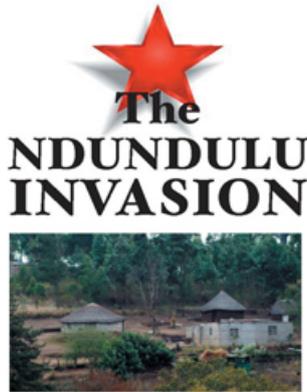


# The Ndundulu Invasion - Chapter 2 - All Along The Watchtower

*The Great South African Novel*



**Evan Mantzaris**

Rosenberg

“I don’t know if this is part of your research, but since you ask, I’ll answer you very honestly. I’m a lot of things, son, I’m a *Zulu* and a *Xhosa*, a God and a Devil, I’m a valley and a mountain, a jungle and a desert, I’m the rain and the drought, but above everything else I am an *amaZulu* man”.

“Why *Mkhulu*?”

“Because I was born in Zululand, I lived in Zululand and I’ll die in Zululand. I haven’t been to school, but I’ve been a cleaner in one place for 40 years. When I walk to the bottle store I touch the ground of the heroes and the ghosts, when I pick up a mango I touch the hand of God,

when I jump the hill with my grandson I can see the deep valleys of Africa, and when I dream I am a warrior in Shaka’s army. I learned to speak and think here, I drank from the river of wisdom of my grandfather. I herded cattle here and I spoke to my ancestors hiding behind the clouds when they bring rain. That’s why I’m a *Zulu*, son”.

“Do you tell these things to your grandchildren?”

“*Mfundisi*, you should know better, it’s not like in my time and your time. Kids, they have their own minds now, they go to school, have teachers with fancy diplomas and high heels, and they learn big words. I think something is wrong with you, *Mfundisi*, you might be lying to me about yourself. You say you are an *Mfundisi*, but I’m suspicious”.

“Why, *Mkhulu*?”

“You don’t use big words like these *Mfundisis* in *ASIKULUME* (Let’s Talk). Son, I’m worried, can I have another *IJUBA*?”

“Sure, *Mkhulu*. What do you say then, *Mkhulu*? Do you say my questions are very easy?”

“Very easy, son.”

“Do you think that all the *Mfundisis* use big words and ask difficult questions?”

“I never met one, son, before you that is, but I judge from the TV. On TV these *mfundisis* talk this language I don’t understand, they use big words.”

“What do you think of this?”

“They either want to confuse people or they are confused themselves.”

“I never thought about it this way.”

“Think about it, son.”

“Why you call me son and not *Mfundisi* ?”

“I have doubts.”

“About what?”

“I don’t think you are an *Mfundisi*. Can I see your ID?”

Mbongi looked straight through the old man’s eyes filled with questions. He reached for his left inside pocket and pulled out his passport. He passed it to him. The old man looked at it carefully and inquisitively. He touched the passport all over seemingly approving of its overall quality.

“This is the first time I see an ID that is not green, son.”

“It’s an American ID, *Mkhulu*.”

“An American one, hey?”

“Yes.”

“How come you speak so good *isiZulu*, son?”

“*IsiZulu* is my first language, *Mkhulu*.”

“I didn’t know there is a first and second language, son. I have only one language.”

“Don’t you speak English, *Mkhulu*?”

“Only when I’m forced to, son.”

“You mean you did this for 40 years.”

“Not necessarily, bosses generally don’t talk to cleaners. My boss was fluent in *isiZulu*, anyway. The Indian who run the spaza in the factory was also fluent, no problem. My ancestors also spoke to me in *isiZulu*.”

“I gathered that.”

“Yah, no Model C schools those days, son.”

“I understand.”

“I’m sure you do, tell me now, what Academic means, I see it on your ID”.

“I work at the University.”

“Doing what?”

“I teach, I research, this kind of work.”

“So you are an *Mfundisi* after all.”

“If you say so.”

“No, I don’t say so, your ID says so.”

“Whatever.”

“What does this mean, son?”

“You don’t believe me, but you believe in a piece of paper.”

“It’s an official paper, son, glittering, best quality cover, shining paper, colour stamps, three signatures, plus it comes from the USA, not from the South African Home Affairs, it looks genuine.”

“It is genuine.”

“I believe you, *Mfundisi*.”

“You can call me son, it sounds more human.”

“So I take it you believe in *ubuntu*, son.”

“Do you believe in *ubuntu*?”

“I asked first.”

“You asked first, and I’m the *Mkhulu*, so since you’ve asked I’ll tell you and as a son and as a *mfundisi*, you’ll understand.”

“OK.”

“Son, *ubuntu* is gone; you can only find *ubuntu* in *Phuzekemisi*’s songs, only there.”

“Explain, *Mkhulu*, please.”

“Son, everything this day is money, people help you they want money, priests pray for you they want money, you go to the *nyanga* (traditional healer) he skins you for a hundred rands, you talk to the ancestors they demand a goat and *umnqombothi* (traditional beer), you know what I mean? You go to the Social Development Department for the old age pension they ask for fifty rands to put you first in the queue, you go to the clinic that’s supposed to be free they skin you for another 50 rands, plus the security guard another 10 to put you first in the queue. You go to the *spaza* (small shop); your cousin charges you 20 cents for a plastic packet, what *ubuntu* son? *Ubuntu* is hidden behind the door.”

“What door, *Mkhulu* ?”

“The door of deception, you see, *ubuntu* is the truth, son, life today is based on a lie, all the lies that the Fynns told my ancestors to turn them into their own kind of Christians, today all Christians have labels, they are a brand, like Coca Cola, Pastor Dube, Pastor Khumalo, Pastor Nyembezi, Catholics, Protestants, Baptists. How many Christian Gods are out there, son, I know of one God, son, a God that has no partitions, no steel doors, no labels, no brand. God is not European or African or Asian or Chinese, son, you know what I mean?”

“I am trying, *Mkhulu*.”

“It’s simple, son, not like the *Mfundisis* in *ASIKULUME*.”

“Why did you mention Chinese?”

"Because of Mr. Hu."

"Who is Mr. Hu?"

"My friend."

"From China?"

"Yes, Red China, because he told me there are two Chinas. How can there be two Chinas?"

"Where did you meet him?"

"There."

He pointed to the other side of the road.

"Where?"

"There", he insisted.

The Professor looked towards the direction. He could see nothing. He opened his suitcase and pulled out his binoculars.

"You see *Mkhulu* now you can see how some *Mfundisis* operate. You are a good man, you never asked me, like a lot of people why I'm carrying a bag wherever I go like a lost traveler. Now you see why this bag is useful, it carries the tools of my trade."

As the *mkhulu* looked at him fascinated the Professor shook his head in disbelief. On the other side of the road on the way facing Eshowe, opposite the Tribal Court, a tiny match box call *SHANGHAI PARADISE* was shining like an emerald ring fighting to escape from the bondage of History. It was a well structured mud house possibly 10×10, most likely reminiscent of the cells where Professors of Anthropology fed themselves with rice during their imprisonment Mao Xe Tung's Cultural Revolution. He put down the binoculars next to his Heineken.

"What is this place *mkhulu* ?"

"You go first, what is this thing you put into your eyes?"

"Binoculars."

"What do they do?"

"You use them to see things that are far."

"Aha, I remember this thing. I saw it in a movie at the Isfahan Cinema in Victoria Street, in a war movie."

The *Mkhulu* turned around; his eyes shy with a mischievous shadow.

"Son, can I look?"

"Of course, *Mkhulu*."

The old man respectfully took the instrument with his both hands. He raised them

to his eyes and turned them towards the sky.

“What are you looking for, *Mkhulu* ?”

“I’m looking for the Anglican God, son. I wanted to see what He wears.”

“Possibly a Chinese T-Shirt, *mkhulu*.”

The old man looked at him, deeply into his eyes.

“Son, I think you are overdoing it, now. What you just said is blasphemous, very blasphemous.”

“Sorry, *Mkhulu*.”

“Apology accepted, son.”

“I did not apologise, *mkhulu* .”

“What does sorry mean, then?”

“I made a mistake.”

“Mistakes are human, son, but some mistakes need to be severely punished, and this is what God wishes.”

“What is my punishment this time, *mkhulu*?”

“Two more *IJUBAS* .”

“Done, *Mkhulu*.”

They looked at each other, the Professor’s eyes deep in admiration and resentment for the old man’s wisdom, The *Mkhulu*’s full of pity for his friend’s deep ignorance.

The sun was traveling fast towards the abyss, hidden behind the green hills, Friday night, the party had just begun.

Next chapter: [Chapter 3](#)

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