

FOUR POEMS

Sizwe Vilakazi

THE NIGHT IN THE GHETTO

As the black blanket of the night covers the sky
A new form of life begins to unfold
Only those who are brave enough dare to go out

I watch helplessly as a thick cloud of smoke from the nearby industrial settlement
hangs on top of my community, an improvised settlement built out of anything
the shanty houses stand proudly, like dancers waiting for an instruction

And I stand here invisible in the night,
watching from the distance
A dusty path that cuts through a maze of shacks
regularly walked by those of us who live in the margins of life
made invisible by poverty whose architects are those men in black suits
sitting and dining on those marble tables in their boardrooms asking each other one
and the same question
“How can we keep them like that?” and then burst into laughter while having a sip of
rare wine and playing the Nutcracker in the background.
Yes, they play that tune because their empire is a pyramid made of our skulls

My people's hopes disappear with the harsh smoke rising from those paraffin fuelled
stoves.
As they cook and eat left over from the so-called elite.
Their strength crushed by the unforgiving harsh realities of their compromised
existence.

Slowly I feel their anger simmering, like a hidden time bomb.
The skull pyramid will tumble down and the men in black suits will get the shock of
their lives because they built their empire on a shaky ground. I hope to be alive when
that time comes.

STORY OF THE WAVES

As the waves of the Atlantic Ocean swing back and forth
Their roaring sound tells the tragic story of a sad sail
If you listen carefully, you might hear it.

This story from the watery graves from the watery graves of my ancestors and yes,
they dare me to tell it,
"Tell them!" they shout as the waves crush against the rocks, "Let them know," they
whisper as I put a shell on my ear.

I will tell of a mother continent
Whose rhythm gave joy to her children
And her blessed soil nourished their souls

Those are not just bones they are my people
Who chose to die rather
Untamed on a sail to a dehumanizing
Existence

The bones have risen to dare me to tell about
The sand in the desert, the roar in the wild, the rushing flow of her rivers, the towering
mountains and the uncaged bird that sings in the jungles of the mother continent.
Africa my beginning and Africa my end.

THE BATTLE OF ISANDLWANA

Their blood runs into my veins
Amabutho against the British regiment
Umkhonto against the Martini-Henry rifle
Bare feet they ran against boots
Never turning back

They did it for the mountains, the valleys, the savannah, the skies, the nguni cows the iziko and the overflowing rivers
For their children they ran
For their ancestors they fought, they built the Zulu kingdom.
Defending their legacy was only a reflex.

My walk resembles their march, against the cannon made of steel they sang and danced to the possibility of death and victory. As other bodies fell, they ran! Turning back was not an option. The grass of Isandlwana will forever tell their story, for they tore an arrogant flag to pieces.

Glossary:

Umkhonto: a short spear designed by king Shaka in early Zulu wars

Iziko: A fire place found in Zulu huts

Amabutho: Zulu army

Nguni cows : a special cow breed created by Zulu women

YOU'RE STILL ALIVE

If you can still walk happily under the trees at the park
as they happily shed leaves and are about to wait eagerly for new fresh ones
if you can pick the leaves and throw them up
and hope they reach the sky, if you can stop on your busy day to admire and smell a
flower, smile and laugh
breathe in fresh air and drink water, eat a delicious meal
if you can still admire the tiny beautiful sparkling diamonds that appear on the water
when the sun is shining
if you can still close your eyes in the shower and pay full attention to the water as it
runs on your skin
if you can still at the end of your day take time to watch the last display of the sun as
it is slowly enveloped into the horizon
or at its beautiful rays as they pierce through the curtain.
If you can look at the full moon at night, its light proudly beaming at night,
and wonder what it would be like to walk on it or what it would be like to build a
castle on one of the stars, you're still alive.