

## **Women from Atu**

we women from Atu swing our hips,  
bright coloured cloths swishing,  
swing our heads, gold earrings jingling  
in defiance to you  
our men who no longer keep us.

watch Tabita's eyes.  
she looks south down the blue-water-white-  
sand coast, already sees Mombasa's  
white towers glazed with the full moon's light,  
rich merchants lingering down narrow streets  
between mosques, she smells their clean  
cotton clothes. sees tourists, white businessmen  
holding her on their laps, feels their soft-  
fleshed legs pillowing her bones. watches  
ships docking with navies, hears bars  
crowded with sailors' laughs,  
while electric lights keep nights as days.

maybe there are bruises, bruises when  
the businessman grabs her arm too tightly,  
his short-trimmed fingernails, hard wedding band  
digging at her skin as she turns away from him,  
bruises when the sailor throws her across the room,  
her eyes fearing his, his eyes red, leaded  
with smoke, with pombe, bruises when  
the merchant rams himself down  
between her brittle legs.

but our skin is dark to hide the marks.

gold chains unlatch from their necks.  
heavy coins slip from their pockets.