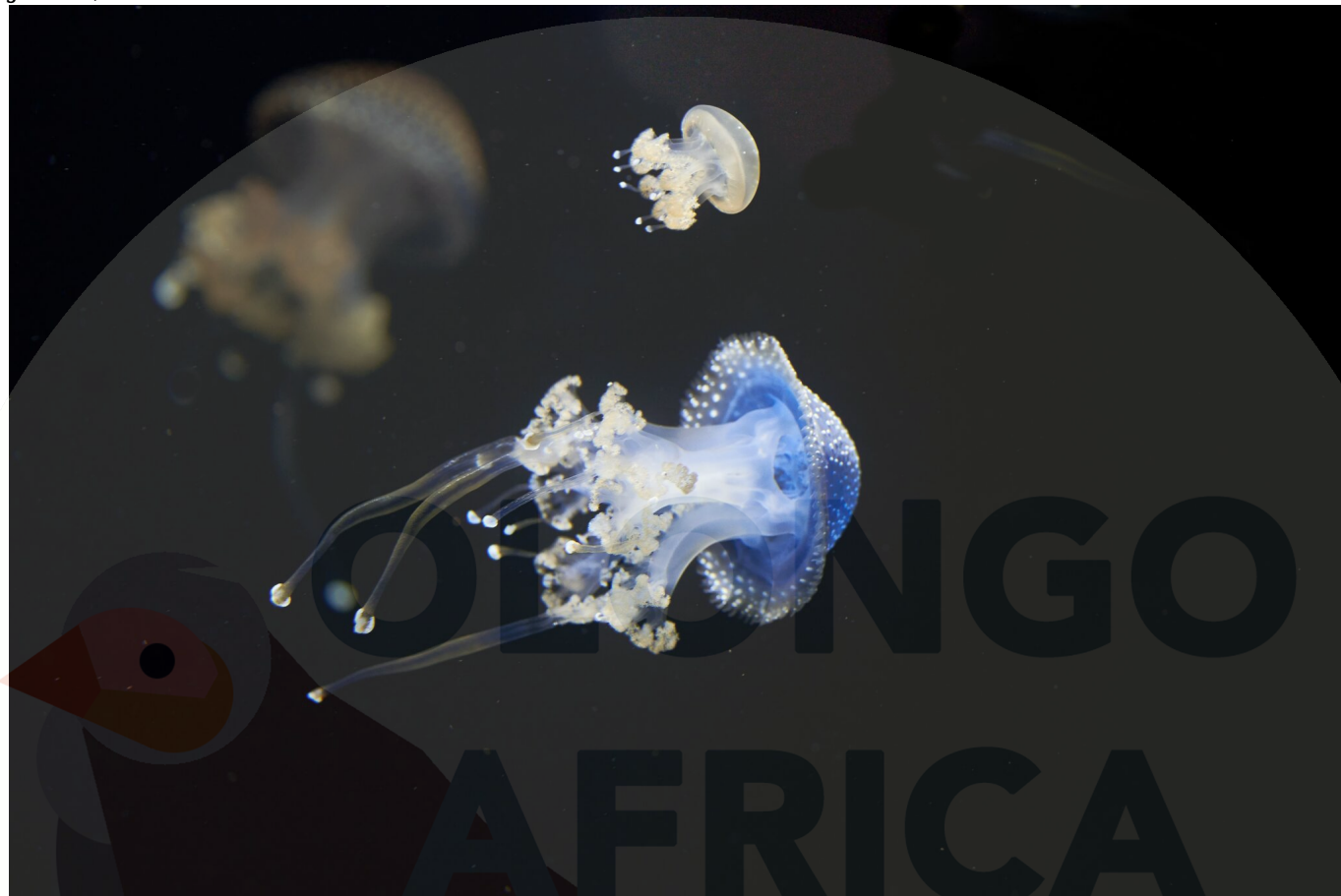


# The Gravity of Daughterhood

Salawu Olajide

June 4, 2026



The daughter who works closest to home/the teacher/the one with a lot of time on her hands & long holidays/is the one all siblings send/Mpesa contributions for home projects/is the one who must study fundi's face for honesty/evaluate sketched designs of sewer systems/measure circumferences of manholes/hire pickups to carry pvc pipes from mitra hardware/bargain with the stone-faced Indian hardware store owners/though everyone knows Indians in Kakamega/never give discounts/The husbandless daughter who has nothing/to do with her time/ is the one who must spend/her school holidays with the parents/ feet chained to coop/by the gravity of daughterhood/she's the one to cook ugali for workers on stone stoves/curly smoke chewing her face/licking tears from her sclera/surely she must remember to glue her eyes on pipes/ensure they're laid correctly/ not stolen & stowed away for resell/does she need to be reminded to ensure that corner pipes get fed /correctly into hungry trenches dug in ruby-red soils/must she roll eyes when fundi runs out/of supplies/asks for more cement/more wire/more pvc pvc pvc/Later/defying gravity/across space/across time/across the Atlantic/she'll stare into a pond filled with red-orange fish/recall her father's dream/how/hand on her wrist/he'd talked of fixing hydroponic agricultural systems & installing greenhouses/to grow egg-yellow spray roses/for export to the Netherlands/The fish will dance/call ripples into the water/and she'll recall how age turned her father/ like maple leaves at autumn/like his father and *his* father before him/into a soft lover/of nature/a farmer who kept broilers in coops/fed them mash from a palm

darkened by age/spoke to them tenderly as he basketed/brown eggs, blue eggs, white eggs/In her reflection in the pond/she'll feel nature/tugging at her spirit/making her fall/in love/with petrichor/with rose hips/with chain link fences & steel padlocks/This need to tend/to care/to grow/will burrow into her skin in winter/worms wriggling in rotting meat/germinate/sprout over her like a magic beanstalk/she/the seed/will yield to the ebb/and flow of life's currents/this latter rain, softening her/pericarp in preparation for planting season/for plunging into deep, dark soils/for a forever homecoming/in the land just over yonder.

---

**Gloria Mwaniga Odary**, a writer and educator from Kenya, just graduated with an MFA from the University of Memphis where she was Managing Editor of The Pinch Literary Journal. Odary is fascinated by historical revisionism and the intersection between research and imagination. Odary was a finalist for the 2026-2027 Steinbeck Fellows Program, and a recipient of the 2024 Georgia Review Prose Prize, the 2024 Isele Nonfiction Prize, the 2021 African Land Policy Centre Story Prize, and a Miles Morland Writing Scholarship. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming from *Transition*, *The Georgia Review*, *Isele*, *Lolwe*, *Weganda Review*, *The White Review*, *Porter House Review*, *CRAFT* and elsewhere. She is currently revising a novel titled *Birds of Paradise* and working on essays about Memphis music legends she grew up listening to.

