Gcina Mhlophe, ‘Sometimes When It Rains’

Sometimes when it rains  
I smile to myself  
And think of times when as a child  
I’d sit by myself  
And wonder why people need clothes

Sometimes when it rains  
I think of times  
when I’d run into the rain  
shouting ‘Nkce – nkce mlanjana  
when will I grow?  
I’ll grow up tomorrow!’

Sometimes when it rains  
I think of times  
when I watched goats  
running so fast from the rain  
while sheep seemed to enjoy it

Sometimes when it rains  
I think of times  
when we had to undress  
carry the small bundles of uniforms and books  
on our heads  
and cross the river after school.

Sometimes when it rains  
I remember times  
when it would rain hard for hours  
and fill our drum  
so we didn’t have to fetch water  
from the river for a day or two

Sometimes when it rains  
rains for many hours without break  
I think of people  
who have nowhere to go  
no home of their own  
and no food to eat  
only rain water to drink

Sometimes when it rains  
rains for days without break  
I think of mothers  
who give birth in squatter camps  
under plastic shelters  
at the mercy of cold angry winds

Sometimes when it rains  
I think of ‘illegal’ job seekers  
in big cities  
dodging police vans in the rain  
hoping for darkness to come  
so they can find some wet corner to hide in

Sometimes when it rains  
rains so hard hail joins in  
I think of life prisoners  
in all the jails of the world  
and wonder if they still love  
to see the rainbow at the end of the rain

Sometimes when it rains  
with hail stones biting the grass  
I can’t help thinking they look like teeth  
many teeth of smiling friends  
then I wish that everyone else  
had something to smile about.