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Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

And this October (for Jack Mapanje)

Permalink

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Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 17(2)

ISSN

0041-5715

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Publication Date

1989

DOI

10.5070/F7172016894

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A Visit to the Museum at MORONGO

by Felix Mnthali

everywhere

it is everywhere the same this landscape of the dispossessed
ancestral glories and the very soul of a people
tucked in obscure nooks of nondescript museums:
shards of pottery, unruly strings of dismantled baskets
bows and arrows; assegais and battering rams;
gun-powder, machetes, and sling-shots against cynical posses
and the jungle rules of "gun-boat diplomacy": we even found
snapshots of a brave cornered by a coalition of looters
and the tamed and dispirited looted
all these are now violent memories of discontinuity
tamed and sublimated and swept under the carpet by time

"They say we came from Asia across the Baring Straits
but our creation myths tell us that we have always been here
and that here is where we were made"

I walk out of that museum with a feeling of "deja-vu":
just which people on this rapacious "man-eat-man" earth
have not been told the soul of their glory
belongs to someone else
and that the monuments of their sweat and the apex of their minds
were only borrowed clothes left behind by invaders
and by birds of passage?

We now know that Egypt of the Pharaohs
and of the great pyramids was the land of black people;
that the great "palaces of stone" in Zimbabwe
were not built by Asians or anyone else but Africans;
that our Africa has never been a dark continent except to looters
and to loiterers masquerading as saviours;
that our ancestors never invited anyone
to wean them from their ways;
that God never asked our ancestors to turn
into pale and ridiculous copies of anyone else!

We now know . . . but does it really matter what we now know,
if we cannot act on what we know?