

Rumours

Slowly like the rising sun, it is dawning on us, as we wriggle out of the past: we find the present most perilous, and the future daunting with its quiet and relentless refusal to completely reveal itself.

By Mongane Wally Serote

Not so long ago, the world was spinning around as if headless, scattering and splashing blood all over the show. It was a moment of rumours: Egypt. Syria. Tunisia. Lybia. Yemen. Afghanistan. Pakistan. Iran was being threatened, and in Iraq suicide bombs went off as if in a drill and

practice rather than in reality; in Mali there was a coup and the country was cut in half, and, predictably, as rumour would have it, French troops arrived, as if there were no troops in any country of Africa. They were spilling human blood and killing human beings for real.

Even closer to home, it felt as if regime change would soon be imposed upon Zimbabwe. It was a time of rumours. Rumours, which can mean there is no smoke without fire, or can be just a perception, or not only point to a truth but actually be manifested. In South Africa, we had, not so long before then, emerged out of Polokwane, a city with a name most ominous, meaning a place of burying each other. Rumours. Rumours. Rumours.

This condition of rumours is sugar to be licked fervently by media, even if the sugar acts as in a diabetic patient, as if acid, runs deep and destroys every fibre, every vessel in the body. 'Sugar, sugar and more sugar!', the destructive bacteria in the body demands; 'rumour, rumour and more rumour!', the media demands, no matter the damage! Both conditions depend on whether interests and needs can be put aside. It is only objective understanding and analysis which can unravel these complexities and lay bare the truth about the events which unfold before our very eyes.

The United States of America, the world power, had characteristically flexed its muscles, sounding the drums of war against other countries, justifying its position by claiming that it was under the threat of terrorism. Rumours abounded then, in the world; the issue here was not whether America would attack this or that country, but when it would attack and implement regime change in whichever country. America, France and Britain, together with other European countries, were committed to bullying any country which sought to protect its national interest against imperialism.

If an African creative person reads the world thus, and understands that the world is under a tight bully grip, how can this be portrayed? What genre must one use to objectively dramatise these events, these complexities, these at-the-time real and complicated matters, these issues which defy logic and threaten to threaten humanity in most unprecedented ways?

The best genre would have been film. However, the funds needed for a film of such magnitude would be immense. Only America can afford a film like that; and the money dictates

how the film will interpret the events; and also, the cowboy and Indians formula of past decades remains the point of reference. America gives reasons for throwing a corpse into the sea, or hiding the corpses of its victims. No one, except the Americans, not even the nationals from where the corpse was made, nor the world, will ever know what was done with the corpse nor where it was buried. What must we do then as creative people outside of America?

One of the other best genres to engage people is the novel. This is especially true if one decides right at the onset to allow oneself to break the rules for writing a novel where necessary. This way, the work carries the load of the content and context which do service to the issues at hand; so be it, as long as it is not breaking rules for the sake of breaking them.

What does one write for, about and why? I write for a non-racial and non-sexist audience. At best, what creative people can do is to contribute to a collective consciousness, at most to a national discourse. I write mainly about where I come from, which is from a black and African perspective, and I do so with an attitude which says I have to teach the English language to learn the African context. English must speak African languages, but also, it must speak English. It must give to the African context the Africanness of Africans, as also it must never ignore the global context from the perspective of a Pan African paradigm.

The characters of *Rumours* must emerge from this context. This context must be educated by the struggle for freedom of the oppressed. The oppressed gave their children to the struggle, knowing that they might never come back, but more important, hoping that their children would bring Africa back. Africa has come back, but it is under threat.

Do South Africans have a sense of the African continent?

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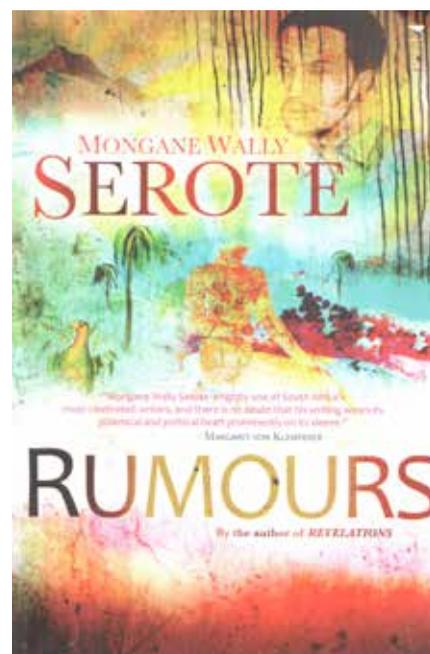
And so it was necessary to explore the possibilities for the African voice to walk the streets, alleys, footpaths and highways. Who are these who carry this voice, why are they the carriers of the voice? What is this place called Africa?

One of the very important institutions in any society is the family institution. Here I go an extra mile. Why did Africa create the African Primary Institution the way it is, with women and men in it given clear responsibilities and roles? Can these roles be interchangeable: personal and public? Can the institution be resuscitated and innovated given the distances we travel and given the various responsibilities we have: to build nations; to build the continent; to create a liveable world with others and to destroy poverty. Where are the children in all of this, how are they brought up and nurtured? What is a home in the 21st century, can it survive the tremendous demands on the people who must create it? The role of the elders and the elderly, are nursing homes their only sanctuary? Is the place for the nurturing of the little ones kindergartens and schools only?

I wrote *Rumours* seeking the answers to the unknowns. I wished to probe and probe the knowns with the hope that they can and must yield not only what we must know, but also say how we must engage with and use what we find. Through the past can we engage the present? I was looking for an African discourse with the deep wish and hope that that discourse can emancipate the African voice.

I wrote *Rumours* seeking to rebel against anything which would intend and seek to capture the African being in us, and enslave it. For in the 21st century western expansion and hegemony continues, and still creates possibilities to enslave, once more, the weak and the poor.

An African dialogue has begun. This is not just to be noted, but must be engaged. The African Union, AU, exists now. More and more the sons and daughters of the continent will be called to defend the right of the peoples to choose the destiny of this place and space. It will have to be through African



Mongane Wally Serote's latest novel, *Rumours*, takes a long and hard look at southern African society through the eyes of a veteran MK cadre. Having totally lost his way, he can only recover through reconnecting with his past. The cast of characters in this important novel explore the wide range of issues confronting Africans in today's world. Below, Serote explains to readers of *The Thinker* how this book was born.

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education, even through arms and African being and blood. What do we do with the soldiers who return after the wars which are to come? What of those who do not return, but also, what of those who betray? There is betrayal and betrayal and betrayal. How must Africa broaden and increase her health portals? Her citizens are threatened by disease, some of it chronic, and some of it incurable, but also where are the sanctuaries when even insanity grips some?

Is the ANC in trouble? What trouble? Have the leaders deviated from being the representatives of the poor, the have-nots? What path is the ANC following? Where is South Africa headed, if the ANC has deviated? Is the ANC really for sale? These are the questions and issues which were the midwives to *Rumours*. ■