

Oncoming Traffic

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by

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Abstract

The poems in my collection *Oncoming Traffic* mainly look at the silence in my personal conflicts. Fusing different styles and tones of writing from the lyrical to the surreal, these poems grapple with issues I struggle with on a daily basis. First as a man, second as a man with a physical disability, and lastly as a black man dealing with the reality of living in a dysfunctional/disabled society. The silence in my personal conflicts means, writing what I cannot say, stripping myself bare and vulnerable. My inspiration has come from poets who articulate such silences.

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Introduction

How I started writing on a notepad

I got to write on a notepad because nako tse kaofela, ke ntse ke sa ngoale mo notepadding, you know, I used to write poetry on random pieces of paper, o kile wa bona, just here and there. And before I get to that other part ya di “amen” and all that stuff, from the first poems I used to write. But how I got to write on a notepad, actually, was very interesting, because what happened? I was in my father’s car, and my mother had just got the car from my father, coz at the time this was after my accident, and ko skolong they were talking about “yho! Ngoana o na re tlo mo koba” ntho tse joalo, “ha e beng a ka tla late futhi” because at that time I was in a wheelchair, you know, so, ok hold on... alright sho, hola. And then so now, so ba re ngoana o re tlo mo koba ntho tse joalo, ha a ka tla late futhi, o kile wa bona, and my mother was going mad, because my father had a car at the time, and, and, modimo, e thata taba e.

So joanong, my mother decides to get the car, and ha a gutla ka transi, she takes me to school in my father’s car, and I felt so proud, like oh shit, ok, ke vaya ka transi ya le thaima, yho! go monate di ya boya, ok, and at the time my father used to drive a BMW, hahahah, 318, o a e bona ntho e joalo. So, and an automatic too but regardless. So ha ntse re vaya re ya ko s’ghela, oh sorry, sho, beer e go a nyewa.

Anyway. So ha ntse re vaya re ya ko s’ghela, eerrm, I look inside the glove compartment, you know, ha ke re, I find my father’s notepad, o wa ngoala daar, he’s got his poetry, you know, sho! one more time, sorry, Black Label what you doing. So oa ngoala daar, entlek o ngoetse, he has written most of his poems on a notepad and I read it and I read it, and the first one I come across, ke daai ding e a e ngoetseng ka Africa, a poem about Africa or something like that, and this is how I literally start writing on a notepad, and I am like oh wow, if my father is doing the same thing, I might as well do the same thing, because to me my father was like my hero jo, you know, he was like the ultimate god, e ne e le motho o ha ke mo shebile, ke bona he’s never laid a hand on me or my brother, he’s never laid a hand on Sthu and me, whatsoever.

Maara. I was afraid of him, it’s a kind of fear that was of respect, because everybody respected him for who he was apart from what he did, a very strong headed man, very together person, o ka tla re mo lala wa gage ha o gone go thikaziseka, ntho tse joalo, you know, so now, I get to school in my father’s car, great stuff, beautiful, fantastic, the morning was like any other morning, and thankfully azange ka fitlha late ko skolong, coz my mother had been stressing, you know KES, eish, anyway, KES

e na le matlakala sometimes but it's understandable it's a school that is running on its own semi private kind of rules, you know. So, granted, if your child comes to school late again, you guys, you in shit, and given the fact ya gore I went to that school under extreme conditions, because the MEC of education at the time was Mary Metcalfe she told them go re no no o a tseba keng, "here is a boy in a wheelchair who is going to come and if you guys don't allow him to come to your school we going to put your educational board under review", ntho tse joalo, you know, and I am thinking, oh great stuff, and my mother has been working left right and centre to keep me in school, and I've been going up and down ka dicombi, you know, transport was not being right, and the time my mother didn't have a car, ok great, this is the first year, the first year as in '97, first year high-school, at the time I was still in a wheelchair, and I mean you don't have a lot of options when you're in a wheelchair, coming from the township going to a school in the suburb, you don't have much option, but my mother hustled to get me into the school, great, lovely.

Now, on this particular day, eer, now, I get to school in my father's car, my mother drops me off and, sho, ok, my mother drops me off e be a tsamaya, it was like any other normal school day jo, you know, went through the old routine, five past eight skolo sa qala and then, you know, I mean ke skolo jo, so come five past two, or ten past two ba tlo nleta joanong, hao! Ke latiwa ke maolady le mamogolo S'bongile. Mamogolo S'bongile le maolady? What's going on here? But anyway, mamgol S'bongile is my godmother, and this is my mother's closest friend you know, so, ba nleta mo le ka koloi, and ra vaya, but what I hear has been happening while I was in school, yho! It becomes even more hectic, and after so many years this is what I have heard, and I have been told, what happened tsatsi le le. Apparently that morning, when my mother went to go get the car ko le thaima, let me have a cigarette, well when that happens. Uuuhhm, my mother went there a tsamaya le Tebza, well, I'll give a character break down ya Tebza.

Tebza jo, is one person, o e leng sextsharo, a good looking brother, my late uncle was a very good looking brother, man, shit, you know, and I mean ladies loved that man, he was like the most harmless person, the most non violent person you know, but I suppose growing up in the township, you're exposed to violence so much that you become violent without realising that you are violent, hahaha, anyway, aothi e na ke konyana, Tebza is like the guy who jokes a lot. So, my mother gets to the house, at the time I was living with my mother, and by then they had been separated for some time but and it was crunch time now, if I don't get to school early, I get kicked out, so o a kokota o a kokota o a kokota, eyi, ha kokota, my father comes down, this is the house that, everything had sort of broke down to a certain degree, di ntho tse ngata di le di a senyega daar, you know, I mean that was literally the first time I ever heard my mother

scream, I have seen shit like that, that house was cursed but let me not blame the building, hahaha, you know, it's just a cop out thing, you know, it's art love supreme after all. So now, le thaima li le la bula monyako daar, la re, "What you guys doing here, what's up", and my mother tells him, "Maakomele o ba tla koloi, he needs transport to go to school man" and my father is like, "Nah, I can't give you the car". And I think him saying no sort of triggered violence in my uncle, in this sextsharo sweet handsome good looking man, o a e bona ntho eo?

Atmosphere e vetse ya changer completely, and as soon as my father said "No, I can't give you my car to take my own son to school", this guy, this slender looking brother, who was actually not even bigger than my father, pushed down the door, a beya le thaima mo le siting, and my mother walked in, like an enraged bull, she charged in more than walked in. A kena a lata di khiya, this I am told, and I can only imagine how it was because of the tone my mother was telling me in, from what I could hear from her telling me, I could only imagine how she got in to that house, you know, she didn't walk in she charged in, ke le wa bona, like an elephant on heat, like she didn't care, like, "A ke kgathale go tseba now, I am going to get the keys, my son needs to go to school". Err fuck, so my mother gets the keys, and then, she storms out with the car, while my uncle has this man, my father, on lockdown, like "Hei, you not doing anything, you not going nowhere", you know, "we taking your son to school mathafaka what tha fuck!" set-up you know. So ba tswa ka koloi, bbbrrrrrr, ke bale ba tswa, and my mother says she almost hit a car. She was not completely telling me all of this, she was telling mamogolo S'bongile in the car. I am gathering all of this from in the car, from school going back home, you know, so my mind is racing, pacing, and I am putting all this shit together.

Apparently, eerr, before ba nka koloi ko ntlong, my father says to her, "ha o ka nka koloi e na, ke tlo go tshoarisa, I am taking you to the police, man", sho! and I think, that also e le e a qah qah fuse to the fullest in my uncle's head, they stormed out with the car, she almost hit something, came to pick me up, and this I didn't know, and I didn't know any of this my mother being my mother, hahaha, she comes cool calm and collected, and I didn't see nothing of that sort, ha ke re, wow, "so le thaima le go file koloi?" a re "ya" you know, and she is like that, even now she is like that, she won't tell you, go re ya no, there is something wrong at home, blah blah blah. So sho, cigarette. Now, eerr, apparently, actually I am told, not even apparently, I am told, that, ha ntse ke le ko skolong, my father did actually do what he said he was going to do, and called the police and reported the car stolen, my god, "by whom", the police say to him and he says, by his wife, oh my god. "Why?" he doesn't say. You know, he doesn't say why the car was stolen by his wife, so ba tla ko gae ko Zone 6, with my aunts, but I am not sure maara my father's older sister, was the one o a na di gatela ko pele, who was on some "ya vele, you must do this, wara

wara wara wara” bullshit.

She kept going on, a re “tshoanetse le mo tshoare, he he he he” you know, and they were all behind my father, but that was sort of ashamed, was my grandfather, the person I am named after, e a nko tloisa bo tloko taba e, it’s sad. When the police came and took her from home, to the police station, I mean there is a case against my mother for theft, for stealing a car, you know, so ha fetla ko stashining, ba motsa, “go e tsa getseng daar” and she says “no, ke e nkile koloi, from my husband” “why?” “ne ke batla go tsamaisa ngoanaka ko skolong, ngoanaka o so le so le so, o gobetse, o tsamaya ka wheelchair, blah blah blah” at least I would think that’s what she said, you know, and the police were like, “mxha, my sister, eish le authi yakho, i yenza kanjani, yazi le authi yakho, eish” you know, and after I heard that, my love for my name died completely, well from where my name comes from, I have always been my name, but it died completely, but one thing I remember ultimately, I remember today from that day is why I write on a notepad, remembering how it all happened ahh fuck it’s hectic.

So that’s how I start writing on a notepad,
so every time I write, it’s as if I go back there again.

I

Me

**Poet Of The Pavements:
The Autobiography Of M R Manaka**

i was born on a loud stage
looking my father
on Mother's page

named after my grandfather
i came bearing summer
in the heart of winter

later I realized
the cold I was born to

at twelve an old man collapsed my universe
with a wall crushing my back
and only my mind survived

hospital is no joke
the scent of wounded worlds
drenches even the food
the cries of grown men
haunt my childhood bed

it was the playwright
my father's tears
that fragmented my heart

after we laid the last breath
of my legs to rest
time learned to crawl
and memory walked barefoot
on sharp and rugged nails

i was born again
as a dancer
on a quiet stage
moving to the blue rhythm
of my father's death

cut-off from my blood
isolated from broken promises
withdrawn from society's painful stare
the poet in me came of age
on raging pavements

that wrapped its arms
around pieces of my beat

at twenty-one
i birthed pages
filled with the weeps
of a twelve year old man

my tears flew me
to foreign lands
at twenty-two
Where people never say hallo
and cities are riddled
with screaming histories
From way, way down below

made love to the Caribbean sunset
Angelina was my home in Cuba
her beauty was my refuge
with eyes as blue as the Pacific

in Jamaica I was a star
and another Afrikan in Germany

learned to speak Spanish in a day
when Madrid almost swallowed me

passed out backstage
with a blonde Holland between my thighs

i learned how to fly
with the ground as my sky

the hurt that wrote my poems
bought me a car at twenty-five
then my old friend Death
built a house for my uncle
extending rooms the following year
for my young uncle and grandmother

the sun still shined
in the coldest days of my life
Italy embraced my voice
and translated the second book
of my Blues

fell in love with a snake woman
my friends ate into my sorrow
they lived off the sun
from the winter of my garden

i have been broke
my soul broken into
lived amongst hungry wolves
made love to long legged
mini-skirted women of the night
many of whom today star the sky

i am hustling life
for a different reality
because I am not going back
to the hospital of my days
or to the sound of my father's hand
across Mother's face
I am not going back
to the 4 rooms of poverty
nor to the empty winds
of my neighbour's jealousy

i have sinned
killed a smile
speared the laughter
of my first lover
and compromised my dignity
in front of my brother
i am a boy learning to man-up
and keep up
if only father told me
that easy does not come easy

Bedsore

sometimes my legs lie to me
and bottle my smile
i have swallowed my eyes
and died behind the walls
of my laughter

i have listened
to the silence of my shadow
when it was time to stand up
and sheltered blood in my pants

i have walked out on my body
and some day
my body will walk out
on me

Dancing In The Middle

i am more
than the crutches inside my cage
i am the finger of a blind pianist
and the jazz of a deaf guitarist

i am one with my rage
that pain of not reflecting
the conflict between me
and what I have been told to know

i connect with distant planets
deciphering the poetry of reality
aligning my shifting memory
with the sands of insanity

The Silence Of Words

i am sorry Mama
i cannot tell you
what you want to hear

i can see
my fear in your eyes

your tongue like my heart
cannot hold the words

that steal
my breath

i am trying Mama

sometimes I lose myself
to question marks
that ask:
“whose blood will carry this line?”

i am sorry Mama
some words cannot outrun reality
they do not allow us
to exhale
what we want to say

To My Mother's Mother

the sky stretches time
inside the home of innocence
empty plates sing of hungry tongues
still rivers of love run rapid
nightmares from distant relatives
claw their way through the dinner table
with eyes sombre and tepid

inside the 4-room walls
of matchbox dreams
the double bass of conflict
trombones the love between siblings
but your humble smile
brings tears to the eye of our storm

the rhythm section of your laughter
pulls together pieces of our hearts
the price of happiness is painful
yet memory perfumes time
with your music of strength in love
and because of you, I live

The Stove

she is old
rusted
and grey
yet her warmth
brings us closer in winter
her hot voice
fills the kitchen
even the pots
love her touch
i was raised by laughter
taught how to walk
in the yellow shoes
of her radiant smile
after the kitchen floor grew
she was the first to move out
she was old
and charcoaled with humility
now we no longer laugh anymore
and she is a painting
on the walls of my memory

Bara

the Venda vendor
sits in a lotus position
conducting an orchestra
of languished fruits and lonely cigarettes
gyrating ballerinas of cue marshals
command a mob
of metal boxes on wheels
drivers clothed in clouds
of ganja smoke sing:
Mina Ngi ya shunqa, mlungu
the music of hair dryers
with diluted tales
jump out of Pelo's Hair Salon
and dance to the R10 scent
of a slowly cooked skopo
outside the barracks of hospital
decaying medicine
and offbeat hooters
marinate the air
school shoe rhythms
of uniform dreams
stomp the ground
while cockroaches of fat rats
invade the soil
covered in dog and human vomit
closed liquor stores fill
with phuza faces
while I sharpen my voice
to knife my way through

Leano On My Mind

the winter star
of this black morning
burns in flames of a childhood
the ghetto cannot forget

breathless streets
suffocating families
living inside a mine-dump
and drilling their way to sleep

the ghetto knows how to remember
the smiles of little men
whose windows hold dying candles
searching for a hole in the ground

yet when I look at my niece Leano
i know that from an avalanche of rocks
a flower can still blossom
and that summer is only a laughter away

Kele

i want to love you
and flower your heaven with starlit poems

i want to love you like
rain to a thirsty soil
like
music on quiet roads

i want to love you like
humming through purple days
like
a thumping beat to a deaf heart

i want to love you like
Black Like Me
like
the poetry of Vaseline to black hair
like
the green scent of wood to a carpenter's hands

i want to love you

“The Blues Is You In Me”

For Kele

blues me baby
blues me
until I think of the sea
blues me
until the pain on my back
escapes the poet's pen
blues me in the morning
blues me in the evening
when the noonday heat
says goodnight
to lovers on a bus trip

so please my love
do not hurry
to bury me in doing it
don't get me wrong
i love it
though let's first blues
through our own jazz
holding and massaging
each other's tongues
let's dance naked
and let not the rivers
of desire swallow us

so dance me
before you blues baby
dance me out
of this comfortable insanity
let us dance the dust
of our ancestor's bones
into the unwritten pages
of love songs

“Spend The Night With Me”

can we get freaky tonight
song jumps out of her car system
and cuts tension with a feather
she looks at me with her heart
while her eyes watch the road
my eyes cannot look away
from pointy nipples under her top
behind the steering wheel

can we get freaky tonight
the song cries out my lust
she knows I want to
i can see she wants
to lose herself with me
she wets her lower lip
my wood stops breathing

i got so many things on my mind
the song and I are in sync
i look at her with imagination
and wonder how her cake tastes
or how her birthday suit
would feel like on mine
the silence in the car
is uncontrollable

spend the night with me
the song continues
to sound my intentions
home is around the corner
must force life into my tongue
and grab opportunity with both hands
We stop, I rush out to get cigarettes
when I come back
she is on her phone
then asks:
“Mak where can I drop you off”

The North Star

i want to live
not only in your dreams
but to be free
from imagining you and me
in a pair of skinny jeans
so let's kiss
and let Scotty beam us up to paradise

when I look in your eyes
a universe swirls with our planets
but matters of the heart
are politics of a different kind
so let's take that chance
and collect 200 lifetimes
of everlasting love as we pass GO

so my love, let loose
and take off your boots
drink chocolate cocktails
of honesty and truth
as I lay down my past
simply for your trust
let the vessel
that carries waters of life
be the North Star
as we journey deep and far

Lerato's Song

i was in love with you once
days used to smile
nights sang with romantic chuckles

you were warmth to my cold heart
i loved you more than water
our cups filled with each other's lust

remember how we danced the moon away?
just you, me and a dying joint
i thought that you and me
will never fade like that midnight zol

i served you my soul
on a plate with seven colors of Sunday
but I was wrong to feed you my heart

Remember Tembisa

For Charmaine

this morning
i woke up next to a memory
and when I tried to hold you
you did not answer my phone
many leaves have fallen between us
but my tree still searches for your eyes
and the flavor of your laughter

how I wonder
if you still remember
how my mind
would run faster than my feet
and how the sun on your tongue
would always breathe me to my beat

this morning I tried touching your scent
but your face was different
you had the look of an angry flower
and your voice groundless
like loose cement

ngoana oa ko Tembisa, forgive me
for dumping your smile
i am defenseless
to the weapon of time
so I cannot write this rain
without crying
the leaves on my tree
still search for your wind

II

We

Tears In The Rain

Title inspired by the movie *Blade Runner*

when the Rain began
i was the ocean
listening to foreign footprints
marching over leaves
that buried fear
in silent trees

i was the wind
shouting “Izwe Lethu”
to sleeping corpses
dreaming of dying
and waking up to death

i was a woman’s voice
clutching a knife by its teeth
to raise a mountain
inside a shack

i was the cracking sound
of a heart breaking
away from it self
only to try piece itself together

when the Rain began
i was a boy hiding in the wardrobe
praying that men with lifeless weapons
will not come in the house
cut open our love
and parade our innards
around the tip of their pangas
like pieces of jewelry

i was the ceiling
looking at eyes
that had become blind
to the rain

i was my grandmother’s feet
standing in the rain’s heat
searching for alms
inside the ballot
of a broken street

when the Rain began
i was the load-shedding winter
on a blackout table
of a student studying
surrounded by candle lights
trying to escape a closed window

i was the fading echo of freedom
lost in the marshes of democracy
and the blood of 34 miners
rock drilling food
to the flames of
a justice gone bankrupt

i was the closed off palm
of a new face
screaming for acceptance
in the name of "Rainbow"

i was the broken flower
inside a 16 year old girl
housing sperms in her womb
only to be granted a grant
from u thixo
wa se George Goch

Children Born Of Children

Inspired by Ingoapele Madingoane's Africa My Beginning, and Khumbula My Child

from the new sound
of an old breath
we learned how to sing
inside the spear
of a foreign tongue

surrounded by silver faces
and the loud smoke
of coal trains
our songs silenced time
from the palm
of a mine dump

we learned how to love
within the walls of our ocean
and raised midnights
to reasonable mornings
hoping the river
will remember our poems

we wrote our names with water
when our hands could no longer
carry the resistance in our stones

and somewhere in our rocks
platinum smiles
dressed in seven hundred years
defaced our soil
and emptied our culture

the sun lost its ambiance
and our skin became
the pale darkness
we don't dance
we drive now
we don't walk
we always on the run
we don't sing
we get high now

time is the loud music
of death on weekends
for every birth

there is blood spilled
and buried in yesterday's bottle

the profitless soil
keeps vomiting graveyards
high-schools are bank accounts
for month end withdrawals
children born of children
raised by bitter willows
and weeping windows

“o a nyela!”

is the child's first word
and at first it was cute
but it was the sound of a knife

the cute knife
cuts a canyon
across the grandmother's chest
and leaves a scar
felt by the next generation

father-bribe-a-man
walks the scriptures
collecting virginity
in the name of “Amen”

this time is too loud
for me to listen any more
how long should tears
sit on the mattress
and mourn their children?

children born of children
oh these children!
children raised to die as children

only the leaves pray
for us to remember our roots
Khumbula my child!
they shout inside the spear
of a foreign page
Khumbula my child

The Sky And The City

the tall sky
walks past short buildings
listening to rooms filled
with weeping hands
festivals of languages
dance all day and night
rivers of train tracks
run beneath a bridge
that cannot bridge
the voice of water
to thirsty leaves
aging bottles
of slender figures
sell dry orgasms
to wet poles

the sky looks on
from the city
that breathes
inside of a shoe
and knows
how the streets feel

the sky walks on
with a grey eye
and looks
at the oncoming traffic
of penis enlargement posters
blue bodies
of steel dragons
raid silhouettes
of fingers trading heights
concrete playgrounds
house brown songs
that are yet to grow
and live in this sound

9 To 5

the sun whispers its way
through the dark sky

the winter wind screams
past a thick layer of laughter
and cuts into the skin
of homeless dreams

migrant bees with polished blues
shuffle through the bitter-sweet taste
of Sunday news

wingless birds
sing to the bass line of time
running on borrowed wheels
traffic is life
at this corner of sunrise

the last sounds of fading stars
flicker in the distance
calling the vagabond moon
back home

the blue sun rings
through the silence
while the soil
bellows cold cries
of walking tombstones
setting off to work

Gae Ga Gesho

two leave and only one returns
the scent of home departs
carrying the bassline of childhood
i feel like a displaced leaf here
i am far from her womb
home is the 11 blue notes of *Hungry Flames*
and the busy sounds of Bara

the air is different here
the land feels offbeat
and time has a rhythm of its own
history is trapped in the stones
and not in the Mfengo tongue
the settlers settled even in the soil

feels as though I am very far from home
yet across the misty hills
i hear my grandmother whispering
“Tsamaya o lo batla bophelo ngoanaka”

Black Day

For Dambudzo

look how normal the shores
have become on your tongue
while a wave of black birds
swim across a closing sky
hoping the *black sunlight*
will expose their wounds

At The Foot Of Uhuru

beneath the wails
of a silent history
memory is an old lady
scorched by dry pensions
home has become a cold paper
where mother tongues are raised to die
dreams struggle to grow
and poverty refuses to move out
the truth of my skin lives in the stones
and only the soil will remember my feet

The Republic

yellow clouds of grey tombs
summon tears from the weary sky
and bury muffled voices
in a graveyard of bloody roses
reverberating the dying of a child's light

yellow clouds of grey tombs
cry the stench of decomposing dreams
stones weep for bleeding feet
mothers feed with smiles
that have learned how to die

the scattered poems
of yesterday's children
forgot how to sing
clothed in silicon words
and fat bellies of punctured memories

beneath these grey tombs
clouds of amputated hopes
thirst for yellow waters

House Music

do homeless people listen to house music?
or do they dance to whatever sound that's leftover
like a maimed cheetah
that still dreams of running
oh City of wretched shells
modimo ke paki
le mini i yeza na kuwe
so give a little
take a little
but please don't belittle
because we are all food
in the eyes of that cunning snake

we are street children with homeless dreams
because we love to dress our images
in false impressions
and dance to music
that won't even house the poor's blues
see how the struggle continues
beneath dingy, dark
and dry highways
where torn hearts
write sad musicals of poverty

If I Could Sing

For ntateHugh

write me a song
about the elusive music
of a woman's thong
write me a song
about the hard music
of a single parent's spinal fluid
write me a song
about the blind poet
who recites music in words
write me a song
about the bump and grind
of a musician's plight
write me a song
about a ghetto ballerina
who can see the song
and hear the dance
write about the notes
of dead flutes
and the unfair dirt
on our soldiers' boots
write me a song
about the haunting cries
of a Griqua's declining smile
write me a symphony
about the soil's history
write me a song
about a father's worn out shoes
and a mother's unfruitful womb
but before you write me out
of this chord progression
teach me how to write your sing

Letter To My Person

peri peri face
atchar monate body
slenda sa ma khathalog
taxi to my Bara
you my Zola Budd
i love you with all
my heart and wind
my morning gwinya and special
the chicken in my dumpling
you and me Streetwise Two forever
why you throw me away, but?
i still chakalaka for you
you are the Kaizer Chiefs of my eye
my Phefeni glamor girl
my finger lickin' bone of Kentucky

Death Of Reason

“Take her out of the house”/ “mme o, wa loya”/ “Akana nhliziyo”/ “khiphani lo mgogo”/ “re gathetse ke yena, go neng”/ “Yaa!”/ “just burn the house down” / “e Siphho! kick her on the head” / “u yenzeni lo mama?”/ “who do you think was responsible for Dijo’s death last week” / “tshisa daar ding maan”/ “wooo! modemo wa maIsrael,” / “bring her out here Thami” / “mercy batho bamodemo, mercy”/ “hau morena” / “nxese, nxese” / “that’s enough maAfrika, we cannot continue like this” / “tsa maya o lo joetsa magoa matlakala ao, voetsek” / “khabani le nja” / “woo shem, na nka mo dira Siphho” / “hahaha, how could you talk about that now maar le wena Nthabiseng” / “just look at him, o fit maan” / “hlehla, hlehla sisi” / “maponisa a fetlhile mama” / “I think it’s a good thing my boy” / “tjho tjho tjhooo!” / “eish, bo fadere are here now, le nna ne ke batla go latlhela sengwe nyana, mmereko o ntene” / “no no no! ntate le ponisa, leave those boys alone, a se bona” / “tyhini! kutheni polis maan? u fika a pha ngo ku geza, thixo” / “dude, lets just go get some weed ko renkeng, I’ve got that new Redman joint” / “bo gata ba na ba beda” / “voetsek ngabo!” / “maAfrika, maAfrika thowusang moya” / “do that at your house, lets get the weed bra” / “no no no, bantu be nkosi nxese kodwa, a si zwaneni la bo baba ba yenza u msebe...” / “tsamaya o lo djoetsa president masepa ao” / “Mama ke tswere ke tlala” / “ok nana, lets go, there is nothing those police men can do now for that poor old lady, a re ye”

My Darling Thabo

take me back
take me to the sound of my skin
i am losing the scent of home

take my eyes away from this room
breathe me out of this suffering
take me to the memory
of my grandmother's hands
i want to bathe in her voice
and remember how to smile

i came to this city
looking for life
and all I found
was the end to many lines
i am not another Sophie-come-to-Jozi story

i love the way your eyes forget this place
when you look at me
Thabo, lets run away
away from the running

Song For The Time

i know why you cannot sleep
you lay awake
watching your plans
wrestle the ceiling
and listen to the night
breathing heavy on your feet

i have heard you ask for directions
from a yellow razor

i know you pray to exit
wounds that breed self hatred

but, I pray for you to listen
and free your laughter
from the cold whisper
of open veins
that steal your doors

i pray for you to exist
in the quiet sound
of the many rivers
inside your smile

Poetry Performs Itself

how do I speak
when your voice
does not know my face?

how do I write my name
when your page
cannot hold my rhythm?

on stage
i'm naked with the word
inside my cage

i am a score
reciting speaking ears
to the written sound

the notes on my tongue
write the face
that know my music

The Nihilismus Of A Black Dada (duck)

he tries to talk
but his words
do not know him
his words do not exist
but he exists in those words
this dada makes no sense
he tries to move
but his mind cannot walk
his feet are not fast enough
to outrun the madness
in his words
he loathes the skin
he is wearing
his words lost their voice
in the kwaito of hunger
the hunger for acceptance
but never for self
he runs and rants
with holes on his tongue
and plastic hands too weak
to carry the cries of his heritage
nihil is his mind
he doesn't trust his mother's songs
songs that tongue
the breath of memory
dada!
stop confusing blackness with poverty
black, "you are on your own"
but never alone
before sound gave birth to time
we ate mala mogodu
from the calabash of nature
black is not the color of your skin
black is the sky after the sun sleeps
the music that swallows darkness
your mother's breath of love

Unstoppable Winds

we, the broken teardrops
of a molested rain
silence angry clouds
and oppose closed roads
that claim to know our blues

we, the quiet death of smiles
when the laughter is dry
dance in blood stained tongues
that fight acidic songs
of a leaking democracy

you, the limping word
that cannot outrun change
live inside the tombstone
of a decapitated system

you, the rotting teeth of lies
will no longer hide the truth
from our sky anymore

III

Silence

Oncoming Traffic

as the grey sun
lays its light to rest
lonely leaves
hustle food to breathe
spaza shops are riddled
with bullet holes
empty fields burn
from the wind of grief
homes are turned
into liquor stores
behind church walls

mothers pray
to a defunct sky
in search of a god
despair holds a candle light
in a spineless room
while children are buried beneath
brown beds of homemade porn

i listen to the oncoming traffic
the autumn dust of depression
giant stadiums of funerals
after-tears of dying years
graveyards filled
with songs unsung
my neighbour's bitter smile
of desperation
the deafening stench
of teenage pregnancy

the oncoming traffic
keeps coming
over a woman's
silent yell for help
street bashes of AIDS
yet nobody wants to dance
a gunman's open skull
in front of his mother's house

my uncle's explosive drinking
trying to hide the silence
in his maroon pockets
my grandmother's quiet anger

the relative who always
expects a hand out
but never hands out anything
the hungry spoiled child
who is never full

home is
the oncoming traffic
the breaking of a heart
the sound of cold seasons
oozing out of Christmas dinners
the hopeless gaze of carrying on

Freedom

the spring of my winter
sunshines its way
through a thick blue forest
undressing the noise of my shadow
and reciting a breath of fresh light
to eyes that were once blinded by the cold

Self-Portrait

i am a horse with a human face
that cannot look past its legs
i drink happiness with a mourning cup
the bronzed moon knows the corpses
that write my poems
my soul lives in a township
of dead bones
yet still my palms itch

The Silence

my wings sing of cages
of spaces imprisoned by darkness
the darkness that gnaws through silence
a silence that knows my plight well
at the new sound of sunlight
i will have to swallow
the music of death
once more

Dispossessed By The Dispossessed

somewhere in the distance
i hear the warbling
of voices swallowed by stones
that stoned the language of the land
memory is lost in the booze of independence
remote controlled darkness
moves random at home
wallets shed a different load
roads are built to imprison time
children of the soil
dress in tears of rape
tears that dry their sweat
lovers plus pierced holes
tonight love sleeps alone
on a bed of domestic violence
covered in divorce papers
who will shelter my heart
from this babalaz'd weather?

Poem For Tomorrow

blood of my blood
soil of my skin, skin of the soil
have you forgotten me?

the music of cheerful flowers
that once springed from your tongue
escapes the breath of an expiring pulse

this I know for certain
death will mug my tongue
and camouflage my skin with the soil
because now is not forever
but tomorrow's forever is now

Segametsi

look at my face

 i am me

look at my hair

 i am love

look at my hands

 i am life

listen to my body

 i am language

look at my feet

 i am separation

look into my skin

 i am pain

Before I die

sky of many words
teach me how to listen
to a poem written by the sea
i want to learn the ways of water
and return the page to my tree

teach my ears how to swim
through stale rivers
that fail to recite the scent
of the ocean's fresh air

sky of my grandmother's song
teach my voice how to hold
the storm in your dance
so I can read my way out of
this avalanche of ignorance

teach my stomach
how to be resilient
against the hunger
that swallows my patience
urging my pen
to follow mediocrity

mother of many skies
teach my eyes how to listen
because *I doubt we can improve*
Upon your blank page

teach me how to write the rain
on dry palms of your sea
because there are no more words
to hide my violent emptiness

Earth, Wind And Hunger

there are winds
the moon does not want to tell
winds of violet storms
of a hungry breeze from an empty ocean
of thirsty rivers caressed by a purple sun

there are songs
the moon cannot dance to
sounds of vacant clouds
bellowing cries of black flames
at war with starving mountains

sunburned trees mourn their leaves
and the voice of earth is lost to angry stones

there are winds
the moon does not want to remember

Open Wound

i am a mountain
dreaming of touching
your summit
the summer scent
of your smile
has become a perfume
in my house of memory

the way your eyes
look at the unlookable
those eyes
have seen more
than what they should have
yet when your eyes
kissed my face
my body would forget pain

i am a tree
missing your touch
of spring on my tongue
a wailing mountain
waiting
to embrace you once more

how come these roads
do not lead you
to my lonely hands
but always take you
to my page instead