

Tariro NDORO

Poems

Fragments: Weekend Mythos

pick a **colour** blue the colour of ocean of water of vast expanses and perhaps escape Rusape Dam rushing like blur before the girl's eyes to the place where time stops still home

pick a **colour** white of white boats, white yachts and pillowy sails of the people who swim there the glistening of fishing rod twine where the girl wants to swim but she is told the river holds secrets the dam is a crucible of ~~mermaids~~ menfish

and time stands still

screams backwards backwards until max the taxi driver brings her back to grandmother's greeting "wauya mwana wa mwanangu, flesh of my flesh" and everything is like it was *before*

In the shadow of Tsanzaguru and the lion head Tikwiri

pick a **smell** wet stones of women hitching their skirts to wade in the river of Perfection™ soap, greased onto shirts by women speaking freely a dialect so rare it will be ridiculed out of the girl's mouth in later years

pick a **smell**, then, acrid *wet* cattle rushing to kick their feet in the dip brown black mottled hides and curved horns an excursion soon to be outgrown, along with climbing kopjes

pick a **smell** acrid *dry* of the library her grandfather left behind shelves that still carry Hemingway & Emecheta but zvipfukuto have eaten the pages the plots have holes in them now bags of fertilizer keep the pages company

pick a **sound** a clang metal on metal iron sharpens iron cow bells on beasts coming home as the orange sun sets

pick a **sound** laughter two sisters playing skip rope in the dust till their feet are brown and ashy on their tongues – a borrowed song that never made sense:

Christopher Columbus was a great man/he went to America in a saucepan / he went to untie, untie, untie/ handy over/ two little sausages in a saucepan / one was rotten... /and another went to die

into supper by firelight orange flames and cricket song wood smoke has burnished the walls remember the girl to those nights where the milky galaxy of bright stars shone sometimes blue sometimes bright and sometimes shooting across the sky (make a wish! make a wish!) then to gossip and prayers and an hour of radio one ~~zviziviso~~ announcements of births and deaths.

pick a **sight** big silver old moon in the inky black night hanging like low fruit, ripe for picking how does the story go? old Rozvi kings tried to steal it from the heavens a legend as ancient as the rocks

In the shadow of Tsanzaguru and Mount Tikwiri

pick a **smell** wet earth wet grass early morning dew cow dung and clean smoke

pick a **colour** pink frock Sunday best follows her grandmother her grandmother in Anglican blue in Anglican white in swift gait a surprise baptism: glacial water on the girl's forehead your name is now Theresa Maria Patricia the girl forgets her new moniker

a particle, **dust**, gathers on the baptismal certificate now folded now carefully placed in the cardboard box labeled *Envelopes of Tudor* wherein lies the last image of a long dead grandfather last seen alive in the summer of seventy six

cause of death: unknown

Notes:

Christopher Columbus was a great man..: rhyme sung by children as they skip

Menfish: literal translation of njuzu (as used in Marechera's *House of Hunger*) which also translates to mermaid, mythical creature half fish half man

Tsanzaguru: is a large plateau in Manicaland. The Rozvi wanted to build to the moon from Tsanzaguru and present it their king as a gift.

Wauya mwana wamwanangu: you've come, child of my child

Zvipfukuto: pests

Zviziviso: announcements

in seventy-six

...what we know of him: he was tall, I have his eyes, he was a headmaster, he drove a car. the war was hot in seventy-six (these are facts)

...concerning his death: he died in seventy-six. the war was hot. he drove off one day, didn't come home. they found him post rigor mortis. boys and men were disappearing those days. the war was hot in seventy-six (this is hearsay)

...concerning my mother: she lost her father in seventy six. she was eleven years old. she had two younger siblings. she learnt to work hard. she learnt to work with the rains. She sold peanuts by the roadside to pay for school supplies (this is her testimony)

... she tells me not to speak to her in English: says she can't understand it, she didn't go to school she says. I ask *how* she helped me with homework? *I taught standard 1 because I'd reached standard 2*, she shrugs. my husband died in manicaland, she says he died in seventy-six (this is Grandma's testimony)

... the war was hot in seventy-six: in seventy six, manicaland was hot. once there was a meeting called for in the bush. turned out it was an raf ambush. selous scouts poured sulfur on people. grandma crawled for kilometers on her knees. entered her house through a window, waited for death underneath her bed. the war was hot in seventy-six (this we hardly speak of)

Notes

RAF: Rhodesian Armed Forces

Selous Scouts: special forces regiment in the RAF

Detention Excerpt

The tongue that is forbidden is your own mother tongue.

- Theresa Hyak Kyung Cha

I will not speak in Shona except during Shona lessons.

I will not speak [REDACTED] except during [REDACTED] lessons.

I will [REDACTED] speak in Shona except during Shona lessons.

I will not speak in Shona except during Shona [REDACTED]

I will not speak in Shona except during [REDACTED]

I will not speak in Shona [REDACTED]

I will not speak in Shona except [REDACTED]

I [REDACTED] speak in Shona except during Shona lessons.

I will not speak in [REDACTED] lessons.

I will not speak in Shona except during Shona lessons.

I will not speak in Shona except during Shona lessons.

I will not speak in Shona [REDACTED]

I will not speak in Shona except during Shona lessons.

I will [REDACTED] speak in Shona except during [REDACTED] lessons.

I will not speak in Shona except during Shona lessons.

I will [REDACTED] speak in Shona except during [REDACTED] lessons.

I [REDACTED] in Shona except during Shona lessons.

I will not speak in [REDACTED] except during [REDACTED] lessons.

I will [REDACTED] during Shona lessons.

I will not speak in Shona [REDACTED]

I will not speak [REDACTED]

Cross the border by night

Cars will pass you on your way to Beitbridge,
You know they belong to your countrymen,

You will stand in a queue for hours
A semi-stampede will start up,
Reminding you of your asthma
You will panic.

A husband will go to the front and ask the officials
If they can please let his sick pregnant wife go first
They will tell him she must go and be sick in her own country.

When you cross the bridge to the other side
The cars' headlights will illuminate the bodies
Hanging for dear life on the pillars of the bridge.
You will feel sorry for them:
If they do not fall to crocodiles,
They will be shot by farmers who think they are monkeys
No one will hear their obituaries.

In Messina you will be robbed
And it will be by your homeboys –
The ones who couldn't find a job here.

At the embassy they will hand you
application forms through barbed wire
You will not complain.

Swept away**Fiela** *verb* to sweep**Fiela** *verb* to sweep [Sotho]**Fiela** *verb* to sweep rubbish**Fiela** [see also *murambatsvina*]**Fiela** human rubbish clogs the system**Fiela** am I different because of my visa?**Fiela** what is the degree of separation between**Fiela** legal rubbish and non-legal rubbish? Go back**Fiela** to your country, *kwerekwere*, my friend said it**Fiela** jokingly but I felt the sting // are we ever safe?**Fiela** Jodi Bieber captured monochrome stills of prisoners**Fiela** shackled in twos en route to ~~deportation~~ repatriation fields**Fiela** I wanted the images but you can't take pictures in the gallery**Fiela** Mother escaped with a mbare bag of her past five years, sleeps**Fiela** in refugee camp at Beitbridge // says she has nowhere to go to but**Fiela** government minister says disloyal citizens got what they deserved //**Fiela** Black Easter sparked by lynching ~~foreign~~ criminal woman // exodus begins**Notes****Murambatsvina:** also known as Operation Restore Order, a large-scale crackdown against illegal housing and commercial activities across Zimbabwe to reduce the risk of the spread of infectious disease.**Kwerekwere:** foreigner (derogatory)**mbare bag:** canvas bag, generally used by cross border traders

Black Easter (reflections)

I say, *each life matters*

you speak of liberty, emancipation
& other Pan-African rhetoric
but you invented words like kwerekwere
& expected the necklacing not to happen

I tweeted *no to xenophobia*

but words came before your machetes
Why don't you visit the townships
my countrymen die there

It will be okay, that doesn't happen anymore

but you don't know about the immigrations officers,
about the wearing of long-sleeved tees
to hide my vaccination scars

How bad can it be, really?

my cousin Farai made it his mission
to be the hardest thug on the street
so his neighbours wouldn't target him

How did that work out for him?

it didn't

The dance of the mustang

but are you tired of apologizing
for being all the lines that tether you?
for occupying all the geographies that can't hold you?

remember this:
there are different ways to say a thing:
with hands, with faces, with song
I spoke with a foreign man once
I did it with my eyes
I said the word and
Let it quiver

they'll tether your tongue like they tether the geldings,
but you remain
 unbroken mustang

see how other mustangs move?
they gallop
see how they gallop?
they run
and how do mustangs run?

With the wind.

Asphyxia

Then I go to my brother

And I say brother help me please

But he winds up knockin' me

Back down on my knees

– Sam Cooke, “A Change is Gonna Come”

suffocation is

a metaphor for breathing under water

for holding the world on your shoulder, woman

there is no rest for the living, the dying, the dead in

black skin and blacker dresses//life is tough but you're still breathing

bleeding, pain, love, suffering on black skin, black ache – labored fifty years to

retire on nothing// headline on friday's paper says there was a riot// downtown

officer fires two warning shots, two are dead, thirteen injured, I wonder

did he count the number?// uh –uh, cicero, tongue in cheek weaved

false-truth. asphyxia is// believing the lies so we can sleep at night

truth is triggering is nowadays// so is saying something

different from men are trash when

sister shows her bruises//

no one is safe here

anymore

Calypso's Song (For men who try to love me while I'm broken)

I tell them my arms
Are not a safe place to bury a heart
I tell them my hands are fractions
Fractal, fractured
A broken soil that will yield no good crop
A contaminated microcosm that will choke
Even what it holds dear

I tell them my heart is a bottomless void,
A sea of chaos, abyss of nothingness
Where love has forgotten its own name
I tell them my fury is a fiery tsunami,
A seismic wave of immortal rage
Yet sailor like they bury their trust
In my arms in my hands in my waters

Prideful pirates aim to tame me
They'll break the rage, that is what they claim,
These seafarers - the ones I toss and turn
In swirl, in pain, in maritime storm
I spit them out on foreign ground
Reduce those Crusoes to dull smoke signals
For nearby boats. Still, none of them believes –
A contaminated microcosm will choke
Even what it holds dear
Nothing, nothing, nothing grows here

Fiction

The Whale of Tikpiti'i

You didn't think I had it in me, did you? On the Island Tikpiti'i there is a way of doing things and a way of not doing things. You, Harold Onyame, are a prince. I am a maggot. You never thought I'd challenge you.

On the Island Tikpiti'i, there is a pecking order. The legend says that your great grandfather, Uvuzwa – Whale of Tikpiti'i taught the seas to obey him. Otherwise there'd be no way to fish, no way to survive. Standing here, against the blue walls of your palace, I ask myself if the Whale of Tikpiti'i also used his influence to squash maggots like me.

I can see it in my mind: men and women bowing down to this man who must have had large eyes like you, who must have had feet that face different directions, who must have ruined village girls by telling them they would be his Queen. Even as he threw them to the curb, they must have thanked him. I see it like the bioscopes they show in Alau City. But did he force any of them like you forced me?

“Thank you, great one of Onyame,” they must have said. The brothers of ruined girls would have kneeled before him, would have thanked him for ruining their sisters. They would not challenge for a stick fight, would not bay like angry beasts. I want to vomit.

*

The air is cloying and I want to go home. I smell the salt of the sea and watch my coward brothers go bravely into the ocean. Bravely, they face the ocean, the waves, and the whales, but none of them were brave when I told them that I carry the seed Onyame. They just looked at each other then sighed and told me to stop lying. Cowards!

In the Village Ozwofor, a rich man ruined the daughter of a widow and refused to marry her. She gave birth to the child during the monsoon. He told the midwives not to help her. His child died in her arms and she carried it to the man's house and, where she stood, carrying the corpse until she died of exhaustion. The elders made him pay her mother twenty cows for her ghost to

leave the village. So here I am, standing outside the house of Onyame, the house everyone else is afraid of.

I have been here since daybreak and I will not leave. No one speaks loudly in the market; they are looking at me sideways, whispering to each other. I told Kezia, my sister, this plan and she said a quiet girl like me shouldn't go against the house of Onyame, besides I don't have a baby yet. I told her peeled damgas are eaten raw at a baby's funeral so I peeled the damgas and carried them here to prove my point. Kezia shook her head and told me it was my own funeral.

I am going to be sick. Big green flies land on my nose and the air around me is getting hotter. I can smell the sweat that is running down my armpit in rivulets, and the voices of bargaining people at the market seem to be fading away but I will tame you, Onyame – Great Whale of Tikpiti'i. Already, your father signals servants to drag me away but I will not be moved
