

# IDENTITY magazine

ISSUE 2  
95p

POETRY · INTERVIEWS · WHAT'S ON



**EXCLUSIVE BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH INTERVIEW**

plus John Lyons, Tina Tamsho, Tariq Latif; interviews, poetry, rap, short stories  
and much much more!!

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 all the answers

But at least we can help  
 with the questions

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## POET/WRITER/STORYTELLER

Victoria McKenzie is a creative writer who writes and performs in standard English and Creole language. She has performed around Britain but is most well known in the North West.

Her works have been published in books and magazines. She has read her poems on radio and also does workshops with adults and children.

If you want to know more you can contact Victoria McKenzie through The NIA Centre on 061 226 6461 or directly on 061 226 5000.



# IDENTITY magazine

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Cheryl Martin and Georgina Blake

## VIBES FROM THE SCRIBES

Welcome to the second issue of Identity Magazine. We include articles on Benjamin Zephaniah, the black British poet who received a personal telephone call from Nelson Mandela asking him to perform at a conference in South Africa, and John Lyons, poet and painter who takes on the loaded question: Do you define art by Black artists as black art ?

This year the Yorkshire Arts Black Literature Project held an historical black writers' conference in Sheffield attracting hundreds of black writers from all over Britain. We include an interview with its dynamic creator Susi Miller. Articles on the longest running Asian Womens Writers' Group in Britain, and Europe's largest Afro-Caribbean arts complex, The NIA Centre are also included.

Identity Magazine seeks to publish quality writing. As the NIA centre's artistic director Morenga Bambatta puts it - we seek to Edutain.

A wild cross-section of poetry and short stories by Asian, African, and Afro-Caribbean writers is also included for your pleasure. If you want to contribute or subscribe to the magazine or get to know more about Cultureword and Commonword then write to us. The address is below.

*Lemn Sissay*

*Identity Magazine is produced by Commonword/Cultureword. For further information on the magazine or the organisation write to Cultureword\Commonword, 21 Newton Street, Manchester M1 1FZ. Telephone 061 236 2773.*

# FANNING THE FLAMES OF THE FIRE.

*The days when you couldn't find a book written by an Asian writer are over. Publishers are publishing Asian writers and bookshops are stocking their books. But this hasn't happened overnight....Lemn Sissay is the Asian, African and Afro-Caribbean Writers Development Worker at Commonword and Cultureword, and he has seen this development over the past five years.*

Some groups have been vital to the development of Asian writing in the UK. The Yorkshire - based Bengali Women's Support Group published 'Barbed Lines' a collection of poetry and short stories in Bengali and English, which won the prestigious Raymond Williams community publishing prize and sold out. Crocus Books have recently published Flame, a book of poetry written by Asian writers from the North West of England. Virago were the first publishers in Britain to publish an anthology of Asian women's writing. 'The Right Of Way' a collection of poems by the Asian Women's Writers Collective has since sold out.

Alongside these collective and mostly regional movements individual Asian writers have developed successful national and international literary careers. Debjani Chatter-

jee won the Peterloo Poets prize twice! Her first book 'I Was That Woman' was followed by 'The Elephant Headed God and Other Tales' a book of children's short stories. Critically acclaimed poet Tariq Latif was recently published by Littlewood Press. His book 'Skimming the Soul' has provoked a great deal of interest. The dynamic performance poet Saqib Deshmukh has recently launched his first book of poetry entitled 'Timebomb'. Saqib continues to travel the length and breadth of Britain performing his poetry to packed audiences. This variety and talent is more evident now than it has ever been.

Asian writers' workshops have also begun to surface like healthy springs. In the North a new Asian Women's Writers' Workshop began in Manchester. Bradford's Asian Women's Writers Group publishes a regular magazine SULTAN which draws advertising from local business. Much needed role models have arisen. Sujata Bhatt a German/Asian poet is taking up a residency in Blackburn, Vaiyu Naidu continues to travel the length and breadth of Britain with her folk tales. Something is happening.....but why at this particular time in our history? I felt that I could not finish this article without talking to someone who has been a part of that process. Saqib Deshmukh lives close by so I visited him and asked him where has this talent come from ?

"In terms of visibility the Asian writing scene has been underground, a bit like bhangra. Mushairas (poetry readings) have been happening for

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*...there were writers in Pakistan and India who spoke like Bob Marley...*

---

years. But because we haven't seen Asian writers it doesn't mean to say it's not been happening! Concerning the arts scene there's a lot of stereotypes of what our art is, often traditional dance and music. English Asian writing did not fit into that stereotype. Therefore it did not get the attention it deserved. There were writers in Pakistan and India in Independence who spoke like Bob Marley, but didn't benefit from that cultural popularisation. I think at the end of the day because Asians are seen as much more alien our art and work has also been seen as alien. Therefore it has not been taken up by publishers, the media, TV etc. Not as much as say Afro-Caribbean culture. We have suffered from a lack of role models. However now there are writers, particularly Asian women writers who are creating a lot of in-roads for new talent. "

As Saqib said when we'd finished our conversation "Whatever happens, now that the visibility of Asian writers is clearer to publishers, the media, and the arts no-one can ever say they can't find us." ■

## STRENGTH

By Kailash Puri

You send strong winds to blow me down,  
But I am straight and tall;  
I am like the willow,  
I bend but never fall.

Your storms may cause a branch to break,  
My body aches for sleep;  
But wasted is your vicious scorn,  
I cry but never weep.

You tempt me with life's luscious fruits,  
And try to lead me from my way;  
But I reject your poisoned smiles,  
I err, but never stray.

## ” قوت ”

کیلاش پوری

تم میری طرف

آندھیاں روانہ کرتے ہو

لیکن میں سڑقاؤں اور اونچی ہوں

میں بید کی طرح مڑتی ہوں

ٹوٹی نہیں

تمہارے طوفان شاخیں توڑ سکتے ہیں

میرا جسم نیند کے لئے درد کرتا ہے

لیکن تمہاری حقارت آمیز کھینگی بیکار ہے

میں کراہتی ہوں لیکن کبھی روتی نہیں

تم زندگی کے انعاموں سے مجھے للچاتے ہو

اور مجھے بھٹکانہ چاہتے ہو

لیکن میں تمہاری زہر آلود مسکراہٹوں کو رد کرتی ہوں

میں غلطیاں کرتی ہوں

لیکن بہکتی نہیں

## PEARLSEED

by Shamshad Khan

What oyster is this mother,  
that the sand in my eye irritates?

No eyewash  
as you blow  
into my eye,  
but  
gales stir in the desert.

Then  
the sands settle  
and your breath cools  
drenching my parched soul.

SHORT  
STORIES  
by  
WOMEN

**ABOUT LITTLE BEARS**

by Kanta Walker

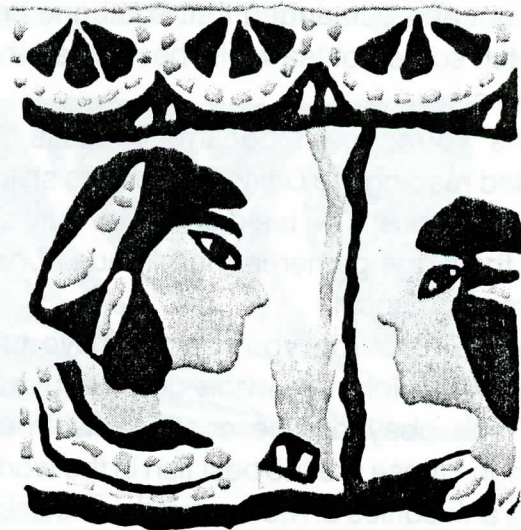
The judge Nasirullah Khan held his court as usual after a long day at the assizes. The tiny coterie of young barristers gathered around him genteely sipping chilled beer with their namkeens (snacks). It was the month of August and still very hot at 6 p.m. The young men were reluctant to leave for home and sat under whirring electric fans. There was a stone seat under the window in the judge's room and scattered cushions were piled high on it. The atmosphere was homely and comfortable. The judge reclined in a carved mahogany chair on the other side of his vast leather-topped mahogany desk. He was smoking his cheroot as usual, and every now and then he polished his nails and the signet-ring on his ring finger. The ring was a striking piece of jewellery in the shape of a red wax seal. He was a man in his early fifties, greying at the temples with thick curly hair and a moustache to match. He dressed beautifully in a silk achkan (long coat) with pearl buttons and matching silk shalwar (baggy trousers) having already removed his wig and gown earlier for comfort. He had practised for ten long years in London at Temple Bar. This was before the insidious immigration laws were passed. It was then that he decided to return to Pakistan after declaring England 'racist'. Yet in some strange way he was proud to have practised and lived in England. On his brass plate which adorned his grand residence after the words 'Bar-at-Law' was engraved 'England Returned'.

The judge was full of reminiscences and tall stories of his love life in England. In Pakistan, where women could rarely be seen in public and contact between the sexes was minimal, such stories were remembered, cherished and much narrated thus giving the judge a rare standing among men.

Tonight's story was to do with a memorable holiday the judge went on in England. Let the judge tell it in his own words.

'There are only two places in England which are most beautiful. In fact, they are known as the twin heavens. One is called Wales and the other Scotland. In Scotland there's a place called the Lake District and it is full of the most beautiful, wondrous lakes.

'Well, I didn't have much money in those days so I hitch-hiked to this Lake District place in Scotland. (The judge had a broad brush approach to his geography.) I stayed for three days near Lake Derwent and there I was seduced by a most beautiful English lady called Celia Pyke. She had hair like raw cream silk, and her thighs - pure white ivory!' Here the judge



paused and looked at his appreciative audience, silent and still.

'Go on, tell us, how did she seduce you?' asked Sadiq seeing the judge take an interminable pause.

'Don't rush, let me recall, the night is still young,' admonished the judge. He had taken a small silver comb out of his pocket and was busy combing his moustache.

'Honestly, I didn't have to do a single thing. The memsahib did it all. Near Lake Derwent there is a village. I forget its name. It was early September and a curtain of mist hung all around the hills. It was cold and late. In sheer desperation, I knocked at a cottage door, and there was this statuesque English lady standing on the doorstep just looking at me. As soon as I looked up at her I realized that I was on to a winner - pure twenty-four carat gold!

"Madam, I am lost!" I told her, "a poor student, and have nowhere to go."

"Come in," she said without the slightest hesitation, "you can share this cottage with me. It is big enough for both of us".

'My goodness, I knew I was in clover! She was so beautiful with such heaven-coloured eyes that I kept looking at her. She was such a fine figure of a woman with such silken, marble thighs, breasts like ripe mangoes and the softest of satin hair'. Here the judge lit another cheroot and demanded that someone be sent to fetch some hot tea whilst he recalled the rest of the story.

The young men became restless, some started reading the *Daily Jang* others shifted on their cushions. The tea came, was duly served and the judge gathered the threads of his narrative once again.

'As I was telling you, I didn't have to do a single thing, for three whole days I commanded and she obeyed. She cooked me trout and salmon - these are the best fish in the world and we drank bottles of red burgundy - the best wine in the universe.

'Miss Celia Pyke, that was the lady's name, filled a bath full of the most luxurious scents and took bath with me, then she massaged me all over, and then we made love, such wonderful,

glorious love. I can tell you that English women are the best lovers in the world but I have never known a woman give better service to a man or make him happier. For three whole days I was in Jannat (heaven). Miss Celia Pyke knew how to make a man feel like he is an emperor - with those marvellous, soft, silken smooth, ivory thighs and lovely pink breasts she seduced me like no man has ever been seduced before. And her love-making had the quality of wild fire and cool streams all rolled into one.'

Here the judge became very still and sighed copiously.

The young men were hungry for details about the seduction but the judge was not at all forthcoming.

In the village of Sea Toller Miss Celia Pyke, a retired teacher lived in a white, geranium-strewn cottage from which she was able to pursue her lifelong interests in bird watching and semi-precious stones. Her niece Harriet had come to stay with her. It was the month of August. The day was cloudless and warm. The women had decided to climb Bessie Boot and have a picnic on top of the hill. Her niece Harriet had started teaching, did yoga and meditation and, besides, had recently acquired a Chinese lover. Harriet had always spent her summers with her aunt, was fond of the outdoors, had much in common with her including a love of the exotic. She was full of stories concerning the eccentricity and strange habits of her young Chinese lover, so Celia Pyke decided to tell her of her little fling a long time ago with an oriental gentleman. Harriet was fascinated. She knew that her aunt, although unmarried, had not been without experience. Celia Pyke started.

When I was about your age I had a love affair, albeit short lived. It must have been early or late autumn. I remember, the trees had begun to turn, it was a grey, misty day, and I had just

finished putting the dubbin on my walking boots as the doorbell rang. It was a tall young man, looking like Omar Sharif. He stood there and just gazed at me and seemed to have lost his tongue. He had enormous black eyes and a curly thatch of black hair. He was handsome but penniless, had little idea of where he was and had nowhere to go. Perhaps I felt sorry for him as I knew that none would give him house-room in these parts. He was only going to be here for the weekend, before tongues could wag, so I calculated that I could please myself. Besides, dark skins have always fascinated me.

'I remember, I had some kedgerree for supper and he ate some of it and we had some strong cider to drink. These are the little things that get you about foreigners. He had such thick black hair on his knuckles and as we drank more and more cider I grew bolder. I wanted to see what his little "bear" was like but he would not let me have a look at it which inflamed my desires all the more. But he hesitated, and told me the most absurd story about bears. He said that in his country the bears were the most dangerous animals. They came into the villages in the middle of the night and ravished their women. They only selected the most beautiful virgins and took them away into their caves. There they set about wooing them by starting to lick their feet. They licked and they licked until the women became theirs and stayed with them. The story was so ridiculous and childlike that I lost all reserve with him and his little brown "bear".

After I had undressed him and seen his silly little "bear", well, I fell about laughing with all that talk about different bears we had earlier. Then he told me that he was impotent and could not do anything anyway. Well, I felt sorry for Omar Sharif all alone in our cold climate. I lay beside him, stroked his curly hair and kissed his moist, full lips. For that moment I wanted that man more than anything in the world and pursued

my own hunger as I wished, doing all the work for him. Eventually, I must have pleased myself on him at least a dozen times. This was a change for him too, I suppose.'

Harriet was not at all embarrassed about such intimate talk.

'What was it like?', she asked.

'Very good, until he told me.'

'Told you what Aunt?'

'That that was his way when he made love to English women. They could never accuse him of forcing them or raping them.'

'I was livid and decided to teach him a lesson. It was Sunday, I packed a picnic lunch and went to Derwent Water. We had our picnic and then I hired us a boat. In the middle of the lake just after he had eaten his salmon paste sandwich I tipped him out in the water.'

'Did the poor man drown, Aunt? How awful!' sighed Harriet.

'No, I made sure that there was someone there at hand to rescue him'. I forget his name now. I wonder what became of him? These exotic men are all right for an occasional escapade but you have to be careful,' said Celia Pyke gazing calmly through her glasses at her niece.



**WALKER**

**BOOKFILE:**

Anthologised in 'Talkers Through Dream Doors' (published by Crocus Books)  
Winner of 1990 Cultureword Competition.



## TIMEBOMB

by Saqib Deshmukh

It's a timebomb.  
The inevitable,  
The everything you feared  
And didn't want to live for.  
Diss the pigs,  
And don't take hand-outs -  
Who's gonna be proud  
Hey look what I've found  
I'm sitting on a timebomb.

It's indisputable.  
It's a cold fact,  
That people put down  
Are gonna fight back.  
Take the ones who say  
it's unnecessary,  
Tell them that  
It's one big necessity.  
It's like a Cold War  
In the jungle,  
Eat the beast that takes the feast,  
That's your first aim -  
Gonna drive the white man  
Out of our terrain.

It's a problem  
Another definition  
Lost in fog:  
I ain't no wog  
Listen to me -  
You only listen when you know  
I'm listening .  
Diss the things  
You take for granted,  
How come when you're giving  
I'm always empty-handed?

It's a feeling  
Of double dealing,  
Ace of spades

And no pay till pay-day.  
Instinction:  
I know it's fiction,  
But I never really wanted to  
It's a song  
It's a timebomb I'm sitting on.

## DODOS AND AFRIKAANERS

by Peter Kalu

Dodo, Didus ineptus  
Pigeon drop...drop...drop...drop...dropping.  
Flap waddle  
Flap waddle, flap waddle  
Swish-waddle. Waddle-waddle.  
Waddle...

Dinosaur didums:  
Dodo didn't  
adi ade adu ada adapt.

Dutch journey-on seaway settler.  
Tried to be an Afri-  
Can't  
Tried to be an Afri-  
Can't  
Tried to be an Afri-  
Can't:  
The Afrikaaner can't  
adi ade adu ada adapt.

# WORD UP

*Information for the nation!! Vibes from the scribes what's happening on the scene is here... read on and act upon....*

**Jackie Kay** the skilled and respected black Scottish writer is now the literature touring officer at the Arts Council of Great Britain. Every few months she compiles and distributes to the nation the Literature Touring Bulletin. This solid information pack is on writers looking for work, promoters looking for writers, publishers selling writers etc etc. There are many direct contacts. It is a very useful bulletins, get it if you can, get in it if you can. If you want to know more telephone Jackie Kay (mondays to Wednesdays) on 071 973 6441.

**The New Playwrights' Trust** based in London are setting up Britain's first Black Playwrights' directory (and about time too!!). They're a dedicated bunch so if you want to find out more about that then write to Julie Reid at The New Playwrights' Trust Whitechapel Library, 77 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX or telephone 071 377 5429.

At last **Saqib Deshmukh** self proclaimed 'Asian With A Mission' is published. Upstart publications, Manchester's first all Black poetry publishing house are bringing out **TIME-BOMB**. Quite an explosive

book it is too... Audiences (especially the Asian youth) have been crying out for his work.

**Cheryl Martin**, Black American Manchester poet and playwright has received a one year writers residency at Pit Prop Theatre in Leigh, Lancashire. The residency is funded by The North West Playwrights' Trust. Cheryl has also been commissioned to write a play by The Arts Council of Great Britain. Pit Prop Theatre is renowned for its community work.

**Trinidadian poet** and artist (why can't folks do one thing at a time) John Lyons received a six thousand pounds bursary from the Arts Council this year. He will be using it to research his next book in Trinidad.

Jamaican poet, dancer and singer **Trudy Blake** published her own book this year entitled 'POEMS'. It is available for £1.50. Trudy has shown that self publishing can be effective but takes time and commitment. Internationally known poet Martin Glynn has done the same thing, in his book he states that self publication is self empowerment. To order Trudy's book write to Trudy Blake, 25 Aked Close, Longsight, Manchester.

A new **Asian Women Writer's Group** has been established in Manchester. It meets at Longsight library, all Asian women are welcome. For more information write to

Cultureword, 21 Newton Street, Cheetwood House, Manchester, M1 1FZ or telephone 061 236 2773.

One of the Caribbean's most famous living writers **Edward Kamau Braithwaite** is coming to the North West of England for a six months residency in 1992. The residency is being co-ordinated by the North's main black literature promoters Cultureword and the NIA centre. EKB's last play was performed by nationally acclaimed Temba Theatre Company. As well as writing many collections of poetry he is studied often in English Literature degree courses.... If you want info about his visit or want to book EKB then write to Cultureword, 21 Newton Street Cheetwood House, Manchester M1 1FZ or telephone Lemn Sissay on 061 236 2773 or Paulette Warner of The NIA Centre, Chichester Rd, Hulme, Manchester, tel 061 226 6461.

There's also an excellent, (and the only one to my knowledge), **directory of Asian and Afro-Caribbean poetry bookshops, distributors, competitions, libraries, Magazines, organisations, publishers and writers workshops**. The directory covers the U.K. If you want a free copy write to The Poetry Library, Royal Festival Hall, London SE1 8XX.

**Zhana** is a Black women's Journal put together by 'Funky Black Women', they are looking for material for two jour-

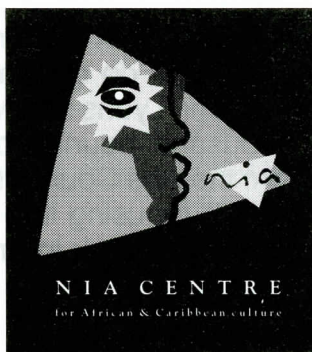
nals, one is on mothers and daughters and the other is on food, body size and body image. Payment of £40 - £50 will be made on publication. Zhana has read Identity magazine and appreciates its quality and wishes us all the best and we return the faith to them. For Black women writers to get further details (and you do need further details) write to Zhana c/o Funky Black Women, PO Box 41, 190 Upper Street London N1 1RQ or telephone 071 403 4083.

Talking of bursaries which we weren't, did you know that the Arts Council gives out six writers bursaries a year of up to six thousand pounds each. Part of the criteria is that you must be published. If you are interested in this get in touch with the Arts Council literature department and ask them to send you the details. The address to write to is The Arts Council Literature Department, 14 Great Peter Street, London SW10.

Crocus books are publishing a book of poetry and short stories by young writers. Anyone under the age of twenty five and above the age of fifteen can enter for this book. As with all Crocus books it will be a good quality paperback. Send up to thirty poems by April 1992 to The Young People's book of poetry, 21 Newton Street, Cheetwood House, Manchester M1 1FZ or Telephone 061 236 2773 and speak to Cathy Bolton or Lemn Sissay. ■

## GET A PURPOSE, GET POWER

**Concept to concrete. As the only one of its kind in Britain and the largest in Europe, the Nia Centre officially opened on the 26th April 1991. Deyika Nzeribe investigates.**



The Nia Centre is the first Afro-Caribbean cultural centre in the U.K. operating on local, national and international levels.

'Nia' is from the Ki-Swahili, meaning Purpose. Paulette Warner, the Marketing Manager of the Nia Centre, states that **its** purpose is to promote a positive image, enjoyment and awareness of Afro-Caribbean culture through the arts, education and training.

The idea and initiative came from a core group of Moss Side residents (many of whom are still involved) in the late '70's, and it is to their credit that their hard work and persistence has led to the cre-

ation of the Nia where so many other such projects have failed.

The building, on the corner border of Hulme and Moss Side, is a £1.3 million conversion and refurbishment of the former BBC Playhouse theatre. The auditorium, has seating on three floors, the flexibility of which enables a maximum capacity of over 900. There is a restaurant/cafe, workshop and exhibition areas, a day /evening creche, and a detailed security policy to ensure comfort and enjoyment.

With one of the Nia's objectives being to provide a 'centre of excellence', and focus for African and Caribbean arts and culture', it has got off to a flying start. After the well-publicised launch by Zimbabwe's High Commissioner, Stephen Chiketa, the opening season's who's who of talent included Martin Glynn, the Jazz Warriors, Pauline Omoboye, Ruthless Rap Assassins, Thomas Mapfumo, to name but a few.

With it's network of national and international contacts, it's rapidly growing reputation, Paulette Warner emphasised the roots of the Nia being in the community. She says, "The Nia Centre is for everybody and for everyone to use." So use it. ■

## HERBS AND SPICES - A TROPICAL HEALING

By Lorna Woods

Florence Nightingale  
Where did you begin?  
Would you present the scroll  
To Miss Mary Seacole?  
If nursing is nursing  
Who's cursing the truth?

Herbs and spices  
Create surprises.  
Medicine altered  
Alternative medicine  
Mary Seacole  
You helped me to realize  
Ancient biology is alive  
Tropical healing lives on!

You eased people on the camp  
With herbal potions,  
The guiding lamp, inspiring  
The power in the physical  
The strength in the mental  
The emotions euphorical  
And the centre in the spiritual.

Looking back through the ages  
I identified the stages  
I re-routed history  
Discovered remedy  
Made some time  
Improved my mind.  
Researched for proof  
And discovered the truth.

A recipe of health  
Is submerged under pressure  
Open up the box and find the other  
Inner treasure  
Spiritual pleasure.

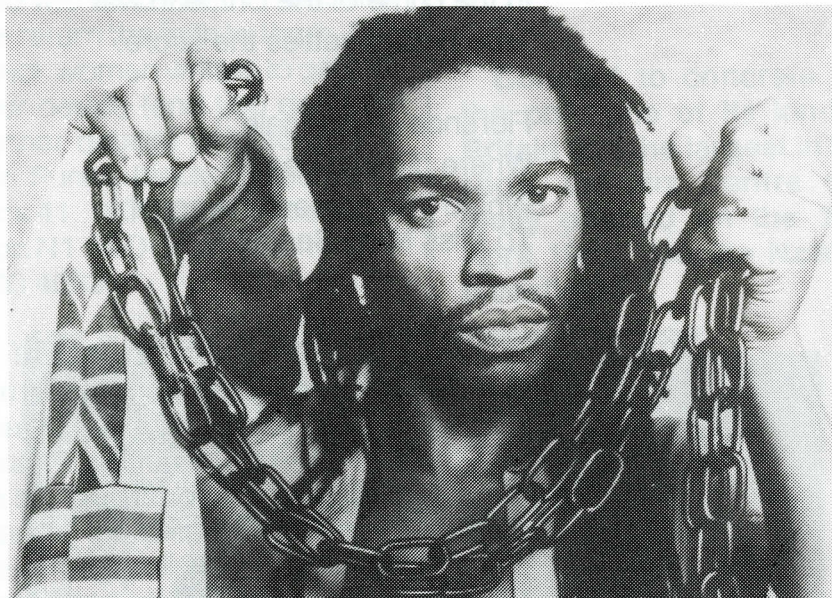
If nursing is nursing  
Who is cursing the truth?  
In the crime of the Crimean war  
True history settles the score.

Florence Nightingale  
Where did you begin?  
Would you present the scroll  
To Miss Mary Seacole?



# THE BOUNDARY BREAKER

things down. It is important I think and shows you that I am rooted in the spoken word.



*When a poet receives personal telephone calls from Nelson Mandela and chats with PLO leader Yasser Arafat you know that he is serious bizniz. Playwright, producer, journalist but first poet, dreadlocked bard Benjamin Zephaniah is the boundary breaker. Lemn Sissay cut into his busy filming schedule to ask him some questions.*

## **How long have you been writing ?**

Actually for most people this is an easy question to answer but with me, you see, I performed a long time before I even wrote. I used to do comedy impersonations, Bob Marley, Mick Jagger as well as poetry. It wasn't until I was twenty years old and moved to London that I started to write

## **Is the spoken word as important as the written word?**

Personally I think it is more important. In modern times it is important to write it down, record it, but the idea that performance poetry has to be judged by how it looks on the page is a load of bull. We were speaking a long time before we were writing. Over thousands of years we relied on storytelling and speaking in rhythm. So it's more important in an historical sense to tell people that the page was not the first. Even today more people listen than read. I believe that I reach more people on TV than I do in a book. I just want to quote one of my poems 'cause it's right....

*"Long time ago before the book existed/ poetry was oral and not playing mystic/ poetry*

*was something that people understood/ poetry was living in every neighborhood."*

You see there is a case for intellectual study but more importantly there is a case for motivating people, reading is stimulating but so is listening. The reason why the oral tradition is so strong in Asia and Africa is because there is not much difference between the rhythms of the spoken word and music, Rap is the perfect example.

## **What are you presently working on ?**

The last poem I wrote is called 'The Allies', it's about the fact that a couple of years ago Syria was our worst enemy. Then, because of the war, they suddenly became our ally. Iraq was an ally then suddenly became the enemy. I think that it is important to stress the hypocrisy of the United Nations.

I remember a few years ago a couple of Iraqi friends of ours came over here. Saddam Hussein had poisoned their water supply. Those two people died here. It was after they died that the news touched on it: Saddam was killing Kurds, Indians, Bangladeshis, Phillipino workers and in some cases Palestinians.

## **You've been criticized for performing funny and serious works together. How would you reply ?**

I would say that I am totally uneducated. I was completely ignorant - taught myself - edu-

cated myself. Often the educated (those serious folks) put people off. They put me off! Sometimes you have to bring out the ridiculous side of things. I've been around as a professional for thirteen years. I believe that is because I have the ability to put both things together. It is a delicate line to balance. And yes I'm proud of, for example, the fact that Nelson Mandela rings me up personally to invite me to South Africa; on the other hand a little nursery down the road will say 'can you come and read,' we haven't got much money'. I can go down there as well and answer the kids' questions about Nelson Mandela. I'm proud of that!

#### **What is it that gives you direction ?**

There's so many different ways that I could answer this question. Firstly, there's this new world order. In 1985 there were poets everywhere and there were people on the streets. With every little cause we were out there. The poets should stay neutral and look forward and into the future and see things that others don't see. It's very important for instance for people to know that this new world order is a sham.

#### **What keeps you going ?**

There's a thing called yin and yang, this is balance. Earlier on I spoke of serious and funny, you know. I study martial arts, balance being central. When I was younger I had a temper, every time I lost it I ended up in jail. I put that energy into my poetry, when I

started it was anger, raw anger. I would have gone to South Africa and fought if I'd had the means. So there was all that aggressive energy, which isn't bad if you channel



it. But to counteract that you've got to have some karma, otherwise you go round hyped-up wanting to stab every policeman and you burn out, it's a matter of balancing out. There was a period in my life I refer to as my hype, I was living more the life of a pop star than a poet. I was living in hotels and skirting round Britain on concorde. When I got to that stage, you'll understand, there's a lot of coke in there, and easy sex and that's what most people took to get a kick as a way out, because you do need something else from the stage and the hotel rooms. Meditation is important but only if it is geared towards your life. What attracted me to Rasta was the

balance of spirituality and realistic politics. If you look at all the religious leaders like Moses for instance, he mobilised people to settle in other lands. You can't be more pol-

itical than that. The idea of freeing yourself from slavery, if you look at His Imperial Majesty it was political when he pointed out that we can't sit with our legs crossed when people are taking our land. There must be balance, political and spiritual. Many of our great minds have had nervous breakdowns, you've got to be a whole person, you can't drive a car and not put petrol and oil in it. Every now and then stop the car and settle!■

#### **ZEPHANIAH:**

##### *Bookfile*

Rasta Time In Palestine  
(Source books)  
Us And Dem  
(Mango Records)

**PASS IT ON**

By Lemn Sissay

How is it that we still smile when the pressure comes ?  
 How is it that we stand firm when they think that we should run?  
 How is it that we retain our integrity?  
 How is it through this maze that we keep the clarity?  
 How is it through pain we retain compassion?  
 How is it that we spread but stay one nation?  
 How is it that we work in the face of abuse?  
 How is it that the pressure is on yet we seem loose?  
 This is the story about a rising truth;  
 when you feel closed in simply raise the roof?

Pass it on, pass it on, pass it on.

Martin Luther had a dream I have a dream too  
 And the only way to get it is to pass it on through.  
 From the day we leave to the day we arrived  
 We were born to survive, born to stay alive.  
 By all means necessary I'm an accessory  
 To provide the positive vibe is a necessity,  
 To clasp our past, to go to war with our fears,  
 To claim and attain in our future years.  
 Sometimes life can be complicated  
 More time their problem is over rated,  
 Nina Simone called it the Backlash blues.  
 And even though they say it's history we all know that it's news!

Pass it on, pass it on, pass it on....

The oppressor hopes and prays for you to cry,  
 To close your hearts and your minds and lay down and die,  
 To be another numb number to treat and delete,  
 To fall into the spiral rhythm of defeat,  
 Malcolm X has a dream I have a dream too  
 And the only way to get it is to pass it on through.  
 No message has been stronger,  
 No sea carried more weight,  
 No army marched for longer no wind swept at this rate.  
 Pride in my skin is in the vision I have seen  
 The pain I withstand for I have a dream.  
 Know who you are, know the ground on which you stand  
 Never build your house on a bed of sand!

# THE COOL CALM COLLECTIVE

*What do a sculptor, a dancer, a structural engineer, a molecular biologist, a business manager, a midwife, an accountant, and a bank manager have in common? They are all part of the Asian Women Writers' Collective. Established six years ago the collective was the first workshop of its kind in Britain. Lemn Sissay spent some time with their administrator Anjum for the low down.....*

**When was the Asian Women Writers' Collective established ?**

We started six years ago in 1984. We met in each others homes, sharing our experiences through writing and it developed from there.

**What has been the stimulus for the group to keep going ?**

Well I think what has kept it interesting is that it's not always the same people who come every week, different people come with different views and ideas. We do many readings and run workshops around the country. Last week we ran a workshop on how to run a workshop. We published an anthology called 'The Right of Way' which sold out and are

at the moment working on our second anthology.

**Can one group serve all the members of the community?**

We get Asian women writers from all different backgrounds, we serve many members of our community and obviously we try to include all Asian women. Because we are Asian and because we are women we have a lot in common.

**There has been quite a lot of press and activity over the past year concerning Asian women writers. Is there a boom in Asian women's writing at the moment and if so why?**

I think there has been a boom! More and more women have become successful through coming to the Collective and finding out about publishing, radio and TV etc. Support is the key, that's why there has been a boom, maybe in the past that support wasn't around. Word has spread, and although we have had our funding cut we take enquiries from people all over the country. At the moment we're working in Leeds, Manchester, Halifax, London, Wales, and Birmingham. We are really busy.

**Is there a wide variety of work by the women of the Collective or is it similar ?**

Oh no, not at all. Asian women writers are different - like all writers!

**What advice would you give to other Asian women who write but who don't go to writers' workshops for one reason or another?**

Do you mean can't or won't? A lot of Asian women can't come out because they have got families or they are restricted by their husbands or circumstances. If an Asian woman rings in and says 'I can't come because of my husband', I/we understand straight away because it's part of a life that we know so well. We hold day sessions every month to try and serve women with children and families and show them how to get published and listen to their work. An ideal place to work out that story or poem or just listen to others. It is really inspiring. We are opposed to racist, sexist and classist work.

**When individuals in your group become successful as writers do they help the Collective or leave ?**

I don't think it matters, the successful have been very helpful and return to the group from time to time, the Collective wants its members to be successful.

Manchester now has an Asian Women's writing group which meets at Longsight Library. For more information contact Louise Ansari on 061 236 2773 or write to Cultureword, 21 Newton Street, Cheetwood House, Manchester, M1 1FZ. ■



## DAUGHTER OF A PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP

by Zahir Ali

I dream of a world of free air and fortune  
where all my songs are more in tune  
and moon that glows kind by night  
where sun brightens no ruined sight  
A home I want with a kitchen sink  
equal times and mornings pink

But helpless daughter in the refugee camp  
by the holy hills of the West Bank  
and blindfolded the soldiers took my brother  
tied his hands behind, they mucked him further  
scarred his limbs and stubbed his skin  
mother cried when he returned so thin  
and father in his chest they shot  
accused him of a terrorist plot  
charged for enticing the hidden vim  
slowly my large family trim

Come back the pain once more  
when mum's hair, the animals tore  
Cry the world could never listen  
dull my days - never glistened  
Earth deaf, offered no hope  
Heaven stared but never spoke

school march - ANGRY I raised my fist  
Pointed his gun, he wrenched my wrist  
Likeness of a hammer to an ordinary egg  
no rotten god I shall ever beg  
Terrified, I stood, crying my will  
My first prescription of a slow death pill

Come back the pain once again  
Endless darkness - let morning begin.

## WHO AM I ?

by Nusserat Ashraf

Am I a woman?  
Sometimes I think not, more a robot  
Programmed to meet other's needs  
Other's demands.

Am I an individual?  
Sometimes I think not, more a daughter  
More a wife  
More a mother

Am I important?  
Sometimes I'm made to feel not  
Opinions not asked  
Feelings not discussed  
Swept away like dust.

When will I be allowed to be me?  
When, when, when?  
How long do I have to pretend?  
I think, right until the end.

## EMOTIONALLY CONSTIPATED

by Michael Ogazi

An always laughing  
always smiling  
Parody of humanity.  
Show polite concern  
at other's misfortunes,  
sensitivity when required  
charm easily,  
Social conscience  
emitted at rallies only  
Always the friend, never the part  
Always listening, nice, polite and  
ever so sorry, never arguing  
cool calm collected at every crisis  
"What crisis?"  
never responsible, it's always us,  
never reveals, 'til you do  
and never ever  
cries in public

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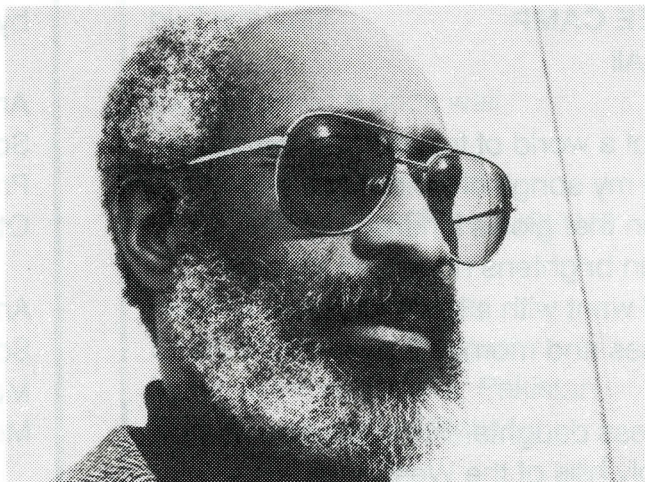
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## POET PAINTER AND CARNIVAL COSTUME CREATOR

Born in Trinidad, Manchester-based poet John Lyons, twice winner of the Peterloo Afro-Caribbean and Asian Poetry Competition was recently awarded an Arts Council writers' bursary in recognition of his achievements. A rich 'calaloo' of cultures and traditions is reflected in his first book of poetry, *The Lure of the Cascadura*. Cheryl Martin digs deep in the comfortable surroundings of his gallery.



**CM: What do you think, John, about the "art" vs. "black art" question?**

**JL:** I think the whole question of black art is quite confusing. We speak about black art the same way we speak about Impressionism, or all those other "isms": as part of Western Art culture. I think it's not that at all. You can talk about principles that are universal to all art, and there are black people doing this. Some artists are motivated by politics, and what they produce and what they express relate very much to the political situation in terms of the way black people are dominated by western culture. OK, that's fair enough. But it's not true, I think, to say there is a "black art" in inverted commas, or that black art has to be political, or black art has to show this thing of being oppressed. I don't think so. When I look at black art, I look at art being

done by black people. Full stop.

There are some branches of black art which are primarily political, such as the Black Art Movement which was started by Eddie Chambers and Keith Piper in their student days. A particular group of black artists were concerned with certain political aspects of their culture, which they expressed. That's fine. But why is it that this particular movement was supposed to represent black art in general? I think that is totally wrong.

**CM: In the States, it used to be true that all blacks had in common the experience of segregation. It made for a very definite universal identity that was reflected in artists' work. Do you think this holds true for British blacks?**

**JL:** To a certain extent that is true. But as I said before, the whole issue of black art is all very confusing. In an historical sense, I could identify with the political aspects of my

culture as sort of belonging to an oppressed group. But reaction to that is not necessarily painting rhetorical painting, or writing things that scream out aloud, "Here, I'm being oppressed". My reaction may be to write a dignified poem, looking at my strengths as a black person. Standing up to it. That is perhaps my way of fighting. Other people may have different ways of doing it. But because I have confidence in the way I am, as a black person, I can come to terms with historical oppression. I can quite objectively, if I want, argue in a debate, or perhaps write an article about belonging to that oppressed group.

My feelings about it have a lot to do with the way I write. I can look at it quite academically and objectively in terms of politics and so on. But I don't, in my everyday life, walking the streets and doing the things that I do, necessarily feel oppressed. I think that's important. To walk around with a feeling like that is itself stultifying. It would inhibit one's creativity.

I'm more concerned with trying to link that aspect of my craft of writing, my art, with all the feelings I have about being a human being. A black person, living on this little speck

we call Earth. I'd like to come to terms with it all, and put into perspective all the politics. When I start doing that with my art, when I start linking my form and structure with that

kind of content, I'll be quite pleased. I'd think I would have achieved something. ■

## SUNSEEDS OF SLAVES

The new sunseeds of slaves  
sprouting up through rubble  
in Englands cityscapes.

In this city bush  
no navel strings are buried;

no suffering eased  
by sighing bamboo grove.

Lost are the earth's wisdoms  
passed through digging fingers  
familiar with yams and tania  
in Carib soil.

Across the generation gap  
words like stones are pelted  
against the living brow-bone:

but theirs is a more urgent pain.

**LYONS:**

**BOOKFILE:**

Lure of the Cascadura  
(Bogle L'ouverture  
publications)

Black and Priceless  
(Crocus Anthology)

The poems on this page are  
written by John Lyons.

## JAB JAB

Out of masquerading crowds  
they came shuffle-dancing:  
jingle jingle, jab jab,  
jingle jingle, jab jab,

jester - clowns  
in brilliant satin,  
armoured against the lashing whip;  
stuffed up like bobolee,  
black face in white face wire mask;

we are di boys, jab jab,  
from Fyzabad, jab jab,  
we fraid nobody, jab jab,  
we big and bad, jab jab,  
we lookin fuh trouble, jab jab,  
in Port-of-Spain, jab jab,  
an ready an able, jab jab,  
jingle jingle, jab jab,  
jingle jingle, jab jab,

arms circle in the air,  
whips flash, crack like gunshots,

before we go away, jab jab,  
yuh goin to pay, jab jab,  
cause we ded trouble, jab jab,  
an big an able, jab jab,

pennies fall like rain  
ringin on tarmac:  
they fill purses,  
shuffle-dance away,  
jingle jingle, jab jab,  
jingle jingle, jab jab,  
jingle jingle, jab jab.

## STOP THE SPREAD OF AID

By Tina Tamsho

i)

We all watched the harrowing images on TV  
Starving Ethiopians  
expecting death to set them 'free.'  
Listened to 'The Cars' singing  
'Who's gonna take you home',  
reached tearfully for cheque books  
poured money down the phone  
poured money down the phone.  
SOME consciences were eased  
negativity released,  
millions raised  
Geldof praised,  
praised for giving Africa  
European aid(s).

ii)

History was repeated  
though Europe's records are vague,  
his live aid mission  
bore colonialism's plague.  
Soon every famous rock band  
for the starving millions played,  
singing 'Feed The World'  
bandwagon aid - bandwagon aid!  
Then Sport Aid ran the world -  
it was Thatcher's day of rest,  
if charity would pay her debts  
she'd certainly invest.  
The media soon cashed in on Africa's plight,  
haunting images of death, transmitted every night.  
As in the press the 'victims' were portrayed  
hopeless, helpless, trapped,  
by the famine and stark poverty clinging to their backs.  
But what about the drought  
what about the draught?  
That's what world starvation is surely all about.

iii)

The world's natural environment is under **ATTACK**

under **ATTACK** under **ATTACK**

from the global capitalist cancer

that separates white from black,

that separates white from black.

The life-giving trees from rain forests they wrench

to slake the thirst for profit, they never seem to quench.

Without this natural filter, the rain floods homes and crops,

And when the sun begins to burn,

aid-giving rain - stops!

So people **ARE** victims when forced into this role,

When their history and their culture are subjected to control,

And when Geldof takes his credit of sterling silver and black gold,

he is merely paying off a debt - Four hundred years old,

Four hundred years old.

He is merely paying Europe's debt - **FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OLD!**

### **ONE HALF**

By Mark Darbey

Twice the influence

Double the lineage

Two times the culture

A pairing in mine own image

Don't call me half-caste

To put me in my place

Instead call me double-caste

but this time to my face

iii)

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## Black Writers Conference

*The first National African, Caribbean and Asian Writers conference was held in Sheffield this year, hosted by SADACCA - The Sheffield and district Afro/Caribbean Community Association. Tina Tamsho writes....*

Organised by Yorkshire Arts Black Literature Project, in co-operation with the Arts Council of Great Britain, the conference was aimed at those with a specific interest in developing a regional and national networking organisation for African, Caribbean and Asian writers.

The opening address by BLP fieldworkers, Susi Miller and Shelley Khair, and keynote speeches from the platform, created a weekend of lively debate which determined the principal aims and objectives of the conference.

The Black only plenary session included proposals on defining strategies from regional networks to fit within national Black Arts. Developing all forms of Black writing. Producing a high profile journal as a showcase for new and established writers. Disseminating information about funders, publishers, and arts assisting agencies. Compiling a directory of Black writers, and developing stronger links with

Black Arts on an international level.

A steering committee, based in Sheffield was formed, and regional representatives were elected.

Tina Tamsho and Shamshad Khan of the Identity Workshop, represent the North West region, and meetings are held on the first Thursday of every month at Longsight library, Manchester. They are open to all Black writers and new members are welcome.

Future plans include a prize-winning competition to find a name for the organisation. If you have any suggestions, or would like further information, please contact Cultureword - 061- 236-2773.

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**TO IDENTITY**



**TWO MOTHERS**

by Georgina Blake

I

Who were not by trade  
seamstresses  
noticed the raw-edged  
world

had been abandoned  
along with the  
wrong order of milk  
for its survival

they gathered it in  
and spread it across  
the uncarpeted floor

in frayed silence  
ignoring the nakedness  
of the task  
they began to mend

II

their lives were  
greedily sucked

as they snipped  
the fears  
and tucked in frowns  
zig-zagged laughter  
and ironed tears

visited imprisoned sons  
with razored cakes made  
of private timeless love

warned daughters  
already lost in fairytales  
where they are saved  
by good  
free  
men

III

two mothers  
who were not by trade  
seamstresses  
fashioned the raw-edged  
world  
in silk emotions

then slept

but in dreaming  
woke to voices  
they had never heard  
their own  
crying for release

when they rose  
the pattern of  
their lives had gone

left noiselessly  
in the night

No more shaping  
to be done

IV

two mothers  
untied their worn  
dusty apron strings  
and took off their skirts  
whose folds had  
sheltered years  
of (grief and joys)

and walked  
naked through  
the streets  
in search of the  
seamstresses  
they had never been.

**I REMEMBER BEING THE VAMPIRE'S DAUGHTER**

by Cheryl Martin

He wanted me-  
not lovely little Lucy,  
but me,  
because I was his,  
No need for mirrors, answers,  
when he had me,  
parted my thighs (I  
felt hair on his knees)--  
but they took him.

God, he had such pale,  
pretty teeth.  
They'd glisten  
as he stretched above  
my waiting neck,  
as Papa bent,  
breathed--  
but they were watching.  
(I saw my other lover, how he--  
the way his eyes wouldn't touch me  
when he knew.)

They used me for bait.  
They saved me too soon.  
They held him,  
poor Papa;  
they left him straining,  
mouth willing, moon

glinting on those beautiful  
teeth.  
Such long teeth.  
Wet.  
Don't.  
(My other lover stood behind him,  
grinning,  
hammer at the ready.)

I wouldn't watch.  
They think they've killed my father.  
But I can still taste his tongue.

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*In the last magazine various pictures were used without crediting the photographer. We apologise to Clive Hunte and thank him for allowing us to use his excellent work. Clive can be contacted on 061 226 3954*

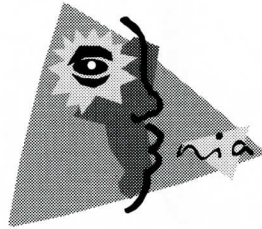
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