

TWO POEMS

by

LOURDES SISON PAMMIT

A DAY OF RECKONING

(Written after seeing the documentary "The Last Grave at Dimbaza")

The Tigers are hungry:

The tiger riders dare not dismount

While fattening their asses

From the sinews of the land,

Salting away gold dug out of the flattened belly

Of a prone Africa whose black hands are shackled

To the dark graves of a nightmare where the drums of despair are
heard

Allowing the continental mind to continue weaving romance
of lust

and mystical splendor of danger.

The tigers are hungry:

The tiger riders dare not dismount

Spreading their chaff of glory and freedom

To ears tired by groans of hunger and slow-dying
death;

They fatten their asses

On diplomatic ties, appropriations of mines and oil wells.

From their tiger mounts they ride over

a prone Africa, tightening the shackles of its black hands

To the dark caves of unending nightmares,

Drowning the drums of despair with frenzied shouts of

"Gold!

Gold!

Gold!"

Translated into seat power.

The tigers' bellies rumble from hunger, heavy with their burden;

Only when the tiger riders dismount, tired out of the chase,

Will the tigers have their feast.

Stand up, Africa! Face the tigers!
Make them throw off their riders.
Break off your shackles and use them as whips,
Signal the drums of challenge, of war;
Let the tigers smell blood, the blood of liberation
and sacrifice;

Let them who were trained from a land of hunting and beating
ground
Turn upon their mounts to spread the fat upon
the hungering land.

TO A SURVIVOR OF BIAFRA

(Written after reading I.N.C. Aniebo's *Anonymity of Sacrifice*)

After preventing other people's war to take place
You went home to fight your people's war
Knowing it is hopeless to engage in a battle
Where nobody wins, and losses are on both sides
Of blindly opposing peoples
Who once called themselves brothers
With a single mind, steadied hands, and a freezing heart
You mustered straggling defences from the carnage
Of blood-emboldened arms which soaked the serene brown earth
With the vibrant crimson flood of ebbing life.
You survived the war where the victor is death
To find there is no graveyard for memories
Of soundless screams waking you in the night;
The sudden flash of a beatific smile
On a young woman's mutilated face;
The sure aim of your gun upon a scampering recruit
Trying to escape death's formidable kiss.

You arranged your features into a mask
Never asking why you lived and the others died;
The war is over. The strewn limbs
Had found their burial grounds.

Still, deep in the night of California
When fermented, sun-kissed grapes
Can not warm the coldness in your heart
The midday African sun scorches through
The percolating smoke of semi-consciousness
Gathering in its fiery embrace the now-innocent bodies
Married to the bleached earth upon which they used to stand.
The screams are deadened in your dreams,
The steel glint of pain hidden behind your resolute eyes;
But your lips never give a smile,
Only a raucous laugh that mocks
The reprieve on a graveless life.

Lourdes Sison Pammit is a Filipino graduate student in Teaching English at UCLA. She will be entering the African Studies Program here this summer.