

que mo diziam suas canções salgadas de esperança
que mo diziam seus olhos onde visões selvagens coalharam.

Passou-me à porta este grupo banhado do luar
da morna noite de África.
E trouxe-me consigo todo um mundo esquecido
e recordações familiares
de palmares dormindo no fundo do pensamento
de visões verdes de bananais e fogueiras semi-extintas. . .
E um vento de monção as espevitou e sacudiu
e riscou relâmpagos nos céus negros do olvido. . .
E uma artéria estremeceu em mim
e logo todas as artérias palpitarão dolorosamente
e o sangue me aqueceu e borbulhou e gritou: IRMÃOS!

Mãe:

Por que foi que me encerraste na alvenaria
desse quarto fechado a todo o mundo,
por que me ergueste muros protectores
e me separaste de meus irmãos
e me vestiste de camadas de sedas
e me ataste fitas azuis no cabelo?
Porquê, Mãe?
Porque me defendeste no egoísmo do teu amor
e me afastaste do perigo do lá fora?
Oh, Mãe, porque me arrancaste à Vida?
O teu egoísmo transformou-me em cadáver
de laços no cabelo e vestidos de seda
e paredes de alvenaria servindo de jazigo. . .
E eu queria, oh queria ir, nua, no grupo estranho
que me passou à porta,
soltando ao luar canções salgadas de esperança
e cabeças se desgrenhando ao vento. . .
Queria rasgar as sedas nas piteiras dos caminhos,
endurecer os pés na lama "copulada" dos trilhos
despedaçar os laços dos cabelos aos ventos do Índico!

Mãe:

queria erguer a minha voz doce e trémula
junto ao corpo seguro, feito de mil clamores físicos,
do grupo maravilhoso que me passou à porta!
Queria derrubar meu jazigo de alvenaria
queria descer ao trilhos lamacentos,
queria sentir o aguilhão da mesma revolta,
queria sentir esse gosto indefinível de luta,

Noémia de Sousa

queria sofrer e gemer e lutar
para conquistar a Vida!

Oh Mãe

porque me roubaste tudo isto?

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Poem

To Maria Irene, in admiration.

Mother:

It was a night with an enormous moon,
like a huge balloon blown up in the air,
when a crowd passed by my door,
a strange crowd with farseeing eyes,
shaking ragged sacks,
their feet cracked and muddied from the roads
and mouths wide open as they intoned their songs. . .
A strange crowd such as I had never seen before,
bringing men and women and children.
And they came from a long way off,
they came from the very depths of life,
they told me in their mouths brandishing revolt
they told me in their songs seasoned with hope
they told me in their eyes where wild visions coalesced.

This crowd passed by my door, bathed in the moonlight
of the soft, warm African night.
And it brought with it a whole forgotten world
and familiar recollections
of palm groves sleeping in the depth of thought
of green visions of banana groves and smouldering fires. . .
And a monsoon wind awoke and shook them
and lightning flashed through the black skies of oblivion. . .
And an artery trembled within me
and then all my arteries pounded painfully
and my blood quickened until it burst forth and cried out: BROTHERS!

Mother:

Why did you shut me away in the brick walls
of that room closed to the whole world,
why did you build protecting walls
and separate me from my brothers

and clothe me in layers of silk
 and tie blue ribbons in my hair?
 Why, Mother?
 Why did you protect me in your selfish love
 and keep me from the danger of the world outside?
 Oh Mother, why did you wrench me away from Life?
 Your selfishness made me a corpse
 with hair ribbons and silken dresses
 and brick walls that are a tomb. . .
 And I would like, oh I would really like to walk, naked, with this strange
 crowd
 that passed by my door,
 raising to the moon, their songs seasoned with hope
 and hair dishevelled in the wind. . .
 I would like to rip my silk dresses on the thorn trees along the road
 and harden my feet in the muddy rutting of the dirt tracks
 and scatter my hair ribbons to the winds of the Indian Ocean!

Mother:

I would like to raise my sweet and tremulous voice
 along with the solid body of people, born of a thousand full-bodied cries,
 from the wondrous crowd that passed by my door!
 I would like to cast down the brick walls of my tomb
 I would like to go down to the muddy dirt tracks,
 I would like to feel the spur of the same revolt,
 I would like to feel this indefinable taste for life,
 I would like to suffer, and groan, and fight
 to conquer Life itself!

Oh Mother!

Why have you deprived me of all this?

Shimani

Sempre que eu recordo a casa à beira-mar da infância,
 surgem teus olhos meigos de xipeia ferida,
 aguados de humildade,
 constantes como um remorso.

Lembras-te, minha amiga, da palhota do Guachene?

Nos meus braços egoístas de dona,
 uma boneca sorria sempre, com seus olhos verdes de gato.

E nos teus braços sempre vazios, Shimani,
 só ternura imensa e insaciada,
 ternura verdadeira de mãe.
 Teus olhos meigos de xipeia ferida,
 com seu eterno brilho de resignação,
 afagavam muito, longamente, quase com desespero,
 a minha linda boneca loira.

Lembras-te?

Depois, era Natal
 e o meu vestido de seda, aos folhos,
 era uma das glórias do dia.
 E o fogãozinho lindo que Papá deu,
 e o anel de ouro que Padrinho trouxe,
 e os lápis de cor traduzidos pelo Sr. Romeu,
 e os sapatos brancos que Mamã ofereceu?
 E os bolos, o arroz doce,
 e o leitão assado,
 e as flores na mesa branca da sala de jantar?
 Natal, Shimani, hoje é dia de Natal!
 Tu foste à missa, como eu,
 foste à missa Shimani?

Shimani não foi à missa, não.
 Shimani nem deve saber que hoje é dia de Natal,
 porque não vestiu vestido de folhos.
 Vestiu hoje o mesmo vestido de riscado de todos os dias,
 roto e velho, comprado no monhé do bazar.
 E veio descalça, sem presente nem nada.
 Só com seus grandes olhos meigos de xipeia ferida,
 no rosto luzidio, espetado no pescoço magro e longo.

Ah Shimani, naquele dia,
 tu partilhaste do meu Natal.
 E todos os natais após, tu continuaste a partilhá-los.
 Mas agora? Agora?
 Quem vai apagar essa lágrima permanente
 do teu olhar de xipeia ferida,
 constante como um remorso, teu olhar
 que dói para além de qualquer comparação?

Ah Shimani, minha Shimani!

published a book of poems, *Familiar Ground* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1989).

* **Noémia de Sousa** (Mozambique) b. 20 September 1927, in Maputo, and educated in Mozambique, Brazil and Portugal. Between 1951 and 1964 she worked on various Angolan and Mozambican journals, and published her poetry in Angolan, Mozambican, Brazilian, Portuguese and French reviews. Among the foremost Mozambican Negritude poets, de Sousa was the first African woman to gain an international reputation as a poet, and she greatly influenced later generations of Mozambican poets. She fled into exile in France during the Mozambican liberation war, in the late 1960s, married a Portuguese man and stopped writing poetry for a while. After the war, she returned briefly to Mozambique, but went back to Europe. Her poems have appeared in Mario de Andrade's *Caderno de poesia negra de expressão portuguesa* (Livraria Escolar Editora, Lisbon, 1953), *The Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*, *The Penguin Book of Women Poets*, *Women Poets of the World* (Macmillan, New York, 1983), *The Other Voice: Twentieth Century Women's Poetry in Translation* (Norton, New York, 1976), *Sunflower of Hope: Poems from the Mozambican Revolution* and Frank Chipasula's *When My Brothers Come Home: Poems from Central and Southern Africa* (Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, 1985).

Leila Djabali (Algeria) b. 1933, was among the young intellectuals imprisoned by the French colonial authorities for her part in the Algerian liberation struggle. Her poem, 'For my Torturer, Lieutenant D . . .', which vividly recreates her prison ordeal, first appeared in Joana Bankier and Deirdrie Lashgari (eds), *Women Poets of the World* (Macmillan, New York, 1983).

Alda do Espírito Santo (São Tomé e Príncipe) b. 30 April 1926; coloured. After her studies in Portugal, she returned to São Tomé where she was a primary school teacher. She collaborated on *Mensagem*, *Imbondeiro* and other Angolan and Mozambican journals. Her poems are included in Mario de Andrade's *Caderno: Poesia negra de expressão portuguesa* (Casa dos Estudantes do Império,

Lisbon, 1953), *Antologia de poesia negra de expressão portuguesa* (Paris, 1953), *Estrada larga* (Porto, s/d 1962), *Europe-Revue mensuelle*, Vol. 39, No. 381 (Paris, January 1962), *Poetas de São Tomé e Príncipe* (Lisbon, 1963), *Nova soma de poesia do mundo negro* (Présence Africaine, Paris, 1966), *Poetas e Contistas Africanos de expressão portuguesa* (Editora Brasiliense, 1963), *Literatura africana de expressão portuguesa*, Vol. 1, *Poesia* (Argel, 1967), *La poésie africaine d'expression portugaise* (Paris, 1969), *Contos portugueses do ultramar*, Vol. 1 (Porto, 1969), *Afrikansk lyrik* (Sueca, Stockholm, 1970), *No Reino de Caliban* (Seara Nova, Lisbon, 1976), and *Antologia tematica de poesia africana* (Lisbon, 1976). She is a member of the Political Bureau of the Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé e Príncipe (MLSTP) and Minister of Education and Culture in the government of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé e Príncipe.

Marina Cashe (Mrs Elimo Njau) (Kenya); teacher, playwright and poet who studied at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda. In 1960, her first play, *The Scar*, won a drama festival award at the National Theatre in Kampala. She is married to the famous Tanzanian painter, Elimo Njau, a Chako from the slopes of Mt Kilimanjaro.

Anna Gréki (Algeria) 1931-1966, was among the young women intellectuals who were detained, tortured and exiled by the French colonial authorities during the Algerian freedom struggle. She published a bilingual French-Arabic volume of poems, *Algérie, capital Alger* (SNED, Tunis, 1963), followed by *Temps fort* (Présence Africaine, Paris, 1966). Other poems appear in Denise Barrat (ed.), *Espoir et paroles: poèmes algériens* (Seghers, Paris, 1964), and *Women Poets of the World* (Macmillan, New York, 1983). 'Anna Gréki' is the pseudonym of Colette Anne Gregoire.

Queen Hatshepsut (Egypt), daughter of Thutmose I and widow of her own brother, Thutmose II, ruled and dressed as a male pharaoh during the Eighteenth Dynasty as a regent for Thutmose III for two years but crowned herself king in order to normalise her rule, claiming Amun Re, the Sun God, as her father. The