

... Birthed in the Patience of Pain

(An excerpt from *The Depth of Memories*)

here
 you taught me to count
 with my eyelids closed
 tiny graves of little ones just about born

Leandra *

here
 you taught me to look deep
 in the eyes of the whirlwinds and hurricanes
 and saw ever-moving shadows
 taking aim: I felt the thud of grandpa's
 falling body caressing my skin.

I spoke to grandpa that somewhere
 not far from the gaze of his dead eyes
 for memory immeasurable,
 black sweating bodies of men
 bending,
 a secret of gold was hatched,
 a secret that was never to feed
 his grandchildren.

I spoke to grandpa
 that not far from his silent body
 black mothers are bending in a row
 of far stretched plantations,
 policed by a whip of green-eyed devils
 a secret is being hatched
 never to feed his grandchildren.

I do not want to speak
 in desperate tongues
 that paths are opening
 here,
 where we count the stillness of the eyes
 like stars in the silence of the wilderness.
 It is in these little paths
 that freedom-ways are constructed
 by men,
 women,
 children,
 who know that a nation
 is never birthed in endless waiting.
 Ask those teenage hands
 holding firm
 little red flags in the streets
 of liberated Saigon;
 Ask those millions of hands,
 waving,
 in Havana's freedom square
 before Che Guevara's unwinking stare;
 Ask the blooming red roses in Angola,
 land of Neto the liberator.

Red is not the colour of our blood.
 Red is the colour of a victory birthed in battle.
 The red of our blood is freedom birthed in the patience of pain.

so say great men:
 to cry over pain
 is to lack respect for life.

here,
 it is in this helplessness of the hour
 and the silence of bodies flamboyant
 where freedom paths are being constructed,
 little paths
 of distances walked from horizon to horizon,
 in search of shelter,
 in flight and battle retreats,
 in search of work
 of a brother, an uncle,
 a sister,
 a cousin,
 of a father lost in the rhythm
 of Jo'burg City's bizarre nights
 of glistening lights policing your memory

these little paths
 are freedom ways
 in search of destiny
 of hope
 in search of humanity,
 a new day and a new horizon
 a new life constructed in battle.

Leandra,
 we have walked your little paths
 and those amongst us
 with a pulsating memory
 to measure the distances we have covered
 can measure freedom's flowering journey.

those amongst us,
 with a living nightmare to recall
 the loneliness and coldness of pain
 can count graves in the making of history

for,
 we are to history
 as crumbs are to bread
 we are to history
 as blood is to our veins
 we are to history
 as smell is to our rotten dwellings
 we are to history
 as a smile is to our cracked lips
 we are to history



Gerard Sekoto

as bidding farewell is
to a child's waving hand
we are to history
as Robben Island is
to the anguish of the Atlantic Ocean
we are to history
as Solomon Mahlangu is
to the glare of the African sun
we are to history
as their bullets are
to our ever vulnerable flesh.

on this road, this:

flowers watered by our own tears
have grown, withered and bloomed
again. Dawn has found us here, intro-
duced the day, and nightfall opened
the darkest chapters, closed them like
we close eyelids of our fallen finest
sons, under this earth that covers
Moshoeshe, Peterson, Barney,
Molokoane ... we have buried spears
and dug the earth to claim them again
into our itching hands. We have left
marks and patches with our feet
hardened by the townships' brazier
splinters, towards a beckoning tomor-
row. Flowers grew and withered
again and when children asked, 'Why
do willow trees whistle and sing for
angry rivers?' we had no answers for
nature's hidden secrets. But we know
for sure that darkness has claimed our
children in full stare of the moon.
When willow trees whistled and sang,
was it not because there were no
mothers to hum lullabies for little
graves mushrooming?

on this road,
mothers
we have seen distances
with no visible destinations
the night without sunrise,
but we,
your children,
are making history
with the smallness of our hands.

by *Bachana Mokwena*

* A small radical township in South Africa
which was completely sealed off from the
rest of the world during the emergency.
After some weeks secret graves were
discovered.