

THIRD WORLD BUNFIGHT
presents

THE PROPHET

Written, designed and directed by Brett Bailey

**PREMIERED AT STANDARD BANK NATIONAL ARTS
FESTIVAL, 1999**

Choreography: Tongesayi Gumpo
Dramaturge: Saskia Noordhoek-Hegt
Musical Director: Phillip Nangle

THE PROPHET takes the form of a ceremony conducted by a PRIESTESS and a PRIEST in their temple to heal the wound opened some hundred and fifty years ago, when the Xhosa nation was finally dismembered after the Cattle Killing – the still-festering wound which Chief Gcaleka rails against in iMUMBO JUMBO. These priests awake the nine deities (the JUJU), who project their healing powers on to the central altar upon which the saga is enacted by a troupe of children. The JUJU in turn summon the wild and sickened spirits of THE DEAD, who invade and possess five members of the audience to play out the ritual-drama, to bring the infection to a head so it may be purged.

The venue is decked out as a dingy, lofty voodoo temple: candles and altars everywhere, drums of fire in the corners, religious paraphernalia, bones and herbs. The staging is in the round, with a raised platform in the centre, a ring of reed mats around this for the audience to sit on, a ring path on which THE DEAD will dance, and another outer ring of seats and platforms for the audience.

The JUJU are ornately painted and ornamented as huge human icons standing on their elevated shrines (oil drums). The nine of them are evenly spaced in a ring amongst the outer ring of the audience. Once awakened they speak and sing in harmonious chorus. Their arms and hands perform *mudras* in slow synchronization.

The PRIESTESS wears light, bright cloth. The dark PRIEST wears black cloth and a skirt of monkey tails.

A group of traditional Xhosa singing women – THE MAMAS – is seated in one corner, in front of a platform of drums played by the percussionists.

The village drama is enacted by eleven black primary school children, smeared with ochre and dressed in beads and simple skirts; and three little white boys wearing red colonial army jackets and carrying wooden muskets.

TEXT:

(When the audience enters the PRIESTS are moving around the ring path, paying tribute to each of the nine JUJU – they pray, light candles and incense, and ring bells – while THE MAMAS sing traditional Xhosa songs. The PRIESTS take up positions, kneeling on opposite sides of the central platform, and begin their invocation of the JUJU. Softly, softly the melody of a hymn flutters onto the lips of the JUJU, eventually swelling to fill the room. Then they begin their sombre, slow chant.)

JUJU: You have called us, we have – come
 You have called us, and we have come
 But briefly
 We have come from beneath the waters
 We have from beyond the stars
 We have come from deep inside
 Ssh... ooom-uh-uh... ooom-uh-uh... ooom-uh-uh-uh-uh... ooom

(The JUJU break into the soaring harmonies of a traditional Shona song – “Eh mama eh” – while the PRIESTS dance.)

PRIESTESS: *(moving around the room, talking to the audience)*
 Nobody knows where she came from – nobody knows
 Nobody knows where she came from – nobody knows
 She said: “The dead will rise, any day now, any day now.
 They are waiting,” she said
 With her eyes rolled back in her head,
 ““They are watching us from below.
 Waiting,” she said,
 ““With their eyes rolled back in their heads,
 Their breath comes out of the ground,
 Hot with waiting, hot, hot, hot –”

JUJU: *(beginning their slow, sweeping, synchronised gestures)*
 In the beginning everything was quiet
 Everything was quiet when things began
 Then the ground split apart and the first people walked out
 They walked out driving the cattle before them
 Cattle red as the sun, blacker than night
 Cattle white as the clouds
 This – is the way – it happened

(The VILLAGERS of the village drama, a cluster of ochre-painted children, enter the arena, circling the audience on their way to the central platform. They are stumbling with hunger and misery.)

 They settled, they settled
 Children came, children came
 Came to be adults, they left, they will return
 Melons grow, they grow and fatten, they wither, they will return
 Moons rise, they fill, and fade, they will return

Always another one, returning, returning, returning, returning
Things go round and around
Ssh... ooom-uh-uh... ooom

Things come naturally to an end
This is the way of things
These are the things we know

(The VILLAGERS have gathered dejectedly on the platform, the king – SARILI – with his head in his hands, in the centre on a little stool. Their PRAISE POET addresses the audience and the village drama begins.)

PRAISE POET: Do you remember how things were before? Do you remember? Do you remember?
Those were the days of happiness; the days of milk and honey, when people lived without fighting.
Do you remember, *uyakhumbula*, do you remember?
In the long winters our people ate the delicious mealies they had planted.
Those were times of feasting!
Do you remember those days? Do you remember?
When the cows were the pride of the nation, and the fond love of everyone. Do you remember?
Do you remember those golden olden days? Do you remember?
Where have they gone?

JUJU: Things come naturally to an end
Yet sometimes things are broken, broken like a pot beneath your heel
Sometimes things are crushed
Sometimes the blood is squeezed out like a scream

PRAISE POET: *(praising his sad king) Hawu Sarili!*
His eyes are like the sun!
His body is large like the earth!
His people are like blades of grass!
The milk of his cattle fills the ocean!
A Ntaba! Mighty chief of the amaXhosa!
A Ntaba! Whose voice is like thunder!
Bayete! Chief of Chiefs! *Bayete!*

VILLAGERS: *Hawu Sarili!*

SARILI: Beautiful *sizwe samaXhosa*, these are days of suffering for us, but we will not give in. Our children shall never say that their parents stopped fighting! We all need to consider things very carefully, so that I, your king, can make the best decision for us.

WOMAN 1: *Unyanisile, inkosi yam.* Our cows and our fields are dying. And now the white settlers are threatening our ancestral lands and chasing our brother tribes into our regions.

MAN 2: They are even sending their magistrates and missionaries to undermine us! We are being assaulted as never before.

(Despairing agreement from the VILLAGERS)

PRAISE POET: Great Python; there is one hope: a people called the Russians have beaten the armies of the settlers in a country far away.

(Cheering)

MAN 1: We must not lose hope. We too can beat the settlers!

MAN 3: Surely these Russians are brothers of ours! They have also had enough of these interfering white English. Maybe they will help us too?

(Excited discussion)

SARILI: My people, we must not become lost in our dreams. Dreaming will not get us anywhere.

MAN 1: My King, you say that dreaming will not get us anywhere, so what do you suggest then? What will bring power back to the great amaXhosa?

MAN 2: Hey *wena*, Dlakadla! You ask such a question? You are making business with the whites, taking their ways and poisoning our culture. Our ancestors are furious with this business. We are being punished because of you. You have no place here anymore!

(Angry shouting and gesticulating. Then the VILLAGERS sink into a soft, sad, traditional Xhosa song)

PRAISE POET: Once the land was like a new and beautiful bride caring for her children. Now she is sick and we are lost, confused and crying for food... Who will ever answer our calls?

JUJU: Sometimes things are broken
sometimes things are crushed
the blood is sometimes squeezed out like a scream

(The sangoma, MHLAKAZA, bursts on to the platform with much snorting etc.)

MHLAKAZA: *Mbr! Mbr! Hawu Sarili!*

VILLAGERS: *Hawu Sarili!*

MHLAKAZA: My king! I have great news, news that will bring the spirit of happiness and power back into your heart!

VILLAGERS: *Hawu Gqir'elinkhulu!* What is the news?

MHLAKAZA: *Mbr! Mbr!* Ha! I have heard the message of the greatest army! They promise to come and save us!

SARILI: You bring wonderful news, Mhlakaza! Where is this army?

MHLAKAZA: At the Gxara River below my homestead, my King. I have seen the shining horns of their cows and their glittering spears sticking out of the river! They have chosen my young niece as their messenger.

VILLAGERS: Your niece!

MAN 1: This is very strange to us, *Gqir'elinkhulu*. Why does an army give a message to a little girl and not to the king directly!

SARILI: What kind of a tribe acts like this?

MHLAKAZA: *Mbr! Mbr!* This is the most wonderful thing, my King! This is the army of our forefathers – this is the army of the Dead!

(Shock, fear, outrage from all)

SARILI: What are you saying?

MHLAKAZA: Our ancestral kings: uXhosa, uPhalo, uGcaleka, uKhawuta, uHintsal! They have come to give us our power back again!

(VILLAGERS leap to their feet to dance and sing: "Qula kwedini! Qula kwedini kabawo. Khawuzenazo kwedini..." – a song celebrating the traditional stick-fighting of Xhosa youths.)

SARILI: *(dubiously)* They told this to you?

MHLAKAZA: They told this to my niece.

(Laughter and outrage)

WOMAN 1: To your niece! How could our royal forefathers, the highest of the high, come to a girl, the lowest of the low?

MAN 3: Mouth of the Elephant, this thing is a trick!

MHLAKAZA: Even I am amazed by this, but I have witnessed it! Listen. They tell her that when the nation has made all the right preparations they are coming.

SARILI: My people, these are indeed confusing times. But also, a dog should not be teased when he is hungry. Where is this girl, bring her to me.

(NONGQAWUSE, who is concealed in a white blanket, is helped onto the platform by MHLAKAZA.)

SARILI: *Intombazana*, your uncle, the reputable sangoma, uMhlakaza, has told us that you have spoken to our forefathers. We have never heard such a thing before - that our ancestors will come back. Can you tell us more?

(NONGQAWUSE's voice is greatly amplified and full of echoes. Still hidden in her blanket she delivers her message tonelessly, hypnotically, swaying to the droning tune of the JUJU who start humming as she speaks.)

NONGQAWUSE: Listen to this now: I have been
sent to you by our forefathers
the chiefs of our nations and the ancient ones
I'm told to order you to leave all the fields
leave them for the birds only
open up all your grain pits
even the old ones with their lids
broken by the hoofs of the cattle
throw all the corn on to the ground
there should be no contaminated grain left
children should go right down into the pit
and make sure every grain is thrown out to rot
then when this is thoroughly done
each and every one of the cattle must be killed
each and every milking cow and racing ox and calf
all of these – even the *lobola* cattle
and the funeral herds of the chiefs
all of these must be killed
until there is not even one living anymore
also all the people having witchcraft items
at their homesteads must go immediately
to throw them into the rivers
so that the land can be pure again
this is what the ancient ones command
burn even the houses and kraals
and throw your possessions outside
then you will see...
when you have done all these things
a new spirit will come into you
all the children who have died will wake up
also their mothers and fathers
and grandmothers and grandfathers
– everyone – it will be a wonder
no one will ever be tired again
no child will be sick or hungry
there will always be fire for warmth
and porridge in the pots
more than anybody can eat
there will be no shortage of anything at all

nobody will be sad or lonely
nobody will even die again
everything will start anew.

SARILI: Young girl, this snake does not like to be played with, what proof can you give us?

(NONGQAWUSE begins to sing a sad little song in a deep masculine voice. SARILI's eyes widen and one by one the VILLAGERS fall silent and turn to NONGQAWUSE.)

NONGQAWUSE: *(singing)* Zimkile, zimkile, iinkomo zikabawo zimkile...*(the cattle of my father have gone away...)*

WOMAN 2: Hey *abafazi!* How could this girl know this song?

WOMAN 1: This is the song of uNonqano! The favourite son of our King. He was killed in a fire three years ago!

NONGQAWUSE: *(in a young man's voice)* I see you, my Father!

SARILI: My son!

NONGQAWUSE: *(in a young man's voice)* See, the red beads you gave me when I became a man.
See your white stallion given to you by Moeshoeshoe after your own circumcision: we travel together now.
My heart is happy to see you again, father.
I am coming, father, we are all coming back.
We will give our nation her strength back again.

SARILI: *(embracing NONGQAWUSE)* Nonqano! Nonqano!

PRAISE POET: Oh Great Day! Oh wondrous news!
The Lion roars again!
The Python uncurls and the people rejoice.

MAN 3: Indeed, it is clear that the Russians are coming to save us. The Russians! The Russians! We thought they were a brother-tribe, but they are our own forefathers!

(cheers)

SARILI: Beautiful *sizwe samaXhosa!* This thing is true! Our prayers have been answered! Women! Make *umqombothi*, the African beer, so we can give thanks. Men, bring uDendo, my most prized ox. I will make the highest offering to honour our forefathers.

VILLAGERS and ELDERLY WOMEN: *(sing)* Samagwaza! Ndakugwaza ngalomkhonto! *(I will stab you with this spear!)*

(Three village men fetch the ox – a boy draped in a blanket and holding a cow skull before him – and bring it to the platform. MHLAKAZA performs cleansing rituals over it and then SARILI raises his spear and stabs the beast in the neck. The ox dies. The VILLAGERS cheer and dance off, leaving the shrouded NONGQAWUSE alone with the fallen ox.)

JUJU: We have come with our presence
 We have come with our juju
 We have come to heal a – wound
 Shoom – uh – uh – oom

(One of THE MAMAS brings a large white enamel bowl to the platform to collect blood from the dead bull's severed throat. While the PRIESTESS speaks, the PRIEST distributes long dried seaweed horns to the JUJU.)

PRIESTESS: Nobody knows where she came from – nobody knows
 Nobody knows where she came from – nobody knows
 They say that her father was shot by the settlers – (tatatata)
 Shot in the field, her mother dies – (tatatata)
 Blood in the field, her mother dies – (tatatata)
 She came when we battled across the river – *siyavuma*
 Chased by the English across the river – *siyavuma*
 The royal house of Ngqika broken apart – (tatatata)
 The mighty House of Ndlambe burnt to the bones – (tatatata)
 Nobody knows where she came from – nobody knows
 Nobody knows where she came from – nobody knows
 To the homestead of her uncle she crawled – stained with blood
 To the homestead of her uncle she crawled, and brought this thing

(The JUJU have brought the horns to their lips and begin to blow their long sad notes to summon THE DEAD. Five men planted amongst the audience begin to squirm and shudder, eventually going into fits on the floor, as the demon spirits possess them [needless to say the audience is shocked at what is happening in their midst]. They are dragged to the ring path by THE MAMAS, stripped, smeared from head to toe in sand-coloured mud, and crowned with cow horns. NONGQAWUSE, kneeling on the platform, slowly parts the folds of her blanket to reveal her shocking white-painted face, hair and body. She wears a dim expression of ecstasy. The PRIEST cracks his whip and THE DEAD stumble through the audience towards the blood offering in the bowl. They submerge their hands in the red. Two of the DEAD lope towards NONGQAWUSE at the carcass of the ox, braying her name through their cleft palates.)

DEAD 1: Nongqawuse –

DEAD 2: Hello, little girl, do not be afraid, it is us again, your fathers. We have returned to put things right here.

DEAD 1: Here, look we have something for you. *(He gives her a red lollypop)*

DEAD 2: So did you tell the people? Did you tell the people what we told you?

NONGQAWUSE: Yes.

(DEAD 1 daubs her body with red finger-spots from the bowl of blood: like the blotches of an infection. She is marked.)

DEAD 2: Did you tell them everything?

NONGQAWUSE: Yes.

DEAD 1: What did you say to them pretty girl?

DEAD 2: Do not be afraid, *sisi*. We have returned.

DEAD 1: Do not be afraid.

NONGQAWUSE: Kill all the cattle –

DEAD 1: Yes.

NONGQAWUSE: Every last one, then you will come back.

DEAD 2: And what else, what else did you say to them?

NONGQAWUSE: Empty the grain pits, every last one.

THE DEAD: Then you will be ready. Then we will come.

NONGQAWUSE: Burn the witchcraft – everyone.

(Horn-blowing builds to a crescendo as THE DEAD make their way to the ring path)

PRIESTESS: Nobody knows where she came from – nobody knows
Nobody knows where she came from – nobody knows
She came with the fear across the river – *siyavuma*
She came with the plagues across the river – *siyavuma*
The cattle coughing up blood and dying – like that
The fields infested with worms and dying – like that
The nation bowing to Jesus, dying – *siyavuma*
Nobody knows where she came from – nobody knows
Nobody knows where she came from – nobody knows
To the homestead of her uncle she crawled – stained with blood
To the homestead of her uncle she crawled, bringing this thing

(The VILLAGERS gather around NONGQAWUSE on the platform, they point out over the audience at the lurching DEAD.)

MAN 2: Look, there in the river, horns sticking out of the water.

WOMAN 1: Hundreds of cattle waiting under the river to come to us! Listen to them!

MAN 1: Where do you see this? I only see light on the water!

WOMAN 2: This thing is true! We shall have beautiful things when we do what she says.

WOMAN 3: I will have the children I always wanted.

MAN 2: And those black spots out there in the sea – can they be the faces of our grandparents?

WOMAN 1: They are singing the old war songs!

MAN 1: I hear nothing, only the wind in the grass!

WOMAN 2: I will never have to break my back in the fields again.

MAN 3: My sick old mother will become well again.

MAN 2: God has sent Nongqawuse to us to tell us what to do.

WOMAN 1: Let us start immediately so we can bring this day closer!

MHLAKAZA: *(clutching a bible)*
Abantu, truly these great things will happen as my niece, Nongqawuse, has prophesied!
Listen to the good news! When the commands of our forefathers have been obeyed these things will happen!
On that day the sun will rise blood red.
When it gets to the middle of the sky, it will stop!
It will stop, turn and then go back to where it came from!
Then the sky will darken, the ground will shake and open like a mouth.
Then our forefathers will come out bringing cattle that will never die.
All these things Nongqawuse has shown me!
The Great Day is coming! Obey our fathers! Obey our chiefs!

(VILLAGERS cheer and jump up to dance on the platform to the JUJU's song – "eh mama eh" – as they await the Great Day. THE DEAD begin their own circling entranced dance on the ring path. Then the expectant VILLAGERS gather to watch the sun – a large bright prop swung across the arena by the PRIESTESS. As the sun moves across the sky and they realize that no miracle has occurred, the VILLAGERS flee into the audience. SARILI slumps crestfallen on his little stool, and THE DEAD collapse writhing and moaning to the floor. Only NONGQAWUSE gazes enraptured across the vistas...)

JUJU: yogon yogon yogon yogon
yogon yogon yogon yogon
you go on, you go on, you go on, you go on

the beginning is – in the end, and so
you go on, you go on, you go on, you go on
the beginning is – in the end, and so
do you feel your – breath?
do you feel your – breath?
listen –
the beginning is in the end, and so...

(They break into the piercing buNyoro chant: “aykangui abakazi”. PRIESTESS brings the bowl of blood to NONGQAWUSE on the platform. She will pour a sticky red libation on the bleached prophet’s head as she speaks. SARILI plays a little thumb piano disconsolately behind them.)

PRIESTESS: If I could run backwards I would run to that homestead – huh!
If I could run backwards I would run this girl across the river
I would run this girl across the river like a snake
(addressing NONGQAWUSE)
I would never let you across again with your visions
I would never let you across again with your dreams
if I could go back
I would say: “Do not come back or you will destroy us utterly, utterly.
If you should come back here we are utterly, utterly ruined.”
(she covers NONGQAWUSE with her blanket)

(MHLAKAZA approaches SARILI again, and we are back in the village drama)

MHLAKAZA: *(bending to greet his king)* Bayete iNkosi, I am here.

SARILI: I have called you uMhlakaza, because I am very worried about this situation in our land. Many people have killed all their cattle; the valleys are filled with bones. The dogs and the vultures grow fatter every day, and soon they will be eating human beings. The rains are falling but there are no seeds in the fields. You promised that the dead would rise, but you lied to us. Our country is heading for disaster and you are to blame.

MHLAKAZA: My king, it is not me but my niece, Nongqawuse, who is responsible. I am merely her humble interpreter – *makhosi!*

SARILI: So what answer does the humble interpreter give? Why have these ancestors abandoned us?

MHLAKAZA: My king, let me consult with my spirits. *(He throws his bones)* *Makhosi!* Ah! See here, there are many stubborn and selfish people in our nation. They are guilty! They do not slaughter all their cattle as our ancestors have ordered. They are still storing bewitched mealies and cultivating their fields. Time after time I have said: change will not come until our land is cleaned out! People will not obey!

SARILI: *(gripping his head in despair, starts to wail)* Oh, my people give me your advice, this thing is tearing me apart...

(Two factions of VILAGERS – the BELIEVERS and the NON-BELIEVERS – rise up amongst the audience and sing their cases to a traditional Shona melody)

BELIEVERS: Mighty Python of the amaXhosa, don't you see our brothers are dividing us?
Their disobedience will be the death of us.

NON-BELIEVERS: Great Elephant of the amaXhosa, can't you see the English are deceiving us?
This thing is a trick to wipe our nation out.

BELIEVERS: Mighty Python of the amaXhosa, these men are undermining our culture.
Their disobedience will be the death of us.

NON-BELIEVERS: Great Elephant of the amaXhosa, a starving people cannot fight an enemy.
This thing is a trick to wipe our nation out.

BELIEVERS: Mighty Python of the amaXhosa, we have seen the miracles with our eyes.
Their disobedience will be the death of us.

NON-BELIEVERS: Great Elephant of the amaXhosa, we are ready to protect our property.
This thing is a trick to wipe our nation out.

BELIEVING MAN: *(shouting at the NON-BELIEVERS)* Look at you, *nihluthi nina*, you have a big stomach, many cattles, a nice salary, a big Mercedes Benz. Me, I have nothing. Before everything was good for me, now it is all gone. What must I feed my children? These times will not change by itself. This country is finished. Finished!

(The VILAGERS sit down. SARILI goes back to playing his thumb piano.)

JUJU: You are almost there
You are almost there
You are almost there
You are almost at the end of the rainbow.
The happy little bluebirds sing
The happy little bluebirds sing
The happy little bluebirds sing.

(3 of THE DEAD have moved in on NONGQAWUSE to dance slowly around her where she kneels on the platform. One of them passes her a small tape deck playing a recording of a repetitive traditional Valley Tonga funereal chant – “weh-weh-weh” – then they leave her. She listens, entranced by the high singing, then starts to sing)

along with the recording. SARILI is drawn by the song and takes the tape deck from her; he too sings along. Soon all the VILLAGERS have joined them in the mesmerising song. SARILI sinks to his knees hugging the tape deck to him, and the VILLAGERS come to adorn NONGQAWUSE in beautiful shiny clothes: a silver foil robe and crescent crown. They raise her up on a dais in the centre of the platform and surround her, ready to dance in veneration. THE DEAD thrash away at their drums and NONGQAWUSE slowly spins high up on the dais as she sings her monotonous summons. During the song three small white boys dressed as colonial soldiers in red jackets and carrying wooden rifles, march around the ring path taking aim at the Xhosas every few steps; and THE MAMAS, led by the PRIEST, also make a slow circuit. The whole room swirls slowly, hypnotically with pulsing bodies...)

NONGQAWUSE: I was down by the river – two birds flew by – the wind on my shoulders – mmmmm
And on the other side – I saw a man – a man from the river – calling me
“Come to me – come to me – come to me – come to me
It’s cold by the river – it’s cold by the river – come to me – come to me”
And the man from the river – took my hand – showed me things – from the other side
A new sun is rising – a new sun is rising – do you hear my voice – come to me
Do you hear my voice – do you hear my voice – come to me – take my hand
It’s cold by the river – take my hand – I’ll show you things – from the other side
Thunder in the mountains – whites of the eyes – fire on the wind – rivers run dry
Thunder in the fields – whites of the eyes – fire in the cattle – blood runs dry
Do you hear my voice – do you hear my voice – calling you – calling you
Kill all the cattle – every last one – then you will ready – then we will come
Empty the grain pits – every last one – then you will be ready – then we will come
Burn your witchcraft – everyone – then you will be ready – then we will come
A full moon is falling – a full moon is falling – the dead will rise – the dead will rise
Do you hear my voice – calling you – come to me – come to me
Come to me – come to me – come to me – come to me

(The JUJU begin their high, staccato song “She said the dead” to a blazing bass drum beat. THE DEAD launch up from their drums onto the ring path to enter their second violent trance dance. The VILLAGERS have each been given a lit candle by the PRIESTESS, and will prance in a ring around the platform to the song. NONGQAWUSE, overcome by the spinning world and the forces surging through her,

grips her splitting head and eventually collapses and crawls under the protection of her blanket.)

JUJU: She said the dead – will rise – with the sound of – blood – in her – ears
- she said the dead will – rise
Any day – now – any day – now – when we're ready
She said that the dead – will rise
They are waiting – she said – with their eyes rolled back in their head –
they are watching us from below
Waiting – she said – with her eyes rolled back in her head – their
breath comes out of the ground
She said the dead – will rise – with the sound of – blood – in her – ears
– she said the dead will – rise
Any day – now – any day – now – when we're ready
She said that the dead – will rise
And you listen – spellbound – to the words that are going around –
they are watching you from below
Listen – spellbound – to the sounds that are going around – their breath
comes out of the ground.
She said the dead – will rise – with the sound of – blood – in her – ears
– she said the dead will – rise
Any day – now – any day – now – when we're ready
Are you ready? Are you ready?
Are you ready? Are you ready?

Henrietta 13/5/11 1:38 PM

Comment: Again, do we include the title of the song?

(As the JUJU chant “are you ready?” the eager VILLAGERS gather at the east of their platform to watch the sun’s journey across the sky again. For the second time the prophecy fails and the sun sinks in the west. The VILLAGERS blow out their candles and slink into the shadows, and THE DEAD crumple again in the agony of possession.)

JUJU: *(leering from their roosts)* Things fall apart – things fall apart – things fall apart and the stars slide by
The stars slide by – the stars slide by – things fall apart but the stars slide by

(The PRIEST and PRIESTESS have come together at the platform where they kneel to continue their ceremony. After placing a lit candle in the centre of the dais they blow kudu horns together and then begin their solemn incantation with the JUJU.)

PRIESTS: We are standing at the end of the world

JUJU: Looking out looking in

PRIESTS: Darkness all around

JUJU: Looking out looking in

PRIESTS: Who will show us the way?

JUJU: Looking out looking in

PRIESTS: Who will show us the way?

JUJU: Looking out looking in

PRIESTS: Who will we follow?

JUJU: Looking out looking in
 Looking out looking in
 Do you hear my voice?
 Do you hear my voice?
 Returning, returning
 Returning, returning
 The beginning is in the end, and so –
 Are you ready?
 Are you ready?

(NONGQAWUSE, drawn by the candle, emerges from her blanket and gazes blindly into the flame. Horns like those THE DEAD wear have risen from her head. She mutters a sad little riddle to herself.)

NONGQAWUSE: Maybe I'm the weeping, 'cause I can't feel my feet
 Maybe I'm the falling, 'cause I can't catch my breath
 Sitting in the long grass, river running by
 Look into the water, all I see is eyes
 Look into the darkness, all I see is eyes...

PRIESTESS: Have you no shame, girl, have you no shame?
 Haven't you done enough?
 Look through the hole and be quiet
 Look through the hole and see the shambles
 Look through the hole and see our vertebrae lost in the dust
 Look through the hole where my heart once beat
 Look through the hole where my pride ran out
 Look through the hole in the centre and be still

(THE DEAD have groped through their delirium to their feet and, watching NONGQAWUSE like hungry cats, they prowl around the ring path while the children chant a nonsense rhyme from the peripheries.)

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam
 xuluqamqam xuluqam
 xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: Little girl, little girl

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: What are you doing?

Henrietta 13/5/11 1:38 PM
Comment: Is this nonsense, or does it mean something?

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

NONGQAWUSE: I'm playing with my doll

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: And what will you do then

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: When you've played with your doll?

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

NONGQAWUSE: I'll go to fetch water

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: You'll go to fetch water

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: Then what will you do

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: When you've fetched the water?

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam
xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: Little girl, little girl

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: Why are you hiding?

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam
xuluqamqam xuluqam

(still staring into the flame, NONGQAWUSE is becoming increasingly paranoid as THE DEAD gain on her)

DEAD: We want to come out now

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: We want to come out

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: We want to come out now

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

DEAD: We want to come out!

CHILDREN: xuluqamqam xuluqam

(With a clatter of drums NONGQAWUSE is possessed by the spirits of THE DEAD: their deep, strained voices bellow through her tiny frame. She tries to scurry away from these demons, but they are inside her. The VILLAGERS chant their frantic song, and THE DEAD begin their final violent round of trance dance to the clashing cowbell rhythms of the JUJU.)

CHILDREN: *(singing)* They are rising, they are rising
The dead are rising
They are rising, they are rising
D'you see them rising?

(The VILLAGERS grasp NONGQAWUSE and stand her upon the dais again, dancing in hysteria as the demons wrack her body.)

NONGQAWUSE: *(roaring)* We want to come out... we want to come out... we want to come out... (etc).

(The whole room is a cacophony of chanting, ringing and drumming, bodies are whirling around the room, and as the PRIESTESS hauls the sun across the sky the PRIEST thrashes a metal drum with cattle femurs. THE DEAD are going demented as the sun swings westwards and the VILLAGERS fall down dead. Then all at once the PRIESTESS brings the whole eruption to an end as she screams her exorcism at the demon spirits. NONGQAWUSE and THE DEAD collapse as the spirits possessing them are driven away.)

PRIESTESS: *Hamba! Phuma!*
Get out! Get out!
Stay away from my children!
A hundred and fifty years you've been here!
A hundred and fifty years among the bones and the ashes,
Eating my children, defiling my house.
Your breath stinks of my pride.
Your breath stinks of my blood.
Get out! *Phumani!*

(THE MAMAS remove the horns from the men whom THE DEAD have left, and wrap their quivering bodies in blankets. NONGQAWUSE too is shrouded. The PRIESTESS sprinkles healing herbs over the bodies of the VILLAGERS and sings a mournful song – accompanied by the humming JUJU, who are projecting their healing powers onto the fallen VILLAGERS – and the PRIEST covers the bodies of with cattle bones.)

PRIESTESS: *(singing) Umam' angalila ma'ndibona ndisenje madoda... (my mother would cry if she could see me like this...)*

(While the PRIESTS are busy with their healing rites over the children, the three little white soldiers hop vulture-like to the VILLAGERS and pick over their bodies. Twice the PRIESTESS drives them away with curses. The JUJU begin their last incantation before the spirits depart from them like smoke into the night.)

JUJU: Dim humankind, listen to us, the deathless, the starborn, the radiant
 Receive our sound: shoom – uh – uh – oom
 Deep inside you – is – the pot of gold
 Deep inside you – is – the pot of gold
 Deep inside you – is – the pot of gold
 Do not be afraid, we – are with you
 Do not be afraid, we are – with you
 We are all around you
 We are right inside you
 In the very heart
 There is no – escape – at all
 The happy little bluebirds sing

(Finally the children rise up and make a circuit of the room with THE MAMAS and PRIESTS, singing “Masiy' eMbo” – “Let's go to Mbo, the place where we were created”. The JUJU sit dead still till everybody has left.)

END
