**Sierra Leone, 1982**

The smoke of the fire didn't reach the garden

the orange golden flames only teased our palm trees, I wasn't scared

my parents still the effortless rulers of our simple cement house

in the West-African village my brother - the gentle historian -

designed maps of even more exotic continents, drew up a chart

for the waves, named all of our trees

him, too, the ruler of his world

Our life without clocks, the potholes

on the roads made every trip unbearably long

the white van stuck on the riverbank again, this time

becoming part of the baptismal service

church members in their flowing robes surrounded us with hymns

waiting for my father to put on his collar

*Lead me to the Waters*

Through the side mirror I watched

eating my oats with powdered milk and water, listening to my brother

recite his encyclopedia of world history

my mother with the other women in their cotton dresses

splashed with planets of bold colors

I climb out to sit on the steps of the bus

watching my dad place his large warm hands on their brown foreheads

and lower them into the water

washing away the dust from the road and the confusion of sin

a woman grabbed my mother's hand

the whisper of wars from my brother

my naked feet dangling, unconcerned

if my world was here or there