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Abdilatif Abdalla: Poet in Politics

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Abdilatif Abdalla: Poet in Politics celebrates the work of Abdilatif Abdalla, one of Kenya's most well-known poets and a committed political activist. It includes commentary essays on aspects of Abdilatif Abdalla's work and life, through inter-weaving perspectives on poetry and politics, language and history; with contributions by East African writers and scholars of Swahili literature, including Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Said Khamis, Ken Walibora, Ahmed Rajab, Mohamed Bakari, and Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir, among others. Abdalla became famous in 1973, with the publication of Sauti ya Dhiki (Voice of Agony), a collection of poems written secretly in prison during three years of solitary confinement (1969-72). He was convicted of circulating pamphlets against Jomo Kenyatta's KANU government, criticizing it as 'dictatorial' and calling for political resistance in the pamphlet, 'Kenya: Twendapi?' (Kenya: where are we heading?). His poetry epitomizes the ongoing currency of classic Swahili form and language, while his work overall, including translations and editorships, exemplifies a two-way mediation between 'traditional' and 'modern' perspectives. It makes old and new voices of Swahili poetry and African literature accessible to a wider readership in East Africa, and beyond. Abdalla has lived in exile since 1973, in Tanzania, London, and subsequently, until now, in Germany. Nevertheless, Swahili literature and Kenyan politics have remained central to his life.

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