

SOUL INCARNATION

Bheki W.J. Langa

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THE BEAST AND THE PEOPLE

despite the scars of slavery
colonialism and neocolonialism
our consciousness
still carry memories of our prehistoric existence
proud kingdoms and civilisations
of ebony people
glowing under the southern star
through now forgotten
millenia

ancestral spirits with ochre painted faces
flashing like masks
of the persecution of my race
through ages an evil dice cast
razed to the ground
shiploads of ebony people
hunted like wild animals
chained and sold as commodity

a gaping scar
Festering and resistant
Racism and xenophobia
Crimes of a colonial fiefdom
We grapple
With evil deeds man contrived

rivers of blood
coursing through the veins
of ancestral lands
footprints
of slave traders
burnished on
consecrated ground

living on fruits of labour
and gifts of nature
land from the
forests
mountains
land
handed down
by ancestors
from time
immemorial

everyday
the men set out at sunrise
with short spears
bows and arrows
and oval shields
hunting wild game
through the dark pathways of the green forest

women toiling the earth like ants
sleepy eyed infants glued to their backs like lizards
on a sun rock

at sunset
the hunters return
dogs running at their heels barking at the day's prey

smoke hangs heavily in the air as all households
prepare for the evening meal

fires blaze warmly as the old women
hold their grandchildren spellbound with captivating fairy tales

by nightfall
the village sleeps
at the foot of the mountain

One day a terrible storm shook the village
dark clouds gathered above the forest
casting dark shadows over the land

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thunder struck the trembling tree leaves
tearing out of split branches
bats flying against the howling cold winds blowing from the sea

waves crushing angrily against the naked shore
startling the young girls frolicking in the sand

a Dreadful Beast had invaded the land
and occupied the Sacred Cave
in the labyrinth of the Great Forest

the village elders
spoke with the ancestors
seeking an explanation
for the Dark Curse that had
befallen the land

ISANDHLWANA INCARNATE

hearts torn from souls
bleeding warm
blood sinking soul
into greedy soil
bodies ripped into shreds
twitching from
nuclear death cells
then the final convulsive retch
the brain still recording ...

police vans
swallow the wounded
death overflows trenches
handcuffs sink into proud flesh
and the journey to the death cells
begins amid shouts of
amandla!
fists resolute
in spite of handcuffs

demonstrations violently crushed
but our songs can never be hushed
for the exclamation marks
of our slogans
land resoundingly on boer pig heads
like knobkierries
the struggle is food
age-old rule of bloodhounds
gives birth to revolt
the sharp teeth of class struggle
chew off whole epochs

we have travelled a long way
in Soweto we were matadors
tricking bullnosed war tanks
and learned
how much a brick
can bleed a bullet to death

the vaudeville flatfooted
enthusiasm of hired killers
vanished in a stone maze
and groans crept
through stone heaps

on bare incarnate rims
we chest heave on
under napalm glare
of sun-baked roads
wringing our intestines dry
whilst steel bats
spit death from treetops
caught in blizzards
of lizards creeping
military green wizards
a shower of hope
from the AK for the MK
when we take aim
we salute not dead stone
but living spirit and blood
Isandlwana incarnate

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ed. Sterling Plumpp, Thunder's Mouth Press, New York & Chicago.*

ECOLOGY SONG

Save the forests
of Tanzania
Zimbabwe
and Kenya
for the Freedom Fighters
Don't let the forests burn
The smoke might block
the warm Afrika sun
Stamp out the fire
and let our guerrilla army
stomp in shouting
Mayibuye!
Save the waters
to wash the wounds
of victorious heroes
Let the winds of change
patrol our country freely
Save the land

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MOTHER

To my mother
who when I was no bigger
than my birthmark
comradely bore me
as the son of my people
felt the fury and pain
of my kicking and pounding
against prison walls
certain about my inevitable
deliverance
I send my love

Your arms defying racist law
crush through borders
reaching me out here in exile
in a warm embrace

From here I bend my knees
to lay flowers on your grave
and to load my rifle
to face the enemy

You have since merged
with the land
but I know you will be there
on Freedom Day

You were made for liberation

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FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE FUTURE

our history is a connoisseur
of brave moments
timeless murals of valour
painted in brushstrokes of blood
on the canvas of resistance
etchings on gravestones
of fallen heroes
adorning the ornate galleries
of our consciousness

Isandhlwana
lightning flash of charging spears
thunderbolt knobkerries crushing enemy
bone and foundation

umkhonto guerrillas
spreading countrywide
like leaflets killing enemy lies

crisscrossing barren rural villages
and bleeding townships
living faster than sudden death
dying younger than stillborn babies

the seventies and eighties
gallant march of the youth and workers
with furnace-room-hot burning hearts
storming the bastille of oppression
in a choreography of resistance
hammering and chiselling
the grotesque apartheid edifice
with the sharp precision of poetry
till it came crashing down
ushering a new dawn

alas!

from the rubble of race domination
the blight of poverty
inequality
and deprivation
still are prickly shards
of a vanquished evil order
debris strewn on the path
of our barefooted
march to social emancipation

drawing on the rich palette
of our heritage
and the frescos of our shared destiny
we shall craft
a statuesque icon
and mosaic to adorn
the archives of our future

till then

our landscapes shall remain
in battle dress

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GONG!

Dance to my bloody gong blues shake
And see if you won't wake
To the sound of broken-bodied dolls
Swinging on a burning string of obscenities
Anatomical expletives
Atomical explosives
Sound tracking the penultimate beat
Of my bleeding heart.

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SOUL INCARNATION

strobe lights
roving eyes
piercing through meandering
smoky shadows
past the
portals
of the exquisite Velvet Lounge

Sweet fragrance of incense
wafts through the room
throb lights casting radiant kaleidoscopic patterns
hugging evanescent figures
on the shifting dance floor
the pagan beat of African drums
nostalgically evoking images
of Africa beyond history

Sultry ebony faced silken ladies
resplendent in shimmering skin-tight black satin garments
elegantly perched on tall stools like lizards
sipping wine
from long crystal glasses
with lips the colour of ripe berries

Focus on the tall lady
with the large golden earrings
and a necklace made of ivory
around her neck

The spotlight falls on her wild thorny dreadlocks
As colour changes from black to green
the scene transforming
into succulent African bush
with tall green grass and dandelion shrubs

a primeval landscape
across which the celestial figure of Mother Nature lies
breasts rising firmly

Bheki W.J. Langa

through ephemeral clouds
like the proud Maluti mountains

She is awakened
by the facetious tropical sun
frolicking on her bare torso
she gracefully rises and strolls
on the warm early morning caramel sands
to the ocean to bathe

She then goes about her daily tasks
In her divine garden

In the evening
she stands on the open horizon
stretches her hand high in the darkening sky
plucks out a few bright diamond stars
and makes herself a necklace

As she rests her head to sleep at night
she can hear the esoteric sound of the drums
where the young people are dancing

The party is heating over spirits soaring
supple bodies gyrating to decadent rhythms
The poet man approaches the ebony lady
gestures majestically to the dance floor chanting

Dance!
to my bloody gong blues shake
and see if you won't wake
to the sound of broken bodied dolls
swinging on a burning string of obscenities
anatomic expletives
atomic explosives
soundtracking
the penultimate beat
of my bleeding heart

The ebony lady accepts the invitation

SOUL INCARNATION

the couple dance vigorously on the mosaic floor
writhing in frenzied abandon
to the occult rhythms
oblivious of the cheering crowd
clapping hands
bodies twirled together in a taut love knot
only warm body sweat between them

Eventually they collapse on each other's arms
on the floor
gasping excitedly
as the beat reaches a thunderous climax

The bartender gleefully leans over the counter
offering a cocktail glass to the young man:

Drink!
from my bloody gong blues lake
and see if you won't wake
to the sound of molten souls
pouring out of flaming hot burning hearts
blood of my people
people of my blood
the kindred spirit
bearing the precious seed of life

The young man raises a glass
and everybody listens as he toasts

After a while
the ebony lad l rises to her knees
seductively lifting her shapely hands to her head
to fasten a brooch
shaped like a Salamander
on her hair
and the scene changes into the lush green field
where Mother Nature is now resting

Grasshoppers and crickets fly
as the Salamander ruffles the tall grass

climbs up the sun rock
zaps a stray beetle with its lightning tongue
and crawls up Mother Nature's supine form
past her navel to her womanhood
and she moans as it slips inside her
into an abysmal tranquil lake
through deepwater coral caves and pearly pathways

The Salamander finally finds a crystal house
at the labyrinth of the lake
there are infants randomly swimming
inside the glasshouse
occasionally touching against the clear walls
the Salamander beckons frantically
trying to entice the elusive toddlers
out of the glasshouse
but they nonchalantly slip away
frivolously defiant

After some time
one of the babies finally
pauses near the open glass door
and the Salamander leads him out
though the tranquil cavernous prenatal kingdom
the baby boy pushes out of Mother Nature's womb
onto the upturned grass
as the child crawls out he grows with every step into a man
a soldier clutching a hand grenade

He turns sullenly turns around
and hurls the deadly weapon in the air

Close up on the grenade as it lands into the grass
the scene changing from green to black
turning the grass into the spiky black hair
of the ebony woman in the dance party
and explodes
bodies fly across the room
vultures drink blood from cocktail glasses
and the young men and women lie prostrate on the floor

SOUL INCARNATION

The explosion rouses Mother Nature
from her blissful slumber
she grimly surveys the devastation
wrought by her maverick son

Then from her celestial pedestal
she leans over to lift the globe of the Earth
and tilts it to pour the water from the ocean
into a calabash
turning it into traditional sorghum beer

She kneels as she places the calabash
before the village elders
sitting in an uneasy circle around the tribal court at the village arena

They savour the bitter brew
A white goat is brought into the arena
slaughtered and burnt
with incense on the altar
as a sacrifice to the ancestors

The smoke enters the exquisite Velvet Lounge
where the young people lie prostrate
The caustic fragrance of incense
rouses them to life
wounds healing as they rise to the dance floor

And the music plays on

SOUL INCARNATION

Friday night
strobe lights
cascading weird shadows
through the ornate portals
of the exquisite Velvet Lounge

Sweet fragrance of incense
wafts through the room
throb lights casting radiant kaleidoscopic patterns
hugging evanescent figures
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FOR BENNIE

Like a Shooting Star flashing its Blinding Light
Through the swirling dark folds of a Stubborn Night
Bennie resolutely traipsed through Life's Adversity
Stubbornly refusing to succumb to the Dictates of Disability
He made light his Lack of Sight
Found Balance and Strength from his Plight
And so when his Candle Flickered and Fizzled Out
He never wavered nor faltered as he Stepped Out
And Cast off his Load
In his final walk Across the Road

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*This was a tribute to Bennie Van Rensburg, an outstanding diplomat who
passed away while serving as Counsellor: Political in the South African
Embassy in Moscow.*

