

# RADIANCE







# RADIANCE

Edited by Sihle Ntuli



## Masthead

Managing Editor  
Clarie Gor

Associate Editor  
Joseph Omoh  
Ndukwu

Current Rajat  
Neogy Fellows  
Yvonne Wabai  
Sihle Ntuli

Founding Editors  
Gbenga Adesina  
Kechi Nomu  
Yinka Elujoba

Designer  
Mahnoor Fatima

## Advisors

Maaza Mengiste  
Brian Kuan Wood  
Kwame Dawes  
Gregory Pardlo  
Ladan Osman

A Long House is a frontier for black thought, stories, and discourse. We publish stories, essays, poetry, conversations, and multimedia art on [alonghouse.com](http://alonghouse.com) and as sole themed issues.

Copyright is held by A Long House and by individual authors/creators of works published. Reproduction in whole or parts without express written permission is strictly prohibited.

The Chapbook is published on A5 sized paper, with Hoefler Text and Stoke as fonts.

Cover is an edited Van Gogh image from a public domain.

A Long House is funded by the founding editors and charitable donations of individuals and philanthropic organizations. To support our work, send us an email:  
[alh@alonghouse.com](mailto:alh@alonghouse.com)



# Let the Sunshine In

From the Latin *radiantia*, meaning “shining” or “beaming,” Radiance, to me, is the act of retaining one’s inner light amid a world that so often seeks to dim it. Some of us do the work of the world on ourselves—an unintentional self-sabotage, born not of malice but of habit. I’ve long wondered why humility is the word we reach for when we downplay our own brilliance. Why is there fear in speaking proudly of ourselves, in naming our light without apology?

When I think of radiance, I think of fire. And here, we choose—provocatively—to overlook the myth of Prometheus, with its infamous theft and divine punishment. Instead, we turn to the Kuba people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, who offer a rare myth of cooperation between gods and mortals. After the goddess Tsetse is expelled for her chaotic tendency to set things ablaze, fire disappears from the world. It is Bumba who then teaches humans how to harness it, revealing its source in the trees. This myth invites us to ask: where do we, as poets, harness our own fire? How do we keep it alive? What does it mean to be

radiant?

Sometimes, our light returns in places we’ve forgotten to look—often just at the corner of our eyes. Our continent is vast, yet the literary spotlight seems to linger on the same regions, the same countries. How do we illuminate those nations that are present in the discourse but remain peripheral, overshadowed by the dominance of others?

It is in this spirit that we introduce *RADIANCE*, a chapbook featuring five poets of African origin: Esther Karin Mngodo (Tanzania), Sandra Nadege (Rwanda), Faswillah Nattabi (Uganda), Vuma Phiri (Zambia), and Yasmina Nuny Silva (Guinea-Bissau). Each poet, whether based on the continent or in the diaspora, offers intimate and moving reflections on what radiance means to them. Through their words, we hope readers might discover what the word means to them, too.

In *Dedication* by Vuma Phiri, we encounter a manifesto for Blackness—bone-chilling in its awe, haunting and thrilling in equal measure. In *Ballad of*

Nantabuulirirwa, we find more than a meditation on womanhood; it is a declaration of presence, a defiant insistence on being. And in the lines “Do not let them fool us, the moon, the moon is ours. Near the moon we do not burn, oh, we do not burn,” Yasmina Nuny Silva offers a glimpse into radiance as reclamation—an act of mindful resistance. One cannot help but feel inspired by the courage and clarity that pulses through every poem in this collection.

Dear reader, I invite you to sit with these words and reflect: what does radiance mean to you? How do you move through a world that will, inevitably, test you? And when it does, how will you protect your light from being dimmed?

Malikhanye!  
Sihle Ntuli

# Contents

Vuma Phiri	
• Dedication	2
• Kinfolk/Skinfolk (I know because my sister, I am you)	5
Esther Karin Mngodo	
• Asubuhi Njema	11
• Wonder	12
• Grief	13
• MWANGAZA	14
Sandra Nadege	
• Nyirankundabanyanga	19
• Izuba Rirashe	21
• Iherezo ry'inzira	22
• Isereri	23
Faswillah Nattabi	
• Ballad of Nantabuulirirwa	26
Yasmina Nuny Silva	
• Guerilla	33
• Spirits	34
• The Moon is Ours	36
Authors	39
Image Credits	45



# Dedication

Vuma Phiri

My people wear histories  
stitched on our skin, entwined in bone.

forming fragments of all our identities,  
carving in us a poetry older than words.

My people descend from ancestors erased from history  
books. Speaking in languages survived through song and story.

When written, they would leap from pages rendering my words  
inadequate  
to compare the beauty of our Blackness.

When our libraries were set alight,  
we rubbed the ashes together

and formed names for our future generations  
to store sacred stories for our survival.

My people yearn to know where our gods are buried,  
to avenge their deaths, destroying the missionaries that killed them.

Visiting their gravesites, we fashion amalgamations  
of spiritualities returning us back to soil, and sun.

The elements we occupied before, bone,  
breath, and light.

My people are well versed in reading vanishing ink,  
often found tracing letters in foreign library books fusing

the missing puzzle pieces of our lineage.

My people attend museums and visit our dead,

worshipping effigies trapped behind glass prisons.

We crave the mystery embedded in each captured object –

we yearn to bury our ancestor's bones, to return our belongings.

My people find thrones on bamboo mats,

to have our crowns plaited onto us

adorned by the hands of alchemists who

imbue new magic from old tradition. We,

who are blessed to inherit ancient alchemy, arisen and alive!

my people, are those who were told to forgo our ancestors,

as if they aren't venerated in our hip's sway.

No leather-bound spines hold their words, yet – we,

their descendants remain with echoes of ancestral memory

pouring out from our veins.

My people carry rhythm in the blood, that grows us  
into poets and percussionists. We learnt to sing from

Our Mothers' voices  
bestowing a symphony orchestrated by God herself.

My people revolt with rocks clutched in our fists, labelled terror  
because we give hell, we garner

warmth from the cinders of burning imperial flags  
and gather strength from our revolutionaries,

here and gone, their bones vibrating under the earth  
their songs, billowing with the wind.

My people inherit names that force colonial mouths to cower,  
and expand worlds when pronounced aloud.

Names declaring a new language on your tongue,  
and occupying a sacred place in the mind of anyone who conjures them.

I tell you; my people are poetry older than words, living  
prayers preceding psalms pressed on pages,

my people, remarkable, in every way

# Kinfolk/Skinfolk (I know because my sister, I am you)

Vuma Phiri

Terra cotta lifelines,  
brown pigmented nail beds  
subtle against an infinite canvas.

Your mouth safeguards portals of  
soft soil un-swallowed on your tongue.  
The blended shades dotted on your face,

between the folds of your arms,  
and behind your knees -  
I know all about these

spaces that store all our  
brown sugar, stirred into Black tea  
undiluted, dense, dark and deep.

I know, because my sister, I  
am you. I am you on your good days.  
When the freckles on your face

beckon the sun to rise.  
I rise with you and greet the  
careless love swimming in the wind,

in the moments we can almost  
drown in the earth's perfect elements.  
I know, because my sister, I am you.

I am you on your worst days.  
When the tears on your face  
dare the sun to rise.

I rise with you, and succumb  
beneath the dominance  
of a world never made for us.

I see myself in every black femme  
who has left this earth too early, knowing,  
always knowing, she could have been me.

I, too, am the women carving their writing  
against their bones, poetry leaping  
from inside their marrow.

I, too, am the women  
who bury truth inside their teeth, unravelling  
their last poem in their suicide note.

I, too, am the women carrying fire inside  
their palms, hands held up, against the sizzling point  
of a policeman's bullet.

I, too am the women strangled inside the grip of  
the men of my skinfolk. The ones who wear a bruised  
curse on their lips, where a soft kiss should be.

I, too am the women who have sculpted themselves  
into the right body, teaching their sisters how to  
transcend  
beyond binary, becoming magic and miracle.

I, too am the women who exist inside  
a dream deferred and a dream denied,  
inherited from a lineage of wounded mothers.

I, too am the women who will never wear  
the spoils of their hard work, who yearn to adorn  
their fingers  
in the diamonds they pry from the earth's core.

I, too am the women who are now gone, weaving  
fingers  
between puffs of clouds, cornrowing constellations,  
connecting ancestors and their descendants.

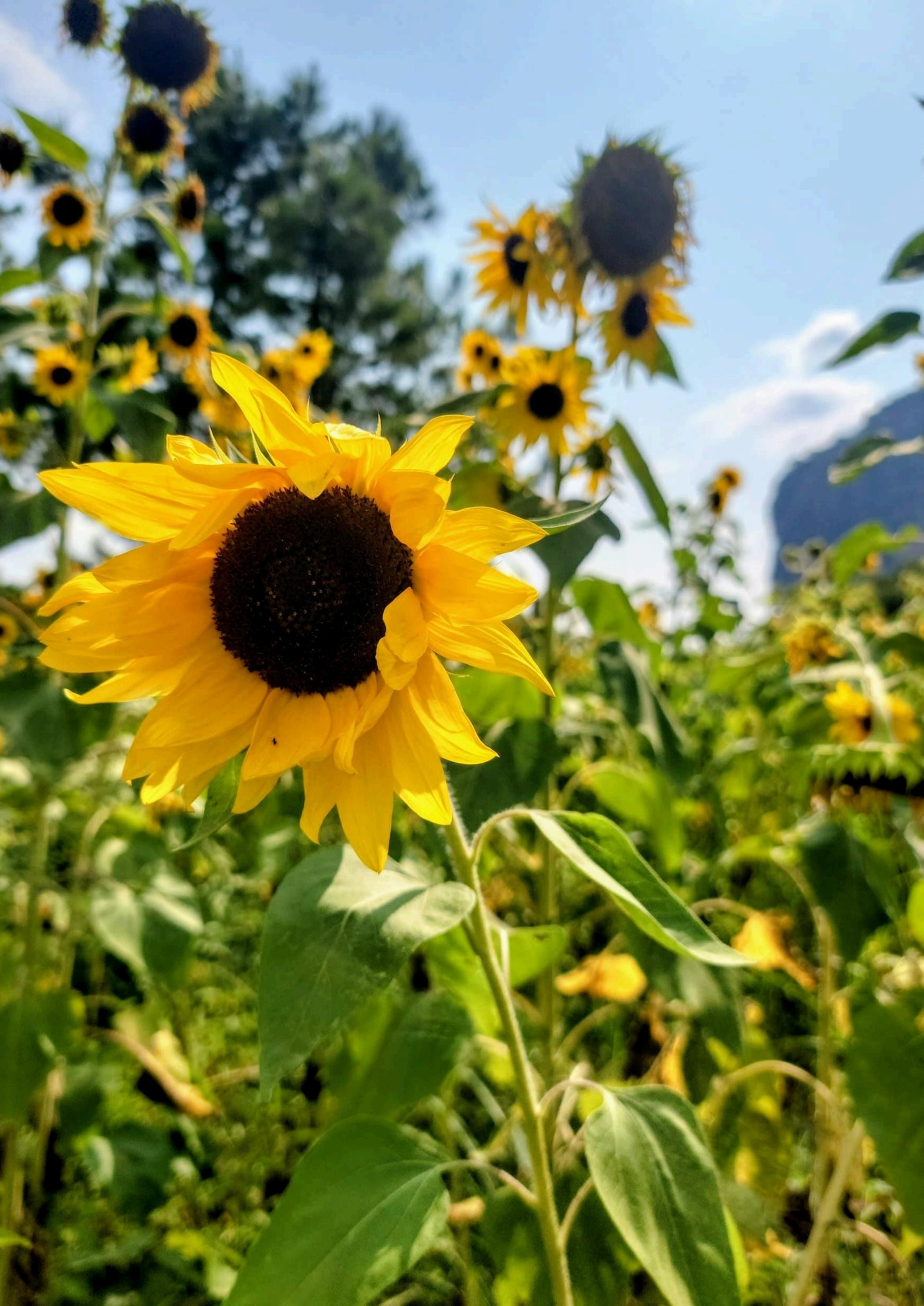
I, too, am the women who are the songs  
of protest. I am the voice these devils will never kill.  
The revolution of my kinfolk is in my breath.

This is why you will always find me  
inside the vibrato of a Black girl's voice.  
Their poetry is shared on my tongue.

I bless the poets born under the African sun  
I bless the fighters born under the African sun  
I bless the writers born under the African sun  
I bless the singers born under the African sun  
I bless the sisters born under the African sun  
I bless the daughters born under the African sun.

It is the light reflected from our words pointing towards what matters most to us. There is a deep vulnerability involved in standing beneath this light or feeling charged with directing it. Every moment of delving into this and choosing to be seen, to be heard, brings us closer to creating a life for ourselves from our words.

Vuma Phiri



Radiance is motherhood. Being a single mother has given me eyes that I would never have in any other timeline. I am grateful for the gift of life passed through my womb. Birthing is a form of knowing.

Esther Karin Mngodo

# Asubuhi Njema

Esther Karin Mngodo

At the crack of dawn.  
A slither of light escapes  
A slim parting of curtains.  
Hurts my eyes  
This memory of you  
Illuminates the room  
Shadows of laughter and longing appear.

The sound of your voice calling my name  
Arms open wide in the heat of the day  
We used to dance  
Like no one was watching  
The gaze of the world fading away  
Sweet poetry.

Curtains now closed.  
I sit silently in the dark with myself  
Afraid of the armour of light carried by the sharpness of your empty words.  
Afraid that if I write my heart down, you may appear.

The last time I saw you,  
You were the sun.

# Wonder

Esther Karin Mngodo

My daughter stands by the bathroom door  
Broken handle; an invitation to explore new worlds  
First, she looks inside  
Then, her two-year old body turns to me  
For permission

My gaze is on her wondering eyes  
I miss myself at her age —  
Unafraid to just be.

She hums a tone of disapproval back to me before I say a word.  
And here I thought mothers are meant to make you brave.  
I will be a better mother next time.

She remains still, still standing at the door  
Her eyes fixated on the white chair-looking thing  
Ready to linger just a little while longer  
Just to be in wonder.

# Grief

Esther Karin Mngodo

Come and sit with me  
Bench by bench  
Side by side  
Here next to me

You have kissed the insides of my anatomy  
With a sunken deep  
A dark cloud always rains on me

You taste like a bitter herb  
And I am now willing  
To let you fly away

I open my mouth  
And with a laugh  
I let you escape  
Into the abyss of the world's mind  
Until we meet again  
God knows, I hope we never do.

# MWANGAZA

Esther Karin Mngodo

Hodi hodi mi naingia, mazuri kusimulia  
Wakubwa nawaamkia, wadogo nawapokea  
Ninalo la kuwaambia, ya moyo kufunulia  
Kichwa usipokiinua, 'tapataje angaza?

We sokea kaa kitako, nianze na nitokako  
Jua jina lina upako, si mchezo si mdako  
Mtoto huyo ni wa kwako, 'Simuite Masumbuko  
Kichwa usipokiinua, 'tapataje angaza?

Koimo hili jina langu, wa kwanza Bibi yangu  
Nyota aipendayo Mungu, yaangaza ulimwengu  
Karibuni kwenye mawingu, machoni toa ukungu  
Kichwa usipokiinua, 'tapataje angaza?

Jambo hili lanishangaza, wengine linawakwaza  
Nikikaa mi nikiwaza, si suala la kubeza  
Utu wa mtu ni mwangaza, uwezao kutukweza  
Kichwa usipokiinua, 'tapataje angaza?

Nuru huwa haifichiki, giza kwake si rafiki  
Nuru haina unafiki, na kweli haikwepeki  
Nuru si suala la kiki, ukatae uafiki  
Kichwa usipokiinua, 'tapataje angaza?

Undani wako una taa, dunia ipate jaa  
Ufahamu tiba ya baa, wokovu wa wenye njaa  
Ilishe nafsi kila saa, taarifa za kufaa  
Kichwa usipokiinua, 'tapataje angaza?

Hakuna jema lisilo'sha, ndio yalivyo maisha  
Nami nisije kuwachosha, bali nipate wachosha  
Wazo hili linahuishia, sio wazo la kufisha  
Kichwa usipokiinua, 'tapataje angaza?





“I sometimes retreat into confusion. In these moments, I forget that I am merely human, a transient being. My own radiance—that inner light—is inevitably dimmed: sometimes by the state of the world, and other times by the storms within my own mind”.

Sandra Nadega

# Nyirankundabanyanga

Sandra Nadege

She swirls in the swivel chair,  
wig like plucked feathers of a dark swan,  
manicured finger tapping—painted bright red  
and loud as a monkey's bum—  
against the mahogany table where invoices of decolonization wait.

She smiles like her masters—soulless and conniving.  
She peppers her speech with proverbs,  
yet she praises the masters that chained  
and tortured the ancestors she quotes in boardrooms.

She spreads the ledgers like prayer mats,  
counting every dollar that flows  
through her crimson-lipped liberation speeches.  
She throws pennies in the smog filled air, a few fall at her feet.

Nyirankundabanyanga is back,  
singing the old song that appeases simpletons  
and exalts the master who signs her paychecks.  
She's demanding reports.

She estimates the casualties of the matrix—  
agonized spirits and bodies of her people  
that waited for salvation  
in pounds, euros and dollars that never arrived.

She is very decolonized,  
very funded,  
and very trapped in systems built  
so anyone who tries to leave suffers enough to return for refuge.

She commands on behalf of you-know-who,  
while her solemn pledge  
to decolonize her own mind dies in her throat—  
monetized and measured,  
invoiced and archived,  
decolonized and destroyed.

# Izuba Rirashe

Sandra Nadege

irabasubiza iti:

“I burn from my chest;  
I command the shadows at my feet.  
I spin in static motions of should, should, should...

I am that shapeshifting sun that calibrates its own light.  
I swell, I burst; I expand beyond every space.  
A piece of me dies and rises—dies and rises—dies and rises.

I was more than.  
I am more than.  
I will be more than.

Ejo.  
Ejo.  
I am more than.”

# Iherezo ry'inzira

Sandra Nadege

They stand outside the mirage (hawk-eyed),  
Frenzied, they climb and latch onto the gangplank.

They want to sail away at any cost (on any ship),  
Resolute, they hang and swing on the gunwale.

They know hope is a fleeting entity (trust it not),  
Desperate, they gamble their souls for passage.

They find peace in the promise of their disembarkation,  
Smug, they always knew. Victory belongs to the gone.

# I s e r e r i

Sandra Nadege

Clutching ash of pulse,  
the hillside tilts on its side,  
locusts rasp my name—  
I stagger into the dusk,  
a tempest dissolves me—void.





# Ballad of Nantabuulirirwa

Faswillah Nattabi

## (I) Zaitun - The Olive

Over the phone your mother relates a dream when the HIV/AIDS pandemic was rife & took over her village.

She watched her cousin slowly fade to the illness the beauty of her flesh morphing into that of a zombie's.

Your mother dreamt that she too was infected & bulged with lesions that excreted pus all over her body.

Her voice trembled with a fear that engrained itself in her soul giving birth to many faces.

Once when unhoarding you decluttered the master bedroom & a litter of rapid HIV tests lay underneath the mattress. [ ]

This fear hid in the whispers of gossip about aunties & uncles who began to hollow & fall suddenly ill.

This was the first sign of the kawuka the bug of HIV/AIDS colloquially termed slim an invasion that deflated the life from your human.

This fear she moulded into a cautionary tale about men  
*if you start with men know that HIV/AIDS exists.*

## (II) Sarah - The Free Woman

Sarah the free woman chased her dreams & escaped a marriage to a muSwahili soldier who brought with him the kawuka.

Sarah deserted the veiling in her last days & shamed the modesty of your mother in a skimpy red dress.

Sarah was ailing but so too was your mother, deep in the displacement of womanhood & ballooned in fabric poking face & hands for the world to see.

Sarah offered you a half-eaten pie which to your dismay your mother took from you whispering that *she is sick*.

### (III) Permutation

The rebellion, slow & subtle, cancered with all the chastisings of your girlhood.

From men & women - teachers at school & the madrassa - aunties & uncles - self-appointed guardians & guiders.

Eat properly - cloister your legs - lower your voice & your spirit

Who would marry your uncouth?  
Who could possibly love  
let alone live with it?

Your innocent curiosity met with the rancour of the adults.

Amina - second wife of your cousin - eldest son of your paternal aunt who too died of AIDS - took particular delight in blanketing you with shame -

at family gatherings - at the mosque on Eid - in rooms full of audience - shame & shame again.

## (IV) Al Fātīhah or The Opening

Perhaps the voice of wisdom was your fathers'  
who in his austerity & critique had insulated  
you with an impenetrable resistance.

& so you took his apathy as approval when  
your enraged hand met the cheek of an older boy  
at a gathering celebrating a friend's sister's matriculation.

It was Amina's son who thought he could parrot his mother & insult you.

The resistance once again proved a sheathing against the  
snicker of puberty a body bellowing for womanhood could  
no longer cower in the pretence of boyhood.

Yet  
your uncouth resisted:  
it gnawed the honeyed rubber of gum in class & hissed with curses  
your spirit had the inkling that you were not here to be controlled.

“I consider radiance to be a state of illumination and purification that culminates from an intense process of refinement. I equate it to the spiritual beautification of one’s being, the way one observes, the manner in which one speaks, listens and engages with the world. To be in a state of radiance is to be in perpetual refinement. Our life experiences in their variations and uniformities, and our choices, whether to resist or endure, become the processes that make us radiant.”

Faswillah Nattabi



“Do I accept me and mine as darkness? Perhaps I ought not to. For the generation that comes after us. To convince them as I have had to be convinced that there is so much light, life, in myself - in my kin - to give the world. But what do we keep giving ourselves to and for? Consumption, and consumption, why radiate if it is swallowed whole by the machinations of a coloniser?”

Yasmina Nuny Silva

# Spirits

Yasmina Nuny Silva

We rose again.  
With moon, again.  
Howling with the winds,  
into the night again To spook the \_\_\_\_\_

my father said never to answer a  
disembodied  
voice calling your name

So i call their names and let the wind carry it

And maybe they will answer and maybe they will be  
Spooked

And never return

Because i own their names now - those names they will  
Decorate my tombstone  
And my children's  
And their children's

Because the \_\_\_\_\_ spilled my grandmother's blood

We rose again,  
With moon again

Disembodied voices

Calling names that were not meant to be our own

-

# Guerrilla

Yasmina Nuny Silva

I shoot my gun into the dust,  
every hour

In the cover of darkness  
i shoot,

In the light i shoot,  
In the mist I shoot again  
In their minds I shoot again.

In the storm, is it a thunderclap  
My bullets, gunpowdered eyes, my bullets  
In their minds

What is time  
the pop pop does not chime on the hour,  
What is time

Except to mark the end, and our lives, our lives are now our own

And darkness, darkness my friend, you have shielded me,

My bullet in their minds, a terrorist, me/them

A white flag, I shoot,

Military garb, I shoot  
Green, red, White, blue, yellow, shoot

My bullets  
Endless,  
Terrorist, me/them, who shot first

Whose God ordained this  
Who convinced you/them/terrorist that you could swallow the darkness  
whole

You never asked my name...

No escudo, escudo, escudo

Escudo  
Could erase Pindjiguiti

I shoot  
Or get swallowed whole  
So Shoot

My gunpowder eyes are corrosive  
No escudo, escudo  
Could erase  
Erase the centuries

I will shoot  
And rip flesh from flesh from and  
in death the darkness you feared will swallow you whole

I will ...  
Karaba my namesake

Whole. Whole.  
Not even your light can escape.

# The Moon Is Ours

*after José Carlos Schwarz*

Yasmina Nuny Silva

Sometimes I want to chase after the sun  
But beneath it I am not known

Do not let them fool us, the moon, the moon is ours  
Near the moon  
We do not burn.  
Oh, we do not burn.

I would like to reclaim myself  
All the things that glow  
And radiate through me  
Be my own moon again

That cannot be taken away  
We cannot be taken away  
From ourselves

But how do we reclaim dead things  
Buried, and now rooted in the weeds  
That drain and drain

I have never witnessed the galaxies  
In the sunlight - in it we have never known the heavens

I only know myself here  
Between dark and dying  
Unwanted and yet desired  
My flesh only  
Only  
Darkness that i am

But the moon  
The moon  
Has always been ours,  
The stars

And when the veil drops  
When the ancestors roam  
We will dance  
And praise  
And dance  
And raise them from the dead

So leave us, finally, with our darkness  
With our moon, our stars  
That are unknown in your burning lights

Sometimes I chase after the sun  
But in the sunlight,  
I do not know myself.

Do not let them fool us, the moon, the moon is ours  
Near the moon  
We do not burn.

Oh,  
Our moon.

We will not burn.

-

CHRISTOPHER FAIR CLOTH 'BREAKWATER' Hand Printed in England 2011

Vuma Phiri is a Zambian-born poet writing and performing in Australia and published in various publications. In 2024, Vuma was the winner of the Arts Queensland XYZ Prize for Spoken Word Poetry. Vuma writes to be an echo reverberating the poet's dreams for liberation, imagining futures where we are free



Esther Karin Mngodo is a Tanzanian writer, poet, translator, editor, and feminist publisher. Winner of the 2014 Ebrahim Hussein Poetry Prize, she authored *Jinsi ya Kurudi Nyumbani* and founded UMBU, which published women in Swahili. Her work appears in *Imbiza*, *Asymptote*, *The Common*, and *The Hopkins Review*.



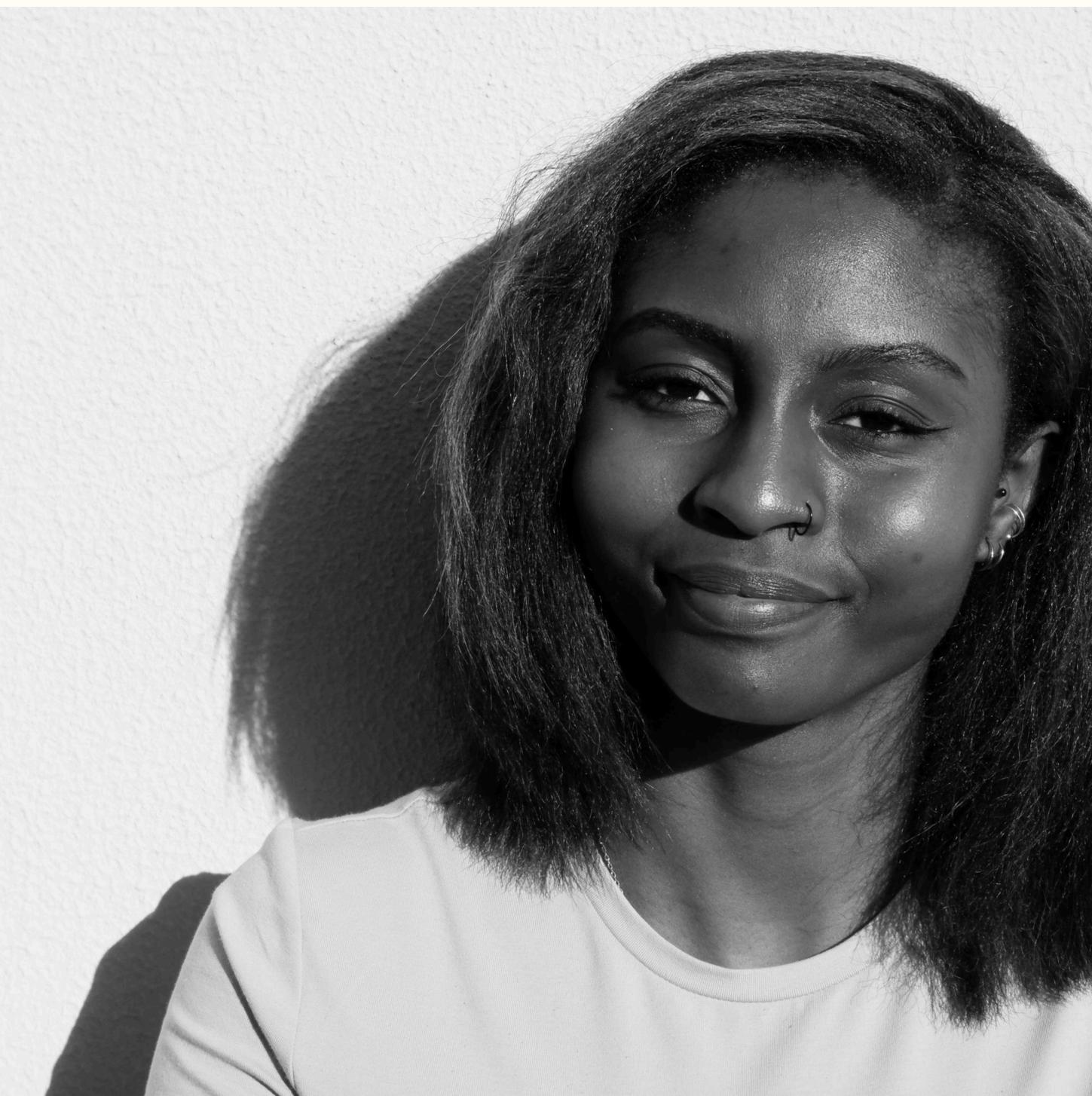
Sandra Nadege is a Rwandan writer, poet, and editor currently residing in Kenya. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication. In her works, she explores contemporary issues and personal growth. She has authored *Light in the Dark*, a short memoir.



Faswillah Nattabi is a Kampala born Johannesburg raised poet and storyteller. With a background in Linguistics, she has been published in New Contrast Literary Journal and Bad Girls Club Magazine. She has performed at Tedx University of Johannesburg and Poetry Africa festival and is currently studying Creative Writing at Wits University.



Yasmina Nuny Silva is a writer and editor from Guinea-Bissau. She completed her undergraduate studies in Political Economy at the University of Birmingham, where she also specialised in African Studies. Her debut collection *Anos Ku Ta Manda* was published in 2019 with Verve Poetry Press.

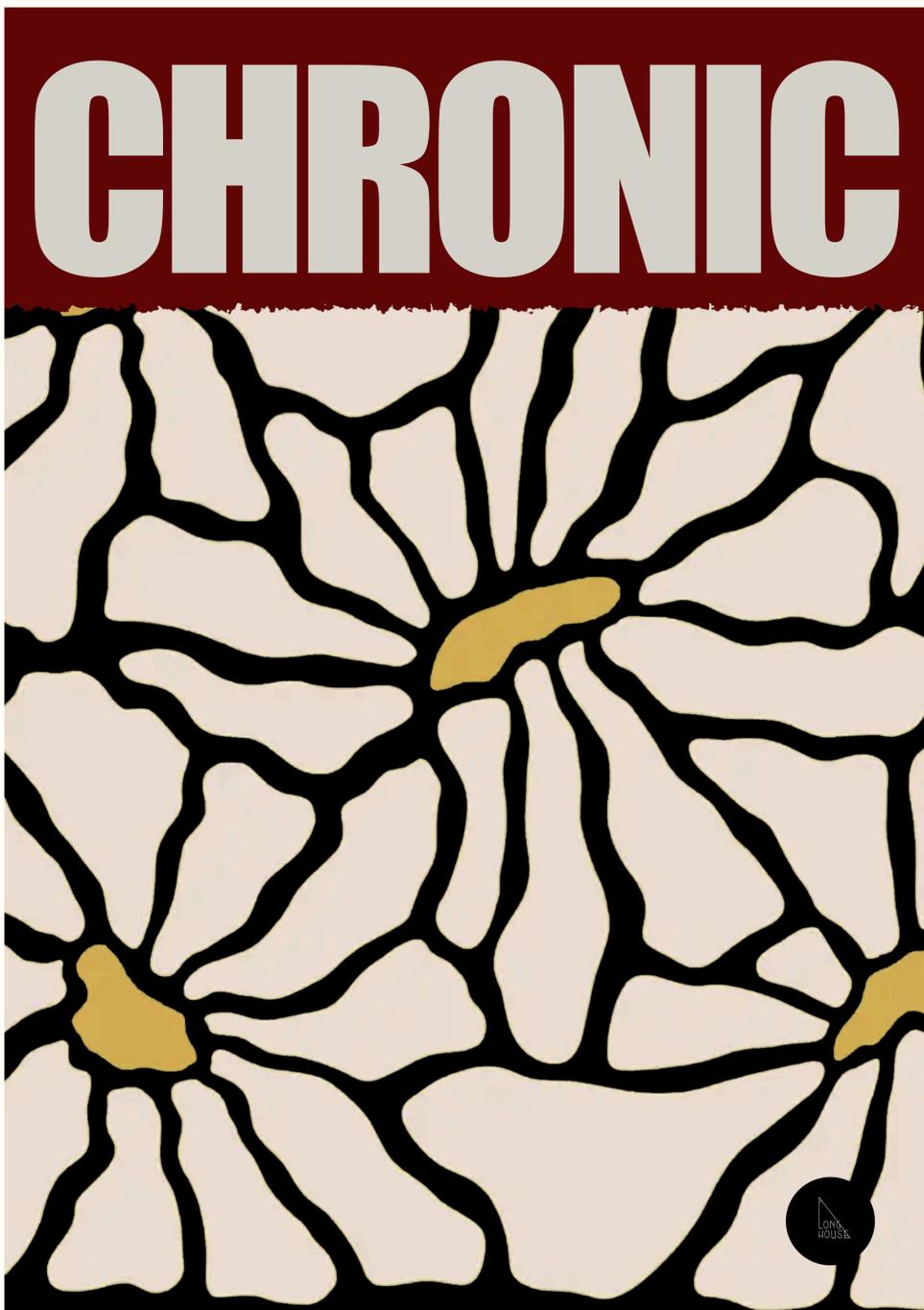


# About the Artist

Tibeb Sirak is an Ethiopian printmaker from Addis Ababa who mostly uses woodcut methods. Inspired by the visual structures that influenced his early environment, he investigates the relationship between pattern, memory, and identity. He considers how the individual is shaped by both internal and external factors while reflecting on personal experiences through symbolic forms and layered compositions. Sirak creates art that is both familiar and abstract by fusing traditional workmanship with modern expression.

# Image Credits

- Erik Ader (unsplash)
  - Sunflower Photo by Loic Ekinga
  - Daniel Burka (unsplash)
  - Sinan Toy (unsplash)
  - Lukas Robertson (unsplash)
  - Christopher Farr "Breakwater" (Pinterest)
  - Shoshana Teitelman (Pinterest)
  - Juan M Parente (Pinterest)
- 
- Cover: "State of Balance", 2024, Tibeb Sirak
  - Inside Cover: "Ayla", 2024, Tibeb Sirak
  - Back Cover: "The Weight of the Unseen", 2025, Tibeb Sirak



Also available in this series

Chronic  
Curated by Yvonne Wabai

