

GHETTO WOMAN

by

Syl Cheyney-Coker

Woman when I saw you
I thought you were African
as radiant in dyed blue boubou
and head wrapped in silken cloth
you drifted slowly in metallic grace
to the rhythm of the wind

What are your roots woman
Wollof, Ashanti, Hausa, Temne
Jollof, Susu, Mandingo or Fulani
where are your maternal shrines
Dakar, Ghana, Mali, Jos
Guinea, Gambia or Sierra Leone

American woman ghetto woman
you are the soul woman
and your music plays in the night of dance
soul music, ghetto music, black music
balangi music, conga music, tomtom music and
tomtom dance
you are the sweet answer of classical riddles
and the lyric of your khalam
glows in the night of your eyes
you are the mask of Watts
and the quintessence of the divine

Watts black Watts
protect and hide her
this dark gazelle
eyes darker than night
lest they cut her down
never to rise again.

SYL CHEYNEY-COKER, Sierra Leonean journalist, was educated at the Prince of Wales School and later took a degree in Radio and Television Journalism at the University of Oregon. He has worked as a journalist for the Eugene Register Guard in Oregon, and his first book of poems is awaiting publication. His interests are African art and drumming.