

Tell Me Lies About Being Born Free

(An African Echo of Adrian Mitchell)

Today I saw a security guard following me

He's dressed in khaki, I am in brown

I seemed to have made an unwanted friend

So cover my screams with promises

So I don't have to see

And tell me lies about being born free

Today I saw a woman losing

Her dignity to poverty

And opening her world to every man

So baptize my body in dirty water

So I can't breath this story

And cover my screams with promises

So I don't have to see

And tell me lies about being born free

Today I saw an elegant Muslim lady

Crying her way out of a shop

Followed by threats that blistered her burkha

So put my legs in quick sand

So I can't 'go there'

Baptize my body in dirty water

So I can't breath this story

And cover my screams with promises

So I don't have to see

And tell me lies about being born free

Today I saw the hunger

And the anger of a worker

Without a wage

So fill my ears with sweet silence

So I can't taste her rage

Put my legs in quick sand
So I can't 'go there'
Baptize my body in dirty water
So I can't breathe this story
And cover my screams with promises
So I don't have to see
And tell me lies about being born free
Today I sadly sensed
The smell of smoke
My dreams evaporating
So cannibalize my brain with Tik-tok
So I don't have to think
Fill my ears with sweet silence
So I can't taste her rage
Put my legs in quick sand
So I can't 'go there'
Baptize my body in dirty water
So I can't breath this story
And cover my screams with promises
So I don't have to see
And tell me lies about being born free

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Zohar Zanamwe

Explanatory Paragraph:

This poem is a response to the Vietnam protest poem, To Whom it May Concern, by Adrian Mitchell. We studied the poem in class as part of our study of the novel Wednesday Wars (set during the Vietnam War). The poem follows a structure that repeats. In the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th stanzas, I tell an anecdote that shows the injustice still common in "Born Free" South Africa: racism, poverty of women leading to prostitution, religious prejudices, unemployment, and the feeling of hopelessness in the youth. In response to these problems, I use the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, and 10th stanzas to give a symbolic and sarcastic response common in South African society (like Adrian Mitchell did in his poem). Each of these stanzas sarcastically asks that the hearer help me to not have to see and deal with the injustice in society, and rather to cover up the problems with the promises of politicians, spiritual experiences, politeness that avoids talking

about some issues ('we don't go there'), sweet silence behind high walls, the numbness of social media, and the myth of the South African Rainbow Nation miracle. Actually, both Adrian Mitchell and I want the opposite of this blindness. We want people to see the issues and to act. Youth are often told that we should be grateful that we live in a democratic country and that we are "born free". But we don't feel free. We feel trapped by our history and the problems that grow out of Apartheid and colonialism and that society mostly ignores. We need people to wake up to the injustices surrounding us so that we can create a world in which the next generation can be truly free.