

Excerpts from  
***earthstepper / the ocean is very shallow***  
**by Seithamo Motsapi**  
Deep South, 1995/2003

**sol/o**

my love  
there are no accidents  
in war – no kisses  
on the belligerent lips of crocodiles  
no loves greener than  
the dancing hearts of children  
no reveller jollier than the worm  
in columbus's boiling head

there are no songs beautifuller  
than the stern indifference of the hills  
there are no flowers more clamorous  
than the seas of children  
home in my little heart

i tell u this  
as the sun recedes  
into the quaking pinstripe  
of my warriors  
grinning & vulgar in their muddied dreams  
of power

i tell u this love  
because the roads  
have become hostile

## **the man**

an almost forgotten acquaintance  
was in town recently  
i noticed that it started raining  
just as he ambled in

i remember him as a simple man  
growing up, we all wanted  
to be doctors, lawyers & teachers  
so the blood could ebb out of the village

my friend had much more sober dreams  
he asked the heavens to grant him  
the imposing peace of the blue-gum in his backyard  
& that all the poor send him their tears  
so he could be humble like the sun  
so the red wax of the stars would not drip onto him

i remembered that man today  
& all i think of is his unassuming radiance  
like that of a blushing angel

as for his dreams  
he tells us  
whole forests invade his sleep at night  
so that there's only standing room  
for the dreams

## tenda

i look at you  
& you remind me of all the mountains  
i haven't seen or embraced  
& since you are like every one of us  
you rise out of my heart  
with the craggy serenity of kilimanjaro  
enduring like prophecies  
peaceful like distances  
since you are like all of us  
eternal like every river  
even when the sea claims us  
for me you carry affirmations  
a sprout in the parch, a mend in the rend  
water from an ancient well  
& since every one of us  
carries the seeds of a storm within him  
since the mountains come to rest  
in the breast of every one of us  
beginning the long journey across the desert  
since the forests & the skies & the faces of children  
overflow with the lessons of love  
for all to learn  
i will always remember you  
& your face that is the end of all roads  
poetry will never travel  
i will remember you  
when i have learned the rustle of rivers  
when i have learned the inconvenient gestures of compassion  
when i have learned to be infinitely present  
& yet invisible like the sky

**dawn**

*for mantsi*

i want to come to you  
so i come to myself again  
i want to see yr face clearly  
so it recovers the misty radiance  
of its primal clay  
again i want to see you  
so in the end you are not there  
& you are there

to lose yrself in distances  
so in the end you attain immensity yrself –  
this crowds into my dreams

lips, eyes, yr face, yr laughter –  
to clasp them so intimately  
in the end they become definitions  
of myself

i see you  
& again i don't see you  
often i lose myself  
only to be found in you

i'm closing in sister  
to lose oneself in the trackless jungles  
of the heart like this  
so the heavens can witness our rebirth –  
this is all i ask for

## the sun used to be white

now since blkness can be a betrayal or  
a shuttling blaze of glory rending the sky

since blkness can be a metaphor for deprivation  
or a drumming beyond the shackle & the shove  
created blk like vengeant spears  
& greeting the sun in outstretched arms  
where blk was the colour & caress of abysses  
where blk was the razor clamour of inner decay  
& meaning spat at us high white & dry  
like an ache over kilimanjaro  
the scowl of the sun & the sneer of the skies  
lacerating mah history into a scarred holler

i was learning the sulphur smile of sneers  
i was learning the jagged jig of fire  
blood knotting into hate like the tall hearts  
of ancestor maasai  
melting into the purple nikon pose  
of tourist disca/dence  
while herds slink into mouths of nairobi daggers  
or the neon surfeit of bloo-eyed yoo-wes sailors  
who can't get enough of mombassa's ochre thighs

we was born blk in a time & planet  
where blk petered into absences & voids  
where blk was the disco/dant melody  
of the primal song of emptiness  
that preceded rainbows & guerillas  
a bleeding emptiness that burned mysteries  
into the shallow hearts of feelanthropists  
or a hasty scythe in the staccato palms  
of mau mau gentlemen  
with eyes like careless sharks  
& hearts impatient like stubborn prophets

i was stumbling upon the rock of onelessness  
up over the precipice where handshakes  
triple hastily into hammers or typhoons  
so the rampant slow kwashiorkor  
of my histri books cd learn mud & manners  
so the worm dancing cosy behind the razor wire  
& the flooding blood in my i-eye cd learn  
the sugar of winds & whips like all of us

in my head guerillas ecstatic  
like storms or ash  
it was biko like a yell of crosses  
preaching deliverance from up on housetops  
love to sprout blk & concrete compassion  
from the festered cracks on the faces of slaves

from the punctured hearts of my loved ones

in my head  
it was gahvi rolling hills & hurling boulders  
over lies & cries  
while in my heart amerikkka shrieked  
her rotting din of deceit & conceit  
her long fangs singing into rapine orgies  
gahvi was a star rising over depths  
chains & murder a ready skulk  
as our hearts began the sure dance  
of burning spears

for the masterplan is not a flag or two  
up the invisible masts of rebirths  
it's more than the solid pre-harmony  
of shrieks & screams  
as we holler our thunder over the wounds  
it's not the comical contentedness  
of your own bucketful of the ocean  
love is in the receding wave of the heart  
the cool slink from the rainbow  
into the embrace of the mesenja

& though the ocean clamours into a roar  
    though the waters invoke the drowsy spirit  
of thunder  
    the ocean is very shallow  
    a time short like loss  
    a mountain low like hate  
the ocean is very shallow

**sofly soffly nesta skank**

boy marley  
armed & ganjaras  
sofly soffly his spliff a mystrical cloud  
thirsty as he pores into the book  
of nolej of wrong & rise  
ever so the drumthud & bass gong  
move us to skank  
while they having fun/k in babylon  
as one more of my peopleses  
slumps into his mouthful of gurgling blood

for the pigses  
who haven't known the sun  
but interstellar con & contraption  
for their politishams  
who haven't known love  
but the bleeding triggah of lies  
that quiets the poor  
for the slipperous slime  
home in their shrunken hearts  
we'll be burning all illusion tonight  
& banging munition all night



## **mah boy stah**

they seh mahvn  
had all the rainbows  
reclining cool like storms  
in the engine rooms  
of his voice  
    i yagree

like all niggahs  
started sinning in church  
velvet staccato baptist holler  
while brotha xy pianod we  
way 'yon river Jordan

but he juiceded the lamb  
of his sweetie melodies  
too close the lyaan  
of his root & father

& as i stammer so  
the eternal embrace of clod & dust  
perfumes the dittieses  
that are buried to their crooning necks  
in the shallow airth  
of the amerigan top folly

## shak-shak

& the carnival entered the last streets  
of the shantytown of

my soul//lightning speed rhythm  
light moving heavy swinging hip

& so the poor wd throw pots of paint  
curdled in the heart to the drowsy skies

so the portraits wd sprout, paint  
of our joy colouring the clouds

riotous multicolour, righteous marching  
shak-shak prophet majaja in front

riotous bell & thundering drum  
shak-shak mthembu foot

sore from his impatient corns

& the carnival entered the last street  
shack shack landscape grey

hunger a mere sunshine away/& yet  
& yet the joy – profuse like air

mirth in madness, spirits rejoicing

& so the madmen – the high  
voltage jolly demons, feet

shoo shoo shifty snap shuffle  
& so the merry madmen of my soul

had the season's last stomp  
after the chafe & bruise  
of the 8 to 5 tortures

& while the electrick carnival  
kicked the weals off  
for the redeemer

already there's a sign  
in the sky  
for those who see

already the graffiti's up  
the walls of my soul:

HISTRYS ON DE SIDE  
OF DE OPRES



**moni**

& so the new blackses arrive  
all scent & drape to their clamour  
head & heart the liquid odour  
of roads that defy oceans

from the fiery splash of pool  
pits they preach us redamp  
shun from the dust  
of the old ways

their kisses bite  
like the deep bellies of computers  
the gravy of their songs  
smells like the slow piss of calculatahs

& so  
the new blackses arrive  
& promise us life beyond the bleed  
of the common yell  
they promise us new spring  
for the slow limp  
of our heads

meanwhile  
the ladder finds the sky at last  
heart or herd slinks to the waters  
mbira grows into a synthesiser  
the songs ask for more sugar  
& my salt sets sail for Babylon

**enia**

my love is like a river or a fist with forty fingers  
my love is like a river that swallows mirrors & saxophones  
& spits out the purple pink salt of songs without heads  
while the skies dance like loa grandmothers

my love is a forty headed fist  
sated on the scented innards of mediocrities  
that smile like overdressed rainbows  
while temples run into my frenzied wounds  
my love is like a road that has grown wings  
travellers drum their contemptible corrosions  
up the walls of my head  
that spits out the tasteless feet of nomads

my love growls softly slow into a child  
or a knot of long-legged affirmations  
tranquil & ray-banned like ancestor khoisan  
against the boiling wiles of the sun  
that is silent like the battered death  
that sleeps on the skeleton coast

Mungu ndiye ajua kila kitu  
the elders say

God is the one who knows everything  
God is the one who knows everything

## river robert

we are at peace here  
even while our lungs are full  
of secret wars  
& primordial fears bruise our suns  
we are at peace here robert

with hopes upon our heads  
& songs sprouting out of our sins  
we bless the lacerations

we are at peace here  
across the rock & scrub  
a sole rainbow pillar  
protrudes from the earth, full  
of promise & solace

i have one eye full of dreams & hintentions  
the other is full of broken mirrors  
& cracked churchbells

i have one eye full of rivers & welcomes  
the other is full of flickers & fades

i have  
a memory full of paths & anointings  
a mouth full of ripe infant suns  
seven legs for the dancing river & the clement abyss  
& a hope that corrodes the convulsions

we bless the long rough road  
we bless the inscrutable darkness  
where our names are rent into spirit

we bless the splinters & the air  
full of asphyxiations & amnesia  
we bless our lacerations & our deformities

we bless the belligerent strangers  
who stay on in our throats  
long after forgotten festivities

as we learn the painful lessons of love  
as we learn to respect the night's sovereignty  
& the slow stern wisdom of the desert  
we bless the mysteries & the silence