



**Mindanao
Peacebuilding
Institute
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The
Invitation
(Up the Hills of Peace)

**And other Poems by
Julius Nzang**

***The invitation
(Up the Hills of Peace)***

*Come up to the hills of peace
Shake the quarrelling off your feet
There may still be hope for retreat
If you will only climb the gentle steep.*

*Rise up like a slithering bee
The narrow paths can set you free
No detergent can wash you clean
But at least you'll find here no mockery*

*Breathe, lay down your mask of emotions
Let's examine what heaves the commotion
What cause or provocation
This is where peace sends war on vacation*

*We've both sailed through freezing islands
Our blazing tempers lit up whole cities
Here at this table we'll try to shake hands
And hope to resolve our hidden miseries*

*Peace has a chance at this table,
If you can't climb the hill I'll bring it to you.
If it's too dark to see I can light a candle
Our lives are worth more than me and you.*

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Wars end at the table

*Then falls in line
The last to believe the thing
That all wars end at the table
Not in the place where corpses stink.
the strength of rage will soon slacken
the waves unsure will be stable
The eyes now blind will open
And yes peace alas! will be able
But I still the war drums sing.*

This book of poetry is a publication of the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute Foundation, Inc. (MPI). The author has given permission for these poems to be published on the MPI website (www.mpiasia.net).

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Drained by stains of shame and sorry

*I hope to my sins
The rest of Life may turn a blind eye
As I wonder what lies on the road never taken
forgiveness never given
from coast to coast I conquered mercy.*

*In great wars men are often mistaken
Fighting for justice with shades of peril
Though life's final pages forbade me see
I hope in this darkness my acts come crashing
At my road's end the path is still missing.*

*I'm seated, among trees of memories
triumphant in million broken trophies
Bloated praises yet freaking empty
Drained by stains of shame and sorry
I hear voices, overrunning barren plots of agony
They've come for me, how don't you see?*

*My favorite imagery: man with twisted limbs
The tip of my tongue wags faintly
In bile from a quashed bladder, bitter
Indignant!
On a piercing steel leans a fine feeling
the humbled hero who concluded great kills
Murder, death is death!
Mother, my secret heartbeat voice my fear
and though on this blade I rest as dead
My soul a wanderer has become instead
Like a gluttonous spirit with no destined end.*

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Dead man rising

*Skinned alive yet he wasn't-
the meat but they
Their uniforms reeking still
Of self consuming disdain*

*Their shame he borrowed
To lift the mist off their face
If his life must pay let it
Let them learn love once again.*

*With every flog by their hand
Their conscience cried-not him
Oh what burden they must lift
With tears they shouldn't feel.*

*His eyes closed, theirs opened
His body dropped where they stand
It's a transfer of one lesson
A dead man's victory over force.*

Borrowed enemies

*I am
Sworn to an order
I don't belong to.*

*I could stay
But these enemies aren't mine*

*Let me die
But let it be my death*

*On this earth
None is worth the debt.*

*When I leave
Do not mourn
Lay me bare in the sun*

*Away with the wind
No memory of me*

*I'm sworn yes
But this debt isn't mine.*

Brief background

When I first became actively involved in peace work as a young Cameroonian, I was confronted with the question: “Why talk peace in a country which is at peace?” Eventually I grew in the knowledge and practice of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. This deepened my understanding of the nature of conflict, hence the subtle awareness that Cameroon was a ticking time-bomb with its accumulated years of latent conflict (negative peace).

Cameroon, like every other nation, has had its fair share of socio-political tensions over its long history since independence and reunification, and people have not failed to criticize the government for its poor handling of situations at different historical points. For instance, the use of military force to crack down on protesters is what many have come to understand as the government’s major playbook. This has often been perceived by the people as intimidation and a blow to their rights to express grievances, even when doing so peacefully.

Cameroon is a bilingual country with French and English as official languages. The country is made up of 10 regions, two of which (Northwest and Southwest) have an English-speaking heritage due to partition and control of the country during the periods between and after World War I and World War II. When the two Cameroons gained independence from colonial masters France and Britain, their leaders opted for a union of mutual understanding and respect (a Federation). Later on, it was united as one nation called the Republic of Cameroon. Over time, many political activists have seen a problem in the union between English-speaking and French-speaking Cameroon, while many of the citizens have felt the dominance of the French-speaking over the English-speaking.

At the close of 2016, English-speaking lawyers and teachers protested what they saw as an attempt by the largely French-dominated government to systematically assimilate the judicial and educational systems of English-speaking regions of Cameroon into French systems. Among other issues, the lawyers protested the presence of French

judges to dispense justice in the English judicial system they had not mastered and in a language they hardly understood. Political activists seized the opportunity to demand total separation of the two Cameroons, calling for a new English Cameroon they refer to as “Ambazonia.”

As they had done in the past, the government clamped down on peaceful protesters with heavy military force. Lawyers were molested; teachers were threatened with a suspension of their salaries among other things; and university students were manhandled by some elements of the military. The government, promising to look into these allegations, formed a committee on bilingualism and multiculturalism. Many activists condemned this move as it was seen as mere propaganda.

A group of Cameroonians in the diaspora hijacked the growing “struggle” when some home-based leaders of “Ambazonia” were abducted from neighboring Nigeria while having a “high profile meeting.” They were labeled terrorists and are presently facing trial.

On September 22 and October 1, 2017, the conflict further escalated as protesters defied all odds and risked their lives by taking to the streets in several different cities and villages of the English-speaking regions. Lives were lost in confrontations with the military, and the Ambazonia cause grew stronger. Whole villages were burnt down.

That was just the beginning of the atrocities perpetrated by both sides. The common person has witnessed hell ever since. Children can no longer go to school; people have sought refuge in the bush and in neighboring Nigeria; teachers are threatened; government workers are targeted and killed; and those who don’t support the “struggle” or the use of force to achieve total separation are victimized, kidnapped and intimidated. Anyone and everyone can be a target marked by either side for elimination. Fear and insecurity have risen to fever pitch. Ghost towns have become the norm as people boycott socio-economic activities and stay indoors as an act of civil disobedience every Monday at best and at worst for days. The sound of gunshots has become an all too familiar music, and dead bodies dance to it every day

Living zombies

*Live zombies zoom in too soon!
Fiango market burst into tears-
another life lesson for recalcitrant citizens
Ambapublic messengers ransack fearlessly
a bold notice at the entrance:*

“No humans needed today;
Mondays are reserved for ghosts only”.

Keep off or be blown off!

A beast like you

See?
I'm getting better
Better at chewing stick
This is something I was never used to
But now you showed me
It always was within.

See?
I'm a better rider
I ride my horse like you do my pride
This is something I never wished I grow into
But you convince me
It always was my life.

See?
Am I not good
Good at turning you down
This is something I wish we'd understand
But now you showed me
I needed but a fight.

See?
I'm getting better
Better at using guns
This is something I never knew at all
But now you persuade me
There's not a better call.

See?
I'm asking questions
If dialogue was too small
This is something our ancestors did before
But now you showed me
I'm more a beast as you.

on the streets. It is perilous. Yet, in all this the common person stands paralyzed.

Presidential elections were held in Cameroon in October 2018 amidst such tensions. Cameroon's octogenarian president, Paul Biya, who has already held power for 36 years, won the election "marred by allegations of fraud and in which many people were too scared to vote."^{*}

Lawlessness has saturated the atmosphere of the English-speaking regions, while the few leaders of the so called "Ambazonia" in the diaspora continue to rant through social media, influencing their forces in what they call "ground zero" to combat government forces. They, too, have resorted to victimizing many of those who have an opinion other than separation, utilizing bloodshed and terror. Unfortunately, most peacebuilders in the country fall into this category of victims. On the one hand, they are constantly being intimidated by the government for teaching people nonviolent protest. On the other hand, they are accused by the separatists of being weak at best and being paid by the government at worst.

As my colleague of German origin and his family had to be relocated at some point to the country's economic capital for security purposes, many other Cameroonians have sought refuge and sent their children to school in the French regions. Meanwhile, because of our efforts to stand for peace, some of us have been threatened and lambasted. Some of my relatives have gone through the horrible experience of being kidnapped and others have lost their lives.

Voices calling for peace and nonviolence are springing up and growing gradually in different parts of the country. Young people tired of the pestilence of war are beginning to speak up; churches are planning activities geared towards preaching peace; and there is yet hope, hope that nonviolence will at some point prevail to end the suffering of innocent civilians. Talking to people and witnessing the devastation caused by the conflict have propelled me, as one also affected, to weave some of these experiences into poetry. The aim is to tell the story in a bid to change the current narrative.

^{*} <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/22/paul-biya-cameroon-85-year-old-president-wins-re-election-landslide>

I'm no agent of SHIELD

I don't have Thor's hammer
Nor captain America's shield
Not the claws of black panther
Or Hulk's angry green
But I have a word and a pen.

I am not S.H.I.E.L.D
Can't hide behind iron suits
I'm no superman
I don't travel among stars
But I have courage to speak without fear

I'm no politician
So don't worry about lies
I won't burn your houses
Just to play humanitarian
But I'm one word you can no longer ignore.

I'm your conscience
The reason you can't sleep.
I'm louder than the usual gunshot
I pierce deeper than the deadliest bullet
Unlike you, I stab from in front.
Then I clean up after your mess!

voices in my head

Let the voices in my head speak loud
Louder than the bombs they blast
I'm sorry but I can't be last
To turn my heart around.

The carcass in the field cry out
Shouting that the land will crack
From the many bodies that we add
This story is so sad.

Count the many friends we've lost
And how many more will fall
I'm sorry that I make this call
Please let's stop this senseless war

If you harden up your heart I see
But it'll never set you free
Think about the souls that bleed
And the kind of seed you yield.

What will happen when the fighting ends
Will the guns all disappear
Think about tomorrow friend
It's the aftermath that we all fear.

POEMS

Introduction

Most of the poems in this collection speak of several distinct times in the progression of the conflict in Cameroon, especially in the wake of its violent turn around. Some of them are based on personal experiences, personal responses to collective experiences, and collective responses to experiences within the confines of the conflict. Others, just like every work of art, meet expressly the unique criterion of the genre, while some fall under free verse. As you read, try to empathize with the human who lives these dilemmas on a daily basis, whose reality has been radically shifted from calm and peacefulness to brutality, insecurity and uncertainty.

You will find that some names and words in some of the poems are very contextual. This is because most of it was written for a Cameroonian audience. However, feel free to build a wave of discussion around these themes. Your contribution will be of immense help to a sky already void of stars.

That said, the following poems can be quoted and reused for purposes intended for peace and not for further separation and war.

Please keep poem formatting at all times possible; some of the poems' meanings are conveyed by their structure.

"Do not cry the tears you don't feel"



Too far to look back?

I've been going circles on a road that never ends
drowning down a river with tied fingers and a pen
Afraid to see how history bends
To make some heroes out of men
Too far gone, can't look back.

I've been crying tear drops from a heart that feel no pain
I've been wishing some day that this drama was a dream
Hoping that the rainbow wash away this red stain
Down the stream.
Too far gone, can't look back.

I've been watching the moon and the sun exchange a day
I've been wandering if me and my foe can do the same
Sitting on a cushion, thinking of what to say
What makes us see life as a game.
Too far gone, can't look back.

I've been asking questions to an answer I already have
I've been fighting battles for a victory already mine
Dancing solo all night
To a music that will never play
Too far gone, can't look back.

You can spend your whole life working for something
Just to have it taken away
You can fight for a nation that may never see a day
Dreams and hopes may come by
But life will always give you what it has!
Too tired, I can't go back.

Losers

Two camps

One, like wolves on a hunting spree

Eyes fierce-red, grip steady on the trigger.

Shiny Black Boots cover clenched sweaty toes

The other, tendons hard hanging over muddy feet

Heavy arms and Sweaty chests panting for the kill

It's about to rain blood.

Grenade and extra bullets on one side

Stones, clubs and determination on the other

Yet Between one's fury and the other's rage

An innocent child stands, wondering if it's all theatre.

Home Again!!

Today a man is dead

They've said it was suicide

Or was It?

Today his friends are dragged to court

Accused of a faceless crime

Maaasssa!

The other day

A young man in cold blood

Slaughtered his mother

Badluck Oooh!

Or was there a video

Of a young woman's emptiness

Sprawled for 2500, chai Epie!

A coincidence of bees

Unleashed on innocent students,

While ghosts walk in towns on Mondays

Merde!

I'm taping this shit!

History books can't miss this hit!

This is "our" legacy

I pray future doesn't laugh at us.

The Promised

A certain fear has gripped the within of a people
Somewhere in their rallying song
The serene inscription: Land of promise, land of glory
In wait the night is slow to fade but
for that promise many a hope tarry

And through the horrors of today;
the incarceration, the arbitrary flogging of the lips,
the disappearance, the parade of force
to the aim primordial a bending of the will...
A people with the promise wait in hope

In their repose
Fresh tears have met the sunken faces of the fathers
As now their spirits agitate within the holy shrines
This wasn't their dream, it wasn't their vision
It wasn't a premonition they contemplated
Not even around their bonfires

Look around you
What have we done with the promise...

Show where the evil resides
It's been hiding in your sister.
But I heard your sister whisper
"I see a devil in my brother"
How have we fallen this far?

And we keep falling,
Dragging our sweet heaven along
All of it will soon be gone!
Scrubbed through the culverts of war
Into the abyss we now prepare
With our own hands.
How did we fall this far?

Why so swift to travel
On a VIP bus to hell?
A proud people belittled
Like a deflated balloon in mid air
Dangling to and fro
Blown about by every snare
You must not be the ink
That writes another man's death wish.
Wake up!

My fellow Samoronians

“My fellow Samoronians”
Children of a great ancestor
How did we fall this far?
Once an island amidst troubled waters
We gave hope to the drowning souls
Our walls stood tall and mighty
Not to keep out the stranded
But to let all who stagger through
Find safety, in this promised land,
The land of peace.

Together we wrought havoc
We shook the enemy lines
Like the quaking of the chariot
That harbor our raging gods.

Something is wrong

How can stars fall from the sky
Yet no one seem to notice?
Blindness shuts the eye, not the heart
But with eyes wide as lagoon
We still fall prey to the pun
Playing by the rules
Of another man’s game; folly!

If any finger remain-
One not burnt by the boiling pot
Point to the devil in our midst,
Don’t be shocked he is your brother
If you stare too long at his darkness
Perhaps you’d see his light
The dark bush only scares from afar
But while in you can spot the trees.
How have we fallen this far?

The Clouds are In

The clouds are in,
The weight of the crossroads roar
A pause threatens.
Not from without, a fear grips
As adjourned the sum of my days to now
Like the collection of a thousand streams to one.

What do I fear
What threats in the pounding of my heart
What omen, what sign, what substance, what stance
Ponder, Ponder, Ponder.
This day has come
The clouds are in.

At Death's Call

His whitish eyeballs sunk in his skull—beside the bombshells set aglow

A thin of blood leaked down his nose—to join the spittle's ooze and flow

Ash splinters concealed like crispy snow—his feeble body down below

Being dragged his skin had scraped about—wet dust from the dilemma around

A chunk of flesh hung from his chest—with all his tissue chiseled out

His dreams with his heavy stature fell—snuffed out by the senseless gig of hell

He heard the steps of death approach—to bind away his startled soul

He called for help from God above—but his voice couldn't tear the heavy sky

His last breath settled on one thought—How foolish it is to live a lie!

Home

Home, a strange word to be
Broken, deserted, frustrated
Home cries out to me

Home is home-less
Residing in exile
In the hearts of the guiltless

Exodus, forced down throats
Terror chased home away
Home, a refuge from the coast.

Now a battlefield
Predators prey on the weak
Home, bullied to yield.

a strange place to be
More passengers than seats
Smuggling home across the bridge.

When Rain's cloud gather

When rain's cloud gather
There's no telling whose gutter will fill
It could be yours or mine
You never know what the flood will steal.

But this you know.
A child is lost in the jungle
Uncertain if his path leads to yesterday
Slowly he forgets how to mingle
With the wolves that stole his tomorrow.

When storm coughs thunder
There's no telling where the lightning strikes
It could roast a tree or skin
You never know what scar the pain may leave.

But this you know.
A pregnant woman presses against the floor
Amidst echoes of crossfire
A house once a home is now a bunker
Shielding her baby from a borrowed death.

When rain's cloud gather.
Only then you miss the sun,
Only then you sing a song,
That reminds you of better days-
That reminds you of yesterday.

Voice of the Voiceless

"Body muses;
Voice of the voiceless!"
The curtains role to new scenery,
To symphonic rhythms and imagery.
The characters meet the rising plot
The theatre roars in seismic applause!

"Body muses;
Voice of the voiceless!"
A colossal stage of bandits
Singing same old song
"We'd build new bridges"
Has change not suffered long!

"Body muses;
Voice of the voiceless!"
Stage props pre-dating actors
Yet incomparable to ancient lines
Where rulers sit on sumptuous vines
While ironic anguish scour the land.

"Body muses;
Voice of the voiceless!"
Poetic justice nicely revered
The actor drinks his own poison
The tyrant built his own prison
The fisherman drowned amongst fish.
Spectators tear in acoustic rumbling
"This is how life should be"

"Body muses;
Voice of the voiceless!"
The curtains close to swipe the scene
The music fades on a high sirene
The actors leave as the plot demeans
The broken stage is in perspiration!

If

If every bullet had a voice
If every gun had a choice
If every blood screamed like Abel's
They'd say "I'm tired"

If every dream came true
Those who dream of peace like you
Would join the guns and bullets too
And say "I'm tired, stop the war"

If all those enslaved by their greed
Will hear their brothers cry and bleed
In jungles far from home and sleep
They'd say "let's stop and think"

Woh-woh +237 stop and think!
Change your mind before you sink

