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Postcards from Taon¹

Evening, Kondele²

A breeze stirs Kondele
Out of its siesta
It is the breeze nudging people
Back home from Kisuma³
As the heavy footfalls
Of those who carry little...
Disturbed, dust rises
And roams the streets. Angry.
Snapping at ankles

Sunday Morning, Kibuye⁴

Dusty
sun-beaten buntings
slowly sway
to Christian hymns
wafting
from across the road
Weary celebrants
dispiritedly dance
between the buntings
—the *mitumba*⁵
hung from ropes
or spread on sacks
on the ground
Now walking sometimes stumbling
avoiding buntings and fellow celebrants
now stopping sometimes stooping
to admire to choose
now pointing sometimes picking up
then haggling over prices
now dropping sometimes taking
the celebrant-shoppers go through
the motions
of a ritual of renewal—
But

there is no sloughing off
here: not to these hymns
of a *mtumba* religion;
not into these hand-me-downs
that were the rage
in Europe and America
a couple of years ago...

Dawn, Huruma⁶

The factory
stretches out
its hand
—the siren—
and
with robot precision
picks up people
from anxious hovels
and fixes them
each in his place:
parts in the
Machine.

Notes

1. These are poems of urban Kenya as experienced by the *wananchi*—subaltern—classes.
2. Kondele. A predominantly low-middle income neighbourhood in the Kenyan lakeside city of Kisumu.
3. Kisuma. Original name of Kisumu. Also, (DhoLuo) the practice of going away from home in search of food.
4. Kibuye. In Kisumu, site (and name) of a large mainly mitumba market that gathers on Sundays. A famous Roman Catholic church is across the road.
5. Mitumba (singular: mtumba). (KiSwahili) Second hand merchandise goods, from clothing to cars.
6. Huruma. A predominantly low-middle income neighbourhood in the Kenyan town of Eldoret. Also, (KiSwahili) “pity.” There is a major factory a kilometre or so away from the neighbourhood.