

Blockade

Black nets,
nooses, traps —
but love allows no withdrawal.
Anguish is only increased
by this magic bottle
of transparent glass.
The bitterness of oblivion only brings new visions.
And again
only love allows no withdrawal.

Let us grant
that the glass is half empty,
or wholly empty —
what can this do to assuage our present grief?
The glass is half empty.

It is known,
that you are still full of optimism,
hypocrite!
And so I pay my humble respects
to the flower-pots with their daisies and roses
on your terrace, recently bombarded.
I bow respectfully
to the bird of prey that grieves
at your sunny chirruping
on the threshold of death.
I pay my humble respects to the way
they put in an endless stream
your recently slain children to sleep
in tiny graves.

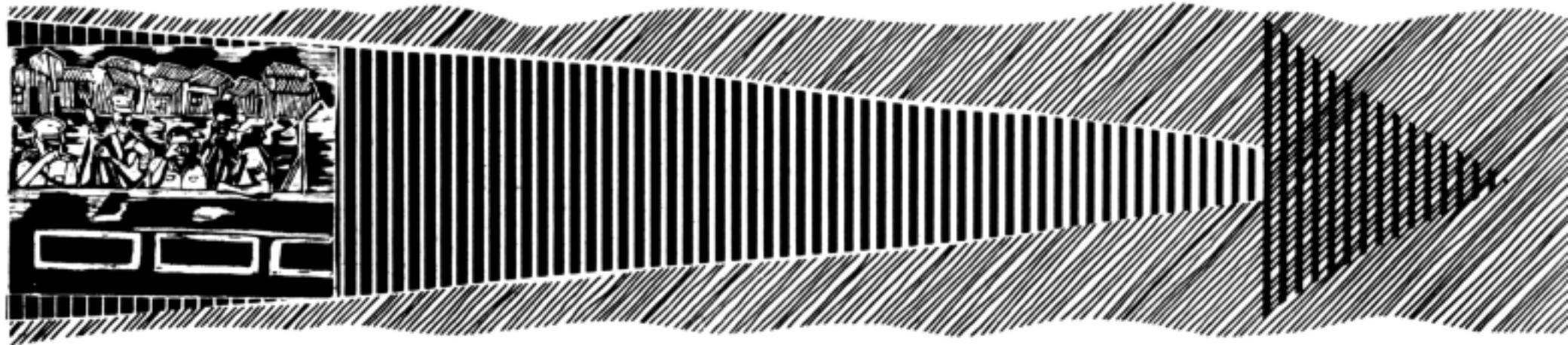
I pay my humble respects
to the lines on your craggy face,
the fingers of your long, cold hands,
reaching out like mountain ridges
on the crater of your human volcano.

If I am destined to die at their hands,
my last request will be
that I should let fall my brow, heavy with thorns,
upon your knee, profaned to sanctity
by the lusts of past love
amid the orange trees,
in the shade of dark-brown olives,
under the reeds, clay-smeared, black as soot and overgrown with grass.

O goddess gone far away,
how shall I tell you of my sufferings
in this uproar filled with hypocrisy?
How shall I breathe your healing fragrance
in this bloody storm?
How can I draw nearer,
if all the tempered sword blades
and all that prickly hatred



David Hlongwane



are closing round me?
let us grant
that a courageous ear of corn
sacrificing its life, will raise its head
through ruins that proliferate like rats —
will this eliminate all the weight of reality
and the stickiness of blood
in a desert without corn?
Ears of corn without grain
desert without acacias,
nothing there but defiant mirages ...

I pay my humble respects
to your cracked lips,
lady abundant in love.
Willingly you bring your sons
one after another
as sacrifices to life
on the altar of death.

I still have the fury of my soul
and the right to vomit
on the pavements of suffering
that are soaked with deadly alcohol.
I know that I shall inevitably die
asphyxiated by my own vomit
on the dunghill of days endlessly following
one after the other.

As for people,
they know how I love them all.
My love destroys the power of that blockade
around the desperate beating of enamoured hearts.
Snares of illusions
of kings, presidents and plutocrats
bring in their train the death of time
on that day filled with the smoke of fire.
Even a scream
can find no vent.
May it take a gigantic saw
to give your half-blind eyes
a glimmer of vision
How right you are
when you say
that the sight of a hospital for the mentally deficient

is a slimming exercise,
a scientific method of giving up smoking
and harmful thoughts.

And then I turn to you,
sending words into your heart,
into your simple hands.
Of all worldly things, only one concerns me:
that you should understand the secret voice of my soul.

Long ago the time-limits all expired,
long ago they invented justifications for the
bloodthirsty monster ...

Pious mother!
May doors, torn off by the wind, preserve you,
May pitilessly slashed arteries preserve you,
May your own kind words preserve you ...
Oh, holy naivety!
The invaders hang on your ribs
submachine guns and boots,
they bivouac in the shade of your mercy
and you comb their hair that reeks of cordite
and shed bitter tears
on their hands, stained with the blood of your own sons.

As soon as you take pity,
I shall bring you my head
on a dish of the epoch's ears of corn.
In the long winter nights
I shall begin telling your grandsons
the story of the rose under torture
and the tale of the children with weapons in their hands.
As soon as you take pity,
you will grant your invaders political asylum
in the burial vault of your much respected spouse.

The day will come, and the hurricanes will die down.
As they grow up, those children who do not
at present understand
the meaning of thunderclaps in the air,
their wooden limbs will grow with them,
They will sing songs of the homeland in ringing voices,



they will get married,
 they will bear children without wooden limbs,
 they will attend sports contests in honour of
 disabled war veterans,
 they will speak pious words and distribute chocolates
 to healthy, sensible children.
 But slowly the tears will run down their faces
 in the cold corner of age,
 and that is when they will grasp
 the true meaning of thunderclaps in the air.

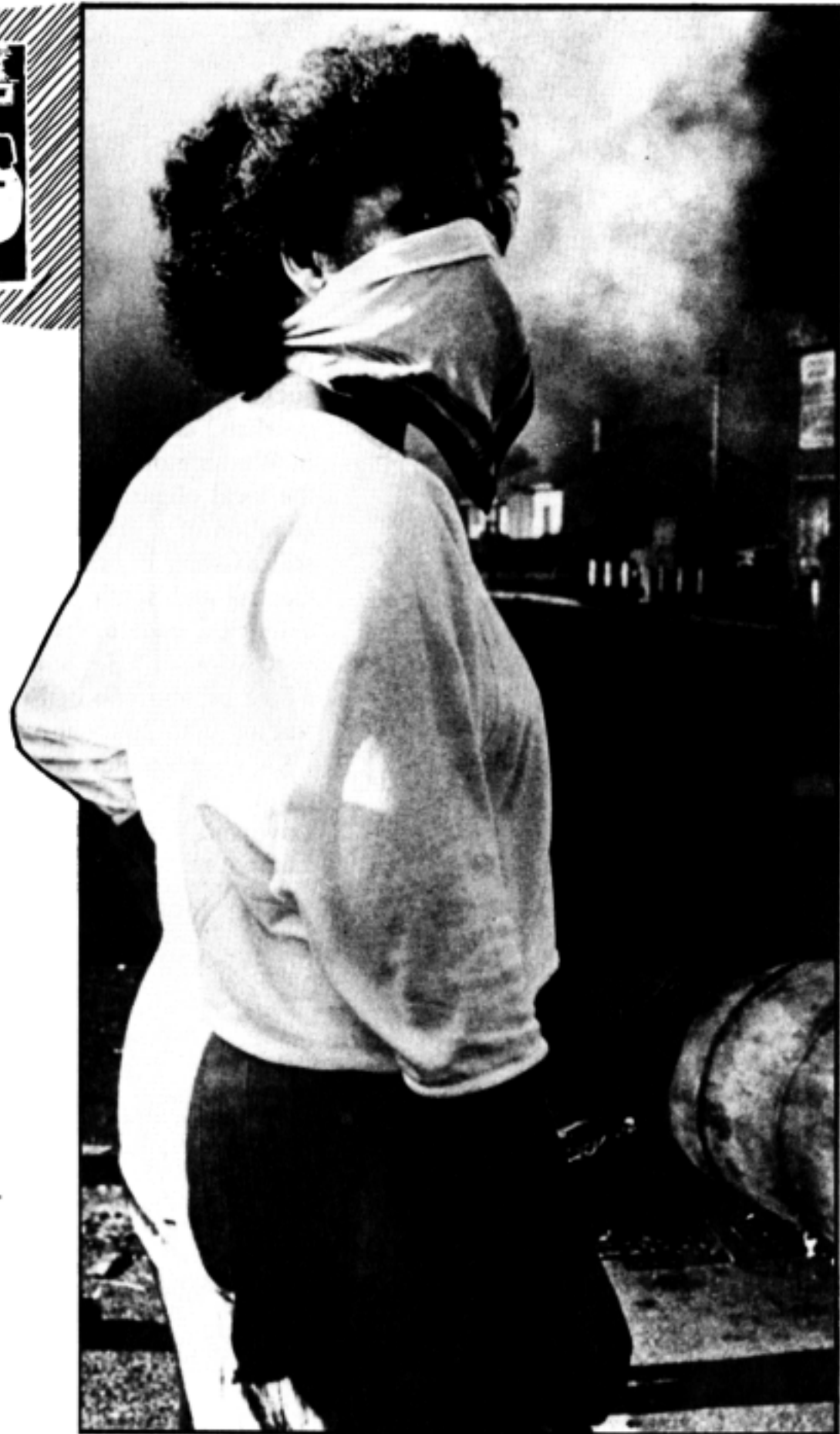
On the TV screen
 Allah's spacious land
 is only 20 inches away ...

My body is torn to pieces,
 the blood flows over the face of the handsome announcer.
 Is a lie any use as a bandage
 for each of these wounds?

Now let us chat about current affairs ..
 If we never catch the bull by his atomic horns,
 our entrails will hang
 like military telephone cables,
 like ropes along which the acrobats walk
 over the squares of youth,
 like whips to scourge our backs.

I seek no explanations,
 bathing in my own warm blood.
 I penetrate the screens of voices and conflagrations,
 I wipe away the barriers of falsehood and explosions
 and kiss you,
 prophetess gone so far away,
 I kiss you,
 I, filled with the last hope before
 rebirth:
 that I shall let fall my brow, heavy with thorns,
 upon your knee, profaned to sanctity,
 forever, with all the mysteries of my suffering,
 and shall draw close to your eternally beating heart ...

Samih al-Qasim (Palestine)



*South Africa — Palestine
 Your struggle is our struggle*