

My poem “Strange New World” inspired by and sent to Issa Shivji, with Shivji’s reply.

Strange New World

I don’t think June will come this year
Flowers will bloom
Schools will be out
A quiet will fill the air

In our boxes
linked by the new luminiferous ether
now governed in our private spaces
new classes suddenly revealed

There are the secure in their houses
the precarious precariat wondering what’s next
those beyond the internet
free of the new surveillance beaten down by the old

They won
We have been individualized and stored for when we are of use
back to jobs we will go
the gears will soon turn again – too soon

The precarity of life will shift to the gig and the factory floor
replaceable is the worker
one more takes home a cough
in comes another from the next unit over

Time to wash our hands and open our eyes
regroup
stay clean, stay healthy, stay free
rise up to re-form
take back democracy

Jesse Ribot
31 March 2020

Shivji’s reply:

Yes, take back democracy
that we fought to build
but failed to design to our taste.

Yes, take back democracy
that was always ours
but usurped by them.

Yes, take back democracy
that we shall architect
build it brick by brick
over the borders
across continents
beyond prejudice and patriotism.

Yes, take back democracy
that cries and hugs
that is compassionate and caring.
Yes, take back democracy
that feels the pain of all
that abhors injustice and inequality
beyond law and courts.

Yes, take back democracy
that demolishes prisons and knows no treason
that treasures love and hates treasures.
Yes, take back democracy
that breathes human and lives human
beyond rights and representation.

In solidarity and struggle for taking back democracy
Warmly
Issa

--

Issa Shivji
Professor Emeritus in Public Law & First Julius Nyerere Professor
of Pan-African Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania