

AHAN—The Tongue

No, it's not the blows, it's not the chains
No, it's not the guns, it's not the chains

Tell me, Solomon, everything separates us now:
Tell me, Solomon, everything separates us now:
You are the King of Jerusalem,
Oh, most powerful of white men
And I, black woman, am subservient before you
Oh, most powerful of white men
For I, supposedly, stole water from your fountain.
Oh, most powerful of white men.

*But where does that power come from?
Is it your hand that bears the sword?
Then what part of your body gives you
This infinite power over men?
And where does that power come from?
Is it your foot that rushes to the battle field?
Then what part of your body gives you
This infinite power over men?*

No, it's not the blows, it's not the chains
No, it's not the guns, it's not the chains

Tell me, Solomon, everything separates us now:
Tell me, Solomon, everything separates us now:
Whole generations that have come from the West
Waving a Bible will now subjugate what's mine
Oh, most powerful of white men
They'll justify their crimes in the name of mercy
Oh, most powerful of white men
Of false compassion or simply of contempt
Oh, most powerful of white men

*But where will your power come from?
From the gigantic scope of your armies?
Then what part of your bodies will give you
This infinite power over men?
But where will your power come from?
From gunpowder or from nuclear arms?
Then what part of your body gives you
This infinite power over men?*

No, it's not the blows, it's not the chains
No, it's not the guns, it's not the chains

Tell me Solomon, everything separates us now:
Tell me Solomon, everything separates us now:
Already the damage is done, and the very spirit of subservience has entered our
souls and we pray to your god
Oh, most powerful of white men
They'll justify their crimes in the name of mercy
Oh, most powerful of white men
Of false compassion or simply of contempt
Oh, most powerful of white men

*But how to sustain this power?
With the heavy chains that shackle your slaves?
And with what part of your bodies will you
Retain this infinite power over men?
And how to sustain this power?
With the whip cracked a thousand times, with the unsanitary cell?
And with what part of your bodies will you
Retain this infinite power over men?*

No, it's not the blows, it's not the chains
No, it's not the guns, it's not the chains
Nor the canons that are armed
It is quite simply with your words
Your pretty words, your poetry.

No, it's not the guns, it's not the chains
And your spiteful slogans
That have poisoned our souls
That have poisoned our souls

*But where does that power come from?
It's from the tongue lying curled inside my mouth
It's because of the words I relentlessly utter
That I hold this infinite power over men!
But where does that power come from?
It's because of words, this poison so often eluding you
That manipulates and convinces you in the end
That I hold this infinite power over men!*

Tell me Solomon, everything separates us now:
Tell me Solomon, everything separates us now:
We'll need eons before the mental subjugation
Oh, most powerful of white men
That has fettered our dreams will finally tumble
Oh, most powerful of white men
It has sown division in our sacred families our tribes
But when all's said and done I want to believe in ultimate redemption!
But when all's said and done I want to believe in ultimate redemption!

No, it's not the blows, it's not the chains
No, it's not the guns, it's not the chains
No, it's not the blows, it's not the chains
No, it's not the guns, it's not the chains

EYIN—THE EGG

*This bird has no flesh
This bird has no blood
This bird has no feathers
Its color is as pure and beautiful as gold
This bird might be dead
Or it might be alive
This bird does not move
Its color is as virginal and sweet as milk*

Solomon, I've been told that you found your messenger among the birds,
For even on their kingdom you impose your law and wisdom
But now I shall speak to you of an unusual bird
But now I shall speak to you of an extraordinary bird.

*This bird has no flesh
This bird has no blood
This bird has no feathers
Its color is as pure and beautiful as gold
This bird might be dead
Or it might be alive
This bird does not move
Its color is as virginal and sweet as milk*

Solomon, they told me you trained an army of birds
And that this army spied in secret on your enemies
But now I shall speak to you of an unusual bird
But now I shall speak to you of an extraordinary bird.

*This bird has no flesh
This bird has no blood
This bird has no feathers
Its color is as pure and beautiful as gold
This bird might be dead
Or it might be alive
This bird does not move*

Its color is as virginal and sweet as milk

Solomon, they told me that you admired the swallow's cooing,
And that on it you bestowed the title of 'springtime prophet'
But now I shall speak to you of an unusual bird
But now I shall speak to you of an extraordinary bird.

*This bird has no flesh
This bird has no blood
This bird has no feathers
Its color is as pure and beautiful as gold
This bird might be dead
Or it might be alive
This bird does not move
Its color is as virginal and sweet as milk*

Its form is perfection—it's like the world itself.
I see you hesitating...
Do you want any further signs?
Its form is perfection—it's like the world itself.
I see your frowning brows...
Do you want a sign from me?
Its form is perfection—it's like the world itself.
Its surface is hard, but it's oh so frail!

Its form is perfection—it's like the world itself.
I see you hesitating...
Do you want any further signs?
Its form is perfection—it's like the world itself.
It's the origin of life—of the paradox of life
I see your frowning brows...
Do you want a sign from me?
Its form is perfection—it's like the world itself.
And for survival it must have warmth!

In my land they say:
The word is as frail as this
Like it, it too will break when it falls

Just some ill-placed irony, a little arrogance from he
Who thinks that the world owes him all.
And without any possible return, the soul of Adonijah your brother
Closed up again and withered,
He listened to your words no more, but prepared for a fratricidal war

Its form is perfection—it's like the world itself.
I see you hesitating...
Do you want any further signs?
Its form is perfection—it's like the world itself.
Yes, the family's word is frail
I see your frowning brows...
Do you want a sign from me?
Its form is perfection—it's like the world itself.
It's as frail as the egg that at any moment can fall.

*An egg has no flesh
An egg has no blood
An egg has no feathers
Its color is as pure and beautiful as gold
An egg might be dead
Or it might be alive
An egg does not move
Its color is as virginal and sweet as milk*

OMIDJE—TEARS

If I present myself before you now, King Solomon
Black-skinned and alone,
Like a child on its first day of life
Pacified and proud,
If I've been exposed to the warfare's rain of steel so I could find you
Black-skinned and alone,
It is because a golden bird brought me your message.
Pacified and proud,
If I've admired the thirst for beauty of peaceable peoples
So I could find you,
Black-skinned and alone,
It's because a golden bird so highly praised your wisdom.
Pacified and proud

*Sometimes it is sweet, sometimes it is bitter
The water that suddenly appeared along my journey
Sometimes it is honeyed, sometimes it is harsh
The wave that seized me all along my path.*

No other Queen under the African heaven
Can resist the curiosity of discovering
A greater wisdom than that of Solomon

No other Queen under the African heaven
Can resist the curiosity of contemplating
A greater wealth than that of Solomon.

*Sometimes it is sweet, sometimes it is bitter
The water that suddenly appeared along my journey
Sometimes it is honeyed, sometimes it is harsh
The wave that seized me all along my path.*

If I present myself before you now, King Solomon
Black-skinned and alone,
Like a child on its first day of life
Pacified and proud,
If I almost died of thirst so I could find you
Black-skinned and alone,
It is because a golden bird brought me your message
Pacified and proud,
If I quenched my thirst so I could find you
Black-skinned and alone,
It's because a golden bird so highly praised your wisdom.
Pacified and proud.

*Sometimes it is sweet, sometimes it is bitter
The water that suddenly appeared along my journey
Sometimes it is honeyed, sometimes it is harsh
The wave that seized me all along my path.*

No other Queen under the African heaven
Can resist the curiosity of gauging
A greater stature than that of Solomon

No other Queen under the African heaven
Can resist the curiosity of gauging
A grander pledge than that of Solomon.

Oh, crest-crowned bird, you'd warned me.
--for I, too, understand the tongue of birds—
The lovely bird leaned over and whispered in my ear,
“If you leave Axoum, your marvelous kingdom of Sheba
No, you shall not regret it;
If you leave the proud people of Sheba behind
You shall never turn back again.”

Oh, crest-crowned bird, you didn't persuade me.
--for I, too, understand the tongue of birds—
The lovely bird leaned over and I whispered in its ear,

How can I be sure,
If I leave the proud people of Sheba behind,
That Solomon's wisdom is very real?"

If I present myself before you now, King Solomon
Black-skinned and alone,
Like a child on its first day of life
Pacified and proud,
It's because I have devised a plan, a ploy,
Black-skinned and alone,
That no golden bird has whispered in my ear
Pacified and proud,
I shall verify if your alleged wisdom will resist
Black-skinned and alone,
My first riddle, which no golden bird can solve
Pacified and proud.

*Sometimes it is sweet, sometimes it is bitter
The water that suddenly appeared along my journey
Sometimes it is honeyed, sometimes it is harsh
The wave that seized me all along my path.*

Salomon, I see you now, you're smiling
From high up on your throne, magnanimous,
In your mind you contemplate my journey,
The manifold pains and joys it's caused me.
In your thoughts you see the peoples' suffering once again
And the emotion that the beauty of humanity provokes

And you say:

*"The water of tears is sometimes sweet, sometimes it is bitter
These tears that suddenly appeared along your journey"
"The water of tears is sometimes honeyed, sometimes it is harsh
These tears that seized you all along your path."*

OGBO—FLAX

King of Kings, King of Kings, King of Kings

Son of David, you are the King of Kings today
Your throne covered wholly in gold
Is guarded by two lions
Two motionless lions
Whose power reassures you

King of Kings, King of Kings, King of Kings

But never forget that fatal day
When stealing your marvelous ring
(the one that gives you infinite strength)
Sakhr the demon caused your power to shatter to pieces
Sakhr the demon caused your riches to shatter to pieces

*Birds idolize it
Fish despise it
Birds idolize it
Fish despise it
It's the rich man's finery
But also what the poor take with them to their tomb*

King of Kings, King of Kings, King of Kings

Son of David, you are the King of Kings today
Your table is carved from emerald
Resting on four sapphire legs
Four enormous legs
Whose power reassures you.

King of Kings, King of Kings, King of Kings

But never forget that fatal day

(the one that gives you infinite strength)
Sakhr the demon rendered you poor
Sakhr the demon changed you into a beggar.

Birds idolize it
Fish despise it
Birds idolize it
Fish despise it
It's the finery of the rich
But also what the poor take with them to their tomb

King of Kings, King of Kings, King of Kings

Son of David, you are the King of Kings today
You have built the grandest of all temples
It rests on twelve bronze bullocks
Twelve bronze bullocks
Whose power reassures you

But never forget that fatal day
When on your finger you wore the magic ring
(the one that gives you your infinite strength)
Sakhr the demon made it sink into the billows
Sakhr the demon made it sink into the sea's immensity.

For forty days you roamed around
For forty days you went and begged
For forty days hunger ate away at you
Son of David, the King of Kings, this is you!
But I implore you to also remember those days
When your shoulders were not draped in rich man's finery

On the fortieth day a fisherman found you
On the fortieth day, pity made him take you in
On the fortieth day, he gave you the fish he'd caught
Son of David, the King of Kings, this is you!
But I implore you to also remember those days

On the forty-first day you found it in his innards,
On the forty-first day, the marvelous ring that was stolen
On the Forty-first day you recovered your infinite powers
Son of David, the King of Kings, this is you!
But I implore now, this day, to tell me
What it is they share, the richest of the rich and the poorest of beggars.

Flax, flax, oh King of Kings.

Birds go mad over its leaves

Flax, flax, oh King of Kings.

From which the net is made that fish so greatly dread

Flax, flax, oh King of Kings.

That bedecks your vanity, you the most powerful of men

Flax, flax, oh King of Kings.

From which is sewn the shroud of the indigent man, your brother!

ALIKAMA--WHEAT

I, Balkis, known as Makeda, too,
I am the Queen of the South
I, Balkis, known as Makeda, too,
I am the Queen of the South
And yet I am your prisoner.
And yet I am your prisoner.
Oh, Solomon, sage among sages
You are the King of Jerusalem
Oh, Solomon, sage among sages
You are the King of Jerusalem
And my heart beats for you!

Now that the judges have sentenced me
Oh Sun
I am forced to live by your side,
Oh Sun
To forget my riches and my realm
Unless I renounce my God, the Sun

*It's buried deep inside the darkness
And yet it's still alive!
The farther it fades into the void
The more life around it comes to bloom
It's buried deep inside the darkness*

I, Balkis, known as Makeda, too,
I am the Queen of the South
I, Balkis, known as Makeda, too,
I am the Queen of the South
I want to go back home
I want to go back home
Oh, Solomon, sage among sages
You are the King of Jerusalem
Oh, Solomon, sage among sages
You are the King of Jerusalem
And not betray my people's beliefs!

I know in my heart all of us worship the same God
Oh Sun
Whether known as Allah, Jehovah, or Vishnu
Oh Sun
Our hearts beat at the same rhythm, the same cadence
And if you convince your people, I, too, would speak to mine

*It's buried deep inside the darkness
And yet it's still alive!
The farther it fades into the void
The more life around it comes to bloom
It's buried deep inside the darkness*

I, Balkis, known as Makeda, too,
I am the Queen of the South
I, Balkis, known as Makeda, too,
I am the Queen of the South
I feel a new life budding inside me
I feel a new life budding inside me
Oh, Solomon, sage among sages
You are the King of Jerusalem
Oh, Solomon, sage among sages
You are the King of Jerusalem
No doubt it is the fruit of our love

The faith you profess I shall bring to my realm
Oh Sun
Provided that it signifies love, not division
Oh Sun
Not subservience, but compassion
But first solve this final riddle for me:

*It's buried deep inside the darkness
"It's the grain of wheat the farmer sows,
The Wheat"*

"Like the seed from which our son will spring"

"It's the grain of wheat the farmer sows,

The Wheat"

And the farther it fades into the void

"Makeda, Makeda

Soon the memory of me inside you will disappear"

The more life around it comes to bloom

"Menelik, Menelik

Our son will be the ear of wheat

The ear of wheat

At the horizon of the Earth, our nourishing mother

Menelik

Is the symbol of our intertwined hands,

Menelik

Like the intertwining of our cultures,

Menelik

Cross-bred child who one day shall sing of a New World

IFÉ -- DESIRE

You have sixty wives, among the most beautiful
Languid, so languid,
Not to mention eighty concubines
And all the ladies of your kingdom
Languid, so languid, Makeda
Who are secretly in love with you
But tonight I read in your eyes
Languid, so languid,
That seemingly there's only one woman for you!
Languid, Makeda

*What is this bit of nothing, this breath,
--No, it isn't love—
What is this bit of nothing, this spirit,
--No, it isn't love—
That with impatience makes the heart
Explode of he who feels it?
What is this bit of nothing, this spirit,
--No, it isn't love—*

You have experienced the wildest joys
Languid, so languid
Such as no man could ever imagine
And many a languid heart
So languid, Makeda
Has succumbed to your advances.
But tonight I read in your eyes
Languid, so languid,
That seemingly there's only one woman for you!
Languid, Makeda

*What is this bit of nothing, this breath,
--No, it isn't love—
What is this bit of nothing, this spirit*

*--No, it isn't love—
That with impatience makes the heart
Explode of he who feels it?
What is this bit of nothing, this spirit,
--No, it isn't love—*

With sumptuous riches
With sumptuous riches
Your palace is filled
And you made me promise
Not to steal a thing
Not to steal a thing

Also, to all your wishes
Also, to all your wishes
I was told to submit.
But this evening,
But this evening
As I darted through its endless hallways

An irresistible thirst overcame me
I didn't resist and drank from your fountain.

Now you confront me
Now you confront me
And insist
That the water I drink,
That the water I drink,
I'm stealing from your palace.

And to all your wishes
I was told to submit!

You move toward me and your smile is
More winning
Languid, so languid,
No woman can resist

I feel my languid heart
As it succumbs to your advances.
Languid, so languid,
And tonight I read in your eyes
That seemingly there's only one woman for you!
Languid, Makeda

*What is this bit of nothing, this breath,
"It's my desire for you, Makeda"*
*What is this bit of nothing, this ethereal spirit,
"It's my desire for you, Makeda"*
*It makes my heart explode
With impatience tonight, oh lovely Makeda
What is this bit of nothing, this breath,
"It's my desire for you, Makeda"*

OBINRIN - THE WOMAN

Seven, nine, two, one, seven interrupt each other
Seven, nine, two, one, nine begin
Seven, nine, two, one, two offer a drink
But only one accepted!

“Makeda”
Is what my father Akebo named me
“Balqis”
Is what they also call me now and then
“Makeda”
Is what my father Akebo named me
“Balqis”
Is what they also call me now and then
I am the Queen of the South, South, South
I am the Queen of...
Sheba, Sheba, Sheba!
I am the Queen of the South, South, South
I am the Queen of...
Sheba, Sheba, Sheba!

They say that my eyes are as black as those of the gazelle
That my complexion glistens like a black diamond
A black diamond
But that hasn't kept my life from being an eternal battle.
For, though I was born a princess,
Born a princess,
I was born a woman before all else.

They say that my breath is light as the wind
That my body is as lithe as the antelope's
as the antelope's
But every four weeks, when pain assaults me
Is that a reason to reject me

To reject me
And treat me as impure?

Seven, nine, two, one, seven interrupt each other
Seven, nine, two, one, nine begin
Seven, nine, two, one, two offer a drink
But only one accepted!

“Axoum”,
Is the name of the town where I was born
“Méroé”
On a sacred island in the Nile
“Axoum”,
Is the name of the town where I was born
“Méroé”
On a sacred island of the Nile
I am the Queen of the South, South, South
I am the Queen of...
Sheba, Sheba, Sheba!
I am the Queen of the South, South, South
I am the Queen of...
Sheba, Sheba, Sheba!

They say that my smile flows across the centuries
That my heel is a *“plume of grace”*
“Plume of grace”
But when our child is born as I lie suffering
Why accuse me and tell me
Tell me
That I deserve this punishment for having sinned

They say that my lavish bracelets are made of ebony
That my coffers are covered in Dragon skins
Dragon skins
But for a long time they refused me power
Under the pretext that woman has no right to speak
No right to speak
Except in the privacy of her boudoir

Seven, nine, two, one
Seven interrupt each other
Seven, nine, two, one
Nine begin
Seven, nine, two, one
two offer a drink
But only one accepted

So I ask you Solomon
Who hides behind this mysterious number?
So I ask you Solomon
Who hides behind this mysterious number?

Seven, nine, two, one
Seven days interrupt the flow of blood
Seven, nine, two, one
Nine months begin a feverish awaiting
Seven, nine, two, one
Two breasts offer a drink to
Seven, nine, two, one
One thirsting little child!

“Makeda”
Yes, that nebulous number is I
“Balqis”
The ETERNAL WOMAN is I
“Makeda”
Yes, that nebulous number is I
“Balqis”
The ETERNAL WOMAN is I

I am the Queen of the South, South, South
I am the Queen of...
Sheba, Sheba, Sheba!
I am the Queen of the South, South, South
I am the Queen of...
Sheba, Sheba, Sheba!