

(translated from isiXhosa)

I don't disdain alcohol

Siphosethu Phikelela

Utywala'ndibuzondi

Nto nje ndiyasola ndinje nje nje kungenxa yabo

Bom'endibuphilayo bugwenxa

Ndilixhoba lobungxwelerha

Hay'inen'utywala lingcwaba

Andikhulanga njeng'abany'abantwana

but I suspect it has moulded me this way
 my life is a mess
 I am a victim of circumstances
 I now know alcohol is a grave
 I was not raised like other children
 a cup of water was my breakfast
 my mother is employed
 she staggers in shebeens and comes back in the night reeking of alcohol
 she is holding me back
 leading me to my death
 like an orphan I sleep on my tears and wake to my heavy heaving
 '...close your mouth, you whore'
 we fight, yell at each other, she looks for a knife and I run to the neighbour's
 house
 I toss and turn in my sleep – a dog licking its wounds

when I came to Cape Town
 I thought I would find greener pastures
 instead I collected regrets
 searching men's pants
 I had nothing
 I gave up on success and obtained a degree in failure
 drowning in Paarl Perle¹
 some still see a princess
 'we wish to be like you when we grow up'
 some still see *iQhawekazi*²

1. A cheap white wine produced in Paarl, Western Cape.

2. *iQhawekazi*- heroine.

3. *mamThembu*- Xhosa clan name.

'Slow down mamThembu³ this is not your path'
 they have never walked in my shoes
 my heart has bruises of hardships

I am in bondage
 I am hacked and left with nothing to bear
 I am spiritually worn out
 friends, the law and my family
 are options I have already exhausted
 I have taken a decision about my life
 rail, me, train.

where I come from

where I am from to be raped is a sacrificial rite
 we don't lay charges
 there are no arrests
 the trial happens behind closed doors
 the rapist's sentence is a goat
 we slaughter it while it bleats

*Imbeleko*¹ is performed in the womb
 every month I bleed
 generations surrender before they set foot here released as blood clots
 from that which I use to pee

my wailing will never be heard
 we do not speak where I am from, we drink our words
 we pour grudge
 when hatred boils
 we drink wrath dry and move on to left-over sorghum beer
 we are rain falling into a beer tin
 we don't know the law

we don't have any law
 how do you give evidence about the spirit?
 how do you capture the image of *Impundulu*²?
 at night we are raped and murdered
 these are cases you never hear about in the courts of law
 maybe this world
 has no place for darkness

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1. *Imbeleko* – a ceremony done to introduce a newly-born baby to the elders and ancestors.
 2. *Impundulu* – a mythical bird of the tribes Zulu, Pondo and Xhosa.