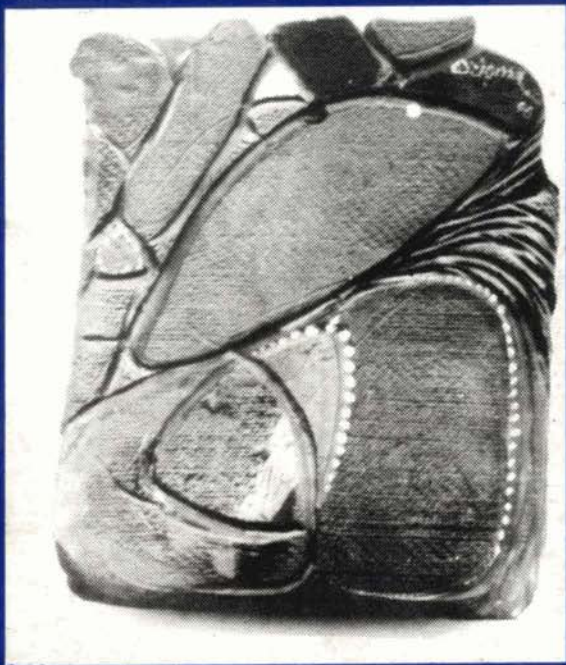




OKike

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING



40

OKIKE
An African Journal of New Writing
NUMBER 40, OCTOBER 1998

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CHIDI ONYEIWU

My Fatherland

You were like a woman jilted by her lover.
Naked, you hungered for his love.
But you got trapped by bloodhounds.
And yours was a gang rape.

Now, you are like a tree on diseased soil.
You asked for life but got its shadow.
You craved for love, but got raped.
So your birth was your death.

Yet you continue to breathe
As their lecherous hands hunt
Your beauties like terminators
And the kisses of your beloved
are like the rhythm of a stale song.

IRO AGHEDO

A Strangled June

The trap fractures the rodent
But the rodent haunts the trap...
A harvest of whirling dilemma

The hawk gulps the arrested dove
But the dove sticks in the hawk's throat...
A season of troubled times

The sky floods the earth
With thunderous grains of storm
But the earth swallows the sky's emissaries

...Our land is surfeited with entanglements
Arising from a strangled June...

Endless Cycle

A dirge swallows the lullaby...
The land is silent, SILENCED
By the drums of death

A stream snakes into the river
The river meanders into the sea
And the sea bundles into the ocean, CONQUERED

The lullaby overshadows the dirge
Derobing the land, our land,
Of sackcloth and ashes

An egg breaks life into being
Wrapped in the tender hands of newness
Pregnant with pluses and minuses

We are the sacrifice
Buried in the Ocean's womb
Born again by tidal waves, RISEN

Time is the umpire
Of this infinite duel

We are lilies of the battleground
Worshipping with our comings and goings
On the mouth-altars of life and death.

A Dirge for Fatherland

The sun saw it and fled the sky
Abandoning the land to darkness.
The plants smelt the holocaust
And wept off their verdant foliage

The lion tears in our jungleland
A jungle bubbling with legion tribes
Of diverse and divergent tongues

Who wrests the antelope
From the lion's ferocious grip?
Who rescues our land
From the hunter's flying bullet?

The staccato rhythms
Of his incoming anthem
Jolted the land like an epileptic fit

Barrel smokes overshadow the land
Like the acrid fumes of exhaust pipes
But we have not shouted Barowo!⁺
Behind the rocky powerhouse

He casts a milestone
Into the bosom of clay pots...
And the land reaps the harvest
Of the laughters between tears

⁺ A Hausa word for thief

Aghedo

... Cataclysmic deaths
Trails of blood.

Saints are sinners, sinners are saints
Chiefs are thieves, thieves are chiefs
I know my fatherland.

The paths are strewn
With cobras' syringe fangs
To strangle our arrested will

Our land, a tower of babel,
Is a gigantic bed of spikes
Dripping with the cold blood of innocence

Yet we had not muttered murderers!
Behind the hangman's haven

On the fasting dunghills,
people and rodents scramble
For non-existent morsels

Sackclothed, ashes over us,
We behold the junta
Wrapping fire under its bloody cloak.

