

Self-ventured Kondoo
The Lore
Baron Legacy
A Dreamer's Haven
Traumatic Pendulum
Memorabilia
The Golden Apples of Amsterdam
Sheng, the Academia, and the Youth
Painted Crudite ...to the Eyes of the Baholders!
The Federal Republic of Yekels
Self-victimizing Critics
Scriptural Abuse
Entombing the Netter King
Concubine in the Cabinet
Shuushuuumoo
Wedged Intellectualuality
State Butchery
Once-Upon Good Old Days

VERTICAL ARTICULATION

Mohamed A. Eno

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Poems

MOHAMED A. ENO



PARTRIDGE
A Penguin Random House Company

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Dedication

This collection is dedicated to the male and female oral artists of the minority communities in Somalia whose versions and varieties of its folklore have been severed from the umbilical cord of Somali Studies and the annals of the national mores. It is also dedicated to the men and women in Africa and all over the world who have been victims of cultural/ethnic bias and whose stories have been denied the audience they deserve. My love and respect to you and your untapped talent.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank all the colleagues, friends and relatives whose encouragement fuelled the completion of this collection. However, as a shrewd oral historian once told me:

It creeps into the environment unnoticed
It steals the most loved of the beloved
It mauls the soul of the living ones
It deprives the psyche of its joyousness
It disillusiones the orientation of the persona

In a matter of a few weeks, two of my beloved ones whose inspiration has been a valuable fuel for my work, my mother Hagia Halima Hussein Hassan and my sister-in-law Khadija Mohamed Abow, departed the world. Neither are things the same without them, nor are the wounds healable. May they, and all our beloved ones who departed from us, rest in eternal peace in Heaven. Ameen.

Foreword

Discursive trends on Africa(ns) in the past two decades or so have been split between two clear trajectories. One, which has been pushed largely by scholars with faith in Africa, has shown a continent on the rise, where previous associations with draconian leadership, bloodshed and other forms of anti-humanist and self-defeating realities are truly a thing of the past. Another trend, clearly pushed by those who think that Africa still needs the political patronage of the western world, has shown a continent that is stuck in the past, unable to overcome nascent challenges and make strides into the future of technological, scientific and democratic advancements that are the natural aspirations and practices now largely associated with Europe and North America. While one may find good reasons for settling on either position, it is more helpful, for more objective thinkers, to accept the past as an inescapable part of our present, without necessarily wavering in our resolve to fit in contemporary times of the technological, scientific and democratic developments which cumulatively work towards bettering our lives and enhancing the dignity of the African people.

This is, essentially, Mohammed Eno's concerns in this collection of poetry. The poetry in *Vertical Articulation* draws on a wide variety of historical influences and current realities, both as thematic concerns and as sources of the artistic imagery that establish the necessary bonds of familiarity between the poet and his African and

worldwide audiences. Overall, the collection appeals to the readers' sense of histories, cultures and geographies whose implications in the current transnational, transcontinental and even transoceanic identifications demand for new ways of thought on what were considered settled matters. Hence, concerns with old themes of alienation, the struggle against forms of domination, as well as the concern with politics of the everyday life, all find resonance in this collection that is appropriately structured around six parts.

Part I, after which the whole collection is entitled, and Part II entitled "Barren Legacy", address themes of intellectual degeneration and the general dearth of reason among thinkers, as well as the anguish that this causes, in some parts of Africa. The major concern is mainly with the state of mental captivity that the intelligentsia suffers from, due to their loyalty to other aspects of their lives, notably ethnic and clan-based identities that, in the context of contemporary Africa, can smoothen one's way to political and economic opportunities or, if the same intellectuals come from politically 'incorrect' groups, suffer systemic obstruction to their career, socio-economic and political aspirations.

Related to the failure of the continent's academics to give moral and intellectual leadership is the whole mess of degeneration and selfishness in which African states steep themselves. This is Eno's concern in Part III of the collection, in which poems like "Of Juices and Johnny Walker", "Lubricating the Bowels" and "Entombing the

Nation”, while drawing on diverse imagery, employs irony to chide leaders – political and intellectual – who indulge in vulgar consumerism when their countries are on a downward spiral. Such consumerism, taking place sometimes against a background of war, captures the moral bankruptcy and selfishness of leaders up to whom many ordinary citizens look. For Eno, there is certain insensitivity to history that our leaders demonstrate, a degree of callousness and blindness that make them ignore their subjects’ suffering in war and peace, ignoring their plight and thwarting the people’s aspirations through repressive regimes. Yet, as Eno accurately observes, the same culture of indolence and entitlement permeates to the lower rungs of society, where greed, opportunism and selfishness drives people to absurd levels. On this issue, for me to say anything is to adulterate the message; it is better that the short poem, “The Politics of Blood Money”, speaks for itself:

Though he wasn't paying
Any tax for his domicile
Bulxan claimed blood money
From the indigenes of Afgooye town
Against a piece of broken bottle
That pierced into his bare foot

By this short yet profound poem, Eno asks: how low can we sink? Can we blame our leaders entirely if this is how we conduct ourselves even when left on our own? For Eno, even the common citizens tend to have something in their character that resonates with the greed of their leaders.

This phenomenon where everyone ransacks historical developments for personal gain, and which I call abuse of history, manifests itself as a corollary to the abuse of power that many people in positions of influence are guilty of. For Eno, the tragedy of this reality is not so much that it plays out in the Africa that he so acutely observes, but that it is presented and correspondingly accepted as a natural order of things by both the abusers and the abused who, in Eno's critical view, are not necessarily victims.

This is also a train of thinking that Eno advances in his Part IV, entitled "Of Concubines and Gender Disorder". His use of accessible symbolism in "The Rotten Apples of Amsterdam", "A Logo" and "Concubine in the Cabinet" all variously address the ever present human weakness of the loins, especially when complicated by power and capital, which push the whole matter beyond the reach of morality. The reference to Europe in the first poem in this section is an important strategy that acquits Eno of any charge of continentalizing a universal problem. Part V, entitled "Social Dismay in Mother Africa" revisits the stock questions of African leadership and systemic violence, using carefully conceived images of death and blood, where annihilation of opponents is pursued relentlessly in "Dreamlike Reality" and "Of Age Old Stupor", and pushed to industrial scales in "State Butchery" and "Of Guilt and the Guilty". Not only does the poet, Eno, find all these despicable, but he associates the same with forms of alienation that some of the survivors suffer from.

Part VI, “Nostalgias, Aesthetics, and Fantasies”, concludes the collection with a focus on the cultural dynamics in contemporary Somalia and Africa generally, where successive generations confront the dilemmas of old versus new identities and the implications of aligning themselves with either. Of course, the break between the old and the new is neither neat nor complete; there are many (dis)continuities that then generate tensions between and within generations, as within individuals. These struggles for identification and relevance, especially among the youth, are reflected in new forms of material and linguistic cultures, changes that, according to Eno, are here forever. By including this section in *Vertical Articulation*, Eno powerfully affirms the fact that some aspects of African cultures have kept pace with developments elsewhere, and that while the dominant images of Africa in the world are those of bloodshed and chaos, there is a tenacious streak in Africa whose aesthetics connects and compares with developments in other parts of the world, showing that with a bit of outward looking African leaders, like their youthful generations, can keep the continent at par with others in the world.

Hence, if there is a preeminent tone of pessimism or even hopelessness in the earlier sections of this collection, the last section restores the hope that tempers the earlier atmosphere in the collection. It is Eno’s rejection of the condemnatory afro-pessimist lenses through which many non-African scholars and leaders have viewed the continent, as it is an expression of his disquiet with the self-serving ‘Africa rising’ chorus that continues to be

echoed by Africanist and Pan-Africanist intellectual and political voices. In a way, Eno's rejection of the dominant discourses and counter-discourses reminds us of Antonio Gramsci's often quoted view that was initially expressed in his prison notes: "I am a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will." From the entire collection, *Vertical Articulation*, Eno's intellectual pessimism is counter-measured by his willful optimism, leaving us with a beautiful, near-sublime collection of poems that I have deeply enjoyed.

Godwin Siundu, PhD

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Department of Literature, University of Nairobi,

Research Associate,

English Department of Stellenbosch University, South Africa,

And Editor, *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*

Endorsements

“The poems are strong, and what I found particularly compelling in them is the way that they make the world of myth and folktales interact with the ‘real’ world, so that each seems to breach the boundaries of the other: the effect is disturbing, thought-provoking.”

– Dr. Noam Scheindlin,
Poetry Editor of *Warscapes Magazine* and
Professor of Comparative Literature in the English
Department at LaGuardia Community College, City
University of New York, USA

“These poems are superbly constructed/crafted, beautifully embroidered, skillfully latticed. The shade they create offers shelter and solace to the inquisitive mind. The language is luxuriant, seductive, and mythopoeic.”

– Ali Jimale Ahmed,
Poet, Chair and Professor,
Department of Comparative Literature at
Queens College and at the Graduate School, CUNY.

PART I

VERTICAL ARTICULATION

Bilaayo berkeeda buliitika waaye
Buunyaale bistoolo looma beerdareeyo

—Anonymous Somali Bantu Jareer
poet from western Afgoye, Somalia (late 1960s)

Trans:

In a daunting battle, sobriety is a key factor to success
Hence, pellets are not worth wasting on a warrior armed
with a rudimentary weapon*

*My translation

Vertical Articulation

In the shrinking hours of that
Thursday night
Moments of wonder unfolded
In my long, real-like reverie
An eruption of *zikr* sparked
Floodlights
Loud oration of mystical verses
Rocked the environs
As a turban-clad saint chronicled
The plight of his dishonor
By hasty scholars of the Horn:
Your refusal to read me rendered
Your knowledge of me too bare
Yet, from mind-shelves of biases
You molested the dignity
I duly deserve.
You weaved mendacious essays
Of unsolicited condemnation:
That I didn't encounter colonialism
Despite the dual-front struggle
I endured in the dark Horn:
One – vicious internal suppression
The other – oppressive foreign domination:

More often than merely imaginable
The poor adjudication gleams
Throughout the Horn literature
Leaving gaps in your learning –
Distortions in historical realities:

The deadly massacre at *Asaayle* was
Deliberately denied due mention
In the dossier of your nationalist discourse
Our arduous engagements with the aliens
From Xawaadleey to the gates of Haawaay
A history merely fettered to decay:

Let this nostalgic manifesto unwrap
The truth for so long you entombed:
That neither did I coerce for followership
Nor did I commit atrocities across ethnicities
Nor had the sobriety of my leadership failed
In the peninsula, nor along the Indian Ocean
Nor in the vast of the nations beyond

The Proclamation

Over four decades ago in Biyooleey
In the heavy rains of a dark night
Scripts appear on the wall
Of the thatched hut I shared
With Macallin Cabdulle “Dheere”:

Aside of the Horn’s makeshift history
My oration spreads across cultures
Vibrant nations young and old
At the height of a vertical articulation

Where despots lost war and world
For rapacity and acts unholy
My sobriety in leadership cemented
The road map to the nationhood
That delivered to the Horn tranquility

To the insensate scholar I say:
How about pondering
Three decades of corruption
Preceding a devastation
Or two and yet more to come
– Thanks to the durable legacy
Of *that* age-old *insanity* and
Obsessions with fratricide?

Devalued Wisdom

Ever since the learned of the land
Adhered to profanity
Absolute moral decadence
They disfigured the quintessence
Of a balanced academic wisdom

Eons ago I read aphorisms
Of arrogant empires falling
Into the vanity of dissipated desires
Incinerating teachings of the wise
Into the murk of a downward stream

A Goose at the Graveyard

The senior clergymen ordered
Seven nights of vigil
In all centers of worship
When wood-gathering women and children
Were struck by the doggone sight
Of a goose at the graveyard
Placing three bodies horizontal
Against three others vertical
On the branches of a *qurac* tree.
Around them, unheavenly embers
Were blazing out of the triple mouths
Of goat-sized deadly desert scorpions

In our folktale the scene portended
The arrival of a vicious ruler
With a large tongue and tail;
His army would ride on pilfered horses
From which they would slay
All the males in the land
For the king to appropriate the women
And the army to despoil the livestock

But our traditional historian explained:
That king had already come and gone
After having the devil's rituals
In his brothers' bloodbath and
That of lepers and albinos from the sea.
Like a goose his unfamiliar ghost
Visits once in a while our graveyards
Whenever God's angels chase him
From the environs of Paradise
For the atrocities he committed
Against a pious leader too tall
Whose bare bones were laid to rest
In a home dubbed Fountain View
Very popular in the Maay-land

Half-human, Half-heifer

Before they put him to rest
A half-human she crocodile
Was waiting in the burial place
Of the deceased leader
From One-Hero-Nation

They pleaded with her
But she wouldn't listen
Till she revealed the motive:
For what he did to the females
During his ruthless leadership
And for the illegitimate offspring
He fathered in the course;
I am neither human nor animal
But a revolutionary curse
Living in his wicked spirit
Until he meets justice
For the lives he perished

Then in a short while
A heavy downpour of blood covered the land
His tormented disciples down on their knees
Horses with human faces galloping
Hastily from every horizon
Awe, despair, fear, hullabaloo
Loud supplications for safety
Prayers, vigil, more *zikh*
The following morning the body
Was still lying untouched
But awkwardly transfigured
Into half-human, half-heifer

PART II

BARREN LEGACY

Wedged Intellectuality

A one-eyed herdsman dictated notes
To a visually challenged note-taker
Who disseminated the half image
The burdened eye had captured
As a whole reality about the land
He had visited

The historian took over a mélange
Of the half-baked oral traditions
Producing a sketch of things fake

The culturologist made his attempt too
Manufacturing a contaminated version
A replica of the anthropologist's

A bunch of power-wielding political conmen
Promoted the myths of their clan narratives
As an identity of a truly shared national history

The erudite danced to the state's tunes
A compromise of intellectual wisdom
That derailed history from its true path

The clergy sounded extremely enthused
In the recitation of the state-sponsored lore
Unawarely advancing empty scriptures

The state manipulated the social theatre
Through censorship, mass-media control
And mercenaries it named the National Army

Barren Legacy

Neither can the desire of
A thirsty nation be quenched
From the depths of dry fountains
Nor will an erudite committed
To the mindlessness of chauvinism
Leave behind a memorable bequest;
Like cracking a faded code
On an ancient papyrus ill-preserved
He offers too little to stimulate
The want of a learner yearning for truth
Yet bred in the promises of a barren legacy

Traumatic Pendulum

Sheer prattling often fails
To fill in the didactic vacuum
Of a thought
One missed at the podium

In the search for peace of mind
One need not seek healing by mocking
For, frustrations consume one's soul
Making one blind in the endeavor
To find a moral sense
In one's being mankind

In a disturbed state of mind
One might not be delivered
From the traumatic pendulum
One's conscience is locked in
Needless to imagine the haunting
One suffers in the process

Self-victimizing Critics

Denotations, connotations,
Verbosities, lo!
What a big tale they tell!
What a big burden they bear!

Like deficient fabrics rolled
Out of obsolete Somaltex mills
They skewed the original truth
In a dramatic, misleading game

They claim weighty knowledge
Of a culture they read less about
Unconscious of the self-victimization
They suffer under their own ink

Petrified Erudite

A cohort of our erudite sailed
In search of fertile fields
Where they sowed words in
Every wet land they went
The world far and near flamed
With lively shimmers of reason
Spread across generations as
Acceptable vertical articulation
Appreciable horizontal propagation

Indiscernible imposters appeared
Afterwards from edges of our own land
Their anomalous learning obfuscated
The advance of our thriving empire
Into unspeakable ailment awful
Infinite degeneration unlovable
Indefinite horizontal petrification
Distressing vertical stagnation
A design of national fossilization

PART III

OF CONFERENCES, CLAN
HICKS, AND THE “COCKTAIL
JUICE” OF ELDORET

**What poisoned him
As
He confessed to the kinship
Again
Was neither from the bitter lemon
Nor
The white man's "sacred" drink
From
The bottle with the white horse on it
But
The spices he mixed with them
Before
Drinking the "cocktail juice" in Eldoret
At
Noon on a very sunny Friday**

Of Juice and Johnny Walker

When we cut our quench with this juice
The youth express
We feel like climbing Mount Kenya in a minute
With ladders made from barbed wire
We can trap an American drone like a rabbit
Or toss a Russian submarine onto land
This juice of supernatural strength
Infuses the power of a million horses
Into our body within abrupt moments
When we can squeeze a giant elephant
To the size of a hungry tsetse fly

A suspicious Mzee Darenboode replied:
Something is cynical about this juice
You call the white man's water
For, your magical *juice* damagingly
Cuts your waste-control system
Often making the youth overwhelmed
In an overflow of a smelly tsunami
Profusely draining from their behinds

Lubricating the Bowels

From the dossier of the 14th Somali National
Reconciliation Conference (Eldoret, December 2002)

The couple garnished jam on cornflakes
Sprinkled chocolate sauce on
Roast potatoes, boiled rice, and spaghetti
And a leg of chicken on the side;
They placed lumps of custard on top
Of grilled pepper steak well done
Before coloring everything on the plate
With red chili and tomato ketchup

Walking rather clumsily to the table
The male turns to a blushing onlooker:
“We have to lubricate our bowels”;
To which the onlooker responded:
“Lubricate nomadic bowels!”

Entombing the Nation Alive

Rural migration swept across society
Urban stability was tumbled top-down
Illiterate immigrants were double-salaried
The most untaught had it even tripled
Thanks to the nationalized tongue of the clan
For equating the learned with the unlearned

The worst exhibition of state insanity
Was sanctioned in the *sacred* massacres
Of innocent citizens opposed to malfeasance
As the rural immigrants vowed addiction
To the immoralities of nation eating
Rather than the advocacies of nation building

When “the wretched of the earth” swept
The state like weeds in turbulent monsoons
Beaten advocates of injustice sniveled
Appealing for mercy under victim status
In every nation they sought asylum
Oblivious to their old repressiveness

The Federal Republic of Yokels

From every ethnic quarter
They collected
Outstanding yokels
To lead a skeletal nation
In economic barrenness

Their art of begging bemuses
Donors, who pile up billions
To fatten our leechlike hicks
Sedated to child mortality
And anything on child learning

In a couple of years a cobra retired
From his top office at fifty
But not without a fat rip-off
To the tune of 50 million dollars
And a burden of shame on the back

Misguided mentorship lured men
Who shunned top academic leadership
To join in the *low-cost* race
Of wolfing a famished nation alive

Bedeviled Dogma

We heaved the blame onto the crook
Who duped our desire into the loop
Making us naive clients of a spook
After tales of our foretold defeat
Dispersed in the atmosphere around us
And by the time our savior arrives
The imp will have long done the damage
Devastation of dearly ones demised
By then swarms of evil spirits will have
Swamped and rejoiced in a big feast
Over the carnage of the forsaken casualties
Whose tormented ghosts gather to echo
The song of their betrayal by the brethren:
My clan and I against the world
My brother and I against the clan
Me and my brother against each other
Me and my psyche against my soul

A Dropout's Haven

We invented a magic term
Christened it *ethnic bonds*
An accredited national institution
That articulates our way of life
Whenever we obliterate the innocent
It is at hand to bear the burden
Of exonerating every idiot dropout
Identified as a hard-core criminal

The Politics of Blood Money

Though he wasn't paying
Any tax for his domicile
Bulxan claimed blood money
From the indigenes of Afgooye town
Against a piece of broken bottle
That pierced into his bare foot

PART IV

OF CONCUBINES AND
GENDER DISORDER

**Between the betrayal of one's social culture
And abuse of one's personal culture
I saw
A myriad of debauchery ruling
In the subtle buffer zone
And often
With consummate leisure
Of misguided hegemony
Yet obfuscated
By individual ludicrousness
As the heir of self-bastardization
Though rarely
Admitted by the vacant mind
Sick with failed self-realization**

The Rotten Apples of Amsterdam

The saying that an Apple a day keeps
The doctor away – withholds sarcasm –
The metaphor that when the same is
Rotten, it keeps anyone else away!

In the middle of that confusion
Aw Daanyeerow answered in rage
That the Apple in question was sown
From a pinkish she-plant weedy
Then the cruelty of modernity hurled her
Into a postmodern gender [mis]baptism
A conundrum of a dual-gender-in-one

From the dole queue Apple adopted
A male concubine as a cover-up
This allured the artist's display
on a billboard:
Apple with white female partners to the left
And a black male concubine to the right
In the background a mushroom of
Communal quotes, tales, and curses

A Logo

Self-interest adulates Labaneey
So she motivates herself with a solo
Performance – a commitment to
Cover up a mess too crucial to
Contain.

By turns playing male and female
In the quest for apt gender identity
A befuddled Labaneey springs
On both sides of the springboard
Reminding me of the mock song:
Aay Faay Muudeey Shoongoow;
*Nin miyaa, naag miyaa?**

* Aay Faay Muudeey Shoongoow was a cultural artist and a great folklore dancer in Afgoye, Somalia. Her artistry was so unique that the power of her stamping was equated to that of men. This style astonished spectators who often asked, satirically, whether she was a man or a woman. Accordingly, some male dancers would join her in a dance as they sang the verse: *Aay Faay Muudeey Shoongoow/Nin miyaa, naag miyaa?*-- which later became very popular.

Concubine in the Cabinet

She built a strong empire on a tacit turf
With politesses a rare commodity
Neither does she aver respect to her senior
Nor does she appeal to a junior with courtesy

In one high-level event overseas
The hosts branded her pathetic
For poor display of personality
Below the diplomatic decorum

Beleaguered proletariat bards bemoan
The bureaucratic backlash in the barn
On Baba ya Taifa's passion
For the mistress he made a minister

Outrage beguiled bardic barbs
At the double-up skills she employs
In her concubinage with the head
And a boy she posted on a mission abroad

Gender Sensitive Courts

In the second plot
To assassinate Fatima
The state assigned
A bulldozer to overrun her
After bullets defied orders
To execute her by firing squad
Then they summoned ill-fated Fatima
To an all-female kangaroo court
Inside a metal container in the presidency
Charging her on two accounts of
Physical resistance to state pellets and
Betrayal of death by “natural causes”

Gendered Gangbanging

They organized a girls' squad
To party out in the early evening
In Female Gangbanging Disco
Before the 9 o'clock newscast read:

Two were sent to the morgue

Three lay in hospital beds

Five held in police custody

Two in the lunatic sanatorium

PART V

**SOCIAL DISMAY IN
MOTHER AFRICA**

**Before yesterday African parliaments passed
a motion
Yesterday citizens were brutally butchered in
cold blood
With machetes, arrows, bullets, and swords
and today
The states summoned all possible suspects
in court
Acquitting all involved human agents
handing instead
The crude weapons a guilty verdict and life
in prison
Before the security forces clobbered the audience
and artists
Out of the President's *royal theatre***

Dreamlike Reality

Fear gripped us motionless
To save us from the destiny
Of those dispensed to death

Under torrential tropical rains
Bodies suspended from life
Rolled through a sea of blood

Then blasts of the elders' voices
Thundered across the cloudy heavens
To explain the mayhem
Upon the creation of man
But when Eve exalted her offspring
Adam instantly warned
With alternate skepticism:

In them I foresee
Oceans of blood shed
In praise of fratricide

From their hearts I read
Greed mocking humility
With ever lavish absurdity

Theirs will be a world sullen
With hatred and menace
Molded in heart and mind

My angst forewarns of a day
They will dethrone decency
Into the deepest caves
Of decayed morality

Of Age-Old Stupor

Then came culprits
With no conscience
Who contaminated
The mutual coexistence
Codified in our communal sciences

They stole our human dignity
Pinned us against each other
In their pursuance of power
They bombshelled the nation
Beyond the norms of mercy
They sowed seeds of hatred
Discordance, rebellion, disobedience
Daily occurrences of elite disappearance

State Butchery

Three hectic weeks of
Dramatic legal showdown
Were coming to an end
Jurors took recess from wisdom
In a system where state power
Remained a haven of abuse

Over fifty decades since independence
The legal system nothing but a mock
Injustice rooting from the doorstep
Of little-learned law enforcers
Also unaccountable judicial staff
Paid from taxpayers' sweat
Hence none is held culpable
For the heinous public butchery
Now widespread in our streets

Of Guilt and the Guilty

In our hamlet guilt is justified
Not by the quality of evidence
But the volume of pages
State-appointed judges etch
To advance a guilty verdict

In today's worrying scenario
Naked under the sun as we lay
State-owned media interviewed us
On our appreciation of an amnesty
After a decade of illegal incarceration

A few days before *acquittal*
We heard of the hundreds of inmates
Who'd perished of lethal injection
Administered as the clemency
That articulates state amnesty

Self-alienated *Kondo*¹

He meticulously learned how to read
The white man's language with ease
He mastered the art of tongue-twisting
That earned him *mzungu*² for a nickname
Extreme loyalty to his colonial masters

When last Christmas he visited home
Disgust overcame both young and old
Over his gibberish tongue too heavy
Inability in the ancestral vernacular

They called him *kondo*, *ngombe*³
A worthless charlatan divorced
From the values of ancestral culture
A son with a bulging belly of shame

Notes:

1. *Kondo* is a Kiswahili word that means "sheep."
2. *Mzungu* is a Kiswahili equivalent to "white man."
3. *Ngombe* is a Kiswahili word and means "cow."

Scriptural Abuse

Since simply carrying a Holy Book
Does not inform heeding the Holy Word
It so follows then
That the accused is not innocent
Just by taking oath upon it
Nor does a distorted learning
Of the Scriptures
Symbolize one's spiritual devotion

In the case of utilizing a Holy Book
Can one claim by sheer disguise
His identity as a righteous follower?
Yet one made the Holy Script a commodity
Towards achieving one's selfish end

Should he who misused a Holy Book
Be considered guilty of wrongdoing?
Or should we translate the cause of the crime
As the culprit's devotion to the scriptures?
I mean,
If I hold a Holy Book in one hand
And commit genocide with the other
Can I seek protection under the same doctrine
Though I never shelter others by it?

Aged Parents and African Diaspora

Though he lives in a mansion
Just a few yards across the road
He pays his mother a visit
Only once a year on Christmas
In her prison-like sanctuary
They call a shelter for the homeless

He kisses her many a time
On this special occasion
To assure her of the deep love
Overflowing from his heart
Before he sees her again
Once upon next Christmas

PART VI

**NOSTALGIAS, AESTHETICS,
AND FANTASIES**

**The hallmark of edification
prevails
When in the learner's memory it
archives
Facts of moments, real-life
experiences
Through which, from the far past, he
retrieves
The stimulus to engage with current
events
While during the journey he
prepares
To wrestle with arduous future
challenges**

The Lore

The bards' expressions
Forebode
The aesthetics of what lives
In
The orality of the African
Lore
For tomorrow's child to
Adore
The passion within forever-
More

Memorabilia

In the glacial weather of Kew Gardens
The vicinity of CUNY's green avenues
My grey-bearded mentor imparts
A set of milestone thoughts
That entail classical literatures
On ancient Western empires
Their affluence in medieval ages
To the miracles of modern times
He engages with a mesh of
Conundrum details undiscussed
Exploration into Eastern wisdom
Through the annals of the oral lore
He inherited
From astute ancestral *afyaaal**

Artistically he espouses
The atypical aesthetics of the East
To the old era of the West
With the modesty of one learned
He is elated by the sparkling smiles
The enthusiasm of the graduates
He is about to address:

The hallmark of edification prevails
When in the learner's memory it archives
Facts of moments – real-life experiences –
Through which, from the far past, he retrieves
The stimulus to engage with current events
While during the journey he prepares
To wrestle with arduous future challenges

* *Afyaal* is a Somali term which means a gifted poet, especially one bestowed with powers of prophesy, cursing, and/or blessing.

...in the Eyes of the Beholder!

For sisters Batula of Kew Gardens, NY, USA,
and Batula of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

The admiration of the searching eye
Might have captured the splendor
Of the mahogany tree long
Before the logger's axe, for
The majesty of its botanical grandeur
Reigns over the plant species nature
Glorified in the kingdom of
Wild forests
The reflection of its unique place
In the household represents
The culmination of the rich allure
Upon it nature has bestowed
In its original habitat in the lore
Mores
Aesthetics
All things pretty!
Hence
...in the eyes of the beholder

Once-Upon Good Old Days

Once upon a good time
In a city once beautiful
They held competitions
In various folk dances –
Mariina, Kabeebey
Huwaa-Jaliiloo were
Among dances as popular as
Nuumbi, Jaariile, Suroow, and Saar
Spectators were attracted into action
On holidays and in festivities;
On those occasions
Amateurs shared the floor
With celebrity dancers

In that city they talked of
“Esterò”-imported attire
Labeled “Made in Italia”
It was more valuable
Than that made-to-measure
To the *paesane*
That unique show of elegance
Marked a good win
As Alta Moda and Italian fashion shops
Around Cinema Hamar, Croce del Sud,
Bar Novecento, and Caffè Nazionale
Showcased imported *Vero Cuoio* shoes
To beat locally handmade footwear
Of top Brawanese artisanship
Until clashing camel boys came
With Klashnikov and *Cara armato*
To campaign for our collapse

Shuushuumoow

My pal shirked away
From tasting *Shuushuumoow*
He called it “yak” –
A product too local
Unpacked, unlabeled
Sold in the open air
Of a dusty *Siigaale* marketplace

The behavior disturbed some:
Should one appraise *shuushuumoow*
For a visible decor that catches the eye
Or should the consumer cherish
The invisible feel of culture
In the succulence of the snack?

Upon sighting it
Galti-William spit in disgust
Upon sighting it
Gob-Same’s mouth salivated
To relish the communal sharing of
Omena, ugali, matoke, fufu, daga, mahamri,
And, yes, a longing for *soor, bukureey,*
Dhamcaso, qamiir, shuushuumoow,
Xawlo-gugub, and caano-baraawe

The culturologist's lenses inform
The divide between Galti and Gob
Not as an accident of individual choices
But an intimate euphoria of social pride
And a repulsive attitude of misperception

Teasers and Teenagers

For my beloved daughter Aziza M. Eno & her friends

Ever since she became a teen
I saw a lot of change in Azu's life
More recently as a college girl
When she uses her hair device
The skin behind the ear must
Suffer too from a bit of curl

When she helps in the kitchen
She manifests the evidence
From her multiple hand burns
Like a decor of *henna* on a bride

She dresses elegantly to the varsity
In top design of the celebrity
Despite her mom discovering later
Smoldered clothes wrapped, tucked
In remote corners she thought unreachable

***Sheng*, the *Academo*, and the Youth: A Celebration of the Generation?**

My kids love to code-switch
In the new constituency
They code-named *Sheng* –
A conundrum phenomenon
Of artistically designed
Verbal concoctions –
Though not so cognitive
To the “conservative” parent

When the interlocution
Behooves me to vexation
I invoke reason, experience
Also the insightful view
Of Mbugua Wa-Mungai:
That the ideal of the *Sheng*
Entails inventiveness
And generational dynamics
Of youth imaging their world
In their own creative expression

So who am I to depreciate
Or even deem disrespect
To the dazzling beauty
Of the academic dialectics
Dearly endorsed
In the lore of the learned
Wa-Mungai's wisdom!

Wrapped in Rap

Like other youth of the day
I have some dot-com teens
Who acclaim the satisfaction
Of being among the geeks
At the dot-com frontline

Ask them a folklore verse
And you will be struck
By the endless recitation
Of all the polemical rap
Enduring in the USA
Including an outline of the genesis
Of the East Coast, West Coast rivalry

Bloomers of the World

To the African artists whose talent flourishes
on the continent and beyond

The broadcast of knowledge
Satirical art in the lore
In rural streets of Africa
On stage in the urban theatre
These articulate a celebration
Embedded in our traditions
A teaching of the mores

The rich oral art
In the cultural performance
Blooms every barren land
In Africa and across nations

