

REMEMBERING YORUBA



By the Students of
Brampton Manor Academy
Introduced & Edited by
Timileyin Amusan
& Kate Clanchy

REMEMBERING

YORUBA

Introduction

Remembering Yoruba grew out of Creative Multilingualism, a four-year research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of its Open World Research Initiative.

In the course of our research, we have come to appreciate our richly diverse languages in the UK – a fabulous multitude with different histories and heritages, communities and places, speakers and writers. We have come to think of our own languages in new ways, and explored the multilingualism hidden even in the English words we use, the dialects, regional expressions and continually changing levels of politeness and familiarity we deploy in our everyday lives.

Working with artists from different communities has illuminated the importance of our languages for our personal language lives and for who we are – how we connect to our particular personal history, our family members, our friends.

Kate Clanchy has been collaborating with poets from diverse language backgrounds, running workshops in schools that have encouraged students to discover the creative potential that lies hidden even in ordinary words. Timileyin Amusan has shared his love of Yoruba with the students of Brampton Manor Academy. Together, they have composed this wonderfully creative multilingual collection of poems.

Professor Katrin Kohl

University of Oxford

Foreword

Yoruba has always been a part of me. It's my mother tongue, and the language I spoke as I grew up in Nigeria. But I can't write accurately, even to write this introduction because I wasn't taught it in school. Growing up, I was never allowed to even speak in Yoruba at school. I hated that. The reason given was so that we could learn to speak English more fluently and to 'look smarter'. When I came to the UK aged fifteen I had to adapt even further as I now I could only speak Yoruba at home. I also realised that my English was 'Nigerian English' and I had to learn a third language, 'English English'. Over time I spoke less and less Yoruba. I wrote my poetry in English. Every time I talked to my friends in Nigeria they would ask if I still understood Yoruba which scared me into thinking I might actually forget one day.

Working on this pamphlet gave me the opportunity to write poetry with Yoruba for the first time and brought me closer to my first language. It reminded me how important Yoruba is to me and gave me so many memories of how my friends and families would call to check up on me when I first emigrated, and how Yoruba could make me feel like everything is not that far away. I was happy to share my poems with the students and to see I could influence other people through my poetry to never forget about our mother tongue. As I read the students' final work, I was very happy to see how much they were able to use and celebrate their language. Their poems are amazing. They help me to feel close to my language again. I hope they do too, and that people reading this pamphlet will also appreciate the beauty of Yoruba.

Timleyin Amusan

Sho gbo yoruba?

Shó gbo yoruba?

No ma

Ah ah

Not even small small?

No ma

I piece of me that I never known
but without it, I feel lonely
Who knows? With it, would I be
an even stronger tree?

Díẹ̀ díẹ̀ nimú ẹlẹ́dẹ̀ẹ́ fi ń wọgbà

Now I feel like a tree planted with seeds of doubt

Unattached petals symbolic of a bereft culture

Weak, scrawny branches.

Leaves that crumble to the touch

Like the ancestral knowledge that has disappeared from my
generation

Shó gbo yoruba?

No ma

Ah ah

Not even small small?

No ma

Adepeju Adelusi

Mo Fe Sun

Sleeping and waking,
a never ending cycle,
the beating of the rain outside,
is soulless music that fills my ears,
I'm so tired,
Mo Fe Sun

As I stare through the glass,
at the raging storm outside,
my heart is heavy and my mood is low,
I guess that's why they call it window pane,
I feel so tired,
Mo Fe Sun

It's like stale bread,
that you eat over and over again,
No flavour and no taste,
just like the life I have to live,
I'm just so tired,
Mo Fe Sun

Then I'm blessed with sleep
Sitting near that window,
Eyes start to droop and lids feel heavy,
My mind is suddenly transported,
To a warm place filled with bright colours,
My real home

Erin ati ayo,
Ifokanbale ati idunnu,
Ni mo fi ri aja alawo aro,
Ti o joko si egbe ile,
Isele yi ko se ajeji si mi,
Iriri na so rewa pupo

Mo ri ipa orun ni ara mi,
Ni ori aga ti mo joko si,
Mo rerin, mo si nse awada,
Pelu awon ebi mi ati ore mi,
Mi ko fe kuro,
Nitori ko re mi

Esther Showemimo

Nkankan bikose otitọ

O ti sun mi, I said as I was bored
But we still have a reason to say, thank you Lord
Oluwa ese, oluwa e tobi
But in the midst of it all I'm lonely.

In this sick, selfish world, your emotions may change
may go from joyful to solemn, an expansive range
You may feel isolated, like no one's there
But you have a father who resides everywhere,
A Father who cares.

Mo fe je
I'm hungry, hungry for the money
E jo tori olorun fun mi owo
But as usual, I only hear no.

A capitalist society is the driving force of greed
Always what you want and never what you need
Always asking for money. It's never enough,
You don't get what it's like to have it tough.

Onen p' aoko s' oja oun oja p' aoko si.
Anyone who gives will receive
We have to work together, a sharing community.
The notion that those in power did not want us to believe.

I am bored, bored but I have realised
O ti re mi: I stand against the lies
The Lord showed me and he revealed,
We have to fight against injustice.
Wounds need to be healed

O ti sun mi, I said as I was bored
How can I be lonely when I have the Lord?

Amaris Ogunyemi

Nothing but the truth

I'm fed up, I said as I was bored
But we still have a reason to say thank you Lord
Lord, thank you, Lord you are great
But in the midst of it all I'm lonely.

In this sick, selfish world, your emotions may change
may go from joyful to solemn, an expansive range
You may feel isolated, like no one's there
But you have a father who resides everywhere,
A Father who cares.

I want to eat
I'm hungry, hungry for the money
Please give me money
But as usual, I only hear no.

A capitalist society is the driving force of greed
Always what you want and never what you need
Always asking for money. It's never enough,
You don't understand what it's like for those who have it tough.

He who sends a gift to the market,
he it is that a market sends a gift to.
Anyone who gives will receive
We have to work together, a sharing community
The notion that those in power do not want us to believe.

I am bored, bored but I have realised
I am tired of this. I stand against unspoken lies
The Lord showed me and he revealed,
We have to come against injustice, wounds need to be healed

I am fed up, I said as I was bored
How can I be lonely when I have the Lord?

Amaris Ogunyemi

Ma sukun

Omo mi ma sukun e jo oluwa ti se

My Child don't cry god has done it

My mother wailed to me in the kitchen

I emptied the rice in the pot

Echoes of screaming encompassed the house but yet the chaos

outside refused to make

refuge in our home.

I look up,

Olorun gbohun mi

My mother said to me

E mi ni isegun

She sang to me

Ikan Ioni

Ikan Iana

Ikan Iola

I kissed the vase

Through there were no ashes left.

Her spirit was enough

The soft comforting voice

Trust in the lord omo mi

Oluwa ti se.

Bethel Uduojie

O ti su mi

Patience is a virtue
How long must I wait
I sit by the window watching the raindrops dance
The wind shrieks unexcitement
But still I must wait
O ti su mi
A prisoner in my own home
My mind runs free but I am shackled
Again again again
I must endure
For this imprisonment there is but one cure
Freedom
I spend the days waiting to be liberated
I must endure
Duro
Stop
Wait
Orun ti dide
The sun of hope shines again
The rays of joy dry up my pain
Oluwa modupe
Mo mope mi wa
The scent of freedom draws nearer
But for a little more I must endure
Surulere
Exhale

Deborah Olaleye

Alagemo

Mo ran ti ni ba iya mi pe mi joko,
Lati so itan alagemo fun mi.
Mo ran ti pe Alagemo nse itoju fun awon omode,
Amo alagemo o le toju awon omo ti e.
Mo ran ti pe Alagemo o nko awon omode jo,
Amo alagemo o le ko awon omo ti e jo.
Mo ran ti pe iya mi so pe:
Aimojo o kun si owo omo alagemo.
Amo ni igba yen ko ye mi.
Bawo ni onijo o le ko awon omo ti e jo?

Now as I gaze down at the pile of brochures in front of me,
fighting back tears and feelings of doubt-
The prospect of having to forge my own path creeps ever closer,
How can I choose a career at such a tender age?
The variety of options makes the decision even harder,
Astronaut, Nurse, Doctor, the list goes on.
I think about my mother's work- a teacher,
I couldn't work the way that she does.
In my heart I know this is something that I must decide on my own-
Nitori pe aimojo o kun si owo omo alagemo.

Oluwadamilola Ademola

Alagemo

I remember when my mother called me to sit and listen
Whilst she told me the story of Alagemo.
I remember that Alagemo cared for children,
But he couldn't care for his own.
I remember that Alagemo taught children how to dance,
But he couldn't teach his own children to dance.
I remember that my mother told me:
The ability to dance is the responsibility of Alagemo's children.
But back then I never understood it.
How could a dancer not teach his own children to dance?
Now as I gaze down at the pile of brochures in front of me,
fighting back tears and feelings of doubt-
The prospect of having to forge my own path creeps ever closer,
How can I choose a career at such a tender age?

The variety of options makes the decision even harder.
Astronaut, Nurse, Doctor, the list goes on.
I think about my mother's work- a teacher,
I couldn't possibly work the way that she does.
In my heart I know this is something that I must decide on my own-
Because the ability to dance is the responsibility of Alagemo's
children.

Oluwadamilola Ademola

Ile aye akamora.

Mo ranti igba ti mo wa ni kekere
Pelu ero ile aye kun fun ife

But that's when I knew
Ile aye akamora

Mi o ranti igba ti mo lose my identity
Tori pe, they took my origin.

Let me tell you
Naija babe ni mi

But all of my life
Mo roti Géési

Mo ranti igba ti mo bere mama ati daddy mi
Pe 'will you please teach me'

All of my friends knew of a secret place
Which was shut off to me, I felt out of place.

Out of touch, out of mind
Yoruba was not in sight

Ti pe ti pe
I dreamt and dreamt

Such large piece of me had been stripped.
Like a nightmare of falling into a ditch

But mo fe feel the heat ni nu motherland mi.
Mo fe bo si ori the Lasgidi streets.

And ti ma gba dura I know that
Emi ati motherland, we will meet.

Tomike Olukanni

Forgetting Yoruba

I remember (Mo Ranti) how mad you get
when I mix you with English (Gèèsi)
And you blaming ilé-ìwé mi for not teaching me enough

Now it's getting weird that
I used to think (ronú) in Yoruba
But now (níṣìnyí) mo ñ ronú ní ède Gèèsi

Níṣìnyí I mix more Gèèsi when I speak (sòrò)
But I will always try hold on to you

I can feel ìrora re sitting lonely waiting
For me to sòrò to my mum and grandma

I can taste your salty tears everytime you feel like you're losing me
Even when you say kòsì wàhàlà I know there's a problem

Mo rántí how you taught me (kó mi) to be respectful
when I sòrò to my elders and how you kó mi
how important (pàtàkì) mothers are though poems (ewì)

So I'm using this ewì to show how pàtàkì you are to me
To tell you I will never forget you , my first friend before Gèèsi

Timileyin Amusan

Sho gbo yoruba?

Sho gbo yoruba?

yes ma

Ah ah

small small?

yes ma

small small.

I piece of me that I never known
but without it, I felt lonely

With it, I might be

A stronger tree.

A stronger tree that

is rooted in the red earth

A stronger tree that doesn't

sway in every wind

A stronger tree that

makes shelter for the children

A stronger tree that

grows up towards the sky.

Adepeju Adelusi

Biographies

Oluwadamilola Ademola

I am an aspiring medic with an interest in languages. I speak Yoruba and French and learnt Yoruba most prominently from my mother who used to teach me using nursery rhymes and parables.

Adepeju Adelusi

I usually go by Peju, and I'm a 2nd generation Nigerian immigrant. I come from both a Yoruba and Hausa background and have experienced and been around Yoruba culture but I have very limited knowledge of the language. I hope that one day I can learn so that I can help pass it on to the next generation

Oluwatannaayo Fagade

I grew up in Nigeria for the first 8 years of my life. My dad is Yoruba and my mum is Igbo. We moved to the UK in September 2010.

Amaris Ogunyemi

I am a vibrant, creative individual with a love for the arts. I take pleasure in being able to express myself in the way that I please as I believe it is important to understand who you are and show the world too. I also take pride in my religion, and therefore I incorporate it into my life as a whole.

Tomike Olukanni

Born in America but growing up in England, I have always struggled to identify with my Nigerian heritage. However as I grew older, I took the initiative to start learning more about my culture and it helped me define who I am as a person and it was the best decision ever! Alongside my discovery of Yoruba, I love languages and I also

enjoy singing and performing and hope to one day incorporate my love for Yoruba into my musical performances.

Bethel Uduojie

I am a British Nigerian born in the UK who is very interested in Nigerian culture. My interests lie in the arts specifically history and debating. My favourite thing about Nigerian culture is its language and its foods. This sonnet for me was a way to try and use language to my best ability to construct a story.

Esther Showemimo

Being born in Nigeria and growing up there for 3 years formed a big part of my identity and helped me become the person I am today. I will always consider myself to be Nigerian first although I am also British. My ability to speak Yoruba is something I greatly enjoy and is important to me as a Nigerian because it preserves the connection to my true cultural upbringing

Timileyin Amusan

I came to England in 2016 to continue with my education. I had been into poetry growing up in Nigeria, but never had the help I needed to be heard. I found that help in my school in England, Oxford Spires Academy. My poems have been set to music by the Orchestra of St John and I was a BBC Local Poet for Oxford in 2109

Kate Clanchy MBE

I am a teacher and writer. My anthology *England, Poems from a School* showcases the work of many young migrant poets. I work at the University of Reading and in schools in Oxford.

*Let your poetry texture the blank page
like a prism splitting light*

Prismatic Pamphlets

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with

Timileyin Amusan

Don't leave without seeing all the colours