

TESTIMONY : THREE POEMS

WORDS : ERIC NGALLE CHARLES

PICTURES : NICKY ARSCOTT

SUPPORTED BY:



CONTENT WARNING:
CONTAINS THEMES AND IMAGERY THAT
SOME READERS MAY FIND UPSETTING

UNDER THE GALLOWS



I HEARD THEIR
WAILINGS FIRST AS RUMOURS

I HEARD THEM FAR, FAR AWAY

UPON MY COUNTLESS WANDERINGS



CROSSING SEAS
AND CLIMBING MOUNTAINS

SEEKING PEACE
AND FINDING NONE

FOR IT WAS
THE FIRST
AND
THE LAST
TIME

SHE LEFT
WORK
JUST
TO BE
WITH
ME



SHE
AVOIDED
MY
GAZE

WHEN I LOOKED
AT HER
I NOTICED
SHE WAS
CRYING



SEEING
ONE'S
MOTHER
CRY
IS NEVER A
GOOD SIGHT.
I THOUGHT
STAYING AT HOME
MIGHT BE
THE BEST OPTION.

STILL AVOIDING MY GAZE
SHE TOOK MY HANDS INTO HERS
AND ONE BY ONE SHE GAVE
EACH OF MY FINGERS

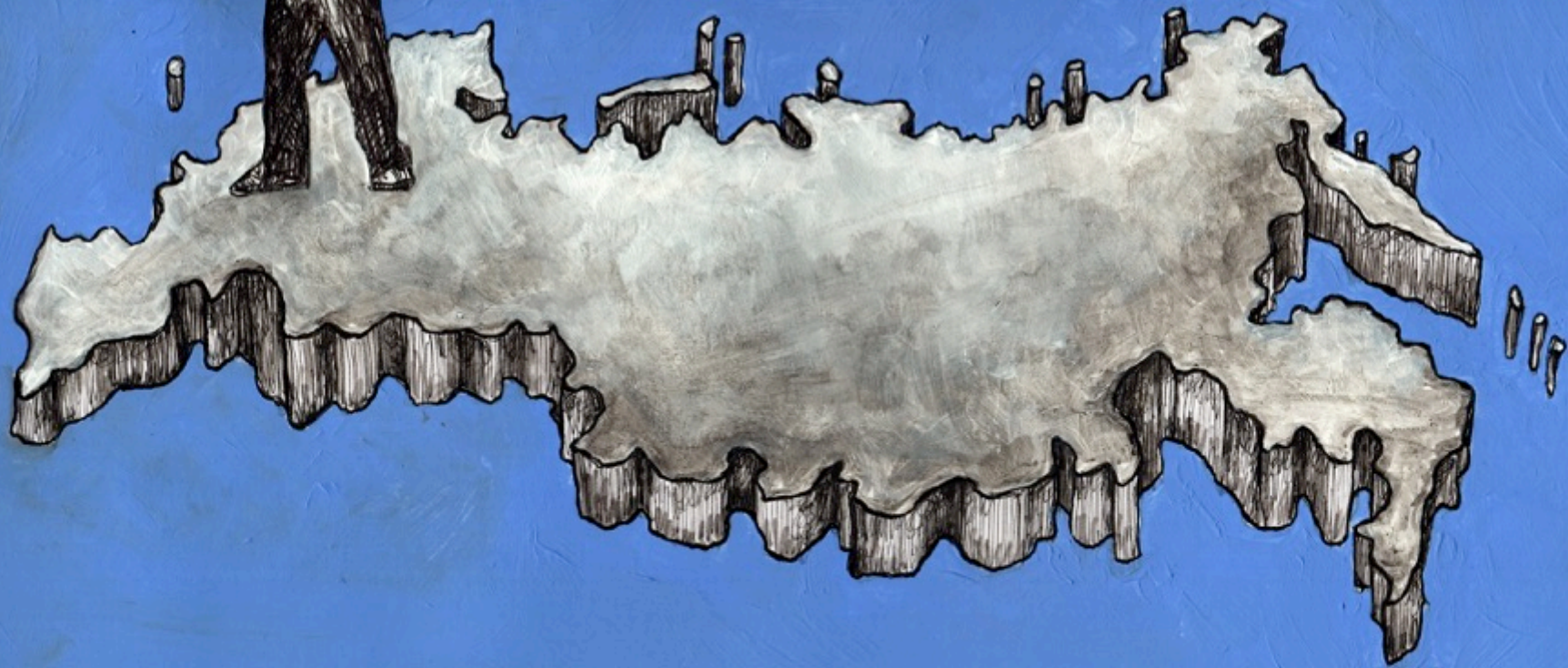


A GENTLE
BITE

PAYING TRIBUTE TO
A VILLAGE ADAGE

WHEREVER I GO
THE SPIRITS OF
MY ANCESTORS
WOULD BE WITH ME
AND MINE
WITH THEM





LITTLE DID THE SPIRIT OF MY
ANCESTORS KNOW I WILL
END UP IN RUSSIA?

MY LATE SISTER'S HUSBAND
SMILED AT ME.



MY FRIENDS VICTOR, KULU
WERE HAPPY FOR ME, THINKING I WAS
BRAVE



INTERNALLY I WAS DYING WITH APPREHENSION AND NOSTALGIA
BUT MOSTLY
THE FEAR OF NEVER SEEING MY MOTHER AGAIN.

[PAUSE.]



[DJEMBE PLAYS]



WHEN I FIRST TOOK REFUGE IN MY WELSH FRIEND'S HOUSE
IN ELY

I WANTED TO TELL HIM WHAT HAD BECOME THE CESSPOOL
OF CRIME WHICH BECAME
PECHATNIKI MOSCOW

I WANTED TO
TELL HIM WHY
I HAD LEFT MY
HOMELAND AT
SUCH HASTE

WHY I HAD
CLIMBED MOUNTAINS

WHY I
HAD
CROSSED SEAS

SEEKING PEACE AND FINDING NONE



AS IF A MYSTERIOUS COURIER HAD CONVEYED
TO MY WELSH FRIEND
WHAT WAS TAKEN PLACE
IN MY INTERNAL COURTS OF JUSTICE



MY WELSH FRIEND PLACED HIS HAND ON MY SHOULDER
HE OFFERED ME A CHAIR

AND HE SAID

ERIC, AG
SHAR, AG
CYMRAEG?

DIM!
DWIN'HOFFI
TRIOG
SHAR, AG
CYMRAEG

MY WELSH FRIEND SAID
"WITNESSES LIKE
YOU SHOULD
STAND
OVER
THERE,
FACING
THE PUBLIC,
YOU SHOULD NOT
DIVIDE
YOURSELF
BETWEEN
JUDGE,
JURY,
PROSECUTION
OR DEFENCE"



DIVIDE
YOURSELF
BETWEEN
JUDGE,
JURY,
PROSECUTION
OR DEFENCE"

HE SAID "IN SOME SOCIETIES
SILENCE
IS
GOLD



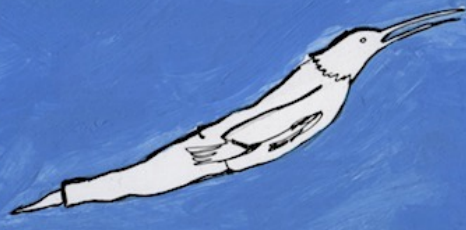
IN SOME SOCIETIES
TALKING IS
SILVER



IN SOME SOCIETIES ONE CAN SURVIVE
A FALL FROM A FIFTEEN
STOREY BUILDING



BUT ANSWERING YES OR NO TO A SIMPLE QUESTION
IS TANTAMOUNT TO DECAPITATION"



"IN SOME SOCIETIES" HE SAID, "THE KING FLASHES HIS GENITALIA TO HIS PEOPLE"



YES AS IF A MYSTERIOUS COURIER HAD CONVEYED TO MY WELSH FRIEND WHAT WAS TAKEN PLACE IN MY INTERNAL COURTS OF JUSTICE

HE SAID

"NGALLE, IN SOME SOCIETIES WHEN TWO ELEPHANTS FIGHT, IT IS THE GRASS THAT SUFFER."

"IN SYRIA" HE SAID
"THE ELEPHANTS ARE FIGHTING"



IN DARFUR THE ELEPHANTS ARE FIGHTING

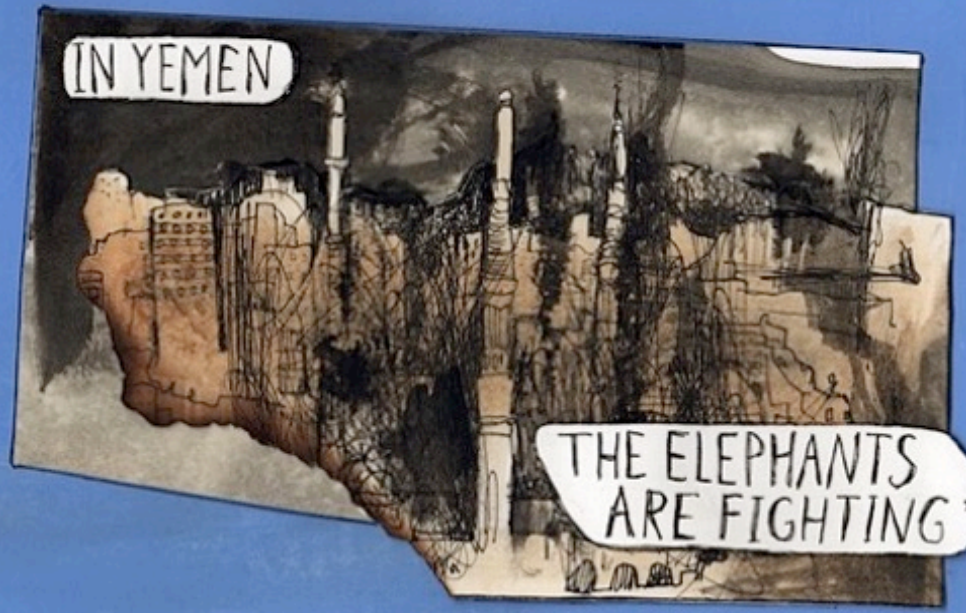


IN ERITREA



THE ELEPHANTS

IN YEMEN



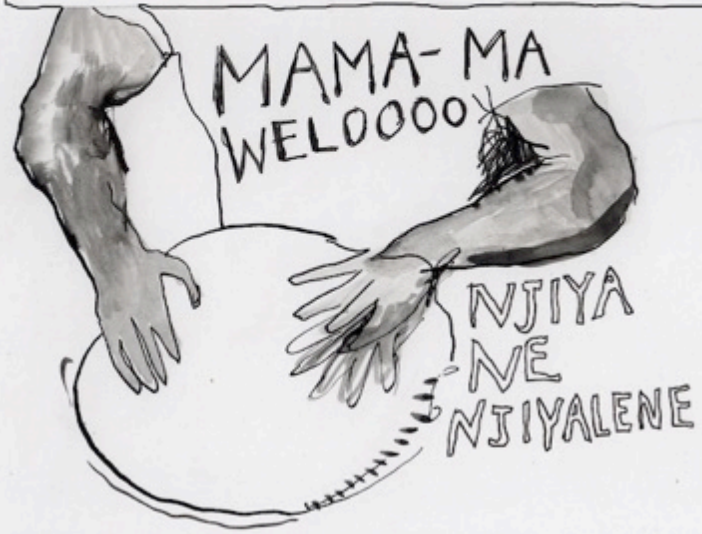
THE ELEPHANTS ARE FIGHTING"

"HERE IN WALES,
CROESO," HE SAID,
"ONE DAY YOUR STAR WILL SHINE
NOT UNDER THE GALLOWS."



WARNING
Mym

WARNINGS TO A STUBBORN CHILD



MY MOTHER
WARNED ME

MY FATHER
HE WARNED ME

THEY SAID

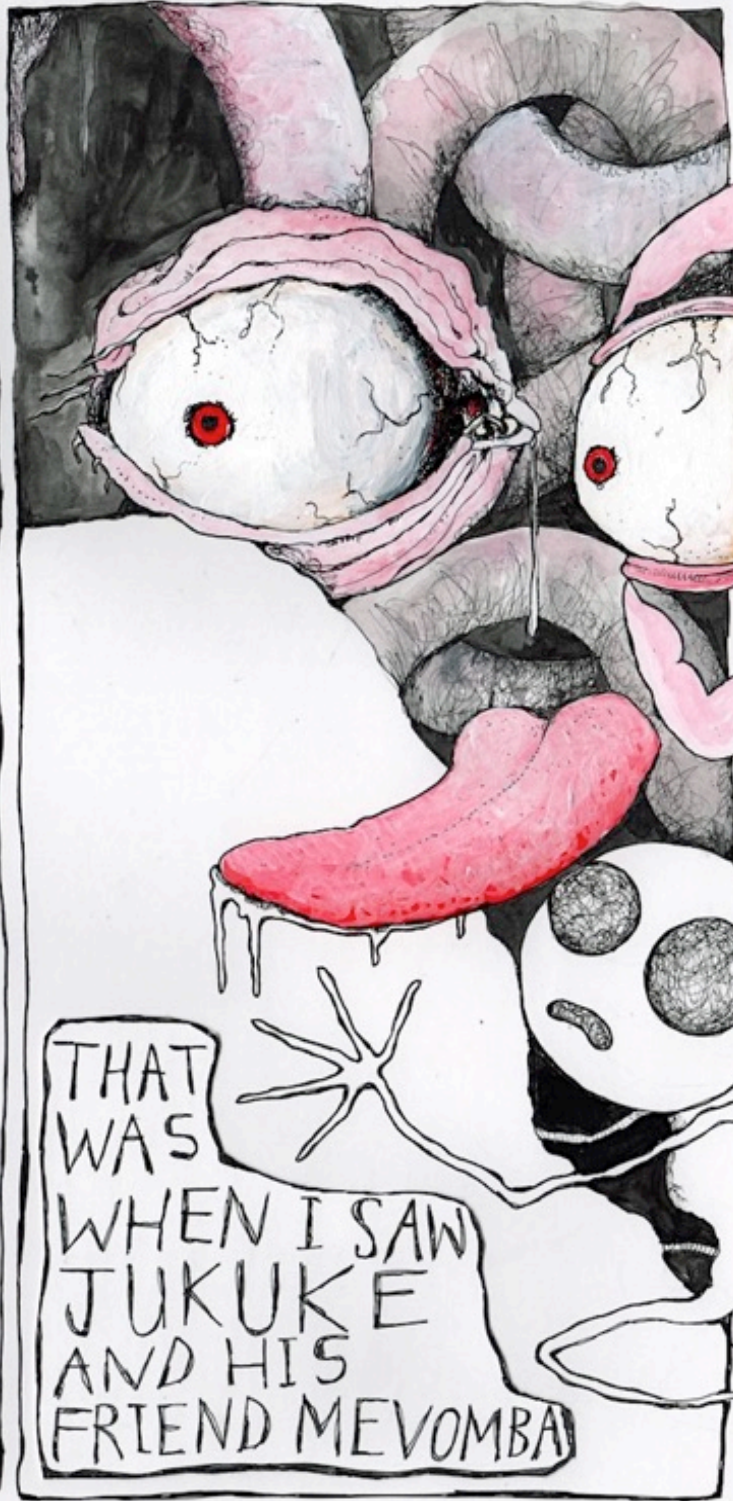


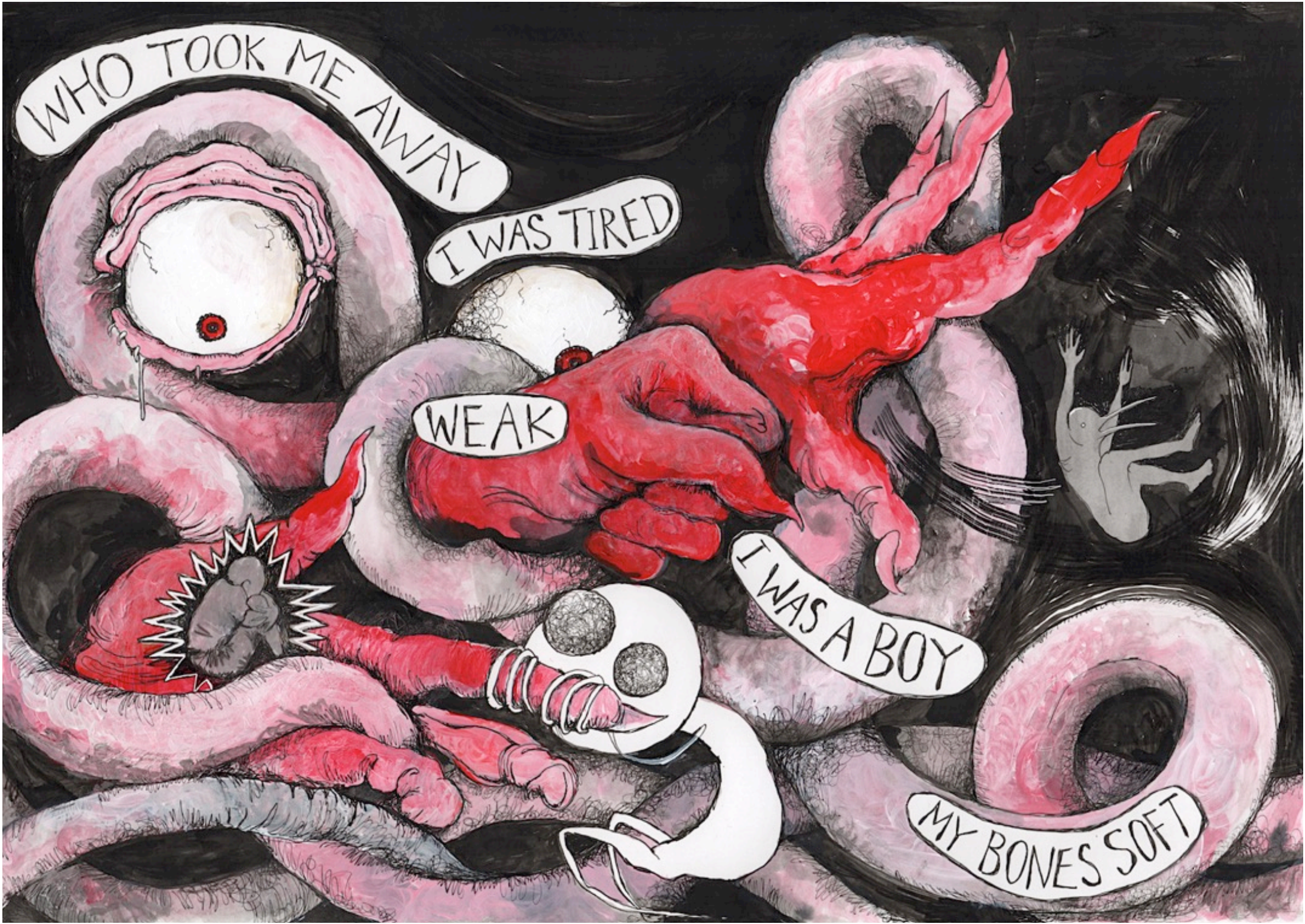
WHEN YOU
REACH ON
TOP OF THE HILL

DO NOT SIGH
DO NOT SHOW
ANY SIGNS
OF TIREDNESS

ON TOP OF
THE HILL, I
SIGHED, I
TOOK DEEP
BREATH, I
WAS TIRED

THAT
WAS
WHEN I SAW
JUKUKE
AND HIS
FRIEND MEVOMBA





WHO TOOK ME AWAY

I WAS TIRED

WEAK

I WAS A BOY

MY BONES SOFT

THE JUDGE BANGED HIS GAVEL, HE SHOUTED

MAKAMA
MAKAMA



EXILE
EXILE

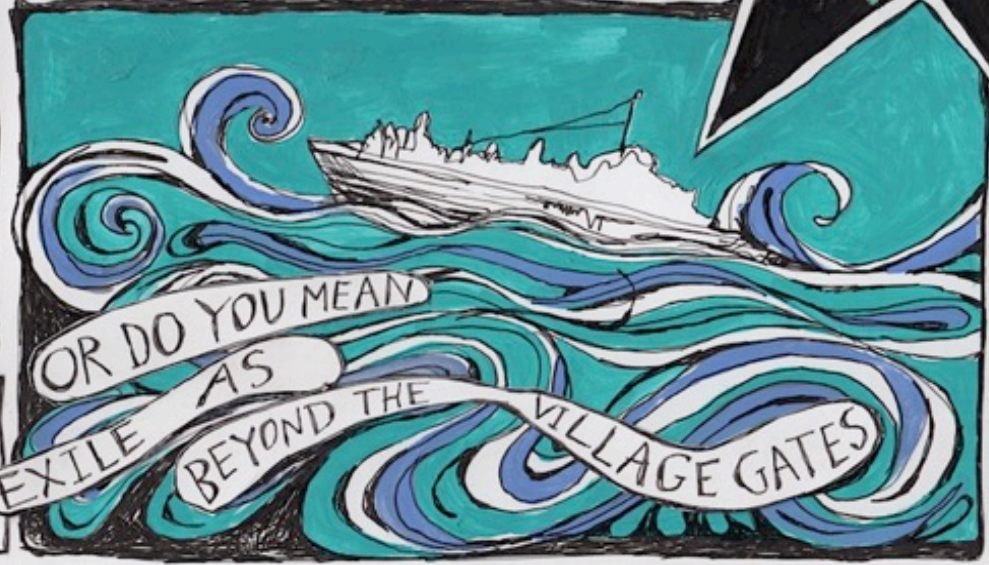
DO YOU MEAN EXILE AS IN THE CASE OF THE
MOLIKILIKILI-THE STICK INSECT
WHO DIED AND RESURRECTED
HERSELF FROM DEATH



TO QUESTION THE GRAVE
DIGGERS, THE MOURNERS
WHY SHE WASN'T WASHED
WHY SHE WAS BURIED
IN DIRTY CLOTHES




Since
correction
lieth in
those
hands *




OR DO YOU MEAN
AS
EXILE
BEYOND THE
VILLAGE GATES

DO YOU MEAN EXILE
AS IN THE CASE OF
MOWBRAY? *Richard II

TO CROSS SEAS
TO CLIMB
MOUNTAINS
SEEKING PEACE
AND FINDING NONE



IN MY FLIGHT
I SAW MY GRANDMOTHER
SHE WAS REARRANGING THE
FLOWERS AROUND MY
GRAVE; SHE REWROTE
THE WORDS
ON MY
EPITAPH



IN MY FLIGHT, I SAW
YOUNG BOYS, I SAW
YOUNG GIRLS DANCING
BARE FOOT IN THE RAINS
OF MY DREAMS AND
MY BROKEN LANDSCAPE

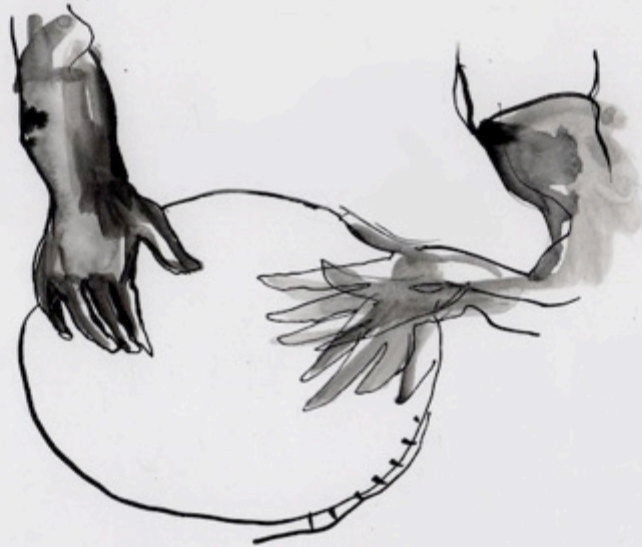
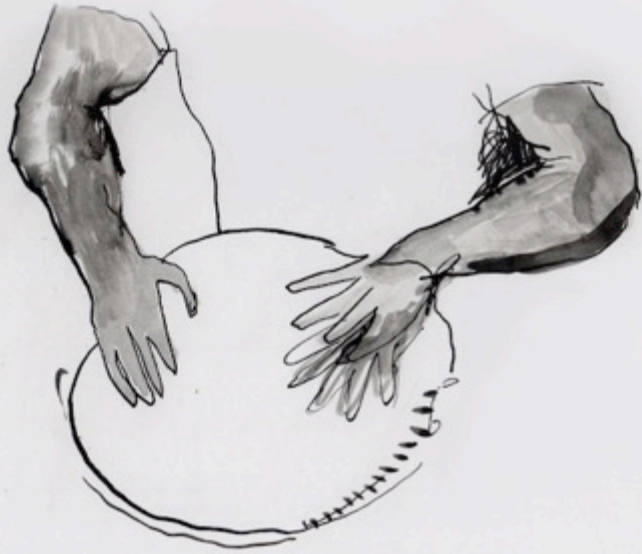


I SAW BEES
PREGNANT WITH NECTAR
THEY CARRIED
HOME

AWAY
FROM
EXILE



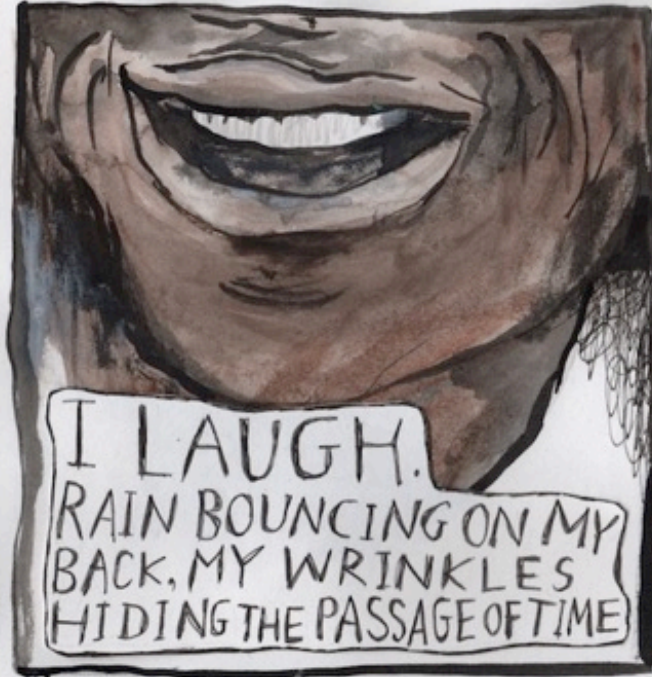
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THAT DAY, I PRAYED IN
A TONGUE I DID NOT
UNDERSTAND



IN A
LANGUAGE
I DID
NOT
SPEAK



I LAUGH.
RAIN BOUNCING ON MY
BACK, MY WRINKLES
HIDING THE PASSAGE OF TIME



LIVING AS A STRANGER
AMONGST
MY OWN



I CRY.

THE SUN RAYS
AVOID MY SKIN

I DO NOT REMEMBER
MY DREAMS



MY SHOES HAVE HOLES



I PAID MY DEBTS
A THOUSAND TIMES

TO THOSE WHO
PLANNED TO
KILL ME.

I LAUGH.

THIS IS MY GRAVE.

THIS IS MY GRAVE.

Home Office

APPLICATION FOR ASYLUM: DECISION PENDING

Dear Mr. Miguel Garcia:

Most asylum applicants are not allowed to work while we consider their application. This is because entering a country for economic reasons is not the same as seeking asylum, and it is important to keep the two separate.

Use this interview to explain how you were persecuted in your country why you're afraid to go back to your country. You may be asked questions about difficult topics but it's important that you explain what has happened to you and why.

You must tell the caseworker everything you want them to consider or it can count against you. Bring all the evidence you have of your persecution. You should also bring your birth certificate, passport and medical records if you have any. Your caseworker will make notes in a document called an 'interview record'. You'll be given a copy of this at the end of the interview.



I STAND
IN A FIELD
OF DAFFODIL

I AM
WAITING
FOR YOU

I AM WAITING
FOR YOU
TO BURY ME.