

"Are You Happy With That?"

Alhaji Sheku Kamara

I heard two sanctuary seekers chatting
Chatting about their situation
Said the first one:
"Man I am sick and tired with this immigration reporting thing
Every week I have to report at the immigration
Damn I'm tired with this signing thing
Especially when it's raining
As from today I will not be reporting any more
If you were a UK Border Force officer
I would have asked you
Are you happy with that?"

The other responded:
"Man can't you see my situation? I've been made destitute
I don't even have a penny to spend and
On my friends I depend
I'm not even allowed to work
It will be illegal if I do
But I have no choice cos I have to live
So I'm gonna start working illegally anyway
And I will not give a damn – just as long as the money
I will be paying as tax
Will be used legally
And not to buy guns, bombs or to sponsor war
If you were a tax officer I would have asked you
Are you happy with that?"

After this conversation
I will just leave this place and disappear
I know you will not be happy with that
So I will not ask
But if you were the Home Office
I would have asked you
Are you happy with that?"

Alhaji Sheku Kamara came to the UK from west Africa as a young man, seeking sanctuary from civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia. From 2003 he became a key player and later captain of Swansea World Stars football team. For more of his poems, and more about him, see Part 3 of the book.

No Celebration This Year (*Damascus, August 2012*)

Sliva Kiki

She says, no celebration this year.
She is five.
She is thinking about the children who go away

and don't come back.
She is thinking about the other children
the children hungry or in a safer place.
She says, no celebration this year.

She says, what will happen with us?
With other people.
With our neighbours.
With friends.
She is carefully thinking.

She is carefully thinking.
She says, no celebration this year.
She is thinking.

She asks her nani.
She wants to stay at her house.
Her own house is too much high.
She hears the tank sound and the plane sound.
She says, what will happen with us?

She says, what will happen with us?
She is waiting until everything is finished
before she goes outside with her friends to play
her favourite game.
She is carefully thinking.

She is carefully thinking.
When the evening comes
she says, what will happen with us?
She says, when the morning comes
can I go again outside?

Sliva Kiki is a Kurdish refugee from Damascus, Syria. She has been living in Swansea since 2009 with her two teenage sons. She studied law for two years in Syria. Sliva often acts as a volunteer interpreter for Arabic and Kurmanji, and she would like to gain qualifications so she can do more to help refugees in the UK, and those in Syria and neighbouring countries. Sliva's poem came out of workshops run by Jeni Williams at the Swansea Museum exhibition "Home From Home?" (created with Swansea City of Sanctuary) in 2012.

A Man and a Woman

Mohadeseh Habibi

In the picture I can see two people
They are everything in my life
I see a man with grey hair and a woman.

Her eyes are worried
The man's hands are worn
He has been working very hard.

I can see a woman who is always worried for her children
It is so long since she has seen them.
It is a long time.

We watch the screen hungrily
They get the picture and I get the sound

I want to touch them, hug them, kiss them
I don't like just to watch their picture
I want to look into their eyes and be with them.

I want to touch their skin, it is tired, so tired, and rough
I love them as much as I love myself
I don't know when I will ever see them.

This is a picture of my mother and father.

< **Mohadeseh Habibi** from Afghanistan wrote these poems in 2012 in the Swansea Museum workshops run by Jeni Williams. Jeni helped her translate them. Mohadeseh came to Swansea in 2008 with her husband. They have two young children. As happens to many refugees, different members of Mohadeseh's family have ended up in different countries. Most of them have been granted permission to stay, but they cannot yet be reunited in one place because they do not have the necessary travel documents. At the time of writing, her brother is in France, her mother in Sweden and her father in Germany. The grandparents have never seen little Maryam. The family just all want to be together.

The Door Poems

Hannah Sabatia

(i) and there he was

A door opens
and there he was

Standing about ten yards away
he called her to come out
she did not dare

The child saw him
afraid too

He went away
they locked the door
never saw him again

(ii) and he comes in with a mobile in his hand

A door opens
and he comes in with a mobile in his hand
unsure

The wife is inside with the child

There is a quarrel

He has no self-control
he slaps her on the face
slaps her till she passes out
slaps her till she passes out
like dark night the room turns
she sees stars like in the heavens

But when she rises up
he is crying as usual
swearing never again

Never again

Never again

But only for this moment

(iii) and she comes in running

A door opens
and she comes in running

A beautiful young girl panting for breath
afraid of what has happened
it was a tense moment

Hurry up and hide, that's all I could say
her masters were fighting
on this fateful evening
the sun had already gone down

She had gone to open the gate
he was drunk, forced her in the car
he forced her but the wife saw them

She was the house-help
loyal and friendly
she did all her chores

(iv) and we enter one by one

A door opens
and we enter one by one

We are searched head to toe
as one by one we enter

We must remember all the details
all the details we want to forget
young
old
we sit on the cold long benches
wait and wait

Come in here
go in there
sit by here
stand by here
do you understand

All we need is safety
but

Why did you lie?
threats
threats

All we speak is taped
taped and recorded
one by one

(v) and in comes the chef

A door opens
and in comes the chef

Another day of boiled eggs for breakfast
a year feels like a decade
the routine and monotony of the hostel
waiting
and
waiting
nobody knowing when decisions will come

A long day and nothing new
out in the endless fields
long barbed spiked wire at the edge

The morning sun a warm blanket

We take photographs of our long shadows
they are metres long

A long day, a long, long day

Memories of nothing

(vi) and suddenly, with great force,

A door opens
and suddenly, with great force

they come in twos and fours
with padded chests, chains, sledgehammers, handcuffs
*nikama jitu, hawajali, haja uondoke ...**
black uniforms, huge, faceless

She coils under the bed

Again under the sofa

In the cupboard

Then tries the shelves

But the baby cries uncontrollably

Nowhere to hide after all

**Swahili: "Like a giant, they don't care, as long as you get out..."*

(vii) and the boy comes in

A door opens
and the boy comes in

Panting, sweat runs down his face
he clings to his mother's dress
like he has met her for the first time

It's raining and cold

The mother calms him down
gives him a glass of warm milk

Slowly the boy speaks
all that his six years have seen

Excuse me can I play with you?
Excuse me can I play with you?
Excuse me...
can I ...
play
with
you?

No boy stops

School after school
the other bigger boys run after him
he is alone, doesn't recall their names
they all look alike, cool, flicking their fine hair off their faces

The boy fails to understand

Mum, what colour am I?

And there are other things he cannot say

Hannah Sabatia from Kenya wrote the sequence "The Door Poems" in Jeni's workshops. Hannah is a qualified nutritionist and a single parent who, since coming to Swansea seeking sanctuary, has played a full and vibrant role in voluntary organizations in the city. A natural leader and community builder, a gifted public speaker, she is vice-chair of Swansea City of Sanctuary, active in the Swansea Advocacy Forum for asylum seekers and refugees, has gained an NVQ in Community Development, is working towards a PGCE in Adult Education, teaches English as a volunteer to parents at Hafod Primary School, at the African Community Centre and the Minority Ethnic Women's Network and at drop-ins run by the Cyrenians, and has made important contributions to the LEANA project (Local Education and Advice on Nutrition and Activity) run by Swansea Council for Voluntary Service.

Hannah hopes to be granted leave to remain and the right to work, in order to have a career in public health education in the UK.

At the time of writing, Hannah's asylum application has just been turned down at judicial review.