

# "The Mamba"

Journal Of African Haiku



Issue 4  
September 2017

# “The Mamba”

Journal Of Africa Haiku Network



*Edited by:*  
Adjei Agyei-Baah  
Emmanuel Jessie Kalusian

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## Editors' Note

Mamba 4 is a ground-breaking issue in terms of huge work submissions coming especially from new poets from countries like Morocco, Tunisia, India, Serbia, Austria, Romania, British Colombia, Ireland, Poland, Sri Lanka, Croatia, The Philippines and The Netherlands, being a clear manifestation of the *Mamba* gaining international acceptance and appreciation. The issue is also privileged to have two astute African professors sharing haiku and haiku knowledge on this "new" emerging poetic form, as a new way of telling the African story. And the honorable academicians are in the persons of the Associate Professor Susan Kiguli, a prolific poet in Uganda, with multiple collections to her name, anthologized in over 100 books, and also the former Head of Literature Department at Uganda's foremost University, Makerere, who shares haiku inspired by sample haiku poems from the previous *Mamba* issues and Babishai Contest Haiku. And also, Prof. Ali Jimale Ahmed, a living legend of Somali and African literature: poet, essayist, scholar, and short story writer, granting interview on Somali poetic form called *shirib* which has some uncanny resemblance to the haiku to Raphael d'Abdon, Africa Haiku Network's

Representative in South Africa, on meeting him at the recent *Hargeysa International Book Fair 2017* in Somaliland. Indeed, Mamba issue 4 demonstrates its uniqueness in terms of rich selection of haikus, haibuns and senryus, and haigas republished from AHN's recent Throwback Haiku Series 2017 on Facebook, as well showcasing two *haiku sequence* for the first time in the *Mamba* from two zealous haikuists from Africa, which we will leave out their names for readers to discover for themselves. And addition features the three winning haikus of Kariuki wa Nyamu (Kenya), Anthony Itopa Obaro (Nigeria) and Pamela Kuadegbeku (Ghana), being the winners the recent Babishai Haiku Contest 2017 organised by Babishai Niwe Poetry Foundation in Uganda. In short, our editorial team is grateful to you all haijins for sending in your beautiful poems and to you readers for finding time out of your rough schedule to draw pleasure from our journal. We urge all members of editorial teams, AHN members, readers, contributors, researchers and friends to continue to assist the Mamba, in whatever form, to grow it into a formidable journal to continuously provide entertainment and as well share intellectual knowledge on African tradition and culture.

Adjei Agyei-Baah  
Emmanuel Jessie Kalusian  
September, 2017

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---







**Justice Joseph Prah  
(Ghana)**

---

after whirlwind  
falling leaves  
bury fallen leaves

---

patterns in my palm  
the bridge narrows  
for my passing

---

air-borne cotton fluff  
a village gossip  
gathers lies

---

ascension night rain  
shifting to where  
the roof leaks

**Maria Steyn  
(South Africa)**

---

year's end  
her skipping rope  
too short

**Sarra Masmoudi  
(Tunisia)**

---

autumn rain-  
the sun clings in its  
last drops

---

autumn moon-  
that white hair  
in the huge crowd!

**Professor Susan N. Kiguli  
(Kenya)**

---

a fast red river—  
young Ugandan village girls  
cannot cross to school

---

Mogadishu tree  
twelve fallen succulent leaves  
Ugandan widows



**Prince K. Mensah  
(Ghana)**

---

leaping tides  
as if to touch the moon  
but settle at the shore

**Kwaku Feni Adow  
(Ghana)**

---

harmattan winds  
quicken the pace  
of dry leaves

---

campfire—  
stoking the night  
with stories

---

son's birthday  
pouring my breath  
into balloons

*Crossing the Bridge (Haiku Sequence)*

**Barnabas Ikéolúwa Adélékè  
(Nigeria)**

---

long rains . . .  
the bamboo bridge strewn  
with new debris

---

distant thunder . . .  
the stream almost flooding  
a bamboo bridge

---

long rains . . .  
the village's bamboo bridge  
becomes driftwood

**Nathaniel Apadu  
(Ghana)**

---

morning dew  
the rising sun shines  
in a droplet

**Michael Achile Umameh  
(Nigeria/UK)**

---

midnight chaos—  
in the hatchery  
a rattle snake

**Ali Znaidi  
(Tunisia)**

---

autumn again...  
a chameleon sifts through  
the fallen leaves

---

dry sky...  
mosquitoes move in and out  
of an empty bucket

**Theophilus Femi Alawonde  
(Nigeria)**

---

papa's fields...  
crows circling  
a bent scarecrow

**Emmanuel Jessie Kalusian  
(Nigeria)**

---

ripe mango!  
a shadow falls  
from the tree

---

after  
the game--  
thunder rumbles

*The Priest and Thief (Haiku Sequence)*

**Emmanuel Jessie Kalusian**  
**(Nigeria)**

---

dawn--  
the town crier announces  
a missing goat

---

morning sunrise  
a crowd gather at  
the village square

---

distant thunder...  
the village priest urges  
the goat thief to confess

---

casting lots...  
the priest's cowrie settles  
at the feet of the goat thief

**Kariuki wa Nyamu**  
**(Kenya)**

---

last night's rain  
in the morning mud  
fresh toad prints

---

wind storm--  
a tree  
a possessed priest



## Ayinbire Alebna Blessmond (Ghana)

---

tête-à-tête...  
the vastness  
in Grandpa's glasses

---

after harmattan...  
a dove returns  
to a leafless mahogany

---

the goat hide  
stretches into  
a drumbeat

## The Big Five

*Haiban by Matthew Caretti (South Africa)*

We've already checked off the cape buffalo, the elephant, the rhino. And there as we enter the next game reserve is a pride of lions feasting on the day old carcass of a wildebeest. Some tearing at the blackened and flyblown flesh. Others too bloated to move, sprawled on their backs in the shade of an acacia, sound asleep.

---

swooning earth  
blood stained bones  
arrayed in light

But the leopard is ever elusive. We roll on through the savannah in our creaking Land Rover, eyes peeled to the low bush and straying again and again to the high strong branches of the baobab where, perhaps, the big cat would lounge during daylight hours.

---

warming sun  
two vultures tatter  
the sky

She has come a long way to see the wildlife.  
To be with me again. Each day out into the  
hinterlands, we search. Straining at the open  
spaces. Occasionally reaching out a hand to  
point. To touch the firmament of our best selves.  
Then each night listening together to vervet  
cries in the canopy before a retreat into the  
isolating darkness of our past.

---

campfire story  
the embers pulse  
then grow dim

We rise early. Press on through the scrub on  
a narrow and rutted track. Just as we settle  
in, a glimpse. Only the rump and the tail, but  
distinctly spotted. White-yellow pale within  
black, again and again. Part lion, part panther.  
Then just rustling leaves . . .

---

water hole  
scuttled hoof prints  
mark a struggle

## Anthony Itopa Obaro (Nigeria)

---

downpour  
waterfalls from rooftops  
pouring into buckets

**Confidence Agbo  
(Ghana)**

---

shining stars....  
in my bucket  
watery crystals

**Mensah John  
(Ghana)**

---

cockcrow...  
rising to face  
the melting moon

**Nureni Ibrahim  
(Nigeria)**

---

whirling winds...  
a couple of leaves  
in tango with dust

**Pamela Kuadegbeku  
(Ghana)**

---

moon circle  
palms into palms  
an armless child breaks the ring

**Michael Adoku  
(Ghana)**

---

clash of breasts  
between two fierce cocks  
noon heat

---

along the beaches  
in the light of the full moon  
turtles bedding

**Samantha Renda  
(South Africa)**

---

distant thunder  
the rocks holding down  
her tin roof

---

just for a moment...  
where the dragonfly  
meets the sky



**Fred Kweku Forson  
(Ghana)**

---

dust from dancing feet  
a corpse's nose plugged  
with cotton wool

**Babajide Michael Olusegun  
(Nigeria)**

---

Africa forest  
a tractor keeps tunneling  
in and out

---

lagoon front  
crabs bathing  
in morning sunrise

---

dawn—  
birds speaking  
in tongues

**Celestine Nudanu  
(Ghana)**

---

a bit of heaven  
in the Virgin's smile  
garden grotto

---

morning rain  
beneath my bedroom window  
a wet school child

**Kwami Sedanu Daniel  
(Ghana)**

---

weekend rush hour  
the siren of a hearse  
sending home a departed

**Onyema McDonald  
(Nigeria)**

---

forest in flames  
kites hover the sky  
as hunters stay alert

---

the cry of an owl  
pierces a silent night  
a great man sleeps on

**Raphael d'Abdon  
(South Africa)**

---

moonlight across trees  
a black mamba's slough  
shimmers in wild berries

**Jamil Danbala Umar  
(Ghana)**

---

quiet neighbourhood—  
drops of light shower re-soun-ding  
on maize crops

---

dead dog on the road  
motorists create a new path  
around it

**Karofi Usman  
(Nigeria)**

---

Harmattan fire...  
a rodent roasted  
in a hunter's trap

---

Eid al kabir...  
the butcher  
sharpens his blade

**Akor Emmanuel Oche  
(Nigeria)**

---

closed tap  
empty cans wait  
at the mercy of rain

**Nana Fredua-Agyeman  
(Ghana)**

---

sailing  
the sun whitens  
an old veil



**Patrick Wafula Wanyama  
(Kenya)**

---

house cleaning  
a spider skeleton dangles  
in a dusty cobweb

---

stars and fireflies  
twinkling simultaneously--  
midnight walk

---

father's garden--  
dry cassia pods rattling  
in the evening breeze

**Abderrahim Bensaid  
(Morocco)**

---

woodland...  
the rising smoke  
from the hunter's fire

---

the climate is cold  
the cafe is warm  
breath of smokers

**Adjei Agyei-Baah  
(Ghana)**

---

anthill—  
a cathedral  
in itself

---

bare brown—  
the teeth  
of the kola seller

---

balcony view  
a rising smoke  
from kebab seller's grill

---

avocado seller  
welcoming customers  
with a slice

---

morning sunrise...  
the fresh scent  
from the baker's yard

**Qwao Nathan  
(Ghana)**



## HAIKU FROM EUROPE AND OTHER PLACES

**Angela Giordano  
(Italy)**

---

tiger hunting  
the sound of drums  
in the savannah

**John McManus  
(England)**

---

death moon  
the former child soldier  
shows me his scars

**Leonardo Lazzari  
(Italy)**

---

fresh wind—  
rustling leaves cover  
the sound of footsteps

---

early spring—  
the deer feels the weight  
of his own antlers

**Aparna Pathak  
(India)**

---

high tide  
the boy jumps  
off the desk

---

homebound  
the tilt of plumeria  
towards sunlight

**Zoran Antonijevic  
(Serbia)**

---

hypnotized  
around room lamp  
dancing mosquitoes

**Vanessa Proctor  
(Australia)**

---

elephant country  
every bush  
elephant shaped

**Sudebi Singha  
(India)**

---

flyover  
sound cuts through  
sound

**Srinivasa Rao Sambangi  
(India)**

---

winter chill  
the warmth of a cut rose  
from Kenya

---

sand dunes  
all i can do is to  
look for wind

**Lavana Kray  
(Romania)**



**Debbie Strange  
(Canada)**

---

open market  
we taste the sound  
of other languages

---

sundown  
the lion's mane  
on fire

**Elisa Allo (Italy/Switzerland)**

---

smiles of children  
an alligator overtakes  
a canoe



**Margherita Petriccione  
(Italy)**

---

Nile cruise—  
naïve jokes  
of the staff boys

**Tiffany Shaw-Diaz  
(United States)**

---

rainforest  
the elders' whisper  
under canopy

**Keith A. Simmonds**  
**(France)**

---

silent night ...  
myriad fireflies glowing  
in scented air

**Mark Gilfillan**  
**(United Kingdom)**

---

somewhere  
in the scrub  
a cricket

---

adrift--  
the rise and fall  
of a nesting coot

**Eufemia Griffio  
(Italy)**

---

old lion  
its last journey  
in the baobab shade

**Garry Eaton  
(British Colombia)**



**Robert Kingston  
(United Kingdom)**



**Elisa Allo  
(Italy/ Switzerland)**



## Bill Waters (United States)



## Dinner In Africa

*Haibun by Krzysztof Kokot (Poland)*

Zanzibar - Every day I go to the port asking for a ship to Moroni in the Comoros. I could fly by plane but it's a big expense for me. The official of the captain's office finally gives hope that the freighter arriving in Madagascar and the Comoros may call at the port. I'm sitting in the morning on the coast and watching. Heat, the air once smells of cloves and once of yesterday's fish. Finally, there it is. In the evening I catch a captain - a German from the former GDR.

We make a deal. There is no cook on the ship, I will cook. Because the cruise lasts for me less than three days so I agreed willingly.

The pantry of the Kenyan ship was richly stocked to meet the European Indian and Filipino tastes. I was surprised by its abundance, but also by the ineptness of the crew.

At night we sailed out and I made up the menu. There were pierogi (dumplings), bigos (Polish

dish of sauerkraut, sausage and mushrooms) of  
canned sauerkraut and Parma ham. Also minced  
chops with parmesan and pineapple, of course  
tomato soup and potato pancakes. I did not  
ask about the confession. Everyone was eating  
like a horse. I was offered to continue doing  
my job between Mombasa and Madagascar.  
Unfortunately, time is running. In Moroni a  
befriended monk was waiting for me, and  
then further north to Poland. When I called to  
tell I was in the port he was surprised. He was  
even more surprised when I walked down the  
gangway laden with mighty packets from the  
sailor's pantry, adorned by the applause of the  
crew. Miracles happen sometimes!

---

smell of cloves-  
disappear from the plate  
cottage cheese noodles

## Lucia Fontana (Italy)

---

coconut water  
sipping sunrise  
on cold sand

**Antonio Mangiameli**  
**(Italy)**

---

rain-  
the weighty wings  
of a stork

**Lori A Minor**  
**(United States)**

---

giraffe cloud  
a piece of Africa  
drifting away

**Malintha Perera  
(Sri Lanka)**

---

bushland  
an elephant bathing  
sand after sand

**Goran Gatalica  
(Croatia)**

---

rainforest pause—  
on sticky tongue of aardvark  
a line of ants

---

rainforest dawn—  
the way how cheetah  
studies the antelopes



**Goran Gatalica  
(Croatia)**



**Dietmar Tauchner  
(Austria)**

---

Savanna thunder  
the breath of  
an ancient god

**Pat Geyer**  
**(United States)**

---

crossing my path...  
peculiar big cat  
drops me a bone

**Anthony Q. Rabang**  
**(The Philippines)**

---

in the tall grass  
two eyes observe  
the resting deer

---

dusty wind  
the chase down between  
a tiger and deer

**Kristjaan Panneman  
(The Netherlands)**

---

around the mansion  
daisies standing strong together  
after the storm

---

deserted beach  
the cry of seagulls  
on the sound of waves

**M. Franklyn Teafor**  
**(United States)**

---

only a total eclipse  
silences the weaver birds  
briefly

**Marilyn Fleming  
(United States)**

---

in the hollow  
of a baobab  
the quickening

**Jennifer Hambrick  
(United States)**

---

dry season  
the old woman's  
smile lines

**Noelani La'au  
(Canada)**

---

night wind—  
the angel's trumpet  
spills a warning

**Kanchan Chatterjee  
(India)**

---

first ring  
on the orphan girl's finger—  
a lady bug

**Edward Schmidt-Zorner  
(Ireland)**

---

fresh wind calls—  
flying across the sky  
a gannet pursues his thoughts

**Andy McLellan  
(United Kingdom)**

---

weathered rock  
feeling every line  
of my age

## ESSAYS, INTERVIEWS, AND WORKSHOP

### Truth Vs Cleverness In Haiku by Barnabas Ìkéolúwa Adélékè

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Haiku, as many are aware, is a verse that captures a fleeting moment in the natural world. Sometimes I try to see it as a discovery of surprising elements or in simple terms, what is there around us which we hardly notice. It is important then that any poet, before picking up his pen to write haiku, understands what it means to find a moment. A poet ought to come to nature as a seeker, a learner, or in a more scholarly term, a researcher. His goal in doing this is to record a truth, a universal truth, which stands accurate, infallible and unembellished for all time. This is difficult for beginners as such are wont, as is the way of mainstream poetry, to allow self to come into their description of the natural world. "How then does a poet write haiku which records a truth?" Someone might ask. It is not too difficult. The answer lies first in removing the ego-self from the 'poetic moment'.

Basho advocates that one who would write a good haiku should learn from the pine and bamboo. Simply put, what Master Basho was saying is that there is a place of learning for the young haiku poet. There is a place of training of the mind to ascend towards the realm where a good haiku could be composed.

First of all, we should understand that the classic masters dealt with the interference of self in recording truth. They saw the need to be out in the natural world, observing the natural world from an eye which is not subjective. They wrote only what nature brought to their senses. Their senses were the signal through which nature communicated. And once they were only mouthpieces of mother nature, they could never be wrong. Nature always conveys universal truth validly to differing peoples and cultures throughout time. This is why today, lovers of haiku are still mesmerized by the brilliant verses of Matsuo Basho, Kobayashi Issa, Yosa Buson, to mention a few.

Most haiku found on the social media and publications are glaringly the poets' contrivances and not a truth brought about by meditation. It seems haiku poets are in a hurry to put something clever on paper, rather than pay serious attention to the validity of their works, which is damaging to the beautiful epigrammatic verse and far from the classic aesthetics that brought many modern poets into it in the first place. It is no exaggeration to say that today, many celebrated haiku are free verses. So I ask, do you think the haiku you write records a truth or just displays your own cleverness?

How do we recognize a haiku, which only shows cleverness?

It is not necessary for haiku poets to put too much emphasis on the 'aha' factor in their verses, but because this is a deeply ingrained concept, many seem to go all out to alter the moment before them to unnecessarily amplify it. At the end, we only have a haiku that might, for example, sound comical; we would laugh over it and that is all. An example of a verse that is contrived rather than an observation of nature is one which I have made up below.

Christmas eve . . .  
the goat for slaughter  
dribbling us

*(Apologies if any verse exists which reads as this.)*

This is comical. It appears as haiku but it hardly shows us a moment captured from contemplation on the natural world. In a bid to find a poignant focus perhaps, the poet has resulted in alluding to dribbling. In nature, a flower does not actually smile, a leaf does not wave goodbye, a tree does not gather autumn or dusk, a nightingale does not wake the dawn. We indeed have 'imagery' (the haiku moments sound great), but these verses are obviously the contrivances or fabrications of the poet.



A contemporary teacher of haiku, Elaine Andre, points out that the human mind readily detects a lie. If a poet offers the readers a lie, we detect it. Meditation or contemplation are bound to bring the 'aha' we need in a haiku. A poet does not need to make this up himself. Once we remove the ego-self by practice in gleaning haiku moments, the resonating factor to readers will always be found in our verses.

Another indication of cleverness in haiku composition is found in the excessive use of poetic devices. Haiku records moments as they are — with the eyes of a child. Attempts to bring in poetic devices to capture the moment make readers suspect the haiku may either be made up, or written by someone still finding his way with haiku or egoistic. Haiku does not encourage the added embellishments—such as of poetic devices borrowed from other cultures. If the moment cannot be written as it is, then the poet should learn to take his time until he finds the right words to use. There should be no hurry in writing a good haiku. Basho was said to review his famous 'old pond' haiku about a thousand times. A good moment, when left to lie, will find its way into composition in words with almost no embellishment. An example (one of my haiku) showing too much embellishment is one below.

midday shower  
a cow's hoof print quenches  
the dove's thirst

*(Editor's Choice Haiku, Cattails, May 2016)*

When I read this haiku now, I laugh at the conspicuous interference of self in the verse. I had written what is true in nature yet poorly composed as I put too much cleverness into it. If I were to write this haiku now, it would read as:

spring rain . . .  
a dove dips its beak  
in a cow's hoof print

With this new haiku, I am able to make reference to season (kigo), adding universal allegory. I have also introduced a 'cut marker' (kireji) to direct the reader to the intended meaning of the verse. The essence of kireji in haiku is to give a clear way of reading the verse to the reader, not to leave it ambiguous. Haiku is not a 'mind puzzle' that forces several readings before the meaning is revealed. I have also assumed the position of an observer who is not bringing his own sentiments or ideas of rightness (subjective judgment) into the haiku. For crying out loud, it is beyond me to say the dove is thirsty! That is subjective and not objective.

It suffices to state what I could see from my objective position. The dove is dipping its beak in the water left behind by rain in a cow's hoof print. The Japanese believe haiku is an open verse. The poet should be conscious of the fact that he is just to state what is before him and allow the readers to finish the verse in their own minds. Indirectly, the writer opens the verse; the reader closes it. When writing haiku that spells out all, the reader is cheated of participation in closing it. Let us bear this in mind.

Someone might then ask, 'What if I want to write from imagination, would I be telling a lie?'

Basho, on writing from imagination as opposed to writing from concrete experiences, advised that a lie must be told skillfully in such a way that truth is still preserved. This is important!

In conclusion, it is pertinent to always remember in our haiku journey that haiku is seldom haiku when truth is missing in it. Let us learn by practice to subdue the ego-self in our composition of haiku. This brings us a step higher to attaining mastery in this beautiful verse we have all come to love.

## Raphael d'Abdon Interviews Prof Ali Jimale Ahmed

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### Biographical notes

**Ali Jimale Ahmed** is a living legend of Somali and African literature: poet, essayist, scholar, and short story writer, his books include *The Invention of Somalia*, *Daybreak Is Near: Literature, Clans, and the Nation-State in Somalia*, *Fear Is a Cow, When Donkeys give birth to calves: totems, wars, horizons, diasporas* and *The Road Less Traveled: Reflections On The Literatures Of The Horn Of Africa*. His poems and short stories have been translated into several languages, including Japanese, Bosnian, Danish and Portuguese. Ali Jimale Ahmed is Professor and Chair of the Department of Comparative Literature at Queens College; he also teaches at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

**Raphael d'Abdon** is a writer, scholar, spoken word poet, editor and translator living in Pretoria (South Africa). He is the author of two poetry collections, *sunnyside nightwalk* and *salt water*, and the editor of the volumes *Marikana. A Moment in Time* and *I nostri semi—Peo tsa rona. Poeti sudafricani del post-apartheid*. He teaches at the University of South Africa and The Mzansi Poetry Academy, and he is the African Haiku Network representative for South Africa.

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## Interview

I had the honour to meet Prof. Ali Jimale Ahmed at the recent Hargeysa International Book Fair, and the interview that follows is the continuation of the lovely literary conversations we had in the seven days we spent together in Somaliland:

*RdA: A couple of easy questions to begin with...First off, what inspires you to write poetry? What poets do you admire?*

**AJA:** I am not sure if this is an easy question. Reading good poets and writers; looking at the world and taking stock of what I see, perceive, feel, hear, and smell; reflecting on things past, and sniffing the air beyond the ridge on the horizon—all these and more inspire me to write poetry. I admire poets who combine commitment with artistry and vision. I admire, among others, the following poets, Mohamed Warsame Hadraawi, the preeminent poet of the Somalis, Mazizi Kunene, Dennis Brutus, Wole Soyinka, Okot P'Bitek, Taban lo Liyong, Kofi Awoonor, Nizar Qabbani, Nikki Giovanni, Richard Wright (the haiku), Meena Alexander, Reesom Haile, Abdillatif Abdalla, Jack Mapanje, Felix Mnthali, Mohamed Eno, Ezra Pound, June Jordan, etc. This is only a representative list.

*RdA: What is your thought process behind a poem?*

**AJA:** As I said before, the poems that I write, consciously or unconsciously, have gestation periods. The process of taking stock of my world includes the unconscious absorption of things that would later lay the groundwork for a poem. For that reason the thought processes that inform and shape my work could at times be concretized through the actual poem, in that sense, the poem becomes an act of instantiation.

*RdA: How much research goes into writing your poetry?*

**AJA:** A great deal...unless, of course, the poem intrudes, unbidden, stealthily, uninvited. But even there, its footprints, its genetic markers sometimes become evident shortly after its birth.

*RdA: Your collection *Fear is a Cow* (published by Red Sea Press in 2002) includes a poem titled "Haiku-ish". Can you comment upon this poem and its intriguing title?*

**AJA:** Before I comment on the poem, let me, if I may, share the said poem with the readers:

All eureka's are  
A poem of pain. Feet must  
Complement Miss Luck.

When I set out to write "Haiku-ish" I had in the back of my mind a Somali poetic form called *shirib*, about which we will talk more in the course of this conversation. I was always intrigued by how the *shirib* had some uncanny resemblance to the haiku, and not only in terms of its antiphonal structure, its provocative amplifications and implications, but also in the way both forms communicate a feeling or impression in the most succinct and taut manner. I called it "Haiku-ish" to playfully downplay or better yet ironize my intentions. With the exception of the 5-7-5 structure, there is nothing else that demonstrate its being haiku. On a serious note, though, I was not sure if I could do justice to both poetic genres—the *shirib* and the haiku. To further ironize my intentions there is another poem in the collection titled "A haiku with a Tail." Beyond that, it is difficult to comment on your work. I leave that to you and other scholars who are better equipped than I to comment on my work. Suffice it to say, there is so much at work before, during, and at the moment of writing.

**Rda:** *Haiku has influenced generations of poets from all over the world (Ezra Pound, Allen Ginsberg, Wole Soyinka... the list is endless). Why do you think so many poets are attracted by haiku?*

**AJA:** Haiku captures the intensity of life's

contradictions and ruptures in the moment, with a kind of magnanimity that allows the genre to be open-ended and incomplete. Historically, the haiku has allowed poets to pierce through life's complexities by crystallizing and compressing opposing and diverse elements in nature into 17-syllables of exquisite and highly saturated verse. The haiku perhaps exemplifies the genre, to quote from Richard Wright, that best views the African philosophy of life as the "primal outlook upon life" (*Black Power*). My take on the Wright statement is that it reflects how existence (ontology) precedes or better yet grounds epistemology in what Raymond Williams calls "practical consciousness." Haiku attracts poets because it is first and foremost a challenge to deliver in so few words what it takes in other instances to write a long poem. It connotes discipline, as it demands a strict form of frugality in the use of words and images. Since you mention Pound, let me give an example of his rendering of Moritake's pithy verse: "The fallen blossom flies back to its branch: A butterfly" (Pound, Vorticism," *The Fortnightly Review*, 1914). One could write a whole thesis on that line. Therein lies the complexity, the beauty, the appeal and the seduction of the genre. Its seduction is couched in a subtle, nuanced "dare."

**RdA:** *The Mamba* is the official journal of the African Haiku Network: it publishes African stories, written in English, using a traditional Japanese poetic form. As a scholar of comparative literature what do you think about the "ontological" interculturality of this editorial, literary and cultural project?

**AJA:** I have always believed—and it is a belief that I gird with action and conduct—that knowledge and disciplines are interconnected, that we should avoid compartmentalizing them. Indeed, African cultures (through fables and parables) emphasize the need to decompartmentalize knowledge. The African fable of the three blind men and the elephant is a case in point. Although all three men had a genuine encounter with an elephant, their separate explanations of what an elephant is, was not enough to holistically describe the gentle giant. In a similar fashion, cultures are not read or understood by separating them from the host of other cultures that constitute our human backcloth. There is a South African proverb that says, "A person is a person only because of other people." We could stretch the proverb a bit further: A culture is a culture only because of other cultures. Thus it behooves that the guiding principle of *The Mamba* editorial team is "ontological" interculturality. Culture, after all, is "a networked whole of cultures," to quote from Kwok-Ying Lau. That said, I do not mean to imply that we

should gloss over differences among cultures—where they exist.

**RdA:** In one of our dialogues, you introduced me to the traditional Somali poetry genre called "shirib", whose form and structure are similar to haiku. Can you tell the readers of *The Mamba* more about its history, its development, its most acclaimed authors?

**AJA:** The *shirib* has a long history in Somali culture. It has been in existence for more than 180–200 years. It is practiced in central and southern Somalia, and also parts of the Sanaag region of Somaliland. Like other poetic genres in Somali tradition, the *shirib* follows strict rules of prosody, especially, alliteration and meter. Unlike other poetic genres or subgenres, however, the *shirib* is accompanied by *jaan*, the rhythmic unity of clapping and footwork. The combination of clapping and footwork coupled with the sound of a horn-trumpet gives the *shirib* its rhythmic balance. The horn is blown only after the poet has recited his verses. Nothing should compete with the delivery of the verses. There is complete silence during the poet's delivery of the verses. That is because the *shirib* verses are taut, pithy, subtle, and condensed, and demand the undivided attention of all participants and spectators.

It is a communal genre that comes to life during communal festivals that celebrate prosperity and the abundance of rains, when the females of their livestock are expecting, when life is at its best. Of course, all aspects of social, political and current events are suitable themes for a shirib poem. The shirib is sometimes used for "aggressive" forms of sable rattling—curse, taunts, and their corollary, blessings and praise. Its aggressive posture is communicated visually through the panoply or the ceremonial attire of the participants: a special code of dress that include a loincloth and a shawl, special shoes, spear, shield, sticks, and especially alloyed and embroidered bracelet worn on the left upper arm of the star poets to diffuse the evil eye. (The custom is obviously pre-Islamic, as the poets now wear amulets with Quranic inscriptions).

The original form of the genre consisted of four long lines, each couplet consisting of 11 syllables. The current popular form consists of two lines of 16 syllables, each line consisting of 8 syllables. We could perhaps say, the long shirib is to the current form what the *waka*, 31 syllables, is to the haiku. That said, both the shirib (two lines, each consisting of 8 syllables) and the haiku (three lines, consisting of 5-7-5 syllables) perhaps have their genesis in a time of intense and rife contradictions in society. Both genres

allow their practitioners to crystallize their thoughts. They use evocation while at the same time evincing events yet to come. In the Somali case, the poet is said to share characteristics with a bird called *dhebad* (hoopoe), said to be privy to events yet to come.

The genre's most acclaimed practitioners include Farah Seefey, Hussein Sheikh Ahmed "Kaddare", Abdulle Raage Traawiil, Jimale Dhegataag, Abdulle Geeda-naar. Farah Seefey is perhaps the most versatile of all shirib poets. Even though he died almost 60 years ago; his verses are to this day remembered by all. Let me give two examples of his enduring verses that are etched in the Somali consciousness. The first couplet is a comment on the world shortly after the Second World War. He said,

Adduunyo uur lahaan arkaa

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Umulisaanse loo arkeyn. (I see a pregnant world/ For which [alas] there is no midwife in sight.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

The poet was obviously disenchanted with the tactics and strategy—or lack thereof-- of those who were spearheading for Somali independence. He could see a new world coming into being; but he could not see

any signs of enlightened leadership that could avail itself of the opportunity. Unfortunately, later events did bear out his predictions.

The next couplet hints at the advent of cars in Somalia:

Miney fattuuro fiq tiraa  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Ninkii fadhaaya maa fiyoow (Crazy is the man  
who stays put/When a car's horn is blown.)  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

**RdA:** *What is your advice to aspiring haiku writers?*

**AJA:** My advice to aspiring haiku writers is simple—Read, write, revise, share your writing with people of good will but who would also be frank with sound criticism, then revise, then send your refined haiku to *The Mamba*.

## Haiku Workshops Report From Raphael D'abdon A.H.N. Representative In South Africa.

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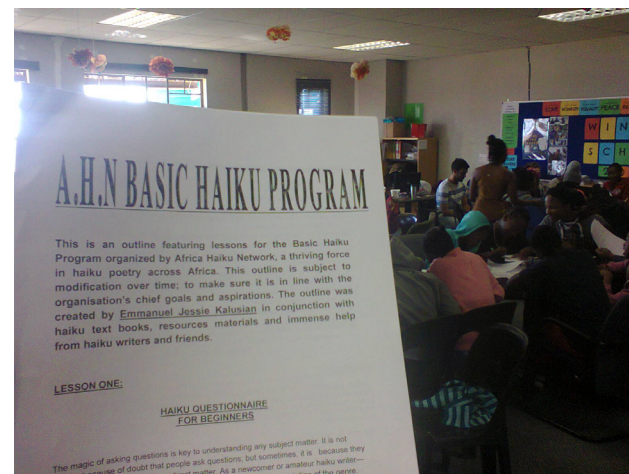
In the last three months, I facilitated 3 haiku workshops, two at the Mzansi Poetry Academy, a new community college located in the centre of Johannesburg, and one at the OLICO's Winter School in Diepsloot, a township in the Gauteng province. The two workshops for the MPA were conducted on June 9 at the Eskia Mphahlele Library in Pretoria, and on August 12 at the MPA in Johannesburg. The workshops are part of a course I am teaching on "Poetry in an international context". The students are mostly university students and workers aged between 20 and 35. 12 and 15 students attended the workshops in Pretoria and Johannesburg, respectively. The workshop focused on the history of haiku, its masters, its structure, and its genesis and development in Japan, the Western world and Africa. *The Mamba* journal was given as reading material: using the teaching material produced by AHN, we discussed the formal characteristics of haiku, and its significance in the African context.

We read haiku from the journal, I asked the students to select their favourite haiku and we discussed them. At the end, I asked the students (none of whom had heard of haiku before) to start writing haiku, share them in their public performances, and submit them to *The Mamba*. One student, in particular, who attended the Pretoria workshop, Solly "MrSoetry" Ramatswi, was very fascinated by haiku. Solly is very active in the local slam and open mic circuits, and he started bringing his haiku into these spaces, much to audiences' surprise. Some people even started to call him "the haiku poet"

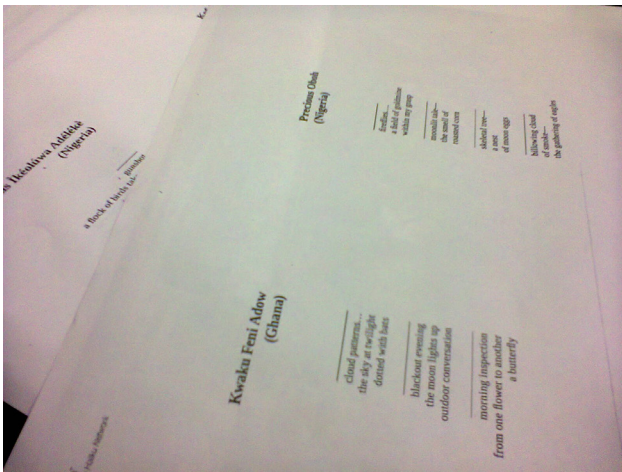
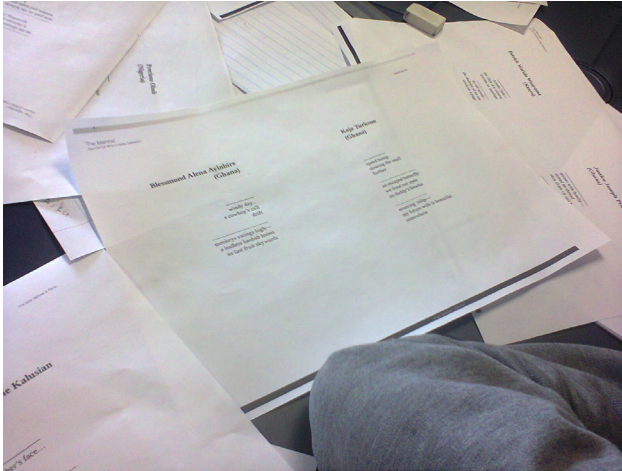
The workshop at Olico Winter school took place on July 6 Zikhuliseni Building, Bophelong Centre, Diepsloot West, and was attended by 60-70 learners aged between 12 and 16. After giving a brief presentation of haiku, and an explanation of how haiku works, I divided the class into 12 groups of 5 learners each, and gave 2 issues of *The Mamba* to each table. Then I asked the learners to read the haiku, choose the ones they liked most, and write one or more haiku in response to them. At the end of the workshop I invited them to read both the haiku they had selected and the ones they wrote in front of the class, and the response was outstanding. Some 12 students responded to my invitation, and read their brand new haiku.

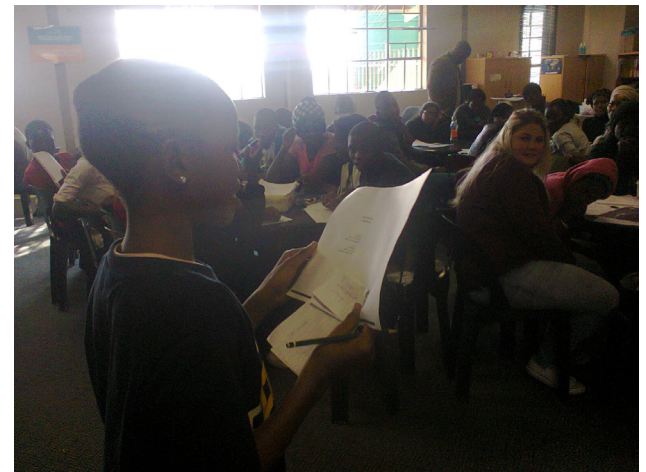
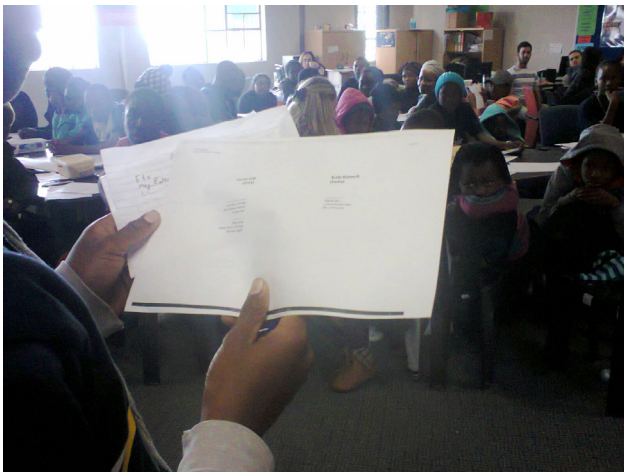
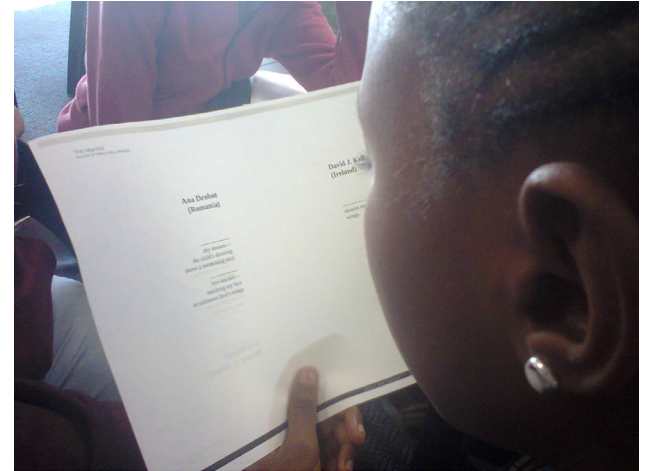
The coordinator of the Olico Winter School is currently collecting these haiku into a single document.

Below are pictures taken during the workshops









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» Nile cruise—

**Tiffany Shaw-Diaz (United States)**

» rainforest

**Keith A. Simmonds (France)**

» silent night ...

**Mark Gilfillan (United Kingdom)**

» somewhere  
» adrift—

**Eufemia Griffo (Italy)**

» old lion

**Garry Eaton (British Colombia)**

» The blunted ends (haiga)

**Robert Kingston (United Kingdom)**

» Talking Kenya (haiga)

**Elisa Allo (Italy/ Switzerland)**

» savanna twilight (haiga)

**Bill Waters (United States)**

» into the village

**Krzysztof Kokot (Poland)**

» Dinner With Africa (Haibun)

**Lucia Fontana (Italy)**

» coconut water

**Antonio Mangiameli (Italy)**

» rain —

**Lori A Minor (United States)**

» giraffe cloud

**Malintha Perera (Sri Lanka)**

» bushland

**Goran Gatalica (Croatia)**

» rainforest pause -  
» rainforest dawn -  
» gardenian statue (haiga)

**Dietmar Tauchner (Austria)**

» Savanna thunder

**Pat Geyer (United States)**

» crossing my path...

**Q. Rabang (The Philippines)**

» in the tall grass  
» dusty wind

**Kristjaan Panneman (The Netherlands)**

» around the mansion  
» deserted beach

**M. Franklyn Teaford (United States)**

» only a total eclipse

**Marilyn Fleming (United States)**

» in the hollow

**Jennifer Hambrick (United States)**

» dry season

**Noelani La'au (Canada)**

» night wind -

**Kanchan Chatterjee (India)**

» first ring

**Edward Schmidt-Zorner (Ireland)**

» fresh wind calls—

**Andy McLellan (United Kingdom)**

» weathered rock

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Ìkéolúwa Adélékè**

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