

# **After the Revolution: A Libretto**

**by Ryan Delaney**

## **Scenes:**

### **Scene 1: Late 1970s**

Military Training Camp, on the Border

### **Scene 2 (The Present):**

Slum Demolition and Eviction, in “C” District

### **Scene 3 (The Present):**

Meeting of Slum-Dwellers, in the City

### **Scene 4 (The Present):**

Mass March on Groundbreaking Party, in “C” District

## **Characters:**

Atta (Protagonist, Shack-dweller)

Atta’s Mother (Armed Exile-on-the-Run)

Rigogo (Nationalist Movement Commander-cum-Politician)

Morelander (Gangster, Landowning Developer)

Staude (Thug, Construction Supervisor)

## **Synopsis:**

During the Revolution in the City of Moreland, a young girl named Atta meets Rigogo, a Revolutionary Nationalist Movement commander, at a covert military training camp, where her mother was on-the-run from the Regime’s Security Forces. When the camp is discovered, Atta is taken to safety of family in a sprawling urban shack settlement called “C” District. After the Revolution two decades later, with the Nationalist Movement now in power, a Gangster named Morelander seeks to evict Atta and her family from their homes and demolish “C” District to build a casino. Attacked by thugs, she escapes to find a congregation of slum-dwellers in the City, whom she tells of the threatened eviction and her past at the camp. The slum-dwellers resolve to hold a mass march upon the groundbreaking party for the casino, where Atta confronts Morelander and again meets Rigogo.

## **Setting and Rationale:**

This libretto is an adaption of a Maoist women’s ballet of the 1970s, the original entitled “Red Detachment of Women.” In its adapted form, it tells the story

of a woman named Atta, living in a shack settlement in a post-colony, where a nationalist revolutionary movement-cum-political party has instantiated itself in the old apparatus of a now liberal democratic state. The story takes place in no particular locale, but rather is informed by accounts of life in urban shack settlements, from various sources, from various parts of the world.

The action unfolds today, in a recent past and present, at a time of broad realignments in the workings of state power, following the decolonization and the Cold War, where old antagonisms between colonizer and colonized, communist and capitalist, revolutionary and reactionary have given way to an uncertain terrain of political mobilization and democratic state power.

Given this, the very terms of the original libretto, and the story they tell – of “the party,” “the revolution,” “the enemy” – carry with them new meanings and historical sedimentations. Among them, the failings of nationalist political movements that, by force, sought state power, even when it meant the demise of past repressive regimes and the establishment of a new order of democratic governance. Among them is also the displacement of a transcendent revolutionary subject (“the proletariat”), as the uniform bearer of any and all radical transformation in relations of force and consent.

The libretto, without nostalgia or the self-gratifying gestures of retrospection or retrieval, attempts to make visible these terms in a politics of today through a process of adaption. These scenes, or moments in Atta’s life, should not be construed as teleological “stages” of her political consciousness or of political mobilization more generally, though they are informed by what has happened, continues to happen and has been well-documented in slums in liberal democracies, in many parts of the world. Finally, she, as a character, does not speak for poor women, or women shack-dwellers: they can and do speak for themselves.

### **Background to the Scene of Action:**

The scene of action is in and around the City of Moreland. The once colonial City of Moreland had been constructed around the port, still functioning today, with industrial tankers, cargo ships, fishing boats stationed at the docks. Atta grew up there, in a section of the so-called native quarters in “C” District, on the outskirts of the City. The old City architecture, quaint colonial style, had been all but replaced by towering modernist high-rises, a futurism of a 1970s design imaginary, which spoke of a brave new colonial city, not of towns and villages left behind in Europe. But the 1970s was also the time of the Revolution. The battles in City, between the colonial Regime and the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, had been bloody. The hated Security Forces expert and ruthless in defending the collapsing Regime: disappearances, torture, street killings, repression of protest, all were routine.

Today, with the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement now instantiated in the apparatus of a newly democratic state, the main thoroughfare of the City looked to Atta almost as it did before the Revolution, with its churches and mosques rebuilt, bustling shops and open-air markets, the life of the port spilling out onto the streets. Traces of the Revolution were evident, of course: a shelled wall, a bombed out

garage, colonial monuments of white men on horses replaced with marble heroes of the Revolution, fists raised skywards.

Yet today, as the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement became the ruling political party, so did the City begin to transform again. Demolished 1970s apartment blocks and tenements made way for construction sites, ultra-sleek glass and steel skyscrapers, sharp edges jutting out over the skyline, with luxury hotels and a massive theme park lining the beachfront. Billboards in the City center that pictured surf and sand proclaimed: "Moreland: A World Class City."

"C" District lay inland on the close southern periphery of the City of Moreland. It was an industrial area that was once a farm. A site of revolt for generations even before the Revolution, the farm in earlier colonial days had been home to hundreds of tenant farmers, like Atta's grandfather, who worked not for wages but for shelter and food from a wealthy, merciless landowner. Today, some of the same families, including Atta's kin, still lived in "C" District, which had grown from tenant farm to native quarters into a sprawling slum – a shack settlement, constructed from makeshift materials of corrugated tin, wood planks and plastic sheeting. If employed, men and women worked in local shops or factories in "C" District, or in domestic service or street trading, some like Atta, as part-time laborers at the new airport and tourist attractions in the City.

"C" District, today, was controlled by a gangster named Morelander. He lived in a grandiose, gated mansion atop a hill, built by his predecessors, which overlooked the settlement. He owned all the surrounding land and collected rent from the "C" District residents, who lived without electricity or running water, alongside his factory dump. He owned all the local shops: Morelander's Produce, Morelander's Meat Supply, Morelander's Bottle Store – a bar, where his men would gather to drink. Not only did he run an extensive criminal operation at the port and in "C" District – including a car theft ring, where his men stole and stripped down cars for parts – he also had corrupt family and friends paid to do his bidding in the City government, the courts and the police. Morelander's latest ambition was to be a developer, to build the El Derado Casino, the vision for which he procured from an American "B" movie. He sought to consolidate and legitimate his economic interests and political connections, while contributing to the project – heralded by promoters and international investors – of producing a "World Class City" in Moreland. Breaking ground on the El Derado, however, required first the demolition of "C" District, and the forced removal of its residents.

## **SCENE 1**

### **I. Military Training Camp**

It is two decades ago, the late 1970s, during the Revolution. The City of Moreland is under a state of emergency.

Atta watches a small troop of women recruits. They file by, dressed in uniforms emblazoned with the emblem of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement. Some

with flags, others with Soviet rifles, on their way to early shooting practice. Atta's mother is among them.

The military camp is situated near the Border, a barren landscape of shrubs and brush, north of the City. The green canvas tents house men and women exiles and recruits-in-training of the Movement's military wing, also serving as a base of armed operations in the region.

Atta's mother was an armed exile in the Movement. After completing a mission to blow up a power-substation in the City, she had been identified by the hated Security Forces. On the run, her mother had no alternative but to bring the young girl to a covert military training camp, as an interim measure, before sending her to the safety of other family, living in a slum in the City, called "C" District.

Following paces behind the troop, Atta reaches the river. Her mother and the recruits are seated cross-legged on the ground. A debriefing session.

A blackboard set in front is scrolled with familiar dictates of the day: "Only by taking up arms and waging revolution can we smash the old and usher in a bright new democratic society."

A camp commander, known as Rigogo, is chairing the session. He tells recruits about the new checkpoints at the boundary of the native quarters, and recent skirmishes in the City. He continues, "It is not just the Security Forces that is the enemy, but the whole man-eating capitalist system!" The recruits shout in chorus, "Down with the Security Forces! Share out the land!" They join formation, Rigogo at the lead.

As the recruits break away toward some rough-hewn, torso-shaped targets nearby, only Atta's mother remains, sitting alone, staring at the words on the blackboard.

Rigogo turns away, glimpsing then the figure in the brush. A quick fluid movement, his hand reaches for the pistol strapped to his belt. He smiles vaguely when he sees the girl: "Too much time in the City," he thought. Knowing her story, and her parents as comrades, now even heroes in exile, he approaches. Atta starts. She had seen Rigogo only from a distance in the encampment; and knew of him before as a tireless revolutionary, already come to prominence in the Movement, though young in years.

Atta averts her eyes to the recruits firing away at their targets. "Here," he said, taking his pistol from his belt. Standing behind her, reaching forward, he positions her feet and hands, places her finger on the trigger.

As they stood, gun in hand, a messenger rushes up to Rigogo, gasping breath.

Headquarters in the City was reporting an infiltration of the encampment by the Security Forces; a full-scale assault was impending. Headquarters ordered an immediate disbandment of the camp, and regrouping on the other side of the Border.

Rigogo re-straps the pistol, shouting orders.

Atta's departure for "C" District would be sooner than expected: she was packed up that night on a truck, hidden beneath a blanket with women recruits headed for the City, as her mother fled across the Border.

## **SCENE 2**

### **II. Demolition in "C" District:**

It is after the Revolution, two decades after Atta arrived in "C" District. Today, comrades hold posts in the Revolutionary Nationalist Party and in the City government.

Atta lives in "C" District with a now elderly aunt and uncle, whom she supports with her income as a cashier at the beachfront theme park. At the register one day, she read in the newspapers that Morelander, the gangster who owned the land in "C" District, unveiled his plans for a new casino: "El Derado Casino Design Applauded by City Government," read the headlines. As she saw the construction workers appear on the edges of the settlement, along with bulldozers and the occasional men-in-suits, Atta thought only quietly to herself, she might get a job, closer to home, at the casino.

With a start, Atta awoke to screams and the smell of smoke. The shack next-door was set alight, red flames rising. Two known thugs, dressed in construction uniforms, stand next to a police officer with flashlight and billy club in hand. Atta then sees Staude, wearing his tatty street clothes, holding a canister of petrol.

Staude was Morelander's chief enforcer, who threatened and harassed "C" District residents under his direction. Atta had run-ins with Staude before: she always seemed to be elected to speak to Morelander on behalf of the community – when the dump started making the children sick, when a family was evicted for being unable to pay rent, when someone in the factory lost his job, or when the police were sent to cut the light-giving electrical lines, rigged up between the shacks and a street generator. Morelander regarded Atta as a troublemaker; and her mother's revolutionary history did not help to counter that perception.

A crowd is gathering, as other residents try to salvage their belongings from the shacks, and bucket water, rushed from the only tap atop the hill, onto the flames.

Atta runs at Staude; he pushes her away, violently. She seizes the petrol container, the force of its release, sending Staude backwards. The police officer rushes to the aid of his boss, dropping the flashlight and plunging them into darkness, save for the growing fire. Still grasping the petrol container, Atta runs, making her way through the slum, where narrow twisting pathways are known only to those who lived there.

Staude sends the police officer to report Atta's flight and interference with the demolition to Morelander. Then, with flashlights, he and several other thugs who had been drinking in Morelander's bar, set out in pursuit. Equipped with knives, metal pipes and broken bottles, they prowled around the settlement in search of Atta. Staude ordered the men to scatter for a more thorough search, kicking down the doors of shacks, to the terror of residents packing their belongings inside.

Atta crept from behind one shack to another until she saw two thugs with flashlights coming toward her. Taking a few steps back, she runs into Staude. He takes hold of her right arm, as she struggles. Thugs surround her.

By this time, Morelander with the police officer has arrived, enraged. He presses the tip of his knife to Atta's temple; she does not look up. He struck her. "Make her an example," he said. The thugs and police officer seize upon her. Atta stood against the beatings until her head swam and she fainted.

Morelander slapped her face to resuscitate her, but Atta remained unconscious. Gesturing violently to the crowd of residents gathering around her lifeless body, he warned, "All of you must go, or you will burn here."

Lighting flashed, and there was a heavy clap of thunder. Morelander and his men walk back toward the bar, just as the storm broke, smoke rising from the settlement.

### **SCENE 3**

#### **3. Meeting of Slum-Dwellers in the City**

Atta awakes, alone on the street, beaten and sore. Still dizzy, she walks toward the City, toward her beachfront workplace, following the streets she used to visit as a child, through the stalls in the market with hawkers selling sweets and fruit, DVDs and loose cigarettes; passed the construction sites where workers wheeled cement beneath the steel skeletons of new skyscrapers; passed the old government buildings with their heavy colonnades and fountains; passed the tenements downtown, some still occupied, where laundry hung from the crumbling balconies.

Atta hears singing. Behind a tiled mosaic wall, obscured from the street, she finds a community hall, a simple wood structure, with what she thought was a church or funeral service inside.

A congregation is standing in a circle in front of plastic chairs, singing songs familiar to her, but the lyrics changed:

*What have we done?  
How did our world become like this?*

*The government won't speak clearly  
The developers won't speak clearly*

*There is a war on the poor.*

It is a meeting. The congregants, she learns, are from slums all over the City of Moreland. From the sprawling shack settlements in former native quarters like "C" District, from the tenement blocks of flats near the port, and from the camps that had sprung up near the airport made of tents and emergency shelters for refugees of the latest construction frenzy in the City.

The congregants sit; a woman pulls up a chair for Atta. She hears stories of housing evictions, of water cut offs, of pit toilets, of rats, of mud, of shootings, of police, of bulldozers, of crime, of family woes, of the Revolution, of the promises made by the City government.

Another woman in the congregation, seated nearby, asks Atta to speak. She tells them she is from "C" District, and about the gangster Morelander, his attempt at demolishing the settlement to build the El Derado Casino, and of the fire and the beatings. She tells them about how she lost her mother and the bright new democratic society talked about at the military training camp.

The congregants speak of the ways to address situation in "C" District. A congregant made one proposal, another made another, and so they sat for a long time in discussion. The last standing proposal was a mass march on Morelander. Atta would have to return to "C" District to bring the proposal to her neighbors. They closed the meeting with a prayer, and sang again in that unfamiliar, familiar way:

*The government won't speak clearly  
The developers won't speak clearly*

*That's why  
Everywhere struggle is welcome  
Struggle will open the road  
Struggle will open the road*

#### **SCENE 4**

### **3. Mass March on Groundbreaking Party**

More meetings, and nights of Atta sleeping in the hall, passed before she returned to “C” District. She and her neighbors began gathering by candlelight to talk of Morelander and how to expose him, to talk of forced eviction and other indignities. Where would we go? Quarters in the City were no longer segregated. But how would we afford it? Living in the City was so expensive. They had nowhere else to go except the development refugee camps the City government had constructed, which was no place to rebuild a life.

“C” District resolved to hold a strategically timed march: at the gangster’s annual party.

Each year, Morelander held a lavish party, throwing open the gates of his mansion atop the hill to his friends in government, his corporate partners, as well as high-earning thugs in his criminal gang. It was a key networking moment for all, where they did deals, paid off bribes, and where Morelander could display and affirm his power, not only in “C” District, but in the broader world of business and politics. It was a society event, though a closed and private one, for as much as it was widely known that the important figures in the City transacted with the gangster, it was a fact to be publicly evaded or denied. This year, however, the party made the headline news: it would be the groundbreaking ceremony of the El Derado Casino.

By dusk, the mansion was a scene of frenzied activity. Waiters in colonial-style uniform, whom Morelander hired from “C” District, moving between elaborate dining tables, carrying in bottles of champagne, platters of meat, a pig to roast on a spit. The mansion garden was lit up with exotic, imported lights beneath frilly white marquees, music pulsing from a speaker system. At the garden entrance, Morelander had lined-up young boys from the settlement to perform what he dubbed a “cultural dance,” for the special entertainment of guests from overseas.

Guests, richly dressed, streamed in. Inside, a small-scale plaster model of the casino was placed next to a podium, so partygoers could marvel at the modern building design and amenities, which would replace the slum that the wealthy of the City regarded as an eyesore.

Morelander ordered the choicest fruits to be served at his table, where aside him were seated his closest allies, notably the City Manager, the Chief of Police and the Magistrate, among the most powerful men in the area. The City Manager takes to the podium, shovel in hand for the groundbreaking. Just as Morelander settles back to bite into a large cake, singing was heard outside the gate.

Guests swiveled in chairs to see thousands of shack-dwellers marching down the road toward the gated mansion. Morelander leaned over and whispered to the Police Chief, who gestured to his deputies to prepare their weapons and call for backup.



The marchers approached, waving banners and carrying signs, and candles. They sung, shouting in chorus, "Down with the Gangster Morelander, Down with Casino Fat Cats and Corrupt Politicians! Down!"

Ahead of the marchers were television cameramen and journalists, who had been tipped off that the march would give them access to the party, a possibly profitable expose on the whole corrupt network of gangster and politicians, and the party of the year turned upside down by a shack-dwellers parade – a story not to be missed.

Whether in response to the marchers or the cameras, guests tried to flee, some backing up into the garden shrubbery, others running helter-skelter. Waiters and dancers joined the march, now at the entrance. The police had arrived pointing guns at the protesters and began firing water canons.

Atta, at the head of the march, entered the garden gate. She tiptoed to the back of the house where the generator was, and disconnected the electricity, lights and music disappeared into darkness. She left a note: Electricity for all, or electricity for no one.

As she turned the corner, she ran into Morelander heatedly talking to what appeared to be a politician, the City Manager perhaps. As the be-suited man turned, he recognized her.

"Rigogo! What are you doing here? Have you joined our ranks in disguise?" Regaining composure, Rigogo reasoned with her sternly, "Stop this now, Atta. It is not the time. The Revolution is over."

"You cannot stop us. You politicians are all the same. All you're concerned about is money; all you're concerned about is votes, not about this gangster exploiting us. How could you, comrade, when you yourself suffered so much." "Things have changed," he said.

Before she could rejoin the march, Morelander took hold of her, calling to the police. She struggles. Rigogo turned to go. Other women rushed up to Atta, striking Morelander. He gave chase, and they followed him down the road, laughing as they went. The march continued.

The next day on the television and in the newspapers the headline news read: "'Local Gangster's Crime Network Exposed!' and 'Shack-dwellers Parade Rains on Politico Party' and 'City Manager Answers in Court.'"