

# My Name is February

– By Diana Ferrus

special feature



*Diane 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.*

*Diane 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.