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Map of My Homecoming

*Every day I am deluged with reminders that this is
not my land and this is my land. I do not believe in
the war between the races but in this country there is
war.*

—Lorna Dee Cervantes

*I cannot flee the United States, my land resides
beneath its borders.*

—Cherrie Moraga

I

Lines in my hands tell me
there can be no ownership of land,
borders are imaginary, highways
are just blue streaks on a road map
labeled with numbers—but I know
borders are bleeding scars
and those beloved blue lines
ride me home to Indian Country

where short-term memory is a myth
like Noah and his Ark from mission school.
Indian women laugh, wipe sweat off our brows
with flour-covered hands that bare fry bread burns
remember with our blood, brains are never so reliable.

Renée Bartocquteh is a Tsalagi Indian residing in Columbus, Ohio.

II

In my country, she says, we are shot
 down on the streets like dogs with rabies.
 My little sister died from malnutrition,
 dehydration. In my country, she says,
 the water is brown with stink, undrinkable.
 No housing either, so many of us crammed
 into one room. It is not like that here, she says.

Behind us, a Peabody Coal truck rumbles up
 brimming with Diné soil and uranium, I
 can hear the bleating of dying sheep, babies
 & mamas crying into skillets of fried
 commodity cheese with pork sausage. At Black

Mesa, we lug buckets of water in from wells with hands
 ashy from sand, soot from the fire where we sterilize
 bottles to kill the coming epidemic maybe
 smallpox may be war.

III

Sweating poverty under Pendleton blankets,
 I dream of Swiss chocolates, ticking clocks,
 Russian teas, British scones, flag ships commanded
 by a lady pirate in a ribbon shirt, a patch over her left eye.
 I dream it up beautiful, romanticize each individual
 hill, stream, child with broom in hand sweeping
 away debris from his cottage porch. I rename each
 country and people with a good Tsalagi word and

*marvel why would the great explorer, Cristóbal
 Colón have ever wanted to leave the Toledo
 cathedrals or the beaches of Andalusia?*

IV

At my mother's table, we all pray
with hands splayed, pressed
on the Formica table like dead
starfish awaiting tidal salvation. The insides
of my eyelids look like road maps home;
the tiny blue veins lead me south to Blue Ridge
to Qualla to cross lines to cross borders
into Indian Country where I pray

& dream of walking free. But on this land
colonizers have built a country called the
United States on the backs of my ancestors,
backs that bleed revolution and poetry
backs that bleed for reclamation.

V

Short-term memory is unreliable
Our history says blood memory saves and land
cannot be owned, but in this country
borders cradle snipers called police
who kill on command. Hunger kills slowly,
a cancer that eats when we cannot—
rape murder suicide are ghosts
who haunt with cold fingers. I know for sure

that I will die here, I cannot leave this
country, our land is here, quaking beneath
US borders—we are at war.

—*Renée Bartocquteh*

Accented with Memories

for my mamá

My voice is accented with memories
my mother slams through the screen door,
with a lottery ticket, a \$50 winning under
the scratched silver goo. I remember eating
good that week—store-bought bread, hamburger,
Kool-Aid with all the sugar—not just half.

Journeys begin and end with birthdays;
reflections in the candles atop a white cake.
At 10, I bargain with the reflection and become darker—
more like the enemy that my mother warns me about
before late nights at the town library.
As my breath heaves down on the candles, I
see my brown hair become black and my skin the color of clay.

I have never left my mother's house.
In her bedroom closet, sitting next to our family
photo album is a scrap of me,
living silently, breathing in the voice
that public school denied me. I
am there writing stories of my *sidanelu*,
filling their absence with memories of *unevents*.

My voice is accented with memories
that do not fit me. These flashes of color belong
to my mother, to my grandmother, to my own
autobiographical fiction. I have romanticized their story,
collapsing my words upon their bones.

I trace my family tree like a lost driver would
follow ink highways with his finger on a map. I can do
numbers in my sleep—blood quantum fractions,
miles to kilometers that lead me home.

My voice is accented with memories
of my mother's journey toward womanhood.
Her voice cracks when telling the story of her own
Nuna daul Tsuny, packing her Christian father's car
with the Salvation Army suitcase empty,
save a pair of torn jeans and one sweater.

Oklahoma dirt under her fingernails.
Ohio must have seemed so far.

Kitchen table laughter is how I dream up my grandmothers,
my mother standing knee-high, wedged between the washtub and
a box of generic detergent. She teases the dirt from the worn
clothes

as *Elisi* cracks her whip of a voice at the men in the second room.
Elisi is strong, weathered-skin like scarred pennies telling my
mother

Tales that would always be with “When nickels were Indians . . .”

Connections with home
land do not splinter with age, instead the image
becomes more like a photograph in a favorite silver frame.
I can draw the map of our land in Asheville just the way
DeSoto found it in 1540. Just the way my *elisi* left it;
my inheritance is this psychic lifeline that snakes
under the generations and always begins
with my mother, all of my grandmothers.

I begin this memory searching for the dedication.

—Renée Bartocquteh

Galoni

Asheville in the Month of the End of the Fruit Moon is

Like the blood red oranges my elisi places in my childish hands
helping me grasp the slight round fruit as she whispers to me in a tongue
of parables and soft syllables.

Our nails dig into the juicy flesh while sweat-covered mosquitoes bite
at our necks, driving us under the screen porch to watch
the red moon from tiny black crevices.

And,

We laugh as the pulp lingers just past sticky lips like legends from our past.

—*Renée Bartocquteh*

Tales in the Wind

Somewhere
a deep canyon,
empty and silent,
only the wind.

A slow moon
rises, light across
the canyon wall.

Coyote sniffs
a chill wind.

The old ones will
come and walk the wind
tonight,
tales will be told
of counting coupe
and good hunting.

When the sun comes,
the canyon will be empty
again.

Nothing disturbed,
no footprints left, not a sign. . . .

—*Edward Henry*

No Snow

The wind comes first,
something from no where,
cold and hard. It must be
the rain pushing, wanting
to be snow. Crows call
from a far country. Time opens.
The old ones walk through.
Saddened by all the sacred
ground growing concrete and
pain, they choose not to visit
and quickly become the rain.

There will be no snow this trip.

—*Edward Henry*

Voices of the Stones

I know of places where the stones
laugh when they think no one is around.
In their long memories they carry everything
and forget nothing. That's why the big ones
are so heavy, never moving, and the little ones
travel so far from their birth. And because
they remember, the stones also weep.
Stay a night in a deep canyon where they
surround you. The sounds you hear you think
are just the wind, listen again, deeply . . .
voices of the stones.

—*Edward Henry*