

Song of Ocol

p' Bitek, Okot

[ProQuest document link](#)

FULL TEXT

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Song of Ocol

1

- 1 Woman,
- 2 Shut up!
- 3 Pack your things
- 4 Go!

- 5 Take all the clothes
- 6 I bought you
- 7 The beads, necklaces
- 8 And the remains
- 9 Of the utensils,
- 10 I need no second-hand things.

- 11 There is a large sack
- 12 In the boot
- 13 Of the car,
- 14 Take it
- 15 Put all your things in it
- 16 And go!

- 17 Song of the woman
- 18 Is the confused noise
- 19 Made by the ram
- 20 After the butcher's knife
- 21 Has sunk past
- 22 The wind pipe,
- 23 Red paint spraying
- 24 On the grasses;

25 It is a song all alone
26 A solo fragment
27 With no chorus
28 No accompaniment,
29 A strange melody
30 Impossible to orchestrate;

31 As if in echo
32 Of women's wailing
33 At yesterday's funeral,
34 Song of the dead
35 Out of an old tomb,
36 Stealthy cracking
37 Of dry bones,
38 Falling in of skulls
39 Under the weight
40 Of earth;
41 It's the dull thud
42 Of the wooden arrow
43 As it strikes the concrete
44 Of a wall
45 And falls to earth,
46 Extinguished
47 Without life
48 Like a bird
49 Hit by stone
50 From a boy's catapult.

*

51 Have you heard
52 The sigh of a monarch
53 In exile?

54 He squats on a log

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55 In the shadow
56 Of a disused hut,
57 It is cold
58 The keen wind
59 Knives through his
60 Torn trousers
61 Licking his bruised knee

62 With rough fenile tongue,

63 Yesternight!

64 Yesternight ah!

65 The smallest toe

66 On the left foot

67 Slowly weeps blood,

68 A fat house-fly

69 Drones away;

70 Under the arm-pit

71 It is sticky,

72 The remains of a shirt

73 Sticks to his back,

74 Yesternight ah!

75 The hot bath

76 The thick purple carpet,

77 The red slippers ...

78 His dry lips taste salty,

79 A ball of thirst

80 Is climbing up his throat

81 He is forcing down

82 Some saliva,

83 Yesternight

84 The waiter on his knees,

85 The woman whispering,

86 'My Lord, My husband',

87 The red wine

88 The soft lights,

89 Woman's smile

90 Inviting man to bed,

91 The hot lips

92 Of her younger sister

93 Firm breasts

94 The embrace ...

95 He looks at his hands
96 At the black finger nails,
97 Cold sweat ...
98 He is choking,
99 He keeps asking himself,
100 'But why? Why? Why?'

*

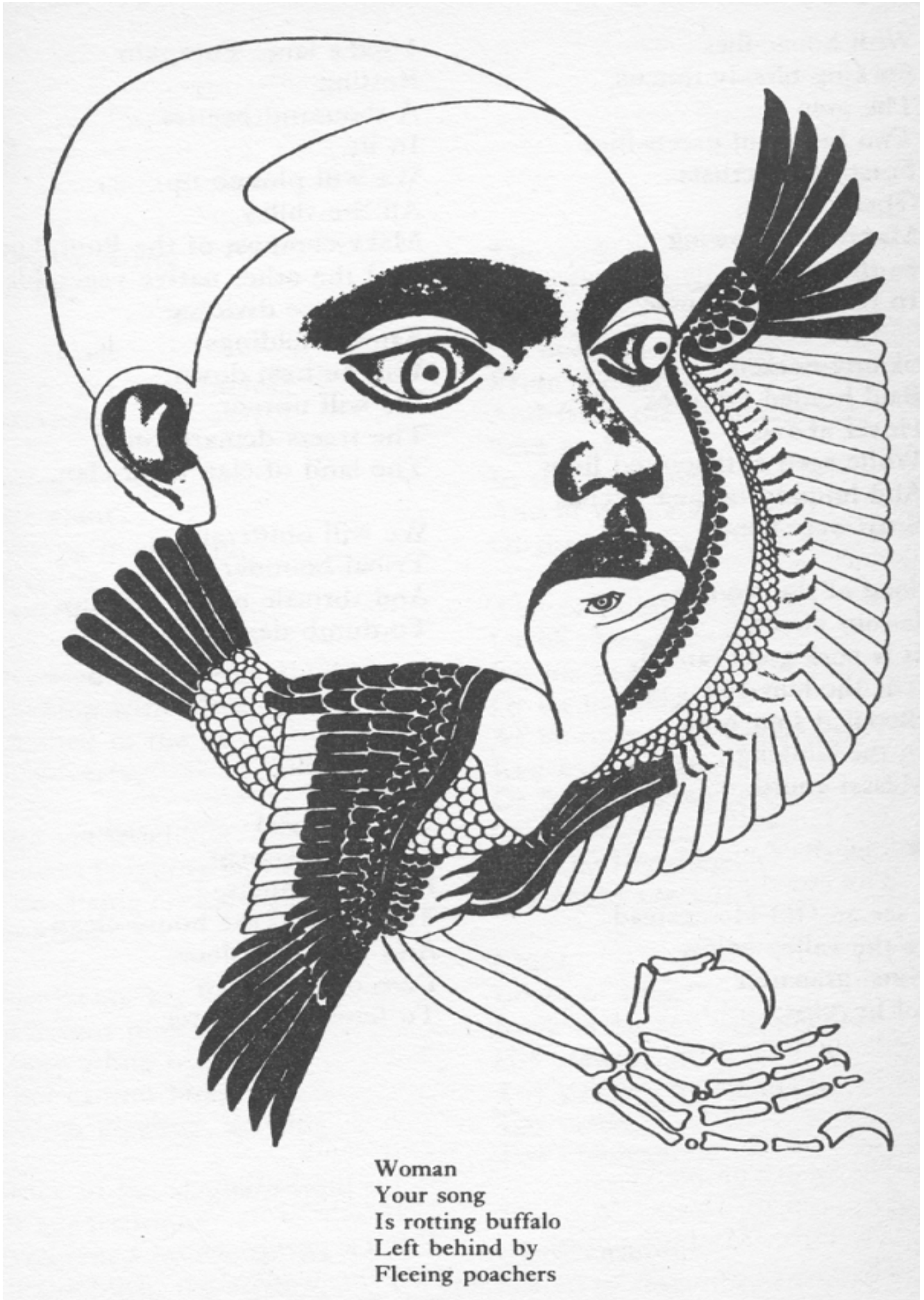
101 Song of the woman
102 Is the mad bragging
103 Of a defeated General,
104 Ten thousand men
105 Dead, dying,
106 The others scattered;

107 It is the pointless defiance
108 Of the condemned,
109 He is blindfolded,
110 The rough hand
111 Of the noose
112 Round his neck.

*

113 Woman
114 Your song
115 Is rotting buffalo
116 Left behind by
117 Fleeing poachers,
118 Its nose blocked

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Woman
Your song
Is rotting buffalo
Left behind by
Fleeing poachers

Enlarge this image.

119 Woman

120 Your song

ProQuest

121 Is rotting buffalo
122 Left behind by
123 Fleeing poachers

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124 With house-flies
125 Sucking bloody mucus,
126 The eyes
127 Two lumps of green-flies
128 Feasting on crusts
129 Of salty tears,
130 Maggots wallowing
131 In the pus
132 In the spear wounds;

133 Skinny-necked
134 Bald headed vultures
135 Hover above,
136 While aged stiff-jointed lions
137 And limping-hipped hyenas
138 Snarl over bones;

139 Song of the woman
140 Is sour sweet,
141 It is pork gone rancid,
142 It is the honeyed
143 Bloodied sour milk
144 In the stinking
145 Maasai gourd.

*

146 I see an Old Homestead
147 In the valley below
148 Huts, granaries ...
149 All in ruins;

150 I see a large Pumpkin
151 Rotting
152 A thousand beetles
153 In it;
154 We will plough up
155 All the valley,

156 Make compost of the Pumpkins
157 And the other native vegetables,
158 The fence dividing
159 Family holdings
160 Will be torn down,
161 We will uproot
162 The treets demarcating
163 The land of clan from clan,

164 We will obliterate
165 Tribal boundaries
166 And throttle native tongues
167 To dumb death.

*

168 Houseboy,
169 Listen
170 Call the *ayah*
171 Help the woman
172 Pack her things,
173 Then sweep the house clean
174 And wash the floor,
175 I am off to Town
176 To fetch the painter.

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2

177 What is Africa
178 To me?

179 Blackness,
180 Deep, deep fathomless
181 Darkness;

182 Africa,
183 Idle giant
184 Basking in the sun,
185 Sleeping, snoring,
186 Twitching in dreams;

187 Diseased with a chronic illness,
188 Choking with black ignorance,
189 Chained to the rock
190 Of poverty,

191 And yet laughing,
192 Always laughing and dancing,
193 The chains on his legs
194 Jangling;

195 Displaying his white teeth
196 In bright pink gum,
197 Loose white teeth
198 That cannot bite,
199 Joking, giggling, dancing ...

200 Stuck in the stagnant mud
201 Of superstitions,
202 Frightened by the spirits
203 Of the bush, the stream,
204 The rock,
205 Scared of corpses ...

206 He hears eerie noises
207 From the lakeside
208 And from the mountain top,
209 Sees snakes
210 In the whirlwind
211 And at both ends
212 Of the rainbow;

213 The caves house his gods
214 Or he carries them
215 On his head
216 Or on his shoulder
217 As he roams the wilderness,
218 Led by his cattle,
219 Or following the spoor
220 Of the elephant
221 That he has speared
222 But could not kill;

223 Child,
224 Lover of toys,
225 Look at his toy weapons,
226 His utensils, his hut ...
227 Toy garden, toy chickens,
228 Toy cattle,
229 Toy children ...

230 Timid,
231 Unadventurous,
232 Scared of the unbeaten track,

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233 Unweaned,
234 Clinging to mother's milkless breasts
235 Clinging to brother,
236 To uncle, to clan,
237 To tribe

238 To blackness,

239 To Africa,

240 Africa
241 This rich granary
242 Of taboos, customs,
243 Traditions ...

244 Mother, mother,
245 Why,
246 Why was I born
247 Black?

3

248 To hell
249 With your Pumpkins
250 And your Old Homesteads,
251 To hell
252 With the husks

253 Of old traditions
254 And meaningless customs,

255 We will smash
256 The taboos
257 One by one,
258 Explode the basis
259 Of every superstition,
260 We will uproot
261 Every sacred tree
262 And demolish every ancestral shrine.

*

263 We will not just
264 Breach the wall
265 Of your mud hut
266 To let in the air,
267 Do you think
268 We plan merely
269 To bring light
270 Into the hut?
271 We will set it ablaze
272 Let fire consume it all
273 This liar of backwardness;

274 We will uproot granaries
275 Break up the cooking pots
276 And water pots,
277 We'll grind
278 The grinding stones
279 To powder;

280 That obsolete toy
281 With which you scratch the soil
282 And the other rusty toys
283 In the hut,

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284 The dried fish
285 Riddled with cockroaches,
286 The piece of carcass
287 Hung above the cooking place

288 Black with soot ...
289 We'll make a big heap
290 Of all the rubbish
291 From the hut
292 And set the heap
293 Aflame.

*

294 Look at that woman
295 Shaking the rattle gourd
296 And talking to herself,

297 Mad creature,
298 Her hair
299 A burnt out forest,
300 Her eyes
301 A pair of rockets
302 Shooting out from the head,
303 Serpent tongue
304 Spitting poisons
305 Lashing crocodile tail;

306 Do you see
307 The fools
308 Sitting around her?
309 Terror infested faces
310 Eyes closed
311 Gummed with tears,
312 Lips cracked, bleeding,
313 Throats
314 Parched deserts of drought;

315 That child lying
316 On the earth
317 Numb
318 Bombs exploding in his head,
319 Blood boiling
320 Heavy with malarial parasites
321 Raging through his veins,

322 The mad woman
323 Spits on the palms

324 Of his hands
325 And on his feet,
326 Squirts beer
327 On his face
328 To cool him,
329 Spills chicken blood
330 On his chest,
331 A gift to Death!

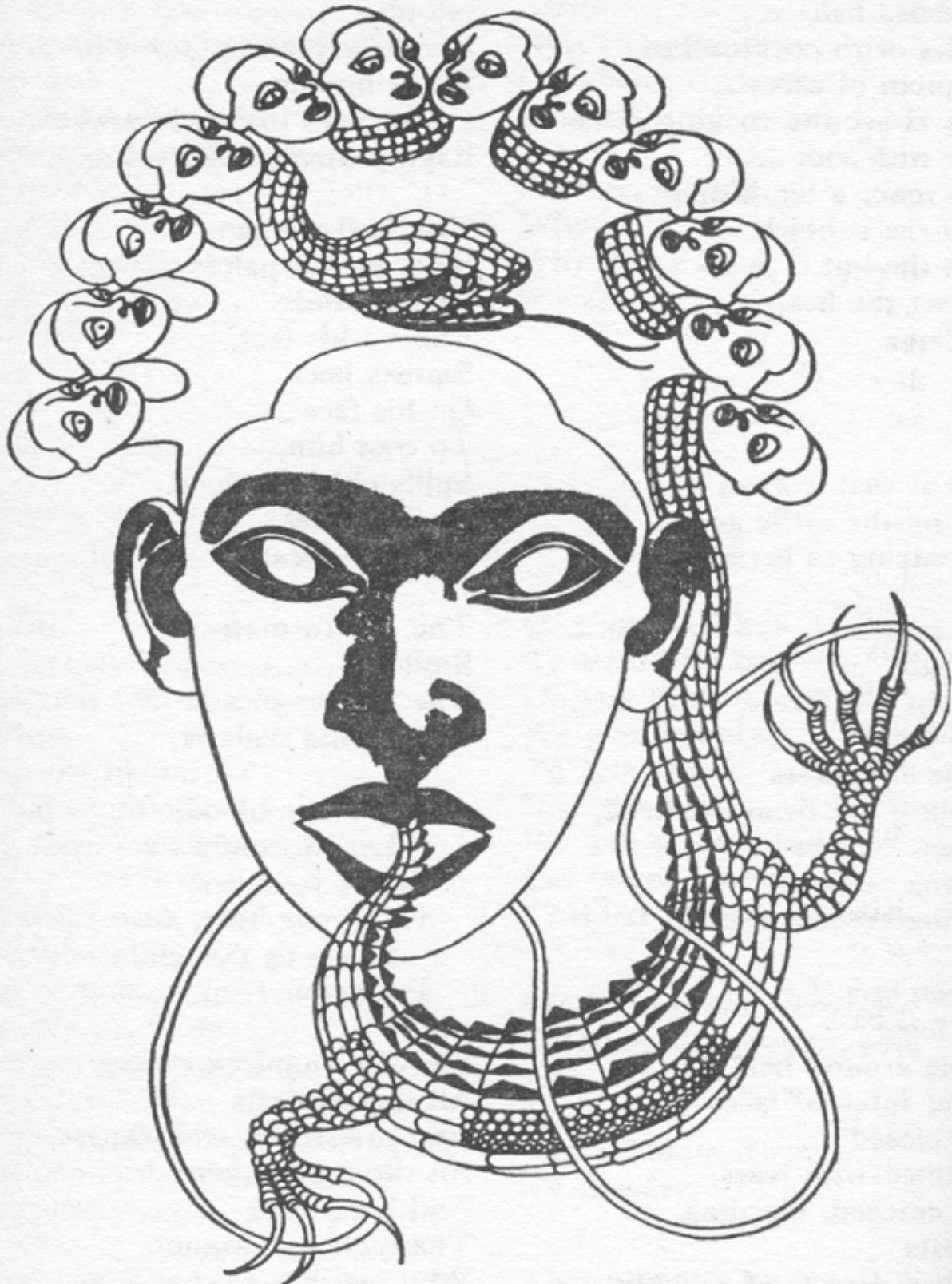
332 The child's mother
333 Smiles,
334 The diviner pleads
335 With dread malaria,

336 I give you blood,
337 Let this child live;
338 Here's your beer
339 Take your beer,
340 Leave us this child;
341 Take your food. ...

342 We will round up
343 All these priests
344 And priestesses of darkness,
345 All the rain-makers
346 And herbalists,
347 The men and women
348 Who sacrifice at chiefdom
349 Or clan shrines,

350 We will arrest all the witches,

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Serpent tongue
Spitting poisons
Lashing crocodile tails

Enlarge this image.

351 Serpent tongue

352 Spitting poisons

353 Lashing crocodile tails

[Page 129]

354 Wizards, evil-eyes,

355 Sellers of fetish bundles,

356 Bones and claws,

357 Dealers in poisons

358 Extracted from plants

359 And venoms from snakes;

360 We will put all these

361 Pillars of fear

362 In a lake steamer,

363 Take them to the deepest part

364 And cast them into the void;

*

365 We will arrest

366 All the village poets

367 Musicians and tribal dancers,

368 Put in detention

369 Folk-story tellers

370 And myth makers,

371 The sustainers of

372 Village morality;

373 We'll disband

374 The nest of court historians

375 Glorifiers of the past,

376 We will ban

377 The stupid village anthem of

378 'Backwards ever

379 Forwards never.'

*

380 To the gallows

381 With all the Professors

382 Of Anthropology

383 And teachers of African History,

384 A bonfire

385 We'll make of their works,

386 We'll destroy all the anthologies
387 Of African literature
388 And close down
389 All the schools
390 Of African Studies.

*

391 Where is Aimé Césaire?
392 Where Leopold Senghor?
393 Arrest Janheinz Jahn
394 And Father Placide Temples,
395 Put in detention
396 All the preachers
397 Of Negritude;

398 The balloon of
399 The African Personality
400 Exploded long ago,
401 DuBois is dead
402 We will erect
403 No memorial for him;
404 Why should I care
405 Who built the citadel
406 Of Zimbabwe?
407 Of what relevance is it
408 Whether black men
409 Architected the Pyramid?

410 Smash all these mirrors
411 That I may not see
412 The blackness of the past
413 From which I came
414 Reflected in them.

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4

415 Noises come
416 From within a dark hut,
417 A foul smell seeps
418 Of crude *waragi*
419 And stale *kwete* beer,

420 Chickens are fighting
421 Over fresh dung of child;

422 It is Adok Too
423 The blind poet from Lamogi
424 Playing the *nanga*
425 And singing praises
426 To a newly wed bride;
427 Footsteps of men and women
428 Are stamping the earth,
429 Puffs of dust
430 Mingled with smoke,
431 Smell of burnt meat;

432 A woman makes ululations
433 A man blows
434 A long wooden horn,
435 It sounds like a sneezing hippo,
436 Adok Too sings softly ...

*

437 Ten stacks of newly split firewood,
438 Leaning against the old tree
439 In the middle of
440 The Homestead,
441 Five stacks of grass
442 For starting fire,
443 Five stacks of grass
444 For thatching a new hut,
445 The hut of the newly-wed:

446 Do you know the slave
447 Who split the firewood?
448 Show me the tractor
449 They used for cutting the grass
450 And the cart
451 That brought the firewood
452 And the grass home;

*

453 I see a young woman
454 Returning home from the well,

455 Balancing a large pot
456 On her head,
457 Some water spilling
458 Her face slimes wet
459 Beads of water
460 On her bare breasts,
461 Long yellow and red
462 Beams from the setting sun
463 Darting over her youthful breasts
464 Like dragon flies;

465 Her naked feet
466 Digging the pathway,
467 Nibbling away the earth,
468 Her soles are thick

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469 Cracked like the earth
470 In the dry season,
471 The skin of her hands
472 Are rough like concrete wall,
473 There are stones
474 Embedded in the skin,
475 Her palms are worn out
476 Like the soles
477 Of old shoes;

*

478 The blind poet's voice
479 Is piercing the thatch,
480 The arrow of his song
481 Strikes the woman
482 Like lightning:

483 O! daughter of Bull
484 Wild lily of the hills
485 You are fit for son of Chief,
486 O! my brother
487 A dream deceived me,
488 What an envious dream?
489 When I woke
490 I was wet ...

*

491 Sister
492 Woman of Acoliland
493 Throw down that pot
494 With its water,
495 Let it break into pieces
496 Let the water cool
497 The thirsty earth;

498 It is taboo
499 To throw down water pots
500 With water in them,
501 But taboos must be broken,
502 Taboos are chains
503 Around the neck,
504 Chains of slavery;

505 Shatter that pot,
506 Shatter taboos, customs,
507 Traditions ...

508 Listen not
509 To the song of the poet
510 The blind musician
511 Plays for his bread,
512 The bread owners
513 Are your slavers;
514 Listen not to Adok Too's praises,
515 They are spurs
516 For the tired horses,
517 Blinkers for donkeys;

*

518 You woman from Kikuyuland
519 Let that burden slide,
520 Fall from your back
521 You are no mere
522 Donkey cart;
523 Cut that *mukwa* cord
524 Cutting a valley in your head,
525 Burn the *kyondo* sacks
526 That bow you down

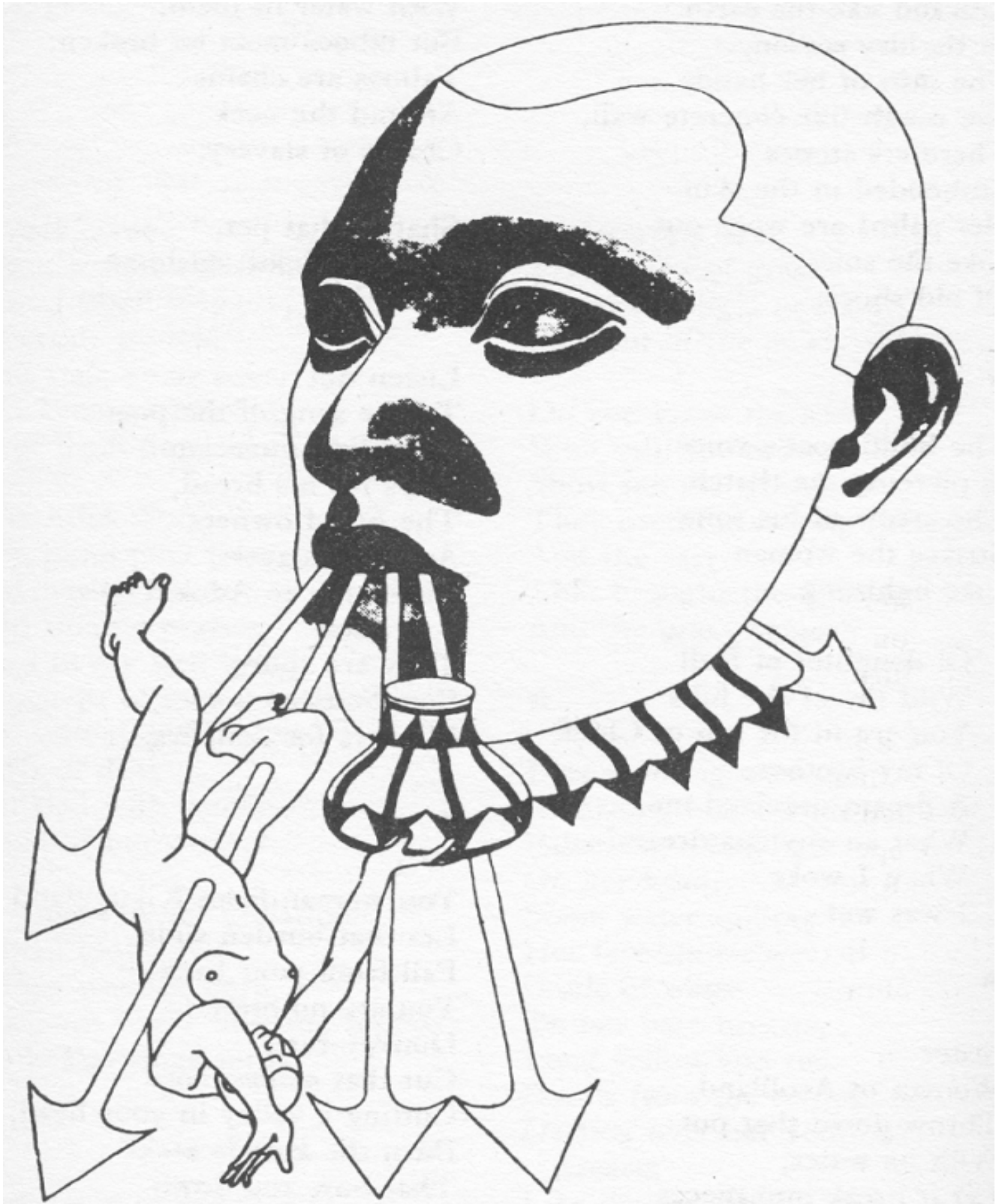
527 To see only my dusty boots,

528 Lift up your head

529 Walk erect

530 My love,

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The blind poet's voice
Is piercing the thatch,
The arrow of his song
Strikes the woman
Like lightning

Enlarge this image.

531 The blind poet's voice

532 Is piercing the thatch,

533 The arrow of his song
534 Strikes the woman
535 Like lightning

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536 Let me see
537 Your beautiful eyes,
538 Let me caress
539 Your sultry neck,
540 Let me kiss your dimples ...

541 Shut up you
542 Bush poet from Kiambu
543 And you from Nyeri,
544 Cease insulting my wife
545 With your stupid song
546 My girl is not
547 A camel;

*

548 Listen
549 My sister from Ankole
550 And you from Ruanda
551 And Burundi,

552 Here's a hammer,
553 Smash those pots
554 Of rotten milk
555 Burst open the door
556 Come forth into daylight,

557 Beat up that old woman
558 Who pumps you full of milk,

559 Are you a caterpillar
560 For wasps
561 To lay their eggs in?
562 Who told you
563 That your fertility
564 Will be enhanced

565 By excessive fatness?

566 Who says you are beautiful

567 When you cannot even walk?

568 You stagger into the sunlight

569 Melting, dripping, wet,

570 A pregnant hippo;

571 Soft, flabby, weak,

572 Bursting buttocks,

573 Your breasts are two drums,

574 Can you see your belly button?

575 I hear the lowing of cattle

576 A forest of long white horns

577 Approaching home.

578 I hear the wild song

579 Of the herdsman

580 He is singing praises

581 To your ugliness!

*

582 Woman of Africa

583 Sweeper

584 Smearing floors and walls

585 With cow dung and black soil,

586 Cook, *ayah*, the baby tied on your back,

587 Vomiting,

588 Washer of dishes,

589 Planting, weeding, harvesting,

590 Store-keeper, builder,

591 Runner of errands,

592 Cart, lorry,

593 Donkey. ...

594 Woman of Africa

595 What are you not?

596 In *buibui*

597 Your face is covered

598 In black cloth

599 Like a bat's leather wing,

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600 Harem
601 Private collection
602 Of tasty flesh,
603 Do you hear the bell
604 Of the leading cow?
605 The dust you see
606 Is not caused by a hurricane,
607 It's the herds
608 Of the Jo-Lango;

609 We will destroy
610 All these *shenzi* cattle
611 The root of their savagery,
612 The cause of their misery
613 And death;

*

614 I see you husband
615 He's had a little drink
616 His mouth drooling:

617 Asha before lunch
618 Chausiku after dinner
619 Young Akelo after midnight ...

*

620 In Buganda
621 They buy you
622 With two pots
623 Of beer,
624 The Luo trade you
625 For seven cows,

626 And what is that Madi hoe
627 The Acoli men give your father?
628 He cannot even use it
629 For digging!
630 They purchase you
631 On hire purchase even,

632 Like bicycles,

633 You are furniture,

634 Mattress for man

635 Your arm

636 A pillow

637 For his head!

*

638 Woman of Africa

639 Whatever you call yourself,

640 Whatever the bush poets

641 Call you

642 You are not

643 A wife!

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5

644 You Karamojong elder

645 Etched with the scars

646 Of spear,

647 You young raiders

648 Skimming across the plains

649 Ostrich feathers dancing on your heads

650 Blown back like papyrus tufts

651 By the Nile,

652 I see blood

653 On the shafts

654 Of your spears;

655 You Maasai warrior

656 Honing your spear

657 And polishing it with ghee,

658 You naked Jie

659 Studying the sick cow,

660 You Turkana scout

661 Perched on the termite mound

662 Ijakait from Toposa,

663 You Dodos General

664 Presiding over the war council;

665 You Suk youth
666 I hear you singing
667 Praises to your black ox,
668 Your hands raised
669 In imitation of its horns;

670 You men on Nandi hills
671 Tending cattle in the rocky pastures
672 Always suspecting an impending raid,
673 You Pokot hordes
674 Driving home the stolen cattle;

675 Kipsigis men
676 I see colourful shields
677 Surrounding a thick bush
678 In which I see
679 A lion's tufted tail ...

680 You proud Kalenjin
681 Chiefless, free,
682 Each man the chief
683 Of his hut.

*

684 When your spears
685 Appeared on the horizon
686 Beyond the Bahr el Ghazal
687 The Nilotes scattered
688 Like flying debris
689 From a bombed house,
690 The Luo ran
691 A thousand miles
692 Were stopped by the big Lake,
693 Had you given chase
694 They might have perished
695 In the water
696 Like the Egyptians
697 In the Red Sea;

698 When you swept Southwards
699 Towards the Rift Valley
700 Other men fled
701 Like antelopes
702 Chased by the leopard,

703 Like grass-hoppers
704 Escaping from a wild fire;

705 You taught Kikuyus
706 Circumcision,
707 Spread the chiefless democracy
708 Of the Age-Sets system ...

709 Kalenjin,
710 You Jo-Lango—
711 Spirit haunted,
712 Survey your booty,
713 Study your empire,
714 Your gains:

*

715 A large arc
716 Of semi desert land
717 Strewn with human skeletons
718 Barely covered by the
719 Hostile thorn bushes
720 And the flowering cactus,
721 A monument to five hundred years
722 Of cattle theft!
723 Wallowing in the mud
724 Of poverty and ignorance
725 You recited poems
726 About the beauty of your beasts,
727 Sang songs about the might
728 Of your spears
729 And your thieving exploits;

730 Believing you were
731 The richest of the earth,
732 Drunk with the illusion
733 Of real power

734 You continued to jump
735 Up and down
736 Up and down
737 As you dance,
738 Firmly holding to the spear,
739 The symbol of your backwardness;

740 You barren empire
741 Remained 'closed' to progress,
742 A vast natural animal reserve
743 In which wild men
744 And wild beasts roamed,
745 Students of primitive man
746 Big game hunters
747 And tourists flocked in
748 From all corners of the world,
749 White woman came to discover,
750 To see with their naked eyes
751 What manhood could be!

*

752 You mountain dwelling Sebei
753 Do you hear me?
754 You Kumam
755 Digging lung-fish
756 From the marshes,
757 You Iteso
758 Fighting at the beer party,
759 You Lutuko ...

760 Listen,

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761 We will not simply
762 Put the Maasai in trousers
763 To end twenty five thousand years
764 Of human nakedness,
765 Dynamiting the ochre quarries
766 Is only the starting gun,

767 We will arrest
768 All the elders

769 The tutors of the young
770 During circumcisions,
771 The gathering of youths
772 In the wilderness for initiations
773 Will be banned,
774 The council of elders
775 Will be abolished;
776 The war dance ...
777 The blowing of war horns
778 Will be punished
779 With twelve strokes
780 Of the cane
781 For each blast;

782 All the men with *moi* names
783 And those with 'killer' marks
784 On their backs
785 And on their arms
786 Will be hanged for murder;

*

787 You will be disarmed,
788 If need be, by force,
789 All your spears
790 And colourful shields,
791 All your bows
792 And poisoned arrows
793 Will be destroyed,
794 Not one will be left
795 Even for the museums,

796 Spearmakers and blacksmiths
797 Will be jailed;
798 Ah!
799 What a colourful heap
800 We'll make
801 Of the ostrich feathers
802 And all the other head gears,
803 We'll reduce the heap to ashes;

804 We will rip off
805 The smelly goatskin skirts
806 From the women

807 And burn them,
808 Cut all the giraffe hair necklaces
809 And elephant hair bangles,
810 Break the ivory amulets
811 Cutting deep in the flesh
812 Of the upper arms,
813 Remove all the chains,
814 Ear rings, nose rings,
815 Lip-stops ...

816 Each head will be shaved ...

*

817 Spearing black billy goats
818 In the dry river bed,
819 Sacrifices to cool
820 The blood of the murdered man,
821 All superstitious activities
822 Will be stamped out,
823 They will not be allowed
824 Even on the stage;

*

[Page 138]

825 Tell me
826 You young man
827 From Maasailand,
828 They call you *moran*,
829 I see your brother's spear
830 Planted at the door
831 Of your hut,
832 You know he is inside
833 Sleeping with your wife!

834 Would you let a man
835 'Borrow' your wife
836 Yet kill him
837 For taking your *shuka*?

838 We shall burn down
839 The *manyattas*,

840 Destroy each one of them
841 Together with all stupid customs
842 That are observed in them.

*

843 Ijakait,
844 Come brother,
845 You are tall and athletic
846 You are handsome,
847 Walk into your City
848 With your head up;

849 Do you see
850 The eyes of the girls
851 Glued on you?
852 Here you do not have
853 To kill a man or a lion first.

854 Take that girl
855 She wants you.

*

856 You sister
857 From Pokot
858 Who grew in the open air,
859 You are fresh ...
860 Ah!
861 Come,
862 Walk with me
863 In the City gardens,
864 Hold my hand ...
865 My woman
866 Here's a rose bud,
867 Keep it,
868 Guard it,
869 Don't lose it,
870 Do you hear?

6

871 Do I hear you whisper
872 Who is that man?
873 What is his name?

874 Do you not know me
875 And my brothers-in-power?
876 All the time
877 I was reading Econ.
878 At Makerere,
879 And my friend the Resident Magistrate

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880 Was sweating and cramming for the Bar,
881 You were busy
882 Performing the get-stuck dance,
883 Spending weeks at funeral parties,
884 Or in the bush
885 Chasing wild animals
886 Or collecting wild honey,
887 Thoughtless and carefree
888 Like children dancing around the hut
889 After a meal;
890 We spent years
891 In detention
892 Suffering without bitterness
893 And planning for the revolution;

894 Tell me
895 My friend and comrade,
896 Answer me simply and frankly,

897 Apart from the two shillings fee
898 For Party membership,
899 And the dances you performed
900 When the Party chiefs
901 Visited your village,
902 And the slogans you shouted
903 That you did not understand,

904 What was your contribution
905 In the struggle for uhuru?

*

906 Comrade,
907 Do you not agree
908 That without your present leaders

909 Uhuru could never have come?

910 And, surely,

911 You are not so mean

912 As to grudge them

913 Some token reward,

914 Are you?

*

915 I have a nice house

916 In the Town,

917 My spacious garden

918 Explodes with jacaranda and roses,

919 I have lilies, bougainvillea, canna ...

920 Do you appreciate the beauty

921 Of my roses?

922 Or would you rather turn

923 My flower garden

924 Into a maize shamba?

*

925 What did you reap

926 When uhuru ripened

927 And was harvested?

928 Is it my fault

929 That you sleep

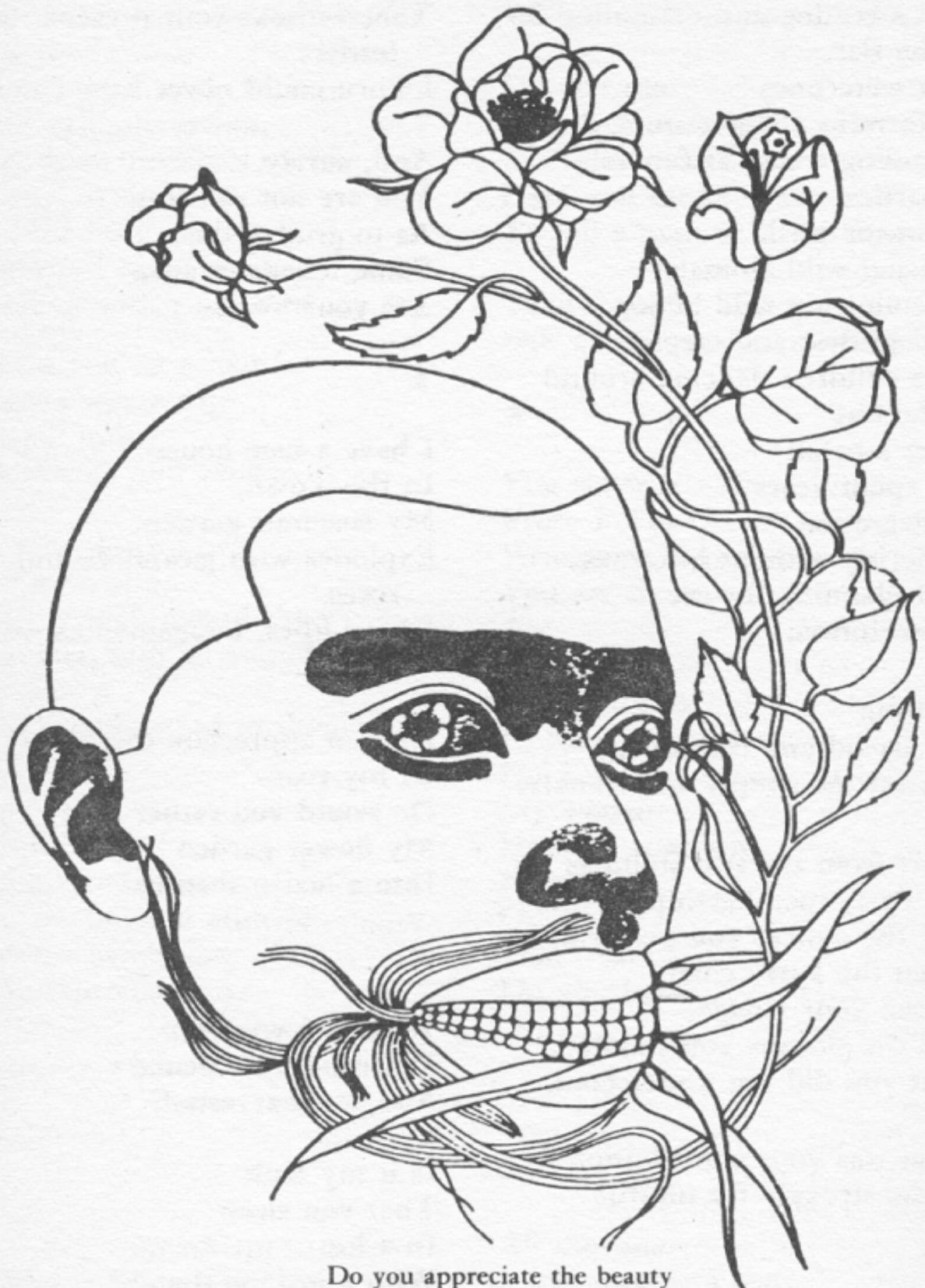
930 In a hut

931 With a leaking thatch?

932 Do you blame me

933 Because your sickly children

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Do you appreciate the beauty
Of my roses?
Or would you rather turn
My flower garden
Into a maize shamba?

Enlarge this image.

934 Do you appreciate the beauty

935 Of my roses?

936 Or would you rather turn
937 My flower garden
938 Into a maize shamba?

[Page 141]

939 Sleep on the earth
940 Sharing the filthy floor
941 With sheep and goats?
942 Who says
943 I am responsible
944 For the poverty of the peasantry?
945 Am I the cause of unemployment
946 And landlessness?

947 Did you ever see me
948 Touring the countryside
949 Recruiting people's daughters
950 Into prostitution?

951 How did I make men ignorant?
952 Was it not I
953 Who asked the Minister
954 To build a school
955 In your village?
956 And did I prevent
957 Children from other villages
958 From going to school?

*

959 I have other properties
960 In the Town,
961 But,
962 Come,
963 Beat the dust off your feet
964 And jump into my Merc.,
965 Let me take you for a ride
966 And show you around my farm ...

967 When the tractor first snorted
968 On these hunting grounds
969 The natives scuttled into the earth

970 Like squirrels,
971 Like the edible rat
972 Pursued by the hunter's dog,

973 Behold,
974 Africa's wildest bush
975 Is now a garden green
976 With wheat, barley, coffee ...

977 Look at that prize bull,
978 Black, hornless and without a hump ...

979 Don't touch the udder of my cow
980 With your unsterilized hands,
981 Don't touch the milking utensils ...

982 Do you see
983 That golden carpet
984 Covering the hillside?
985 Those are my sheep ...
986 Wool, mutton;

987 O!
988 How refreshing it is
989 To watch the plants germinate,
990 Grow, flower and ripen,
991 And the young healthy animals
992 Playing!

993 I come to my farm
994 Every week-end,
995 It's wonderful to get out
996 Of the Town
997 Into the fresh air

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998 Of the country,
999 I enjoy the smell
1000 Of the earth,
1001 The aroma of the coffee blossoms

1002 Intoxicates me!

*

1003 Tell me

1004 My friend and comrade,

1005 Do you remember

1006 The night of uhuru

1007 When the celebration drums throbbed

1008 And men and women wept with joy

1009 As they danced,

1010 Hands raised in salute

1011 To the national flag?

1012 Did someone tell you

1013 That on the morning of uhuru

1014 The dew on the grass

1015 Along the village pathways

1016 Would turn into gold,

1017 To be collected by the women

1018 Going to the well

1019 To fetch water,

1020 Or by the early morning hunters

1021 Laying traps for the duikers

1022 At the water holes?

1023 And the leaves

1024 Of the *olam* tree

1025 That fall off

1026 At the start of the droughts,

1027 Did you dream

1028 That the leaves

1029 Would become banknotes

1030 And be scattered by the wind

1031 Among the villagers?

*

1032 We have property

1033 And wealth,

1034 We are in power;

1035 Trespassers must be jailed
1036 For life,
1037 Thieves and robbers
1038 Must be hanged,
1039 Disloyal elements
1040 Must be detained without trial ...

*

1041 Have lions
1042 Begun to eat grass,
1043 To lie down with lambs
1044 And to play games with antelopes?
1045 Can a leopardess
1046 Suckle a piglet?

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7

1047 What do you mutter there
1048 Idiot?
1049 I hear you whimper
1050 Like a sick puppy,
1051 Your penis shrivelled up
1052 With fear;

1053 Listen to the beggar's song,
1054 The song of a cripple
1055 At sunset:

*

1056 We sowed,
1057 We watered
1058 Acres of Cynicism,
1059 Planted forests of Laughter
1060 Bitter Laughter
1061 Corrosive venom,
1062 Men shed tears
1063 As they rocked
1064 Held their sides
1065 Laughed, laughed,
1066 Floods of tears

1067 Turned red;

1068 We manured the Land

1069 Frustrations sprouted

1070 Bursting the soil

1071 Like young banana trees,

1072 Fat Frustrations

1073 Flourished fast

1074 Yielding fruits

1075 Green as gall;

1076 On the hillsides

1077 We planted Fear,

1078 It's blood-red blossoms

1079 Covered the hills

1080 Like February fires,

1081 Prickly leaves

1082 Hard and yellow

1083 Pricked men's skins

1084 Causing festering wounds;

1085 In the valley

1086 A streamlet trickled,

1087 Its water sluggish, slimy,

1088 Beside the streamlet

1089 The lamb

1090 Uhuru

1091 Dead as stone,

1092 The shimmering flies

1093 Giving false life

1094 To its open eyes!

1095 A herdsboy

1096 Sat on the bank above,

1097 Threw small stones

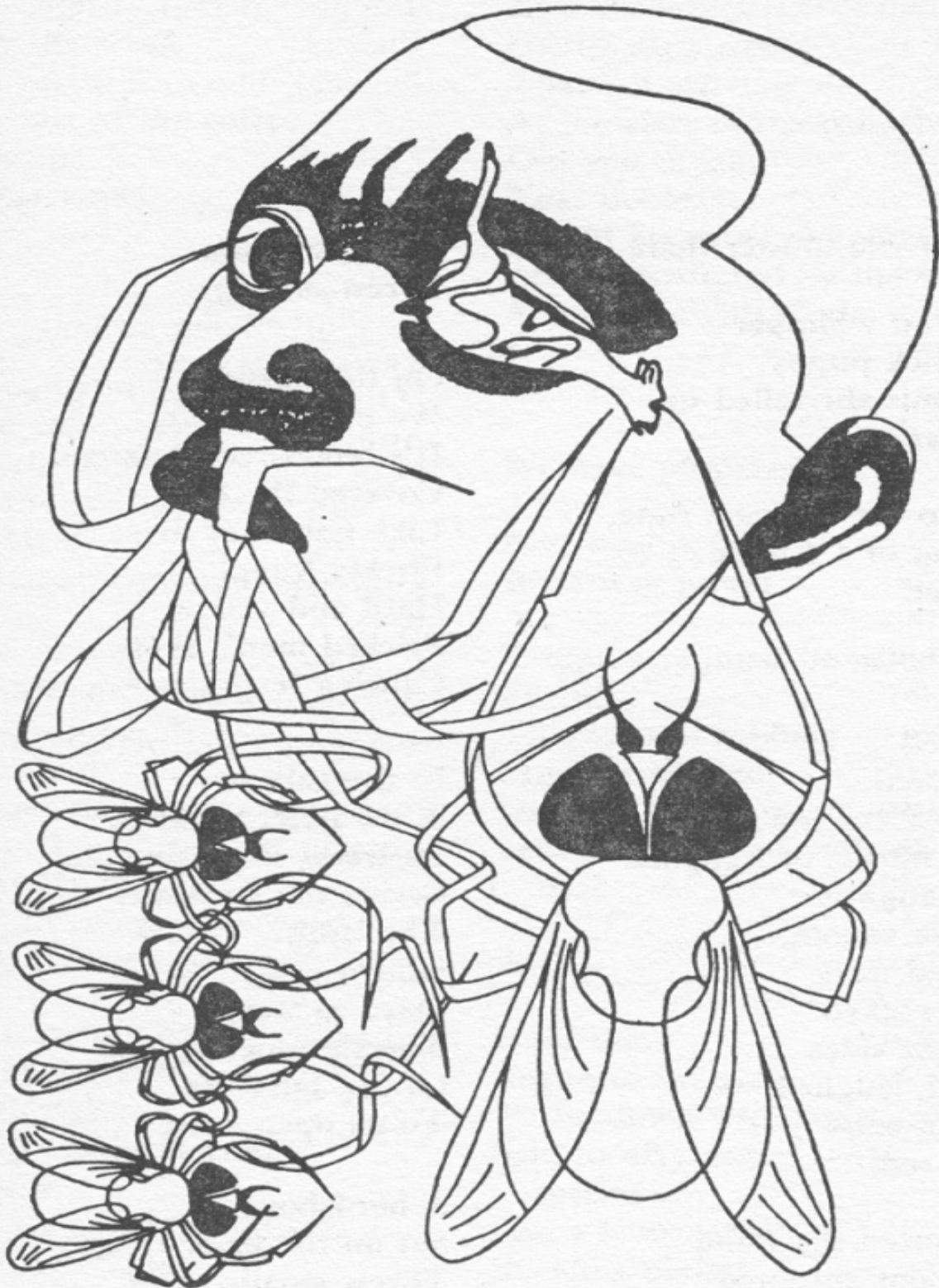
1098 Hit the carcass,

1099 The flies rose

1100 Like white ants,

1101 The boy sobbed

1102 Eyes smarting with pepper;



The lamb
Uhuru
Dead as Stone,
The shimmering flies
Giving false life
To its open eyes?

Enlarge this image.

1103 The lamb

1104 Uhuru

1105 Dead as Stone,
1106 The shimmering flies
1107 Giving false life
1108 To its open eyes?

[Page 145]

1109 Two men stood
1110 On the other side
1111 Roared like thunder,
1112 Peals of Laughter
1113 Dipped in poison
1114 Pierced the boy
1115 Like daggers of steel,
1116 Blood gushed from his heart
1117 Anointing the Land!
1118 We reaped Cynicism

1119 Stored it
1120 In a concrete granary
1121 Wider, deeper
1122 Than Mwitanzige^[12],
1123 We distilled Anger
1124 From the Laughter
1125 Ten thousand tons
1126 Of venom;
1127 Stored it in a tank
1128 Underground,
1129 Acrid steam rose
1130 Like lazy smoke,
1131 Trees and grasses died;
1132 A smouldering mound we made
1133 Of Frustrations and Fear
1134 Higher than Kirinyaga^[13]
1135 Its fiery lips
1136 Licked the clouds,
1137 Heaven wept;

1138 A hunter
1139 Sat in the shadow
1140 Of a rock,
1141 Rubbed two sticks
1142 A flash,
1143 Thunder roared,

1144 Flames
1145 Purified the Land!

*

1146 Out of my way
1147 You cowardly fool
1148 Creep back and hide
1149 In your mother's womb;
1150 Vex me no more
1151 With your hollow wailings
1152 And crocodile tears
1153 Over uhuru!

1154 You Pigmy men
1155 Skinning the elephant
1156 With rusty knives,
1157 I see your children
1158 Happy, dancing,
1159 Swinging from branch to branch
1160 Like naked hairless
1161 Black apes,

1162 You dwarf
1163 Rubbing two sticks
1164 To make fire,
1165 Which is the plant
1166 From which you extract
1167 Poison for the arrows?

1168 You *mukopi*
1169 Carrying water
1170 For your landlord's wife,
1171 You squatter ...

[Page 146]

1172 What is uhuru to you?

1173 You Indian dukawallah
1174 Coughing spittle onto the floor,
1175 Your citizenship card

1176 Nailed on the wall,
1177 You prostitute
1178 Sowing syphilis in the nightclubs
1179 You unemployed ...

1180 You loyal Muganda
1181 Dressed in white *kanzu*,
1182 I see you kneeling
1183 Before another man,
1184 Trailing your *kanzu*
1185 In the mud,
1186 Like a priest
1187 But serving an altar of man
1188 Not God;

1189 You man from Bunyoro
1190 And you from Toro
1191 What's wrong with your knees
1192 That you lie on your bellies
1193 Eating dust?
1194 Are you earthworms?

1195 When the naked Luo,
1196 Through trickery,
1197 Established their rule
1198 Over you,
1199 And stole your cattle,
1200 Your women, your land
1201 And made you serfs,
1202 For five hundred years
1203 You continued to show
1204 Your 'loyalties'
1205 By performing acts of servitude;
1206 What is uhuru to you?
1207 You Bairu from Ankole
1208 You slaves in Ruanda and Burundi,
1209 Do I see you
1210 Holding a beer pot
1211 While your lofty master
1212 Sucks the beer
1213 Through the sucking tube?

1214 Let that pot fall

1215 Beer and all
1216 Shatter and splash
1217 Over the chief's head;

*

1218 We will uproot
1219 Each tree
1220 From the Ituri forest
1221 And blow up
1222 Mount Kilimanjaro,
1223 The rubble from Ruwenzori
1224 Will fill the Valleys
1225 Of the Rift,
1226 We will divert
1227 The mighty waters
1228 Of the Nile
1229 Into the Indian Ocean.

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8

1230 Woman
1231 I see cups of tears
1232 Streaming down your cheeks,
1233 Your body shaking
1234 With anger and despair
1235 Like a mother
1236 Sitting by her dead son;

1237 Let them raise the alarm,
1238 Sound the war drums
1239 And blow the war horns,
1240 Let the women make ululations,
1241 Call all the tribesmen
1242 And all the tribeswomen,
1243 Let them gather together
1244 For the last time;
1245 Let them put ash
1246 On their heads
1247 And on their bodies
1248 Let the women cry aloud
1249 And beat their chests with stones,
1250 Let them throw themselves

1251 On the ground
1252 And roll in the dust
1253 And tear their hair
1254 In mourning!
1255 Let the men
1256 Polish their weapons
1257 And arm themselves with spears,
1258 Shields, bows, arrows
1259 And battle axes,
1260 Let them wear ostrich feathers
1261 On their heads
1262 And swishes
1263 On their arms,

1264 Let them blow their horns
1265 And their wooden trumpets,
1266 Let the youths
1267 Perform the mock fight
1268 And the women shout
1269 The praise names of their men
1270 And of their clans
1271 And of the clans of their husbands;

1272 Let the drummers
1273 Play the rhythms
1274 Of the funeral dance,
1275 And let the people sing and dance
1276 And celebrate the passing of
1277 The Old Homestead!

*

1278 Weep long,
1279 For the village world
1280 That you know
1281 And love so well,
1282 Is gone,
1283 Swept away
1284 By the fierce fires
1285 Of progress and civilization!

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1286 That walk to the well

1287 Before sunrise,
1288 The cool bath in the stream,
1289 The gathering of the family
1290 Around the evening fire ...

1291 That shady evergreen *byeyo* tree
1292 Under which I first met you
1293 And told you
1294 I wanted you,
1295 Do you remember
1296 The song of the *ogilo* bird
1297 And the chorus
1298 Of the grey monkeys
1299 In the trees nearby?

*

1300 Let the people drink
1301 *Kwete* beer and *waragi*,
1302 Let them suck *laco*i beer
1303 With the sucking tubes
1304 As they mourn
1305 The death of
1306 The Old Homestead!

1307 You village chief
1308 Sitting on the stool
1309 And leaning on the central pole
1310 Of your hut,
1311 Mount the rostrum
1312 At the drum post,
1313 Let the people draw near
1314 And keep silence,

1315 Deliver your farewell speech;
1316 Farewell to your friends
1317 And your age-mates,
1318 To your sons and daughters
1319 And to your grandchildren,
1320 Let them bid farewell to you
1321 And to each other,
1322 For tomorrow morning
1323 As the cock crows
1324 For the first time,

1325 The people will disperse,
1326 Each following his or her own route:
1327 Pilgrims to the New City,
1328 And once they depart
1329 They will never meet again!

1330 Say Goodbye
1331 For you will never
1332 Hunt together again,
1333 Nor dance the war dance
1334 Or the *bwola* dance. ...

1335 Bid farewell
1336 To your ancestral spirits
1337 Fleeing from the demolished Homestead,
1338 With their backs to you
1339 They can no longer hear
1340 Your prayers,
1341 Waste no more chicken or goat or sheep
1342 As sacrifices to them,
1343 They are gone with the wind,
1344 Blown away with the smoke
1345 Of the burnt Homestead!
1346 Stop crying
1347 You woman,
1348 Do you think those tears
1349 Can quench the flames
1350 Of civilization?

1351 Wash your face with cold water,

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1352 Here's soap and towel ...
1353 Take some aspirin
1354 It'll clear your headache ...

*

1355 I see the great gate
1356 Of the City flung open,
1357 I see men and women
1358 Walking in ...

1359 And what are you doing there
1360 Under the tree
1361 Why don't you walk in
1362 With the others?
1363 Are you feeling homesick
1364 For the deserted Homestead?
1365 Or are you frightened
1366 Of the new City?

1367 You have only two alternatives
1368 My sister,
1369 Either you come in
1370 Through the City Gate,
1371 Or take the rope
1372 And hang yourself!

9

1373 Your Excellency
1374 Bwana President
1375 I salute you,
1376 And you Honourable Ministers
1377 Discussing the White Paper;
1378 Mister Speaker, Sir,
1379 You Backbenchers
1380 And Opposition chiefs,
1381 Greetings to you!

1382 I rise
1383 For your Lordship,
1384 Robed, bespectacled,
1385 I see the learned attorney
1386 Addressing the jury,
1387 And his brother advocate
1388 Consulting a volume
1389 Of the *Law Reports*
1390 A House of Lord's judgement;
1391 Amen!
1392 The black Bishop
1393 At the altar
1394 Is blessing the people
1395 In Latin,
1396 Do you see his golden crown
1397 And scarlet robe?

*

- 1398 Tell me
- 1399 You worshipful Mayors,
- 1400 Aldermen, Councillors,
- 1401 You Town Clerks in wigs,
- 1402 You trade union leader
- 1403 Organising the strike,
- 1404 You fat black capitalist
- 1405 In the dark suit,
- 1406 You sipping the Scotch,

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- 1407 Bank manager computerising overdrafts,
- 1408 You surgeons and physicians
- 1409 At Mulago and Kenyatta Hospitals,
- 1410 Surveyors, architects, engineers,
- 1411 Accountants, broadcasters ...
- 1412 You artists, novelists,
- 1413 Dramatists, poets,

- 1414 Military men
- 1415 And you Police chiefs,
- 1416 I see you
- 1417 Studying the situation
- 1418 And plotting the next move;

- 1419 You Permanent Secretary
- 1420 Composing the Minister's speech,
- 1421 You Party leader
- 1422 Standing on top of the Land-Rover
- 1423 Addressing the market crowd,

- 1424 You African Ambassador
- 1425 At the United Nations,
- 1426 Your Excellency
- 1427 Speak,

- 1428 Tell the world
- 1429 In English or in French,
- 1430 Talk about

1431 The African foundation
1432 On which we are
1433 Building the new nations
1434 Of Africa.

1435 You scholar seeking after truth
1436 I see the top
1437 Of your bald head
1438 Between mountains of books
1439 Gleaming with sweat,
1440 Can you explain
1441 The African philosophy
1442 On which we are reconstructing
1443 Our new societies?

*

1444 I hear a faint flute
1445 Playing in the moonlight,
1446 It is Leopold Senghor's tune
1447 Of African Socialism,
1448 Do you hear
1449 That distant drum?
1450 Is that not Mwalimu
1451 Nyerere's *Ujamaa*?

1452 The Osagyefo
1453 Is silent,
1454 The anthem of
1455 United Africa
1456 Is drowned by
1457 The sound of guns!
1458 Tell me
1459 You student of communism,
1460 And you Professor of History
1461 Did Senegalese blood
1462 Flow in the veins
1463 Of Karl Marx?
1464 And Lenin,
1465 Was he born
1466 At Arusha?

*

1467 We shall build

1468 A new City on the hill

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1469 Overlooking the Lake,

1470 Concrete, steel, stone ...

1471 The termite queen-mother

1472 Will starve to death ...

1473 Broad avenues, spacious gardens,

1474 Parks, swimming pools ...

1475 We will erect monuments

1476 To the founders

1477 Of modern Africa:

1478 Leopold 11 of Belgium,

1479 Bismarck ...

1480 Streets will be named

1481 After the great discoverers,

1482 David Livingstone,

1483 Henry Stanley, Speke ...

1484 We will not forget

1485 Karl Peters ...

1486 'Hannington Park'

1487 To commemorate the Bishop

1488 Murdered by Mwanga's men,

1489 If we can trace them

1490 We'll hang them

1491 For the crime.

*

1492 You young soldier

1493 Guarding the border post,

1494 Do you know

1495 When that sacred boundary

1496 Was drawn?

1497 Which of your ancestors

1498 Established the area

1499 Of your beloved

1500 Country?

1501 No street

1502 Will be named

1503 After Mansa Sulayman

1504 Of ancient Mali,

1505 He is as irrelevant
1506 As the Greek goddess Artemmis,
1507 A miserly king
1508 He passed nothing on
1509 To us;

1510 Mohammed Askia
1511 Great monarch of Songai,
1512 What a hollow sounding name?
1513 The Nilotic chiefs
1514 Labongo and Gikir
1515 Were famous for their quarrels
1516 Over a spear
1517 And for splitting open
1518 A baby's belly
1519 To retrieve a bead!

1520 Let the kings of Ghana
1521 Rot in the earth,
1522 We'll forget
1523 The rulers of Monomatapa ...

1524 As for Shaka
1525 The Zulu General,
1526 How can we praise him
1527 When he was utterly defeated
1528 And killed by his own brothers?

1529 What proud poem
1530 Can we write
1531 For the vanquished?

NOTES

[12] 'Killer of locusts', Lake Albert in Uganda

[13] Mount Kenya

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