

NEW DAWN

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**Anthology of Writing from SABLE Litfest - Literary Festival for the
MBOKA Festival of Arts, Culture and Sport**

Cover Artwork:

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Editor: Tanyaradzwa Guvi

Publisher: SABLE LitMag

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Collated from Mboka 2017 and Mboka 2018

Published Summer 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Pieces of Mboka in one package; a taste of Gambia from different tongues across the continent and diaspora in poetry, prose and interviews. The first *New Dawn* anthology brings you the colour, vibrancy and spirit of Mboka Festival of Arts Culture and Sport in The Gambia. Following issues will be published in Wolof and or Mandinka and English.

MBOKA – ONE FAMILY, ONE AFRICA

By Anni Domingo

Mboka, new family, new friends. We drive along to places with names that roll off our tongues, Farafina, Wassau Stone Circles, Janjanbureh, Juffureh, Kunte Kinte Island. Walk through the market, colours bouncing in the sun, bargaining for cloth, cowrie bracelets and bags. Travel in ferry, canoe, yellow-green taxis, buses dodging people dodging animals. We slow almost to a halt to allow cows to amble across the road, and goats with their kids gamble with death. Donkeys with heads bowed low pull the weight of people, the weight of the country, the weight of Africa, on their backs. Lay down your burden like the monkeys, my totem, swinging high above, calling out *come play, come snatch and run, run, run.*

Mboka, One family in Wolof. Mboka Festival of Arts and Culture has brought us all from Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Barbados, England, to the red dusty road of The Gambia - to Africa. I walk into the coolness of hotels, Senegambia, Djeliba, Djembe, unquestioned although the sun is darkening my skin into Gambian blue black. I blink at the blueness of swimming pools cooling white bodies burning in the heat of the day. No *toubab*, me. I blend with my cousins, body and soul. One Art. One Culture. One family.

Mboka, one family. Listen to the rhythm of Africa, the kora, the drums, the balafon. Kankurang uttering piercing cries, wielding machete, dancing the masquerade. Youssou N'dour leads me into the dance. The sounds of Africa bathe me. Washing away the lies, leaving a truth that is hard to swallow. So, eat, eat, eat, yassa, benachin, domoda. Drink my fill of ginger, lemon, red wonjo, pale brown baobab juice. Eat, drink and feed my heart. I swallow Africa. It fills my mouth with words written in the air for me to capture and inhale. Stories of loss. Lives and hopes.

Mboka, one family, one Africa. I breathe in the dust and it tickles my throat. It blows into my ears, my eyes and up my nose. Red dust covers my skin. The sand pushes between my toes as I sink into a yoga pose and wait for the sunrise. I lift my arms to reach for the sun and pray for all those who journeyed the middle passage, and for those who were left behind. I watch the ebb and flow of the ocean that washed the dust of home from my ancestors' feet. From such a beach, chained

and branded like cattle, they were dragged away. I hear their voices, their cries. Their spirits have returned to tell of their rage at the injustice of slavery.

As the heat of the day wanes, sounds fade into silence and sink into the dust. The setting sun turns the sky rage red, burnt orange, and ginger yellow, before it fades, throwing shadows into the ocean. In the eerie silence silhouettes reach out to dance with the trees. Cries rise from the ocean bed, calling, calling, awakening voices hidden within, touching my soul. Remember? I do not remember what I do not remember. I do not remember the pain of not knowing. All I know is that the ocean has brought me home – Mboka. One family. One Africa.

TANJE VILLAGE MUSEUM

By Dorothea Smartt

I.

breathing in the harmattan haze
here in The Gambia some years ago

young children excited at seeing a van
loaded with visitors – running behind

shouting “pens!”, “pens!”, “pens!”
on the road from Banjul to Tendaba

passing through the country’s red soil
tall women with head balanced basins

towering provisions tied-in with cloth
seasonal dust sifted on skeletal trees

every now and then cerise bouganvillia
bursts open leaves to scorching sunlight

those bleating voices walking to school
in the pre-dawn? - Tendaba village goats

II.

Mboka family parted by borders and ocean
swept together in Serakunda market place

sharing tastes; a ladle cradles blackeye peas
crushed moulded dropped sizzling in oil

hot akara patties eaten with familiarity
like skittish Gambian sheep prompting

visions of the Barbados Blackbelly running
over the open limestone cliff tops at St Lucy

where the same diaspora dust coats all.

I AM BLACK AND DIVINE

By Isatou Alwar Graham

The Black Lives Matter Movement moulds this Poetry.

The struggle against racism will never be a joke but a perpetual value.

For I am black and Divine, the black night that divides the earth in heavenly equation

My blackness beams the sky; unfolding starry moonlights.

I am the singular ink of purity reducing God's words into Holy Books

And the black liquid that wrote Moses' Ten Commandments.

I am the Jewish black Tefillin of biblical adage; bound as symbol of divine protection
on their arms and heads frontal.

I am the black veil that draped the holy Kaaba in Mecca

And the black turban of Mufti's pride; I am Black and Divine.

I am black and phenomenal, the trophy of all music and sports.

The sensation, pulse and heartbeat of the athletic track: **Usain Bolt**

The jewel of the basketball track: **Jordan**

The legend of football famous; **Pele**

The heavy weight boxing champion of all time: **Ali**

The diamond of the tennis court: **Serena Williams**

I am black and legendary, the apex of freedom fighters tipping the scales; **Mandela**

I am the embodiment of a walking Bible and pacifist tearing down

the barriers of racism: **Martin Luther King**

I am black and hospitable, the most charitable and wealthiest King of all time: **Mansa Musa**

I am the political Personality who touched the unreachable star;

whose name fills the earth and the name he bore is: **OBAMA**

I am the milky galaxies of black divas and super star musicians of Hollywood fame.

Lo! The soul lifting music themes and heavenly vocals

Shaking the world: **Youssou N'dour** and **Sona Jobarteh**

I am black and phenomenal, the toast of Buckingham Palace: **Princess Megan**

Your sole TV billionaire and celebrity: **Oprah**

I am the glory of Egypt pyramids and sphinxes; the Bantu looking: **Abu Simbel**
I am black and universal, the black gown that robed the learned litigating your disputes
The black colour that dignified those historic swearing-in ceremonies
and solemnized your funerals with dignity.

I am the black liquid that enhances your beauty and blackens your greys
Sparks your eyes, beautifies your lashes and shapes your brows.
I am black and universal, your wakeup coffees and teas. I am that sweet honey
Vigorously energising your fatigued souls
I am that heavenly gift of romantic delights and children joy,
I am black and universal.

MBOKA MEMORIES

By I-Sis

Mboka lured me to The Gambia

Inviting, smiling coast of West Afrika.

Perhaps this soil was home to my foremothers' foremothers,
fathers and brothers. Perhaps red dust paths carried them too,
from home to field, to temples, shrines, and fishing boats.

What if they, like me, communed with nomadic cows and goats?

Mboka-shaped memories: Of bountiful roadside vendors,
beautiful babies wrapped and carried by back.

Of predecessors, who like me, walked along unpaved tracks.

Cowries and kola nut intrinsically anchor me, spiritually and physically.

Mboka introduced me to determined, resourceful women at stalls in Bakau,
by 'turntable', 'traffic lights' and in Kololi. Strong-minded women
like my Mother's Mother, Great-Grand Mother, I imagine them to be.

Hips, thighs and sculpted calves concealed by layers of colorful cloth:
indigo, tie-dye and batik with heads wrapped chic.

Studious schoolgirls in bright shirts and matching hijab.

Serrekunda market where street art is the barter.

Sistas bonding whilst buying fruit, earrings, sandals and fabric.

Glimpsing the cinematic: a stylish woman calmly stands
clasping a composed chicken in her hand.

Mboka conjures images of palm trees, men catching a breeze
sitting under Baobab trees.

Handmade beds crafted from bamboo adorn the highway.

Sweet tasting oranges, mangos, pineapples, and papayas
and my favorite little bananas. *Mboka* – land of flourishing
home-grown crops, groundnut, cassava and creamy cashews roasted
and carefully carried on heads: *only 50-dalasi Sista*.

Green taxis, town fare for tourists, but it's yellow taxis and gelli-gellis at 8-dalasi for us returnees.

Mboka lens, silhouettes of the unfamiliar familiar vegetation native to my homeland along unpaved streets.

Red dust haze sprayed legs, sandy feet.

Caravans of radiant, resilient melaninated women, elder, younger, new mothers, daughters.

Full bodied, buxom, athletic, frail, slim and small framed.

Dignity and pride in the rhythm of their stride.

Poverty evident at every junction and wayside.

Sanctification of wealth, a global problem, vile phenomenon, worldwide we have a serious problem while obscene wealth is justified.

Mboka, visions of the Gambia, carmine-tinted canvass calling to me across the Atlantic.

I was desperate, near frantic to leave Ingran's freeze.

Once Senegambia,

for 400 years she was part of the great Mali Empire.

Frontiers where carved by the knife of English colonial butchers to impose artificial borders, in 1894.

Independent since 1965,

but far too many can't thrive, they only just survive.

And now the new threat is tourism, yet another form of colonization.

Mboka led me to my ancestral coast.

Balaphone and kora melodies remind me of the griot bardic tradition sited in this ancient civilization. I walked upon shell-coated beaches once tread by Afrikans free and enslaved.

I heard unrested souls as they wailed from beyond the waves.
My lineage called to me in languages I can no longer recall,
was it Mandingo, Wolof, Jola, Serer, Aku, Manjago,
Serahuli, or Fulani?
Fatou, Amadou, Omar and Musa, Aminata, Penda and Suma
Bah, Njie, Jallow, Jobarteh,
Jobe, Sangyang and Suso.

Mboka's mission: Pan-Afrikan literary unity, revering our ancestry.
Gathering a commingle of artists, actors, bloggers, poets, producers and writers.
Imruh Bakari's precious words, tumbling like gemstones of wisdom
chanting down the system. Celebrating and commemorating our Sista, Buchi Emecheta.
Enthralling and enquiring young minds, savouring the sight of Dorothea.
Topnotchpoet the incredible Mr LKJ. Jeliya music by Tunde Jegede.
Lyrically nourished by Natalia, Elephant Woman's understudy, Ms Molebatsi.
One Afrikan People, seeking to reclaim ROOTS, customs, faith and identity.

Mboka, venerating OUR creativity,
OUR origins, OUR history.
Nurturing our continent's future.
Innovative, productive, revolutionary lyrics,
a transformative process.
Our Destiny manifests in WE.
Cloud Collective, voices of youth speaking truth,
confronting and exploring societal taboos.
Lyrical catharsis, saturated with astute political analysis,
by The Gambia's finest, the adventurous poet, Immortal X.

Mboka, like the roots of an elephant tree, magnificent, strong,
intertwined branches traverse the Afrikan diaspora.

Sankofa - looking to the past, reaching back to find remnants of the self, left behind.

Encouraging imagination to thrive.

We the survivors of enforced migration, OUR obligation to co-create the vision.

We OURSELVES, components of the solution.

We each have a responsibility to implement a legacy,

a blueprint for what we build, how we live,

to construct OUR own narrative,

use OUR words to paint an image in which Afrika's potential is fulfilled.

WHY DID YOU COVER THE FACE OF THE INNOCENT?

By Bintou Sanneh

Oh Lord, where are the faces of the innocent people. Where can we find the faces of the innocent people? They are nowhere to be seen simply because they are all covered.

When you visit some clinics and discover that nurses are not taking good care of the patients, especially the pregnant women and the young children, at the end of the day who will want to go to that clinic? Everyone will have the concept that all the nurses in that clinic are all the same. At the end of the day where can we find the faces of the innocent people? Nowhere simply because they are all covered.

THE CONSTANT MAMA AFRICA

By Essa Bah

In the land of the sub-Sahara, long, long ago when the moon was not bright, grandparents lit fires in the middle of the compound and gathered their grandchildren and narrated stories to them and sometimes taught them how the civilised of Kantora live. If the grandchildren fall asleep, their mothers take them to their huts to sleep.

One night, Kisima was sitting with his elder brothers and sisters and their grandmother, Jainaba discussing the Waanaabaa Circumcision ceremony, the incoming male circumcision that took place every seven years in Kantora. Kisima was curious and impressed about the topic and he continued asking his grandmother, "is it an obligation for every clan to take their male children for circumcision?"

"Of course, it is a must my child, don't you know it is pride for every clan especially for us the grandparents?" Kisima asked again, "what about the females, are they not part of the circumcision?" Grandmother Jainaba nodded in her pillow and glanced at Kisima and began to speak.

"My child, don't you know, taking a girl child for circumcision is as bad as killing a million new born babies? It is taboo, female circumcision is unacceptable in our land. There are good and bad cultures and traditions and female circumcision is a bad culture and tradition. A woman's beauty is a special gift and should not ever be tampered with. I remember when I was ten, I lost my parents. My grandmother took me to the devil clan and I was forced and taken to the 'Ngansinbaa' (in Mandingo, this means the mother responsible for circumcising the female child and the women who do not pass through circumcision). I was circumcised. That sorrowful and painful day I lost so much blood and I became unconscious for a very long time. When I woke up, I saw myself in a very thick Forest and we, the initiates were sitting on the ground and some women took some very dirty water and spilt it on us. We were beaten mercilessly and heartlessly by these women; they were telling us that this place is a place of correction and showed the young women and girls how to be disciplined and how to respect their elders and their husbands if they are taken to their husbands houses. I suffered a lot with my mates; we were helpless, defenceless and powerless. Even my grandmother was part of this group of women who were punishing us. My mood and trauma over took me. I could not even enjoy the tears that were rolling down my face with agony, nobody was there for me and my colleagues. It was not a correction centre, rather a punishment centre. There were fifty of us at the start of that sorrowful time, but only fifteen went back to their families, all the rest joined our ancestors. After the death of my colleagues, the gods of our land were angry and eventually punished the people of the devil clan by showering hunger and disease on them. The devil clan finally fell and now no man is allowed to live in that land of evil. Because of the circumcision I lost three children for my husband and thanks to the gods your father was lucky to survive as my only child.

The grandmother lifted her two hands and placed them on her head feeling scared and said,

“Do not ever raise this topic again, otherwise the gods of our land will not be happy. “

MOONSHINE IN BALACLAVA

By Patricia Foster McKenley

You ever 'ear them talk 'bout moonshine?

My sister who resides in Jamaica
asks me with zeal in her voice.

My south London *Yes. I have;*
stilted, a pitch higher than hers.

I listen to her describe how the moon

leaves its silver paint stain wide and long, over
expanses of open land, where street lights
are minimal. How upturn-faced folk

are always mesmerized by this cascading
light and watch the splendor from verandahs,
while sharing *St Elizabet' parish* folklore of

the rolling calf with pig snout and clinking
chains around its girth, or of the grey-stone 'duppy' church
with vague faces and eerie laughter behind broken windows.

I imagine my sister with long thick shiny black plaits,
a few thousand miles away from younger
London siblings, creating stories and memories

to tell us when we eventually meet. Tales
flit through my head, buoyant recounts from
my parents' childhoods told zestfully

to their London born offspring, hungry
for sagas of 'back home'. Here, the crickets'
chorus rides in time on the beat

of the night stillness. The constant buzzing
soothes. The multiple stars hang
and glisten; their intense brightness

belies their distance. Now the moon reprises
the overseeing role of the day's rainbow.
The air is clammy. Silhouetted breadfruit leaves wear

flecks of silver light. The moonshine forms stripes
on my sun-dark skin and is delicate
on concrete stairs leading down from the verandah.

The moon's spindly silver fingers beckon
my head skywards. Wispy angel wing clouds,

visible and prominent near the moon's splendid
aura, haloed around its gleaming, circular mass.
Somewhere a young man calls out, *Donna* in the night

amphitheatre. Teenage Donna answers with distorted
inaudible cry. *Where are you?* Young man shouts back.
A dog barks in short bursts; orchestra of night sounds

around me, the moon is the spotlight.
The TV sound inside my sister's house
becomes distant

as my gaze into the night grows longer,
my nephew counts the stars;
by nine he is smiling and breathless.

I stand with sister and nephew,
our silence absorbs the last traces of moonlight
which fades, hides behind silkened clouds, re-appears

again, as I gather new stories to tell
on my return to cold, mundane nights
under a lacklustre shine.

FEMME COUVERT

By Musa Bah

The sun was just setting, and the darkness of the night was setting in. Fatou, standing in the courtyard, was humming in a low tone. The words were undecipherable but carried great meaning to an 'experienced ear'. She tried to tune out the noise coming from inside the house where her many siblings were shouting as if their lives depended on it. Slowly, in rhythm with the singing birds, she started humming a sad and melancholic tune. She had a lot to say but didn't have the platform. Born to poor parents who fancied themselves 'religious conservatives', she was being given away to a local marabout as a wife. She had not even been consulted on the issue. She had seen the man come to her father the other day but didn't know what it was about. The only indication from him was when he came out and saw her, his chubby face turned into a smile. That brought a sad smile of her own to her face. The man was stout, with a goatee who dressed like an Arab Sheikh who had lost his herd of camels. What could he want from me? And for what did she do to deserve such a benign smile from him? Fatou had an intense distrust of the man. She once heard him preach to a group of the villagers and said that girls should never be sent to school. They should get married and serve their husbands obediently. According to him, that was God's instruction, and that of His Prophet.

She had always avoided even making eye contact with this 'ignoramus' as she feared that he might find a way of convincing her father to withdraw her from school and marry her off. She knew that there was a real possibility of that, seeing that her father always wanted to portray an image of being "righteous and holy" who wouldn't want to be seen as being westernized.

Fatou had envisioned herself completing her education as she was in the sixth grade (six kilometers away from her village) and developing into a mature young woman. She wanted to be that woman who helped young girls who were in trouble but here she was at sixteen and having her own problems to sort out. She had racked her brain repeatedly to seek a solution to the problem but there seemed to be no way out.

'Fatou, what's wrong?' Binta Faal, her mother asked looking worried. Fatou could make out her mother's features in the dim light from the receding sun. There were wrinkles on her face which

spoke of the years of hardship she had gone through. She had been married for twenty-nine years in this very remote and deprived community. Throughout Fatou's life, she had never seen her mother sit for more than two hours without having to do one chore or the other. She was either cooking, pounding, or laundering clothes. Fatou remembered how her mother would get up as early as five o'clock to pound cous, and from it prepare the breakfast porridge most mornings, and take it to the farm where her husband and the boys were. It was a two kilometre walk and could be tiring. Sometimes, on her way from the farm, she would branch into the bush and fetch firewood. The bundle of firewood increasing her load of the bowls and the baby on her back, she would rush home. The lunch cannot - should not be late less her husband beat her up, again!

She would return home and immediately go to the kitchen and prepare the lunch which also had to be taken to the farm. Whilst she was at it, she would be washing the bowls she had just brought back from the farm and laundering the heap of clothes which usually looked like they had come from the entire village. By the time she completed all of these, she would run out of water. She would then take a pan and rush to the well which was half a kilometre away. There she would have to draw the water from a twenty-seven metre deep well. She would fetch drinking water, fetch water for laundry, cooking, and even for the men to take their bath in the evening.

Her mother moved closed to her and placing her hand on Fatou, patted her. She understood all what was going through Fatou's head. She felt sorry for her only daughter whom she had hoped would escape the trauma she herself had gone through.

"Come inside," she said, "it will be all right."

INTERVIEWS WITH MBOKA FAMILY

By Debbie Golt

“We send that message to the world, we are all one, the world can learn from Gambia. That is why in Gambia we call each other brother and sister. We have Mandinka, Wolof, Fulani, Jolla ... We are one family.” ‘African Lions’ local traditional percussion band. Indeed, MBOKA is the Wolof expression for Family/Connection.

My role was to create an audio-recording with interviews and sound-recordings. I spoke with as many people as I could – delegates, participants, trade fair stall-holders, local musicians.

Here I share some visiting artists and delegates’ answers to my first question amalgamated with some other comments.

Why did you come to the festival?

James Murua: I knew fellow Kenyan Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o was involved in 2017 so it was a no brainer. As a literary-blogger I have my ear to the ground and delight in spreading the word to my 5000+ monthly followers. As an urban animal with no tribal allegiances, the Mboka notion of inclusion strikes a chord. I noticed people wearing 'Gambia has Decided' teeshirts and I thought Yes! Gambia has decided to be an awesome literary space!

A highlight? The tributes – Bra Willie (Keorapetse Kgositsile), Buchi Emecheta, Musa Diallo, Dr. Raphina Philott Almeida – listening to people read the work, really easy to cry. Bra Willie was to be buried the next day – really raw – one of most important poets to come out of the continent. Not only was his work really brilliant – the way he was able to connect with people on the continent and diaspora and influence everybody – this is unique to cross both.

Natalia Molabatsi: I had the pleasure of being invited as a poet on the programme, I’d met Kadija at different festivals and conferences in the continent and I am working intermittently on a South Africa edition of Sable Lit Mag. South Africa’s blooming with spoken-word poets and poetry-writers.

Our Poet-Laureate just died; through him a generation of younger poets became inspired by poets in exile, by women, experiencing political activist poets, a broadened landscape of what we can write about and perform. I'm lucky to be amongst a group of women poets talking about different issues, empowering people, raising awareness of white supremacy and of white and male privilege, and becoming able to crush it, ownership of women, of our bodies, minds and queerness – a whole array of important issues to bring forth – women bold, brave and intelligent enough to bring them to the forefront. We live these issues and in performance, poems wear us and we wear them.

Femi Elofuwujo, jr: I had to accept the invite! Kadija and I have been in discussion for several years regarding working together and the opportunity arose with the second edition of Mboka with an ambition to direct a related play. I advised that it would make sense to use this year as a reconnaissance trip. One of the things to do, especially as a director, is to research the world of a play and get under its skin which can take up to a year for most fruitful results. This visit was like a crash course enabling me to milk my presence - talking to locals, going out to location, participating in the festival through attending and networking with all directly involved. When you go to a place like The Gambia, I implore anyone to seek that community which is far off the beaten track, off the path of commercial living up to the Western world - find where real people and culture are being celebrated.

Dorothea Smartt: I was looking forward to returning to the Gambia after many years; Kadija is trying to establish an important Festival and I wanted to support the effort and enjoy the opportunity to connect with writers from Africa. I took away a strong sense of comradeship and support among the writers present.

Anni Domingo: I wanted to be part of the Festival that Kadija had put together from the moment I first heard about it. I felt it was such an achievement and wanted to support her. I also wanted the opportunity to take the workshop on Shakespeare that I have done all over England, Europe and the USA, to my continent; to work with Gambia's young people, and to show how drama can be used as an important educational tool. On a personal note I had never been to The Gambia and was very interested in seeing how close it is culturally to Sierra Leone, my country.

Gambians have always travelled to Sierra Leone for education but during the war, things in Sierra Leone changed and many found refuge in Gambia. I wanted to go and see the place that had been so welcoming to my people, including my brother and his family.

Olusola Olaleye: I had never been to The Gambia before. Mboka is a new festival organised by Kadija, an amazing opportunity and I wanted to be part of it. I wanted to work with young people with Special Educational Needs as I know that drama as a concept, as an educational tool, is not well represented on the African Continent in general. I wanted to be part of the change. I have previously worked in South Africa with visual-arts as an educational tool. Arts-education in general and particularly for children with physical or mental disabilities is not highly represented here because obviously some governments aren't trying to make sure state education meets people's needs, especially in rural areas. This was part of my desire to be part of the festival – to stretch and expand the remit for literature as a community engagement tool.

I-sis: I was drawn by the idea of being in Africa where my foremothers and fathers originated, and I was enticed by the idea of performing on African soil. The West African coast is significant spiritually, historically. Although I don't know where our ancestors walked, we know that many were taken from Gambia. The culture is so strong, the Kora, Djembe I love African world music and Gambia is the place where Sona Jobarteh comes from. Come to Mboka, experience Sankofa!

**FIVE YEAR ENGLAN PLAN
(Extract)**

By Musufing

An de vicar in de pulpit seh to the newly arrived
'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me'

Dem clasp dem coat fi no mek e breeze and de luke-warm worshipers bruk dem spirit

These brothers and sisters of the Caribbean of Africa in dem bright attired splendour, peppered
the pews of de church, as unsure eyes looked dem over

'John 14 Chapter 1'

Doroti and Renford, their small children huddled beside claspin dem kerchief
wonder silently as dem look up at de vicar. Dem fi keep the faith even when
likkle white pickney, wid dirt an dis maarnin jam smudge pan dem face, spit pan dem

Even doe land lady chow dutty wata, an slam ar door brapse!

'But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also'

Big man like Renford fi tun im cheek and smile when im hear 'the black wog's back' when im
punch een pan de time clock at work

'Let us join in song, hymn number 86: Let Us with A Gladsome Mind'

RE-MEMBERED WARMTH

(Extract from) Numbi Arts/ Sandele Arts Group poem

where did we come from?

Dengaa Fateh Sen Aadabii

Hait yuh Barry

Waa African ngaa

where are we going?

a heavy pounding darkens the mood:
memories of division, pain and despair

heat

building

no turning the other cheek.
our existence means resistance.

heat

building

we have been around forever
in the wind, through the water,
across the land to the stars

heat

building

our ancestors live alongside us

Nyunn Waa Africa leing

Waa African ngaa

BREAKIN' BREAD WITH THE INNER MAN

by Alieu Bah

sometimes i sit with the wise. they show me my flaws without saying a word. if you ever sit with one of them, remember me.

i've learnt that humans are beautiful. that movements of people can change the world. that it takes humans to cry and lean on.

i have learnt that it takes goodness of heart to take action. that courage is inspired by love. that revolution is love in action.

in learning, i learnt about myself too. that my frailty is an armour to let another rise up. to ride on. to light on.

i have learnt from the wise that being human is to be in awe of the breath. that every one drawn is an edge to the eternal.

i've learnt that time is but the space in which we enact ourselves. that it only exists when we are conscious of it.

in learning about life i've learnt to believe in the longsuffering of the righteous. that it takes time for the moon to reach fullness.

i've learnt that we all die. that death is another part of life. another path of walking. of living. of breathing. in strange lands.

i've learnt that pain is part of life. that melancholy is holy. that holiness is the lonely dance to the peak of existence.

i've learnt that to let go is divine. to leave the table is a sacred act in times of estrangement.

i've learnt that hate is real. that it's only a thin line that separates it from love. that energy is the defining factor.

i've learnt to smile at another unknown is to show that another world is possible.

i've learnt that there are other worlds. that it's possible to bring them on. that truth is the key that opens them. that revolutionary consciousness is the door.

wa kataba `ala nafishi rahma.

THE PROMISE

By Olusola Oyeleye

The sun lowers a sleepy head on the ocean in Kololi,
Now the spirits come to play.
They take the forms of animals,
Awakening the ancient voices within.
Come monkey play
Come donkey lay down your burden for the day,
Come cow and gather in the ritual as the light dims
Come goats with your kids, come gather as Mboka begins.
One family, One Africa,
The Promise fulfilled.
Animal, vegetable, mineral
Gather to sounds of ancestral rhythms,
the drum, the kora, mbira, balafon
No space remains,
Chaotic movement, frenzied tones, shifting to serenity.
The heat drops slowly.
As the oceans' glaze makes silhouettes of the gathering,
A troupe of restless spirits by day,
Now with eerie stillness, the beasts of nations gather in the dust
Waiting.

BIOGRAPHIES

ESSA BAH

Essa Bah was born and brought up in The Gambia, West Africa. He attended the College of Professional Studies where he studied Community Development and Leadership. In May of 2017, Bah published his first book *Mission Accomplished*. Bah has most recently been working under the Gender and Child Protection Unit at Gambia police force headquarters.

MUSA BAH

Musa Bah, born in The Gambia, is a teacher at Nusrat Senior Secondary School. He is also an English Language undergraduate at the University of the Gambia. With a passion for literature, Bah has published five books so far: *The Midnight Call*, *Bechek*, *The Sledgehammer*, *The Email*, and *Everyday English*.

ANNI DOMINGO

Actress, singer, and dancer, Anni Domingo also teaches English, Drama and Creative Writing. As the Director of her company Shakespeare Link, she takes Shakespeare workshops to schools and colleges. Alongside writing workbooks for Shakespeare, her poem Empty Cradle and short story Empire Girl have been published. Her novel Breaking the Maafa Chain is to be published soon.

DEBBIE GOLT

Golt is a global music and arts consultant. She has been at the forefront of arts and music for over forty years: *Rock Against Racism*, Oumou Sangare's first UK dates, first Internet-Radio – gaialive.com, womeninmusic.org.uk. Golt's sought-after radio-show *The Outerglobe*, currently on Resonance 104.4fm/London www.resonancefm.com, takes African music, arts and wider culture as its starting-point.

ISATOU ALWAR CHAM GRAHAM

Graham, who studied Law in Malaysia and Australia, is currently working at the Attorney General Chamber's & Ministry of Justice as the Deputy Solicitor General & Curator of Intestate Estates. In 2010 she did her Chevening Fellow on Human Rights Studies at Nottingham University. Her poems have appeared in *Women Writing Africa West Africa & The Sahel* and *Black Women Writers*.

I-SIS

I-Sis, originally from Trinidad, in the Caribbean, is now based in London. She draws inspiration for her poetry from her activism and engagement with Pan Afrikan politics and campaigning against structural injustices. I-Sis engages in wordplay, playing with language, and breaking its conventions.

OLUSOLA OYELEYE

Olusola Oyeleye, a lecturer at UCA Farnham, is an award-winning writer, director and producer working in opera, music theatre, visual arts and dance. As well as being an artist educator in some of the UK's top galleries, she also has an extensive portfolio of working in arts education Her poetry has been set to music by Akin Euba and performed at both Harvard and Cambridge Universities.

BINTOU SANNEH

Bintou Sanneh, a young aspiring writer from The Gambia has recently completed her first novel. With the encouragement of her mentors and undying passion for the art form, Sanneh hopes to be published soon.

SAI MURRAY

Kazi Ruksana Begum, Laurence Case, Sulugman Darboe, Terri Edwards, Cheryl Martin, Sai Murray, Mackie Robinson, Barry Stephenson. Performed live as part of Mboka Festival in collaboration with Numbi Arts and Sandele Arts Sofola Troupe