



## Babah Tarawally *text* · Scott Emblen-Jarrett *translation* Kenneth Aidoo *illustration*

'Our leader Bala Sunkaworo is dead', sounds the crackly voice of the village informant over the megaphone. The end of an era. For thirty years, Bala Sunkaworo has been chief of the village, and for thirty years the village informant has been his assistant. The pair of them are thick as thieves. Many people also call him the chief's ruthless right-hand man. Both gentlemen are climate criminals and have contributed to the fact that our village is warming up and floods every year. As far as I am concerned, both gentlemen can burn in hell. Out of fear of reprisals from the police, who would gladly lock me up for such a statement, I am keeping this thought to myself.

The very same nature that he tried to destroy has now enveloped him and will devour him whole. I hope his informant will follow shortly behind him. Like anyone who willingly and knowingly fails to take the consequences of climate change seriously and continues with activities that cause the planet to warm up further. I sincerely hope such people do not triumph over the Earth.

It has been known for weeks that the chief was dying. Alongside his climate crimes, he is known as a strict leader who tolerated no dissent and who abused his power to intimidate his opponents.

Looking around me with this in mind, I am surprised the death of Bala Sunkaworo has caused such sadness among the very same subjects whom he oppressed for years. Could it be that he had the most powerful weapon of all, the spirit of his suppressed subjects, in the palm of his hand? We will be forced to grieve his death for a month. My grief will be a theatrical display without feeling.

Within half an hour of the announcement, hundreds of people have lined up outside the home of the chief to say their goodbyes. Everyone is forced to show their love for the

fallen leader. I too am standing in line. One by one, the people stand in silence for a moment next to the coffin to offer a prayer and a final farewell. Emotions are running high and the sadness of the people is so great that some even faint. This might be due to the overwhelming heat of course, which paralyses our village all summer long. Do not speak ill of the dead, so goes the old saying. This means not a bad word will be said of the tyrant who oppressed us for years.

I go stand next to an old woman. With tear-filled eyes and quivering voice she begins her prayer. 'Oh leader, now that your flame has been extinguished, we are left behind with the sorrow and despair that you have left us to join your ancestors. Give my love to my husband, my son and all those who I hold dear. I am also on my way and we will see each other again soon. Yet I ask a favour of you, this much you owe your loyal people. Come back a better person! In exchange for this, I pray to God that this transformation will be less painful.' The old woman mutters something else and ends with 'goodbye and rest in peace, amen.' Her sentiment was beautifully expressed, but how can she use such words for our tyrant? Soon a gravestone will be raised on which these same words will appear: 'rest in peace.' How absurd, how laughable!

As the old woman walks away, I am next in line. Burning with rage, I pass my message on to the dead man under my breath: 'You Bloodhound, torturer, demon and slave driver. You deserve no applause, no sadness, no tombstone and no statue. I hope your road to hell is a short one. Please do not come back, I beg you, but if you ever feel inclined to set foot on this Earth again, plant as many trees as you have cut down in the last thirty years (minimum)!'

**Kenneth Aidoo** (1988) makes films, paintings, drawings and video installations. He graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academy. He makes portraits with oil pastel.

**Babah Tarawally** (1972) is a writer and journalist. He fled Sierra Leone in 1995. He wrote *De god met de blauwe ogen* en *De verloren hand*.