

John Le Carré 's *Mission Song*

Living in South Africa where corruption pervades every level of human activity, the desire to escape is strong. Then one reads a novel, any novel, by Le Carré and one learns that there is no escape. One hears Archbishop Tutu calling on world leaders to boycott the opening ceremony of the Olympics in Beijing and one realises that it is a voice in the wilderness. It is the voice of one who believes in ubuntu and the belief in ubuntu has become a form of naiveté.

In *Mission Song*, we hear the voice of a young man, in South Africa we would call him a Coloured man, in America they would call him a biracial man. Salvo is his name. He is the son of an Irish missionary and a Congolese woman and in the novel he is the personification of naiveté. Having been educated in England, he is an anglophile and believes in the basic goodness of the people who profess a basic goodness. Like Archbishop Tutu, he believes in ubuntu, the form that it is given in Britain.

As he recounts his adventures, we watch as he slowly begins to uncover the reality under what is professed and discovers that corruption is a global characteristic, is universal. And corruption is all about exploitation of the masses under the guise of development.

It is driven by greed, apparently for wealth. Billions and billions of whatever the currency.

And we may ask why? Who really needs so much?

But it is not the wealth in itself, it is the power that is orgasmic; the power to control and screw whole countries, whole continents - rape on a colossal scale.

Petty rapists that we read about everyday in our newspapers, petty rapists who attack on a one to one basis are like drug addicts, needing their small fixes; but rape at the global level as depicted in the novel, promises a state of continuous coital excitement.

Someone like Salvo, hence his name, repudiates the notion of rape and is shown as a man who loves, truly loves and therefore is truly civilised, an exemplar of ubuntu. As Salvo, he does fire the shots that stave off, momentarily, the corruption into which he is unwittingly thrown. But what is Le Carré saying to us? Can we only be civilised at micro levels. That society is by its nature corrupt? That ethics and morality are indeed the opiate of the masses?

Muthal Naidoo

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