SOMAGWAZA

Text, pronunciation and translation

/ha-we ha-we so-ma-gwa-za/
awe, awe summagwaza.

/so-ma-gwa-zam na jo we jo we/
Summagwaza m'n yo weh, yo weh.

/hem na jo we hem na jo we/
Hey m'n yo weh, hey m'n yo weh

Translation

"The South African compilers of the original collection from which this song was drawn state that the word "Somagwaza" is no longer translatable. However, according to Ysaye M. Barnwell of the vocal group Sweet Honey in the Rock, a non-literal translation is, "He who can carry his own spear no longer needs his mother."

Background

"Somagwaza is a ceremonial song of the initiation of young men into adult standing in their community. The teenagers live in a special house for a set time, and are taught the traditions and responsibilities of adults in their society in South Africa. . . At the end of the period of initiation, the boys wash off the ceremonial clay (with which they have decorated their bodies). They leave their huts on the hillside, and run down to the river to wash, singing this song as they go."2