

Hilda Twongyeirwe

In conversation

Here I stand, Robben,  
hugged by wild winds of Devil's Peak,  
wondering; Mandela,  
what held your centre together in that bottomless pit,  
you and others that survived it all

amongst,  
lunacy  
leprosy  
criminal  
outcast  
spirits?

My eyes follow the water,  
black.  
Deceptive with calm,  
heavy.  
Burdened with ocean memories,  
deep

Speak spirits I beg of you.  
Let your words float on these winds and let me,  
hear of your great history 400 years back.  
of entangled pasts of,  
national boundaries and global boundary-less nationals.

Decode your Robben language,  
so I may interpret your secret gestures,  
the shake of heads,  
wave of hands,  
wink of eyes,  
that connected you earthwards.

Speak,  
Spirits  
I await  
Your tale,  
Patient.

I see you now.

I see you,  
racing outward,  
tucked inside sea-shells that littered the shoreline after each tide.  
Filling each crevasse, each nook,  
weaving underground bridges and highways like safari ants after heavy  
rains.

Now I see  
I can see that when you were locked up, your spirits fled.  
They soon learnt to swim,  
to roam oceans at ease.  
To traverse earth without passports,  
To escape red-eyed warders wading the island.

They flew sky-high  
sowing seeds  
of solidarity,  
affirmation,  
of a past reclaimed,  
of generations unburied.

They sowed seeds of a future recreated.  
And you Robben,  
you became a boardroom,  
writing history.

## Breaking Order

In Cairo the word order rules  
Sheep and horses and pyramidal oranges  
Mingling but minding speeding taxis  
Keeping an eye on possible customers  
Scrutinising which is which  
In the face of stiff competition.

Nearby, gardens sit stiff like women in Burqa  
Ensuring their beans do not trespass  
Do not shed leaves in neighbouring gardens so close  
Buildings standing back to back, neck to neck  
Touching yet not touching  
Racing souls within.

Violet my friend stands motionless  
She is fascinated, charmed  
She wants to touch and behold colours of Cairo

To smell and caress and belong  
And lol!  
A statue across the road beckons.

It is a musical guitarist of ages  
Treacherous sinews stroking strings  
Her legs fail to stand still  
She lets them, step by step to relish the relic  
Till a deep voice restores order  
“That’s dangerous; can’t you see that is a man?”

Yet,  
Inside rooms, two birds face each other in an artistic gesture  
Their souls touch with lips  
Enchanted by a red rose in between  
Breaking rules of order  
In the painters brush.