

The Happiest People on Earth

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We are H-A-P-P-Y
We are H-A-P-P-Y
We know we are
We are sure we are
We are H-A-P-P-Y
Happppppy!

I

I come from the country
Of the Happiest People on earth,
Where death sells at ten for one kobo
And the Living envy the peace

Of the hastily dispatched.
Living every day on the edge of the knife
Suffering all night at the mercy of the bullet
Taunted and tossed from wall to wall

Foodless, drinkless, and faint from fright
Lean like a line from the book of pain

Hunger has a seat in my little hovel
My growling stomach is the devil's drum

I count the stars from my lowly bed
The lightest shower is riot to my roof
When geckoes snore in my bedroom wall
The cockroaches tremble in their shining coats

I do not know when last a smile
Stumbled between my lips
A shark can shuffle through the ocean of my tears.
Sadness lives in the furrows on my forehead

Yes, I come from the country
Of the happiest people on earth
The thunder of our laughter
Rips through the ears of the world

II

I come from the country
Of the happiest people on earth
Where rulers dance on the grave
Of their people's joy

Visionless, clueless, and gleefully rapacious
They gobble up the seed yam,
Their prodigal belches mocking the impotent
Silence in a house of fleshless ribs

Our cars come from Asia
Our phones from Finland
Our toothpicks from Hungary
Our proud Constitution from the lordly West

Our laboratories have no labour
Our libraries no books
Our classrooms have neither class nor room
Mimic mammals that we are so proud to be

Too happy for original thinking
We beg and buy others to think for us
Our universities happily shut down for months
Our brains are on permanent sabbatical

Too happy to know
The sobering weight of sadness
We are the giggling giants
Of the earth's happiest country

III

Our enviable chaos
Our fantastically corrupt propensity
Our globally certified incompetence
Our preference for fast and easy wealth

Our act-first-think-later 'philosophy'
Our leave-it-to-God religiosity
Our world-famous disdain for Science
Our unbreakable bond with the God of Unknowing

Our rabid aversion to Reason
Our impatience with the through and thorough
Our seed-eater's improvidence
Our headless covenant with the here-and-now

Fifteen million Nigerian children out of school
The straight and sure way
From babyhood to bandithood
And the trail of tears in our happy land

Failing factories, booming churches
The jobless join the hopeless
Miracle crowds on tenuous hopes
Predatory pastors and their phantom faiths

Happy through them all
Our eyes glow in the dark
Dancing and shouting in garish garments
We the owambe* crowd of a happy nation
IV

Dapchi-happy
Laughing all the way from Chibok
Happy, happy massacres in
In crowded churches and teeming markets

Happy for robbers who strike at night
And bandits who defile our noon
Happy at our army's patriotic absence
And the police who abandon their posts

Happy about the nation's falling house
Its quicksand foundation
Its shifty floor and cracking walls

Its termite-ridden roof and dreadful aspects

Happy about the lies
Which become our truth
Happy about the myth
That supplants our mirror

Happy about rulers
Incapable of thinking
Happy about the ruled
Who prefer them so

“Big-for-Nothing-Country”:
Our sobriquet from jealous nations
But who does not know
We are the happiest people on Planet Earth?

*A lavish, sybaritic kind of party

Niyi Osundare is a leading African poet, dramatist, critic, essayist, and media columnist. He has authored 18 books of poetry, two books of selected poems with several literary laurels to his credits.

