German Expressionism Revisited by Allen Forrest
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We say to girls, you can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful. Otherwise, you would threaten the man. Because I am female, I am expected to aspire to marriage. I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. Now marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support but why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don’t teach boys the same? We raise girls to see each other as competitors not for jobs or accomplishments, which I think can be a good thing, but for the attention of men...

~ Chiamamanda Ngozie Adichie
We teach females that in relationships, compromise is what a woman is more likely to do. [...] We teach girls shame. Close your legs. Cover yourself. We make them feel as though by being born female, they are already guilty of something. And so girls grow up to be women who cannot say they have desire. Who silence themselves. Who cannot say what they truly think. Who have turned pretence into an art form.

~ ‘We Should All Be Feminists’, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Women talk. And when we talk, we talk about subjects beyond the stereotypical conversations that concentrate on men, household politics, clothes, and fashion. We talk about the role we play in what is perceived as an evolving society, where progress by and in favour of women is glacial at best – and why victories are so cathartically celebrated – and all of this sandwiched between a regular eight-hour workday where, it must be noted, we are better qualified than the men, but paid substantially less, because apparently we don’t “need the money”. As though a woman’s needs can be accurately assessed by the organization’s (mostly male) senior management. As though our ambitions don’t supersede a man’s by 2:1.

In a wonderful article titled ‘A Woman of War’, * Pakistani-American writer and feminist Mehreen Kasana speaks to the different societal pressures between both sexes in Pakistani society, “Male-entitlement dictates a woman’s silence. If we could see the mimetic model of the erasure of a woman’s voice, it would be an incredibly bloody sight.” But look closer and you’ll discover: it’s not just us. Patriarchy and the male gaze exists just about everywhere and they will continue to exist until we, the women, the ones unfortunately tagged as the childrearing parent, push for a change. It may very well be a grassroots campaign that starts from one household and carries through to others.

Girls taught to shine but never outshine their brothers; taught to be the childbearing crucibles of household warmth; taught to make food and present it just right; to do well at school but have the showmanship of cake-baking trumpeted over academic prowess.

When I was growing up in Pakistan in the nineties, there were far too many television serials attesting to the difficult and problematic relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, given that both were competing for the attentions of the man they loved. Why must it always be about pitting women against each other? Especially how infrequent the “catfights” are among men which are termed “competitive behaviour” or “male aggression”. Aggression, it would appear, is strictly correlated with testosterone. We seem to be rooted in the same barbaric tradition that existed in pre-Islamic Arabia, of burying our daughters and elevating our sons. I cannot speak to how many female infants are buried alive in our rural areas, but the urban approach is no less barbaric. Girls taught to shine, but never outshine their brothers; taught to be the childbearing crucibles of household warmth; taught to make food and present it just right; to do well at school but have the showmanship of cake-baking trumpeted over academic prowess.

When women allow for their sons to be shown preferential treatment at the expense of their daughters, an entire generation of economic security, not to mention intellectual and emotional welfare, goes right out the window. We may talk ourselves to death about the pervasiveness and sheer disgustingness of the “male gaze”, but we as women have allowed the culture to perpetuate by treating the men in our lives like gods. These are the husbands and fathers of tomorrow and how they treat their wives and daughters falls equally on the men and women who birthed them and the parent who raised them. Teach your sons to honour their wives and the whole patriarchy is thrown on its head; teach your daughters that they are only as ambitious as how high their arm goes and you curtail their boundless enthusiasm, creating the stereotypes so many of us are trying to break through. It doesn’t help when men stomp around the world like it’s their oyster, leer at women, make passes at women, all the while knowing that they won’t get their due.

In ‘Everyday Sexism’, author Laura Bates, who uses testimonials from girls and women across the world including Pakistan, notes (in a strikingly similar way to Nigerian writer Adichie whose quote starts this piece), “It feels a bit like a punch in the stomach every time I read an Everyday Sexism entry about girls being told, unequivocally, at such a young age, that they are somehow by definition inferior to their male peers. Marked out – sometimes even at their very moment of success – as if they’re somehow defective on the basis of sex alone.”
Girls taught to shine but never outshine their brothers; taught to be the childbearing crucibles of household warmth; taught to make food and present it just right; to do well at school but have the showmanship of cake-baking trumpeted over academic prowess.

So this isn’t just a problem that men perpetuate; they parrot the world that society’s created for them and the women who ultimately live with them. In an earlier editorial, I wondered why the burden of marrying and procreating must always fall on the woman, such that if there’s a party that must give up and compromise, the automatic assumption is always that it will be the woman. If she chooses to do neither, “there must be something wrong with her”, but in the case of a man, “he’s just playing the field.” The term “womanizer” and “slut” refer to the woman, such that if there’s a party that must give up and compromise, the automatic assumption is that she’s the reason for it, but in the case of a man, “he’s just playing the field.”

What is the equivalent term for stripping a woman of her ability to exist as an individual, on her own merit, quite apart from who she married or who “sired” her? Where is the term that defines “don’t venture too far, lest you wound your man’s ego”? It’s important to bring this devastatingly misogynist and sexist culture into the drawing rooms of society, applauding the ever persistent discussions of politics and religious discourse, two themes woven into the lifeblood of Pakistan. How we treat women and how they are perceived in society are sadly closely intertwined with how they see themselves. We must teach young girls the power of ambition, something they have in droves as children – ask any five-year-old girl what she wants to be and I doubt you’ll get “housewife” as an answer. These are protocols we imprint on them as they grow older, reminding them to never dip a toe out “too far”. Adichie writes, “We say to girls, You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful but not too successful, otherwise you will threaten the man. If you are the breadwinner in your relationship, pretend that you are not, especially in public, otherwise you will emasculate him.” Emasculate: “[to] deprive (a man) of his male role or identity”. Just what is a “male role”? And what is the equivalent term for women? What is the equivalent term for stripping a woman of her ability to exist as an individual, on her own merit, quite apart from who she married or who “sired” her? Where is the term that defines “don’t venture too far, lest you wound your man’s ego”?

What are we so afraid will happen if women are given access to the same resources as a man and the same words of encouragement? We teach this to our children, to the generation that stands to break past our insufferable prejudices that are dutifully weighing down our society and preventing true reform. In my day job, I’ve travelled to Pakistan’s remote villages and there are an alarming number of women who are teaching as teachers in schools or ploughing the fields and who are, for all intents and purposes, the reasons their households are running so smoothly both financially and civically. But when it comes to spending, their unambitious men are aces, and lord over the existences of their wives, daughters, mothers and sisters. And this culture has been allowed to persist in urban society just as much as it has in “backwater places”.

The move to change status quo has to start from somewhere, but perhaps the best place to start is by asking young girls and young women what they want and to not bring a media culture that myopically defines what toys are “for” boys and which ones are “for” girls; that bombards them with ideals of impossible perfection to “land”… not a job, but a man (I’m sure there are far more ‘How to Get Your Dream Guy’ books than there are ‘How to

Endnotes

Ngozi Adichie, Chimamanda, ‘We Should All Be Feminists’, Fourth Estate, 2014


Translated from Urdu: “My son isn’t involved in such activities.”

Translated from Urdu: “He is a boy.”
This House is an African House

This house is an African house.
This your body is an African woman’s body.
This your vagina is an African woman’s vagina.
All three, you keep clean, you hear?
Otherwise I will wash you out
with bleach, scrub between your legs
with a scouring pad, then I will take your body
and clean the house with it.
At eleven years old I didn’t want a woman’s body.
I was sure my friends didn’t have vaginas
and I wanted to be just like them.
They weren’t from Africa either.

— Kadija Sesay
The consequences of FGM are irreversible and long term, because it damages healthy tissues and interferes with the natural function of the female body.

Hands of Master by Iryjna Lialko
For a woman in northwestern Cameroon who wanted her own farm

She dropped her walking stick, clutched at a cornstalk. A coffee bush cushioned her fall.
She died under mango trees, under kola nut and avocado trees, her nose pressed to their roots,
hands buried in dead leaves, her thin legs spread out like palm oil in a hot pan.

The trees she loved were not her own.
The townspeople called her a sorceress, a cunning second wife who used witchcraft
to take her husband’s land away from the children of his first wife — rightful inheritors of their father’s coffee farm. The trees went to them

when she died. But they did not know what to do with the things she called her own:
her blackened pot; a sack of rice;
yams, potatoes, earth clinging to their skins;
a blunt machete with worn-out handle; bolts of new cloth;
gifts from her children, dresses she never wore
because she did not go far

except to watch over the farm surrounding her husband’s cluster of rooms.
The day she died, they found firewood burning beneath a stew of beans, onions, and palm oil.
They saw the gray of wood smoke, restless and circling inside her windowless kitchen, sliding its way down the mud walls, out through the door and into the farm to find her — their farm where she fell like a ridge of some new soil and planted herself into the smell of eucalyptus leaves.

~ Viola Allo
By Chika Unigwe

The mother of my memories was elegant. She did not walk with slow steps as this stranger did. This was not the mother who told me that no matter how hard life got, a woman owed it to herself to dress well. The mother, who despite the poverty my father’s death and his brothers’ greed had driven us to, always managed to look glamorous.

It took her a while to notice me. I waved, she waved back, her face breaking into a smile. And then I walked up to her. She smelled the same. At least that had not changed. I held her and soaked in her scent the way I did as a child when I woke up from a nightmare of her being killed in a car accident, the way my father was. I fought the urge to reach out and straighten her wig. I hugged her and the familiar warmth of her dissolved whatever embarrassment I felt at her deterioration.

“You look tired,” I said, taking over the trolley she was pushing.

“I have not slept in twenty four hours.”

“Why not? I especially booked a night flight for you so you’d be well rested?”

“I could not sleep on the plane. I haven’t seen my own daughter in three years, was I going to risk missing my stop?”

My mother had never been on an airplane but I had not thought that she would think that planes operated like the buses she took from Nsukka to Lagos, making pit stops along the road, and if one slept through their stop, they were carried back to their destination. Although I wanted to laugh, I was consoled in thinking that perhaps her aging was temporary, that once she had rested she would be back to the woman I remembered. She held my hand in both of hers and I knew that she too had missed me.

My mother’s startled look stayed put.

“Why not? I especially booked a night flight for you so you’d be well rested.”

The smell of all the home food you’re cooking.”

“What is?”

“The smell of all the home food you’re cooking.”

My mother had come with bags of ground egusi and dried bitterleaf; ground crayfish and smoked fish. My mother had never been on an airplane but I had not thought that she would think that planes operated like the buses she took from Nsukka to Lagos, making pit stops along the road, and if one slept through their stop, they were carried back to their destination. Although I wanted to laugh, I was consoled in thinking that perhaps her aging was temporary, that once she had rested she would be back to the woman I remembered. She held my hand in both of hers and I knew that she too had missed me.

2.

My mother’s startled look stayed put throughout the first week of her arrival. They lighted upon my doorknobs (shiny); my TV (big); the rug (soft, soft like a baby blanket); the fruit basket (thesebananas, these plums, you say they are real?). At the end of the first week, she set them on me (this house is too quiet. How come you never have visitors? Have you no friends?)

“Of course I do!”

“So how come they do not come here?”

“Because everyone’s busy.”

“Doing?”

“Working.”

She clucked her teeth against her tongue the same way she did when I told her at 16 that the boy she had caught me with was just a classmate. While I was out at work, my mother divided her time between cooking and watching TV. My house smelled of my childhood: okra soup and jollof rice; the preparedness in the bedroom she and my father had shared only a few months earlier. I walked up to her. She smelled the same. At least that had not changed. I held her and soaked in her scent the way I did as a child when I woke up from a nightmare of her being killed in a car accident, the way my father was. I fought the urge to reach out and straighten her wig. I hugged her and the familiar warmth of her dissolved whatever embarrassment I felt at her deterioration.

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The 504 Peugeot in which we had driven to church on Sunday mornings. Uncle Justus, my father’s older brother laid claim to that. As he did the sofas, the TV and finally the house. My tenth birthday was spent helping my mother set up what was left of our belongings in a one-room apartment, smaller than the bedroom she and my father had shared only the year before. In that one room, she entertained my friends and hers. Once a month she hosted six women from her Christian Mothers Group. On those days, they sat on the veranda, and kept me awake with their laughter.

“This is like being back home”

“What is?”

“The smell of all the home food you’re cooking.”

My mother said nothing. In her eyes I saw the startled look get wider. Then she clucked her teeth against her tongue.

3.

Five weeks into her stay, she complained that she was running out of foodstuff. Was there anywhere we could replenish her stock from? My mother had come with bags of ground egusi and dried bitterleaf; ground crayfish and smoked fish. I told her I had not imagined that customs would check her. I told her I had not imagined that customs would let her through with so much food. She said nobody checked her.

“Why did you bring so much food?” I asked the day she arrived.

“I was not sure I could stomach whatever it was you ate here. One does not learn a new dance in old age.”

4.

The day I took my mother to Farmers’ Market was the first day I heard her laugh. It struck me that I had not realized before then that I had not heard her laugh since she came. She had smiled. She had complimented but she had not laughed. At Farmers’ Market that day, she picked up a guava, pinched it, smelt it, laughed and threw it in the shopping trolley. At that moment, I realized that even though I had been unaware of it, I had dragged her around the city —taking her to museums and malls— especially to dazzle her into letting out that laughter of hers that made my father’s death easier to bear. In her first week with me, I took her to the Georgia Aquarium where we caught a dolphin show and she wondered aloud how an animal that looked so dumb could be as intelligent as to dance in sync with humans. She wondered about how much water the aquarium contained, asked if we were single handedly supporting the place when I told her how much — at her insistence — our tickets had cost. She had gone with me from one part of the...
The day my father died, I came back from school to find my mother wailing and rolling on our veranda the same way she was doing now.

Sketches of my Mother' previously appeared in Mslexia, and is republished here with permission from the author.
Bisexuality, as succinctly defined by Shanghai Pride, "is the capacity for emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction to more than one sex or gender. A bisexual orientation speaks to the potential for, but not requirement of, involvement with more than one sex/gender." [i] While this is a rather broad definition and may apply to an unknowing majority of the world’s population, it is interesting to note that, at least as far as self-identified bisexuals go in the United States, it would seem that most self-identifying bisexuals are women. Men are more likely to be either gay or straight, according to the report 'Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations,' issued by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission’s LGBT Advisory Committee. [ii] This report concludes that bisexuals (in the United States) face widespread discrimination, even from their non-heterosexual peers. [iii] Extensive studies indicate that bisexuality is something the courts not only don’t consider, but will essentially sweep under the rug in order to keep the status quo in a binary stasis. [iv] In general, we seem to like classifying things, objects and people into neat categories, and bisexuality blurs more than one line. We have a clean, if somewhat unwanted, divide in hetero/homosexuality. While this is a passive form of discrimination, it is nevertheless capable of causing social rifts between groups of already marginalised people, as well as potentially debilitating stress on one’s self-image. Before taking a look at the victim’s mindset, however, we must take a look at the instigator’s mentality, and why they might not even be aware that they are discriminating against their brethren.

The term “monosexism” is as much an orientation as it is a social ideology. Categorically speaking, monosexism exists, even within the LGBTQ+ community as a sort of an unspoken mindset which can lead to several assumptions, especially pertaining to bisexuals. Perhaps the most immediately harmful of these assumptions is how bisexuals are often expected to identify as gay or straight when coupled with the same or opposite gender. [v] In other words, people are passively deconstructing bisexuality as a way of being, pushing it off in the rather childish sense of it “just being a phase”. Consider that 15% of adult students (i.e., students above the age of 18 in post-secondary institutions), in a survey conducted by the University of Pittsburgh “had serious doubts about bisexuality being a ‘legitimate sexual orientation.’” [vi] In other words, educated people are helping enforce a mentality that begins for many in their high school years.

I admit that during these years in my own life I was guilty of a number of things: not least among these is thinking poorly of bisexuals. At the time, I felt that a lot of my peers claimed to be bisexual less because they actually were and more because they liked the attention this could generate. And maybe, just maybe, I saw this behaviour primarily in females. Before recoiling in disgust at my presumptive judgement, consider that studies have been done to show at least some substantial proof of this trend. [vii] I think it is worth pointing out the sort of insecurities people often develop during these years, especially pertaining to their physical value and self-worth. Where those insecurities exist, fear perpetuates.

Though a cliché, it is nevertheless accurate to say that most people fear the unknown. But what happens when the “unknown” manifests itself in your sexual partner, an admitted bisexual, and while you don’t doubt their affections, there is a nagging fear in the back of your mind that one day they will just up and leave you for someone of the opposite gender? Even the most confident of individuals can be afflicted by such fears. Those who are closest to us are often the biggest threats in the sense that they can most easily cause us the largest amount of turmoil.

Fear can lead to violence, and violence doesn’t need to be the schoolyard bullying and brawling some of us might remember all too clearly from our youth. Rather, violence occurs in the workplace, and, perhaps more heartbreakingly, in the home. In fact, bisexuals have the highest rate of sexual assault acted against them, including rape, than gay or straight people, at least in America, as a 2010 study by the CDC (Centre of Disease Control & Prevention) found. [viii] This includes bisexual males, and more often than not, as far as reported incidents go, the assault is enacted by a sexual partner. [ix] The CDC’s report breaks down by percentage for different groups (gay, bisexual and straight), but focuses explicitly on sexually-related violence. In areas where
there is insufficient information, the report states as much. A substantial number of sexual assaults are perpetrated by members of the same sex for each category, though men were most often indicated as perpetrators of the same sex for each sex life.[xvii] As a result, important factors may be missed. Although this might not impact an individual, or several individuals, it is indicative of a greater problem: the inability of healthcare systems to properly deal with a full range of sexual realities, even if the patient is a doctor himself.[xviii] This is amidst higher mental health problems, suicide rates and higher rates of HIV as well.[xiv] And even more dangerously, bisexuals are being grouped together with homosexuals, despite their drastically different psychological distress levels.[xv] Each of these factors is further complicated by matters of ethnicity and social status, as healthcare is generally privatized in America and thus not always affordable for those in lower income brackets.

Each of the studies mentioned make a series of recommendations that health care providers should take serious note of. Largely speaking, this is simply a matter of being aware and informed of the differences between bisexuals, homosexuals, and heterosexuals, as each one is essentially its own. That, and people need to stop being so phobic, since it is impossible to please everyone that is other people that they have sex with, and therefore, to trigger an individual’s mental stress.[xvi] Visibility is of the utmost importance – institutions that serve bisexuals need to advertise, because not everyone knows about them. And the hospitals and clinics need to know how to distinguish between sexual orientation and gender identity, due to the impacts it can have on a person and collecting the correct data about their personal history, as well as how they publicly identify themselves.[xvii] It may also come as a relief to hear that, at least in some states in America, members of the LGBTQ+ community are legally protected not only from discrimination at work, but also when it comes to housing and public accommodations, such as restaurants.[xviii] While this is a small percentage of the world, it sets a precedent both in how it is progressive and how it has sparked contention over LGBTQ+ rights in a country known for being rather conservative and mono-religious. That said, if in the coming years there is even one country where legal rights are firmly established, we’ve taken a small step towards equality.

It is difficult, when you are not part of a community, to see what happens within it. It may also be extremely difficult to come out of a community and reveal truths about how you’ve been mistreated due to your sexual identity. The struggle for social acceptance is a long, hard road, but it is not something that can be accomplished in isolation by the victimized. Rather, the instigators need to pause and rethink why they pour such hate on their fellow human beings. We might think that something is just a phase, and perhaps for a minority it is. For the rest, it is a gift we are cursing them for.

Aaron Grierson is a Senior Articles Editor for the magazine.
TRANSGENDERED

Lagos is a chronicle of liquid geographies
Swimming on every tongue it lands with tales
Of how it disowned the parentage of loneliness
So that her every cranny is the heritage of noise

The virgin now a woman was once a desired myth
The very old one reverses into an ideated antonym
Lagos is a Gemini—one is old the other is new
Lagos is the old laughing at the new, and its tide of frowns

New Lagos is a resentful stranger haggling pace
A place which would try to make a whore a virgin
For imagination is not an artist’s birth right
It is determined by leaders who rebirth nostalgia

New Lagos is the future flirting with the past
The fast-forward land, city, and the woman
Whose adopted children call the land: mother?
With a short memo: this Lagos is our Lagos—not

This Lagos is our Lagos—not, and not at all
For every space is not for sale until owned by vagabonds
This city is a myth of geography: Lagoons and land
All who see shall know: Lagos is a raped woman

New Lagos is a cinema of clampdowns that shouts:
This city has changed and can no longer be raped
This city is ready to rape anyone standing akimbo
No car no leg no arm no face no eye: this is Lagos

~ Jumoke Verissimo
1962. Jofri, a young man from Ghana is on a scholarship to study at the (then) renowned Textiles Institute in the small (West) German town of Lauterbach. He and a fellow student, the pretty, young German woman Ursula, meet and fall in love. They marry after their studies, settle in Ghana and have twin girls. The marriage falls apart. Ursula fled back to Germany. Their twin girls live their first eleven years with their father in Ghana and thereafter join their mother in (West) Germany.

The students, old and new, were assembled in the auditorium, waiting for the School Director. Ursula spotted the three black students immediately. Everyone did. They could not be missed because they kept to themselves and apart from the rest. They could have come from America or Britain or France, but everyone knew they were Africans because they were already aware that a group of African students, sponsored by their various governments, had enrolled in the school under a special program with the West German government to receive training in various aspects of the textiles industry. Several of the German students, who had never set eyes on a black person before, stared at the three Africans in awe. Ursula didn’t stare. She was only four when it happened: the episode with the Black American soldier who stormed their doorsteps in Wiesbaden. Certain incidents in life entrenched themselves in one’s memory, no matter how young one was at the time. Ursula went on to encounter many more Black American soldiers after the war, but this was the first time she had seen Africans; so, while she didn’t stare, she stole glances. Blacks though both black Americans and Africans were, it seemed to her that there was something peculiar in the demeanor of the Africans. The black Americans were second hand Africans. They had been Americanized. The three Africans were the real thing, the raw ones — and who hadn’t heard of all those wild, weird stories about Africa? How did they make it to Germany anyway? Wasn’t Lauterbach too cold for them?

“Beats me,” one genuinely shocked female student remarked to another.

“And look at them!” said her friend, “They look almost the same.”

“Except for that one,” the first observed. “Take a good look at his face,” she quietly urged her friend. “Be careful; don’t let them see you staring.”

The friend did. Her eyes widened. She scowled. “What is that?” she hushed bewildered. “Where did all the scars on his face come from? Someone scratched him badly. Did he get into a fight?”

At this point, as if on cue, the auditorium door opened and in he walked — tall, dark and with a face full of enigmas — and he was wearing the biggest and brightest of smiles as if he owned the sun. He strode to the front, ran his eyes through the gathering and, spotting the three fellow Africans, started towards them. It wasn’t only Ursula’s attention he gained. Others were also staring and whispering; but, for Ursula, instant panic gripped her. The sight of him didn’t bother to be discreet. It was so focused that it caused great agitation inside her chest. Her heart was thumping as she turned his head slightly and, in the midst of the large and amorphous gathering, sought her face. The four Africans were all in the weaving class, three Ghanaians — Jofri included — and the one Nigerian with the finely incised facial tribal marks misconstrued as scars. Going by their names, one would have thought that the other two Ghanaians besides Jofri were English: William and David. The name of the Nigerian however was long and complex……
The School Director unceremoniously shortened it to Obu; and it was Obu who broached the issue several weeks into the semester, having made a lengthy observation.

"Ah, ah, you Jofri, my brother, why, is it that you are refusing to see or that you cannot see? Are you blind or are you a coward who is afraid of white women? Why are you wasting everybody’s time eh, ah, ah?"

William and David giggled helplessly. Jofri pretended not to have the slightest idea about what Obu was hinting at. That irritated Obu gravely. "Jofri," he charged, "Do you mean to say you haven’t noticed, eh, ah, ah?"

" Noticed what?" Jofri feigned.

Obu placed a hand on his hips;iggled his upper body; struck an exaggerated feminine pose and imitating a poorly managed high pitched female voice, gushed with a flick of his eyelids, "Jofri, can I borrow your…..eh…..head? Jofri, can I borrow your head? Jofri, can you show me this and that? Always creating opportunities to be near you and you are telling me you haven’t noticed eh, ah, ah?"

(from Chapter 28)

"My brother, so how are you planning to attire yourself?"

Jofri pretended that he had no idea at all what Obu was talking about. "Attire myself for what?" he asked.

"Ah, ah, the carnival, what else; your two countrymen with those silly English names should undoubtedly dress like the colonial masters to match their ridiculous mode of identification; Master David….hey, haw! Master William….hey-haw!" imitating the posture of an imaginary arrogant colonialist and pulling an imaginary moustache and beard to complete the act.

Jofri roared with laughter.

"So how are you dressing?" Obu asked again.

Jofri shrugged, "I haven’t yet decided," he replied.

"Ah, ah, as for me, my brother, I’ll dress like my village chief."

"Here in West Germany?"

“Yes! Ah, ah…."

"You brought some of the attire worn by your village chief in the hot Nigerian sun all the way here to wear in chilly Lauterbach?"

"Ah, ah, of course not…."

"Then how do you intend to dress like your village chief, Obu?" Jofri asked with a little laugh.

"Anyhow, my brother, ah, ah; I’ll put on this and put on that and say that is how my village chief dresses. Who can challenge me? Who knows how my village chief dresses except me?"

"You think that will make your village chief proud?" Jofri feigned seriousness.

"You think I should worry about that? Obu replied, making a funny face, "My brother, ah, ah, he is in Nigeria and I am here in West Germany. Have you forgotten?"

Both of them broke into laughter. Then Obu ceased laughing abruptly and said, "By the way…."

"What?" Jofri snapped.

"If by the time of the carnival you are still wasting time, I’ll ask her to dance with me."

"All right," Jofri replied casually.

Obu flipped out. "My brother, ah, ah, did you hear what I said?"

"Of course…."

"Ah, ah…and?"

"I said, all right!"

"Eh, all right you said? My brother, ah, ah, you mean I can dance with her?" Jofri’s apparent calmness astounded Obu.

Jofri chuckled. "If she will dance with you," he replied.

Editor’s note: This excerpt from ‘Between Two Worlds’ by Sana Fatima Hussain, Asmata dari lootna is defined in the Oxford Urdu-English Dictionary under three heads: 1. Use force, show high-handedness 2. Exceed limits 3. To rape.” The everyday use of the word extends to describing an unfair act or an injustice done to an individual. So the meaning of this one word covers something as trivial as stealing a parking spot to rape. Asmata dari and izat lootna are also words that are used to describe rape. While more purposeful than ziyadti, these words take away male agency from rape, and reassign the focus from the perpetrator to the victim. In contrast, English includes the word “rape” to explicitly define the crime of forcing another person to have sexual intercourse with the offender against their will. Yet, recently, the use of rape as a verb that describes a plethora of actions, ranging from defeat or victory in a sporting event, performance in a test or even being overcharged in the market, has become disturbingly common. The word has now been modified to a tech-friendly, on-trend variant, “frape”; casually thrown around on Facebook timelines and comments to indicate that someone has been tricked and/or humiliated by a prank by one of their friends on the social media website.

These examples of the implications of the word “rape” are meant to contextualise how language reinforces negative attitudes towards women, often normalising and sometimes aggravating them. The fact that a word used to describe a horrifically violent act is also used for other inconsequential things that are in no way comparable to rape, reflects a society’s desensitised attitude towards the issue itself. It also shows how the act is considered something that is inherently linked to a woman’s honour, shifting the burden from the rapist to their victim(s). When seemingly decent people make jokes linking masculinity, dominance and superiority to the vile act of rape, and express pride over it, they don’t realise that the language they are using not only trivializes the trauma, horror and pain of rape victims and survivors, but also makes them culpable in promoting rape culture. In fact it is often through the uninformed use of such words that language becomes a tool in perpetuating sexism and violence against women in society.

Simone de Beauvoir’s well-known opening line to Book 2 of The Second Sex [1], “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman”, is also indicative of how society constructs acceptable and unacceptable ideals of womanhood and femininity; which are then systematically reinforced throughout their lives by various means including language. Language, as a medium of social interaction and expression, not only reflecting the biases and prejudices ingrained in a culture, but also limits thought in terms of roles and norms related to gender. An article by Stephanie Pappas titled ‘Gendered grammar linked to global sexism’ cites a study conducted by researcher Jennifer Prewitt-Frellino and her colleagues, which finds that when presented with gender neutral pronouns like “they” or in languages where a single gender neutral pronoun is used for “he” and “she”, people automatically assume that those being referred to are men and not women. This is the result of years of conditioning, which begins as soon as children start to learn language. They are taught early on that “man” and “mankind” refer to the whole of the human race and that when talking about a person whose sex is not identified, he/him/ his is used. A blog piece titled ‘One giant leap for language’ puts forward an interesting hypothesis on what language may have been used if it had been published earlier.

Talking Gender

A linguistic bias against women.

By Sana Fatima Hussain
women instead of men who had made that fateful landing on the moon. Would it have been "the first womanned Moon landing"; would the inscription on Nixon's plaque have read "Here women from the planet Earth first set foot upon the Moon, July 1969 AD. We came in peace for all womankind"; and would the much quoted line be "one small step for a woman, one giant leap for womankind"? The answer of course is no; because in language, as in every other walk of life, mankind is representative of the human civilization as a whole, whereas womankind is just that.

The same is true for words and titles that signify power, dominance and superiority. Because society typically thinks of these qualities as being inherently masculine, in sentences such as “The president addressed the nation” or “The party leader’s service to the country will always be remembered with high praise”, it is a foregone conclusion that the people being referred to are men. Language also reinforces our socially constructed assumptions with titles like chairman, fireman and policeman instead of chairperson, firefighter and police officer. When referring to a woman who occupies a position of power or has a job “in a male-dominated field”, the need is often felt to add a disclaimer like “lady” doctor, “lady” reporter, “woman” pilot, and actress, to serve as a reminder that women typically do not belong in such professions, which is why in this rare occurrence their gender must be emphasised along with their professional titles.

Not only does language discriminate against women by portraying them as “Others” in positive, important roles, it also attributes words and phrases with negative connotations or those that promote gender stereotypes to women. Michael Sainato in ‘Sexism in the Dictionary’ says that “Modern dictionaries have incorporated sexism into several stereotypically feminine negative terms [...] The rampant use of female-specific nouns used in example sentences that perpetuate the negative connotations in language that are inferred by traditional sexism”. He gives the example of the Oxford Pocket Dictionary and the free online Merriam Webster Dictionary, where definitions of words and example sentences of their usage are blatantly sexist. He cites the word “impressionable” as an instance, which has been explained through the sentence “a girl of eighteen is highly impressionable”. Similarly, feeble, coy and naïve are explained through multiple example sentences of their usage are blatantly sexist. Oxford Pocket Dictionary and the free online Merriam Webster Dictionary have incorporated sexism into several stereotypically feminine negative terms. The same is true for words and titles that signify power, dominance and superiority. Because society typically thinks of these qualities as being inherently masculine, in sentences such as “The president addressed the nation” or “The party leader’s service to the country will always be remembered with high praise”, it is a foregone conclusion that the people being referred to are men. Language also reinforces our socially constructed assumptions with titles like chairman, fireman and policeman instead of chairperson, firefighter and police officer. When referring to a woman who occupies a position of power or has a job “in a male-dominated field”, the need is often felt to add a disclaimer like “lady” doctor, “lady” reporter, “woman” pilot, and actress, to serve as a reminder that women typically do not belong in such professions, which is why in this rare occurrence their gender must be emphasised along with their professional titles.

It is a fact that the use of language mirrors social mores and values. Using language that is sexist and insensitive towards women is a reflection of the patriarchal values that we all imbibe living in society, affecting women both on a personal, day-to-day level, and on a collective, large-scale level. These values are reinforced when a boy is chastised with “you throw like a girl”, or a girl is admonished for being bossy, pushy or a nag. The firing of Jill Abramson, executive director of the New York Times, ostensibly because she was “brusque”, “pushy” and “mercurial”, is a perfect example of how language upholds the bias that society harbours against women. All the qualifiers that were used to describe Abramson’s “arbitrary decision-making, a failure to consult and bring colleagues with her, inadequate communication and the public mistreatment of colleagues” would never be used for any of her male colleagues. In fact, when speaking about the same traits in a man, the media would most likely describe him as a direct, authoritative, no nonsense kind of guy. Kat Lister, in her article ‘Who cares if Jill Abramson was bossy?’, comments on this double standard and women’s disadvantaged position at work, in language and in the media by saying that “Try and forget the pay discrepancy story for a moment and simply concentrate on language and the expectations women placate to exert authority with one foot stepped back. Jill Abramson’s story shows us all what happens when a woman throws her ball like a man. She gets knocked out of the game altogether. She’s told it’s her fault... Assertive? Yes, but never aggressive. Commanding? Certainly, but always with a smile. Behave too professionally and you’re an ice queen, show too much emotion and you’re unreliable”.

Unfortunately, narratives about women, whether it be women in politics, women at work, homemakers, victims and survivors of rape, or women in the entertainment industry, are all insidiously and categorically sexist. And the bias is present all across; from Urdu newspapers with bylines that read “lady reporter”, to British newspapers carrying headlines, “mother of three poised to lead the BBC”. For anyone sensitised to gender and language, it has become very clear while observing and participating in everyday discourse that language marginalises, stereotypes and belittles women. It reasserts the systemic prejudices that are ingrained in patriarchal society, and is often also used to rationalise misogyny. While it is true that gendered modifications in language alone will not end patriarchy, it would be a start. A much needed start that will, at the very least, force language users to confront their own biases and see how they are reflected in the everyday usage of language. Or, to quote Sheryl Sandberg [i], it may also prompt one to reconsider calling a little girl “bossy”, and say instead “that she has executive leadership skills”.

Sana Fatima Hussain is a Features Editor for the magazine and in her work, explores the relationship between literature and the social causalities it represents.

Endnotes
A DRY SEASON DOCTOR IN WEST AFRICA

Little girl, small pikin, abandons her friends and a game of hopscotch, runs quick-quick through dirt-swept streets, bounds barefoot over littered paper and plastic, runs to her father with her itchy toes.

Papa sits on a low, wood stool, contemplating young soccer players on a nearby field, village athletes whose feet beat air into the dirt. Wagging tongues of lace-less shoes lap up grains of sand, imitate small whirlwinds from the Sahel.

An old woman in a green caftan peers into an empty well, lowers a bucket into it all the same, waits to hear it hit the water table rock. Behind her, a waiting line coils around and chokes a baobab for shade.

The girl finds her father on his cement front porch, feet turned out and chin in hand. She holds her foot up like a fist, shakes it in his face, twists his ear with a scream. Take it out! Now-now! It scratches.

He commands her to fetch a bottle of alcohol and two big cotton balls. Go to Mama’s sewing kit, bring me the silver needle with the fire-blackened tip, he says. He ducks into the kitchen for the carton of matches with a picture of a boxer on it.

They assemble their tools on the porch. Papa studies her toes in the light of a harmattan-hooded sun, his corn-and-cotton-farm-worn hands function like mechanical clamps for her foot, his dented fingernails go to work for his daughter.

Her hands clasp his khaki-clad shoulder, his calluses tickle her arch. Ai! he says. Little lady, wife of so-and-so, your husband won’t be happy, if you live with a half-eaten toe.

She presses her toes together. I will never marry, she says. Jamais dans cette vie! Where can I find a man like you? She shakes her foot. Hold still, he says. And I hope you didn’t scratch it.

He steadies needle to toe, needle to toe, squints with the wrinkled concentration of a sun-baked archaeologist, gently excavates the devil beneath her skin. It takes him a while, the better part of an hour, to finish the job.

He doesn’t want to burst the white sack and send out an invisible trickle of greedy eggs. This parasite could be a mother with vampire babies to feed. He digs around, does not disturb this flesh-eating creature.

With the little girl’s skin peeled back in needle-cut strips, he scoops out the milky jigger, a maggot with a black full-stop dot of a head. He places it on a cotton ball, strikes a match. I want to see, please! She watches the jigger writhe on its fiery deathbed.

Papa slides the needle through a new flame, sterile. He presses alcohol-soaked cotton over the crater in her little toe. It burns. She feels clean. But, for days, trouble stirs in her foot.

The itching grows. Always, she runs to him. And sighs, in passing, for the girl who has no father. She fetches the tools—needle, matchbox, alcohol, and cotton balls—and goes in search of him.

He is her dry season doctor who cures her the best he can. He holds her toes, spreads them like rust-colored coins in his hands. Helps her learn and remember what love must look like.

He is her dry season doctor and she makes the most of him.

~ Viola Allo
The psychology of bigotry demands that we are each our own moral police.
By Maria Amir

Often when one thinks about it, the idea of prejudice seems rather simplistic. Most of us are inclined to dismiss “other” people as prejudiced or bigoted based on an intrinsic binary each of us carry that indicates how “good” we are; and by good I am alluding to a number of modifiers “moral”, “clever”, “liked”, “successful” — it’s astonishingly fluid, this definition of “good”, when one thinks about it. Then again, so few of us ever think about it. Prejudice, in nearly every incarnation, is something that is cultivated and perpetuated by other people on even more “other” people.

The “I” is never prejudiced.
The “we” almost never.
The “us” occasionally.
The “they” almost never.
The “I” is never prejudiced.

There is a meme making the rounds on the Internet these days, one of those classic, hackneyed humanist memes that tends to resurface every time the human race is being particularly brutal to itself. The meme shows a baby staring into a camera and bears the caption “this baby does not hate anyone, please don’t teach it to”. I am always struck by how simple the idea of “not hating” sounds but how it is anything but easy in practice. For the case in question, it is quite macabre — using the image of a baby to introduce a maxim on the birth of bigotry. The fact is, babies are raised by people, in places, with certain philosophies; each faction will multiply into a personality, and each personality will be a composite of values, and those values will begin with prejudice. After all, the human race has not yet found itself capable of defining a version of “good” that does not simultaneously include denoting what is “bad”.

It sort of begs the age-old question “why can’t we all just get along?” It appears we can’t and history and experience suggest that we won’t. One of the reasons prejudice survives and thrives is that, as social creatures with the ability to reason, human beings rely on classifications to build structures. We ground ourselves in space and time by aligning with a gender, race, religion, cast, creed, country, colour, language, art, policy, ethic and power. It is how we tell our stories because a universal “human” story would just be too big and too complex and ironically “too simple” to be compelling if there weren’t points of conflict and dissonance. After all, doesn’t every great story thrive on conflict?

There is some measure of scapegoating that inevitably takes place when one places religion over rights and an ideal over human lives.

Psychological research on prejudice first emerged in the 1920s and was based upon American and European race theories that attempted to prove “White” superiority. At the time, on reviewing 73 studies on race and intelligence, an influential 1925 Psychological Bulletin article [1] concluded that the “studies taken seemed to indicate the mental superiority of the white race.” In light of medical, anthropological, and psychological studies purporting to demonstrate the superiority of white people, many social scientists viewed prejudice as a natural response to “backward” races. This perspective changed in the 1930s and 1940s as civil rights movements began to take root to challenge colonialism and anti-Semitism. But in some ways it grounded how we continue to view prejudice as being primarily rooted in race even today. There are many forms of prejudice but some part of our universal ethic grounds it in racism. This may be one of the reasons why modern variations of this phenomenon like “Islamophobia” are often grounded in race debates rather than religion debates. The words “that’s racist” has ethical appeal to underpin issues marking prejudice, even when those prejudices may be about ethical considerations themselves. This is also where many of the ideological pitfalls of “multiculturalism” are often located. There is some measure of scapegoating that inevitably takes place when one places religion over rights and an ideal over human lives. Then again, the debate of who gets to decide which cultures demand scrutiny and along what lines is often prejudiced in and of itself. So there is really no escaping some incarnations of prejudice.

It is hard to identify at what precise juncture prejudice is perpetuated; some claim it starts at birth, others that it begins to take root with how one is socialised. And yet there is another dimension to prejudice, it operates differently on an individual level and a collective level. If enough people validate it, it can and often is incorporated into ethical frameworks — religions, philosophies, laws. After all, nearly everything that is considered prejudiced today was once considered acceptable, if not downright moral at some point in history, and who’s to say the variables in play right now won’t shift to form future prejudices?

However, one thing becomes clear in emerging and archived narratives on prejudice and bigotry — the real battle lies somewhere between the juncture where fact becomes fiction and when statistics start to converge into stories. The former grounds a narrative into rationale and the latter into the realms of romance. Most of our prejudices are rooted in some romantic notion of morality, we eulogise and glorify these acts for “the greater good”, bearing out the notion that curbing things we don’t like in the now serves a glorious overarching purpose. Human beings need to have “reasons” behind what they do. Doing the “right thing” is never enough unless there is some glory — personal or public — to accompany the act. This is where our morality is underpinned, not just in the face of “right” but in the stories that can be told about it. This is why the science of prejudice can never completely be disassociated from the story of prejudice. The why’s must always be grounded in a complex concoction of familiarity rather than mere facts and figures.

Carl Sagan said “The truth may be puzzling. It may take some work to grapple with. It may be counterintuitive. It may contradict deeply held prejudices. It may not be consonant with what we desperately want to be true. But our preferences do not determine what’s true.” [2] It’s a beautiful sentiment, noble and direct, but socially speaking, very hard to translate. “Accepting the truth” is very different from “telling the truth” in our collective consciousness. This grounding of truths is complicated when people need to find a way to rationalise them to their liking — and we all rationalise truths we don’t like.

Perhaps this is the point at which prejudice is born?

According to Georg Christoph Lichtenberg [3], “Prejudices are so to speak the mechanical instincts of men: through their prejudices they do without any effort many things they would find too difficult to think through to the point of resolving to do them.”
Hereafter, there is free reign for a spark of bigotry to take flight and prosper. As Voltaire held, “Men will commit atrocities as long as they believe absurdities” and by the strictures set out by Sagan, most things living depend on it. This is the reason why even though social categories form an indispensable part of human thought, they are open to approximation because of markers such as race, sex and age; all of which form a sort of continuum and are therefore the bedrock of social labelling.

This is the problem with binaries; they are inherent in concept formation but almost never pan out in fact-finding missions. Even seemingly clear cut binaries such as “Day and Night” and “Land and Sea” on closer examination have degrees of variance and instances of overlap. Tentative boundaries always exist but they are confusing and often blurry. This is why the variances and shades seldom survive when summarised for the benefit of an audience. Narratives of prejudice are built on summaries and on closer examination have degrees of variance and binaries such as “Day and Night” and “Land and Sea” inherent in concept formation but almost never pan vile and dogmatic, but neither form “truths”.

The most standard incarnation of prejudice involves “Us versus Them” formations that begin the moment most of us start to compartmentalise. It is perhaps somewhat telling then that human education is founded on the act of compartmentalising both information and experience. Having an “Us” and a “Them” is a fundamental part of how we recognise ourselves.

Gordon Allport first explored this relationship between prejudice and categorical thinking in his seminal work ‘The Nature of Prejudice’ [4] While recognising the emotional, social, economic and historic dimensions of prejudice, Allport also proposed that it was an outgrowth of normal human function by saying, “The human mind must think with the aid of categories... once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudice. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends on it.” This is the reason why even though social categories form an indispensable part of human thought, they are open to approximation because of markers such as race, sex and age; all of which form a sort of continuum and are therefore the bedrock of social labelling.

This is the problem with binaries; they are inherent in concept formation but almost never pan out in fact-finding missions. Even seemingly clear cut binaries such as “Day and Night” and “Land and Sea” on closer examination have degrees of variance and instances of overlap. Tentative boundaries always exist but they are confusing and often blurry. This is why the variances and shades seldom survive when summarised for the benefit of an audience. Narratives of prejudice are built on summaries and oversimplifications: good / bad, wrong / right, more / less, big / small, powerful / weak, moral / immoral and the constant underpinning lens is always us / them.

Games series and theDivergent series marketed at young adults highlight the demerits of group think and assimilation. The rebel is now being fetishised, even if only for profit rather than any kind of ethical grounding.

This leads us along another segue, how many of us ever stop to think who considers us to be a “them”? We are all conditioned and trained to see through only one side of the telescope, looking out, never in. We are all conditioned and trained to see through only one side of the telescope, looking out, never in. Much of why this is natural for us rests in questions of power. Human beings, like other animals, have hierarchies and as Orwell would have it, “Some animals are more equal than others.” [5] Power is the pivot to why we seem to have been unable to genuinely sustain a world without overt prejudice.

After all, even if it is impossible to eliminate all categories, it should certainly be conceivable to eliminate the ostensibly cruel ones like racism, sexism and war. And yet what is so hard to conceive of today is that most narratives that centre on global society. We have made efforts, however, hurt to compartmentalise, it is the follow through. This may well boil down to a case of practice versus principle. The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights underpins our modern human “principles with the highest aspiration of the common peoples. Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.”

Again, sounds so fundamentally simple, doesn’t it? Simple to understand and anything but easy to do given that the parameters of prejudice — whether subtle or sadistic — always qualify these words into hierarchies when it comes to practice. In practice, we universally acknowledge that it is harder to un-teach prejudice than to teach it. Yet, while most of us accept this truth, many still ground their morality and on the premise of excluding people rather than including them. Our “Us” is nearly always an exclusive club rather than a free membership global gift.

In his novel ‘The Stand’ [6], Stephen King describes the birth of bigotry in these words:

“Show me a man or a woman alone and I’ll show you a sable. Give me two and they’ll fall in love. Give me three and they’ll invent the charming thing we call ‘society’. Give me four and they’ll build a pyramid. Give me five and they’ll make one an outcast. Give me six and they’ll reinvent prejudice.”

Give me seven and in seven years they’ll reinvent warfare. Man may have been made in the image of God, but human society was made in the image of His opposite number, and is always trying to get back home.”

We generally try to paint our own compartments as moral, ennobling our bigotry against the larger, more pervasive “others” trying to attack our life choices. King, who knows a thing or two about the macabre, suggests that the process by which most of us construct our goodness and our gods may be taking the wrong way home.

Maria Amir is a contributing editor to the magazine and previously served as the magazine’s Features Editor.

Endnotes
By Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond

We knew what they wanted by their accents. If we heard Mexico or Guatemala in their English, they wanted the babies. If we heard India or Pakistan, they were there for the one-year-olds. Jamaica: the bucks would jerk, dragging their feet to the end. Ghana, Nigeria, or Senegal—same as the Americans: the cries would rise from every corner of every pen.

Most of us were born and bred in South Jersey, but we couldn’t help but pick up a little culture on the farms. There isn’t a goat in the tri-state doesn’t know the Tasiyya or Shalah, or what “what aguam” means; not a nanny or a billy whose ear isn’t attuned to the difference between the tentative Ghanaian cadence, the direct Nigerian brogue, and the seductive Senegalese drawl.

“Every day—any day—any one of us could be picked out for any reason, and we would be. The accents would come, standing just outside the pen, pointing; then the farmhand would come in. We’d part like hair, pushing into the walls of our containment area, then alternately cry, call, or sigh when he wrestled his pick off the floor.”

“Not him!” a mother would sob, almost halfheartedly, for her wretched boy, the real wailing having happened when the wethering had been done in the first place. Every goat knows a castrated male is condemned to go the way of meat.

“Not me!” the eunuch would beg.

Relieved we’d been passed over, the rest of us would coo “It’ll be alright,” even as we all heard the prayers, watched the blood spurt and dribble, smelled the burning hair, and listened to the mechanized spray of water that preceded the hacking.

For the most part, I was content with my lot in life. I had had the fortune of living all my years on the farm I’d been born on, and by the same providence, I was designated a breeder.

A breeder is the safest position a male can occupy on a farm. Bucks are considered hard to control, even when they can’t smell a doe in heat; but breeders are responsible for siring half the herd—an integral part of the farm’s economy. To prevent the deformities associated with incest, there can only be one or two male breeders on an average-sized farm; whoever that is, is the alpha of the herd.

On the totem of status, the breeder falls just under the angora goats, which get fed and brushed all day, and just above the dairies. (A dairy would dispute this fact. I’m sure, but you tell me if you all day, and just above the dairies. (A dairy would dispute this fact. I’m sure, but you tell me if you

Even on my high perch, I remained aware that one day, perhaps when I was nine or 10, I would start to age out of breeding. My kids would begin dying early or start exhibiting abnormalities: Distorted faces with one eye, or three horns, no nose, six legs. Thereafter, a younger buck would be brought in from another farm, and that would be the meat of me.

I hoped, when that happened, a discerning accent would bypass the tender kids for the well-earned flavor of my long and aged loin. When my time came, I intended to go without the requisite theatrics. I would stand still and stoic under the executioner’s knife, content to let the hysterical dirge of the nannies and kids usher me into the afterlife.

But this was not the way it was to be for me. The season preceding my last one on the farm, meant life for us. What we didn’t realize at the time, though, was that life meant death for us. A different farm would have been able to weather a slight dip in business, but the unexpected loss came at a time when finances were stretched thin. After 42 years in operation, management had made the reasonable decision to replace the fencing and build budgets against the number of kids the does would have per season.

These were intelligent measures, but, as anyone on a farm knows, everything is subject to providence.

To cover the shortfall, management started selling some of the babies. Usually, about six weeks after the kids are born, they are separated from their mothers into neighboring pens to be weaned; the cries are almost louder than when the farmhand comes in for a kill. But that spring, instead of moving the kids next door, the hands packed them onto trucks, never to be seen again. My nannies lowed with bitterness into the night for weeks, and they didn’t forget.
When the next mating season came, the does had seemingly conspired not to reproduce. I tucked my nose in each nanny’s undercarriage, as usual, but they gave me no heat. They were cold as winter. All of them. Under the circumstances, my own interest was minimal.

In seasons past, my owners had had to force me to eat when it was time to mate, but now I had to resolve as I squalled louder and louder. When he left, I took my spot in a corner. I didn’t feel I deserved to be. After all my seasons of reliable service, all the bucks and does I had produced, management owed me a better send-off than this. So I ran.

I was not a young buck anymore, and, again, I had put on weight, but I was moving fast. As I gained a solid distance, I looked back and saw the hands of sirens; Human laughter. Raised voices. And an accent I recognized: “Eighty-tree! Eighty-tree! Eighty-tree! Q4!”

A hand, disembodied by the sunlight, reached out to push me into the pen I would share with a phalanx of wethered bucks. I had put up no resistance, but as I squalled, the goats seized their chance. The truck driver alighted, trying to help wrangle the escapes. He caught one, but the angora didn’t make it across the street. I had to look away from the blood curdling his curls.

The intersection was utter chaos. Cars were honking. People were cursing. Sirens were deafening. The driver now stood guard over me zealously, loosely handling the other one. I was almost 250 pounds at last weigh-in; at two to five dollars a pound, I would fetch a nice price. I took pride in that.

Finally, the farmland emerged from the tunnel, angrily dragging the fugitive goat across the road. We were marched into a grim warehouse. Chickens squawked bitterness and gossip from the tightly packed wire cages that covered the walls, and cows, sheep, and goats bleated greetings, obscenities, and misery at us from their pens. I nearly slipped on the blood, but I maintained my composure as we passed buckets full of dripping heads. Just as I ate, I told myself, I would be eaten. This is life.

Once again, the hand used unnecessary force to push me into the pen I would share with a phalanx of wethered bucks. I had put up no resistance, but as a buck that had once been the alpha on the farm, I understood his need to assert his power given that I had lost the nanny and angora.

As he entered the pen, the goats parted in panic. When he left, I took my spot in a corner. I could smell the musk of another buck in my new enclosure. My eyes filled with tears, a three-legged buckling leaning against the wall of the truck to peer out the window, an angora that was foaming at the mouth, and me. I didn’t ask them where we might be going, and they didn’t volunteer any guesses. Respectively making peace with our impending doom, we ignored each other.

For more than an hour we rode. Stopping. Starting. More animals coming on. Some animals being taken off. And then it was my turn.


A hand, disembodied by the sunlight, reached into the truck, looped a rope around my neck, and yanked me down. Because I didn’t resist as he passed buckets full of dripping heads. Just as I ate, I told myself, I would be eaten. This is life.

Once again, the hand used unnecessary force to push me into the pen I would share with a phalanx of wethered bucks. I had put up no resistance, but as a buck that had once been the alpha on the farm, I understood his need to assert his power given that I had lost the nanny and angora.

As he entered the pen, the goats parted in panic. When he left, I took my spot in a corner. I could smell the musk of another buck in my new resting place, but I was the biggest of the lot and no goat would dare tell me to move. His place was now mine.

I closed my eyes, as concurrent recitations of the Tasmiya and Shahda rose in the distance. Bangladesh was in the house, as was Trinidad, Ecuador, and Brooklyn. This is where the accents had been last season and this one; and where the accents went, I now knew, we had no choice but to follow. This was the way of meat.
Every so often, you find a piece of furniture, an old head wrap or something like a skirt held together by a rusty pin. Our years, spilled all over the ruggedness of this war-torn place, our years, wasted like grains of rice.

Relics of your past, left for you, in case you returned accidentally or intentionally, in case you did not perish with everyone else. Something hanging onto thread, holding onto the years to be picked up, after locusts and termites have had their say, the graciousness of looters, the graciousness of termites and temporary owners of a home you built during your youth, during the Samuel Doe years when finding food was your life goal. How gracious, the war years, how gracious, the warlords, their fiery tongues and missiles.

All the massacres we denied, and here we are today, coming upon a woodwork of pieces of decayed people that are not really pieces of woodwork at all. This should be an antique, a piece of the past that refused to die. Wood does not easily rot, but here, termites have taken over Congo Town the way Charles Taylor claimed the place, the way Charles Taylor claimed our land and the hearts of hurting people, the way the Atlantic in its wild roaming has eaten its way into town even as we roamed, in search of refuge, the way whole buildings have crumbled into the sea, the way the years have collapsed upon years. What took us to war has again begun, and what took us to war has opened its wide mouth again to confuse us. What took us to war, oh, my people!

~ Patricia Jabbeh Wesley
QUARTER TO WAR

A land slumbers under a blanket of coffeed weeds
With lashings of withered wreaths numb on gravestones
A broken fence, a lone gatekeeper, a shroud of trees
Keep the memoir of ghosts who can only sleep
When relatives insist on visiting, bringing new flowers
Which they then water with tears and dress in silence

The broken branches which are gathered under trees
The faded epitaphs speaking to the sun about memory
The dried leaves cracking with the reticence of rainfall
The shade from the high weeds crowded into themselves
The people crouching to straighten fallen headstones
On their beloveds’ graves, then murmur their departure

The footfalls fading from the streets
The trees departing from the avenues
The sweat evaporating from the skin
Remote traffic sounding like gossip

A lone gatekeeper standing by the gate
Adding up thoughts of differences and loss.

~ Jumoke Verissimo

He She and Golden Apples by Iyrina Lialko
THE SCORE
By Hawa Jande Golakai

The LG flatscreen sounded a tiny ‘zooop’ as it went off, fading to black over the ‘Harpo Studios’ emblem, trademark of Oprah Winfrey’s empire. Heavy-hearted, Zintle Msengwana sighed to her feet. The queen of talk was serious; she was really going off primetime for good.

“Pushing the lamp aside, she knelt beside the bundle on the floor, pulling back the duvet. She jerked and uttered a tiny whimper.”

Zintle couldn’t believe it. Not much made her days cleaning up other people’s mess easier to stomach. If the halls were empty and the work hadn’t piled up, relying on hidden stashes of snacks and soaps was the one trick she allowed herself before she started her routine. Management in some lodges was strict, and allowed only good clients to book rooms. At The Grotto, class and wallet size equaled a tiny whimper. Underneath lay Rhonda Greenwood, face down and back turned, head barely visible beneath the rumpled folds.

“Ma’am,” Zintle put a hand on her shoulder and shook gently. “Ms Greenwood. No answer. ‘Ms Greenwood. Are you awake?’

She had no idea why she was whispering, only suddenly she felt scared. She shook harder, and watched Rhonda Greenwood’s pudgy, prostrate form jiggle back and forth under her hand with no will of its own. Gulpung, Zintle heaved, dragging the edge of the duvet and Greenwood closer. The woman pitched and rolled, coming to rest on her side. Through the blonde strands falling across her face oozed a dried mess of thick, creamy-looking fluid inside and around her mouth. A dark red lump stood out behind her ear.

“Yeah. All the senior guys have rooms but their partners don’t stay here with them. It’s not allowed. I mean, they stay the night sometimes but not usually. Especially peak season.”

“Hhm,” Vee snapped another close-up of Greenwood’s face, lungs starting to ache as she leaned close to get the blotchy nose and raw lump behind her ear in the frame. Behind her, she heard Zintle’s gasp at her audacity. Trust me, I don’t want to be doing this either. Then why was she? She clicked on, capturing the protruding tongue and thick foam in and around the woman’s mouth. When she finally had to inhale, the strong, gassy hit of booze inside and around her mouth. A dark red lump

“Naww,” she groaned as water swirled down the bathtub’s drain.

“Yintoni? What? Zintle looked panicky. “I only let the water out. I shouldn’t do that?”

“No, I don’t think you’re supposed to do that. Maybe there was evidence in it.”

Zintle’s apprehension switched to disgusted disbelief. “Nyangahamba ilo!” she said, then blushed as she remembered. Vee didn’t speak Xhosa. “That’s crazy. Like what, urine?”

“Vee giggled into her hand. Zintle cracked a smile. “Yeah, maybe urine. I don’t know.” She gave Zintle a comforting pat on the shoulder. “I’m sure it doesn’t matter.”

Nonetheless she captured all angles of the bathroom and clicked through her efforts, Zintle craning her neck over her shoulder. When she reached the end, Zintle wrinkled her forehead and made a mouth-shrug. The gesture pretty much summed up the entire gallery: meaningless. Vee started to put the phone away.

“Must everything be correct?” Zintle asked.

At Vee’s quizzical frown, she continued: “Do you want photos of your room exactly how it was? Before I found her?”

“Yes, but... you moved anything?”

“Lo glass.” Zintle pointed to a wine glass
on a side table in the bedroom. “Lo glass ibime pha ngshe’bafini.” She clicked in irritation and repeated, “That glass was by the bathtub.” Her face clouded. “Ndidicholle. I touched it. I picked it up with my fingers.”

Vee chewed her lip. Finally she said, “Okay, bring it back where it was. It’s fine, you can hold it,” she cajoled. “Long as you’re the only person who touched it.” Nothing suspicious about a maid’s fingerprints all over a room she regularly cleaned. That’s if anyone cared to check, like the police. If this was a police matter at all, come to think of it.

Pinching it by the stem, Zintle set the glass on the peach-and-cream tiles at the foot of the tub, twisting and turning it around several times. Finally satisfied it was in place, she nodded gravely at Vee, who aimed and snapped.

“That all? Did you move anything else?”

Zintle’s immediate, involuntary nod faltered fast into a shake of the head. Vee narrowed her eyes. Avoiding her gaze, the maid quickly stuffed both hands into her mouth and covered it with a hand, head shaking in emphatic denial.

Then Vee recalled how she’d met Rhonda Greenwood, alive and well, a mere day ago.

“We’ve met before, haven’t we?”

She had turned and looked down, quite a ways, into the bright brown irises of a plump woman, clipboard tamped against her chest by a pair of well-manicured hands. Her face was round, almost unnaturally spherical, and crowned with fine, artificially lightened hair, teased – tortured into a bun on top of her head. Her smile could’ve fracked the entire Karoo for free.

Vee smiled back politely. She and Chlöe were quite a ways, into the bright brown irises of a plump woman, clipboard tamped against her chest by a pair of well-manicured hands. Her face was round, almost unnaturally spherical, and crowned with fine, artificially lightened hair, teased – tortured into a bun on top of her head. Her smile could’ve fracked the entire Karoo for free.

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“Hang on a minute...” The woman’s face blanked out, her head taking up a curious bobbing motion, akin to a beach ball on a gentle tide.

“Ummm...” Vee interjected, concern budding after several moments.


Vee blinked. “Whoa...”

The nodding and jaw-breaking beam kept going. “People get such a jolt when I do that, but who wouldn’t love that reaction.” Her laugh was tinkly yet full and broad-spirited, much like herself. “I did this course a few years ago, you know, the ones that improve your memory by tapping into alpha waves to increase how much of your brain you use. I know,” she held up a hand, “sounds like utter rubbish but it actually worked. Well, for the most part anyway. When you’re in hospitality you can’t afford to forget names and faces.”

Vee extended her hand with a polite smile, provoking the woman to bright, open laughter as she shook it. “Oh, of course I’m being silly, you don’t know who I am! Rhonda Greenwood, deputy general manager. I know you from that thing last year...”

Please don’t say the Paulsen trial, Vee thought.

“...the conference centre at Portswood. The Portswood Hotel at the V&A Waterfront. You were there for some journalism training group as was I, well for a management refresher in my case. A couple of our tea breaks coincided and that’s when we chatted. About shortbread, the silliest of things.”

“Oh yeees!” Vee sighed into a grin. “That was ages ago, early last year. You gave me your grandmother’s recipe for genuine Scottish shortbread, and I gave you my mother’s one for Liberian shortbread.”

Up and down bobbed Rhonda’s head, in agreement, and also because it now appeared to be a tic she had no control over. “Which is more like a muffin isn’t it, and truly scrumptious. How long are you staying with us?”

Vee blinked her way back into the room, the memory of an effervescent Greenwood fading as she looked down at the crumple of human being near her feet. This woman had died with two – possibly more, who knew – great shortbread recipes in her head. This woman, whose alpha-enhanced brain was rotting away along with her everything else, was giving off more and more of That Dead Smell with every passing minute. She gagged, rushing for the door.

“What do we tell the police?” Zintle pressed, scurrying her short, plump legs to keep up. Refreshed by clean air, Vee stopped outside back entrance of the lodge’s kitchen and shielded her eyes against the sun, face stern.

“Zintle, you can’t tell the police I was in there with you. Please, okay, no...you really can’t,” Zintle folded her arms. “It won’t be good for me, it won’t be good for you either. I’m a guest. They’ll ask why you

Swing by Weldon Sandusky
told me about it.” And there's the small matter of those pictures I took.

“But I needed help. You were the only person around.”

“They won't see it that way.” Vee squeezed Zintle’s arm. “I beg you, don’t. Tell your housekeeping manager or whoever that you just found her, which is true. And if they ask you about moving things, be truthful. You won't get into any trouble.”

“Where are you going?”

“Back.” Vee pointed in the direction of the wall and made a swooping motion with her hands.

Zintle put her fists on her hips. “You jumped from the other side, the bootcamp? Yoh, sisi, are you mad? You guys aren’t supposed to come to the lodge.” She paused for a moment, then motioned you mad? You guys aren't supposed to come to the lodge? Yoh, sisi, are you mad? You guys aren't supposed to come to the lodge.

“Is this how pathetic our professional lives have become? Right now we could be chilling in a proper office, having a proper lunch and working on the real assignments we have. But noooo. Because we have the privilege of being the paper’s misfits of choice, nature is our office.” Chlöe waved her hand to indicate the surroundings, making a face so sour on the word 'nature' that Vee had to choke down a laugh. “We get to eat tasteless sandwiches on top of a hill and watch racist porn through someone’s window because we have no other entertainment.”

She bit into the sandwich and grimaced. “Thank you so much for bringing me here.”

The embankment overlooked a gorgeous expanse of open road, koppie formations and grassland that lay outside the lodge’s enclosure. Within the grounds though, the vantage point was purely strategic, affording an unobstructed view of a flatscreen TV in one guest’s room. They had never been able to see who the occupant was, but the viewing content had certainly proved illuminating.

“Come on, quit being such a buzzkill,” Vee said. “We both know it’s Nico’s doing that we’re stuck at that pupu-platoon bootcamp; he had to flex his muscle after our palaver last week. So let’s just suck it up lil’ bit longer and we’ll be out.”

Vee nudged Chlöe with her shoulder and barely got a smile in return. “And Porno Guy here seems to be the only person who cares about us. He keeps his TV on all day and his window open, and at least his choices are imaginative. He deserves some credit for that.”

“How do you know it’s a ‘he’? Could it be a very liberal, oversexed woman.” Chlöe stretched her legs and leaned back, craning her neck at an awkward angle to follow the exertions of the four nude actors on-screen. “On second thought, definitely a man. That’s way too much admin for any woman to find it remotely sexy.”

Vee handed her the Fanta, her favourite, over her mouth. “Stay tuned,” Vee mumbled.

Her face was round, almost unnaturally spherical, and crowned with fine, artificially lightened hair, teased – tortured really – into a bun on top of her head.

Editor's note: This excerpt is taken from 'The Score', and is republished here with permission from the author.
Sometimes, I close my eyes
Sometimes I see the world, scattered
in small brick shacks along the hillsides
far away in Colombia,
where it is only the poor, at the peak
of the mountains. Medellin, holding on
so the city can find rest.
Sometimes, I see the poor in my Bai,
shoeless and old, his teeth threatening
to leave him if he continued on,
and walking on barefoot, he looks ahead,
his eyes, not betraying the future, where
the children he’s populated
the globe with, will cradle him beneath
the soil, where we all go, poor or rich,
where we all go, if we believe in the grave.
Sometimes, it is just these children who
have emerged from a long war they never
saw; children, left along
the sewage drains, the same people who
brought on the war, now recapturing
the land as if the land could be captured.
Sometimes, the world is hazy, as if fog
were a thing for the artist’s rough canvas.
Sometimes, the world is Iyeeh’s
shattered water gourd, the one Iyeeh told
you not to drop, her world, shattered
but sometimes, this is the way of the world,
the simple, ordinary world, where things are
sometimes too ordinary to matter. Sometimes,
I close my eyes, so I don’t have to see the world.

~ Patricia Jabbeh Wesley
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Poetry

Jumoke Verissimo is a Nigerian poet and writer based in Lagos. She has read her work across Nigeria and internationally. She is the author of the award-winning ‘I am memory’ (Dada Books, 2008) and ‘The Birth of Illusion’ (Fullpoint, 2015). Her poems have been published in several anthologies, including the ‘Livre d’or de Struga’ (Poètes du monde) and ‘Migrations’ (Afro-Italian, ed. Wole Soyinka). Her poetry has been translated into Italian, Chinese, French, Spanish, Arabic, Macedonian, Mongolian, Norwegian and Japanese. She is a recipient of the Chinua Achebe Centre Fellowship.

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Patricia Jabbeh Wesley is a poet, scholar, public speaker and human rights activist. Born in Monrovia, she is a survivor of the Liberian Civil War.


Fiction

Amma Darko is one of the most significant contemporary Ghanaian writers. Her novels include ‘Between Two Worlds’ (Sub-Saharan, 2015), ‘Not Without Flowers’ (Sub-Saharan, 2007), ‘Faceless’ (Sub-Saharan, 2003), ‘The Housemaid’ (Heinemann, 1999), and ‘Beyond the Horizon’ (Heinemann, 1995).

Chika Unigwe is the author of three novels, including ‘On Black Sisters Street’ (2009, 2011 Jonathan Cape, UK and Random House NY) and ‘Night Dancer’ (Jonathan Cape, 2012). Her short stories and essays have appeared in various journals. Her works have been translated into many languages including German, Japanese, Hebrew, Italian, Hungarian, Spanish and Dutch. A recipient of several awards, she lives and works in the USA.

Hawa Jande Golakai is the award-nominated crime and speculative fiction author of ‘The Lazarus Effect’ and ‘The Score’. She is an honouree of the Africa39 Initiative to recognise the most promising contemporary talent. Her work has appeared in several African and international publications, including her piece ‘Fugee’, which appears in the 2016 Commonwealth non-fiction anthology. She is also a medical immunologist, and lives in Monrovia, Liberia.

Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond is the author of Powder Necklace, which Publishers Weekly called “a winning debut”. Named among 39 of the most promising African writers under 39, her short fiction was included in the anthology Africa39: New Writing from Africa South of Sahara. Most recently, she was shortlisted for a 2014 Miles Morland Writing Scholarship. In April 2015, she was the opening speaker at TEDxAccra. She is currently at work on a new novel.
We do a great disservice to boys in how we raise them. We stifle the humanity of boys. We define masculinity in a very narrow way. Masculinity is a hard, small cage, and we put boys inside this cage.”

~ Chiamamanda Ngozie Adichie