

**NWF ANTHOLOGY**

**ISSUE #1**

**B E A R I N G  
W I T N E S S**

**EDITED BY ABU BAKR SADDIQ**

CULTIVATING  
CREATIVITY



PUBLISHED BY *NWF JOURNAL*

## **COPYRIGHT INFORMATION**

© 2024 NWF Journal

Website: [www.nwfjournal.com.ng](http://www.nwfjournal.com.ng)

## **INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

Copyright © 2024 by The Authors.

## **ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

The authors have asserted their moral rights under applicable copyright laws to be identified as the authors of this work.

## **PERMISSIONS**

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher,

NWF Journal. Inquiries concerning reproduction outside the bounds of fair use should be sent to [info@nwfjournal.com.ng](mailto:info@nwfjournal.com.ng)

**Cover Art & Design: Ibraheem Uthman**

# CONTENTS

5 Introduction

8 Every time the media talks about death, I think — Joemario Umana

9 a thousand dissolving [elegiac] — Emmanuel Umeji

11 Hourglass — Adesiyan Oluwapelumi

13 A Brief History Of Erasure — Ridwan Fasasi

15 Bunch OF Perhaps — Zaynab Iliyasu Bobi

16 Bearing Witness — Kaltum Sandiyama

17 The War Of Questions — Oladejo Abdullah Feranmi

18 Contributors' Bios

ZAKIYYAH DZUKOGI

## INTRODUCTION

In the absence of respite from relentless conflict, it is often to the power of art that the human spirit turns for comfort and expression. Poetry has stood out as an eternal sounding board for the gamut of human emotion: from the highest joy and deepest love to the darkest sorrow and despair. The anthology entitled *Bearing Witness* here offers a powerful series of poems variously documenting the terrible costs of war on individuals, communities, and societies throughout the world.

Within these pages are poems delving into the raw experiences of persons caught in the crossfire of conflict. They paint graphic pictures of lives shattered, families displaced, and trauma sustained from wars. The poets capture, with evocative imagery and words that come from the heart, how insidious violence is upon the human psyche.

For example, in one poem, the author writes:

*How does the ill confront God, life, and fellow man on the battlefield? In this conflict, where children cannot flee, how swiftly do they crawl towards God?*

These questions poignantly bring into relief some of the deep moral and existential dilemmas of those caught in the midst of violence. The poet invites the reader to reflect upon what war does to the human spirit and upon the quest for meaning in the use of suffering.

Beyond this, however, the poems also give the general impact on society as a whole because of the war. The infrastructural reduction to rubble, communal displacement, and the loss of social texture are thus talked about. The poets reflect on what happens to the entire society in order to give a full understanding of the holistically extended consequences of conflict.

Another poem, for instance, describes the devastation caused by war on a city:

*—outside, the city took every cruelty the war offered. & yet the earth is kneeling to something grievous than the war—silence.*

These lines outline a city reduced to dust and rubble, where even the earth seems to mourn the loss of life and the destruction of the natural world.

Through their words, the poets in this anthology offer unforgiving testimonies to the facts of war. They call us to witness the human cost of conflict and consider the urgent need for peace and justice. In this trust, they enable us to meet the outbreaks of empathy, compassion, and commitment to a just and equitable world.

*“no one leaves home unless home is the  
mouth of a shark you only run for the  
border when you see the whole city  
running as well.”*

*— Home, Warsan Shire*

EVERY TIME THE MEDIA TALKS  
ABOUT DEATH, I THINK — *JOEMARIO*  
*UMANA*

suppose guns stay silent | don't speak |  
don't let their spit rapture bodies like  
the final trumpets of judgement day |  
and bombs don't dig up earth like a  
thousand horses hooves in a stampede.  
Suppose a bullet is not made an orphan  
to make more orphans. Suppose bodies  
are not made to hug bodies cold as the  
metal that took them but still warm like  
the sun in a summer day. Suppose the  
difference between sunset and a body  
falling on the ground is just that and not  
light succumbing to night. Suppose life  
scares death like the endless night scares  
man and death doesn't obsess over life like  
a stalker because of man's hunger to play  
God. Suppose man knows anytime he plays  
God someone dies. Say humanity suffer no  
amnesia for mortality. Suppose we don't need  
salve for the wound or the wound at all. Suppose  
like a tornado our love for one another is strong  
enough to uproot the hate | maybe man will  
understand that war doesn't beget peace just  
grief—a deep dark gnawing quiet that makes  
life a stranger.

A THOUSAND DISSOLVING [ELEGIAC]  
— *EMMANUEL UMEJI*

you dissolved because your home shares same sharpness with the sun [] & your bodies were made of ice// because you sat on that raffia mat [] fist pillared under your jaw, wanting to explain how the war burst// what stretched it to this time// you dissolved because your adversary rebuff a ceasefire [] a cold atmosphere that will keep you all in your ice-form// you dissolved like the last prayer a man drooled during his last encounter with bullets behind a mosque in khartoum// you dissolved the way distance swallowed you up from your folks upon war-displacement// you dissolved into a song [] in the tone of a dirge// you dissolved because you don't know where the guns will start their next arrogance// you dissolved because your home is rusting on the map// you dissolved because you are a novice in this war-game// you dissolved because the news presenter forecasts the extinction of your

species after the war// you dissolved because  
time isn't healing// you dissolved because time  
isn't swallowing this war anytime soon// you  
dissolved because dissolving is the only way to  
escape the war, like an ice if the sun becomes  
too lousy with its rays// you dissolved because  
death -in some way- now taste like living// &  
because you are plagued by the allergy to  
breathe in this genocide, you dissolved

*HOURGLASS — ADESIYAN*  
*OLUWAPELUMI*

before the sky rained missiles and bombs  
before pigeons in flight forfeited their wings for the ground  
before libraries were burnt into pages of ash  
before air became a currency  
before the black mass of genocide in Gaza  
before a glossary of artillery colonized our mouths  
before olive trees razed in an arson decimating oxygen levels  
before Rafah became a museum of ruins  
before 2139 killed and 789 wounded  
before Muhammad al-Dura shot by a Israeli sniper falling  
lifeless to his father's side  
before our poets wore hearts embroidered with bullets  
before our radio and TV became a collagist of horror news  
before #freepalestine hashtags drowning Twitter's feeds  
before urns scattered abroad at doorposts  
before teargas foliated inside our lungs  
before monoliths plagued by ghosts who refused to leave  
before imploding explosives  
before barking dogs

this place was once a sanctuary

where there was no threat to being alive  
where the only language that colonized our mouths was  
laughter

where we recited sheets of sha'ir from the Quran under  
moonlight  
where the scent of green tea and strawberries seethed our  
mornings  
where the scenery outside our windows was a bouquet of  
butterflies and floating tulips  
where we played soccer on the streets of Gaza  
where only fireworks blotted our skies  
where we organized festivals without fear of hosting a funeral  
where children danced in hoops and played on swings  
where the minarets housed no makeshift graves  
where we planted chrysanthemums instead of corpses  
where our poplar trees flourished in groves instead of graves  
where flying skylarks brood our heaven

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ERASURE —  
*RIDWAN FASASI*

*"of the war in Gaza, Congo, Sudan".*

—outside, the city took every cruelty the war offered.  
& yet the earth is kneeling to something grievous than the war  
—silence.

at first, it was hummingbirds drifting out of the solemnity  
of the blue sky.

then, drones turning the blue lushness into a darkened city—  
shrapnel piercing through bodies; bombs pummeling silence  
into gravity.

On X, a man says if hope is not enough to shield a body  
against

hurt, it would make the body outlive the suffering.

mystery: if the flesh could flaunt scars as survival, what about  
the soul?

at the precipice of the war, I learnt about the grief of  
hummingbirds

—folding time backward in their mouth as if to trace back an  
escape

route out of the war. & what lullaby pricks the birds in transit?

from a distance, I could hear my mouth deciphering

the language of silence—that the body needs to be reminded  
of its grief—

that there's a girl at a refugee camp whose father

& mother & sister & brother were lured into the crevice of  
death.

Beside her, a boy asking if home  
is enough to describe the ruins they left behind.  
say, home or ruins is where his baby sister recoils from birth  
into death,  
bullets coursing through her body like orison through the  
horizon of God's ear.  
& this is how my hands plot a sad note about absence. I am  
crawling back  
into the song that once burnt my throat.  
I am clutching tight to every line in this poem—  
marking the threshold between the adjective of what qualifies  
a man as  
humane. what is left of the bullet if it chisels into a body &  
claims victim?  
on the TV, a man in suit says to war is to  
cleanse the land of its suffering. & this poem cleaved open—

**BUNCH OF PERHAPS — ZAYNAB  
ILIYASU BOBI**

*Gaza bakeries targeted and destroyed by Israeli air attacks.  
Al Jazeera, 2nd November, 2023.*

Perhaps  
no one launched the airstrike  
Perhaps  
the bakery wasn't targeted  
Perhaps  
the airstrike mistook it for a black-hole  
Perhaps  
the bread owner wasn't starving  
Perhaps  
s(he) doesn't know hunger  
Perhaps  
s(he) died not killed  
Perhaps  
the bread loaves were blood-philic.  
Perhaps  
Sharq Bakery was too old to stand  
Perhaps  
we might have gotten it all wrong  
Perhaps  
it never happened just like the media said.

**BEARING WITNESS — *KALTUM***  
*SANDIYAMA*

In the eyes of the storm  
In Gaza's rubble, a child's cry  
Echoes through the shattered sky  
A mother's grief, a father's pain  
As hope and peace are lost in vain

In Sudan's camps, a refugee's tale  
Of fleeing war, of lives set sail  
On treacherous seas, they search for shore  
Where safety dwells, and love is stored

In Congo's heart, a brutal fight  
For power and greed, day and night  
The innocent suffer, the earth does weep  
As justice falters, and hope does creep

But still, we rise, we resist, we bear  
Witness to the horrors, the scars we share  
We speak out, we stand, we hold on tight  
To the human spirit, a beacon in flight

In the eyes of the storm, we find  
A glimmer of hope, a peace of mind  
A world united, a love so true  
Where conflict ceases, and peace shines through.

THE WAR OF QUESTIONS — *OLADEJO*  
*ABDULLAH FERANMI*

What lessons do we impart to our children amidst our strife?  
How do we distinguish the hum of an airplane from the wail of  
a missile?  
How does the ill confront God, life, and fellow man on the  
battlefield?  
In this conflict, where children cannot flee, how swiftly do they  
crawl towards God?  
How do the cries of children echo like angels battling to return?  
When home lies in ruins, how do we endure the dagger of  
blood in our mouths?  
How do we challenge yesterday when tomorrow brands us  
refugees?  
If hell exists on earth, can these mouths serve as windows?  
Can tomorrow be cheaper than our lives? Do we need enough  
permission to live?

# CONTRIBUTORS' BIOS

## Joemario Umana

Joemario Umana considers himself a wildflower. When he is not creating, he is getting created. He is the author of the poetry gazelle; a flower is not the only thing that's fragile. He tweets @JoemarioU38615

## Emmanuel Umeji

Emmanuel Umeji is a creative and innovative individual with a passion for community building. As a Poet, he strives to inspire others through his work and collaborations. Feel free to customize it to fit your needs!

## Adesiyan Oluwapelumi

Adesiyan Oluwapelumi, TPC XI, is a medical student, poet, essayist & Assistant Editor of Fiery Scribe Review from Nigeria.

## **Ridwan Fasasi**

Fasasi Ridwan, Swan I, is a poet of Yoruba descent from Kaiama, Kwara State. His works are published/forthcoming on Synchronized Chaos, Afrihill Press, SprinNg, Eunoia Review, Kalahari Review, PCU, World Voice Magazine, Arts lounge and D'lit Review. He was shortlisted for the SprinNg Annual Poetry Contest '23, Splendor of Dawn Poetry Contest '23 and SOBAF Poetry Slam '23. He was also longlisted for the 2024 Akachi Prize for Literature. He tweets @Ibn\_Yusha44.

## **Zaynab Iiyasu Bobi**

Zaynab Iiyasu Bobi, Frontier I, is a Nigerian-Hausa multidisciplinary artist, poet, and licenced Medical Laboratory Scientist from Bobi. She is the author of the chapbook Cadaver of Red Roses (winner of the 2023 Derricotte/Eady Prize).

## **Kaltum Sandiyama**

Kaltum is a Student/Poet with a passion for social justice and human rights. Through her writing, she aims to raise awareness about global conflicts and the human experience. She draws inspiration from personal experiences, news, and the resilience of the human spirit.

## **Oladejo Abdullah Feranmi**

Oladejo Abdullah Feranmi, a black poet, won the 2024 Deconflating Surveillance with Safety poetry contest by Petty Propolis Inc. He was a finalist in the Hayden's Ferry Review Poetry Prize and shortlisted in the Thomas Dylan Poetry contest. His work appears in publications like Paper Crane Journal's 'Outstanding Young Poets.'

