

Living with Ethel

She moves quietly
into the spaces, surefooted,
extending the family,
another language in which she is fluent.

At strange hours of night we hear
staccato tongue-clicks
and strident cadences
as she mothers by mobile.

Ethnet umbilicus to a world
glimpsed in the startling
sienna flow of her evening kaftan
and the fragments of distant lives:

Siblings nursed to early graves,
Relatives and their blood-tied needs.
Beliefs you can really die for.
Friendships that may save your life.

All told without judgement or agenda,
as we prepare our separate breakfasts
and she doubles up in husky laughter
savouring the ironies of life.

Her timbre can harden with incomprehension
at English politeness bleached of compassion.
the everyday echoes of white-man's dominion
for she's a long-time student of oppression.

But the lilt soon returns to her voice
as she outstrips us all in the Britishness test;
and we know that Ethel is truly
a citizen of the World.