

exiled ink!



Zimbabwean writers and literature in exile and
poetry • prose • articles • reviews

Spring/Summer 2006

price £3

Editorial Team

David Clark
Janna Eliot
Miriam Frank
Soheila Ghodstinat
Jennifer Langer
Richard McKane
Isabelle Romaine
Regg Shumba
Nathalie Teitler

EWI Patrons

Alev Adil
Lisa Appignanesi
Moris Farhi MBE
Esmail Khoi
Howard Jacobson
Julia Camoys Stonor

exiled ink!

Exiled Ink! is published by Exiled Writers
Ink registered as Charity No.1097497

**EWI Artistic Advisory
Committee**

Ghias Al Jundi
Mir Mahfuz Ali
Janna Eliot
Miriam Frank
Soheila Ghodstinat
Choman Hardi
Richard McKane
Brikena Muharemi
Hom Paribag
Isabelle Romaine
Darija Stojnic
Nathalie Teitler

Editorial Office

Exiled Writers Ink
31 Hallswelle Road
London NW11 0DH
Tel: +44 (0) 20 8458 1910
jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk
www.exiledwriters.co.uk

Design and Layout

Angel Design.net

Cover image: 'The City' by: Zimbabwean artist: Josiah Bob Taundi

"That place that makes you think that's where everything is happening is now for the rich, yuppie and sophisticated. Not everyone can afford it now. Not everyone can sell something to someone any more, least of all vegetables, cigarettes or fruit. The government wants a clean organised urban environment with rich clean people in it. The government does not want to fight poverty anymore; it wants to fight the poor. So colourful, lyrical, seductive, individualistic and yet deceptive - that is *The City*."

Josiah Bob Taundi

With gratitude to Hammersmith and Fulham Arts Team for funding this issue.

Material may not be used without the written expressed permission of Exiled Writers Ink. Views expressed in the magazine are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of this magazine.

ISSN 1744-149B

Contents:

4 Editorial

Zimbabwe Writers and Literature in Exile

- 5 Zimbabwe's 'Thought Police' Fail to Silence the Poet's Voice • *Bart Wolffe*
9 When Citizens were Gathered/Exile • *Bart Wolffe*
11 Will You Care For Us?/We Laugh • *Hilton Mendelsohn*
12 Zesa Moto Muzhinji • *Brian Chikwava*
16 Home is Home • President Mathendele • *Thabo Nkomo*
17 Tsitsi Damgarembga and Yvonne Vera: • *Isabelle Romaine*
20 Is it All Over? • *Michael Dakwa*
21 Qabuka • *Ben Evans*

Poets on Memory: Saving Exiles from Drowning?

- 22 Glory/Evening Stroll • My Village • *Reza Hiwa*
24 O my Handsome Bedouin • The blue distance the cobalt forests •
And colour cloaks the apple tree • *Alla Dudayeva*
25 Poems • *Nigar Hasan-Zadeh*
26 Daddy's Key • Ten • Azza • *Sholeh Wolpé*
27 Interrogatory/A Dream • *Adel Soleiman Guémar*
28 The Art of Identity: Memory, Myth and a Feeling of Home for young Bosnians
• *Karin Altenburg*

Exiled Writers on Exiled Writers

- 29 Kurdistan: A Freedom Writer is Born • *Kamal Mirawdeli*
30 A Lifelong Exile in his Own Country: Croatian poet Ante Zemljar
• *Vesna Domany Hardy*
32 The Afghan Connection: The Silk Route of Poetry in Octavio Paz
• *Bashir Sakhawarz*
34 Recognising the Gaps: Translating Hector Tizón • *Miriam Frank*

Reviews

- 36 The first Albanian Film Festival in London • *Valbona Bashota*
37 Avere Yakha, Avere Thana • *Janna Eliot*
37 Still Here • *Miriam Frank*

Books

- 38 Venus Infers by Alev Adil • *Isabelle Romaine*
38 Afsaneh ed Kaveh Basmenji • *Soheila Ghodstinat*
39 The Umbilical Cord by Samira Al-Mana • *Jennifer Langer*
39 The Silent Minaret, by Ishtiyag Shukri • *David Clark*
40 The Ministry of Pain by Dubravka Ugresic • *Isabelle Romaine*
40 From Zayandeh rud to the Mississippi by Mahnaz Badihian • *Jennifer Langer*



Editorial

Memory in the literature of exile

Memory plays a major role in the literature of exile, as it keeps the writer's story alive. In the section on Zimbabwe, exilic memory is a resource to assess, denounce or deplore the political and social turmoil prevailing in the country with the writers articulating their desperation and anger about the condition of their homeland. Large numbers of writers have been forced to leave as explained by Bart Woolfe, with the Zimbabwe section revealing the extent to which the dire situation continues to impact on Zimbabwean writers in exile which in turn may trigger the reader's memory of last summer's hunger strike by Zimbabwean detainees fearful of being deported from the UK.

The dispersal of peoples, the shifting of national boundaries, and the complexity of zones of conflicts, incite exiled writers to define their spaces of memory. The geographical, linguistic and political dimensions of the poems and stories in this issue, are a means by which the writers articulate their concerns. Alla Dudayeva's poetry, associates the ravages of the Chechen's war to landscapes of memory, those of blood stained Caucasian mountains. Multilingualism and cross-cultural identities prompt Reza Hiwa to chose French as the language to reminisce on a particular episode in his life, setting aside momentarily, the anguish of assuming his other identities, Kurdish and Persian. Even political stances suggest an act of recollection. The story of Kamal Sayid Qadir, for instance, informs us of the Kurdish struggle for justice in South Kurdistan. And while the article depicts a vigorous human rights activist, it also carries an individual tone which discloses the author's personal memory.

For the writer in exile, memory is a double-edged, if not ambiguous space of creativity. On the one hand, the image of the absent country remains an unvarying point of reference, and on the other hand, the absent country, seen from afar, and always at risk of being forgotten, is the reconstruction of a loss. Yet, like an umbilical cord, which however tenuous, refuses to be broken, exilic memory holds fast to remain the writer's space of identity.

Zimbabwean Exiled Writers and Literature

Zimbabwe's 'Thought
Police' fail to silence
the poet's voice

Bart Wolffe



In hearing that *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer was being put on at REPS Theatre in Harare in 1996, a friend from Germany posed the question of the significance of the event in this way:

"Surely, such a play is an indulgence by the bastion of an elitist white minority trying to maintain a colonial myth of validity for its doomed existence in black Africa? – Why are you not doing a Wole Soyinke or, indeed, black Zimbabwean drama instead? Do you still teach Shakespeare in schools?"

- Fine, those may not have been the exact words but the intention is there, reflecting the liberal, popular conscience of the idea that Africa is possibly an exotic affair of drums and masks and gyrational dance movements mimicking some extreme grotesquery of "primitivism", (a word we are certainly not allowed to use in this politically-correct day and age of press-freedom and free speech!) To be sure, while the rest of my former nation is starving from food shortages and the drought and the botched land-reform programme, these dancers dressed in animal-skins are those the tourists go to see after their splendid five-course dinner at Victoria Falls. The troupe performs around the "boma" or camp fire on the ever-green lawns of the manicured hotels, while the visiting first world with their precious foreign currency, are busy sipping gin and tonics. They are also enjoying the imported fragrances of the frangipani trees and moonflower and jasmine alongside those virulent tropical colours of the also exotic and non-indigenous plant forms. These make up the verdancy of most wealthy suburban homes along with the lilac profusion of the jacaranda trees that line the streets of the capital of Zimbabwe, Harare.



While writing this, the Zimbabwe dollar stands at something like one hundred and seventy-five thousand to a single British pound as opposed to what was a parity between the two currencies at the time of Independence of this small African nation just over a quarter of a century gone by.

Along with the collapse of economy comes the collapse of all freedoms it seems. Marx had a point. Before we can talk of art, there must be economic distribution of wealth. Perhaps, art is a privilege of the rich after all, (for who can afford to sing when their bellies are empty and their children malnourished with kwashiorkor?) Perhaps it is no wonder that only state-sponsored art flourishes in Zimbabwe where you will receive your bread and butter wages as long as you sign on the party line and tell it *their* way to help promote the brain-washing. So much so that many a musician has sold his soul for ZANU PF to foot the bill. To the point of the former spin-doctor, the minister for propoganda, Jonathon Moyo, producing an album of politically-acceptable hit songs played in between each programme *ad nauseam* on the television and radio prior to the run-up of the rigged elections and supported by top popular musicians like Andy Brown and *The Storm* spouting the bastard lyrics for the ruling party at the price of freedom and any remaining integrity.

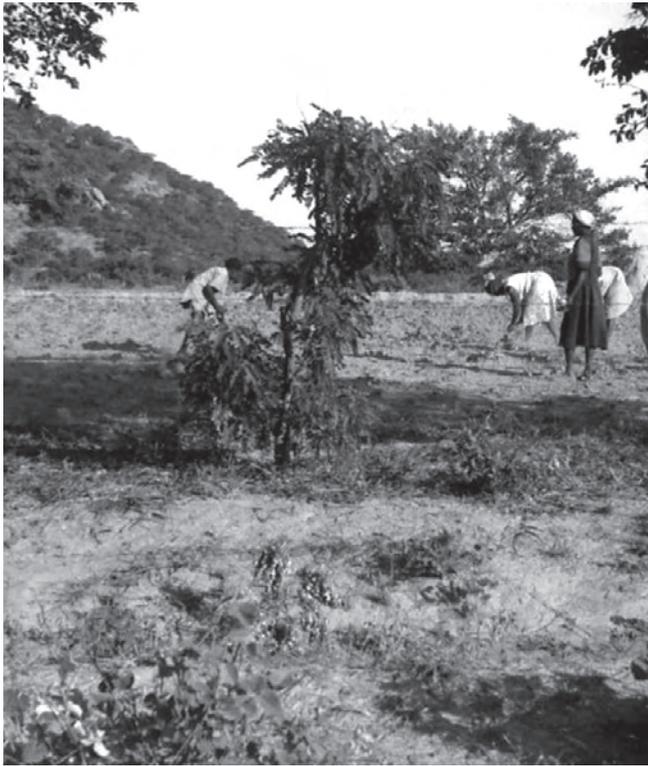
In fact, it is now three years since I left Africa. I realise that this same German friend I referred to earlier would go to the *Palm-Garden* in Frankfurt, host to the tropical glass-houses that host life-forms and greenery ranging from orchids to aloes from all over the world but not a domestic shrub in sight. Here, on permanent display stood sculptures from famous Shona stone-carvers by the names of Takawira and others, abstract to the point of ousting Henry Moore without a second glance. And here, *Taruwona and the Mujuru Boys* played and sang, their finger-pianos or *mbiras* plucked at in the gut of gourds. The Africa voices enchanted many a night in Europe and America with their songs and dances and in fact, made their living, not on home soil, often, but abroad alongside dance companies like *Tumbuka*, so much more popular and successful than back home.

Ephat Mujuru, the father of this *mbira* empire of story-tellers in song, passed away at Heathrow Airport not so long ago just as did Alec Smith in January this year, son of Janet and Ian Douglas Smith, former prime minister of the infamous Rhodesian UDI days, ex-Spitfire pilot for the RAF no less! Ephat had just left his beloved family arriving in the UK and Alec was in the process of returning "home" to Zimbabwe, Alec, an African football promoter and furthermore, part-time white impresario for the arts of black Africa. Another paradox in the whole picture. Alec's brother-in-law, Clem Tholet, achieved notoriety for his song, "*Rhodesians never die*", an anthem of the white colonists during the struggle for Zimbabwe's national independence and majority rule. Clem passed away in Cape Town, having left his Rhodesian homeland behind when the new and independent Zimbabwe came into being.

However, it is not only the exile of the whites from their former homeland, but musicians like Thomas Mapfumo, now living in the USA, originally a songwriter for the liberation war whose *Chimurenga* anthems were in the service of the struggle by the Maoist-trained guerrillas in the bush, who is now fairly much persona-non-grata back home. This also applies to Oliver "*Tuku*" Mtukudzi, with both performers/songwriters having their latter hits banned by the Zimbabwean Government for being politically critical of the corruption and abuse of power. This is also the case for poets like Chenjerai Hove and playwrights, Andrew Whaley (Winner of the Edinburgh Fringe award for his work *Platform Five*) and Wiina "*Lucien*" Msamati, (now a member of the National Theatre company in the UK and co-author of *Born African* that also won The Spirit of the Fringe in Edinburgh.)

In 1980, at the time of Independence for the young nation of Zimbabwe, the talk was of reconciliation by Robert Gabriel Mugabe, of working together as one new nation with different tribes, different colours, different beliefs, for a new future for all which could celebrate the strengths and offerings such a diversity could give the country.

Indeed, the Zimbabwe Writers' Union was formed, initially meeting in Old Shell House in what was Baker Avenue before the name changes of all the streets to those heroes of the liberation and naturally, Mugabe had a main



street in every town named after him. At those gatherings were Chinodya, Hove, Zimunya, Whaley, Mungoshi, myself - Bart Wolffe, Dangarembga, Chifunyise, many more...

The Zimbabwe Film Producers Association was formed and *Solo and Netsai* was the first locally made soap to appear on television with a multi-racial cast. Later came the ground-breaking *Waiters* where the full spectrum of cultural diversity and belief was represented and tackled the thorny issues of the day in debate through its unique brand of comedy. ZIFTAU, The Zimbabwe Film and Actors Union was formed to bring together the diversity of voices and talents and lend professional status to the Performing Arts with the backing of much training from donors and members of the international community including reputed directors and screenwriters and technicians. Festivals became the order of the day, International Film and Arts festivals a regular event (HIFA – the Harare International Festival of the Arts) showcasing local and international performance at its best supported by all the host embassies represented in the new free nation. Features were shot in this land of optimum sunshine, *Cry Freedom* and *Dry White Season* and other anti-apartheid films along with various awful African adventures like Rider-Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and its silly sequel of *Quartemain* as well as the multi-million dollar series *Under the African Sun*, an idealised romanticised version of the tourist dream of Africa with all the appropriate spectacle, dance, gratuitous witchdoctor or shaman, scenery of Victoria Falls, poaching and hunting stories and once-abundant wildlife. The *Boys Own* version of Africa at its worst.

In fact, what potentially made it work was simply that the government had no arts policy in place within their early manifesto and money was therefore to be made, there was freedom to express opinions and ideas and controversy also.

When ZANU PF realised this rich cash cow was the only uncontrolled media outlet for alternate voices to the State-domination, they decided to hijack the enterprise. Only they would now pay the piper. They created their own Art Merit awards for party card-holders. All independent creative voices were excluded. They contracted actors and writers, dancers and musicians to play their tune and only theirs on television and radio and banned plays and productions that crossed the line by daring to offend and challenge the status quo. They censored and they sent in their spies. - The CIO.

The policy of reconciliation that Mugabe had once declared, he now refuted, publicly, angrily, loudly on the airwaves and in the press which he controlled and owned. Outright, he stated there was no more reconciliation to be had for whites and dissenters and minorities who had no place in Zimbabwe. The torturing of journalists by the police and army became an international outcry. Despotism new media laws were put into place sought to silence criticism. "No cartoons please, we're ZANU PF." The pogrom had begun to purge the thinkers, to sterilise the nation. *Murambatsvina* "Operation Clean Up Trash" saw thousands upon thousands of homes and livelihoods demolished by the army bulldozers moving in on the townships a few months ago. After all, here was the breeding ground for voices of the opposition, hungry, unemployed, the enemy within. Divide and rule has always been Mugabe's policy. His most infamous operation to clean up was called *Gukurahundi* in the early 1980's that saw his notorious Fifth Brigade trained by the North Korean allies slaughter tens-of-thousands of the minority Ndebele tribe in the opposition Matabeleland province. The numbers of the dead are still uncounted. Amnesty International ran a weekly report on torture there and the excavation of mass graves by Shari Eppel, the wife of John Eppel, another writer and political satirist (*The Giraffe Man*, DG Berry's *The Great North Road* etc.) History never learns from its mistakes. This, too, was another designated operation about the winds that blow clean before the rains. There has never been reconciliation here.

Like the *griots* of Francophone countries in Africa and the praise poets, the voices of Africa that are allowed to criticise the status quo are the court-jesters, the King's fool, the satirists and lampooners or cartoonists if you will, but even they are no longer welcome. Most French-speaking writers from Africa who have succeeded are to be found living in Paris and not in their former homelands. The same goes for Doris Lessing and Wole Soyinke. Rejected by their home countries for speaking out, it becomes the lot of the artist and the writer to find alienation and exile. Independent newspapers are now published on the internet for fearing of being bombed as were the offices and Printing press of the leading tabloid (*The Daily News*) that outsold the government leading paper, *The Herald*.

Brian Chikwama, winner of The Caine Prize for African literature serving a residency at a university in south England laments the loss of his homeland and is incidentally married to a white Zimbabwean lawyer with a background in Human Rights. There is no room for either of them to

practise their skills in a country recently taken to task for its record of human rights abuses by the AU – the African Union.

Take veteran journalist Jerry Jackson. Jerry is running SW Radio, the *Independent Voice of Zimbabwe* broadcasting to Africa from London despite the assistance of the Chinese radio-jamming equipment used by the ZANU PF regime of Robert Mugabe. Jerry has been rendered effectively stateless by the Mugabe government which has stripped her and others of their citizenship for daring to differ. When Jerry who was working for the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, opened her telephone lines to public opinions on a topic which proved contrary to the government voice, she was perfunctorily dismissed. She, like all independent voices, is permanently subject to the scrutiny of Robert Mugabe's thugs in the CIO - Central Intelligence Organisation, Zimbabwe's very own *stasi* or secret police. The "Thought Police", I call them.

The fact remains, the voice of Africa is not monolithic, after all.

I propose, unlike majority tribal domination or mass-media state-controlled broadcast, the artist, the writer, the "creative native" is most likely independent, the free-thinker often and inevitably exiled either physically or at least mentally or both. He or she is a mixture, a strange hybrid of post-colonial legacy, sometimes a mother tongue replaced by *English* or French or any other colonial language. A creature, therefore, of conflict resulting from this marriage of cultures but nevertheless, in love with all worlds and the power of language to express one's thoughts and ideas in the best and truest possible way in their refugee status in the only country that will accept them now; the country of the mind. The true alien or "*auslander*" as they say here in Germany where I am now living. The Outsider.

There is a need to realise the need to move forwards and be prepared to embrace change as a principle of African evolution towards democratisation of art at least and hopefully also better governance and economic improvement rather than donor-funded lifestyles for the future of Africa and its rulers. Like Derek Walcott in his poem *Friday's Progeny*, the concession to admit the love of the adopted English language out of his Caribbean homeland is not necessarily unresolved. There is room for both worlds to meet although Soyinke would be called a sell-out for writing in English by his own people initially. African artists mostly succeed in death. That is when they are afforded recognition it seems. Other writers, Dambudzo Marichera, did not achieve their resolution while alive and so died with their voices, I believe, as yet unformed. Like his *House of Hunger*, Dambudzo's acid school of thought was always angry, angry with East and West and Black and White and the whole world. With Mungoshi, (*Waiting for the Rain* and *The Coming of the Dry Season*), the theme of family conflict between brothers occurs. The older brother, a traditionalist, plays a cow-skin-covered wooden drum, the younger an artist sponsored to leave Africa by a catholic missionary priest with his talent. All bridges to the past are burnt on his crossing his Rubicon when he flies out of

Zimbabwe, the rejection of ancestor worship in exchange for the embrace of the church and the family divided as a result.

The primary difference between Mungoshi's maturity as a writer and Marichera's angry monotribe might be summed up by Charles Mungoshi's lines from one of his best poems, I believe:

"If you don't stay bitter and angry for too long, you might still gain something from the old country..."

Similarly, Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* places her two protagonists, both girls, in a circle where the more peasant-like rural maiden as opposed to the urban-slick and city-literate girl, trade places, the old and the new, change and tradition, eternal themes moving around one another in an eternal circle, a cyclical dance of pots and round mud huts and pregnant pumpkins and musical gourds. I find it somewhat ironical that Tsitsi's novel was initially rejected by the Zimbabwean publishers for the reason that possibly, she was a woman in a male-dominated writers' domain. Only when it received acclaim internationally through publication by *Steam Iron*, a women's press in Britain, did she find acceptance at home. She too, suffered her exile and married a German but went back to her home country as a film maker of documentaries and features favouring the government.

Change, - "*chinja!*"- the slogan of the opposition MDC party in Zimbabwe, "*nhasi haari mangwana*", (*Today is not the same as tomorrow*) an issue that all voices from Africa must deal with, their dilemma and eternal conflict. The die-hard traditionalists reject modernity in favour of grass-roots Africa. Opposition threatens the status quo. Criticism is a precursor to change and that is why the total closure of all independent newspapers and the vetoing and silencing of voices has been such a key issue in the stranglehold over culture and freedom by the regime of Robert Mugabe.

There is hope. Artists fight back where they can, simply by speaking what they have to say. When the poet loses his voice, the people lose their priest.

Recently, *Super Patriots and Morons*, a political satire written by Reisdon Banda and produced by Daves Guzha of Rooftop Promotions was outlawed by ZANU PF and Daves is taking the government to court in his attempt to fight for freedom of expression. His stand reflects what all the creative voices hope, that is, for plurality culturally, not isolation and stagnation from the dogma, indoctrination and fundamentalism of all intolerance. The freedom to celebrate the country of the mind. To have diverse opinions. Where friends surpass language and nationality and know that the voice of Africa is not one, but many.

After all, art is humanity at its best. And that does not matter from where it comes or by whom it is spoken or sung for it is universal in its common truth. That is the voice, the real voice of Africa and it is served by many names unsung.

Bart Wolffe

When citizens were gathered

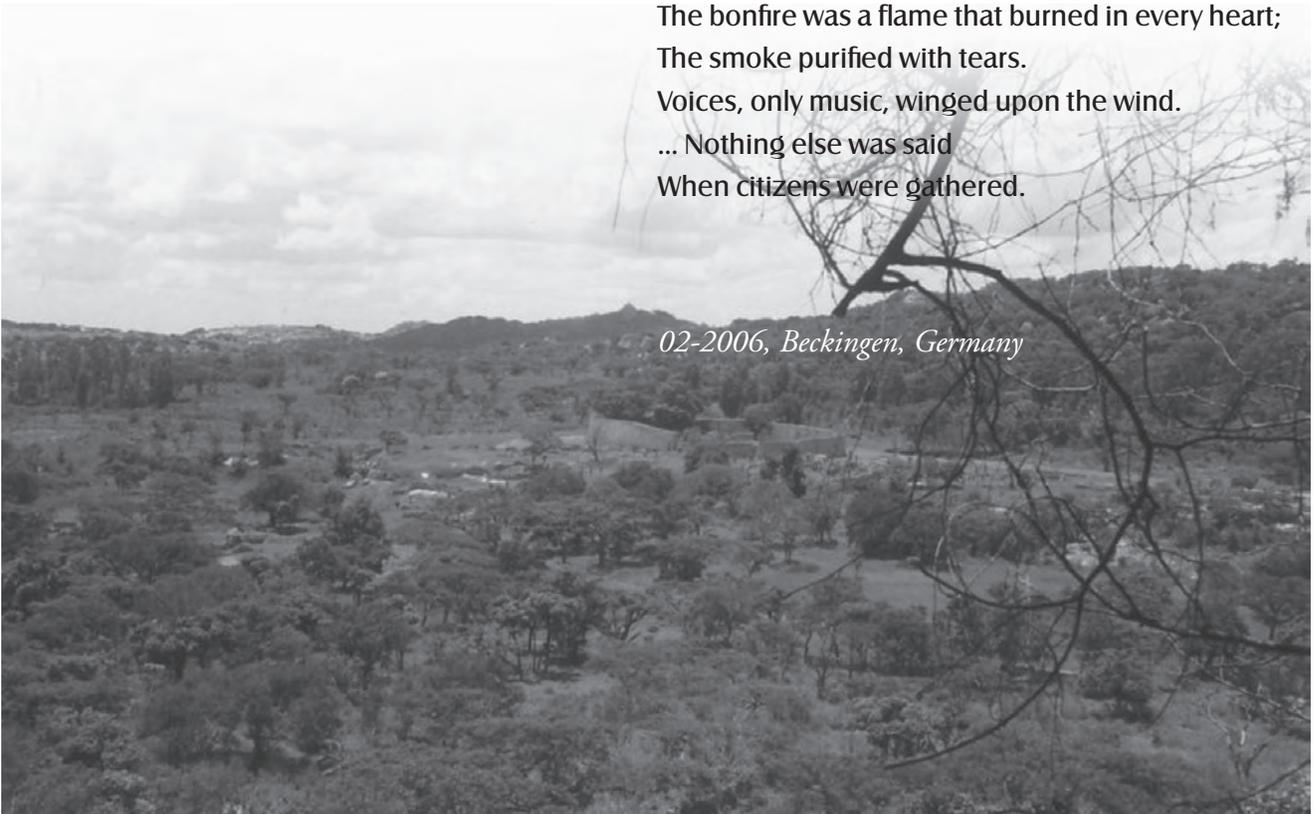
It's only when season-hot and urgent young
Like you and I once were in the old country
Have even turned to despise our fever
That knowledge slowly makes us known to our-
selves.

A country is born in the struggle for a voice
That men can unquestionably claim their own.
A poet emerges when all that's left to be said
Whispers wind-wide across Africa.

Knowledge, that forerunner, salt-air warm,
On a night when the wind can be heard
In the trees two thousand miles from Mozambique,
It should be a balmy breath on every mother's child
Across your back, Africa, the sometimes mother,
It should be wider, warmer, more promising
Than the ritual of an individual kiss.

I saw so many faces dancing in the flames
Where the party-goers rose and fell like shadows
Moving from darkness into light.
The bonfire was a flame that burned in every heart;
The smoke purified with tears.
Voices, only music, winged upon the wind.
... Nothing else was said
When citizens were gathered.

02-2006, Beckingen, Germany



Exile

Tough stuff, stones, especially the rolling
ones
Turned in my pocket's fingers.
A touch of home.

Like the incomplete carving
That woke me on my window sill
The night I heard crickets in Golders Green

When actually it was a bird
Pecking at the glass
This
No-name migrant seeking a border.

So the sparrows speak of ...
So do the crows,
Globetrotters, their universal language
I don't share

... Africa.
Under whose gravestones lie my parents
And other minor heroes
Whose only fruit be dust.

So is it written in yesterday's ink
Of the pavement suicides
It lingers in the kopjies' granite
Gathers on the blackboard's chalk
That a dictator's pen
Lasts for many homeless histories

The stillborn tomorrows
Of which homecomings seldom happen
Easily
In the mecca of Jerusalem
Or the sand grains of Gaza
Or Great Zimbabwe's geometry

Whose living occupants, lizards in the sun,
Are food for snakes and thoughts
In the obituary of winds.

But sometimes Jericho and Berlin meet
At the defeat of walls

And
Time steps past
Moving on the soles of seconds
Just another traveller
Jesus sandals all

While a red carpet flows

Sometimes I cast a stone
At the idolatry of hope
And scratch the surface of a lake
Starlessly called cyberspace
In my race to reach the moon.

Stone bird fly on.
Two stones won't kill one
But words will always break my bones.

Home, my mind made up
That my country exists
In that crossing Jordan passport-less
To the unruled pillow
Always welcoming whore
Bottled up promise of forgetfulness

And yes

Any damned address.

Germany, 19-12-2005

Will you care for us?

Could you live here?
Surrounded by the ruin
of decaying dreams.
Sleep on these sheets,
stained by the blood red wet dreams of
fear.

Could you chained
roam these unnamed streets
and not think of freedom?
Listen to their singing
become the hollow echo of a whirling
wind,
a dirge of stomachs empty.

Could you long for love?
realising that love does not exist
where love is not returned,
knowing you cannot,
because you love your country first.

Do you believe in hope?
A Damascus road,
a beam of light,
the voice of Christ,
politicians blind, repent!
Surrender to my peoples will!

They are helpless,
thrust into a world of guns.
They may cry,
but their tears will cause no flood,
to cleanse this land,
to wash away this blood.

Could you ask them to be strong?
That are beaten down,
knowing you've been gone too long.

Could you find a way to help,
having asked to go back,
and been told that you must not.
That your escape is all that they have got.

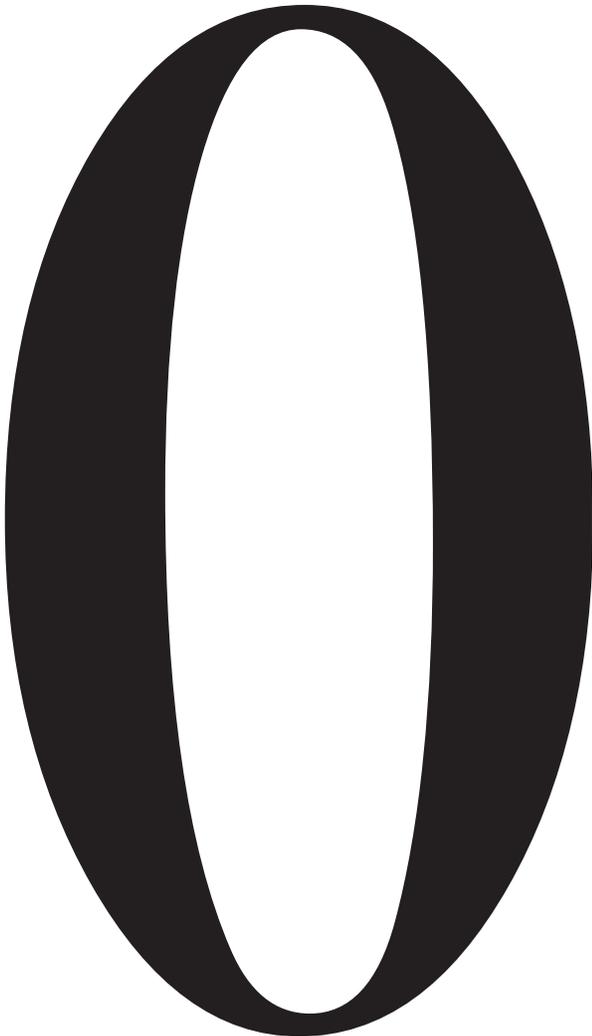
Cry for me,
because I can not.
Pray,
because I have not heard from God.
Make a wish,
because I know no faith as strong as this
the simple expression of one child's will.
Will you care for us?
Where it seems the world will not

We laugh

I wouldn't be here
were it not because
love made me leave
but still
with every heart beat
every breath
every tear
I bleed Africa.
Though fond memories heal
there is no pain
no elation
no escape
from that voice
that is constantly
reminding me.
Mango trees
marula
climbing the sgangacha
I'm wrapped in it
on the brink of defeat
trying to find feeling
in their eyes
or dust on their feet.
There's nothing
Only the laughter
of my countrymen
In the very face of death
and that
sustains me.
How many of these
placed in the same position
would find the strength
or will to laugh.
Maybe that is
the reason
we are
where we are
When we should fight
or fear
We laugh.

Zesa Moto Muzhinji

*A short story by Brian Chikwava,
the Caine Prize winner 2004*



n a purple patch of earth, lent its hue by a carpet of jacaranda flowers falling from a nearby tree, a man and a goat are locked in a dogged tussle. The goat, sober as a monk, is 43 years his junior. The man is still slightly inebriated following a night of gallant drinking. Planet earth twirls through the heavens at a dizzying speed while he pins the goat down with his chest and clings to the grass lest he be flung off both goat and planet. The maid, Maria, is absorbing the spectacle through the kitchen window. She claps her hands in the customary gesture of disbelief when her madam, Mrs Moyo, strides into the kitchen.

'Aizve, what is Ngoni doing? Is this not a bad omen? I hope we do not hear that the plane carrying my son and his wife has crashed.' Mrs Moyo claps her hands sharply.

'Ngoni's madness,' says Maria, unusually voicing her judgement.

'Eeeh, the people that Tambu's father brings us! I don't know where it is he finds them,' Mrs Moyo claps her hands again as she heads out for the door, Maria supportively behind her. By the time the two women are in the garden, Ngoni is on his feet yanking the now motionless goat's head into a large tin dish.

'Ngoni!' Mrs Moyo shouts from a distance.

'*Ama!*,' he answers, taking off his cap, and folding like a deck chair into a servile crouch, his hands clasped together in respect. There is no sign of his manhood gone berserk and lunging inconsolably in the direction of the goat as they had expected. So it wasn't bestiality after all! The women are relieved but don't show it.

'What are you doing Ngoni?' madam interrogates.

'I was told by *baba* that the goat needed to be killed and skinned this afternoon,' he replies rubbing his palms together.

'How can Tambu's father ask you to kill a goat by yourself? Did he not say he would find someone to assist you?'

'No he did not.'

The madam claps her hands again and sighs 'Perhaps you could have tied the goat down instead of wrestling it on the grass. Now, look, your overalls are such a mess.'

'That's what happens at work *amai*. We are used to it.'

Before the exchange totters to an end, Ngoni, seizes the opportunity to run through the obligatory morning ritual: 'Er ... did you sleep well *amai*?'

'We all slept well Ngoni, what about you?' the madam replies.

'I slept well *amai*, apart from being bothered by mosquitoes. If I was capable, I would bite back.'

The women laugh. Ngoni has, by now, completed his repertoire of the body language of servitude, and is carefully placing his cap back on his head. He unfolds his gangling figure to brush off the jacaranda flowers still stuck to his old orange overalls. The women go back into the house, Ngoni picks his knife and turns his attention to the dead goat. The slit across its throat is large enough, but Ngoni is not sure whether to leave the blood to drain into the dish for a few more minutes or to hang the animal up by its hind legs on the low branch over his head. He knows this is necessary for good meat. Not only does it ensure that the blood thoroughly drains away, it is also makes it easier to skin and disembowel the goat. He wanders off for a cigarette break in the tool shed.

Five minutes later he returns with a rope, ready for the final touches of his cheerless task. Despite all his efforts, the goat's body sticks to the earth. 'Mariaaaaa!' he hollers. Maria emerges from the house, in the full glory of her green apron and white cap, water still dripping from her hands.

'Ey, you, *amai* does not like people shouting. You will disturb the neighbours,' she cautions. This is one of the

finer aspects of good neighbourly existence that Ngoni is yet to appreciate, being only a week into his new job in the leafy Gunhill suburb of Harare.

'OK! OK! But can you help me lift this beast?'

'But you are the garden boy! It's your job!'

'Ah Maria don't be like that. Look at this goat – practically a cow! Even *garden boy* doesn't have the strength to lift it. You tell me?'

'What about Costa, can't he help you?'

'He's off this week, have you not yet realised?'

Maria is faced with a choice that's unlikely to make little green extra-terrestrial men any greener as they peer down from space. She can refuse to assist only to be compelled later by *amai*, or agree now and risk blood-staining her clothes. It's a false choice, she realises, and gives in.

'OK. You pull the rope while I lift the goat, right?' Ngoni tells her. Hands on hips, Maria considers the instruction while staring at Ngoni who already has the goat's hind legs in his hands. 'What are you waiting for Maria?' he says impatiently.

As she moves close to Ngoni, Maria is hit by a whiff of alcohol 'You are drunk, aren't you?'

'Is that what you came outside for? To tell me that I'm drunk?'

Maria's eyes light up, and a wide grin stretches towards her ears. 'You are. Admit it?'

'Yes I drink, smoke and eat. My only obligation before I die is to have a child. But, right now, I'm not drunk, ok? Now let's get on with work.'

'Eeee, hee hee!' Maria claps her hands prudishly. 'You make me speechless! Be careful *amai* doesn't get to smell your breath or you'll be in trouble so early into your job.'

'But it's not as if I stole her money to buy myself beer.'

Just then *amai* appears from the house 'Maria,' she hollers. 'What are you doing out there flirting with Ngoni? Are you having problems finding boys in your neighbourhood?' Maria and Ngoni are not only taken by surprise but, despite scurrying for psychological cover, are unable to conceal the embarrassment caused by *amai*'s pre-emption.

'Err...I'm helping Ngoni.' Maria manages a seemly response.

'Helping Ngoni? How can you possibly be helping Ngoni with your hands on your hips like a madam?'

'He had ...' Maria decides not to enter the fray, and takes a step towards the house, clumsily catching the rim of the tin dish with her right foot and sending goat's blood flying onto her legs.

'And I'm the one who is supposed to be drunk,' Ngoni murmurs to himself with a smirk, revealing his nicotine-stained teeth. From way up in the heavens the little green men peer down again and conclude: Ha ha, she has comprehensively lost the argument about sobriety. Then they continue drinking their Bloody Marys.

'Now look what you've done Maria,' iterates *amai* in customary fashion, reclaiming the hands-on-hips pose. There's no written agreement but as a servant, Maria

knows to whom this body lingo belongs. She cannot help feeling she has been caught red-handed although she can't put a finger on what it is she has pilfered. While she bends over to wring out her bloodstained dress and apron, the madam continues: 'And what assistance does Ngoni need anyway? What kind of a man is he who can't tie a goat up on a branch?'

Crouching down in the background and calmed by the cigarette between his lips, Ngoni, is busy untying the goat's leg, his eyes avoiding the flicker of *amai's* stroboscopic glare. He knows that at times like this it is essential to give the impression of being fiercely purposeful, which is what employers want to see. He opts to keep this pose until his madam is out of sight. Sure enough, as soon as Maria and *amai* disappear, his figure erects itself over the goat carcass. His cigarette smoke is gently carried away by a reluctant wind, as he stares at his feet and sinks into a muse 'These boots; a vile pair. The things that are visited upon us in these hilly suburbs, you will not believe,' he mumbles to himself. 'Now that I've stuffed my size 9 feet into size 8.5, how do I tell them that they need to buy me another pair of gum boots?'

'But you've been wearing them for the past week!' will most certainly be the resounding rebuttal

'Then what do I say to that? It was stupid of me to wear them to begin with. But normally one does these things in the spirit of being a good and undemanding servant. You will be hoping that later you will find a chance to drop in a polite word to draw attention to your discomfort. You don't want to refuse to wear the gumboots that belonged to the garden boy you replaced, and over-hear words to the effect that...*he's a spoilt garden boy. Making demands on his very first day? We've never come across this before.*'

After an hour of erratic but gritty determination, Ngoni surprises himself when he single-handedly hoists the goat up the tree. He ties the rope around the branch many times and as the animal gently swings. He take a couple of steps back.

'Fire! ZESA *moto muzhinji!* Lots of fire!,' he muses 'They call me Mze. You don't mess with me. Fire!' Miles away ZESA's employees are oblivious to the fact that Mze's triumph over a goat has led him to invoke the indebted national electricity supplier's name to ignite his spirit. Under circumstances where other people may call upon their ancestral spirits, Mze appeals to the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority's spirit to ignite a fire that will enable him to burn his way through the days' tribulations.

When Mze still had a job in Goromonzi, that place where evil witches threw up their arms and gave up on accosting him, he was a jaunty regular in the villages around Goromonzi High School. He delighted in assisting the villagers drink their home-brew. Then, at about midnight, embracing a beer filled calabash, he would stagger down the dark paths, across the streams, spilling the beer as he fought off the witches flapping their wings in owls' bodies. He would reach the groundsman's quarters at the school with the wind blowing a single note baritone tune inside the calabash, the beer a memory.

Still, early in the morning Mze would manage to get up and fire up all the boilers in the students' hostels. By the time the students woke up, the boilers would be shrieking and spitting steam high into the sky while Mze sat in the morn-

ing sunshine on the rocky outcrops just outside the school fence, smoking marijuana, whistling, and egging the boilers on: 'ZESA *moto muzhinji!*' Birds would flutter off nearby trees, stunned by his piercing whistles: a series of spasmodic and incremental vibrato bursts building up towards a crescendo that raised goose-pimples among innocent and sleepy pupils. Rural folk have traditionally used whistling to spur themselves and their oxen when enthusiasm begins to flag and the earth defiantly thwarts the plough But to Mze it was for cheering the boilers on.

When evening descended, his lanky figure would again be seen swaying either to one of the villages or to the beerhall at Juru Growth Point, depending on whether he was broke or not. Either way witches, having turned into owls, would accost him on his return journey, and he only prevailed by imploring his high voltage ancestor: 'ZESA *moto muzhinji!*' his defiant voice would reverberate through the night. 'Evil witches can not bear to see a good man prosper and enjoy life Why?' Mze never understood. In the absence of an answer, all he could do was applaud himself, '*Moto chete!* They call me Mze. You don't mess with me.' Indeed Mze is what they called him in Goromonzi. But it was not a name he could let his respectable new employers in Gunhill know about without alarm bells ringing. What would you think if you discovered that your garden boy was also called 'Spliff'? Sure, he could have told his employers on his first day but it probably would have been the last time the Spliff rolled onto that property. Thanks to it's shrewdness, it's still setting itself alight on the Moyos' property, and contemplating the most efficient way of cutting a dead goat into refrigerable pieces.

Later in the afternoon, the Moyos will host a braai. At around 4 p.m. fancy 4x4 vehicles will roll in through the gate. Their doors will flick open and prominent MPs and business people, all with formidable waistlines, will wriggle out. Not only are they dying of over-indulgence but they also delight in the status quo and are willing to thwart any ideas of political change; notions that those dying of starvation in neighbourhoods like Mze's are prone to indulge in with irresponsible zest so to speak. Mze has been informed by Maria that their employer's son, Gilbert, and Bridget, his English wife, will also be arriving from London this afternoon. He is hardly interested as he has to concentrate on preparing the meat they will eat, setting up the braai-stand, arranging the garden chairs, chopping the firewood, and various other menial duties. He doesn't know that Gilbert will not be in a good mood. He and his wife have had a trying week.

Just before they left, Bridget's mother had arrived to stay with them for five days before their departure. The plan was that she should house-sit during their one-week absence. While necessary, her presence always, has predictable destabilising effects. She is never without her dirt fighting armoury: washing and disinfecting liquids, a toilet brush and an assortment of scrubbing brushes. Her rules of engagement are simple: go straight to the germ population's Falluja – the toilet, bathroom or kitchen – cordon off insurgent scum, unleash fire-power and wipe it out. Bridget and Gilbert, who have not been issued with gas masks, simply become collateral damage. It's not only her firepower that causes disquiet as fumes abound, but her devout unilateralism: walking into a young couple's house and declaring hostilities without their consent. As she darts between the kitchen, toilet and bathroom, spreading freedom in all the

dark corners of the house, Gilbert's avoidance tactics like going to buy a newspaper irritate her: 'Why do you need another newspaper? Didn't you buy one yesterday?' It's hardly surprising that the young couple, having walked out of a war zone arrive in Harare in a curious state of mind.

'Where did you get this old man? I don't think he can find his arse with both hands!' Gilbert belligerently asks his mother soon after their arrival.

'You mean Ngoni? From Chitungwiza,' Mr Moyo MP answers.

But his wife immediately contradicts him. 'Chitungwiza? What Chitungwiza?' she laughs derisively, 'Your father is not telling you the truth Gilbert He just picked him off the streets while the wind was blowing him to and fro like street litter.' There is an outbreak of laughter.

'No *amai*, you are not supposed to say such things please,' Mr Moyo MP reproaches her as the laughter dies down.

Chopping firewood from a distance, Ngoni pretends he's out of earshot and finds himself whistling an old tune: *isati yatongwa nevatema nyika yedu hatimbofa.... Before our nation is ruled by blacks we refuse to die ...* It's a very dated tune, nearly thirty years old, and he is not fully appreciative of the other possible interpretations with which contemporary life has recently endowed the song. It would discomfort MP Moyo, a member of the ruling party, were he to take stock of recent street lingo, to realise that the term *murungu* has acquired a new meaning over the past few years. It would alarm him if he could hear Mze's conversations with *combi* conductors on his way to work:

'Boys can we move a bit faster, some of us are late.'

'Sure we'd love to, but our tyres are worn as smooth as a snake's belly.'

'You guys will cost me my job. I will find *murungu wangu*¹ breathing fire. Can't you buy new tyres?'

'It's a problem these days my friend. Ask my *murungu* over there,' the conductor will point to the driver isolated in his cubicle, in a disintegrating sweat-soaked T-shirt, and a shaven head. He steers the vehicle with one hand while picking his nose with the other.

'So that's your *murungu*?' Mze throws a rhetorical question.

'Yes that's my *murungu wangu*,' the bus conductor replies.

'Yea,' Mze sighs and smiles 'He's the genuine article. I've yet to see *murungu wangu* picking his nose,' he laughs before adding, 'As long as he's paying you well that's okay *mwana wamai*.'

While Ngoni's battle with the firewood rages, the conversation around the braai veers towards everybody's favourite topic: who has acquired the latest gadget or car? Mr Ngwerume, also a ruling party MP and business man, like Mr Moyo, has just bought a Mercedes Benz SLR McLaren. 'There are only three of them in Africa,' he casually drops the all important statistic. And then he delivers a seminar on its capabilities: the car has a high performance V8 engine with cutting edge compressor technology and a top speed of 330km/hr. It uses Sensotronic Brake Control and its brake discs are made from fibre-reinforced ceramic. The body is

made from a carbon fibre composite to absorb energy in a collision. You can power adjust the steering for angle and reach, and of course on the steering wheel is a soft touch COMMAND system integrating the display and controls for GPS navigation, cell-phone and the Bose premium music system that uses eight strategically located speakers. The car is dangerous my friend!

Before Mr Ngwerume MP is through with his presentation, Gilbert's sister Tambu drives in with a convoy of four cars; her girlfriends, who are also waiting for their A-level results. After thronging Gilbert and Bridget in a soapy counterfeit welcoming ritual that is normally seen on MTV, it doesn't take much for them to wrench the attention off Mr Ngwerume MP. Their parents, also busy trying to ape the consumer lifestyles that satellite TV disgorges into their living rooms, speak highly of their girls' sophistication, each of whom thinks she's J-Lo, sings J-Lo songs, and speaks Shona with a satellite broadcast accent. As the girls take over the hi-fi on the veranda, dial the volume to max and start to sing along, Ngoni carries the firewood to the braai-stand. Once his task is over, he lingers aimlessly, waiting for an opportune moment to take his cap off, crouch down and address his *murungu* and his wife: 'Baba and *amai*, I'm through with my tasks I shall make my way home now.'

'OK Ngoni, we shall see you tomorrow,' says Moyo MP swigging a beer.

Ngoni makes his way to the tool shed, takes off his gumboots and puts on his sandals made from old car tyres. Then he remembers the *machete* that his *murungu* instructed him to throw away, as it is too old to be of any use. Knowing that it will be of some use in his neighbourhood, he decides to take it with him. After that he makes his way along the driveway and out of the gate. Out of sight, he retrieves a *mze* from his back pocket. It's a little crumpled and bent but that hardly matters because by the time a *combi* stops for him on Enterprise Road, he will be in his element; able to leap onto the bus and hurl his trademark invocation at the passengers to announce his arrival.

'ZESA *moto muzhinji!* They call me Mze, even the president knows me! Is there anyone here who would like to have their pencil sharpened?' he will ask waving his *machete* and smiling mischievously.

A couple of hours later he will be strolling through the streets in his neighbourhood in Chitungwiza, puffing a *mze* and shuffling along as neighbours compete to greet him from their houses.

'How are you Mze?'

'Fire!' would be his brief but emphatic response. Too hot to even bother with the customary niceties.

'How was your day, Mze?'

'*Moto muzhinji!* Lots of fire!'

'Mze what's up?'

'ZESA!'

'ZESA *moto muzhinji* Mze!' someone would cheer him on, to which he would reply '*Moto chete mwana wamai!*' It's only fire my mother's child!

Yes, it's only fire, and you become his mother's child when you fan his fire.

¹My white man

Home is Home

East west, home is best
The heart is full of happiness here.
Dry bread at home is better
Than the Sunday roast abroad.
I never miss what I never had.
My lonely spirit wonders
In the streets of this strange land
For I am nomad and strange
My feet can no longer bear the weight
My disadvantage is your advantage
Pin my body to your heart
My mind does not mind
Home is home,
My roots are still there.
Do we really need to look the same?
Like two fried eggs in order to be equal?
Do you think that I am shy to be shunned?
You can't bribe my God-given originality
Poverty is not a crime sir!
Yes, I am lucky to be blessed
It is better to be born lucky than rich.
Face the truth
I cannot keep up with the Joneses
For my dreams are doomed
So take me home
My soul needs to rest peacefully.



PRESIDENT MATHENDELE

Cursed be your name
You three-legged hissing serpent
Pregnant with dangerous poison
Posing to be a lamb of God.
Your sharp incisors
And ever grinding molars
Seek a return smile from your prey.
I kneel down and pray for your prey,
Your nights are full of bloody nightmares.
Your road is thorny
Your grapes are more than sour.
You spit your speech.
You vomit your song
You scatter your poetry
Your big dry head is as stubborn as a mule.
I regret my vote!

Outspoken Women Writers: Tsitsi Damgarembga and Yvonne Vera

Isabelle Romaine



The special attention paid to Zimbabwe in our current issue, includes two formidable women writers: Tsitsi Damgarembga and Yvonne Vera. Both Shona Zimbabwean authors are renowned for trespassing on patriarchal territory and breaking taboos relating to incest, rape and abortion. Their heroines, set in colonial or post-colonial Zimbabwe, develop critical awareness and strength to shape their life despite the discrimination intrinsic to their gender.

Tsitsi Damgarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (Women's Press, 1988) - the first novel to be published in English by a black Zimbabwean woman - was awarded the African Section of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1989. The trials of Damgarembga's heroine, her path to self-discovery, and above all the tone of her narration, have propelled *Nervous Conditions* to the rank of a modern African classic. During Africa 2005, few authors failed to make a reference to the novel which, in Kwame Appiah's words, has "the human capacity to conjure new worlds in the imagination."

Yvonne Vera, who died aged forty, in Toronto in 2005, was a prolific writer: "When I am not writing, which is most of the time... it is as though I am fasting". Vera's works - *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992), *Nehanda* (1993), *Without a name* (1994), *Under the Tongue* (1997), *Opening Spaces: An Anthology of Contemporary African Women's Writing* (1999), *Butterfly Burning* (2000) - are published by Baobab Books. With *The Stone Virgins* (Weaver Press, 2002), which depicts women's traumatic experiences during the War of Liberation and the current political violence, Vera pushed the barriers of conventions too far in the eyes of the current government, and subsequently, she found living in Zimbabwe unsustainable. Vera boldly stated: "I am against silence. The books I write try to undo the silent posture African women have endured over so many decades." In 2005, Yvonne Vera won the Tucholski prize (Swedish PEN award).

Tsitsi Damgarembga and Yvonne Vera are authors who seize the pen, as a symbolic weapon, and unflinchingly appropriate the written word:

'I was not sorry when my brother died.'

This is the opening sentence of *Nervous Conditions*, an arresting sentence, which prompts Yvonne Vera to comment in her Preface to *Opening Spaces*:

'This is a shocking statement which I cannot imagine uttered in a room full of uncles, grandmothers, parents or siblings. Moreover, being uttered by a woman, without preamble; the head bowed for example, the knees bending even further than the knees ever can reach. None of this. In the culture in which Dangarembga's pronouncement is set, such a statement would make clear that the speaker has been abandoned by her ancestors and all acts of healing summoned.



Dangarembga does not apologise for the taboo in her mouth. For being a witness. If speaking is still

difficult to negotiate, then writing has created a free space for most women – much freer than speech.

There is less interruption, less immediate and shocked reaction. The written text is granted its intimacy, its privacy, its creation of a world, its proposals, its individual characters, its suspension of disbelief. It surprises in the best carnival way, reducing distances, accepting the least official stance. The book is bound, circulated, read. It retains its autonomy much more than a woman is allowed in the oral situation. Writing offers a moment of intervention.'

When Vera asserts that "Writing offers a moment of intervention", one could imagine the gap, the space, offered to a woman writer who would transgress the prescribed codes of her own culture: within that space, she would explore her memories. This is precisely Dangarembga's and Vera's approach: their concerns with the constraining legacy of colonialism and tradition on African women, lead them to an exploration of private and collective memory.

Nervous Conditions is taken from Jean-Paul Sartre's Introduction to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Dangarembga had the quotation printed at the beginning of the book, "The condition of native is a nervous condition", as if to delve into our recollection of the recent past in the relationship coloniser/colonised. The 'nervous condition' of the native is, according to Sartre, a function of mutually reinforcing attitudes between coloniser and colonised that condemn the colonised to what amounts to a psychological disorder.

Nervous Conditions portrays Tambu, a young girl who lives on an impoverished Rhodesian farm during the late 1960's. Tambu is intent on getting an education and developing her independence, but she has to face the autocratic authority exercised by the men in her family. The death of Tambu's brother gives her the chance to be educated: she is the next in line for school since she has no other brothers. She attends the missionary school run by her uncle Babamukuru who, having been educated in England, is the family provider as well as the decision maker.

The novel draws the emphasis on education and its relation to gender. Indeed, much of Tambu's coming of age happens through her relationships with four women – her mother, whose life is one of neglect and deprivation; her two aunts, who experience mistreatment from the men in their lives; and her English educated cousin, Nyasha, whose intimacy Tambu shares, and who rebels against her oppressive father and eventually develops an eating disorder.

Tambu's mother's comment encapsulates the meaning of acculturation for a poor, black woman, who is doubly bound by the laws of the men in her family, and by the social stratification of colonialism:

"This business of womanhood is a heavy burden."[...] "How could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on. Easy! As if it is ever easy. And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength."

The novel underlines the complexities of cultural heritage through exploring the contradictions between tradition and modernity. As Tambu pursues her education, she finds herself alienated and cut off from her parents and friends who maintain the traditional culture and values. The very education that allows her to find a place in the modern world also threatens to sever her from her cultural heritage. Her mother denounces Englishness as the cause of all ills: "It's the Englishness," [...] It'll kill them all if they aren't careful." Several times Tambu is reminded not to forget her friends and family, her traditions, her customs.

For her part, Nyasha, her cousin, has no memories of Shona traditions. She is caught between Western and Shona mannerisms, and struggles to make a place for herself in society. Tambu witnesses her cousin's anorexia, an illness - not associated with Shona ways - which represents the discordances between two cultures, that of Rhodesia and that of England. The frictions between education and a male-dominated world, the unstable continuity of cultural heritage, Nyasha's eating disorder, are the symptoms of "nervous conditions." They are the disorder brought by colonialism.

Nervous Conditions is said to be semi-autobiographical. Yet, as we follow Tambu's narration, we cannot fail to notice that Dangarembga's social and educational circumstances could not have been more different from Tambu's. Born in 1959 in Motoko (eastern Zimbabwe), then Rhodesia, Dangarembga comes from a family of highly educated Zimbabweans. Her parents studied in South Africa and in England; her mother was one of the first women academics in Zimbabwe. Between the age of two and six, Dangarembga lived in England; on her return to Rhodesia she attended a missionary then an American convent school. Dangarembga's mastering of the Shona language is inconsistent. She learnt it, forgot it and learnt it again during her schooling process. She calls English her first language, Shona her second: "I personally do not have a fund of our cultural tradition or oral history to draw from," she admits "but I really did feel that if I am able to put down the little I know then it's a start."

Hence, in *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga draws from a wider canvas of cultural memory. The juxtaposition of Nyasha, who was never taught her culture and Tambu, who is imbued of her Shona origins and Western culture, enables her to highlight the challenge and uncertainty between 'forgetting' and 'remembering' in postcolonial Africa.

Yvonne Vera's stories are intense and lyrical. They paint the pain and hardships of women during the liberation war, through a weaving of thoughts and memories which tie together people, land, water, fire. For instance, in *Under the Tongue*, which deals with incest, the link

between the heroine and her grandmother is made through a tight netting of symbols such as sky, river, and stone:

Rivers begin in the sky. Rivers begin with our tears.

Grandmother's cry follows me everywhere. I touch my tongue.

It is heavy like stone. I do not speak. I know nothing of rivers.

Grandmother is a river. I am not Grandmother.

At times, the femininity which intersperses the heroine's traumatic experience conveys the mutual plight of women bearing the brunt of men's violence. There is, in *Butterfly Burning*, a description of a self-inflicted abortion, in which:

Phephelaphi receives each motion of her body and the liquid spreads over her arm, over the sliding nylon of her fingers, and the unborn child too small to be a child, just a mingling within the nylon, something viscous and impolite amid the lace spreading along the hem, and the elastic gathering the nylon into pretty pink frills that glisten, shimmer, cupped in her hand. She closes her hand secretly.

Vera's accounts of the images and experiences of war in Zimbabwe through women constitute an exploration of the memories buried by people traumatised by decades of ethnic and political violence. From *Nehanda* to *The Stone Virgins*, from pre-colonial Zimbabwe to the wars of liberation, Vera wrote - with a difference - the history of her country. Together, with Dangarembga, they told their stories delving in their forefathers' heritage, while never forgetting to break the silence.

No news is bad news!...
for Zimbabweans that is. You can help.



The Mugabe regime has stifled freedom of the press. *The Zimbabwean*, a UK-based independent weekly, tells the real story. See now: www.thezimbabwean.co.uk. Make a difference by sponsoring a sub for schools, libraries or individuals in Zimbabwe for **ONLY £2.50 a month**. Yes! I want to help get the real news into Zimbabwe.

Your name _____ Email _____

Name and Address of recipient _____
(LEAVE BLANK IF YOU WISH US TO IDENTIFY)

Cheques to: *The Zimbabwean*, P O Box 248 Hythe SO45 4WX.
Pay online: www.thezimbabwean.co.uk
Standing orders: *The Zimbabwean*, HSBC, Sort 40-25-24, Acc 01363204

SENDaSUB Scheme

Is it all over?

Michael Dakwa

Is it all over, those days?
Of full bellies, happy faces, contented smiles
When money was plentiful
And worth the work
Is it all gone, never to return?
Families living in peace and harmony
Children full of innocence, curiosity and questioning
Full of dreams,
Brimming with hope and expectation

Is it all over?

Is this the end,
Of a cherished dream?
Of one people, different colours, creeds and faiths
Living and breathing as one
Is it all gone,
Banished like a passing nightmare?
Or was it a flirtation with an imaginary lover
Who can say?
It's like it's never been.
Like scent from a beautiful dream
Try smelling it in the morning
It's gone.
Or maybe it was just imaginary voices we heard
Of dreams heading our way
Or Chinese whispers of tidings meant for us
Destined never to arrive
Will those hopes ever return?
Can the wrecked roads ever be rebuilt?
And the shattered calabash be remoulded
Can we learn to trust, hope and live together as before?
Will it, and can it be done?

It's night-time
Danger lurks around,
And we cannot see the road
There's death waiting in the shadows
Smells of disease in the air, burning and destruction
Yet to every night there's a dawn
But will we be there to see it
If and when it comes
Will it be worth the wait?
Will it bring hope?
Or more destruction, despair and anguish
Is it possible for us to hope and dream again?

Or shall we?

I want to hope and believe
That all will be well
But for many scarred, disfigured, and lives destroyed
The lamp of hope is fading, flickering
And dying out.
It's hard to reopen your windows
When all you can smell is death

Can it, and will it be done?



QABUKA

Ben Evans

British stages are inundated with what is being hailed as the 'new wave of political theatre'. Court cases are re-enacted, interviews with politicians are painstakingly recreated by actors, performers shout political slogans to audiences who have paid £40 for a ticket - and it all leaves me cold. The problem, for me, is not too much politics; rather, it is too little theatre. It is arguable that all great theatre-makers engage with their political moment, but the stage cries out for humour, mischief, beauty, and wonder, as well as tragedy, invective, and the all-pervasive 'issue'.

When I started work on *Qabuka*, a devised work exploring the lives of Zimbabweans-in-exile, this was my dilemma. How to expose a political reality which urgently needed to be revealed, and on which I had been campaigning for years, whilst creating a piece of art which enthralled, charmed, and delighted as all good theatre should.

In March 2005, an international company of four actors, a dancer, and a musician, joined me in interviewing Zimbabweans now living in England. We started developing *Qabuka* from structured improvisations based on the cast's own experience of interviewing those in exile. We were inspired by people's frankness, and by their ability to laugh in the face of what can only be described as overwhelming odds - in the form both of Zimbabwean brutality and of British asylum bureaucracy.

Although deeply rooted in the political and personal

struggles of those in exile, the work was never didactic: the work embraced the humour, mischief, and beauty of those stories we encountered.

However, when we came to work on the project again, later in the year, much had changed.

In Zimbabwe, a government-sponsored wave of intimidation and violence was taking place. Kate Hoey MP, a powerful advocate for Zimbabwean exiles, had secretly filmed the terror sweeping the country. The community in London were bolstered by having recognition of the troubled political situation, whilst distressed to see the evidence in nightly news bulletins.

In the UK, over one-hundred Zimbabweans had staged a hunger strike whilst in detention. Refusing food had become a last ditch attempt to avoid forced repatriation. Then a glimmer of hope - forced repatriations had been halted until the high court judged whether repatriations were legal. The verdict was due the day after our final performance.

And so, as we interviewed, devised, rehearsed and performed, try as we might we couldn't find the humour, the mischief, the glint in the eye which characterised our earlier performances.

Now we are about to embark on the final and fully staged production of this show which has been in gestation for a year. The situation for Zimbabweans in the UK has changed once again - and no doubt the show will reflect that. We will try once again to find the humour, the mischief, the lightness of touch. I know the work will be political, but for me, as an artist, the question is: will it be theatre?

Qabuka by Full Frontal Theatre will show at Oval House Theatre, Kennington, London, 27th June - 15th July 2006. Box Office 020 7582 7680

Poets on Memory: Saving Exiles from Drowning?

Reza Hiwa

De l'Obscure Etincelle: nouvelle poésie d'expression française, l'Harmattan, 2004

Born in Teheran, of Kurdish origins, Reza Hiwa lives in Paris. The intricacy of cumulative identities and fusing of languages is the reason for Reza tackling Fate head on. Fate is the old adversary he defeated twice.

Reza escaped two dictatorships and survived a serious knife attack which nearly took his life. It is this near death which revealed the poet concealed in him. The pains he then endured are likened to the contractions in the womb, a sort of self-induced birth – a deliverance. This is how Reza summarises his challenge to Fate. 'Promenade' the account of his ten month odyssey from Teheran to Paris is in French. Reza could not bring himself to write it in Persian, a symptom of what he wittily calls 'historical dyslexia'.

The following are extracts from 'Promenade'. Translation of the poems below: Isabelle Romaine.

Lozan Ghafoor

GLORY

To Jenin

After the victory
back home
the brave soldiers
broke all the mirrors
to avoid the gaze of the last witness.

EVENING STROLL

Yesterday,
I heard the song of the field
my field of wheat
in the soft evening wind,

yesterday, I saw the corpses of poppies
without petals,
yet upright
ready for an encounter

yesterday, I heard birds
old harridans
shout and sing
anything
with no restraint
all together

yesterday, I did not hear them
say
"the one who is not with us
is against us"



Lozan Ghafoor

My Village

In memory of the Iranian poets and writers who disappeared during the terror of the nineties, who remain forgotten

There was once a village
where men had
sad faces
closed fists
in their pockets
where women's
wild beauty
was concealed
like a shame,
where children could not play
that was a disease, they said,

there was once the same village
where lived a poet
and his friend the Bird
with the colours of the rainbow,
one morning at dawn
over the village roofs
they sang a song
scented with the roses of Kachane
which talked of flight
and dream

no one has seen them since
but in the village
people still hum the song

Alla Dudayeva

Alla Dudayeva is the Russian widow of Chechnya's first president, Dzhokhar Dudayev. Her husband's mountain homeland, a land steeped in ancient traditions of honour and valour, became the site of contemporary genocide, with over a tenth of the Chechen population wiped out. In 1996 Dzhokhar was killed by Russian special forces in a missile attack. Alla followed him loyally to the end. She now lives in Turkey. Meanwhile the war continues.

These poems are taken from her biography *Dudayev*, published in 2003.

Translated by Anna Gunin

O my handsome Bedouin!

Of which sands, of which plains?
There flies a dry and sultry wind,
Covering up the oblivion of the days.

Languor of lips, memory of nights
And the ardent sound of your speech
And the bronze suntan of your skin
And the scent of roses, a Caucasian gift,
The sorrow of your eastern eyes.
Sand rustles hour after hour.
And life on the sharp end of the wedge
Is carried away by the river of time...
Freedom's furious cry,
The fire and mourning of your oration,
And the black wave of the explosion.

Your final words
Were heard by the wind and carried on,
It sings a song to freedom, to the sun.
The mountain torrent trumpets it out,
The East resounds with prayers.
The national call "Allah Akbar"
Is beckoning you: "Return, Dzhokhar!"
And dead, leaning against the rock,
You terrify Russia twice as much.

In awe before you
Silver-haired Caucasus bowed its head.
Arising from the flames of war,
Ichkeriya, your sons
Go to the battle preordained.
For Groznyy – the most thunderous fight,
"Victory!" the long-awaited shout,
And the mountains shuddered for a moment...

Brooks tinkle crystal-clear,
Eagles soar, shooting high in the air,
But guarding over your peace
Is the valley of your childhood – Yalkhoroy.
The summits, the wind, the clouds
And the centuries softly whisper,
And near your ancestral tower
Blossoms a young briar flower...

The blue distance, the cobalt forests

The blue distance, the cobalt forests,
The faraway road leading straight to heaven.
Blood streaming on the snow, closer all becomes clearer,
But you don't wander up to your knees in it,
But you have no black hole ripped through your roof
And yesterday your children didn't die
And armoured personnel carriers didn't drag
Your eighteen-year-old brothers in tow
Along these roads, in blood-soaked trails
In the mountains genocide hasn't yet become normal
So many tears and blood upon my land
Conscience of all of Europe – bathe in it!

Strasbourg, 2001

And colour cloaks the apple tree

All is petals of apple blossom,
Bringing to the world a sunshine colour,
The see-through air of early morning
Reveals its secret to us.
All tells us: We are wonderful,
We have existed for all of time,
In the world it has long been known
That good will always triumph.
Doubts retreat like shadows,
Like childish fears now and then,
Day conquers night-time's hour,
And the fog in the rays of dawn
Glistens with dazzling dew!
But good does not conquer.
There's no end to the killings, to the war.
Uniforms in masks without a face
Light up the way to Golgotha.
And no one knows whose command
Is ringing out "Kill!" this time
Again blood and mire, a lie without end,

Miscreant begets miscreant,
And now you won't be let in to paradise –
You return to the public barn
And to the rations, the cattle enclosure.
And why not cattle, for into war
You wander, as if unto slaughter,
With your head hanging down!
And colour cloaks the apple tree
The final and bloody trace...

Nigar Hasan-Zadeh

Nigar's work appears in *An Anthology of Contemporary Russian Women Poets*, edited by Daniel Weissbort and Valentina Polukhina, Carcanet, 2005

Translated by Elaine Feinstein

1

Listen to this heart touching
The tiles of a roof: sh, sh.
I am in a stranger's cage
Painting the bars silver,
As if they were my own nails.
Don't disturb me. I am scratching songs
For you, my godchild, to remember.
Perhaps today, perhaps later,
My fresh lips will breathe on to your pages

Look at that question mark on the paper.
It is an eyelash of mine left there to dream.

2

Today I want everyone to look into my eyes
And sing as if they loved me,
I don't care if it's true.
Let all those who were once touched
by the paper lips of my poems,
who left their own signature
on my body, and would not let me
sleep at night for the twenty-eight hours
--or centuries--of my life

They must begin to sing.
My ears are open.
I'm listening.

But what comes back to me?
Silence.

3

Why don't you smile? The sun
has put on lipstick.
The house is warm and
you still have your own teeth.
There is somewhere to rest your head,
a place to eat and drink.
A wild and playful soul
should be laughing out loud
until Heaven hears and smiles.

So smile, damn it!
Why don't you smile!

4 ON MY OWN

I'm fine, I'm absolutely fine.....
Do I believe that?
Maybe I do,
but perhaps I deceive myself,
since what is not remembered
usually disappears.

At least there is no anger.
Maybe someone could film a smile
and put it under my nose
like a magic fish
or a piece of candy for a
child.

I'm absolutely fine. I want
to spoil myself like this
tomorrow, and then day after day
until joy becomes a habit.
You see, I'm feeling fine.
.....That's what makes me a poet!



Abbas Bakhtiari, Paris-based daf player

Daddy's Key

A boy yells *Daddy!* in a busy restaurant and runs toward a man in a raincoat shaking rain from his umbrella at the door. The man kneels, receives the child in his arms.

Pepper in my eyes—

I knew a child in Tehran who lived two doors down,
every night cried *Daddy!* out the window to every man passing by. Each morning his mother explained about the war with Iraq, about the key to paradise sewn to his father's pants, but by evening the child forgot, pushed open the window to the street, waited...

Azza

The ceremony of grief

Women in black rock
their bodies, beat their chests,
girl-children serve, in glass
tumblers, steaming auburn tea
baklava on plastic trays.

Here, tears flow like streams
wet the ornate Persian rugs
and in the courtyard —
 where she poured kerosene on her head,
struck a match —
silver fish roam the small pond oblivious
tears soak into the soil where nothing grows
but sad sprigs of bitter herbs.

On the other side of the yard men sit
with hookah pipes, crack salted pistachios.

The butcher who was to take the girl as bride
now sits on an embroidered cushion, strokes his
twisting gray mustache.

Ten

I used to think I was closer to God on our flat rooftop,
that like the moon He could see me standing
 alone
on it's small vast empty where
 I was everything
 I was all I knew
 I was ten.

But even then I understood
the deceptions of time, of mortality:
Now not born... Now dead for many years

And that inside everything was nothing
and inside that only
 God:
 A giant eye hovering
above a city where beatings, prayers, slayings and
kindness were one color's shades

And I only
a speck of a girl on one rooftop among many.

Interrogatory

back to the wall
I watch my life
pass by and my eyes
are black holes where
light disappears

rising this inhuman stench
contaminates my torturers
and the whole world
each time I fall
head first
from the top of the metal ladder
my groans are silent

my body
inert
still recalls the scent of flowers
and gorgeous dawns

I want to die like this
to die on them
ultimate escape
undermining the troops' morale
to be buried in an unmarked grave
or in a common ditch
to be able to dream at last
in peace



© Nafissa Boudalia

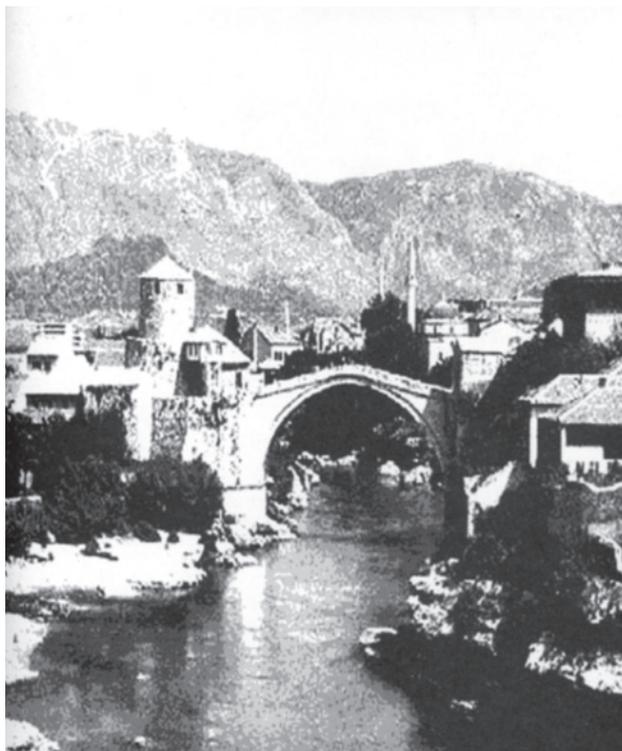
A dream

the storks have come back
to make their nests on the highest
rooftops the wind is rising
over the blue lake
rocking the boat and from the shore
the orphan is signalling to you
through the swirl of dead leaves
the naked trees
are stretching their arms up into the sky
which is watching you smiling at last

From The State of Emergency, poetry collection

The Art of Identity: Memory, Myth and a Feeling of Home for young Bosnians

Karin Altenburg



As part of The Art of Identity project, developed during a fellowship with the British Council's cultural relations think-tank Counterpoint, the archaeologist, Karin Altenburg tried to explore how identity is re-negotiated by people who are suddenly forced to leave their lives behind and start again in a new place. She worked closely with a group of Bosnian refugees who currently live in the UK, Sweden and Denmark and who were all uprooted from their lives during the formative years between 14 and 24, leaving their home and their culture behind under sudden and traumatic circumstances. Her aim is to assess how these displaced Bosnians 'use memory and myth so as to reshape their identities and create a new future.'

The following are short extracts from her observations:

'There are about 2.4 million Bosnians outside the Balkans. What does it mean to be Bosnian in the Diaspora? Most of the Bosnians I have talked to give different answers – some feel more Bosnian than ever – "my Bosnian identity was not formed until I had lived in the UK for a while" – others feel that they have lost their identity along with a sense of belonging – "I am a nomad, I can live anywhere but I will never really feel at home again."

The words diaspora and exile carry negative connotations of scattering, break-ups, exclusion, displacement, se-

clusion and penalty. Some of the participants talk about the strange feeling of being considered exotic, of being put under the microscope and pitied by people in the west.

There is a clear confusion between the perceived identity of the immigrants themselves and the identity that has been placed upon them from the outside; on the one hand as they were forced to leave their homes and their country and on the other hand as they try to create a new life in a new place. They were ethnically cleansed for being Muslim and for carrying the wrong names and this identity placed upon them by the aggressors followed them in exile. To find oneself and define one's personal identity in this situation is not easy.

Some of the young Bosnians I have talked to mention the humiliation and amazement at suddenly being stripped of the privileges of a middleclass background, of their rights and dues as they were put through the immigration system and thus placed amongst the lower echelon of society.

Some of the participants share a great cynicism about the world order and about human kind – about the way in which the conflict in Bosnia was dealt with by the Western powers but, above all, they share a fear about the latent capacity of people to rise against each other.

When I set out thinking about this project I was interested in finding out 'where a specific immigrant community gathers, in what parts of a city they settle and how they rearrange space in order to feel at home.' ...[A]lthough there is a certain level of integration I have come to understand that all participants 'suffer' more or less from a sense of nomadism and, from their point of view, coming to terms with the transient aspects of their lives is more important than feeling at home.

During the course of this project I have come to understand that the participants belong to another type of migrants...They belong to a group of European migrants whose identities shape policy in the current society; they are part of the process of globalisation and by moving between cultures they have achieved great insights – they have become transient experts on a good day and, to use Amna Dumpor's phrase, they have become 'floating souls' on a bad day.'

Perhaps immigrant communities as well as refugees (who have not yet re-settled) ought to be perceived not in terms of their indigenous identities but in terms of their transient identities. The 'here and now' is only one of those specific places along the path and, although they may want to be known as Bosnian, Bangladeshi or British, these immigrants are the basis of the hybrid society which will shape Europe in the 21st century.

Exiled Writers on Exiled Writers

Kurdistan: A Freedom Writer is Born

Dr Kamal Mirawdeli

This is the story of Dr Kamal Sayid Qadir, who was born in a small village south of Hawler in South Kurdistan in 1958, and emigrated to Austria in 1978.

There, he studied law at the Vienna Law School, gaining a PhD in international law. He belongs to a family in which eleven members were martyred in the course of the Kurdish struggle for independence and justice in Iraq. Dr Sayid Qadir has always been sensitive to injustice and tried both through his writings and actions to use law and intellectual argument to fight injustice everywhere, especially in his homeland of Kurdistan.

When he returned to Kurdistan to teach at Salah-al-Din University in 1999, he was shocked to note that political parties controlled the universities and academic institutions, and corruption and injustice were destroying Kurdish society. He left Kurdistan and went back into exile with feelings of despair and anger and began to publish articles against corruption on independent Kurdish websites.

Until six months ago few people in Kurdistan knew of Kamal Sayid Qadir.

Today he is the most well-known and talked about Kurdish writer, not only in Kurdistan, but internationally. His name has become inexorably linked with the cause and campaign for free expression, freedom of the press, human rights and civil society in Kurdistan. Sayid Qadir's intervention was Socratic in that it has everything to do with saying or striving to relate the truth whatever the cost, to assert the right of reason and the prerogative of the writer to say the unsaid and to trivialise the taboos of power. Sayid Qadir began a startling, radical and courageous legal and intellectual challenge to the established tribal-political power in Kurdistan, which took everyone by surprise. Many did not take his words and actions seriously. In a sense, Dr Qadir's intervention represents a post-modern challenge to a pre-modern, one could even say pre-historic, anomaly in parts of Kurdistan.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which controls the present capital of South Kurdistan, is a tribal-political organization which is historically established around the leadership and authority of the Barzani family. To justify their totalitarian control, the political parties draw on their past. They consider everyone who has died in the process of the 'revolution', including Sayid Qadir's family, as martyrs and consider that they 'own' the martyrs and their surviving family members and everything that Kurds have done and achieved. They own the cities today because they were 'mountain revolutionaries' yesterday. However, the Barzani family goes much further than this. They have created the cult of the leader 'Barzani' and the ideology of 'Barzanism' which, like any authoritarian totalitarian ideology, is based upon the illusionary principles of origin, centrality, continuity and sacredness: that the Barzani family represents the historical continuity of the Kurdish movement; and that Mustafa Barzani is a spiritual leader of Kurds and so all members of the Barzani family, especially his sons and grandsons, are sacred and must not be criticised or attacked regardless of their actions.

When the Kurdish people first freely elected their parliament in 1992, many intellectuals demanded that all power should naturally and democratically be with parliament. To prevent the division between the

authority of party leaders and parliament they suggested that the leader of Kurdistan Democratic Party became 'president or speaker of parliament'. The official reaction of the party, which was published and widely publicised in their official party newspaper, was that: "The leader was too sacred to be the head of parliament. If someone in parliament asked inappropriate questions this would affect (the leader's) sacredness and this is something that the party never allows to happen." The result of this thinking was five years of in-fighting and bloodshed.

Even today, two decades later, it is inconceivable in Kurdish society for someone, even in exile and on Internet, to directly, courageously and unequivocally challenge and criticise autocratic leaders. But Kamal Sayid Qadir did just that. In addition to his powerful exposition of the conditions of corruption, national treason and social injustice in Kurdistan, he presented direct challenges not only to leading figures in the Barzani family but also to the principles upon which the ideology of Barzanism is founded. That is what worried the Barzani family most: consequently they invested massively in publicity and hired their own writers to assassinate the character of Dr Qadir by reducing all his arguments to the issue of slander and painting him as mentally-disordered. Dr Kamal Qadir was jailed. His action was not impulsive, nor did he do it for fame. He studied law, knew he had a reasonable legal case, knew what he was facing and was prepared for it. But he was prepared in a civil and legal way: the way he has learnt, experienced

and is accustomed to in Europe and perhaps that is where he was naive. He believed with Saddam gone, with Kurdistan supposedly free, and with all the talk about rule of law, democracy and human rights, he would be allowed to have a civilised open legal battle with the Barzani family (whom he accused of attempting to murder him in 2000). He would either win or lose but either way he would have been of service to the cause of truth and freedom in Kurdistan. But it seems that this was exactly what Barzani family wanted to avoid. They could have ignored Dr Qadir upon his return to Kurdistan in October 2005 but instead they tried to kidnap and silence him - their own way. When they failed, they set up a court, which took five minutes to sentence Dr Qadir to thirty years imprisonment.

Then began a campaign on behalf of Dr Kamal Qadir, started by his two sisters in Germany, for his release. It achieved great success with over five hundred Kurdish writers and intellectuals, mostly in exile and from all parts of Kurdistan, signing a petition against the Barzani party and applying for the freedom of Dr Qadir. Amnesty International and International Pen have taken up his case, the US and Austrian Governments have directly intervened and the international media has reported his case.

The Barzanis apparently gave in, tactically announcing that all charges against Dr Qadir had been dismissed by an appeal court, and he was free.

A Lifelong Exile in his Own Country: Croatian poet Ante Zemljar:

Vesna Domany Hardy

Ante Zemljar (1922-2004) was an extraordinary figure, poet and a maverick. In 1941 as a young man he was first imprisoned as an anti-fascist by the Italian fascists occupying his island of Pag, in Croatia. He managed to escape from prison and from the hiding place and witnessed the first execution of one hundred Jewish youths by a squad of the notorious Ustasas. He made a garland of some wild growing greenery and hung it on a large cross in the centre of the local cemetery, dedicating it to the victims of fascism whose execution he had just witnessed. When the garland was discovered the hunt for him over the island truly began.

Years later his first collection of poems was called *Manhunt for Me Over the Island*. At the time he managed to join the resistance movement and to escape from Pag. After the war and liberation he became a student of literature. But such an existence was not to last. In 1949 he was imprisoned, again without trial or guilt being established and he was made to suffer for four horrific years on the Goli otok, (Bare island), i.e. Tito's gulag. There the physical and physiological torture was worse than in Auschwitz, more so as their jailers were yesterday's comrades in arms. In 1989, only after the Yugoslav Communist Party ceased to exist and the truth about Tito's political prisons was no longer a secret, did he manage to publish his opus of poetry.

The poems here are from the collection *Hell of Hope and Hunt for me over the Island*.

Translated by Vesna Domany Hardy

Dark hiding place

Caught
in a deadly circle
our hope stumbles gripped
to a black horse riding through a dark whirlwind

Blinded
when we touch each other
we create encounter flags
breathless

above the darkness
and the poison
touching our emaciated arms

We are intensely afraid of darkness being switched off
of being exposed
tender
we are deeply frightened of the mighty darkness
on the black horse in the black whirlwind

Dedicated to poet and fellow prisoner: Risto Trifkovic
From the collection: *Manhunt for me Over the Island*

Looking at a War photograph

Crouching behind a low wall in a circle
We observe the effect of our cannons
On the little town where my mother waits for me

The elevation is perfect
We are hitting with precision
Judging by the smoke
Rising from the houses sheltering my mother

Cosiness of silence

Thrown under a dry stone wall
two soaked crows
united in silence

The sea, the stone blocks,
occasional blade of grass waiting for the sun
crouching we think about Whitman

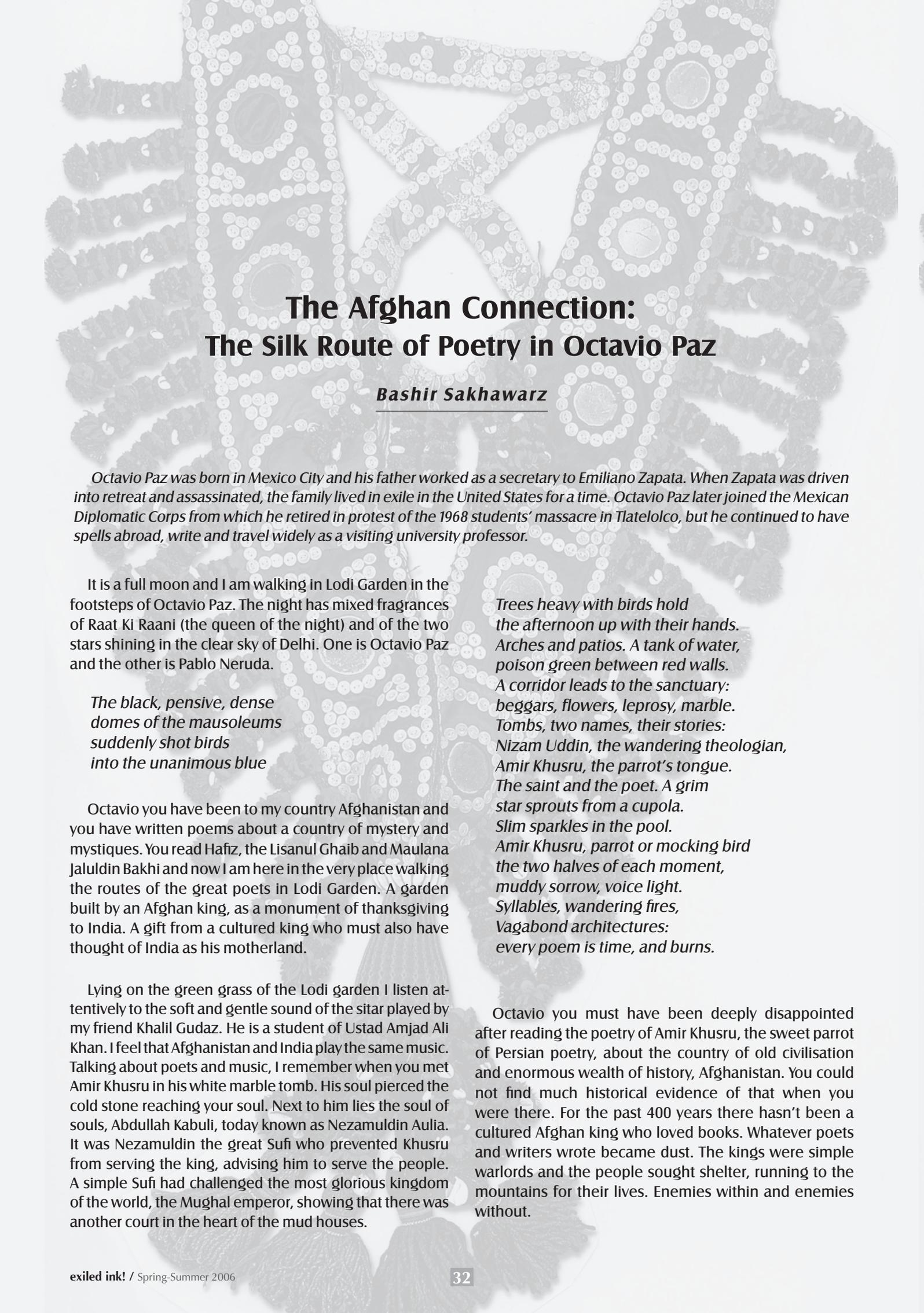
Within the wires and under the supporting wall
protecting us from blasts of north wind
we are silent about the wire, silent about the wall,
together

Talk is about Andric, Drina
The path over Grmec, Romania
what are we silent about with such an abundance of
words?

Days and years stretch out; two poets
what do they keep silent about, close to each other
while nails are stuck into their eyes
bleeding daily
they hand the silence to each other
their daily bread of warmth

Distant is the sea – at arm's length
Distant is the wire – at arm's length
Our strong silence keeps pace

Next to each other we are digging closeness
bridging the trenches of banishment
Burdened with the horrifying silence



The Afghan Connection: The Silk Route of Poetry in Octavio Paz

Bashir Sakhawarz

Octavio Paz was born in Mexico City and his father worked as a secretary to Emiliano Zapata. When Zapata was driven into retreat and assassinated, the family lived in exile in the United States for a time. Octavio Paz later joined the Mexican Diplomatic Corps from which he retired in protest of the 1968 students' massacre in Tlatelolco, but he continued to have spells abroad, write and travel widely as a visiting university professor.

It is a full moon and I am walking in Lodi Garden in the footsteps of Octavio Paz. The night has mixed fragrances of Raat Ki Raani (the queen of the night) and of the two stars shining in the clear sky of Delhi. One is Octavio Paz and the other is Pablo Neruda.

*The black, pensive, dense
domes of the mausoleums
suddenly shot birds
into the unanimous blue*

Octavio you have been to my country Afghanistan and you have written poems about a country of mystery and mystiques. You read Hafiz, the Lisanul Ghaib and Maulana Jaluddin Bakhi and now I am here in the very place walking the routes of the great poets in Lodi Garden. A garden built by an Afghan king, as a monument of thanksgiving to India. A gift from a cultured king who must also have thought of India as his motherland.

Lying on the green grass of the Lodi garden I listen attentively to the soft and gentle sound of the sitar played by my friend Khalil Gudaz. He is a student of Ustad Amjad Ali Khan. I feel that Afghanistan and India play the same music. Talking about poets and music, I remember when you met Amir Khusru in his white marble tomb. His soul pierced the cold stone reaching your soul. Next to him lies the soul of souls, Abdullah Kabuli, today known as Nezamuddin Aulia. It was Nezamuddin the great Sufi who prevented Khusru from serving the king, advising him to serve the people. A simple Sufi had challenged the most glorious kingdom of the world, the Mughal emperor, showing that there was another court in the heart of the mud houses.

*Trees heavy with birds hold
the afternoon up with their hands.
Arches and patios. A tank of water,
poison green between red walls.
A corridor leads to the sanctuary:
beggars, flowers, leprosy, marble.
Tombs, two names, their stories:
Nizam Uddin, the wandering theologian,
Amir Khusru, the parrot's tongue.
The saint and the poet. A grim
star sprouts from a cupola.
Slim sparkles in the pool.
Amir Khusru, parrot or mocking bird
the two halves of each moment,
muddy sorrow, voice light.
Syllables, wandering fires,
Vagabond architectures:
every poem is time, and burns.*

Octavio you must have been deeply disappointed after reading the poetry of Amir Khusru, the sweet parrot of Persian poetry, about the country of old civilisation and enormous wealth of history, Afghanistan. You could not find much historical evidence of that when you were there. For the past 400 years there hasn't been a cultured Afghan king who loved books. Whatever poets and writers wrote became dust. The kings were simple warlords and the people sought shelter, running to the mountains for their lives. Enemies within and enemies without.

*The present is motionless
The mountains are of bone and of snow
They have been here since the beginning
The wind has just been born
Ageless
As the light and the dust
A windmill of sounds
The bazaar spins its colours
Bells, motors, radios
The stony trot of dark donkeys
Songs and complaints entangled
The tall light chiselled with hammer-strokes
In the clearance of silence
Boy's circles
Explode
Princess in tattered clothes
On the bank of the tortured river
Pray meditate
The present is motionless
The floodgates of the years open
Days flash out
Agate*

*The present is motionless
The mountains
quartered suns
petrified storms earth-yellow
The wind whips
it hurts to see
The sky is another deeper abyss
Gorge of the Salang Pass
black cloud over black rock
Fists of blood strike
gate of stone
Only the water is human
in these precipitous solitudes
Only your eyes of human water*

Afghanistan is a traveller, like you and me. It has travelled through the course of history. Through happy periods when it was touched by Buddha, when it was lit by the light of Ahura Mazda (the ultimate truth), when its temples mushroomed in the hills, mountains and deserts, when it woke up with the recitation of Khayam, with the beat of the Sufi soul on drums, with farm people growing the food of love. Afghanistan invented a face for itself, travelling deep into history:

*He invented a face for himself.
Behind it
he lived died and resurrected
many times.
His face now
has the wrinkles from the face.
His wrinkles have no face*

On the road to Kabul and then Balh there was nothing but the natural and stunning beauty of the country in front of you and you were too late by many years to see the magnificence of the caravansaras on the Silk Route. I too wish I had lived in that era. Perhaps Octavio, myself and Ibn Batuta would have become friends travelling together. We would have gone to Kabul on the Silk Route, where we would have passed the Kabulis in the market speaking at least four different main languages to do business. We would have seen the Charbaghs, the copies of the Mughul Gardens built in India. We would have listened to the sound of music emanating from the streets of Kabul. Kabul was full of professional musicians, dancers and storytellers, but today nothing remains but a footprint in the few surviving history books.

Nowhere in the Lodigarden I think about you and my country and I can conclude that India at least, has kept its charm and beauty. It is a country of many religions and many sects and it is a country of tolerance. It is here that I can discover my own motherland, by walking the Qutab Minar, walking in the Charbaghs or simply the Lodi Gardens. Here I discovered you and poetry.

Poetry: *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz, 1957-1987*,
Edited by Eliot Weinberger, HarperCollins India

Recognising the Gaps: Translating Hector Tizón

Miriam Frank

During the years of the military regime in Argentina, 1976-1982, Hector Tizon went into exile in Spain.

Following a visit to the remote Andean region in the north west of Argentina, bordering Bolivia and Chile, which left me spellbound by its spectacular landscape and intensely curious about its inhabitants and history, the Anglo-Argentine journalist, Andrew Graham-Yooll, lent me some books by an author from the capital San Salvador de Jujuy. As I turned to the first page, I was bewitched by the sheer strength of the words I read.

Aquí la tierra es dura y estéril; el cielo está mas cerca que en ninguna otra parte y es azul y vacío. No llueve, pero cuando el cielo ruga su voz es aterradora, implacable, colérica ...

Here the earth is hard and barren. The sky is nearer than it is anywhere else and is blue and empty. It does not rain, but when the sky roars its voice is terrifying, wrathful, implacable....

I took the book home and settled down to read it. However, I soon found out that the language was very difficult, not only were there many words I didn't understand, and could not find in the dictionary, of Quechua origin or archaic *Spanish*, but many of the concepts and images were expressed in a strikingly unusual style. Even so, I sensed revelations in Tizón's writing which I was determined to understand, and I suddenly realised that the process of translating it into English would help me to gain those insights. And so I sat in front of my computer and painstakingly proceeded to unravel each sentence, digest it, feel its life and rhythms and to recreate it in English. Not only was the surprisingly and powerful language of Tizón opening up a new world, but it was also putting me in touch with an old buried world inside me from which I had been wrenched at the age of 12 leaving me in some confusion: my life in the small primitive village of Acapanzingo on the outskirts of Cuernavaca in Mexico, which had been abruptly changed for that of Christchurch, New Zealand. I became aware of our amazingly personal relationship with language and its emotional overtones, I realised the resentment I had felt for so many years towards the English language which in New Zealand, where I first started to use it, had represented a forceful repression of all the enthusiasm, excitement and love of life which I had experienced in Mexico and expressed in Spanish. My translation of Tizón became a vital bridge between those two languages and between my life in Acapanzingo and Christchurch. It brought about a full reconciliation between myself and English, which I came to love and appreciate and, in addition, to enjoy the exercise of its manipulation: the wonderment of examining each word, phrase and concept, the search for

clarity and precision in the face of the shifting associations and meanings of words which appeared dependent on experience, mood, and who knows what other factors! The more I realised the ephemeral quality of words, the greater was my need for precision. The process was like treading on quicksand looking for an anchor. And it was revealing and fascinating.

In the correspondence that ensued between the author and myself, we frequently exchanged our thoughts on translation. He described how the translation of a literary novel involved not only the entire rewriting of the work but also, and more importantly, its *recreation*. He explained the process of interpretation, a special communion between author and translator in which one merges with and complements the other, to help one another to be *clear*.

The world that rises out of Tizón's pages is a world of sensations, reaching back to their very essence, as though everything is being experienced for the first time. Each idea on the page is a surprise, a discovery, and develops if we try to analyse this phenomenon. We are accustomed more commonly to process our incoming perceptions into an orderly arrangement which fits our preconceptions, to force them into a system we have already created and decided we believe in and gives us the 'meaning' we are looking for. Tizón dispenses with this. Instead, we are left hanging without the familiar props, in an uncertain, ambiguous world. Having been trained in my profession to think scientifically and to write descriptions of research work with the discipline of logic and consistency, I found in Tizón's writing what appears at first sight to be the antithesis of that ordered world. And yet on closer examination I saw that – on the contrary – it states it even more clearly, from a different angle. In the process of my translation, I learnt to face and accept the doubts and ambivalence of life and our immediate world, to recognise the gaps, to be aware of the unknown and the unexplained, and to undo our automatic need to classify, organise and correct the world. Paradoxically, through Tizón's *fantasy*, I was getting closer to 'reality' ...whatever that is.

The sense of novelty conveyed by Tizón makes use of language we are unaccustomed to and a total absence of the cliché.

El vuelo de un pajaraco tiñó de sombra por un segundo la luz difusa de la ventana y esa sombra se le pintó en la cara como un claro pensamiento.

The flight of a large bird momentarily blotted with its shadow the diffuse light from the window, and the shadow was imprinted on his face like a clear thought.

Por momentos semejaba que el viento corría a sus anchas como si no hubiese paredes y hasta creyó ver unas aves en el cielo, en ese cielo de piedra de donde a veces alguna se desprendía, para caer como un pétalo pesado.

At odd moments the wind seemed to be blowing about at will as though there were no walls, he even thought he saw some birds in the sky, in that sky of stone where occasionally a piece broke away to fall like a heavy petal.



Miriam Frank

Tizón's peculiar idiom which arises from his particular vision and poetry forms an essential part of the ambience evoked in his writing, and it seemed essential to express that strangeness in English. This demanded a knife-edge balance between an easy, flowing English and Tizón's unique language: it was necessary to capture one without sacrificing the other. A commonly expressed view regarding translation suggests that in the face of difficulty in reconciling the author's meaning with native English, the scales ought to be tipped towards the latter, the translator's professional reputation being given perhaps greater importance than the work he or she is translating. However, the stipulation that every foreign work should read in English as though it had been conceived in this language begs a number of questions. Should we aspire to narrow down concepts and descriptions which have evolved from a non-English way of thinking and feeling, to the strict boundaries of our own familiar idiom? In the case of Tizón's writing, the evolution of a world so distinct and removed from anything English would be badly served by introducing an English ambience as a result of a vernacular translation. Moreover, the English language is rich enough and diverse enough to absorb deviations from its familiar forms, and to work within the limitations of commonly used language patterns would mean to give up the fascinating challenge of that language's infinite creative possibilities and, as a result, the enrichment of our experience and understanding.

To convey the world in Tizón's writing, as well as the meaning, it was important to capture the *rhythms* of the narrative, which in certain instances may give frothiness to a serious statement, or impart a subtle sense of tongue-in-cheek, insouciance, or gentle ridicule of the concept being described, rather in the way that intonation may add the final touch to meaning in the spoken language. Even the sights and smells Tizón so vividly spreads in front of us are accentuated by the rhythms and sounds used to describe them. The English rendering of his writing had to make use of comparable effects to convey the atmosphere experienced when reading Tizón.

Nuevamente llovía, pero el agua golpeaba solo un pedazo del techo de la cocina. De ahí llegaban murmullos, rumores de líquidos hirviendo, aromas dulzunos de pailas que derramaban, crepitares lentos, perezosos; tintineos, picar de cuchillos sobre tablas de cortar cebolla fina. De pronto un hondo, helado silbido y un golpe de batiente de ventanal.

It was raining again, but the water was hitting only part of the roof of the kitchen. Murmurings from there drifted towards them, sounds of boiling liquids, sweet aromas from overflowing frying pans, slow and lazy crackles, clinking and clanging, knives chopping on boards finely slicing onions. Suddenly a low icy whistle and the slamming of a window casement.

...vió que el campanero, como un viejo murciélago arrugado, se columpiaba del trenzado de tientos del badajo. Parecía soñar, adormecido por la vibración y el ruido, percusión y eco, que rompiendo desde el seno del campanario que hacía de tornavoz, se expandía sobre el paramo.

...he saw the bell-ringer, like an old wrinkled bat, swinging from the clapper's leather-throated braid, he seemed to be dreaming, lulled by the vibrations and the noise, the percussion and the echo, which bursting forth from the depths of the belfry that acted as a soundboard, were spreading out across the empty plains.

Having devoted a large part of this discussion to that which is different and exotic about Tizón's vivid descriptions of life in the high Andean plateau, known as the *puna*, I feel obliged to state that perhaps the most important revelation to be derived from his writing is the universal ordinariness of man here too. There are Shylocks and Hamlets in the *puna* too, as he tells us. Although there is nothing new in this insight, Tizón presents his observations with the freshness and subtlety already alluded to, giving us a sense of rediscovery, a new confirmation seen from another angle of what we hopefully already knew.

The translation of Tizón's works has added an entirely new insight into my already rich world. It has revolutionised my relationship with language, and thus with myself. It has clarified my own ideas and opened the doors to greater communication. And it has led me – as well as acting as a vehicle to pass on the ideas of others – to my own writing.

Extracts from: *Fuego en Casabindo*, Galerna, BA, 1969 and *Fire in Casabindo*, Quartet Books, London, 1993

The first Albanian Film Festival in London



Valbona Bashota

A very welcome event for the Albanian community in the UK and for film fans in general, was the first Albanian film festival in London which represented the cinematographic achievements and Albanian artistic values of a range of film-makers. The Albanian Film Season was organised by 'Arberia', the Albanian Association in the UK, in co-operation with the British Film Institute with all the films translated into English. The programme included some of the most successful film directors including the elite of Albanian film directors, Vladimir Prifti and Isa Qosja. The films were mainly from the period 1990-2005 but newcomers' films were also shown. Study meetings and open discussions with film directors, film critics, journalists and other film professionals also took place.

The themes were mainly the harsh reality of life in Albania after the 90s Revolution, the break-up of the Socialist Dictatorship and the main problem of Albanian society – the large-scale migration of people due to difficulties and poverty. The film *Sakos Wedding* by the well-known Albanian director, Vladimir Prifti, won an award for the best script in the Tirana Festival in 2000. The film is about a tragic love triangle, the difficulties of life in Albania and the necessity to migrate for a better life. The other films such as *Letters in the Wind* by Edmond Budina, *Moonless Night* by Artan Minarolli and the short films *Dog's Hovel* by Bujar Alimani and the *Abandonment of Eden* by Eno Milkani, all describe the effects of migration and refuge, the hardships and consequences.

Kosova Film Production was present with one feature film made in 1985, *Proka* by Isa Qosja, its main theme being the difficulties one man faces for being different from the society in which he lives. Also shown, was the film *Kosova 9/11* by the director Burbuqe Berisha, which was a comedy portraying the reaction of Kosovan Albanians to the events of 11th September. It shows the naivety of people who believed that the USA was attacked by Serbia; the film won several awards in Kosovo and Albania. *Tirana - Year Zero*, mirrored life and its hardships in the capital, Tirana, with its main character being a young man who refuses to leave his country and therefore faces a very pessimistic future. The film won an award at the International Film Festival in Salonica, Greece. The documentary *Butrinti* is about the history of discovering an ancient Albanian town called Butrinti and features the distinguished actor, Ndriqim Xhepa.

A new era in British-Albanian visual arts has begun with the new Albanian filmmakers of the UK - Bekim Mala, Astrit Hyka and Valon Jakupaj.

Avere Yakha, Avere Thana (Second Site)

Janna Eliot

A groundbreaking exhibition at Greenwich University brings together four artists of Traveller/Roma descent. Under the title 'Avere Yakha, Avere Thana' (Second Site), issues of identity, history, politics and culture are explored from the perspective of an often ignored and despised minority.

Daniel Baker's works literally reflect the ambiguities of Traveller life - visibility, marginalised areas, archetypal representations. The artist paints his images of nature on gilded and etched glass, producing a beautiful liminal state of "masked visibility" which challenges the spectator. His most striking piece is a narrow rectangular mirror on which the words NO TRAVELLERS are inscribed. The viewer, mirrored in the work, is thus both involved and banished.

In collages of glowing jewels and exotic textiles, Delaine Le Bas shows a glorious fairytale world where little girls play in woods. But as in all fairytales, menace lurks behind the innocence, and words written on the paintings deconstruct the romantic myth. The tension in her work is highlighted by *A Nation of Dog Lovers*, in which a dog walks along the intersections of the Union Jack flag with his proud owner, leaving a trail of mess. And Gypsies are dirty? is the unspoken comment.

Damian Le Bas provides an intricate, surreal record of Romanichals and Travellers, picturing bystanders, traders, hawkers, caravans, forest preachers and policemen. His method results in a Chagallistic, Aboriginal fusion which is uniquely Damian. He too sprinkles words over his pictures, using various Romani dialects and European languages to score witty points. In *Love, Peace, and Hate*, a Kali-like figure is surrounded, embraced and dissected by other figures in a surreal exploration of power.

Albanian Ferdinand Koci was the first Rom to attend the School of Art at the University of Tirana. His pictures are a construct of tra-



Ferdinand Koci

ditional images - Gypsy dancers, the Gypsy woman washing up in her bower, - realistic depictions of his Romani village childhood. But his black and white monotypes pose a disturbing, questioning reality, almost mocking the dancing figures. Squalor fouls the mythical rural paradise. The women's faces are beautiful but ravaged with worry. The juxtaposition of these pictures forces viewers to re-examine their response. Look again at that lovely lady washing up and you detect antipathy, boredom, an unwilling acceptance of inescapable drudgery. Koci brings to the exhibition memories of his childhood and a way of life which is threatened in England and most of Europe. This gifted Albanian Rom shows the beauty behind the dream which is lamented, remembered and explored by the artists in this great collection of Romani art.

Staging this exhibition in a prestigious art gallery in the Old Royal Naval College is in itself a statement, implying that Gypsy/ Traveller culture is a valuable resource that should be celebrated.

Still Here

Miriam Frank

The exhibition is part of a creative project undertaken by 'All Change' which has been working with refugees, asylum seekers and people from migrant communities in Islington to create works which explore their experiences of moving to and living in London, from the personal and profound to the everyday and entertaining.

The exhibited works, which included photographs, videos, projections, writings, the spoken voice, music and installations, ranged in their moving and often lyrical or humorous expression, from difficulties experienced in coming to terms with unfamiliar surroundings, through to the appreciation of a new environment as it begins to feel like Home. One of the exhibits forms a continuous projection of images from a series of postcards created by a Brazilian artist, Leticia Valverdes, of individuals, families and community groups worked into famous London landmarks. Another takes the form of a song describing the long journey across Africa on foot of a mother with her baby from Eritrea to the safer shores of England, and her lament at having to separate her baby from his father and his country. Yet another consists of photographs accompanied by verse explaining the difficulties encountered by a wife's humorous attempts at cooking Indian dishes for her husband in a small London flat, having left behind her cook and mansion of a home in India.

BOOKS

Venus Infers: poems by Alev Adil

NE Publications, 2004

Reviewed by Isabelle Romaine

These poems, in two parts, form together a narrative on identity and sense of belonging. In 'Dead Sister' the narrator is haunted by the persona of her imaginary twin, the other self. The attraction of opposites likens the two sisters to a voracious monster:

*devouring herself myself
in a carnal carnival of self-doubt
and repressed regret.*

'Twin'

In 'Venus Infers', mythological characters encroach on memory, exile, and the endless quest for identity. Eurydice and Ariadne, haunt urban spaces land marked with tube stations and anonymous hotels.

At that stage I am wondering why choose *Venus Infers* as an overall title? Why choose the goddess of love and beauty in a narrative of displacement, and dislocated identities? *Venus*, the Roman Goddess, is intrinsically associated with Aphrodite, her Greek counterpart who symbolises love and lust, beauty and cruelty. Today, there is no *Venus* without Aphrodite and vice versa. It is this complete merging of identity, which gives, I think, the general tone of the narrative, that of hybridity.

The poetry of Alev Adil - who was born in Cyprus, grew up in Turkey and lives in London - is indicative of a world of fractured references where split identity equates the tear up of mother/ other tongue:

*I am not whole
but parts of me have been
torn up and left behind.
No, not my heart
much more - my tongue.*

'Forgotten Songs'

It is a marginal discourse where the conventional oppositions male/female, mother/daughter

*either/or
our 2 trapped human representations
'Medusa Kisses Perseus'*

give way to gender fusion and role confusion. For instance, in 'Motherhood' and 'Sometimes', the narrator's sister gives herself male attributes to engender and give birth to a baby daughter, who shares the same identity as the narrator:

*Now I'm also my niece, my dead sister's beloved baby.
'Sometimes'*

It is a surreal discourse where Lewis Carol's Alice and Freud's Dora disrupt the deceptions of patriarchal interpretations ('Setting fire to Freud's Couch').

Finally, *Venus inferns* that memory is a sustained object of our dreams and our desires; the book takes us through an odyssey where private and cultural memory made reality contingent, and it would be hard to:

*Try to figure out whether the lesson we need to learn
is how to remember
or how to forget.
'Marash'*

Afsaneh: Short Stories by Iranian Women

edited by Kaveh Basmenji, Saqi Books, 2005

Reviewed by Soheila Ghodstinat



Betsabeh Omran

Afsaneh is a collection of the best Iranian female authors writing under the repression of the Islamic Revolution. The edi-

tor, Kaveh Basmanji, a writer and journalist who currently lives in Prague, has selected a range of stories which focus on women's voices in a male-dominated society.

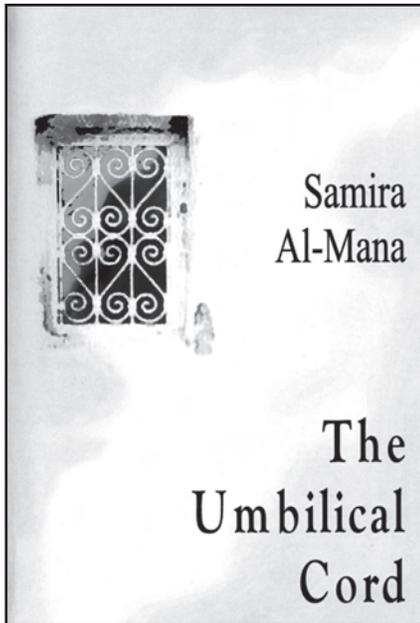
The collection begins with one of the finest works from one of Iran's greatest female writers, Simin Daneshvar, entitled, 'To whom shall I say hello?' In a simple, sincere style, Daneshvar explores the dilemma of women before the revolution. She portrays the difficult life of a lonely, old woman abandoned by her husband and son-in-law. The talented Goli Taraghi evokes a totally different atmosphere. 'The Shemiran Bus' is the story of a young innocent girl who befriends a macho bus driver, despite her family's disapproval. The deep and simple friendship between the two main char-

acters is sensational. Mahshid Amir-Shahi bravely highlights women's emotions, loneliness and traumatised relationships. Sharhnoosh Parsipour is one of the most controversial female writers in Iran, whose style can be compared with huge writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez. She takes the reader to an exquisite world of magical realism. Writing about all types of women, from well educated to illiterate, her main characters are lonely ladies who seek sanctuary in nature or in the grave.

Afsaneh is a truly engaging book which is a must read for everyone. Although all these magnificent female writers have a very different style of writing, their common aspect is evident in their female characters and the sincere portrayal of their lives, passions and emotions.

The Umbilical Cord by Samira Al-Mana

Translated by the author and Charles Lewis, published by Central Publishing, 2005



Reviewed by Jennifer Langer

One of the themes of this novel is the nature of memory with the umbilical cord of the title inextricably connecting the Iraqi

characters exiled in London to their country and culture of birth. There is a constant longing for their homeland and because of this, the two main characters, Afaf, a divorcee and Madeha, a widow, live an exiled existence of fear, anxiety and frustration. Memory in this novel is a conflicted space as Iraq has become an idealised myth with memory being a tool to sustain them and to affirm their identity in exile. Through Proustian processes of recognising British people's gestures or facial features as those of Iraqi friends and relatives, Afaf is able to excavate memory and evoke aspects of these friends and relatives, 'With the Iran-Iraq war they had become like ghosts, phantoms belonging to her memories.' Yet the characters try to rationalise memory by reminding themselves of the harsh reality of Iraq with its political corruption, war and hardships so that a tension between the rational and the emotional results.

The novel also portrays an exiled community whose suspicions in terms of political allegiances, are transferred to exile making open relationships difficult. Although gatherings of exiles provide opportunities to reminisce, negative narratives of Iraq cause deep, inner sadness amongst the

community. 'They saw that the situation was hopeless, that something was being sifted and dissolved in the sands and rivers of their country, as henna dye turns yellow and vanishes.' Feelings of fear, despair and powerlessness are compounded by the difficulties of accessing news of family in Iraq at a time of war.

Gender is a further theme in the novel with Afaf and Madeha seemingly liberated women but yet 'The past lingers in the form of ambiguous feelings handed down by our ancestors.' When Madeha submits a detective novel to a London-based Arab publishing house, it is rejected on the grounds that it includes words such as 'body' and 'prostitute', amongst others. At an Arab women's group meeting, she feels an outsider believing that the priority of the other women is to indulge and obey their menfolk achieved by the deployment of fear, threats, intimidation and punishment.

In conclusion, *The Umbilical Cord* provides an insight not only into a range of narratives of members of the London Iraqi exiled community but also into the state of exile generally.

The Silent Minaret, by Ishtiyag Shukri

Published by Jacana Media,
Johannesburg, 2005

Reviewed by David Clark

We hear about the main character in the story, Issa, second hand for much of the time, which keeps the reader in suspense, wondering whether we are ever going to meet him. Moreover, the narrative in the book starts more or less at the end of the story, the moment when Issa disappears, whilst studying in London, whilst some of the other characters in the story are galvanised into action, trying to piece together what had led up to this mysterious disappearance. His childhood companion and near-brother, Kagiso, arrives in London in search of Issa. He brings with him memories of growing up together in the same household in Johannesburg. Other memories also flood in, of his dissenting grandmother, back in the far away village. But above all it is the memories of the dissenting Issa, already as a boy railing against the received history of White South Africa, which leaves out of account the role its Blacks played in such history. Kagiso recalls the dissenter as a silent dreamer, captivated by landscapes of deserts and dreams of freedom, with

Lawrence of Arabia as his boyhood hero. As a schoolboy in his teens he joins the protest marches and later studies at the more radical but less prestigious University of the Western Cape, where there is a more welcoming audience to his dissenting voice.

But the story unfolds bit by bit, weaving in past and present, searching for Issa whilst uncovering new aspects of Issa's life in London and connecting with Issa's past in South Africa. Issa's elderly Irish neighbour, with whom he used to share evening meals together. Katinka, the young Afrikaner woman whom Issa and Kagiso had once given a lift to on their way to a protest march in South Africa, and who was now living in London and frequently met up with Issa in a hookah café on the Edgware Road. Even Issa's mother, a successful career woman, now Emeritus Professor, arrives in London, sharing her own reminiscences with Katinka. And woven within this tale are extracts from the official reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as brief glimpses of Issa's uncompleted dissertation on the early colonial settlement in the Cape and the history of Black and White contact in the early days of settlement. The thesis does not pull any punches concerning that colonial history, whilst also tying in the history of Islam in South Africa with the anti-colonial struggle. History is told and

retold, made and remade, as Issa notes in his draft dissertation, and history includes the present. Indeed, Shukri's novel is very much concerned with the way in which the past and the present are interwoven, and he brings us right back into the present. The very moment in which Issa's disappearance takes place, a recent past is recalled to the reader, an uncomfortable present in which we are all still immersed. This is the moment in which the war in Afghanistan had just taken place, the bombing of Baghdad is being shown on the television screens, and there is a night-time police raid on the Finsbury Park Mosque. All of this proves too much for Issa and he disappears; the novel yields more revelations, but we do not really discover what happened to Issa.

The reader is left feeling uncomfortable about the past and uncomfortable about the present. But at least the protagonists in the novel learn some bitter lessons and take heed, Katinka follows her secret lover back to Palestine and teaches in a school for children living in a refugee camp. Kagiso reasserts the right to have a Black voice narrate his documentary film about the history of Mafeking and the subsequent Homeland of Bophuthatswana. Yet the reader is left with the uncomfortable feeling that the colonial past is still very much present with us today.

The Ministry Of Pain by Dubravka Ugresic

translated by Michael Heim, published by Saqi, 2005

Reviewed by Isabelle Romaine

Tanja Lucic is a Serb who fled Yugoslavia during its disintegration. She teaches Servo-Kroatisch literature at the University of Amsterdam to Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian refugees, many of whom, to make ends meet, work at the 'Ministry', a factory making clothes for sex-shops. Tanja narrates the story as she assesses the effects of war on her language. Hers is a language which has been fragmented and damaged with the disappearance of Yugoslavia and the sprouting of new entities. What was once a cross-fertilization of Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Montenegrin and Macedonian literature, has become three languages – Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian - at war against one another. Mother tongue is a common burden Tanja and her students share as exiled people. Most words, they think, are devoid of substance because they are not anchored to their experiences of refugees, and fail to convey meaning. Hence, like linguistic invalids, they choose to communicate in Dutch or English.

Tanja embarks her class on an exercise of "Yugonostalgia". Each student is invited to write a memory piece, composed of every day minutiae that had once made up their life in Yugoslavia. The end result is an imaginary space filled up with fragments of comic strips, videos, ideological slogans, Bosnian hotpot recipes, Serb dialects, jokes...and the cementing of the group whose common ground is the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the repression of memory and exile.

In many ways, "Yugonostalgia" recalls Dubravka Ugresic's previous novel, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*. In that novel, mosaics of stories, anecdotes and memories, evoke the life of Europeans exiled since 1946. Incidentally, the museum of the title was created in Berlin, by the Soviet Union, to gather the traces of the Nazi capitulation in May 1945. Built by a Soviet Union which no longer exists in a Germany which has disappeared, the museum becomes a site to collect the exiled fragmented memory.

The Ministry of Pain focuses on the fragmentary nature of identity and language on exiled people. This is a dark novel, where

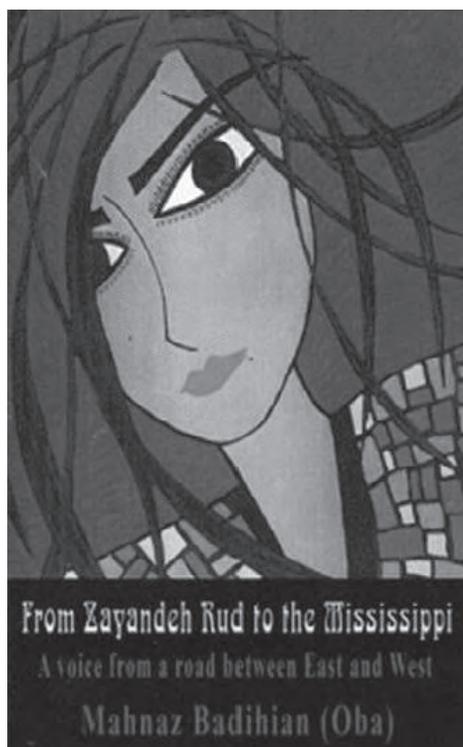
the violence which happened in Yugoslavia, reverberates on Tanja's story. A student, Selim, kills himself when his father is accused of war crimes. Tanja is beaten by Igor, a trusted student, in what highlights a sinister bondage between victim and victimiser. In some ways, the symbolism of the 'Ministry' is its encasing of a powerful bondage, that of the exiled to their homeland. An uncomfortable prospect when endorsed by Tanja's disturbing equation that exile means defeat, return equals death, hence the only moment of freedom is departure.

Born in 1949 in Yugoslavia, Dubravka Ugresic went into exile in Holland in 1993. Some of her best known works are her polemic collections of essays *The Culture of Lies* (1995) denouncing the nationalistic ideology in Croatia; and *Thank you for not Reading* (2003) a cynical insight on today's state of literary culture. In her fiction *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (1999) Ugresic re-engages her thoughts on questions of nationalism, exile and the recasting of the past as memory which prevail in *The Ministry of Pain* (2005). Her collection of playful stories *Lend Me Your Character* was also published in 2005.

From Zayandeh rud to the Mississippi by Mahnaz Badihian (Oba)

Published by Authorhouse, Bloomington, 2005

Reviewed by Jennifer Langer



This is a collection of poetry by Iranian born Mahnaz Badihian who has lived in the US for twenty-five years. Half the poems are translated from Persian and half written in English.

The subtitle of the collection is 'A Voice from a Road between East and West' and her work aims to mediate a space between the two cultures. However, this collection represents the emotional difficulty and struggle of negotiating the loss of home regardless of the length of time spent in the country of exile. There is a sense of loneliness in an alien American environment. Identity is continually interrogated – she asks 'Where am I from?' and dreams are significant as they reveal her repressed consciousness, be it of the blue of the Caspian Sea or of the mirror in Iran waiting for her return. She yearns for the sensory signifiers of her homeland – tapes of Shamloo reading, a bag of *sabzi*, the sound of the Copper Bazaar, her grandfather's pomegranate garden, because although she persuades herself that her life is filled with harmony, nevertheless 'something is missing' which leads her to perceive herself as a prisoner of memory. In the poem 'Mirror', despite breaking the mirrors of the present, the narrator continues to see past 'unshattered faces in shattered dreams' with the mirror also being an emblem of temporality and the irretrievability of time marked by 'the footsteps of moments'. Finally, the presence of her poetic muse relieves the suffering of loneliness and the pain of memory and she experiences elation.

The poetry also focuses on unrequited love with some of the love poems deploying traditional Persian poetic metaphors including 'wine', 'flame' and 'moonlight' and in fact Badihian grew up with the mystic poetry of Rumi, Hafez and Khayam. Sufism, the Islamic/Persian form of mysticism, demanded the most intense forms of introspection and this is what Badihian does in her poetry.

However, examining of the self is problematic in a culture that idealises feminine silence and restraint and interestingly the poetry is written in the safer space of exile.

Biographies

Karin Altenburg was born in Lund, southern Sweden. She worked in academia, as an archaeologist in Britain and Sweden before joining the British Council in Stockholm in 2001. She held the first cultural fellowship with the British Council's think-tank Counterpoint, and now works in the Embassy of Sweden cultural department in London.



Valbona Bashota, a Kosovan Albanian, arrived in the UK in 1994 due to the Serbian repression in Kosova. Her poetry appeared in Albanian publications and she took part in literature festivals in Kosova. Her poem 'Hope' is included in *Best Poets 2005* published by the Poetry Society. She works as a freelance journalist for various Albanian publications and is studying for an MA in Professional Writing.



Brian Chikwava is a Zimbabwean writer who is currently resident in London. He is the 2004 winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing and is currently working on a novel alongside a short story collection. Brian is also a Charles Pick fellow at the University of East Anglia, Norwich.



Mike Dakwa is a Zimbabwean freelance journalist and author. His play *Mist of Tears*, was performed in South Africa. He has published a collection of essays and poems, *Only Hope*, and is currently working on an autobiographical novel, *Black my Story*, depicting life in post-independence Zimbabwe.



Vesna Domany Hardy was born in Zagreb, Croatia in 1941 in a progressive Jewish family of which only her mother and her survived the Holocaust. Vesna studied at Zagreb University after which she worked as a teacher of English and literature. In 1974 she left Yugoslavia. She is now a freelance writer, researcher, translator and interpreter, and her writings on cultural themes and humanitarian issues, book reviews and poetry translations have been published in a range of periodicals and weekly papers in the UK and former Yugoslavia.

David Clark is the child of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany in the 1930s. He grew up in Australia, Italy and Austria, before returning briefly to England, then studying in Canada, USA and East Africa. He now teaches tourism studies and contributes to various cultural magazines in London.



Alla Dudayeva grew up in a military family in the Soviet Union. After studying art at university, she married Dhokhar Dudayev who became a general in the Soviet Army, and later, the first president of the Chechen Republic. He led the fight against the Russian invasion of Chechnya and was killed by the Russians. Alla was forced to leave Chechnya with her family and now lives in Turkey. She is an artist and poet, and currently writing her second book.



Janna Eliot was born in England, of foreign ancestry. She has published four novels under the name of Rukshana Smith: *Sumitra's Story*, *Rainbows of the Gutter*, *Salt on the Snow*, *the Poet who Sold Time*. She produced a series of children's stories for China Research Press and writes stories, poems, articles and songs. She translated Settela by Aad Wagenaar from Dutch. She has a special interest in the literature of exile and Romani culture and plays guitar with the London Gypsy Orchestra.



Ben Evans is Artistic Director of Full Frontal Theatre, a freelance director, and Artistic Programmer of Oval House Theatre, London. Ben is also a member of OutRage!, the Gay & Lesbian human rights organisation, whose attempted citizens' arrest of Robert Mugabe in October 1999 focused international attention on the deteriorating human rights situation in Zimbabwe.



Miriam Frank was born in Spain during the Spanish Civil War (her German Jewish mother had fled Hitler and her American father a settler in Lithuania), spent her childhood in Vichy France and Mexico as a refugee and her teens in New Zealand. Returning to Europe in search of her roots, she worked as a GP and finally as Senior Lecturer and Consultant in Anaesthesia. She is now retired and writes.

Soheila Ghodstinat was born in Tehran and since leaving Iran, has lived in seven countries. She is author of *A Journey to Starland*, her autobiography. She wrote for and performed in the Exiled Writers Ink European production *And the City Spoke*.



Adel Soleïman Guémar grew up in Algiers and worked in Algeria as a journalist from 1991. However, threats to his safety persuaded him to leave. He also published stories and poems some of which won national prizes in Algeria. Some of his poems appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation* 3/1 (2005). A collection, *State of Emergency*, is in preparation for 'Visible Poets', Arc Publications.



Nigar Hasan-Zadeh was born in Baku, Azerbaijan. Her award-winning collection of poetry is entitled *On Wings Over the Horizon*. Her collection *Under Alien Clouds* is being translated from the Russian by Richard McKane and Elaine Feinstein. Nigar's work appears in *An Anthology of Contemporary Russian Women Poets*, Carcanet, 2005.



Reza Hiwa is Kurdish, Iranian, French. He survives between Paris and London. Some of his French poems have been published in the anthology *De l'Obscure Etincelle*.



Jennifer Langer is the founding director of Exiled Writers Ink and editor of *The Bend in the Road: Refugees Writing*, *Crossing the Border: Voices of Refugee and Exiled Women Writers* and *The Silver Throat of the Moon: Writing in Exile*. She is completing an MA in Cultural Memory.



Hilton Mendelsohn was born in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in 1970. His short stories and poetry appeared in various publications. After moving to London in 1998, Hilton continued to write and co-founded a group of exiled Zimbabwean writers 'Writing Wrongs'. He works for the Movement for Democratic Change, the main Zimbabwe opposition party, and also co-founded 'Wezimbabwe'.



Kamal Mirawdeli is a Kurdish poet and writer who left south Kurdistan to live in exile in Britain in 1982 after arrests, intimidation and threats to his life by the Iraqi regime. He has written widely on politics, philosophy and literature in Kurdish, Arabic and English. He has published three collections of poetry in Kurdish. His first collection in English is entitled *Passage to Dawn* and was published in 2002.



Thabo Nkomo 'The Border Voice Poet' was born in Plumtree, Zimbabwe in 1973 and came to the UK in 2000. He has a diploma in journalism and has produced several poetry/music albums including *Amaguğu Amatsha*. He is also an artistic director, choreographer, musician, author and educator.



Isabelle Romaine a French Cameroonian, graduated in Geography at Lyon II University. She taught History and Geography in a lycée in Dakar, Senegal. She has an M.Phil. and an MA in Cultural Memory.



Bashir Sakhawarz was born in 1960 in Kabul but fled Afghanistan for Pakistan in 1980 due to the Russian invasion. In 1984 he was awarded a British Council scholarship and since then has been living in England. He has written articles, poetry and short stories and has also published three books.



Bart Wolffe was born in Harare, Zimbabwe and left in 2002 for exile in Germany via London. He is a Zimbabwean leading playwright with work performed in nine countries. His fourteen plays include *The Sisyphus Road* (2002), *The Art of Accidental Stains* (2002) and *Killing Rats* (2001). He has several published books, mostly poetry, including *Of Coffee Cups and Cigarettes* (1991) and *Changing Skins*. He was a freelance journalist and was involved in the media in film, television, print and radio.



Sholeh Wolpé is an Iranian born poet and translator who now lives in the U.S. where she pursued Masters degrees in Radio-TV-Film and Public Health. She is the author of *The Scar Saloon* (Red Hen Press, October 2004) and her poems and translations have been published in many literary journals and anthologies in the U.S., Canada and Europe. Sholeh is the recipient of several poetry awards.



welcome to your library

connecting public libraries and refugee communities

*We welcome the opportunity to
connect with exiled writers*

What is Welcome To Your Library?

Welcome To Your Library is a project connecting public libraries with refugees and asylum seekers. The project started in five London boroughs and has now extended nationally. Current participants are library services and partners in Leicester, Liverpool, across Tyne & Wear and in the London Boroughs of Hillingdon and Southwark.

The London Libraries Development Agency is co-ordinating the project with a grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Invitation

We have developed an e-list and welcome anyone to join this who is working in or with public libraries and refugee communities. Its aims are to help people working in or with libraries to:

- develop awareness of relevant resources and policy developments
- publicise relevant courses, events and publications
- ask questions, request help or provide information on relevant practice issues

We're experimenting with format, content and frequency but it's roughly one e-digest weekly.

To sign up, just send a blank e-mail headed WTYL e-list to helen.carpenter@llda.org.uk or to john@nadder.org.uk

For more information about Welcome To Your Library please contact::

Helen Carpenter, Project Coordinator, Welcome To Your Library
London Libraries Development Agency, 35 St Martin's Street, London WC2H 7HP
Tel: 020 7641 5266. Email: helen.carpenter@llda.org.uk

See also:

www.llda.org.uk/cms/contentpage/wtyl and case study at:
www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=79005

london libraries development agency
LLDA
adding value to London's libraries



The Fleeing Garden:

Kurdish Exiled Voices

'The Fleeing Garden: Kurdish Exiled Voices'

A booklet of literature containing prose and poetry by
established and new Kurdish writers

Published 2006 by Exiled Writers Ink

Available from Exiled Writers Ink: £3.90 to include p&p

www.exiledwriters.co.uk

Edited by Choman Hardi

An Exiled Writers Ink project