

My Name is February

– By Diana Ferrus

special feature



Diana Ferrus is a poet, writer, performance artist, activist, founder member of Bush Poets, the Afrikaans Writers Association (Afrikaanse Skrywersvereniging) and Women in X-chains. She is a member of the Women's Education and Artistic Voice Expression (WEAVE), played an instrumental role in the repatriation of Sarah Baartman's remains from France to South Africa and was a recipient of the Minister's Award for Women.

Her work has been published in various collections and some serve as prescribed texts for high school learners. She worked for 25 years at the University of the Western Cape until she retired in 2016. She has completed a postgraduate degree in Women's and Gender Studies.

Diana performed this poem at the 'Unbroken Spirits: Concert for Humanity' that formed part of the Living Rights Festival. She has graciously given New Agenda permission to publish this poem.



my name is Februarie

my naam is Februarie
ek is verkoop
my borste, privaatdele, my oë
my brein
is nog nie myne
soos die Sao Jose
loop ek opgekap
word ek telkens gesink deur 'n ander storm
geen Jesus wat op die water loop vir my

My name is February
I was sold
my breasts, private parts and eyes
my brain
are not mine yet
like the Sao Jose
I am walking ruined
often sank by another storm
Jesus walking on water for me

my naam is Februarie
ek soek nog die stang van die stuur
want onderwater lê die familie
die kind aan ma se rokspant
die ma aan pa se hand
hoe diep lê hulle, aan watter kant

my name is February
I still search for the rod of the steering wheel
because the family lies at the bottom
the child stitched to mother's dress
mother's hand locked in father's fist
how deep down are they, on which side

my naam is Februarie
opgeveil, verkoop, die hoogste bieder
het ontslae geraak van my regte naam
geen vergoeding betaal
vir dit my naam, gesteel, gesink
onderwater lê dit nog
saam met die familie
wrakstukke van die Sao Jose
ten gronde geloop deur 'n wind
briesende branders wat die buit
se hele toekoms besluit
die profyt teen die wal uitsmyt

my name is February
auctioned, sold, the highest bidder
disposed of my real name
paid no compensation
for that, my name, stolen, sunk
underwater it still lies
with the family
wrecks of the Sao Jose
ran aground by a wind
furious waves that decided
the future of the loot
smashing the profit against the embankment

my naam is Februarie
die Masbieker op die Sao Jose
so was ek genoem
toe my hierse moedertaal gestalte kry
toe tonge met mekaar begin te knoop
en letters 'n vrye gang begin te loop

my name is February
the Masbieker on the Sao Jose
that's how I was called
when my mother tongue of here came into being
when tongues started to form a bond
and letters started walking freely

in 'n desperate poging in hoop
dat magte ook nie hierdie identiteit moet stroop
word ek die Masbieker, net 'n naam
onder 'n ander lug gekraam
en diep gevul met skaam

in a desperate attempt at survival and hope
that forces should not strip this identity too
I became the Masbieker, only a name
born under a different sky
and deeply filled with shame

My naam is Februarie

my name is February

I rearranged this landscape
my hands wove the patterns of the vineyards
my feet pressed the grapes
and I was paid with the wine
I carry Alcohol-Foetal Syndrome children on my back
my name is February
I still march on the eve of December first
I walk the cobblestones of this city
when I cry out in desperation
"remember the emancipation of the slaves!"

My name is February
two hundred years after the Sao Jose
I was given the vote
they said I was free

but don't you see how often I am submerged
weighed down
I am the sunken, the soiled
forgotten
and yet memory will not leave me

My name is February
stranded at Third beach
but no one comes to look for me
no one waves from the dunes
no bridges back to Mozambique

my name is February
I will be resurrected
brought to the surface
unshackled, unchained, unashamed
My name is February.