

Poetry from Mozambique

Jose Craveirinha is Mozambique's leading poet; designated a Prophet of Independence, he was imprisoned by the PIDE in the 1960s. He is today a prominent figure in the Mozambican Writers Association. He was a close friend of Comrade Alex La Guma.

Since my Friend Nelson Mandela Went to Live on Robben Island

Since the tribunal when my friend Nelson Mandela
Sentenced Mr John Vorster to everlasting prison
and decided to live with a few more people
on a tranquil island,
it was a shame that four million
"whites only"
were detained in South Africa.

And with regard to this, do you know what happened?
Nothing special in psychological terms,
as the sixteen million didn't understand
their dramatic social dilemma
and aren't letting a political question
turn them back now
from using bombs.

And after all this, my friend Nelson's wife —
seeing that her husband had ordered the freckled Mr Apartheid,
ragged with incoherence, to leave the prison dwelling —
will ask at home, towards late afternoon, "Dear Nelson,
where are we going to relax a little tonight?"
And my friend Nelson, a good-natured husband,
shrugging his shoulders so strengthened in the rallies
of solidarity with all those in the island of solitude
imprisoned by millions in the prison of ideas
will answer: "I don't know, my dear."
And unemployed, like a worker on his holidays,
Nelson will puff out smoke from his pipe
over the ancient route of the Cape of Good Hope,
and with his eyes diving into the Atlantic and Indian Oceans
turning to Winnie, he'll add: "My dear,
shall we go to the cinema in Pretoria
or in Soweto?"

So I remember as if it was now the general amnesty,
how my friend Nelson in the pleasure of his island villa
aside from his lion of nerves sharpening his claws on the walls
from the prison sitting at the end of the continent piled up with
news,
even granted amnesty to the eternally condemned Mr John Vorster.
Then I remember too the supermanifestations of gratitude
of those four millions, vaccinated against their fatal whiteness
crying out, "Thank you very much!" when they were exempted
from their duties of flying the vulture mirages over Soweto
with no more taxes to pay for BOSS agents spying over Soweto
or finishing with salary deductions to pay for Panhard tanks
that make Soweto children sick from gunpowder ice cream
and even freeing everybody from permanent medical assistance
caused by the contaminated personnel of uranium laboratories
hidden somewhere in maximum security
making some ultra-secret thing
that the whole world knows about
except the headman
of a bantustan.

And a special notice is called to the situation
of the four million South Africans when they were nationalized
into African citizens of the same country as my friend Nelson,
and he, shooting his name to all the Earth's news broadcasts
from the rest resort called "Robben Island"
in the solution on behalf of sixteen million people
plus the other four million (minus BOSS) —
because the time factor is vital
so that Nelson goes to the cinema
arm in arm with Winnie
be it a theatre
in Johannesburg
or in Soweto.

So with regard to the situation of my great friend Nelson,
the psychological problems of that old amnestied criminal, John
Vorster,
and the phenomenon of Robben Island surrounding South Africa
form all sides —
the measures to be taken are laid bare in this report.

As for the sixteen million compatriots of the Mandelas
working overtime for the benefit of the four million
still detained in their respective epidermises —
if it wasn't for BOSS
Robben Island
and Soweto
all this could be pure demagoguery —
but it's the truth!

JOSE CRAVEIRINHA