



**TRANSLATIONS FOR OLIVER MTUKUDZI'S
TSIMBA ITSOKA:
“FOLLOWING THE FOOTPRINTS”**

“Ungade wé?” (oon-GAH-day WEH) (“Would you like it?”)

Mtukudzi is addressing the issue of violent crime, and asking the perpetrator how he would feel if the tables were turned. “I’m asking, ‘Would you like it if your daughter was raped?’” he says. “In other words, what kind of footprint are you leaving behind, based on the life you’re living now? And what would that footprint look like to you if it were pointed in your direction, or in the direction of someone you loved?”

“Chikara” (chee-KAH-rah) (“Wild Animal”)

Chikara is a reference to any wild and dangerous animal. “It’s a song that talks about different shapes of footprints,” says Mtukudzi. “You can tell the breed of a dangerous wild animal by the shape of its footprint. And you can tell by looking at the footprint whether an animal is dangerous or safe.”

“Kuropodza” (koo-roe-POTE-zah) (“One who talks too much”)

A song about communication, and how easily it can break down between individuals and groups. “If you just talk and talk and talk, you’re not having a discussion,” says Mtukudzi. “You need to make some space for someone else to speak back to you. If you speak and then listen, then it becomes a conversation. If you’re self-disciplined enough, and you listen to others, and give your opinion at the proper time, you’re leaving a good footprint. You’re leaving room for those around you to say the things they need to say.”

“Mhinduro” (min-DOO-roh) (“Reply”)

A commentary on the fast talking that the guilty resort to in order to cover their tracks. “In the song, I’m saying, ‘Why do you give answers when there are no questions?’” says Mtukudzi. “It only proves that you’re guilty. You’re explaining yourself when no one has asked you to. You’re trying to cover yourself. You’re trying to cover your guilty footprints.”

“Hapana Kuti Mbijana” (ha-PAH-nah KOO-tee m-bee-JAH-nah) (“There’s no in-between”)

The moral compass has only two headings. “In this song, I’m saying you’re either in heaven or in hell,” says Mtukudzi. “There is no in between. You’re either a good person or you’re not a good person. Either your footprint is a good footprint to follow, or it’s a dangerous one that should not be followed at all.”

“Njuga” (n-JOO-gah) (“Gambling Card”)

A song that compares the game of life to a game of cards – on that should be played well and fairly. “The dealer shuffles the cards and gives them to all the players,” says Mtukudzi. “He’s supposed to know it all. He’s supposed to know everything about the game. But he ends up the loser. You should play your cards well, and play to win. If you don’t, then you have no one to blame but yourself.”

“Kuipedza” (kwi-PET-zah) (“Wasting”)

A song about making the best of our short time in this world. “The song talks about wasting precious time with negative emotions,” he says. “Hating each other is just a waste of time. If we love and respect each other, the world would be a beautiful place. We need to spend the time we’re here making good footprints.”

“Masimba Mashona” (mah-SIM-bah mah-SHOW- nah) (“No power”)

Ownership, responsibility and respect all go hand in hand. This song looks at the importance of taking responsibility for the things that are yours and respecting those things that are not yours. “You have no power over the things that are not yours,” says Mtukudzi. When something is yours, you have the power to do anything with it... If you’re not responsible, you’ll abuse what’s not yours. You’ll misuse other people’s property.”

“Mbiri Hurimbo” (m-BEE-ree hoo-RIM-boh) (“Fame is sticky”)

A poignant ballad that peers into the bright and dark sides of fame and celebrity. “Fame is not something you’re born with,” says Mtukudzi. “It’s something that comes to you and sticks to you. It’s not you. It’s what you do, or the result of what you do. When you’re famous, your footprint becomes bigger than your foot. Maybe too big. It becomes easier for people to follow it, even if it’s not the best footprint to follow.”

“Nzungu Imwe” (n-ZOON-goo IM-weh) (“One nut”)

In America, we often say “one bad apple can spoil the whole bunch.” Mtukudzi makes the same point with one bad nut in a mouthful of good ones. “You might have a handful of nuts,” says Mtukudzi, “and you throw them in your mouth, and if there’s just one rotten nut, all the other ones in your mouth will taste bad. In life, if there’s just one bad person in a community, he can spoil that whole community. And that one person can leave a bad footprint for everybody.”

“Vachakunonokera” (vah-cha-koo-no-no-KEH-rah) (“They are going to delay”)

A song about youngsters who sit around waiting for their parents’ inheritance rather than making their own way in the world. “In our culture, you can only inherit your father’s property when your father is dead,” says Mtukudzi. “But if he doesn’t die until a very old age, he’s going to delay you from learning how to work hard and earning something for yourself. It’s better to work hard now, while your father is still alive. Your parents are not going to die on your time, when you need their money.”

“Kumirira Nekumirira”

(koo-mee-REE-rah neh-koo-me-REE-rah) (“Waiting and waiting”)

A call to action to those who would rather be controlled by adverse circumstances than take control of them. “We can’t wait for miracles to happen,” says Mtukudzi. “If there are problems that have to be solved, if we want our lives to be better, then we have to do something for ourselves. If we’re not taking action to make our life better, if we’re not walking, if our feet are not moving, then there’s no footprint for people to follow.”