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## INTRODUCTION

Alfred Temba Qabula, Mi S'dumo Hlatshwayo and Nise Malange are known by thousands of workers in Natal. They are known for their cultural work: poetry performances, plays, songs and their struggle to create a cultural movement amongst workers in Durban. They see themselves as part and parcel of a growing and confident democratic trade union movement in South Africa. In 1985 all three of them were central to the creation of the Durban Workers' Cultural Local whose principles are outlined below. By the end of the year they were responsible for the development of a Trade Union and Cultural Centre at Clairwood along side the shop steward council in the area.

The poems in this book have been composed for performance at mass-meetings, trade union and community gatherings, for festive and sombre occasions. Save Nise Malange's poems, the rest have been composed in the Nguni

(Zulu and Xhosa) vernaculars. Consequently, the poems printed here in translation and outside their context suffer: they lose much of their oral power: the songs, the chants, the ululations, their improvisatory nature and of course, the popular responses that accompany their oration. Despite that, the words here are strong enough to communicate in their own right. What follows is a brief introduction to the three activists.

### QABULA

Alfred Temba Qabula was born at Flagstaff Transkei, in 1942. His grandfather was a transport-rider, his father and his uncles were miners and sugarcane workers. Migrancy and influx controls ruled his area's and his family's life. Seventy percent of able-bodied men in his area subsist through migrancy. Qabula was raised under harsh conditions as a child - he was orphaned after his father was poisoned and his mother wilted away very early in his life. As a young man, barely 18 years old, he was caught-up in

the Pondoland rebellion. He survived the conflict by hiding and starving in the forests with his friends. In those days death was stalking the area and agriculture collapsed. 1964 found him on a train bound for Carletonville to start his first migrant contract with a construction company on the mines. For five years he lived in the compounds at night and worked as a plumber in construction gangs during the day. In 1969 one of his foremen started a business at Redhill and lured him away to Durban. There, he “shacked-up” with his uncle at Amaouti in Inanda Reserve. It is no surprise that Qabula’s poems, songs and praise-pieces are pained by the “hurt of migrancy”. His immediate family - a wife and three children - remained on the land. His heart, his feelings and his source of inspiration remained with them in their world of the countryside. As he announces in one of his poems the natural sounds and landscapes there are his sources of inspiration but also a source of resistance: “...From this criss-cross of sounds / and song / Delivered by your creatures / I / get inspiration / to sing / And also to write / And also to ask my sisters and brothers / “Why are you quiet? / Silent?” ...is there nothing that tickles you into action / from all this?”

Despite his feelings though, his experience is of an urban world of ugliness, harshness and noise where, “...we see the railway tracks / the highways, the buildings and factories / the structures ... we hear / the trains / the motor cars and machinery / the bombs going off / the sound of gunshot / and you refuse to ask them / why they are conducting themselves like that / You don’t complain / when they are making so much NOISE!...”

In 1974 he entered the noisy world of factory production at “Dunlop S.A.” (Sydney Road). From then on he had to adjust to the demands of the mass production of rubber products. Qabula adjusted to his job by creating a unique world: in his head. For the past decade he has been composing songs there about everything that affects his life and the life of others. He survives the working day by composing songs of redemption or

resistance: “I would see some-thing that hurts, that causes me pain and then I would spend the working day making a song about it.”

In 1983 he joined the Metal and Allied Workers’ Union (MAWU) and was part of the shop-steward steering committee which organised all the Dunlop workers into the union. That year, he participated in the making of the “Dunlop Play”. In 1984 he started - dressed in a colourful costume - to perform his “Izimbongo zika Fosatu” composition at union meetings. His performances initiated a revival of imbongi poetry in union gatherings in Natal and beyond. This oral poetry, thought by many to be a dead tradition or the preserve of chiefly praises, resurfaced as a voice of ordinary black workers and their struggles. Since then Qabula has written more poems, plays and projects within the Durban Workers’ Cultural Local. He is now completing a book on his life experiences and together with Hlatshwayo and others he continues to orate his poems.

## PRAISE POEM TO FOSATU

You moving forest of Africa  
When I arrived the children  
Were all crying  
These were the workers,  
Industrial workers  
Discussing the problems  
That affect them in the  
Industries they work for in  
Africa

I saw one of them consoling others  
Wiping their tears from their eyes  
I saw wonders, 'cause even in his  
Eyes the tears did flow.  
'Worker, about what is that cry Maye?  
You are crying, but who is hassling you?  
" Escape into that forest,  
The black forest that the employers saw and  
Ran for safety  
The workers saw it too  
"It belongs to us", they said  
"Let us take refuge in it to be safe from  
Our hunters"  
Deep in the forest they hid themselves and  
When they came out they were free from fear

You are the hen with wide wings  
That protects its chickens.

Protect us too with those  
Sacred wings of yours  
That knoweth no discrimination

Protect us too so that we gain wisdom  
Militant are your sons and daughters  
One wonders what kind of muti

Sprinkle on us too that we take  
After them and act likewise.  
FOSATU has given birth I  
ts sons are spread all over Africa  
Even overseas you find its sons:

FOSATU you are the lion  
That roared at Pretoria North,  
With union offices everywhere

Whilst walking,  
Thinking about the workers' problems,  
I saw a fist flying across Dunlop's cheek  
Whilst Dunlop was still shivering,  
Perhaps Bakers was asking  
"What did my neighbour do  
That he is being hurt like that?  
I saw a combination of fists  
Bombarding Bakers on his ribs,  
Until Dunlop was concerned,  
He called the shop stewards and asked:  
"Madoda, please tell us,  
Is MAWU now going to cause trouble at Bakers?,  
"No, Banumzane"  
"Who is organising at Bakers?  
"Of course Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union."  
But where does it come from?  
"From FOSATU."  
"This MAWU where does it spring from?  
"Also from FOSATU.'  
"Same constitution?  
"Yebo."

Same policy, same constitution,  
don't worry Jim,  
It's still another MAWU.  
Chakijana! Wake up and wear your clothes  
Of power and wisdom

Keep your gates closed FOSATU.  
Because the workers' enemies are ambushing you  
They are looking for a hole to enter through In order to disband  
you  
Oh! We poor workers, dead we shall be  
If they succeed in so doing Close!  
Please close!

You are the mole that was seen by the bosses' impimpis  
Coming slowly but surely towards the factories  
Fast ran the impimpis  
And reported to their bosses and said:  
"Baas, Baas, thina bukile lomvukuzane buya losayidi  
Kalofekhthri kathina."  
"Yoh, yah; What is the mvukuzane my boy, tell me,  
What is it?  
Is it one of FOSATU's unions?  
You are a good muntu  
Mina bhilda wena 6 room house  
Lapha lohomeland kawena.  
Thatha lo-machine gun, vala logates  
Skhathi wena buka lo-union  
Bulala lo-union  
Skhathi lo-union yena ngena lapha fekhthri kathina,  
Amashares phelile Lo-union thatha yonke.'  
Whilst still wondering what to do,  
There came a messenger and said:  
"Better leave everything as it is,  
'Cause the union is already holding a meeting with  
The workers in the canteen  
Not only here - there at Sasol as well.  
FOSATU, we have chosen you to lead us  
Time and again we have been electing leaders,  
Electing people with whom we were born and grew  
Up together. People who knew all our sufferings,  
Together with whom we were enslaved.  
We had elected them because we believed they were A

lamp to brighten our way to freedom

But to our dismay,  
After we had appointed them, we placed them on the  
Top of the mountain,  
And they turned against us.  
They brought impimpis into our midst to inflict  
Sufferings upon us.  
Some of us, those who were clever, were shot down  
To the dust with bullets  
Others were shut behind the walls of darkness  
Others opted for fleeing the land of their birth

Is FOSATU also going to hug you with those warm Hands?  
His hands that know no racism?  
Prayed we did to our Mvelinggangi and the  
Ancestors have answered us, And sent to us FOSATU!  
Don't disappoint us FOSATU,  
Don't sacrifice us to our adversaries,  
To date your policy and your sons are commendable,  
We don't know what's to happen tomorrow.

Listen I am a Sangoma,  
You have come to me so that I tell all about you  
I have thrown my bones and called on my abalozi.  
My bones and my abalozi are telling me this:  
Yebo, you have good and handsome sons  
Also they are intelligent and quite healthy.

Good Mnumzane, I am writing you a letter to ask  
Permission to use this ground.  
We will be discussing and reporting to our members  
About all that we have achieved.  
Here is the agenda so that you may know about  
What we are going to discuss.  
There you are big man, your refusal is a challenge.  
Get hold of him and pull him by the jacket.  
Put him into the judgement box.

Come Senior Judge

Judge against him for refusing us permission to use  
This ground.

Why do you refuse us permission to use this playground?  
The old man said this and that and he was left  
Disappointed because the judge granted permission  
Don't play with fire, my friend because  
You'll get burnt.

You are the metal locomotive that moves on top  
Of other metals  
The metal that doesn't bend that was sent to the  
Engineers but they couldn't bend it.

Teach us FOSATU about the past organisations  
Before we came.

Tell us about their mistakes so that we may not  
Fall foul of such mistakes.

Our hopes lie with you, the Sambane that digs  
Holes and sleeps in them, whereas others dig  
Holes and leave them.

I say this because you teach a worker to know  
What his duties are in his organization,  
And what he is in the community

Lead us FOSATU to where we are eager to go.  
Even in parliament you shall be our representative  
Go and represent us because you are our Moses -  
Through your leadership we shall reach our Canaan.  
They call you the disruptionist because you  
Disrupted the employers at their own meeting.  
Because you man of old, asked a question:

"Did you consider the workers?

Have you really planned about FOSATU,  
The workers' representative?

No!

Well then we can't continue because FOSATU doesn't  
Laugh when they see something that makes workers  
Look laughable The meeting was disrupted

All that remained behind was beers, whiskeys, and  
Disappointment.  
The cakes and the cooldrinks were also disappointed.  
Hero deal with them and throw them into the Red Sea.  
Strangle them and don't let loose.  
Until they tell the truth as to why they suck the  
Workers blood.

I am coming slowly and I am watching all that you are  
Doing.  
You're great FOSATU.  
Bayethe!  
Amandla kubasebenzi!

(SFAWU AGM, Edendale Centre, Pmb, 1984)

## MIGRANTS' LAMENT

If I have wronged you Lord forgive me  
All my cattle were dead  
My goats and sheep were dead  
And  
I did not know what to do  
Oh Creator forgive me  
If I had done wrong to you  
My children: out of school  
Out of uniforms and books  
My wife and I were naked - naked  
Short of clothing

If I have wronged you Lord forgive me  
I went to WENELA  
To get recruited for the mines  
I went to SILO  
To work at sugarcane  
Oh creator forgive me  
If I had done wrong to you  
But they chased me away  
They needed those with experience  
With long service tickets and no one more

If I have wronged you Lord  
Forgive me  
I left my wife and children  
To look for work alone  
I had to find a job  
Oh Creator forgive me  
If I had done wrong to you  
I was despairing in Egoli  
After months searching for this  
job And when I found one  
I lost it  
For I didn't have a 'SPECIAL'  
If I have wronged you Lord

Forgive me  
I found a casual job  
I felt that my children would be happy  
With my earnings  
Oh how happy I was!  
Oh creator forgive me  
If I had done wrong to you  
Yes, as my children were happy  
And as I was working  
The blackjacks arrived to arrest me  
So again I lost my job

If I have wronged you Lord  
Forgive me  
When out of jail I searched again -  
Another casual job, happy again  
The boss was happy too  
And he gave me a letter  
To fetch a permit from back home  
Oh creator forgive me  
If I had done wrong to you  
But the clerk said: 'I can't see the paper'  
And added 'You must go in peace my man'  
So I had to buy him beer, meat and brandy  
For him to 'learn' to read my piece of paper

If I have wronged you Lord  
Forgive me  
I was working again  
But I realized so far for nothing  
Oh Creator forgive me  
If I had done wrong to you  
So I joined the union to fight my boss  
For I realized: there was no other way  
Lord But to fight with the employer  
There was no other way  
Now go trouble maker go.

## AFRICA

Oh, I thank the Creator  
For moulding and placing me  
In Africa

When my eye rests on you Africa  
You are indeed  
A bride on her wedding day  
Pluned in all the treasures  
Found in you:  
The gold, the silver, the copper and aluminium  
The diamond, the lead and iron ...  
Recounting them would take us  
To infinity

When winter comes  
Our eyes touch the mountain peaks  
Clad in snow  
Confirming you Africa  
Indeed a bride on her wedding day  
It is then, at such a time  
When you look at the trees  
Tall trees  
Tall trees and short grass  
All swaying in unison  
Singing a tuneful song  
Waving from this side and that  
As if singing and saying  
'We thank you Africa  
For the nourishing rain  
For your sun

As it strengthens us against the cold  
For stretching our tendons with your winds  
So we grow vigorous and full of life"  
It is then that I feel content

When summer announces itself  
Africa  
You wear  
Your multi-coloured Blankets Africa  
- you are beautiful Your hills, mountains, rivers and streams -  
your fitting ornaments  
Announce your beauty to our eyes  
And we see all around us  
Nothing but a smile of happiness and satisfaction  
We get proud for being close to the parent  
Of everything on your surface and under-neath you  
Africa  
Your plains! Your landscapes!

When spring arrives  
With its green and its flowers  
With all its multitudes of plants  
When the winds start up again  
The aromatic scents of flowers, trees and plants  
Perfuming my nostrils  
They make it hard for me  
Not to sing your praises Africa

Nations from far away  
Are crying for you Africa  
Africa of different nations  
And many populations  
Wishing that they were yours  
Or that you were theirs

We love you

Africa  
For being our guardian parent  
Looking after us  
We wash in your fresh water  
We know of your plentiful treasures  
The oil, the salt, the cement and glass

The cotton, the iron, the copper and uranium  
The diamonds, the aluminium and coal

We are proud of you  
And we know we are who we are  
Because of you  
Our source of life  
Giving us cold winds  
To refresh and awaken our bodies  
The sun  
To warm our bodies  
So they become healthy and strong

In summer mornings  
When mist is covering the hills  
The mountains  
Hovering over the plains, the landscapes,  
And valleys, at that moment,  
When the sun rises  
As the mist begins to lift

Leaving the trees  
The grass and flowers  
Soaking in dew  
Just when the first warmth begins  
The birds  
The animals and bees  
Surge to and fro  
Making different patterns of sound,

I am left in awe and,  
I hang from a question -  
What have I done for the creator  
To deserve being placed here?

From this criss-cross of sound  
And song  
Delivered by your creatures

I get inspiration  
To sing  
And also to write  
And ask my sisters and brothers  
why are they quiet? Silent  
Why are you so quiet, so silent?  
Is there nothing which tickles you to action  
From all this  
From our parent, provider and source of life?  
Where do we find  
The water, the fruit, the crops and wind  
The rain, the cold and heat?  
From where would we hear the thunderstorms  
Were we not here in the Africa  
Of our forefathers?  
We are proud of you, our treasure

From inside you treasures are taken  
From your face, fruit, food and water.  
Africa of peace - you are beautiful  
But, in your face now  
We see the railway tracks  
The highways, the buildings, and factories  
The structures ...  
They fought battles scrambling over you  
We hear  
The trains, the motor cars and machinery  
The bombs going off, the sound of gunshot  
And you refuse to ask them  
Why they are conducting themselves like that  
You don't complain

As they are making such a NOISE !  
You are still and silent  
You behave as if in your final death-pangs forgetting  
To ask how you were when you were full of life  
When death announced himself  
You never asked how many sins you had committed

In your life!  
Life? Is this Life?  
No.  
Instead you welcome your retainers  
And hide them in your face  
Oh Africa of peace!

Youth -  
Echo the sounds, the songs  
And dances  
Of the plants, the birds, the bees  
And animals You can make Africa flourish in its pride  
Sing, praise and thank the lord  
For moulding us and placing us  
In Africa  
Africa  
You are beautiful  
Africaaa.....

(Opening of Clairwood Trade Union and Cultural Centre, October 1985)

## DEATH

Stunning creature  
invisible to naked eyes  
if we could only see you  
you would have already  
been slain

But you left us grieving  
or those dear to us  
young and old  
who stumbled in your path  
They were stalked and throttled  
By your jealous and ruthless power  
They were whisked through the world  
Before we noticed their arrival  
What they did wrong  
no-one comprehends.

With great fury  
you clasped them for your killing  
extruding their flesh  
So that now only their bones are left  
We remain in constant mourning  
for you have deprived us  
of even those who we could turn to for solace.

Death you always murdered  
our helpers  
our heroes and national leaders  
Men and women who cherished justice  
you lifted them up  
to dump them under gravestones  
for punishment.

Death how did they offend you?  
How did they worry you?  
You are silent

no answer escapes your lips  
But,  
the Day will come  
when the orphans  
those widowed  
would turn out to be your judges

Woe unto you death  
on that day t  
he fires you stoke for others  
shall haunt you  
The pain and suffering you fully inflicted  
to nature  
to nations  
will descend on you.

Nature  
the nations of the world  
shall stand before the greater judge  
giving evidence  
of crimes you have committed  
and can't deny  
and finally the truth shall emerge.

You shall receive the  
hatred netted by you  
on nations  
but double in its venom  
Your conscience  
eternally persecuted  
a haunted creature you shall remain  
But now ...

you are the intruder  
the gate-crawler  
baffling and stunning  
the doctors  
the faith-healers

who make it their business to save lives  
from your deadly paws  
frustrating their success.

Your evil deeds  
constantly disturb us  
You are the abyss  
which stands in the way of our desires  
In fear of you  
We meekly stand

Devourer of life  
Raging Bull  
Rude intruder of sealed doors  
Howls start at the exit of your many departures  
Your elector has no misgivings for your labour  
For daily you drag  
Plenty more prey into your caves.  
You are recognised

in all lands  
talked about amongst the nations  
disturber of peace.

You strike and take  
Even young committed men and women  
Workers for liberation  
builders of communities  
in the midst of their efforts  
leaving behind a trail  
of unfinished mounds of effort

You have marched  
those who are our yardstick  
into jails in the shadow of your feast  
into graves the others  
and after your kill  
you are still thirsty for more

Do you know that the  
death-cart  
the wagon you use  
will one day carry you over as well  
Do you know that the  
day of your end  
shall reverberate throughout the universe?

And all human creatures  
Would scramble for your remains  
your bones  
so that nations  
that people can strike  
up to celebrate our liberation  
Maye! Death!  
Inventor of orphans  
The day we apprehend you  
an agonizing punishment awaits you!  
On that day  
the impossible will become possible  
Donkeys shall sleep with lions  
negations shall become confirmations  
and your turn  
for final punishment shall sound

Death  
enemy of man  
Woe unto you ...  
then.

(Flagstaff, Transkei, Christmas 1985)

## THE TEARS OF A CREATOR

O' maker of all things  
Grief  
Assails you from all sides  
Each step forward you take  
brings emnity nearer  
What is the nature of your sin?

In the factories  
Your enemy suffocates you  
On this side: the bosses  
On that side: the boss-boys

Attackers and assailants  
Stalk you  
From all chambers  
And channels  
Permits and money  
Become the slogans  
Through which  
They pounce on you  
What is the nature of your sin?

Your labour power  
Has turned you  
Into prize-game  
For the hunters of surplus  
What is the nature of your sin?

In the busses  
In the trains and taxis

You are the raw meat,  
The prey  
for vultures  
Are you not the backbone  
Of trade?

What is the nature of your sin?

Worker  
Your rulers  
Have dumped you  
Away from the cities.  
Now all the misfits and orphans  
Of other nations  
Can suck you dry

Now  
You are a nameless breed of animals  
A stock of many numbers  
And your suppressor's lust  
To suck you dry  
Recognizes neither day  
Nor night What is the nature of your sin?  
Your hand  
Has developoed  
A drunkard's tremble  
It can no longer draw straight lines  
To steer you clear  
Between the law enforcers and the bandits

Worker  
Are you not the economy's foundation?  
Are you not the engine  
Of developepment and progress?

Worker  
Remember  
who you are;  
You are the country's foundation base and block

Oh maker of all things  
The world over  
Worker  
Your capacity to continue loving

Surprises me, its enormity  
Touches the Drakensberg mountains  
What is then,  
The nature of your sin?

Your sin  
Can it be your power?  
Can it be your blood?  
Can it be your sweat?

They scatter you about  
With their hippos  
With their vans  
And kwela-kwelas  
With their teargas  
You are butchered  
By the products of your labour  
These are the cries of the creator of all this

COSATU  
Woza 'msebenzi, woza COSATU, woza freedom.

Oh COSATU  
We workers  
Have travelled a long way here

Yes: we have  
Declared wars

On all fronts  
For better wages

Yet,  
Victory eludes us.

We  
Have dared to fight back  
Even from the bottom of the earth

Where we pull wagons-full of gold  
through our blood.

We have  
Come from the sparkling kitchens  
Of our bosses.

We have arrived from the exhausting  
Tumult of factory machines.

Victory eludes us still!

COSATU  
Here we are!

Heed our cry -  
We have emerged  
From all corners of this land  
We have emerged  
From all organizations.  
We have emerged  
From all  
The country's nooks and crannies!

We say today  
That  
Our hope is in your hands  
We are ready.

We say: Let your hands deliver us from exploitaion  
Let our freedom be borne  
Let our democracy be borne  
Let our new nation be borne

COSATU  
Stand up now with dignity  
March forward  
We are raising our clenched fists behind you

Behind us  
We call into line  
Our ancestors in struggle  
Maduna and Thomas Mbeki  
Ray Alexander and Gana Makhabeni  
JB Marks and hundreds more.

Where are you ancestors?  
Lalelani and witness:  
Here is the mammoth creature  
You dreamed of  
You wanted to create  
The one you hoped for  
Here is the workers'  
Freedom train!

It is made-up of old wagons  
Repaired and patched up ox-carts  
Rolling on the road again  
Back again  
Revived!  
Once capsized by Champion

The wagon - once derailed by Kadalie

Here it rolls ahead  
To settle account with the oppressors  
To settle account with the exploiters.  
Here it is:  
The tornado-snake - Inkhanyamba with its floods!  
Its slippery torso!  
Here it is: COSATU  
The spears of men  
shall be deflected!

Here it is:  
The tornado-snake of change! Inkhanyamba,  
The cataclysm

Clammed for decades and decades

By a mountain of rules.  
The tornado-snake  
Poisoned throughout the years  
By ethnicity  
And tribalism.

Here is this mammoth creature  
Which they mocked!  
That it had no head!  
And certainly no teeth

Woe unto you oppressor  
Woe unto you exploiter

We have rebuilt its head  
We lathed its teeth on our machines.  
The day this head rises  
Beware of the day these teeth shall bite.

On that day:  
In the desert Mountains of lies shall be torn to shreds  
The gates of apartheid shall be burst asunder  
the history books of deception shall be thrown out

Woza langa  
Woza Federation  
Won Freedom

COSATU  
Stop now

Listen to our sound

You'll hear us sing  
That the rulers  
And employers

Are sorcerers!

Do not smile  
Do not dare disagree

If that was devoid of thruth  
Where is the ICU of the 1920's to be found?  
Where is the FNETU of the 30's to be found?  
Where is the CNETU of the 40's to be found?  
And the others?

They emerged  
They were poisoned  
Then  
They faded!

COSATU  
Today be wise!  
In the desert  
Only the fruit-trees  
With long and sturdy roots  
Survive!

Learn that  
And you shall settle accounts with the oppressor  
You shall settle accounts with the exploiter  
You shall settle accounts with the racists.

Here is COSATU  
Who knows no colour  
Here then is our tornado-snake-inkanyamba

Helele  
COSATU

Helele Workers of South Africa

Helele,

Transport workers  
Helele,  
Miners of wealth  
Helele,  
Cleaners of the bosses' kitchen  
Helele,  
Builders of the concrete jungle  
Helele,  
Workers of South Africa.  
Helele,  
Makers of all things

Woza msebenzi! Woza COSATU! Woza freedom!

(COSATU launch, Kings Park Stadium, November 1985)

## The Small Gateway to Heaven

Tall brown walls crowned  
with barbed wire fences,  
Walls that hide what lives inside  
from all outsiders,  
And inside them, the inmates never see  
the world outside.  
They hear sounds,  
Rumours of lives,  
They hear stories.

And on these walls two gates,  
A small and a big gate,  
Just as it was told in the  
histories of custody,  
But also in the stories of the entrances to heaven.

And they feel that they are blessed,  
Those elected to enter feel they are blessed,  
entering the small gateway to the hostel or compound.  
Those unmarked, those without numbers on their wrists,  
cannot enter.  
But I entered, I was elected to enter the small gates,  
And these eyes have seen wonders:  
I saw the people sleeping stacked in shelves  
like goods in a human supermarket.

I saw the elect, long strings of men  
in queues,  
One after the other tracing their steps through  
the kitchens  
To meet the sight of men perspiring rivers on their bodies  
of glass,  
Beads of sweat pouring  
as they were stirring cauldrons of stiff porridge,  
Stirring away with enormous logs  
and others with ladies shovelling the porridge

onto dishes made hard like the rockface  
And you imagined the heat of your food  
before you received it cold.

Then there were others; with his enormous ukhezo,  
Fishing for pieces of meat and gravy  
Slapping it onto the plate shouting  
to move on, stop wasting his time,  
Pouring out insults,  
Swearing and throwing the plate so the gravy  
Poured and smudged surfaces, fingers, anger.

He was having his fun,  
His daily amusement,  
on the brink of a riot.

And at night another is busy courting  
his workmate,  
Praising him as the beautiful one from kwaTeba,  
the one with short breasts, saying-  
Since you left your sister behind  
Please take her place in my bunk tonight.  
And he asks him and asks him to acknowledge his proposal.

This is the small gateway to heaven  
for the elect,  
For the old men turned to animals,  
And the young men mesmerised by promises.

And I remember:  
When the recruiters invaded our homes  
to get us to work the mines,  
They would say:  
“Come to Malamulela,  
at Mlamlankuzi with its hills and valleys,  
There are mountains of meat,  
There a man’s teeth become loose from endless chewing,  
And there where the walls are grumbling,

Where the stoneface is singing,  
Promising bridewealth and merriment,  
Where sorrows disappear at the wink of an eye.  
Come to the place of the  
    Hairy Jaw  
    where starvation is not known”.

And we joined the queues through the small gate to heaven.  
And we found the walls of our custody,  
    and degredation,  
    and of work, darkness to darkness,  
        with heavy shoes burdening our feet  
        with worry,  
For nothing,  
At the place of the Hairy Jaw,  
    away from our loved ones.

And i have seen this prison of a heaven,  
This kraal which encircles the slaves,

And I saw it as the heart of our oppression,  
And I saw the walls that separate us  
    from a life of love.

## THE DUMPING GROUND

1.  
Wherever  
    he has placed his creatures  
    on the day of his calling  
    they shall respond

Even at the dumping ground  
    where filth is piled-up high  
    alongside humanity’s rejects and rubbish -  
    they shall respond

No-one can muffle such a response  
    by insisting that  
    he was not calling

No-one can silence the caller  
    even if he was to be gagged  
    if his eyes were shut  
    his ears were blocked and his mouth  
    stitched  
    even if he was gaoled  
    in a tightly-sealed boxhouse -  
    so he heard nothing, saw nothing  
    knew of nothing -

still  
    on the day marked by the call  
    his voice would sound through the lungs of this world  
    and the world would respond.

2.  
Because  
    such a time has come  
    miracles happen  
    at the dumping ground  
Sturdy trees  
    with large and brilliant-coloured fruit

emitting scents and beautiful to taste  
have grown  
and are available for free  
at the dumping ground

But the farmers have assembled, worried  
asking each other  
who indeed dared to plant the trees  
who dared cultivate them  
to bear their fruit for free  
at the dumping ground?  
who dared destroy their monopoly of planting  
their right and their privilege to sell  
good fruit?

This new owner was a foreigner  
and an impostor  
“let us destroy these orchards rooted in filth  
let us tear the trees down  
let us chop them to pieces and set them alight...  
let us destroy this abomination  
in our midst”, they said  
And so they did  
at the dumping ground

3.  
And our poor black brother  
who sleeps in a scrapyard’s Toyota  
nearby the dumping ground  
asks in alarm

“Am I dreaming?  
What do these eyes of mine see?  
The world is beginning to blur in front of my nose  
I can see  
the East and the West  
the North and the South  
blurring together

In front of my eyes  
I can see  
the mountains, the valleys and hills coming together  
the sun, the moon and the stars are amassing  
You cannot separate the sea from the rivers  
and waterfalls  
everything is blurring together and spinning  
Am I mad or am I dreaming?  
No, I am awake  
I am in my full senses!”...  
“Have pity on me  
such a poor, poor fellow  
born to be a victim of fear  
bred to be a victim of discrimination  
I am scared...  
Where am I to hide?  
Nature is coming together  
And I shiver whenever I stare  
at the dumping ground”...

“Oh!  
they have torn all the trees down  
at the dumping ground t  
hey have dug a deep hole  
they have chopped all the trees to tiny pieces  
thy have poured paraffin and set them alight  
they have dumped and buried them in the deep hole  
they have stacked broken bottles  
old and rusted pieces of metal and iron rods  
and broken bricks on top  
to make sure they are never to grow  
ever again”...  
“But my poor tired eyes  
what do they see?  
Am I mad or am I caught  
in a dream  
No.  
the trees are sprouting all over again

and they are sprouting-forth leaves  
what will the farmers say?

They are annoyed  
they are full of hatred  
they are furious  
But the trees have more fruit  
more than ever before  
Beautiful fruit sprouting-out  
from this place of filth  
At the dumping ground

They are greater than what the farmers yield  
and they are for free  
and the farmers' produce is going to rot  
It has already started fermenting  
for people are gathering  
these free-fruit of filth  
At the dumping ground."

We have come a long way  
with our efforts,  
with what we are doing  
We have scraped through broken glass  
and sharp bottles  
We have been suppressed  
so we would never dare raise our heads  
We have broken through the rubble  
and we are making our very own world  
At the dumping ground  
and we do not exploit  
and we do not cheat profits out of each other  
we have slipped through their grip  
leaving their cheeks blown-up with anger  
and we are growing

We are responding  
and someone is calling  
He is calling on us

to work hard as daylight is coming  
it has been a very long sunset  
and a very long night  
We are to sleep and listen to the voice in our dreams  
do not fear.  
The one who is beginning to call  
is standing beside you  
with gifts and with infinite talents

Work on!

## MOTHER

Even though I cannot see you through  
these natural eyes  
I can see you through my  
imagination  
The Lord only gave you a short span of years  
And then you left for the land of the high  
winds  
long before I came to appreciate  
your presence  
You left me  
with endless years of solitude.  
But I still hear that soft  
echoing voice  
guiding my way forward

Yes, Mother, all this leaves  
me with a question -  
What is a home without a mother?

When I am away, out on the road  
Hungry, thirsty and full of tears  
I think about you Mother  
and I regain my strength  
My hunger, thirst and exhaustion disappear  
The road's sorrows and worries  
disappear as I reach out  
For you  
My mother

Your word is the light in this  
world of darkness.  
In times of war, your counselling  
becomes  
the weapon  
I conquer with.  
Even in my solitude I do not

feel lonely  
because of your instruction and lessons.  
Though you left me rather early  
before I came to appreciate your presence.  
I say I don't regret.  
The time had come for you to  
pass on to the land of the high winds  
There too, your good work was needed,  
my Mother  
Now Mother  
you must feel free  
for your nation is feeling that way too.

## IN THE TRACKS OF OUR TRAIN

We assembled its pieces together  
and it grumbled and roared.  
Its grumbling and churning  
has caused unrest  
in the stomachs of the capitalists.  
They shout from the top in Pretoria:  
“But, what IS happening’?”

There was no answer from Pretoria’s hills  
but the Drakensberg mountains  
and the plains of Ulundi shook.  
And they said there:  
“Yes, this engine is powerful  
and it raises great flames and much uproar  
It was ignited on purpose  
to choke us  
and punish us with fumes and heat.

God created bees  
and they produced sweet honey  
and the people praised God for the bees and their honey.

Satan was angered again  
so he created flies to destroy the honey of the bees  
and the flies sprayed and relieved themselves on it  
and the people were angered by Satan and his flies.

Satan said: I know, I know.  
Typical.  
Everything done by me is never praised  
it is always criticised and scolded.

What we have made moves forward  
When its wheels wear out, our unity jolts it forward  
When they block it on its way to Capetown  
it does not lose its power, it roars ahead.

When they block it on the road to Johannesburg  
it does not lose its power, it roars ahead  
it grumbles on, with flames and fumes and anger

But they gossip and plot out its undoing  
and they accuse its anger of a communist plot  
and its roar of subversion

And we follow its tracks, also singing

The powerful ask:  
Who allowed these stalks of cane, these blades of grass  
to sing?  
Songs are the property of trees, you have to be tall  
you have to have stature, substance and trunk to sing  
But we sing  
Many with eyes get confused by the stature of trees  
But at least our song reaches the blind  
They listen to it closely  
and understand  
That the deals their capitalist suitors  
have struck up at the Sopaki grounds  
might feel like a bangles of gold  
but they rattle like chains

Across the river the grumble is heard  
There is motion and uproar  
The people will it to cross the waters now:  
To jive and to dance on new grounds  
To hum more pleasant sounds.

We agree.

## THE WHEEL IS TURNING

1.

Kill them all - the dogs.

Because, they say, they are becoming  
smarter.

They do not discriminate:

the ignorant and the wise - exterminated

But still,

truth remains unchanging  
it cannot change and lying  
causes anger

Our heads - held high

they hide theirs

The struggle moves forward  
backwards never.

2.

The English arrived -

and we were made ministers of religion  
teachers and clerks

taught to be kind,

humble, trusting and full of respect

but ignorant of the ways our country was governed  
we began losing whatever we cherished for hope.

3.

But the wheel is turning

darkness - ending  
daytime - beginning  
the light has come

Come freedom

truth is unchanging  
its colours are stark

The end of your nights of lying  
is here

Surely you can see for yourselves...

Return

what is not yours

the rightful owners are demanding it back.

4.

The struggle moves forward

backwards never

the wagon wheels turn

and their sound's echo

can be heard in our hearts and our souls:

the rightful owner of the coat

stands freezing

rain soaking his bones

shredded by frost and cold winds

But you? You are smug

For your children? Oily the best

and he? the crumbs

and troubles

a stranger

coatless in his rightful place.

5.

You were deceived

by the first man

who uttered:

"It is enough...I'm satisfied"

since then you sat content and comfortable.

I use similar words

"It is enough" and,

"you have enjoyed yourself too long

Now it's my turn

return my rightful share!"

6.

The struggle moves forward

never backwards at all..

The earth has been gulping innocent blood

- the first blood spilled in this struggle

the very same earth we fought to retain  
since then we have noticed your conscience pricking  
your heart has found no peace  
days and nights you use for pacing

7.

You pace up and down  
as ammunition you cargo on innocent people  
Coward  
you are smudging the prospect of light  
Your Casspirs, your teargas and guns  
your vans and your dogs  
do not dampen the fire  
they feed it.

8.

Coward  
You avoid attacking people  
with weapons like your own  
You fear them

But still,

one day you shall harvest what you have sown  
cursing the day you were born  
This drought infested earth  
will feast on your blood  
What you did unto others  
will be done unto you  
and your armoury of weapons  
shall follow you down  
as the struggle moves forward  
backwards, never.

9.

And you - Special Branch?  
Who will help you?  
those who have helped you  
have turned into murderers

turning you into a curse  
on the road to our freedom  
And you even turn onto your own people  
killing them with your own hands  
they say

10.

But the wagon-wheel turns  
the struggle moves forward  
backwards never.  
Your police and your soldiers  
are sniping at all those fighting for freedom  
but the struggle continues  
The police are detaining and killing  
freedom fighters  
torturing people in unimaginable ways  
yet it does not weaken our struggle  
our struggle is fuelled once more

11.

So many people detained  
and so many people killed  
that resistance should have been over by now  
But the wagon-wheel turns  
rolling forward  
and the struggle continues  
Your rulers' merciless detentions  
and jails  
malfunction  
and the struggle continues

12.

Impimpi remind yourself  
what you are going to do  
when we start taking over  
As victory strikes  
your friends will desert you

13.  
Now we are your lambs for slaughter  
We are a torturing game for your friends  
you look on and laugh at us  
when we demand our rights  
when we condemn exploitation  
and shout about our unpaid labours  
you lead us onto paths full of traps  
but your days and those of your friends  
have been numbered  
and your friends will gladly give you away

14.  
And then, when our children  
complain of their, gutter education?  
you deliver them for slaughter  
too  
but remember you do not weaken our struggle  
it  
strengthens

15.  
The day is near  
when your murderous weapons  
will stand witness  
for the higher judges of truth  
who won't be bribed with your money  
and then the filth of your deeds  
will become known  
Then we shall clasp you with  
the steady grip of our hands

16.  
Soldiers  
murderers  
you have made orphans of us  
with your guns  
You gain your rewards  
and respect

for showing no mercy  
and lacking in conscience  
You continue your routine  
of cruelty  
But can't you see  
that it is our struggle  
you're making more respectable daily  
as we march forward?

17.  
In the graveyards  
and under black clouds  
people bury their loved ones  
- mourning and shedding their tears  
yet it bothers you little  
you do not sympathise  
you show no remorse  
you pretend to demonstrate bravery  
your rifles are lifted as you snipe at some more  
defenceless people  
unable to fight back

18.  
They had them all killed -  
like dogs  
they are becoming smarter  
they did not discriminate  
between the wise or the fools  
it matters little whether in celebration  
in tears or in prayer  
it is all the same,  
all game for some sniping  
after all they are all getting smarter.

19.  
When we gather,  
singing and orating our movement's slogans,  
we know

that the souls of the people you have killed  
are with us in the struggle  
Your tyranny cannot overpower our stniggle  
ours continues going forward  
- backwards never  
the wheel is turning  
by tomorrow you shall be trying to flee  
but you shall be eating dust  
stamped to the ground like a snake  
- a trying punishment awaits you.

20.

The wheel is turning  
Oppressor - wake up!  
Beware and be conscious of what you are up to  
Tomorrow the throne you occupy  
will become just another seat for others  
the others whom you hate  
will not allow you to forget their injuries  
which you have inflicted  
The wheel is turning  
and there shall be no mercy for those killing  
innocent children.  
The wheel is turning  
freedom is nearer  
our strength and our dignity  
- increasing  
we shall conquer  
as your time is coming up.

21.

The struggle moves forward  
backwards, never  
the wheel is turning  
you can hear the creaks of its motion yourself  
Day after day  
your gun's bullets  
pierce the bodies of more freedom-fighters ..

Piercing the bodies of those who shout  
that you have been enjoying far too much  
for far too long  
According to your logic  
everything should by now have been sorted,  
quiet and under  
control.

22.

Even for those you did not look like an oppressor  
who ignored your actions  
and respected you,  
you are becoming a monster  
they do not trust you anymore  
they do not address you as a friend  
you are becoming an enemy.  
Even those who ignored our struggles  
have opened their eyes in honor  
because you do not discriminate  
and your bullets do not discriminate  
everyone's up for the killing

23.

The blood of the people  
finished-off by Amabutho  
has also started to talk  
and to bear witness.  
They also are not ashamed to be killing  
people in mourning or prayer  
no feeling of shame when killing our youth  
and people's eyes are opening up to the horrors  
in this state of thieves  
but they only kill the flesh  
the soul remains alive  
and the struggle refuses to die  
the struggle moves forward.

24.

Don't kill  
don't intimidate  
don't be an obstacle to freedom  
if you want the end of our struggle  
then grant the people what they want  
but you can't face this truth  
that's why you kill and intimidate  
that is why you have created walls of darkness  
where you torture all our leaders  
and all those who speak-out the truth

25.

The wheel is turning  
the struggle moves forward  
backwards, never  
the day is drawing closer  
when not a single person shall again  
be killed by your bullets  
but the people you have killed -  
their blood sucked dry  
by this drought-stricken earth,  
all those killed by amabutho  
they will rise up from the graveyards  
and with their bare hands  
shall tear you to shreds  
But you will not die  
You will wish you were dead  
but you won't be.

26

The wheel is turning  
the struggle moves forward  
backwards never  
your sun is setting  
your days draw near  
your friends, your allies  
and your propagandists  
they will desert you

they shall climb on platforms in front of people  
and denounce you.

The struggle continues  
and your Saracens  
your machine-guns and sten-guns  
your aeroplanes  
your Casspirs and your kwela-kwelas  
your teargas  
shall not break our strength  
Your day is selling  
Maye, unto you that day.

27.

In this war  
that is being fought around us  
we are not turning back  
we are wading through the blood  
of our kinsfolk  
when one of us falls  
when one gets  
detained  
another freedom-fighter  
of the exploited is born

28

The wheel is turning  
the struggle moves forward  
fires are raging  
as the enemies  
are worried and cannot sleep  
and cannot eat  
for their stomach rejects food  
because of all the plotting to set us back  
because of the plans to put the fire out  
we continue with vigour  
we say: turn wheel turn  
turn on  
and the flames keep on raging

and the smoke worries them a lot.

29.

The wheel is turning  
the struggle moves forward  
we are not to lose strength  
we die on the one side  
we rise on the other  
and continue  
on and on with our struggle  
until you become mad  
a lunatic oppressor  
wearing garlands of tree-leaves on your head  
and trying to end off your life  
because the struggle continues  
the wheel is turning.  
we move on.

## AFRICA'S BLACK BUFALLO

The bull that left its byre when still in its calf stages,  
who followed the rocky paths, followed later by more calves  
meeting on the mountain ridges longing  
for their mother, bellowing and longing  
as they never reached the promised pastures  
they were searching for,  
to live and graze irrespective of their colour.

The black bufallo selected by other bulls,  
To leave the kraal to be apprenticed  
It followed secret trails  
And the others did not see it,  
They heard rumours it was gone.

Outside the kraal, among others it bellows,  
The other bulls give warnings, saying, "it is enough" and  
"homecoming is near"

Apprenticed in Algeria and told to come back home  
Spotted on its arrival by the others  
who complained that it was dangerous to their grounds  
and their families could not sleep at all.

They gathered, declaring it an enemy, declaring war  
They seized it and forced it in isolation on the island of Patima,  
They returned to separate it from its calves, saying,  
it is not safe enough  
from the island of Patima it bellows and the dust goes up  
and the others get unrested by the dust,  
each bellow shows more power  
they throw it into further isolation,  
on top of a mountain of fish  
From such distance there it remembers its calves,  
It bellows and the dust moves up,  
the calves hear and on goes their sturdy stampede

even some of the others associate with the black buffalo's calves  
together they stir up the dust on the paths to the top  
of the mountain of fish

The oppressor leaps and shouts  
that unfortunately, they will never be tolerated while still  
alive

But their stomachs are grumbling and running from worry  
their tails were grass-wet from excretions,  
but still they attack decimating all  
even the milking calves are kicked, stabbed by horns.  
and finished.

But the day is coming,  
The tall grass will be scorched  
and a new season shall start with no lies

Calves from black, brown and white buffalo's are stampeding  
harnesses are cracking, the yokes are left behind  
they do not sleep at nights, they have no place to sleep,  
they do not eat because they have no pasture to graze in,  
they do not drink water,  
because the rivers were diverted and dried  
they are being apprenticed  
they are swaying and beating up dust  
shaking off suffering

Be prepared black buffalo  
the weight of suffering is teetering upon our shoulders.  
to end  
a cruel life beyond belief.

## Usuku lokubuya

Kulobusuku  
Bengilele ubuthongo  
Ngivuswe ngumsindokazi omkhulu  
Nokuzama zama komhlaba  
Ngivuke ngagqoka ibhulukwe  
Langagqokeka, ngithathe ingubo  
ngazembesa, yasuka yawa phansi

Ngibona ibheshu nesinene ngalibhozomela  
Umncedo angiwufakanga ngoba  
bengiphuthuma  
Bengihehwa yimvunge ebizwakala emnyango  
Imvunge yomculo namahubo, nokuduma  
kwezulu  
Ukuhaywa kwezinkondlo nokusina  
Kukhala izigubhu namacilongo kuzamazama  
umhlaba

Ngiphume ngabheka isimo sezulu  
Isibhakabhaka angisibonanga  
Inyanga nezinkanyezi angikufanisanga  
Izintuli zisimbozile isibhakabhaka

Ngizwe izwi lokikizelayo lithi  
Waphuthelwa Mathand'ubuthongo  
Awulubonanga usuku olukhulu  
Lokubuya kwamaqhawe e-Afrika yasendulo

Amaqhawe angakuvumanga ukubuswa  
I-Afrika ngabasemzini  
Laba ngabazilwa izimpi ezinzima zasendulo,  
banqotshwa  
Yebo bafa, befela izwe lase Afrika  
Lizwakele lomuntu onamandla amakhulu  
Avukile amaqhawe, abuyela ekhaya e-Afrika  
Eza ngamahubo, ngokusina, izimbongi

zihaya izinkondlo  
Kukhala izigubhu, amacilongo, ukukikiza,  
nokuzamama komhlaba  
nokuduma kwezulu  
Ngimelwe ngumqondo okwesikhashana  
Ngizibuza ukuthi ingabe ngumbono yini na?

Cha  
Libuya nabazabalazi basendulo  
Ngesule amehlo, kwesuka imbici ngasho  
ngabona kahle.

Hhawu nguDingane owabaqothula  
basemzini abantshontsha  
izinkomo zakhe ayebathume ukuba  
bazilande kuSigonyela  
NguMzilikazi kaMashobane  
NguSikhukhuni  
NguCetshwayo owalwa wanqotshwa  
owadonsa ejele lase Robini island,  
wadingiselwa  
kwelamangisi. Wabuya sekuhleli  
oxubhagwinya esihlalweni sakhe sobukhosi

NguMoshweshwe oyibanika ephezulu  
kweThaba Bosigo wayiqothula  
eyasemzini ngamatshe  
NguSoshangane  
NguBhambatha kaMancinza owalwa waze  
wabalekela  
eMaputo engavumi ukuthelela ikhanda lakhe  
nabantu bakhe  
NguMakana, nguNgqikaNguHintsa owafela  
ezandleni zamasosha amangisi efela  
i-Afrika  
Vukani Ma-Afrika ninanele, bahlangabezeni  
nibamukele  
Yizwani ubumnandi bamahubo, nibone

ubuhle bokusina  
Zimbongi nilaleleni? Vukani nihaye  
izinkondlo zokubamukela  
Magagu okuhlabelela hubani nihlangabeze  
ngamahubo  
Phakathi kwezimbongi yimina ngedwa na  
engithwele imimoya  
yamaqhawe asendulo, ukuba ngibone ususku  
lokubuya kwabangasekho?  
Kikizani, hubani, gidani, lukhulu lolususku  
kikiki!

## Death-defiers

This poem was performed to welcome the eight ANC leaders recently released from prison.

Death-defiers, revolutionaries, we salute you  
You who were parted from us young  
and now you who returned to us old.  
You aged under the darkest clouds  
Just because of your love for your land and  
your people

Although you were parted from us body and  
soul  
Our hearts kept you nearby  
And your names have become special on our  
tongues  
And in our meetings your names are slogans  
That remind and educate workers and youth  
Since you were parted from us  
We, for our part have never rested  
We were ruled by the iron grip of oppression  
And as you return it has reached  
unimaginable peaks  
And all the paths of this land are flowing  
with blood  
Our blood, and, the blood of the young ones  
At our homes the fires are raging  
And many of us are homeless

We are the soil's offspring here  
Yet we are wanderers without shelters  
We have been made destitute to beg at  
foreigners  
We have been made to feed foreigners  
As our children stay hungry  
And our children are branded as fools  
As their children are reared by our mothers

and daughters  
To grow up and denigrate us some more.  
We are like swallows building only with mud  
But even then our efforts are kicked as if  
They were a rabid dog.

Comrades - I am speaking up:  
I am asking: what does the release of our  
death-defiers,  
The release of the "eight", mean  
When thousands of our people are still  
imprisoned?  
When thousands of our people are still in  
exile?  
Does it mean that we cease our efforts,  
Fold-up our arms and stare?

Does the ungagging of Mbeki for seven days  
mean that  
Victory is near?  
Is this reform?  
Are we to be fed on dummies instead of  
milk?

Comrades - I am welcoming our  
death-defiers  
With the voice of the exploited  
We are workers coming here from factories  
From all the different industries of South  
Africa  
We are coming from the bowels of the earth  
We are the miners of the gold and diamonds  
Miners who do not know the fate of their  
product  
We are from the rubber factories  
Where we make tyres for cars we never drive  
For the "kwela-kwelas" that chase us in the  
townships

For the “saracens” that kill our children  
For the “bulldozers” that demolish our shacks  
We are the backbone of apartheid South  
Africa  
We are the pillars of the economy  
We are the source of the wealth of this land

And we are saying:

“We demand to drink milk from Africa’s  
cattle”

We are the backbone of this mess despite our  
feelings

As employers pay us wages after apartheid  
deductions

As the shops take apartheid tax-money

As the trains and buses add their tax

As we pay rent for our makopokopo houses  
in the townships

Our lives are lived through apartheid tax  
added

We workers for our part salute your courage

Salute your commitment to truth

And for surviving through difficult  
conditions

As you were forced away from your families

As your love for South Africa made you  
everyone’s kin

And I am not embarrassed to say that

Your roles are still there despite your parting

And that your vacated seats are still here

Come and rejoin us then

To live under the Group Areas Act

Under the Labour Relations Act

Under the state of emergency

Under apartheid tax-added

Under escalating bus fares

Come join us workers in our exploitation  
and oppression

See how we get batoned, when we strike

How we are decreed unlawful in whatever  
we do.

But join us for we have not lost hope

Get into our “inqola”, our wagon and move  
with us forward

The colourless wagon

Whose riders brace themselves in joy despite  
their suffering

Who are like cattle with udders full of milk

Treading the paths of apartheid

Gossipers gossip

That it entered big buildings which hide the  
hen

That lay apartheid’s eggs

Informers are asking:

“What is this wagon, this incipla

Without a driver doing?

How does it know its destination?”

I will not tell you

Turn to your side and ask the one beside you

Our actions now

Confuse their minds

Forward MDM,

Roll-on the in-laws are waiting

But beware:

The dying donkey still kicks final hard  
blows.

## Dear

My dear, I am sorry, I left you without  
warning  
Because of the hardship we were both facing  
A thought struck me and I realised the  
reason for our hardships.

I walked paths I did not know  
I wandered until I discovered the fountain of  
our sufferings  
The source of our problems as people  
And the doors that our people have been  
knocking upon

They knocked on the day of the  
thunderstorms  
They knocked on the day of Domania  
But the door was not opened  
They knocked while the sun blasted them  
But the door was not opened.

They stood still on a cool day of gentle winds  
And on this gentle day they were harrassed  
and dispersed  
They remain dispersed up to this day

I thought hard for other ways of knocking  
I understood I had to learn other languages  
To learn all African cultures in order to sing  
That is why I departed, I left you

I had no right to be seen by the light of day  
Nor by the darkness of the night  
I took shelter with all the wild beasts  
The mosquitos fed on me but they did not  
harm me

I longed to write to you about my sufferings  
But I lived far from postal stations and shops  
I wandered till I reached my destination  
I learned to strum at my guitar  
And to sing African languages, I was a  
singer.

My dear, I wish you now to tell them that  
I am a sailor  
Wandering the world  
When they asked about me  
I know they will harass you  
But tell them I am a sailor wanderer  
Never be subordinated

I wandered through Rhodesia and sang  
I strumed at my guitar  
And the in-laws danced until they fell  
The door was opened, they took Rhodesia  
And gave birth to Zimbambwe.  
I visited through Portugal, they danced  
And slept while Lorenzo Marques was  
changed to Maputo

I am a popular singer known by the people  
I am unpopular with the in-laws because my  
music is not bubblegum music  
But my music speaks the tongues of Africa

I sang in Angola and they danced and fell  
I sang and resolution 435 was adopted  
And Maggie ran losing her skirts to block me  
I am known at home, strumming my guitar  
They heard me in Messina  
I played at Sasol, Vorster is my witness  
I played at Carlton Centre, Johannesburg  
knows  
I played at Witbank, Le Grange can tell you

I wandered and sang at Indwedwe,  
uMzinyathi can tell you  
I sang over the bridge, Umngeni is my  
witness  
I sang behind the hospital and they were in  
heaps  
This is true, Clairwood can be the witness

I sang at Jacobs, Mobil can tell you  
I sang at Kwa-Langa at Bhayi  
I have wandered through all South Africa  
I am popular

I stood and strummed my guitar at Umlazi -  
the in-laws fell.  
This is a fact, Ngculazi can be my witness  
He was so excited when hearing my music  
That he was made the in-law's enemy  
Today he is still wandering in the mountains  
Having nowhere to stay because of his  
excitement

Dear, when they ask you about me, tell them  
that I am a sailor  
I am visiting far away places  
It is well known all over the world that I am  
a popular singer and the best guitar player  
And my music is loved by the people.

## Mpondoland Blues

“Run black boy run  
bullet's coming  
run to Edolobheni  
find the kitchens  
clean the pots  
clean the  
pans  
dance for the baas  
your kraal is ashes  
your goats are ashes  
the burning horseman from the  
hill has died”...

(Qabula, 1992: PG)

## It has been such a long road

It has been a long road here  
with me, marking the same rhythms  
everyday.

Gentlemen, pass me by  
Ladies, pass me by  
Each one greets me, "eita!"  
and adds:  
"comrade, I will see you on my return  
as you see I am in a hurry  
but do not fear, I am with you and  
understand your plight."  
"Do not worry  
no harm will greet you  
as long as I am alive.

We shall make plans with the guys  
and we for sure will solve your problems.  
You trust me don't you?  
I remember how hard you struggled  
and your contribution is prized.  
In fact everyone knows how hard it all had turned  
when you were fighting for workers and for the community's  
emancipation."

Nothing lasts forever  
and our friends now show us their backs  
and they avoid eye-contact  
pretending they never saw us.

Even those whom by chance our eyes did meet  
would rush and promise and leave behind  
a "see you later."  
"What is your phone number comrade?  
I will call you after I finish with the planning  
committee on this or that of the legislature

and then we shall work something out for you, be calm."  
Days have passed, weeks have passed  
years have also passed  
with us waiting like the ten virgins in the bible.

I remember the old days  
when we had become used to calling them  
from the other side of the river.  
Some of them were in the caves and crevices  
hiding when we called  
but we hollered loud  
until they heard and they responded to our voices.

As they came to us dust sprang up  
and spiralled high all the way up to the sky.  
When the dust of our struggle settled, there was no one there.

The dust covered my body  
it cursed me into a pathetic fate  
disguising me, making me unrecognisable  
and whoever recognises me  
is judged to be deluded, deceived  
because the dust of their feet still covers my body.

And now we, the abominations, spook them  
as the dust of their feet covers our bodies.  
And they run away  
each one of them saying: "hold up the sun  
dear friend, doesn't the fog cover each and every mountain?"  
Although you don't know us, we know ourselves:  
we are the movable ladders  
that take people up towards the skies,  
left out in the open for the rain  
left with the memories of teargas, panting for breath.

Winter and summer come and go and leave us the same.  
The wind or the breeze has not changed us. Here is a summary  
of our praises –

the iron that doesn't bend, even  
Geneva has failed to bend it,  
the small piece of bath-soap about which  
meetings and conspiracies were hatched  
to catch and destroy it.

It still continues to clean men and women  
who desire to be cleaned.  
It has been a long road here  
see you again my friends  
when you really need us  
when the sun clears the fog from your eyes.

## **Of Land, Bones and Money**

They talked, they talked a lot  
about this and about that  
ignoring that the real talk  
was about land,  
about bones  
about money  
in this country without a proper name  
in this camp of the restless dead  
Tutu cried about the darkened skies  
Mandela cried that the stalks were not bearing  
green ten rand notes

FW cried that the miners darkened the gold  
And Slovo and Hani saw red everywhere in the Bantustans  
and streets  
But Tutu and the Bishops and dominees saw rainbows  
and they agreed,  
and we agreed:  
a fence on this plot, no fence on that  
a skeleton here and a skeleton there  
give a black cent and take a white rand  
in this nameless country  
but we prayed together in this camp  
what we did not say in our prayer was  
that the seasons of drought have no rainbows

## SOCIALISM

your hand in mine  
no queues, no numbers  
music  
and the cattle resting  
without bellows from the abattoir  
in their daydreams  
your hand in mine  
without any memory of hunger  
music  
guitars, sitars and violins  
and all the children dancing  
rivers and trees singing  
about past hardships...

Wherever  
he has placed his creatures on the day of his calling they shall  
respond  
Even at the dumping ground  
where filth is piled-up high  
alongside humanity's rejects and rubbish — they shall  
respond No-one can muffle such a response  
by insisting that he was not calling No-one can s  
ilence the caller even if he was to be gagged  
if his eyes were shut his ears were blocked and his mouth  
stitched even if he was gaoled in a tightly-s  
ealed boxhouse — so he heard nothing, saw nothing knew of  
nothing  
still, on the day marked by the call his voice would sound  
through the lungs of this world and the world would  
respond.

At the dumping ground  
and we do not exploit

and we do not cheat profits out of each other  
we have slipped through their grip  
leaving their cheeks blown-up with anger  
and we are growing  
We are responding  
and someone is calling  
He is calling on us  
to work hard as daylight is coming  
it has been a very long sunset  
and a very long night  
We are to sleep and listen to the voice in our dreams  
do not fear  
The one who is beginning to call  
is standing beside you  
with gifts and with infinite talents  
Work on!  
(tr. from isiXhosa by Harold Nxasana)

