

I Have Gone Away Many Times

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by

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Abstract

I search for beauty and for myself amidst the debris and ruin and violence, so my poems are mainly grounded narratives that combine the lyrical and the political, celebration and lament. They reconnect with nature, the now ravaged landscapes that gave me my first impulse to make songs, poetry, and art. My poems also draw on my Xitsonga culture – its folklore, proverbs, idioms, parables, and clan praise songs. Stylistically I am influenced by Mahmoud Darwish's and Garcia Lorca's musical structures, while Aimé Césaire has shown me how to write a long poem in both abstract and concrete registers, and Yehuda Amichai how to write with a questioning style, dislodging accepted dogma. Local influences are Mzi Mahola and James Magaisa, with their critique and celebration of culture. I pick up fragments elsewhere, as I go.

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I

We Have Come

We have traversed deserts and forests journeying
Following the echo of distant ululations
They said there is dance and song at Mtilenis
Who said distant streams cannot quench my thirst
We the Ngovenis have arrived with tins of snuif,
The old man's jacket, and the old woman's blanket, and a bottle of brandy

<i>Hi mabarhule, makula-nkondo</i>	we of the big foot
<i>Hi masiya-yi-govile yi govela vurhena</i>	we are the valiant ones you leave camping
<i>Hi mafamba-hi-ndzhandzha- wakwe</i>	we are one who walk on his side of the riverbank

We were blinded by a flower Tintswalo in your fields	
<i>N'wina va ka Dzumba wa Mthunzi</i>	you of the shadows and of rest
<i>N'wina va ka Ntila a wu landziwi</i>	you of the path that is not followed

We have come to ask for water
We have come to ask for one who will set the fires in our hearth
We have come, we the valiant ones, we of the big foot, we have come
To you of the shadows and of rest, and of paths that can't be followed
May we have the flower in your fields

Laniwani

Huddled into a police van few hours before, for skinning *nkwahle* – a delicate meal – the land iguana that loves rocks. Murder it is, inciting extinction.

But Laniwani asked, bending backwards as if staring at the courtroom roof, where was the *nkwahle* family - the complainants in the case - the mother or the uncle or the aunt at least.

When no one could point at a *nkwahle* in the courtroom, and someone said “the State” but could not point at anything; Laniwani stepped down demanding to be unchained. The *nkwahle* family had no quarrel with his meal. And the magistrate smiled, ordered him uncuffed.

eskom na gezi - eskom and power

when two men from eskom arrived
with the prepaid meter box for installation
two years after the first general elections
they found mxengu snoring the afternoon
away in a donga
in the middle of an empty yard
with aloe sprouting into
a dense bush on its margins
after a night of *mqombhoti* and chant

when two men from eskom arrived
with the prepaid meter box
to connect mxengu to the grid
borrow him some light
he cursed waking up daring them to a fight
and when they asked where the box should go
since there were no walls
he pointed to a pole among those
surrounding the donga
and when they spoke of rains
and the danger of electric boxes in the open
he said to them cursing
borha mhandi, loko u nga swi lavi tshika
chisel a hole on the pole, if you don't want to, leave

Memory of a Midnight Walk

we were adventurous teens
wandering in the wild
on our way home one night
from xihosana village around 12.50 a.m.
to nkuri-tomu some kilometres away
through a narrow path snaking through grass
when suddenly a rolling flame
exploded violently ahead of us
we heard giant footsteps behind the flame
and a hoarse voice that thundered through the dark
always last in every school race
i was first that night
sprinting through the grass
ahead of the rest

they say on that path
next to the cemetery
on midnights like this
the dead arise
to slap passersby
disrupting their sleep

Nkuri

we loved you once
before we staggered on dead bodies
with gaping wounds littering your bushes
where we were children once
chasing *nthagavele* and *n'warhida* the locusts

before we stumbled upon that girl
with hollowed eyes and mutilated genitals
staring from a cave
under that fig tree
where we picked *makuwa* on our way
to john mbedlhe high school
two rivers from home

before the suffocating stench
led us to thabelo and lufuno
rotting on the banks of nsami
whose waters we drank to dull the sting of heat
as cattle grazed the day away in the distance

we loved you once
before old man mavhavaza whipped and cursed his wife
as donkeys pulled her like a cart across your gravel roads
the cheating wife who gave him many children
now men and women
carrying his name into posterity

we loved you once
they say there are ghosts who still hitch hike
short skirts, high heels, handbags
at the foot of xidzahisi hill
and motorists waking up ashy white
in cemeteries the morning after

we loved you once
picking wood in your now dry forests
the riversand we once walked on
is for sale now
rains die in the clouds
for fear of licking your wounds

listen to *duwetse* and *tselenga*
as the initiates sing the winters away
graduate as men to cultivate hope
in your hollowed eyes

Naskanani

Naskanani, ku vula mukhalabye
Wa nga naskanana naskanani
Ahenhla ka naskanani
U yi naskanana haleno
Ni ta naskanana naskanani
Hatlisa mani, demmet
Va langutana

Naskanani, says the old man
Please *naskanana naskanani*
On top of *naskanani*
And *naskanana* it here
So I *naskanana naskanani*
Hurry man', dammit
They looked at each other

Kambe i mani naskanani

But who is *naskanani*

naskanani
means everything and nothing at the same time,
it is a placeholder.
It is both a verb and a noun,
and none of the above.

burning witches

October 1993, Nkuri-Tomu Village

screams transported in smoke to places far
the shade is calm under the *ntoma* tree
buried in the blanket of a descending sunset
next to the soccer field where the comrades meet this sunday
to take stock of the numbers eliminated
of witches that haunt the nights of this village
fires on tyre hanging on their necks
the last necklace they will ever wear
a ticket to their last breath
aluta continua victory is certain

when the singing subsides a new list is drawn
comrade mavaya raises his hand pacing to the front
'watch out for madala khosa', he starts in a stutter
when the crowds descend into silence he talks of khosa's dog
that wandered into mthunzi's yard the night before
a fit bulldog that collapsed and died
the moment mthunzi shouted 'voetsek'
but chairman checkers interjected
'*maar entlek*, who is dangerous here?
khosa who sends a dog,
or mthunzi who kills the dog
by shouting 'voetsek''
comrade mavaya stutters
into silence

the river is thirsty

its back bent and burning
no fish or frog in its belly
only a dusty silence
suffocating its cough

the land is dry

the rains are gone
cattle used to graze here
on these once lush grasslands
on the banks of nsami
before they surrendered
to the sting of heat
river nsami dry

fields stare
with hollowed eyes
they can't feed
they need feeding
there can't be ploughing there
this moon at least
no watermelon or corn

the velds are bare
the hare has left
the cattle are bones

somewhere
in some place
kyoto, rio, joburg
a puzzle is being knitted together
of how it came to be
that the rains have cursed the land

the hands of a man

*In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread,
till you return to the ground*

Genesis 3 v 19, The Holy Bible

you count stars
alone in the night
discern codes
on the face of the comet
the trail of the morning star
because your belly grumbles

in your kraal
the honeybird cries
those with bellies bulging
offer kind advice
grass grows not
on a man's hands

Avuxeni a va dyi - Greetings are not for sale

the lessons of life are simple my son, grandfather told me
do not walk the streets of this village as if you were blind
listen to the voices that populate its suns and its moons
we do not have much but the land is kind
receive every soul that crosses your path
the lessons of life are simple my son:
avuxeni a va dyi

<i>avuxeni kokwana n'wamarilele</i>	good morning grandma n'wamarilele
<i>vutomi byi kwihi ntombhi ya vaxadzi</i>	where is life daughter of vaxadzi
she raises her head with a smile to respond:	
<i>khohlokhohlo hi famba na yena n'wananga</i>	we walk with the colds my child
<i>ho vona rona dyambu</i>	we see the sun
burning ants gathering food	
for tomorrow and the day after	
she walks slowly away on her stick	
carrying the drought of seasons	
on her bent back	
drought that erodes the soils of the heart	
soils that yielded plenty yesterday	

<i>inhlekani ncila</i>	afternoon you of a tail
<i>a va ololi</i>	that can't be straightened
<i>mi kwihi</i>	where are you
with a crackling voice and a smile he responds:	
<i>hi vatomi ntukulu</i>	we are of life grandson
<i>ho vona mapapa</i>	we see the clouds
that rot in the sky	
and not burst into drops of nourishing rains	
he walks away to look for the one stray cow	
fallen by the river and spotted by neighbours	
one of the last to leave his kraal	
which stands deserted at the back of his hut	
his head a bald middle of greying surrounds	
he has been to the place where north and west meet	
and has heard the rumbles of a troubled south	

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the lessons of life are simple my son:
avuxeni a va dyi

grandfather is gone but the lesson remains:
even when the herds are consumed by the veld
avuxeni a va dyi
even when droughts weigh heavily on our souls
avuxeni a va dyi

on empty stomachs of dry fields

hi le ka mzamani

avuxeni, inhlekani, riperile

and hope for tomorrows kinder than droughts

it is the place of one who tries
morning, afternoon, evening

flickering flames

flames eat away at the creeping dark
as smoke carries the smell of frying corn into the night
firewood yielding to the licking tongue of flames
'and so the rabbit ran away from the lion's mane', *kokwana* says
how stupid can the rabbit be we ponder to ourselves
but she interjects with a smile as she turns the corn quizzing
'the legs of a millipede are anchored on a hundred rings'
those that rule are rulers because of the ruled
we say together for the lone hunter brings no meat home

the dark eats away at the creeping flames
somewhere faraway the owl is hooting
only shadows visible across the flames and *kokwana's* voice singing
'*n'wangwenya madziva mukon'wana* crocodile of waters in-law
n'wangwenya madziva mukon'wana crocodile of waters in-law
a wu ndzi nyiki xa ku vengwa why not give me that which is hated
xi nga vengwa hi manyike hated by manyike
a ku vana a nga va lavi saying he does not want children
u lava wo makondlo but wants rats
swi nga swilo swa mincila which are things of tails
xi ri xa vengwa' it says it is hated
the girl brought up by a crocodile in the cave
under a fig tree daughter of manyike
the greedy man whose wives bore rats he ate and children he killed
the bloody man who butchered children opting for delicacies
the man who laid a green carpet and slaughtered a cow for the girl brought up by a
crocodile
'*xi ri xa vengwa'* it says it is hated

kokwana's flame has been flickering too long
but refuses to die many times as darkness creeps in
my sister grabs my corn and ploughs away a few rows with her teeth
reminds me as i lament: '*ndzi ku bulela ndlela yo ya ka vakokwani'*
(am paving for you the road to grandpa's homestead)

kokwana smiles and asks if we knew of the clan names of the vatsonga
about *va ka masiya-yi-govile yi govela vurhena* the valiant ones you leave camping
vanyamatsi, na van'wanati the nyamatsi, and the n'wanati
magigwana jambane magigwana jambane
xa mavone khoseni of mavone at khoseni
vakhandziyi va makhukhuri va ku i swikepe riders of stormy tides
nhlave na nhlengweni nhlave and nhlengweni
misava ya vakokwana lands of our of forefathers

but she interjects with a smile as she turns the corn quizzing

'who is the lone traveller that wanders the night'
the moon we say together for one finger can't crush a louse
the moon we say together hoping for another story
but the night is old and tomorrow another day of harvest
and so *kokwana* stands slowly on her stick and starts to walk
before turning to caution:

Xitsonga a hi xintsongo loko hi tsongola eka xona swo tsokombela

(Xitsonga is not small when we pick from it things delicious)

Xitsonga a hi xintsongo tanihi ntsonga lowu rhurheleke vutsonga

(Xitsonga is not small as a granary housing vutsonga)

Proverbs

the sun rises twice
first from the hills
then from the heart

*

we walk into light
without memories of our dreams
dreams walk into night
without memories of us

*

bright moon hanging
on tree branches
the stalks are green
the harvest is near

*

the shepherd cracks the whip
to incite fear
the fear of the flock
is the power of the shepherd

*

power is a tail
of a caught water-rat
a tail held useless
in the hands of the hunter

*

the hawk that snatches chicks
does not turn the chicken run
into its home. nor does it know
the ways and habits of chickens

*

the track of an eagle
footprints in the water
cannot be followed
even under the brightest of moons

*

many cross the ocean unharmed
but one will not escape the sharp teeth
of a shark that will never know

the one cut by it

*

howls shatter
the innocence of night
but how does a dog bark
with teeth sunk into a bone

*

the iguana has two tongues
and eyes that can only be seen
by the one skinning it
remember this, upon catching a thief

*

deserts, plains
stretches of sand
time is a traveler
history a storyteller

*

love for its part
mourns for itself
for those sacrificed in its name
and for those who sacrifice love

*

whirlwinds
hurricanes and floods
storms and waves
shadows of wrath

*

death is in the foot
we step with it
our graves everywhere
where our shadows walk

*

we will hold on to the sun
before it shatters
what we once were
and never can be again

Ti hahile

Ti hahile
Tinyenyana ti nyenyana na tiko ro kwalala
Tinyenyana ti nyenyana na ku xika ka xixika

Ti hahile
Ku ya hlota risana rin'wana kun'wana
Risana na vululwana lebyi rhapaka tinyoxi

Ti hahile
Ti siya xivundza exivundzeni
Ti tsemile mpfhuka hi mpfhuka

Ti hahile
Ku ya tumbeta miloti ya tona
Exisakeni xa mihlovo ya vutomi

Ti hahile
Ti hambana ni mihahamo ya swicele
Ti hambana ni swihanano swa nsele
wa tiko leri

They have flown away

They have flown away
Birds despise dry lands
Birds despise the landing of colds

They have flown away
To hunt for sunrise somewhere
Sunrises and flowers that harvest bees

They have flown away
Leaving loneliness lonely
Traversing skies

They have flown away
To bury their songs
In the nest of the varied colours of life

They have flown away
Away from hallucinations and nightmares
Away from the kind offerings of the brutality
of this land

II

Rockey Street, Yeoville

23 May 2010

the uniforms raided our street one afternoon
wrestled sweets bananas and peanuts that lined the pavement
kicking tins of *mbawula*¹ roasting corn and frying peanuts
battered and chained whoever lifted a finger in defiance
the litter that polluted our streets should be cleared, we were told
it was at the hour when the sun turns red in the sky

¹ brazier

Corner Bree

flocking in still
several exits and entrances
cnr bree and ntemi piliso
every day end we queue here
12 13 protea glen
i enquire on my way
to avoid a wrong queue
marshall points as he counts
1 2 3 4 to the red inyathi
behind the white siyaya
in front of the white iveco
ak' sheshwe he shouts
turning to the next person
enquiring about a taxi to zola
rapera
greetings on a phone to harare
amagugu alelizwe ayosala...
magogo sings, eyes closed,
a young girl holding her hand
bowl in hand, cents clanking
no notes in sight
flocking in still
the queues zigzag
taxis hoot
for space to enter
for space to exit
voetsek wena
someone is swearing
we shuffle
every day end we queue here
rapera

Gomorrah, beautiful city

thousands touch the ashes of your ruins
learn to run naked on the endless streets of cities

devoured by brimstones and fires
tormented heavens flooding
godly commands for another cleansing
in a coup d'état calling for a void
not even grass allowed on vacated grounds
only offshoots of sin sprouting from the ruins

your death in the exploding flames a testimony
of the fate that befalls cities of beauty
an adulterated home of abandoned loves
of infinite pleasures hatching seeds of sin
downstream river jordan city of plains

Kwandonga ziyaduma – Place of rumbling walls
(fragments- of paths and memories)

rumbling walls

they rumble no more, these walls
rumours of gold, ghosts of *magayisa*
and meat that never finishes
they rumble no more, these walls

freedom

those that flocked to the city
when the fields were castrated

wrestled and slaughtered
that beast called ‘influx control’
declared everywhere home

the red ants

the court said the building
was too old to carry our bodies
unfit for our breaths
red ants confiscated
mattresses pots
broken stoves
threw them ten floors
down onto the streets

children screaming
the old the sick
no time for goodbyes
amidst the wrestling

the red ants are not ants
they are human beings reduced
to machines that bulldoze
those whose plight they share
for a meal

out of buildings too old
to carry our bodies
lumping us with pots
broken people broken stoves
the cold thickness of winter

robots

red eyes
frowzy hair
dry lips
a black rubbish bag at hand
a small cardboard piece
against his chest
bold black letters:
i keep this corner spot free
pointing at the letters and the bag
approaches a black sedan
whose driver winds up the window
and looks away

night, orlando east

when the raindrops
spattering against sheets of zinc
eat away at the soil below the wood
foundation to the *mukhukhu*
dig a donga into its inside
sinking the mattress and blankets
rousing the one negotiating sleep
a man needs a spade
to fight the torrent

via village road

charcoal blackened
next to the M2 highway
barefoot on the grass
barefoot on broken glass
he pauses to urinate
spits before moving on
utterly naked

through the windows
in a taxi to work
some look at his face
others at his penis
others his dreadlocks
drifting in the cold winds

night, tshiawelo

through the subsiding flame
of a paraffin lamp
full blast music
at the main house
a shebeen
and a couple having sex
at the corner outside your door
it makes sense to read
zoning schemes &
township ordinances
the *communist manifesto*
and steven bantu biko

taxi rank

jesus crisscrossed
winding queues
at a packed bree taxi rank
among fatigued workers
animated students
and ghostly wanderers
destined for zola
mapetla, tshiawelo
he spoke of the splendor of heaven
the glory of the kingdom
blessed are the poor in spirit
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
through the lips of beggars
singing in voices
deeper than the souls of angels
as we waited
for a taxi home

III

People's General Council

December 2010

9.30 am sharp
we meet at the square
sammy marks
whoever that is
in capital city pretoria

passbooks are passports for entry
delegates only in the conference room
howling will not be permitted
minister of security will see to that
the centre will hold to have the final say
on all pending matters of dispute
it will count delegates one more time
nominations shall be by show of hands
remember the hand that feeds you
names below the threshold will fall away

only leadership speaks
no questions asked
the medium-term vision must be on course
in defence of the revolution
bouncers will be on standby
transgressions will not be tolerated
red is the colour of our flag
waved in the streets
and in bourgeois parliaments

this is the people's council
democratic centralism shall prevail
in praise of communism
socialism is hereby deferred
indefinitely into the future

since it was my only business there
i walked out
before the expulsion axe was lifted

into the wilderness

a nation becoming

we slaughtered a buffalo for a braai
after eugene and his horses left the trade centre
beard, short khakhis and a long gun at hand
under curious trees inaugurating future bosberaads
khakhi shorts and talk of volkstad and gunshots departing

*did you tell her mother and father and the gods
that their daughter has died in faraway lands
with none her own but wandering spirits like her own*

a beautiful bird quizzed us
whether toppling bloodthirsty clowns amounted to a revolution
enough to undress soldiers and dissolve an army
bury angola guerilla tactics, cuban aid and soviet training
worthy of the majestic animal we butchered for a braai
or drowning in liquor toasting to a rainbow future

*did you tell her father and mother and the gods
that their daughter has died in faraway lands
with none her own but her own spirit wandering*

mines or banks or farms were deleted from the agenda
only parliaments and city halls and embassies were tabled
for discussion
and private rights cemented in a fragile covenant
in whose wounded womb crawled a new nation

*did you tell the gods and her father and mother
that their daughter has died in faraway lands
with none her own and no flowers laid to mark her grave*

the chief of nkatha, *mtwana ka phindanghene*
as if to curse tomorrow, almost walked away
until a solid promise was extracted from the negotiators
that homelands would be renamed provinces
and prime ministers converted to premiers
inaugurated every five years after a ballot
leaving intact the designs of architect verwoed
savages lumped variously according to tribe

*did you tell her father and the gods and her mother
that their daughter has died in faraway lands
with none her own but the tormenting sounds of unceasing gunshots*

every other bleeding memory shall be deferred to a commission
whose chair is to be an amusing emeritus bishop
to dull the sting of grueling confessions
we shall call it truth and reconciliation
following a chorus of rigged testimonies and half-truths and streaming tears
we buried atrocity in pardons and dragged reparations
and those lost in the jungles of exile were never fetched

*did you tell her mother and father and the gods
that their daughter has died in faraway lands
with none her own but tormenting fractures of freedom longing*

future bosberaads, curious trees,
departing gunshops, boipatong
someone asked of the freedom charter,
and its place on the walls of the union buildings
they were warned of the omnipotence and might of the markets
and how those that owned the wealth that fed me and you
would skip the border to protect their interests
so quietly a resolution was mumbled
bury the freedom charter on a tomb
locate it in a small tower in the middle of kliptown
organise a glamorous state funeral
let poet president thabo mbeki render the oration
and the square is to be duly dedicated
to that silent old sage walter sisulu

*did you ask of her mother and father and the gods
that they please welcome this their daughter
give her a place to rest in this her plundered home
for she is a spear, fallen in combat*

ingwenyama ise khaya

the lion is now home

*A funeral song – in memory of mgcineni 'mambush' noki
(found poem)*

how do we find peace
thwalikhulu, mqanduli
atop your rolling mountains
covered in green shrubbery
when gunshots are fired in the air
and sad songs come pouring
out of grieving souls

crestfallen women, a widow, a coffin
a bullet-riddled body
men huddled into squatting position
softly clapping their hands
ingwenyama ise khaya
ingwenyama ise khaya

the lion is now home
the lion is now home

how do we find peace
when the police have killed mambush
his body among a group
that lay scattered around a kraal
in nkaneng at wonderkop
when gunshots fell silent

pangas, knobkerries, swords
droning, mumbling
and exclamations of shock
chilling details
miners mowed down by the police
ingwenyama ise khaya
ingwenyama ise khaya

the lion is now home
the lion is now home

how do we find peace
amid reports and statements
noki was knocked down by a police nyala
and pictures showing him
lying face down and motionless after the shooting

a bullet-riddled body
a number, a government mortuary
a coffin lowered into the grave
and sad songs pouring out of grieving souls
ingwenyama ise khaya
ingwenyama ise khaya

the lion is now home
the lion is now home

emidio the young

(for emidio mido macia)

emidio the strong was not strong enough
for the police mob that wrestled him
out of his taxi to the back of the police van
where he was tied and dragged
legs against tar
through the streets of daveyton
deep cuts on arms
bruised testicles
and water on the brain
emidio the taxi driver
died in a police cell

nhamuave

(for ernesto alfabeto nhamuave)

to contemplate flames and sweltering flesh and clothes
screams echoing into the depths of an empty rainbow

to contemplate the smoke of hate forming a cloud
above decomposing zinc at ramaphosa
and ashes that travelled in a lorry on a sand road to vuca
to a reed hut of tin roof and earth floor

to contemplate machetes and iron bars pounding on flesh
shouts of 'the dog is dead' before petrol and the match is lit
screams of a burning man on his knees praying for help

is to stare into the forehead of a beast that bellows death
to harvest the sweltering wounds of freedom

winding roads and railway lines and dense forests
still lead eduardo and armando and ernesto to these lights
that blinded their grandfathers four moons ago

Death of a Song

September 2011, Johannesburg

dubul'ibhunu will be banned
judge colin lamont
must have surmised to himself
the young can dance still
to the heightened rhythms
of *mlilo* and *mnike*
hlokoloza and *boso ke mang*
relish their youth
without dreary reminders
of where this country came from

The Spring Rains

Gukurahundi: the drought that paints all seasons red
Herbert Chitepo, child of Watsomba
Do you find peace still in the quiet of your grave
Amidst the wails and ails of mother Zimbabwe
As she dances violently on the burning coals of lost dreams
Groans are a contained composition of imposed pain

Gukurahundi: the drizzling early rains of shame
Chaff cannot wash away chaff
The spring rains have long died in the clouds
You have killed the corn and nurtured the weeds
Tsholotsho clothed in the stench of dripping gore of pardoned hatred
Matabeleland is a hidden grave of those despised by angel Gabriel
The divine works of the holy anointed Fifth Brigade
But the chaff will be washed still, and the fields readied for the plough

Gukurahundi: the drizzling early rains of hate
Chaff can never wash away chaff
The cursed dark cloud lingers on the blue sky still
A ravaged race for piteous remnants
Shona and Ndebele are children of Zimbabwe
ZANLA and ZIPRA: ZANU-PF a decaying forest of hollowed seeds
Thorns nurtured, and the wheat uprooted

Gukurahundi: *murambatsvina* children of the blood
Mothered by the denied blindness of the angel
But when you bled and sweated for the country
We thought you would share the find of that bitter hunt
Tekere, Nkomo, Tsvangirai hang on a shared cross of sin
MDC an infested nest of angry bees
The wealth is gone with the shifting oceans
Zimbabwe's children die with degree papers in pockets

Gukurahundi: the drizzling early rains of burdened chaff
You spit honey and scatter the bees of your land
Thomas Mapfumo, Oliver Mtukudzi, Alick Macheso
Singing voices echoing love in foreign lands; abandoned children
Babylon has no mercy beloved angel
Chitepo: your children die in the winter colds of our Johannesburg
A meal for the starving crocodiles of the Limpopo
What kind of mother leaves her own in the desert to fry
Even then, time is a crawling tortoise
In the end, even angels revert to their creator
When a mother decides to be a grave

Brutal rains of pouring death and dry waters
Blunting ululations, condemning dance, breeding sorrow
Zimbabwe crawls in the darkness of blood
Grinding poverty ground as a lasting meal
We thought brigades were for peace and security
Would a tiger shed its skin: and dance naked for a laughing world
Blood and sweat do not coin flowery dreams
Chitepo: The mat in your grave's floor must be in tatters

Sing our Redemption Songs Marley

Sing our redemption songs Marley
Kingston town is a ruin of a paradise
The drum of poverty echoes through the streets of Trenchtown
Flowers of song blossom to bury thorns and prickles
Peter Tosh caught a bullet and cursed death
Bunny Wailer disappeared in the jungles of time
How many rivers do we have to cross

Sing our redemption songs Marley
The campaign to journey back home is buried in the waves of Carribea
The dream of visiting the graves of our forefathers drowned
Africa is but a dying heath of flowing rhythms of the *mbira* and *marimba*
Who says a new home can be built on the hilltops of Babylon
When Hussein Barack Obama crawls through the corridors of a white house
Crawl chasing dreams from his father anchored on the audacity of hope
Ancient Marcus Garvey snores violently in his grave
The whip of slavery explodes still

Sing our redemption songs Marley
The Lion of Judah has found a new home in the mountains
We take a leaf from Revelations 5: 5
The virgin girls await the arrival of the groom
Lamps burning until olive oil flies with the winds
The herb is a restless bone foretelling the suffocating sorrows of Babylon
Holy Mount Zion brews miracles still

Sing our redemption songs Marley
Mother Zimbabwe searches for her soul
Tongogara and Chitepo are but mere skeletons on a forgotten shrine
The hippos ravage fields they have not cultivated
Gabriel stretches his legs on the throne
Collects fragments of madness
Planting epilepsy in the bones of Harare
Congo and Sudan remain sores in the nose
The unification of Africans an agenda item in AU boardroom sessions

Sing our redemption songs Marley
Babylon stands firm still on her two feet
Another leaf from the folktale of history is burnt
Children fed lies and poisoned to curse their roots
Our humanity plundered and buried in angry flames
We gonna fight, we'll ave to fight, fighting for our rights
Life is one big road with lots of signs
Babylon a fierce mamba pregnant with poison

Sing our redemption songs Marley
The minds of the oppressed remain chained in illusion
Growing dreadlocks tabooed by the learned
Owls and hyenas belong to the same tribe
Laws holding souls and spirits in captivity
Universities, churches graduate thieves and murderers
Women's screams have become our lullabies
Sheriffs kill still our seeds before they grow
When we shoot them we are thrown into dungeons

For redemption songs is all we've ever had
The Island Jamaica is a rare pebble
The gravity of the grave despise the beauty of your heart
Sing our redemption songs Marley
So we *smile with the rising sun*

IV

he waited for the train

from the combustions of life a refrain
to die on these rails without a brain
a skull empties quickly in the rain

Kokwana u fambile - Grandmother is gone

The sun crawled
(*kokwana u fambile*)
The moon howled
(*u fambile kokwana*)
The stars exploded
(*kokwana u fambile*)
The forests whispered
(*u fambile kokwana*)
The rivers sang
(*kokwana u fambile*)
The oceans moaned
(*u fambile kokwana*)
The desert blackened
(*kokwana u fambile*)
The mountains vowed
(*u fambile kokwana*)
The winds screamed
(*kokwana u fambile*)
The night crumbled
(*u fambile kokwana*)
The day broke
(*kokwana u fambile*)

ku tika ka misava – the weight of the world
(for my brother, risimati)

your friend butter
no longer dances *mukhukhu* wednesday nights
nor wears the worn out khakhi suit you gave him
he no longer answers to questions
unasked in circles he is not wanted
but scratches for relevance
on the corroded surfaces of loss

old man nail
humba yi olele nkuma
the rands he owed you for the thatched roof
you made for his hut were never recovered
old man nail who wielded an axe of words
a sharp tongue seeking for victims to slice

madala ri tlomutile tolo
lying on his bed
conversing with the moon
spread in the open
in the middle of the yard where
he had demanded to be moved
to cool his burning body
to watch over his homestead
watch snippets of seasons past
on a late september night
seven years later
nhlalala ya mindzhuti
yi rhengile na n'weti
yi vungunya vusiku
and now lies
a few meters from you
eka mandlhomo

your wife n'wajohannes
was banished from home
days before you lost your breath
they say she knows
what ate your navel
hollowed your soul
so she never set foot
on the dust that envelopes your chest now
the dust that carries your weary bones
to watch you go

the snail has gathered ash

old man (the sun) set yesterday

honeybird of shadows
has dusked with the moon
made fun of night

at mandlhomo

or sing you the last song

at the corner
under the shade
hurdled as if praying for warmth
at the zion christian church
not far from the cemetery
your voice sprang from a tired face
through the thick silence of the congregants
whatever had exhausted your flesh
corroded your soul
in the sting of your melody
no one could dispute
ku tika ka misava
ku ta hluleriwa hi xikhongelo

i still hear your voice
a shrill of anguish
a melody of hope
ku tika ka misava
ku ta hluleriwa hi xikhongelo

i was not there at your funeral
that saturday morning when
they buried you in an unmarked grave
lost in johannesburg
with no rands to commute home
i imagined you singing your sorrows
away into the hearts of mourners
like you did that sunday
i last heard you sing
ku tika ka misava
ku ta hluleriwa hi xikhongelo

Mgqumeni

longed for his guitar and the sounds of *maskandi*
ululations that transported him to thrilling summits
but there is no music in the recesses of the grave
so he lived among zombies in a forest cave
says he was not there in our many visits to the grave
it was the red bull that appeared in a vision at hospital
that initiated him into a world other than our own
somewhere between life and death
until shembe prayers rescued him
emerged from the bushes across the road
we did not know whether to run or wait
a singer awakening from years of slumber
and a community drowning in shock
until a magistrate rescued us

For the Passerby Who Passed On

(for the old man, Skorokoro)

In the drizzling rains pouring down through glaring skies
You walked away silently with the winds
And bid farewell to the soil you toiled
The soil you cultivated for food at Ruigtesloot beckoned you
Eighty four years a journey long and wild
Memory clogged, anecdotes of passing episodes of life
We were not there when you honored your name and passed
You passerby who passed on and left the past with an echoing void

As if to mock the Christmas we had planned to celebrate with you
In the songs and dance we have always known you for
Skorokoro Magwazane wa ka Mdluli
Who will nurture the seeds sown and scattered everywhere
Now that you have departed
Remember the child that cries when pierced by a thorn
In the song you danced to always with passionate bravado
They mourned in Alexandra, Giyani and Ruigtesloot
When you passed on passerby, leaving in the past an echoing voice

Friday afternoon, eighty-four years later
Walking away in the rain without care
To negotiate permanent settlement with the ancestors
Is this what you meant when you said you would live for our sake
I speak to you now in the foreign language you asked me to speak
In defiance of streaming tears and mournful sorrow
The guitar that kept you sane for nine years is silent now
Unless you say there is song and dance still amongst the dead
Then we shall come and sing around your grave
And never miss the sounds of Skorokoro

New Canada, 1993

Xintsanana died one morning

Xintsanana was thrown out of a moving train

Xintsanana, *swintsanana*

In the end

In the end, we shall crumble into spiraling dusts of memory,
departing to find rest in the cryptic vaults of the grave,
to lay to rest ruins,
--poignant reminiscences of journeys travelled.

In the end, the sun shall set on the blue sky still,
and darkness shall clothe the gentle earth black,
and there shall be no song,
--just distant whispers of a lonely moon

Last Will

i

take me home to nkuri the village of my fathers
bury me there at the village cemetery on a sunday morning
so *mokhukhu* from tshiawelo can march with my coffin
let me lie next to my uncle who inducted me into the church
do not wear black as your cloth of mourning
bath instead in noisy waters of the river
sweat among flaming stones of the mountain
drink of salted waters sing songs and dance
do not point a finger at anyone for my death
do not put clothes or a blanket on my grave
only wreaths and a tombstone for remembrance

ii

when i die as i soon will
do not leave me for long hours in the open sun
do not take me to the mortuary of cold ice and number my body
do not lock me in a small box of wood or can me like fish
put no stone or flowers on my grave
take me away at the hour when the elephants go to bath
dig me a pit wrap me in a blanket cover me in dust
sit me facing home in the east
a sharp knife placed in my left hand
and a spear in my right
for battles ahead

V

on the banks of nsami river

(for makhosani james magaisa)

on the banks of nsami river
sitting naked covered in white
nursing pains of their bleeding manhood
singing of home and longing for their mothers
children of the veld cursing at the winds
under these skies where no bird passes
hunting for rabbits and termites
to accompany pap spread on the leaves
they want to be men when the bushes burn
and they walk away singing *hogo*
the horn of the missionaries did not reach their ears
but they heard you makhosani
on the labyrinths of tides singing

of khazamula shrivelling
into bones in the master's backroom
of termites that sliced the heart of man and left a hole
the echoing cry of the african child
burdens of hunger ravaging the black skin

on the banks of the river
sitting naked on the rocks facing the sun
nursing pains of their bleeding manhood
singing of home and longings for their mothers
children of the veld cursing at the winds
their minds wander in whirlwinds
the deserts slumber, quiet and lonely
the skies know no borders and kings
and birds fly freely with the winds
but under these skies no bird passes
under reed huts reciting *machamacha*
and the goats sulk fingers of one who misses a line
they want to be men when these reeds burn
they did not hear the cry of the owl behind the smoke
but they heard you makhosani
of the labyrinths of tides singing

singing of africa from the edge of a cliff
singing of her children dying of kwashiorkor
the womb of kings swelling with blisters of rot
the milk of *vutsonga* spilling to console dry soil
black skin of thirsts under deadly mountain shadows

on the banks of nsami river
sitting naked in the cold winds of dawn
nursing pains of their bleeding manhood
singing of home and longing for their mothers
children of the veld cursing at the winds
they want to be men when these wounds finally heal
the foreskin of boyhood lost in blind-folded screams
cut against stone by *mayine's* sharp blade
the ritual of burnt leaves sprinkled on their manhood
against the echo of chant
hi vana va nkwanyani we are children of the bird
hi yimbisa swivanani we circumcise the little ones
under these skies where no bird passes
they did not hear the winds cursing back
or the rude laughter behind their screams
but they heard you makhosani
on the tides of labyrinths singing

of the heart of the earth that is rotten
of nkrumah's cry and an africa collapsed to a mound
black skeletons crawling with spears sunk into their hearts
the angry gods of the land looking away
and how the young must not look into the red eyes of their elders
but play hide and seek into the night singing *xikoriyo*

on the banks of nsami river
i saw you walking naked on burning sands into the sun
where you sat watching the maddening dances of seasons pass
what lands banish honey and songbirds of slithering song
songbird of the winds scavenging for secrets of tides
father of *xikolokolo* and *mihloti*
ntukulu wa vadzivi na vachongo (grandson of the dzivi and the chongo)
what lands banish healers from throwing bones that talk in their rolling
son of gija the possessed one
makhosani, old man
do you hear still the children of the veld singing
tselenga tsenga tsengoo
swi ta hela (it shall end)
sitting naked covered in white
nursing pains of their bleeding manhood
singing of home and longing for their mothers
they sing for you too
sculptor of words wounding and healing
on cold mornings like this
on the banks of nsami river

sasavona

remember nhlave
from whence you came
mirror of heavens
generous and far away
love is a frail flower
at the mercy of those watering
what use is lying on
the thorny carpet of seasons
the glitters of our land
are mists that wither at sunrise
it was in your eyes that
i first caught a glimpse of skies

remember walking away
the other day
leaving me alone
counting stars in my dreams
found yourself a new home
as nyamatsi enthralled
your endless curiosities
alone i searched
for my soul in the shadows
marriage is a shrine on the grave
of the home it once was
until i found you wounded
and crawling on the other side

your beauty mocks the ploughs
plunder and harvests of years
you gave away your heart
almost lost it at play
but hearts churn blood
transport it through
endless channels
of our decaying bodies
fatigued gathering fragments
of dreams lying
scattered and missing
hearts are clocks
in the winding of life-death
fatigued gathering broken pieces
of clay left in the ashes
ecclesiastes talks of a time
and season for everything

including me finding you
wounded and crawling
on the one corner of the grave

your heart is a pot
of secrets that will blind the sun
the day they come crawling
into its rays in search of air
you have crossed rivers
of fierce crocodiles and hippos
you have removed lids
of a hundred granaries
of manhood
still you long
to unpluck the moon
deadly games of kiss
and hide in looming dens
where you wounded others
on the other corner of the grave

the land tires of ploughs
and seeds of drought
read of time on the faces
of flowers at noon
look at the sun
walking away
christmas arrives
at the dying hour of every year
it was in your eyes that
i first saw the face of death

remember nhlave
from whence you came
mirror of heavens
generous and far away

Constellations

there are no patterns in the stars
only a dim glimmer of fractured memory
sol plaatje lives on in a museum
faraway in a diamond town you call home
but i see him in the pages of your chronicles
beyond the note you scribbled on the cover one morning
about me finding you
about you finding me
on the tattered pages of life
patterns of stars resigned to adventure
dreams are for free

there are no patterns in the stars
only stars that pattern fractures of our memory
like you walking across the lawns of the union buildings
velvet smiles on to welcome a stranger
camp chairs not allowed at a poetry reading on the lawns
are you finding klaaste, baard and sobukwe
or are you dancing your days away in translation
for nina simone and edith piaf
translating words in a museum
transfixing galaxies in the stars
dreams are for free

there are no patterns in the stars
only fractures upon fractures of memory
of a couple kissing under a tree
meters away from us at burghers park
pictures of you at a photoshoot hours earlier
longings for sea and long walks in the open fields
the constellation, and the one stray star
that hurriedly explodes into oblivion
as you point to the sky as we lied on our backs
searching for patterns in stars that have not known any

joburg longs for its dreadlocked daughter
and i for a lover in the belly of a diamond town
apparel designs and ragga sounds at the baseline
its nights are wintry and skies alone
clear of the mine dusts that coalesce
into fogs and mists
of grief

A poet said once

in the labyrinths and rainbows
the poets paint
there are generous vaults
to bury our agonies

but inside the haunted conscience of lines
blood torrents angrily like waves
skeletons smile on thumps of ink

and raving flames plough holes
hallucinations that muddy purities
in the troubled thoroughfares of stanzas

there are generous vaults
to bury our agonies
in the labyrinths and rainbows
the poets paint

The poem is fragile

1

rising from ashes as if
voices of the dead tapping

to inhabit the sinking ruins
of languages inherited
broken vowels

crippled verbs
wounded nouns
burning consonants

the poem is fragile

ephemeral
shifting
fluid

hanging,
on the wobbly scaffolds
of promise

2

on the wobbly scaffolds of promise
hanging

fluid
shifting
ephemeral
the poem is fragile

wounded consonants
crippled nouns
burning verbs
broken vowels
of languages inherited
to inhabit the sinking ruins

voices of the dead tapping
rising from ashes

the poem is fragile

I have gone away many times

Children of the night
Chorus to the night
He Xikoriyo heee
Heee

We sing *Xikoriyo* chasing the dark and weight of sleep
I of the night have gone away many times
From the dry rivers that nurtured fish that fed me
And dry tree branches graced by birds praying for rains
Lightning that thundered flames that consumed crumbling huts
And dying bushes that once sheltered the snake and the rabbit

To bustling cities on whose streets a thousand languages flow
And strangers drinking blood with guns
Love chokes here from the rushed greed for wealth stolen
And birds become passersby whose landing songs are cursed

Children of the night
Invaders singing
Ka nhwe mi dya yini What do you eat in your father's homestead
Hi dya maxalani We eat corn

From fields of nourishing greens and nourished livestock
Wealth that exploded clans unfolding to cover the land
The fat squeezed by imposed dog tax and hut tax
The brutal force of those who reap where they did not sow

To pregnant cities that have hatched casinos where human lives are tokens
Where wealth is buried in stones with names and prices and owners
Glittering stones planting angina in the bleeding heart of justice
A dog with teeth buried on a bone does not bark

Echoes far away
Children of the light
Tihuku ke And the chickens
Ti dya vusokoti They eat ants

From the rambling drums and wild dances of my forefathers
Bones that speak and a marula tree that smokes and drinks
Embrace buildings that tower to kiss the skies
The hope and promises of a New Jerusalem in a land eroded by rot

Echoes nearby
Children of the night

Hi khoma N'wamani
N'waXitihlwani

Who are we catching
The one-eyed-one

We sing *Xikoriyo* chasing the weight and dark of sleep
I of the light have gone away many times
Returned many times to find patterns that rendered me foreign
Here where we all ate from the same pot once
Listened to parables and idioms and folktales around whispering fires
Here, in these ruins that stand deserted by love

Chorus to the night
Children of the night
He Xikoriyo heee
Heee

Glossary

The words and phrases defined/explained here, belong in large part in the Xitsonga language. As such, in the few instances where other languages are used, the source language is explicitly stated. Titles of the poems under which the words/phrases appear are in bold and italicised.

We Have Come

ku gova: to camp

landza: follow

mabarhule: one of a big foot

makula-nkondo: a synonym of mabarhule

n'wina: you (plural)

ndzhandzha: riverbank

ntila: path

vurhena: bravery

wakwe: his or hers

Laniwani

nkwahle: land iguana

eskom na gezi-eskom and power

borha: chisel (more accurately burrow)

gezi: power or electricity

loko: if

mhandi: pole

mqombhoti: traditional beer

tshika: leave

u nga swi lavi: you don't want

Nkuri

duwetse, tselenga: two (among many) songs sung by initiates at a circumcision school

makuwa: figs

Nkuri: a rural village near the town of Giyani in Limpopo

nthagavele, n'warhida: names of locusts

Naskanani

ahenhla: on top

demmet: dammit

haleno: here (this side)

hatlisa: hurry

i mani: who is
kambe: but
ku vula: says
mukhalabye: old man
naskanani, or nasika: is ‘thingy’ in English, if such a word exists, or *nantsika* in IsiZulu
ni ta: so i
va langutana: they looked at each other

burning witches

maar entlek: tsotsi taal for ‘but in fact’
ntoma: jackal-berry tree

Avuxeni a va dyi- Greetings are not for sale

a va dyi: they do not eat
Avuxeni a va dyi: a Xitsonga proverb meaning loosely that greetings are not for sale, that you must greet people- always and everywhere
Avuxeni: literally translates ‘in the East’, or the place of the rising sun, used by the vatsonga as a greeting in the mornings – an equivalent of good morning
dyambu: the sun
famba: walk
inhlekani: it is afternoon; intended to translate: good afternoon
khohlokhohlo: cold, or flu – more specifically the word emulates the sound of a cough (*khohlo*)
kokwana: grandmother, in this case (the word is used for grandfather as well)
mapapa: the clouds
mzamani: one who tries
n’wamarilele: used as a name, in fact is *n’wana wa marilele*, which means daughter of marilele. Elderly women are usually addressed this way – their father’s name or their father’s surname preceded by *n’wa-*. As such, Mtileni’s daughter could be addressed as *n’wamtileni*
n’wananga: my child
ncila a va ololi: a tail that cannot be straightened. Basically referring to the tail of a monkey or a baboon – the latter is a totem of the Baloyi/Mathevula among the Vatsonga
ntukulu: grandson
riperile: the sun has set; intended to translate: good evening
vatomi: from *vutomi* (life), to mean ‘we are of life’
vona: see

flickering flames

lava: want
loko: if
madziva:

makhukhuri: stormy tides

makondlo: rats

mincila: tails

misava: land

mukon'wana: in-law

n'wangwenya madziva mukon'wana: is a folk song that punctuates a folktale about a man who, though married to many wives, prohibited his wives from giving birth to human children. He wanted to give birth to rats so he eats them. Until he saw the beautiful child his wife hid in the care of a crocodile in the river.

n'wangwenya: crocodile

ndlela: path

ndzi ku bulela ndlela yo ya ka vakokwani: am paving for you the road to grandpa's homestead. It was said by an older sibling to a younger one, as a tactic to get a bite on the other one's corn.

nyika: give

rhurhela: to house, or host

swilo: things

tsokombela: delicious

tsongola: carefully pick, used primarily in relation to food (picked from a pot or a plate)

vana: children

Vatsonga: the first language speakers of Xitsonga

venga: hate

vengwa or *vengiwa*: hated

vutsonga: the culture/traditions/values/norms of the Vatsonga

xintsongo: small thing

Xitsonga: is a Southern African Bantu language – whose variants include Rhonga, Tswa and Shangaan - predominantly spoken in parts of Mozambique, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

Ti hahile

exisakeni: in the nest

hlota: hunt

kwalala: dry (season/place)

mihlovo: colours

miloti: whistles

nsele: cruelty

nyenya: despise

swihanano: gifts

ti hahile: they have flown away

tiko: land, country, village

tinyenyana: birds

tinyoxi: bees

tumbeta: hide

xivundza: loneliness

xixika: winter

Rockey Street, Yeoville

mbawula: isiZulu for brazier

Corner Bree

ak'sheshwe: tsotsi taal for 'hurry up'

amagugu alelizwe ayosala emathuneni: an isiZulu funeral song, meaning that the precious ones of this land will remain in the graveyards

magogo: isiZulu for grandmother

rapera: Shona for 'the sun has set'; intended to translate: good evening

wena: isiZulu for 'you'

Kwandonga Ziyaduma-Place of rumbling walls

Kwandonga ziyaduma: isiZulu for 'place of rumbling walls'. A familiar praise for Johannesburg, as a place of rumbling walls; where meat is never finished (*kwanyama ayipheli*), only a man's teeth get finished (*kuphela mazinyo yendoda*)

magayisa: migrant workers – returning to the village from towns or the mines after months away

mukhukhu: a shack

a nation becoming

umtwana ka phindanghene: child of phindanghene, a praise for the Zulu prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of Inkatha Freedom Party

ingwenyama isekhaya – the lion is now home

ingwenyama isekhaya: isiXhosa for 'the lion is now home', a funeral song

Death of a Song

boso ke mang: 'who is the boss' (Sepedi), a song by Hip Hop Pantsula (HHP)

hlokoloza and *mnike*: two songs by Arthur Mafokate

umlilo: 'fire' (isiZulu), is a song by Durban-based group BigNuz

The Spring Rains

Gukurahundi: Shona for 'the early rain which washes away chaff before the spring rains', used to refer to the 1980s Matabeleland massacre

murambatsvina: Shona for 'getting rid of the filth', the 2005 government sanctioned 'operation clean up' or 'restore order' in Zimbabwe

Sing our Redemption Songs Marley

marimba: a percussion musical instrument

mbira: Shona word for the thumb piano, an African musical instrument

Kokwana u fambile - Grandmother is gone

Kokwana u fambile: more accurately grandmother has walked away, which means simply that grandmother has passed away

ku tika ka misava-the weight of the world

eka mandlhommo: at mandlhommo, the latter being the name of the local cemetery

humba yi ole nkuma: the snail has gathered ash, a Xitsonga proverb to mean that death has struck

ku ta hluleriwa hi xikhongelo: will be resolved by prayer

ku tika ka misava: literally translates the weight of the world, but refers loosely to the troubles of the world

madala: old man, father in this instance

nhlalala ya mindzhuti: honeybird of shadows

ri tlomutile tolo: it (the sun) set yesterday

yi rhengile na n'weti: has dusked with the moon

yi vungunya vusiku: made fun of night

Mgqumeni

maskandi: a kind of Zulu music

Mgqumeni: real name Khulekani Mseleku, was a popular Zulu maskandi musician who passed away in December 2009 aged 27 after a short illness. 29-year old Sibusiso John Dlamini-Gcabashe in 2012 claimed to be a resurrected Mgqumeni, returning from the dead. The latter's true identity was later revealed, and he was found guilty of being an imposter by a court of law.

New Canada, 1993

swintsanana: slowly

Xintsanana: little one, to refer here to a short man of small build

Last Will

mokhukhu: Sepedi for the Zion Christian Church male dance, performed mainly Wednesday nights, Saturday nights and Sunday morning for hours at a go. The collective of men performing such a dance, can also be referred to as *mokhukhu*

on the banks of nsami river

hi vana va nkwanyani: is a song sung as the removal of the foreskin by the *mayine* unfolds. It is sung by the circumcision school mentors and awaiting initiates, loud enough to bury the screams of the one being circumcised (who is himself blindfolded and held by a few strong men)

hogo: traditional circumcision school. One of the songs sung in the school is also hogo.

machamacha: one of the recitations

mayine: the traditional healer who runs the school, specifically trained for such

mihloti: tears, the title of J.M. Magaisa's first collection of poetry

swi ta hela: it shall end

swivanani: the little ones

xikolokolo: a must, the title of J.M. Magaisa's second collection of poetry

xikoriyo: a hide-and-seek game played by children, especially under moonlight.

yimbisa: circumcise

I Have Gone Away Many Times

Hi dya maxalani: We eat corn

Hi khoma N'wamani: Who are we catching

Ka nhwe mi dya yini: What do you eat in your father's homestead

N'waXitihlwani: The one-eyed-one

Ti dya vusokoti: They eat ants

Tihuku ke: And the chickens

xikoriyo: as defined above, the Xitsonga words repeated in the poem are the standard punctuations of the game. The one group saying the first lines (mainly asking questions) are the ones who must find the group that disperses into hiding after *hi yaloyi* (the ones hiding being the group that responds throughout the exchange)