

**mashogojo
maškoško
boshokhoshokho**

—notes for a story that is yet to be written

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These notes constitute a story that is yet to be written. It is published here as a companion to the installation 'Makhalaka' presented as part of the exhibition 'Handle With Care' at the Javett-UP opening from May 08, 2021 to January 31, 2022. 'Makhalaka' is a prototype towards a bracelet style by the same name. It is presented here as a series of ideas and tangents that inform my quest for the bracelet, which is associated with one's capacity to occupy one's personal dreamscape.

**Vushokhoshokho vya valoḁa dzila ya
phaḍalaja-vadimu**

Helloooo, i wanted to know if you know what "go lla Mašokošo" means

Hi. Never heard of that 1 before

Heheheh, I guess ke ngwala ka sepedi. I heard it in khereto kha balobedu. Bare "ba khuduha ka mašokošo, mašokošo a go ama kgomo tša batho" i also find it in reference to mourning in direto tša makgapa (Makhaba). It sounds like a particular sound

According to my grandmother, the root -shokhoshokho signifies 'great deal of things'. Like if one says 'o apa kheshokhoshokho' means 'you are saying a great deal of incoherent things'. Boshokhoshokho on the other hand is a great deal of tools or belongings. I just don't know if the meaning applies in this praise poem also.

Weeks later...

Finally found out the meaning of the word. It's 'mashogogo' (mashokotjo). From the verb 'rogoja' to suck milk as a calf. So mashogogo is milk that is drawn after the calf has suckled.

And it could also be a plural of 'lishogogo' meaning a calf that still suckles.

**The excerpt above is a copy of Whatsapp conversation with Khutatso Seshai who is currently working on the second version of the Khelobedu orthography and dictionary in collaboration with Valodagoma*

Prologue

Ḑava ye i thoma ga ṅaṅedi.
ṅaṅedi je tharu. Huri mashogojo,
mašokošoko li vushokhoshokho
vu dzena gafhi, ri ḑo vona bili.
Nṅa gi hubuḑe vaabara-tshweu,
vatshibidi va hu loḑa dzila ya
ṅaṅedi, va khumana mafhadi li hu
luyya ...

A few years ago, I sat at a dinner
table in Berlin talking to an
enthusiastic American Jewish
anthropologist about Balemba.

As we spoke, I enthusiastically professed to be a Molemba –the “so called” black Jew. This proclamation had come off a recent visit to my father and grandfather on account of a dream I had suffered. Of course, at that point I had not yet encountered the complexity of the Balemba-black Jew paradox/discussion. All I knew was that in the 1880s a Molemba man (a Mokhalaka) had left or fled from his home, travelling from Venda into Vulovedu where by chance (if there is such a thing for a Molemba) he happens to save an important Mulovedu religious protagonist from an assassination. This man, nicknamed Sebolai on account that he used his gun and killed a man to save another, would

become that man's bodyguard. For this act he was blessed ga myeji (to translate this would lead us down a slippery road) instead of the standard gift of a lihubo, a highly sought-after copper sweat scraper—'lihubo la dintsi ja Makgaga' is another long story still to be imagined. The protagonist in question was Kgašane who founded the Lutheran church in Vulovedu after a dream instructed him to get baptised while travelling in search of guns in the Cape— a gun was a thing (a rite of passage) for Valovedu at that time. With Modjadji trafficking and controlling guns sourced from Portugal, Kgašane sought independence and made plans to find his own gun source in the Cape. So Kgašane and his

friends had travelled to the Cape to see about guns. Kgašane was not just an ordinary Mulovedu, if there is such a thing. He was the door that maintained Modjadji's cycle. He was the inheriting son of Mamatlepa and was liable to commune with dimyeji ja Mamatlepa –another tangent to be indulged at some point. Because of his refusal to commune on account of his belief, he would suffer death by stoning after hiding the drum that instructs Modjadji to call the two-year-long national goma that coincide with Modjadji a khi la vuṭhugu vya gweṇa. Vuṭhugu vya hu mu isa vuyavathu—"death"—only to emerge as a young girl from the goma she initiated. You see, va ri Modjadji is immortal and does

not die, she simply leaves and then returns. Vamye va ri gi "ritual suicide", none the less Modjadji u phaḁalaja vadimu vyalo ga he Venus chases away the night only to return for dinner to commune with vadimu.

To get back to my story, Sebolai saves Kgašane, "forfeits" lihubo and a century later here I am, or at least that's how the story goes. The conversation with the anthropologist was really about genetics and the questions around the Cohen gene linking Balemba to the priestly order associated with Moses and Aaron. These would be the priests I understand to have been key to the success of King Solomon in his endeavour to build and maintain

his sacred place. I hope we get to speak about Solomon and his mines, I am very interested in the stories—mabarebare—about his copper mines in Phalaborwa. Modjadji and Solomon have become an obsession, dotted with tangents about Credo Mutwa who uses Valovedu and Balemba interchangeably—he speaks of a young ill-treated Mulovedu widow whose child plays with the child of a visitor from out of space, seeing how the children play well together the mothers promise each other that when the time is right, the “alien” child will return, and their two nations shall play together once more... more later.

Anyway, I had been in Berlin because I had been going there for

some time, searching for stories about some Valovedu who had ventured there in 1894—fuelled by a rumour of a dream. In a way I was on the trail of Sebolai, who I suspected to have been on this voyage. At that point I had come to appreciate that Valovedu were keen travellers, and while their travel (especially at that time) had been unimaginable to me prior to my own travels, I was starting to appreciate that to be a Mulovedu was to be a traveller—I recently heard khireḍo kha Valovedu, kha Modjadji ...va ri la khovela gi lala dzila, gi muḥlohadi khi na muloḍi gi loḍwa gi mavu a dzila... Early in my chase for Valovedu, yes! gi Mulovedu, fhela li he u ga bebya u hi Mulovedu, you must still claim it. In 2006, like any

traumatised (is this the right word)
“model c” kid from the 1994 batch,
I had begun a series of trips to
Vulobedu in search of myself and
a memory of what it was like to
not be roused by the arrogance
of a secure white fragility and the
all-consuming anger of being a
“disenfranchised” young black
man from staying too long in
Gauteng. At this point I was truly
in search for a time when I was not
constituted by comparison, but
by *hu zwireḁa*, where my history
and innovations marked my
descriptions. Where I was simply
Ditebogo ha Mudimu, *George
Mahasha beu ya Vulovedu*, where
*gi veho khiḁuhulu kha vathu-
Valozwi*, *Bakone*, *Bakhalaka*,
Mudau, *Tlou ya go kwa byofa
nama*, *e sa tšhoge lehu*, *e tseba*

gore e ya kae.

My quest had been a yearning for the old man and women I remembered from my childhood. A bit worn out but beaming with vitality from being back home after a few decades of migrant labour—a generation that lived another forty to fifty years after retirement, long enough to remember and savour the delights of their travels and childhood without the bitterness. What I found with these forays back home was a story—a series of story prompts. The first, which I found on the internet, following my chronic insomnia—that persistent 3am waking that is as sure as the morning star (Modjadji—phaḍalaja vadimu). The same insomnia that

is facilitating this text. It was an insomnia that came and went, at first it seemed irregular and brought on by stress or a heavy workload, but after years suffering it, one could almost link it to the disappearance and reappearance of diṅaṅedi ja dibula–Diguluvyana--digoma. You see I found the story on the internet, because like a child of my time, I would visit and converse with my great-grandmother Bodwekhe–vona Makoma muhulu maṅhwa a di vona– who would tell me fascinating stories about her life and what she knew of our history—often reminding me “huri nkhi vuje makhuwa ga huri va hlalifheḁe thugo”, li huri “muthu gi hu tshibila, a vuye a bontshe ba havo”— and then I would search

the internet to see what else I could find from her prompts. This insomnia has bought me quiet an education, often I would wake to wonderful unconventional films and documentaries during the graveyard shift before telemarketing and soft porn was a thing—we should really revisit the old South African late-night programming—what a library. After my trips home I would find myself googling Bakhalaka and Bakaranga drawn from Bodwekhe and hearing praises at family funerals—I remember the pause in the praise after the utterance of the word “mbubu”, recalling my mother’s irritation and comment about how “vulgar” khireḍo kha Mahasha can be, to which the praise would

continue by reiterating that "...va ri Khilovedu ha khi ruhani, khi ya reḍa". A story that resonated was one of Valovedu (who have many names, as there are languages) or a Mulovedu who had left home in search of salt—an encounter in 2010 as I installed the photographs from my trips, a Mulovedu man, Malatji, came to visit me at the invitation of another Mulobedu man who was installing the show at the JAG, Malatji told me that if I really wanted to know Valovedu I should follow mafhadi, which is the Khilovedu technical name for salt. This Mulovedu (vamyē va ri gi Thobela or Thovela—curious tangent still to be indulged) would eventually found or "dominate" (or is it that the state became indebted— khikhuwa khi ya bala—

depending on how you want to think about it, or on what one knows of Khilovedu) an influential state—vamyē va ri gi Vambanyalo (k2).

Anyway, a Mulovedu leaves a secure home in search of salt, settles somewhere and the people divert their tribute that way—ga Khilovedu ri ri va ya luva (loba). I had held on to this story because at that point in my life it was important to excavate a long history of Valovedu and by extension my own. The website was a strange repository or directory of humanities text and archival listings around what we now call the “precolonial history”—I still don’t know why it’s not just history—dinonwani—, after all isn’t

contemporary colonialism a blip in an otherwise very long history of Southern Africa. Anyway, the site--which has been cleaned up beyond its initial utility-- drew on, challenged and cannibalised anthropology in an expanded sense (archaeology, geography, social anthropology, history and so on) and painted a "speculative" history of the region that did well to expose the colonialism we are -post, de-, -re'ing as a small event in an otherwise colourful story...

Exits

... My story goes on to talk about my gravitation to dreaming as instructed by the mention of a dream by the Berlin travellers, followed by my dream of Orion's Belt which leads to Balemba that go traveling following a star and ultimately leading to the meteorite that fell at the current ZCC headquarters in Moria.

It is curious to be editing these notes as the Jagger Reading Room (African studies library) at UCT burns. I had found most of the archival listings in this collection later when I started writing on Modjadji. While I am shocked by the loss, I am excited

by the possibility to recover the “lost” resource from the vantage of contemporary memory. May it be playful and imaginative. After all it is not the first time a fire would visit such a collection, the Anthropology Museum at Wits university has a story to tell of objects held in trust away from its audience, with rumours filling the air about the source of the fire. But again, this is salacious gossip.

Just the other day I received a scan of the 1905 Transvaal Native Affairs Department’s publication ‘short history of the native tribes of Transvaal’. In a curious entry, they characterise Balemba in a very short paragraph on page 64, listing among their five distinguishing characteristics to

other so called "tribes". Listing that they hold constant prayer meetings, and that "they are good "bracelets" ... makers ". Of course, my father's characterisation of our skill with the bracelets is far more imaginative.

18 April 2021

This textual form (pamphlet??) functions as a notebook and you are welcome to continue the story in the pages that follow. In this form the prologue, which was originally written with Northern Sotho orthography as I am accustomed to--of course dotted with Khilovedu sounds. I offer it here rendered in a Khilovedu orthography developed by Kgothatso Seshayi and published as 'Thalusamandwi ya Khilovedu' (Khilovedu to English dictionary) in 2018.

By intention the prologue should flag key stories in a rather entry level story (at least for the moment--or one whose telling will take a few attempts). It should conclude with mashogojo and

the question of incoherence--
vushokhoshoko--as a key strategy
for my telling of Khilovedu,
Balemba and ultimately
Bakhalaka whom the prototype
bracelets engage. All framing
khireḍo kha Modjadji and by
extension Valovedu and Balemba
as suffering from a sickness of
traveling or is it restlessness?--the
only sickness they cannot cure.



Credits

University of Cape Town

Image credit: George Mahashe,
image of a selection Balobedu
Material culture collection
(Accession No. AE-SAM 9671
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History Centre)

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Iteration 1a