

Poet's note

Chinwe Azubuike

It is an honour to be here, though not physically, but spiritually I feel myself amongst you all through my poems. And I hope that the purpose for which I have had to share these poems with you opens an avenue for us all to seek right from wrong, and start a chain reaction in the fair treatment and justice for women in Africa.

Chinwe Azubuike is a contemporary African Poet. She is regarded as a strong female contemporary voice from Africa, born in Lagos-Nigeria. Her origins are from Imo State and she is the first born of a family of five children. Her late father, Wisdom Azubuike served in the Biafran War and was married to Mary Azubuike, her mother. Her humble beginnings were a far cry from the literary educated class of poets- born into a relatively poor family. Over the past decade she has gradually crafted her own powerful voice and found a unique style of no-nonsense writing that comes directly from her heart. Recently she has participated in various writing groups throughout East London. Her literary development began whilst attending secondary school. She constantly viewed herself as a spokeswoman for Nigeria's deprived underclass and recognised within herself a strong sense of social justice. This is reflected in her poetry, as her work highlights the complicated issues and beauty of the people of Africa, especially the plight of women and children. The bulk of her work focus' on female issues; of love, life and torture with specific references to ethnic family traditions within West Africa. Her meteoric rise in African literary circles came about when she was invited to give a talk on female circumcision for the BBC World Service in 2004. Following on from that success she gave various readings at the Poetry Society in Betterton Place, London. She has spoken candidly on various radio stations in the Capital and her work has been published in various online publications and offline magazines in London and throughout the world. Presently, she is running a campaign worldwide for women, against the victimization and deprivation of human rights of "the Widow" in Nigeria. This issue is extremely personal to her as it is borne out of her own bitter experience when her father sadly passed away. She has written extensively on the subject with essays and poetry and intends to create a documentary in Nigeria about "Death of a Husband".

These two poems are part of my series I have been creating, growing up as a young girl in fighting the Victimization of Widows. This is an issue I have since developed a stronger interest in since loosing my father- however, I do not want this to sound very personal. My personal experience has precipitated my fight further for this course for all other women in Nigeria and Africa as a whole who have suffered this, and still going to suffer this injustice.

At the end of it all, I fight to see something done, and the thing I seek is this:

I seek a Legal framework that will protect women in their homes, communities, and states of Nigeria. A law that outlaws domestic violence and entitles them to own property and recognizes their right to inheritance. I want a Parliament that will adopt and pass on an Act.

An act that addresses archaic traditional inequalities women have faced in family relations, inheritance and ownership, bringing customary law and the constitution into closer alignment with international human rights standards.

The Act should be seen as a leap forward in regards to women's long walk to freedom.

Onwu Di

Chinwe Azubuike

She dies and...

'Oh! Take heart'

'May God comfort you'

'It's one of those things'

He dies and it's...

'Aahh!!!' 'She has done her worst!'

'Ajoo Nwanyi!'

'Amuusuu!'

On sick bed,

On wheels,

Beneath the sea,

In the air,

'She was the cause!!!'

They always say.

The other people lament

'What rubbish!'

'Such injustice!!'

But to deaf ears they fall.

They come in troops

Lazy bones in disguise

To reap where they sowed not in the name of kinship.

Day by day they saunter in, to cast your lot

And at times, battle over the remnants

Like vultures to the carcass.

Di,

Stand up!

Get up from your eternal slumber and show us your slayer

For your home is falling apart.

Your kinsmen have ravaged your house.

Your wife has become a barbarian

Made to drink the juice of your corpse

Stripped of her beauty by her skinned head

Ruffled and tossed like a culprit.

They have sentenced her to a dozen months imprisonment
In the confines of your ancestral home.
They gave her white this time to cover her nakedness.
A change from the black that used to be the uniform
And until she completes her days,
The light of the sun she dares not see again
Nor witness the joys of the world.
And when that happens,
A second wife we fear she may become.

The other people lament again,
'What rubbish!'
'Such injustice!!'
Yet to deaf ears they still fall.

Your children, we know not their fate
Chased away from your cocoon
Scattered like sheep
Destitute we fear they shall become.

Di,
If you do not arise and prove the innocence of your wife,
Then your home we fear,
Is doomed forever.

Of Widowhood

Chinwe Azubuike

Blood shot eyes from endless stream of tears
Unfathomable thoughts of denial
Questionable words to celestial bodies and gods
Irrational musings aimed at nothing

The total stripping of aided beauty
The sudden chastity commanded and demanded
From the inside to the outside
Seeming endless days of incarceration

The constant haunting dreams
Presumed doubts of 'the' occurrence
The feared bullying from kin, unbecoming

The new vacuum in our hearts and beds
The registered absence-forever,
Of 'the other half'

The final acceptance of death's handiwork.