We’ve only been doing this for three years. We know who our customers are.”

‘I’m sorry, Mr. Rodriguez. Of course you do. It’s just that I usually talk to someone in the office.’

“Senora Rivers, we don’t got no office. Only a Cuban guy with a cell phone. The boss hired him to do the grunt work. He’s Irish. You can probably figure that out from the name of the company. He thinks we’re all *stupido*. Including you. So do you own this house or rent it?”

Oh now *he’s* questioning *me*? He’s not supposed to do that. I ignore his inquiry. The nerve. Clearly, he’s the aggressor of the two—maybe the supervisor. But I get the message. None of this is any of my business, any more than the status of my residency is his. Now what?

‘I’ve been meaning to tell you that you guys do a nice job.’

“Hey fellas!” he calls out to the others. “The lady says we do a nice job. How lovely. *Muchas gracias, Senora.*” They applaud, drawing the attention of the neighbors. They’re mocking me and I’m not sure I understand why.

“You need to turn on your sprinklers or the weed killer won’t take. Unless you want to hire somebody to do that for you, too.”

Okay, *now* he’s being sarcastic. Downright hostile. I wonder if he’s dangerous. I’m not afraid of these people. I need to stand my ground. ‘Just make sure you take those bags with you. Otherwise, I’ll call the police.’

“Senora Negra, with all due respect, we do not follow orders from people like you.”



**NO JUSTICE,  
NO PEACE**



## **I Hear Your Cry** **Marie Johnson-Ladson**

Black Children  
Black Brothers and Sisters  
Black Mothers and Fathers  
Black Families  
I Hear Your Cry  
You are belittled  
You are degraded  
You are fearful  
You are frustrated  
You are hurting  
You are killed  
I Hear Your Cry  
You feel angry  
You feel discouraged  
You feel helpless  
You feel hopeless  
You feel offended  
You feel mistreated  
I Hear Your Cry  
You demand action  
You demand change

You demand fairness  
You demand equality  
You demand justice  
You demand opportunities  
I Hear Your Cry  
Stay alert  
Stay encouraged  
Stay in control  
Stay hopeful  
Stay peaceful  
Stay strong  
I Hear Your Cry  
You are great  
You are overcomers  
You are powerful  
You are tough  
You are unique  
You are Warriors  
I Hear Your Cry.



## The Rage is Real Series™ (Racism/Part 2/Short Version)

**StellaLouise**

The RAGE is REAL  
Real enough to let  
bold face liars, Jim Crow  
and black-face know,  
“the jig is up.”  
Real enough to alert assaulters, molesters and  
rapists, #Times Up!  
Real enough to see dreams of my fathers strung up,  
dreams of my mothers chained  
up, dreams of my brothers locked up and my sisters’  
dreams deferred. Forgetting  
they come from the land of Nzinga, the African  
Queen, not from the land of  
Barbie.  
Rage knows white and wealth are not supreme.  
“Privilege,” is to be a Human  
Being.  
Parents, can you see? Anger, ignorance and fear get  
planted in me.  
Where does rage go? A chain gang, a foot train,  
hiding in four hundred years sold  
as human cargo? In 800 miles, hunted by hounds, in  
marshes and swamps on the  
underground railroad?

It’s in the anguish of grandmothers raped for life by  
“massta” while Miss Ann sits  
knitting in the parlor acting unbothered.  
The Rage is Real!  
It’s in the innocence of Trayvon Martin. It’s in the  
demise of George Floyd and  
Eric Garner. It’s the police killings of Tamir Rice,  
Freddie Gray, Michael Brown,  
Corey Jones and Philando Castile . It’s in Joel  
Johnson, a human being with  
special needs, shot on “Philly” streets just begging  
for quarters. It’s the mysterious  
snuffing out of Sandra Bland’s vibrant life. It’s in the  
killing of Breonna Taylor,  
who woke up from bed just to be murdered. The rage  
is about her and so many  
unnamed others!  
Google Black man murdered and you see; Black man  
murdered in the backyard,  
Black man killed in his apartment, Black man  
murdered in Jasper, Texas, Black  
man murdered in Mississippi.  
Too many murdered by police to give “each one” any  
justice.



### The RAGE is REAL

Denial of the pain is, too. DNA inherited as me and you. It's broken limbs on the family tree. It's the trauma in you and the trauma in me. It's teen rapes, veteran fathers, it's in the children of bipolar mothers. It's in epic suicides rates. It's inherited in the foster care and criminal justice systems. It's in ghetto education and greenhouse gas emissions.

Rage festers when untreated. It grows for a reason. It's pain and fear suppressed; then explodes as out of control anger. Rage is a cry for action.

Healing rage starts with loving compassion. Look in the mirror; it starts with your reflection. It's not about controlling anger; it's about accepting the truth, teachings and growth rage offers. Outrage means, when there is a knee on the neck, bullets in the back, there are few options!

Rage is real, but hopefully, it's only an unwanted house guest. Learn from it quickly; it doesn't go easily, it demands attention and can make a big a mess!



## Searching for Justice Quietly, Softly Mùthoni wa Gìchùrù

*Kenya.*

At a college in Embu where I was a tutor, a colleague slapped a fellow tutor, a back handed slap that rang out with a whack! The two were arguing over the timetable with Stella\* accusing Mutha\* of altering it.

A few women tutors and I gathered around Stella, who was running her hands over the welts that had erupted on her face. Mutha walked out of the staffroom and out of the college. Stella reported the incident to the college administration. The following morning, I learnt that Stella had reported the matter to the authorities. Mutha was arrested and charged with assault.

After lunch, I found Stella clearing her desk. She had been fired; told she had put the college into disrepute. Mutha, having been released on bail, was going on with his lessons.

Once again, the women tutors gathered, our hands over our mouths, supporting faces that suddenly felt heavy. We could not go to the college Principal; he had sacked Stella. Stella had approached the Director of Studies, a woman, and the director had told her she should not have provoked Mutha. Anger gave me strength. I led the women to one of the executive directors of the college. We told him we were resigning en masse since we felt threatened. He may have been touched by our plight, or worried about the disruption our exodus would create. Mutha was sacked that afternoon.

What happened to Stella and her assault case? I don't know. I talked to my colleagues, the women especially, asked them if they would be willing to testify and got an emphatic no. Let the matter rest. Perhaps Stella realized how futile her case would be and dropped it.

I have thought as I did then, of how the search for justice for women is done softly, unobtrusively. It's as if the issue of justice for half the population is not important enough to cause a disruption. There are cases of sexual abuses sorted in Kenya, kinyumbani, at the family or clan level, so as not to shame the perpetrator.

A man, who sold milk in my village, touched a girl indecently, running his hand over her genitals as he handed over the milk bottle. Mothers warned their daughters against getting inside his house. My late mother shouted at the man at a road junction one market day.

“Don't ever touch my daughters! I will kill you if you do.”

Many people in the village would point at her with their lower lip drawn out after that.

Women are expected to solve their domestic problems, including violence against them, kinyumbani. Call a few old women and men of the clan, ask the perpetrator to give the wazee a goat and declare a truce.

Anger against injustices facing women quivers, silently, softly. In Kenya we call women who are vocal in the search for justice embittered single or divorced women. Or we say they have grown horns.

\*Names have been changed.



## Where Are You From? Mercy Mkhana Simiyu

It started when you checked in.  
They raised their voices to ask  
“WHERE ARE YOU FROM?”  
They stared at the inky black of your skin  
and pasted plastic smiles on their faces,  
their cheeks tinged so pink with their intent:  
changing seats so they didn’t have to catch your  
Blackness.  
Your son didn’t notice, enthralled by this idea of a  
moving bus,  
with windows through which he saw green trees  
whizzing by.  
His excitement toppled out of his three-year-old  
mouth  
and beamed out of his small brown hands in waves  
against the window  
but you were too concerned with holding your  
Blackness in,  
and keeping your Africanness still.  
It started when you checked in.  
You handed over your blue passport and the  
immigration officer  
stared you up and down and, instead of welcoming  
you home  
like he did to the others who went before you,  
he asked you what you are doing in America.  
Your son was cocooned in a lesa on your back and he  
stretched up,

giggled at the immigration officer and waved his  
tiny, brown, three-year-old  
fist in the cold still air of the arrivals hall.  
We’ve come home, sir.  
You added the sir because decades here have taught  
you to defer.  
In your other home.  
Where your son and his brown skin match the  
majority  
and his lilted accent somehow seems to give you, by  
proxy,  
some elevation - some pat on the back because you  
went majuu.  
In this home, past the immigration and customs  
lines and the  
deep search into your bags as they laughingly say  
how  
Africans bring in the darndest things while you  
stand there  
swallowing your saliva and shrinking yourself even  
as you  
know there is nothing in your bags this umpteenth  
time of travel.  
In this home, where your son and his brown skin  
match the majority  
painted as lawless, disorderly, negative criminal  
elements,  
your lilted accent somehow further strips you of  
your humanity,





the first layer off courtesy of your tinted skin.  
You travel with your papers in hand, your accent wells up in your throat,  
and you try to keep it pushed further down because if  
it asserts itself, falling from your tongue  
when the policeman walks up to your car window...  
You breathe in slowly and deeply, your hands at 10 and 2,  
Shrinking yourself into the seat, bargaining with God,  
the painter who tap-tapped you into this dark exterior of existence.  
And the giggle of your black son from the backseat  
shoots visions of how all this could possibly end if  
this policeman decides your accent is a threat.  
He lowers his voice to ask  
where are you from?  
It started when you checked in.  
The power of you slipping through your fingers,  
staining everything in its path, draining from you  
with every blue-eyed stare and every push from the establishment.  
How can you hold onto your power  
when the powers-that-be at every possible check-in of life  
are there asking:  
**WHERE ARE YOU FROM?**



## DON'T FORGET ABOUT US

### A Spoken Word Poem

Candace Nicholas-Lippman

As you lay me down to sleep  
I pray you Lord  
My soul to keep  
And if I die before I wake...

And if I die...

I wonder if she said her prayers that night

I wonder who was the last person she called  
Were her and mama on good terms  
Did she and her friends  
Have next day plans  
Before they closed their eyes  
And they said their "good nights"  
Did she and her boyfriend  
Make love one last time

Was she looking forward  
To tomorrow  
Only for tomorrow  
To never come

Eight bullets  
They placed inside her body  
With no regard  
For police policy  
They broke into her home  
Like thieves in the night  
And then spun their villainy  
In a way  
That made  
her  
look guilty  
And here we are

5 months later  
And I just saw a picture  
Of one of Breonna's killers  
Living his best life  
On the beach  
With his privileged daughters

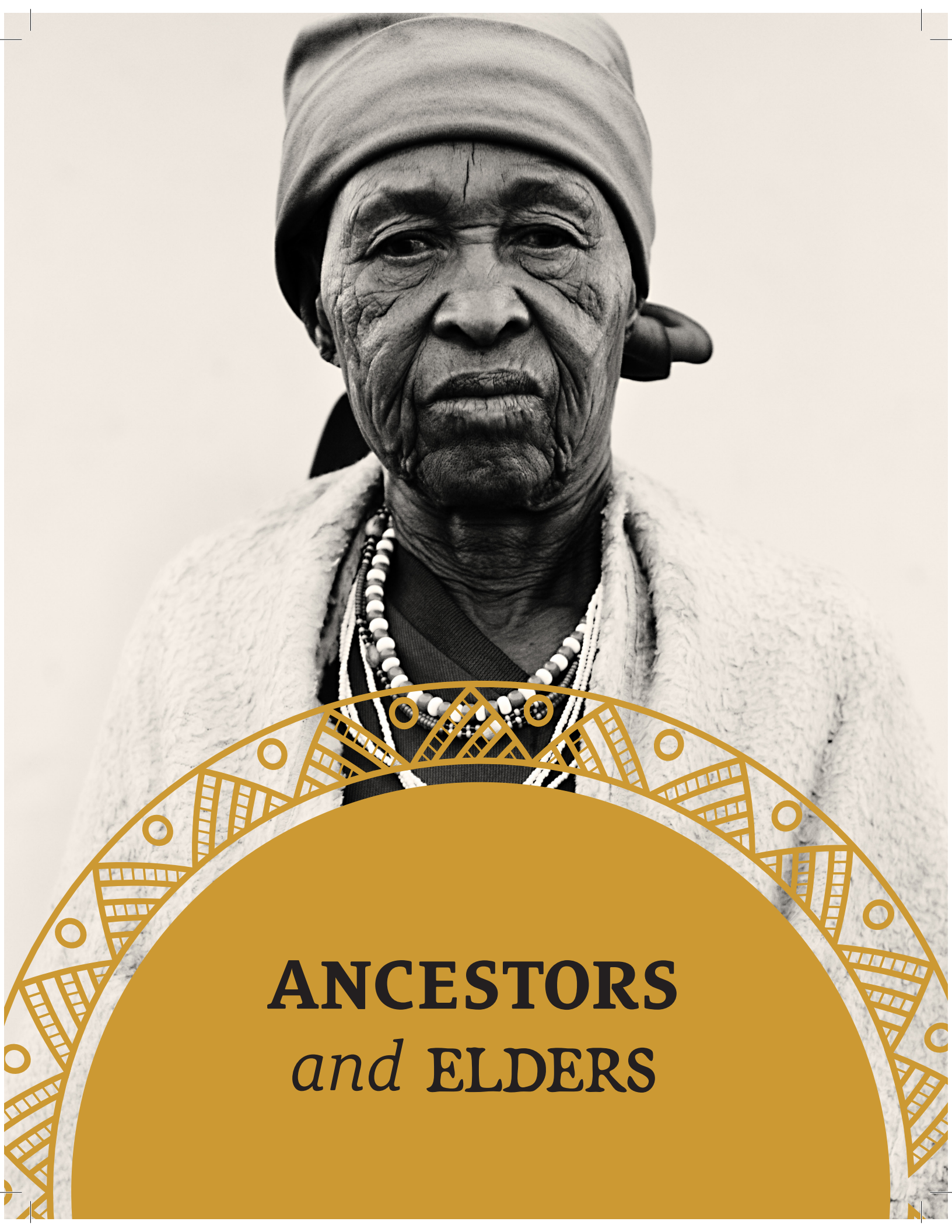
Don't forget about us.  
Before there was Breonna  
We had Sandra Bland

5 years ago  
Pulled over  
For a "failing to signal"  
Infraction  
How easily  
These blue uniformed monsters  
Labeled  
This BLM Activist  
Suicidal  
A verdict  
That is normalized  
For Black people  
As our struggles  
Deemed so overwhelming  
That  
We must be crazy  
Enough  
To take our own lives  
While in police custody  
Don't forget about us.

Not just  
To highlight  
My black sistas  
As my brown friends  
Are also common victims  
Vanessa Guillen  
Fought for this country  
And homeland  
But died  
Not by the hands of war  
But by a man  
She considered comrade  
And for the military  
To mishandle  
Yet another case  
Of sexual harassment  
Is just like these cops  
Who live above  
Their own laws  
I'm still waiting  
For the outcry  
For these women  
Just as loud  
As they are the black man  
Who will cry for the little boy?  
Is often  
The question  
And I say...  
Everyone  
The world  
In outrage  
Riots  
And  
"we demand"  
protests  
Are all birthed  
After the murders  
Of Black men  
But my sistas  
Often seen as an afterthought  
We  
Are not only fighting  
Black & Blue SWAT teams  
White supremacy  
Bigotry  
And brainwashed ideology  
But also *our* brothers  
Our Uncles  
Our fathers  
Best friends and cousins  
Where are the black men

Who wrap  
us  
in protection  
You  
Look like me  
You are my kin  
Yet my dark skinned  
Sista  
Can be thrown in the garbage  
Toyin Salau  
Can be assaulted  
And then murdered  
By a Brotha  
That she would've advocated  
His life matters  
Or that  
A grown man  
Can yank off my panties and pants  
Without permission  
We are no one's property  
Where is the accountability  
This  
Culture  
Of rape  
Murder  
And bullying  
Is like the Corona disease  
It has existed  
Way longer than we think  
And is covered up  
By masked individuals  
Who are meant  
To serve & protect  
Where's our covering  
Atatiana Jefferson  
Murdered in Fort Worth Texas  
Rekia Boyd  
Killed by an off duty detective  
Dante Servin  
19 yr old  
Renisha McBride  
Murdered  
In Dearborn Heights  
Korryn Gaines  
While holding her son  
SWAT team killed her  
For a traffic violation  
Kira Johnson  
Amber Issac  
Sha-Asia Washington  
All died  
From medical negligence

Need I go on?  
Sexual violence  
Daily bias  
Institutionalized  
Gendered racism  
Black women  
Always at the forefront  
Leading the protests  
Being the catalyst  
Not only  
Giving life  
But saving them  
Forgiving  
Courageous  
And strength unmatched  
Carrying the whole world  
On our backs  
As well as  
In our bellies  
I  
Demand  
You care about me  
Because without me  
There'd be no you  
So look at my face  
And remember it  
Cause God forbid  
I don't wanna be  
Just another hashtag  
Don't forget about us.



**ANCESTORS**  
*and* **ELDERS**



## Minnie Louise Johnson-Nelson Sandra Nelson

*“Make a way where there is no way.”*

There was a reason those words came out of her mouth; a reason they fit her so. Born in 1912, into the savagery of the American South, Minnie Louise Johnson was my mother. One of ten, she lost her mother at age nine. But from the beginning, those in the know saw it—it was not ordinary for this little girl to have such hands: big hands, working hands, the hands of an old woman.

She migrated North in the 1940’s; worked in white homes; gave birth to my sister, brother, and me; bid farewell to an untenable marriage; and took on the ubiquitous challenge of raising her three Black children in a sub-standard housing project. Assailed, sometimes weary, she pressed through. She was a leader, a builder, an over-comer, a misbehaving little woman with a made-up mind, and whatever she put those hands to bore her mark. When the little white girl lost her dollar and the white principal detained and searched only her “colored” and “Spanish” classmates (including my sister), my mother – the President of the Parent-Teacher Association – put in a call. She told that school head, “I don’t know what God you serve. But you better thank your God that I am on this phone. Because if I was there with you, I’d pull your head off and throw it to you!” We were hers, in her care, and her faith and warrior spirit covered us, schooled us, and grew up in us a deep understanding that we mattered.

The world had prepared for Minnie Louise Johnson a cooling board, but her hands broke boards. And in apt recognition, at age 72, she was awarded a Black Belt in Taekwondo, a declaration of her expertise in punching and kicking and in celebration of her strength, splendor, and spectacular spirit.

We Speak Her Name.

Minnie Louise Johnson-Nelson.





## The Last Three Things My Mother Did ...

Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni

The first of the last three things my mother did  
Was to struggle to walk up the stairs  
To the hospital ward where she was to be admitted  
Given that there were no wheel chairs in those days  
Nor an ambulance wheeler to assist get her to  
her bed

The second of the last three things my mother did  
Was to tell me where she had hidden her life savings  
She instructed me to go and look beneath the  
wardrobe in her bedroom  
She added: “to reach the place, you have to lie down,  
stretch your arm  
In order to feel it in an envelope, neatly wrapped in  
elastic thread”

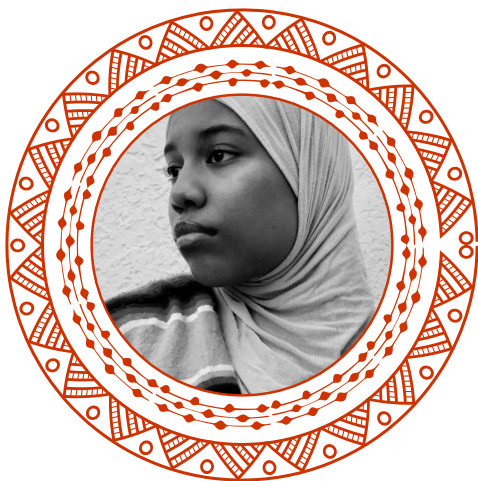
The very last of the last three things my mother did  
Was to ask the doctor why she was in so much pain  
day in day out  
To remind him that she had been complaining of  
severe pain the past four years  
And all he ever did was to give her medication and  
promise that it would go away soon  
The doctor looked down and answered: “the pain will  
go away, soon”

The pain did go away, a week later, one Tuesday  
afternoon towards dusk  
As promised by the doctor, the pain did go away for  
good, never to return  
My mother had fallen to the ground as she struggled  
to walk around the hospital ward  
She had vomited all the pain in her system, then  
sighed, one last time  
My mother’s pain stopped but then mine started and  
settled deep within me

It seems the pain flowed from her system into mine  
that half sunny half dull September afternoon  
For inside me it lives every hour of the day and  
night, like a true, loving companion  
Its severity only changed in nature and form as it  
transferred its abode  
As wise man Birago Diop once said: “Those who  
are gone are not really gone,  
They are in the wind, the trees, the water  
that flows...”

Indeed, the first thing I have done since I made  
that discovery  
Has been to follow the spirits of my ancestors in the  
rustling trees, the burning fire,  
The flowing rivers, the wild waterfalls of my home  
village high up in the mountains  
The whispering spirits in the quiet of the forests  
interrupted only by the chirping of birds  
As I stretch out my hand to other humans in pain  
and pull them out of the bottomless pit of despair  
The spirits of all the ancestors gone before us  
whisper to them, lovingly : “you’ll never be alone”.

\*BIRAGO DIOP, LE SOUFFLE DES ANCETRES  
(DU RECUEIL LEURRES ET LUEURS, 1960, ÉD.  
PRÉSENCE AFRICAINE)



## Daughter, Daughter Asiyah Herrera

Red sun rock  
Sandstone  
Tropical call, coasts  
Rainforest, air water thick, muggy mosquito infested.  
House, made of adobe, Colombia, dark black as the morning  
brew, head full of curls, Abuelita.

Brown mud, wet rain, fields and farm hands. Plow trodden,  
southern dust, South Carolina. Daughter, beloved daughter, hair  
tight in the plaits ribbon tails. Brown as the fresh soil, Grandma.

Little brick house, tree shade. Garden front walk, single mother,  
4 kids, eldest girl. Daughter beloved Daughter, Christian  
prayer turned Mecca. Sun scripture summers in Mattapan.  
Lightskinned, Mother.

Daughter daughter. Small bright eyed, Spanish tounge, Arab  
prayer, patchwork. New England storms and heat. Oldest of  
7. Small apartment chalk, powdery on pavement. Empanada  
dinners, strange side stares, white discomfort, and she is  
growing into her skin digging through her past brown as the  
tree bark. Daughter daughter beloved daughter, soy yo.



## Completion

### Candace Arthuria Williams

Aretha had always been a good writer. Everybody said so. She grinned when she read the word “Outstanding” at the top of her essay. But then she heard the teacher giving a long list of publishers to a blond girl. *Why not me?* she wondered. *Didn't I get an A, too?*

After college, she was hired as a management trainee, an ambiguous designation that didn't amount to much. There were ten others in her group with high opinions of themselves. For years, she competed in a race she could not win. But in spite of her saddened heart, Aretha did well at the things that were expected.

Then came marriage—another losing proposition. After putting her husband through school, the outward appearance was success. Three kids later, Aretha conceded that something was terribly wrong. As the years rolled on, they were all doing great, according to their own expectations. A doctor, a lawyer, and a CPA who made more than the other two combined. She had admonished her children to avoid chasing money, but rather pursue what would make their hearts content. They failed to listen. It was all a sham.

Bruised and battered, this was Aretha's last stand. She would not go to his stupid dinner and sit at the wives' table. Never again. The quarrel continued for days. Finally, he grabbed her collection of stories and tossed them into the fireplace that had cost ten thousand more than the house was worth. Aretha felt her stomach descend into her knees as the life she had never lived passed before her. Thirty-seven years and five thousand six hundred twenty-two pages. Dreams, determination, and damned hard work—reduced to embers—with nothing remaining except the smell of burning paper. It was his *pièce de résistance*, the grand finale of a well-orchestrated campaign—the climactic stench that was too much to bear.

She asked God to remove her from the pain. But He took too long. The next day, she did it herself. Aretha had finally written the end. The last Chapter. Her lifelong work was completed.





**WOMEN**  
*and* **LEADERSHIP**



## More Power to Women, Lord Knows We Have Earned It Gasheri Mundia

Growing up, there were things that my parents told me that stuck with me, like a soundtrack, playing throughout my journey from childhood to womanhood. My mother told me what her mother had told her and that is to never rely on a man. And my father in his quiet but authoritative voice, constantly told me, “Mami, you can be anything that you want to be.” He also expected me to get a university degree because that way, I would have more options. I took what my parents said to mean that being in a position to choose our paths is power, education is power as is financial stability.

But I find that we live in a society where, as women, having that power is not always encouraged or approved of. And so to fit into that society, some women give up their power. I experienced this when I joined university. There I saw gender roles being played out to the detriment of the women. And this is something that would follow some of them into their marriages and would have them giving up their jobs, promotions, opportunities to further their learning and so on, not because they wanted to but because it would be expected of them; an expectation that would not and is usually not extended to the men. And by giving up this power, these women put themselves at the mercies of the men. And if those men chose to treat them badly, since the women gave up their power, their options would be limited.

I grew up watching my mother work five days a week at her civil servant job. She was also our gardener, lovingly tending to our yard and bougainvillea fence. Once that was done, as a qualified veterinarian, she would stock up on the tools of her trade, including this heavy artificial insemination liquid nitrogen container and walk from client to client, as needed. She grew to a point where she owned two agrovets and even went back to school. As a child, she made it look easy but looking at it with the eyes of an adult, wearing all those hats was anything but. For her though, that was her power. She relentlessly pursued it and our family is the better for it.

The path that my mother and others like her chose is not easy. Because being a woman means being in a constant and never-ending battle between what you want to do and what society expects of you. And every day, women have to choose which battle they will take on. Some women tap out early and give in for the sake of peace, give up their power, and fit into society’s mold. I do not blame them. Or maybe they are not really tapping out; maybe fitting in is their power. All I can say is more power to all those women fighting these battles every day, Lord knows they have earned it.



## I Was Born

Amoafowaa Sefa Cecilia

I

I was born  
I was born a seedling to pose as a tree  
To feed a dozen mouths  
Like manna with a deviation of long lasting

II

I was born  
I was born a spear in a prayer clenched palms  
Seen as a nuisance and grew as a blessing  
After weathering storms  
...and changing forms

III

I was born  
I was born a hidden rainbow in a thunder  
And grew a little wonder whose surrender  
...was sought by villains  
Who always turned fans

IV

I was born  
I was born to a world of passion  
My blood a working trouble  
My bones, malleable but unbending to terror  
To help win wars long unwon  
Before I was born

V

I was born  
I was born a trophy in filth  
...a bully target among hyenas  
...a sore on a rotting skin  
...a solution among problems  
And now I live a miracle  
Passions driving my actions  
All pains forgotten  
Making me glad I was born  
Born to lead



**Morgan Lett** is a thriving, black millennial mother, writer, and creator. Morgan finds inspiration in daily life experiences as a black woman. Morgan lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Christie A. Cruise, Ph.D.** is an author, educator, and social justice advocate. In 2019 she released her first book, *It Don't Hurt Now: My Journey of Self-Love & Self-Acceptance*. Her poetry and self-portrait photography has been published in *Remington Review*, *Gallery & Studio Arts Journal*, and *Sunspot Literary Journal* (forthcoming).


**Susan Mwangi** is a Kenyan storyteller with a deep interest in all things creative. She enjoys creating and consuming art, crafts and literature. Words fascinate her above all else - their power to form, misinform, deform, reform and transform minds and hearts.

**Rev. Greta Sesheta** is author of a CD and manual entitled "Calling in the Circle: Peace and Power through Prayer and Meditation," "Journal for the Journey" with *Transformational Signposts and GPS\* (Guiding Principles of Spirit)*, "Poems to Wake Up To," and soon to be released "Kitchen School."

**Fiske Nyirongo** is a Zambian Writer based in Lusaka, Zambia. She writes both fiction and nonfiction. She is a 2020 Pen African Writers Resident. Her work centers on narratives about Zambian women, children and queer people.

**NyarSimba Simba** writes about a variety of topics like history, emerging topics like space and climate related topics, observances, fiction and non-fiction, plus humorous articles.

**Marcella S. Meeks** has been writing since 1988. Her work has appeared in *Authorship*, *National Writers Association*, *Primary Treasure*, *The Guide Magazine* and *Our Little Friend*, *Smarty Pants for Kids*, *Funds for Writers*, *First Writer Newsletter* and *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, to name a few.



**Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni, Ph.D.** is a creative writer from Kenya. She has published poetry and short stories aimed at sensitizing youth on various issues of importance to African societies including gender issues and positive cultural practices. Recently retired, her dream is to write for her grandchildren about days gone by.

**Eisha A. Mason's** writing is intimate, raw and spiritual. She weaves together the personal and communal, spiritual and political, the relationship between love and struggle. She is always asking: How do we heal? How do we love? How do we defeat injustice and create beauty in our lives and the world?


**Benuyenah Patricia Rejoice Akosua** is a Ghanaian educationist, published writer, poetess, Fulbright International Leaders in Education Program Fellow, National Treasurer of GATE, and member of the Ghana Association of Writers. Patricia co-authored *IATEFL Global Issues SIG (GISIG) Creating Change: Global Issues in Africa (2020)*.

**Edith Adhiambo Osiro** is a writer with a passion for all things words and an insatiable appetite for the art of storytelling. Born and bred in Kenya, she seeks to fit in a world of stories. She writes creative fiction and non-fiction, plays and when the stage is right, acting.

**Ashla C. Hill Roseboro, Ph.D.** is assistant professor of communications media at Alabama State University. Her research areas study the intersections of women in media and digital media. She founded a television show on a local NBC Comcast station in Virginia. She has served on community and state boards.

**Rozerth Rosemary Mensah** was born a twin in Kumasi, Ashante Region in Ghana on 26 October 1968. She loves writing and has numerous works unpublished for lack of funds. She is single, a vegetarian, has great sense of humor and looks forward to publishing her works.

**Regina Greathouse** is an African American poet and self-published writer from Montgomery, Alabama. Her inspiration for writing came from finding an outlet for certain life experiences. The author's belief is that when one has certain God-given gifts that they cannot only encourage others, but also onself.



**Achieng Nyar Duro** is a Woman of Letters from Nairobi, Kenya. Having taken her first bic to penmanship at adolescence, her mother would say she has been writing since the moment she tasted the earth's space. Now in this life, she uses the written word to express what she sees, breathes and experiences, through poetry, spiritual understanding, short stories and so much more.

**Christine Amolo Nyotta** is passionate about writing, singing and acting. Writing for her has been a way of expressing her emotions, thoughts and a form of communication. Her first poem, "DEAR FAILURE", was published by *Writers Space Africa* magazine on the theme of Failure. When she's not writing, she's doing outdoors activities such as hiking, bicycle riding and swimming.

**Betty Pierre** is a Haitian American poet and social worker for 30 years. She published her first poetry collection *Babel* in 2007 and is writing a new book of poems, *Nothing in Isolation* to be published in 2021. Blending heritage, activism, languages and history, she creates unique thoughtful provoking poems.

**Candace Arthuria Williams** began her career in Marketing Communications. Currently, she writes short fiction and essays in an expansive range of genres. During the pandemic, Candace completed a diverse collection entitled "Very Short Stories for Very Busy People." Her objective—capture readers' imaginations without consuming too much of their time.

**Marie Johnson-Ladson** is a writer of poetry, prose and short stories from New Jersey. She has a passion to find beauty, fiction and reality in the world we live in. She loves to do photography, listen to music and has been published in *Ben Speaks* and *Spillwords*.

**StellaLouise** pays homage to ancestors. Her poignant references aid in the visual and visceral nature of her poems. *You can dance, sing, cry and weep on a page and take others with you: Truth Shots, Tubman Chasers & Ida B's Well* is due out in February 2021.

**Mùthoni wa Gichùrù** is a Kenyan author. She has written several young adult novels, children's story books and short stories. Mùthoni was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize 2015 and Africa Book Club prize 2018. She is the Coordinator for AMKA's space for women writers Kenya.



**Mercy Mkhana Simiyu** is a Kenyan storyteller in Kampala, Uganda. Her stories & prose are inspired by her adventures from working in Ethiopia, Liberia, Kenya, Uganda and the United States. To pay her taxes and feed her son, she works in public health tech innovation.

**Candace Nicholas-Lippman** is currently starring in the Lionsgate series BLINDSPOTTING. Previous acting credits include Good Trouble & In The Next Room. The Fall of 2019 marked Candace's Off-Broadway debut in her one woman show, A Rose Called Candace, as part of the United Solo Theatre Festival in New York City.

**Sandra Nelson** loves rhythm, especially, the savory, sweet deliciousness of Black Women's words. A wife, mother, grandmother, and retired Nursing Professor, Sandra is 72 years old; the proud echo of a Southern, gritty, faith-filled, story-telling African-American family. Her completed manuscript is entitled *Somebody's Calling My Name*.

**Asiyah Herrera** is 18 years old, she was born in Cambridge Massachusetts and has resided in Boston her whole life. Between the ages of sixteen and seventeen she wrote five novels and edited them the following year. Asiyah is best known however for her poetry; she is a part of three forthcoming publications including the IWWG Mentorship publication titled *Heels into the Soil: Stories and Poems Resisting the Silence*.

**Gasheri Mundia** is an aspiring writer and poet from Nairobi, Kenya. She finds that things make more sense to her when she writes them down. She is excited about her writing journey and cannot wait to see where it leads her. Find her on WordPress at <https://knightlessjules.wordpress.com/>

**Amoafowaa Sefa Cecilia** is a Ghanaian from Kwahu in the Eastern Region. She is a prolific writer, blogger and teacher. Her versatility in poetry and prose has won her many dedicated followers on [www.amoafowaa.com](http://www.amoafowaa.com). She believes in writing to impact souls in any way possible. She is the author of *Poetry Excursion on an African Mind* and the critically acclaimed *Ashawo Diaries*.

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