

RE-IMAGINING DEMOCRACY: IN SEARCH OF SILENCED VOICES

“Ipassa”

By *Kholwani Ndhlovu*

We huddled over the foul-smelling tyre fire. Stories about home going all round its cold in Marabastadt but it's the life. Some of the guys I have seen in previous months they seem ok. We are becoming a small community of the unwanted.

New people come to the fire with tyres they also buy from the entrepreneurs in the area, these guys will sell you a tyre with becomes your right to sit in the fire. I check the time, its still only 9 but its dark on a winter Sunday. No cars are passing here anymore.

Someone is sharing a story about our common enemy now. The lazy good for nothing people that will only come here in the morning to bribe the unofficial queue marshals. These people have no real authority but as bullies do if you argue with them you are out, and you may not get your asylum renewed that week, so you will have to sleep there again today or shut up and take the abuse. They are the law here and who can you tell the cops that ever come here seem to be friends with them, so fear of arrest on some shoddy stuff keeps people from doing anything about it.

A scream goes off in the dark a short distance away, someone has been robbed. How docile are we, is this self-preservation or cowardice? Let's pretend it was self-preservation. But the spirit does get broken if a people keep being beaten down. The jobs we have are the ones the locals wouldn't touch, its waiters, trench diggers construction workers street sales men, maids. Just a rag tag band of *les miserables*.

The screamer comes into view. She had had her bag snatched, but she's ok. The plan was she was going to stick around for the night and her boyfriend will collect her in the morning.

I'm tired now. I go back to the queue that has started forming. I find where I had left my box, they are five rand and when you leave they are your proxies and will vouch for you should you be accused of line cutting. But its ok even though I wonder what white people see in this camping under the stars nonsense. Its just temporary homelessness, even though for them it is voluntary.

I wonder what drove us to this country, babies sleeping “under the stars” all for a piece of paper. It boggles the mind why we have to go through such terrible things in an African country but such is life. Men I have never met have sat down and decided that just because I was born in a different place I deserve to be treated like half a person.

I unfurl my plastic sheet, its going to be my blanket for the night because I wouldn't have risked the task of having to wash a soot filled and dust riddled blanket.

Good night South Africa