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The Dance of Shame

Whether a man or a woman, when the trap catches;
 Whether renowned or rejected, must go by force,
 The milder for women, the fiercer for men;
 Friends and relations look away in sorrow,
 Tears of regret or fake screaming for a trick;
 The captor hilariously dance, lieutenants supporting:
 Capricious jiggle to coach the villain;
 The dance of shame with children chanting!
 The rope for the animal to be fettered with,
 But now the waist of a hefty man or a fat lady,
 Round the waist, the knot tight and never slackened,
 Stripped of shirt if a man, bear-chested nothing secured,
 Dance to the rhythm here and there, weeping but still;
 Bearing on the head what're incriminates,
 Sweating profusely like a Christmas goat;
 This one is different, for it's just unique.
 Pretentious rogue sometimes may feign;
 To slack the dance or drop the weighing load,

Flash of whips on the back soon awaken;
 To inform the sneaker this is not child's play,
 The drum stops abruptly, the dance halts!
 The illiterate Commander now a General;
 Mockingly asks the cheater of men,
 Heaving, crying and wiping shameful tears;
 Indicting item forced to mention aloud!
 At the instance of the enquirer with koboko,
 Though not a news but to heighten the shame,
 To appreciate the gallant job a kobo or naira;
 A chief or a cook the captors would lavish,
 On and on, the match goes on...
 Under the hot sun or showers not withstanding;
 This act of bravery and show of shame,
 Meant to curb and warn contemplators of vice,
 To think twice and steer clear of theft,
 It's a dance of shame and not of fame:
 Tabakaka!

The poem reminisces about the practice of apprehending and shaming criminality in the northern part of Nigeria in the nineties. Local vigilantes, comprised of able-bodied men, manhunt and apprehend burglars and trespassers who steal people's valuables or farm produce. Caught criminals are normally paraded around the town with drumming, singing, and chanting the shameful word "tabakaka." In refrain, a crowd, mostly youth and children re-echo

mimicking and dancing hilariously. The vigilante commander holds the rope tied around the waist of the thief to direct the movement from shop to shop, stall to stall, coercing the apprehended to dance and respond the refrain well or be lashed on the back with "koboko," a locally weaved whip made from cowhide. A well-done token (kobo or naira) is handed over to the gallant commander by the populace, who grin to damn the vice—an act to encourage the gallantry and bravery of the vigilantes. This practice was meant to discourage theft.