

WATERING THE BELOVED DESERT
Brown Turtle Poetry Series



WATERING THE BELOVED DESERT

New and Selected Poems
by **Mvula ya Nangolo**

Selected, introduced and edited by
Frank M. Chipasula

BROWN TURTLE PRESS

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FROM EXILE

From exile when I return
I'm going to beg someone to touch me
Very, very tenderly
And gradually put me at ease
I wish to feel again how life feels

I've not been home for many, many years
For many years I've been out of sight
For many years I've not been touched
And I've learnt to be homesick here in exile
Where life is not so bright

I've not been touched so tenderly
I've been searched by bullets
Going through my camouflage
And leaving my heart so fresh
I wish to feel again how life feels

From exile when I return
I'm going to beg someone
To introduce the newly born babies
Help me identify those grown-ups
And lead me to the cemetery
Where friends and playmates have long gone

From exile when I return
I'm going to beg someone
to understand my silence
the letter that didn't arrive
about our clan and tribe
for now I only belong
to my country and nation

still I wish to be touched tenderly
by hand and atmosphere
of people in a peaceful sphere.

IV

When death comes prowling like a leopard
you said you'll know it's time to depart
but for the time being
you wish to see those bare sands of the
Namib
you wish to inhale not polluted air
you wish for the cooling shade of the great Baobab
where many moons ago you were born
and now that it's the norm
to rest buried in a numbered grave
what do you think of every morn of your life?
hunter, hunter's son—my *khoi-khoi* brave?

V

Let us together now
before your eyes are closed
and your heart stops dancing to the tune of life
let us together now
do the frog dance before tomorrow
praise our ancestors without sorrow
and then search where they'd hidden your bow
I need your poisoned arrow tomorrow.

A FLOWER

Ever walked that footpath
to my village
between that communal well
and your uncle's homestead?
If next you come
not by flying machine
but walking in single file
with your chum or scum
from the city...
just don't walk by
but stop

Put a flower on my grave
for I died like a brave
for your salary so high
which you receive with no sigh
I'd freed you
and lest you forget the brave

There on that grave
Just a flower-child
onto my eternal bed
where I rest not yet dead
just a flower lad.