

MATAM PAGES

Writer, Performer, Pleasure activist. I write stories for all Black people who love all Black people, centering Liberation and creating the world we want to see. The Root Work Journal is part of this mission, and I seek to learn all the ways to reimagine Black life and actualizing its breath on the page, and beyond.

Tongues as Casting Net

There are 16 different stages of life found in shrimp from egg to adult

Egg

15th-century Portugese explorer Fernando Po & I have one thing in common: we both love shrimp.

when my country emerged from the mesh of his mouth - tongue a casting net - he called it Camarões, after the abundance of shrimp found in the River Wouri

i.

in 1884 Kamerun was first colonized by the germans

ii.

War gives so many bodies

example: in 1916, germany lost the 1st world war, Cameroun was placed as a mandated territory, given to france and britain to rule

iii.

They gave us two new languages & an anthem Chant de Ralliement / The Rallying Cry of a country lost in translation

iv.

Language gives so many bodies

example: in 2018, the english-speaking regions of Cameroon were deserted after bloody conflicts between the French speaking military & armed separatists

Nauplius

When you eat shrimp you have to separate the shell from the meat - pick it apart, carefully, from the head
example: Mile 16, once a thriving neighborhood in the capital now littered with shell casings, a country picked apart from the head - shots

ii.

When I eat shrimp I always eat it whole,
I've never known how to pick myself apart.

Zoea.

There are two times more indigenous languages in my country than there are species of shrimp

yet we are fighting over what has never belonged to the land
colonization leaves everything only as a shell of themselves.

ii.

Fact: the pistol shrimp can deliver an explosive attack from its claws snapping,
hotter than the surface of the sun, louder than a gunshot

iii.

if a bullet has not penetrated a body's internal organ or caused infection, doctors will leave it in rather than risk surgery. The surrounding tissue encapsulates the bullet, preventing it from dissolving and leaching into the blood.

Mysis.

Camarões is the bullet
Kamerun is the body, Cameroun is the doctor
Cameroon is the surrounding tissue,

ii.

language is the defiant blood still learning how to survive
despite any of their gun

iii.

there is a war leaching inside of me everytime
I speak in the tongues fluent in lonely
spliced in grief

Postlarva

I wonder what my home was called before the kiss
between shore & wooden ships turned us into a chorus
of hives & a body losing its breaths.

I found a new home now. Built on centuries of brave
but so many of us are still living in fear. Still surviving.
Caught in the undertow of the proud waving flag

the great american cleansing, come hell or high water
And suddenly my tongue has become a shell of itself.

Juvenile

Food gives us so many bodies

example: the woman I love is allergic to all shellfish
I wonder whose language our children's blood will inherit?
I kiss her gently, like I know I have something to lose
like she is home, & I know what a fishing mouth is capable of

example: mama says tchaseu si ne zeuzo zou
she implores to always bless your food before you eat.
Some people pray for country; Some people become prey, for country
Amen before the feast. Hallelujah before the blood.

Adult

My country is a foster child, still trying to find itself

in blood & osso

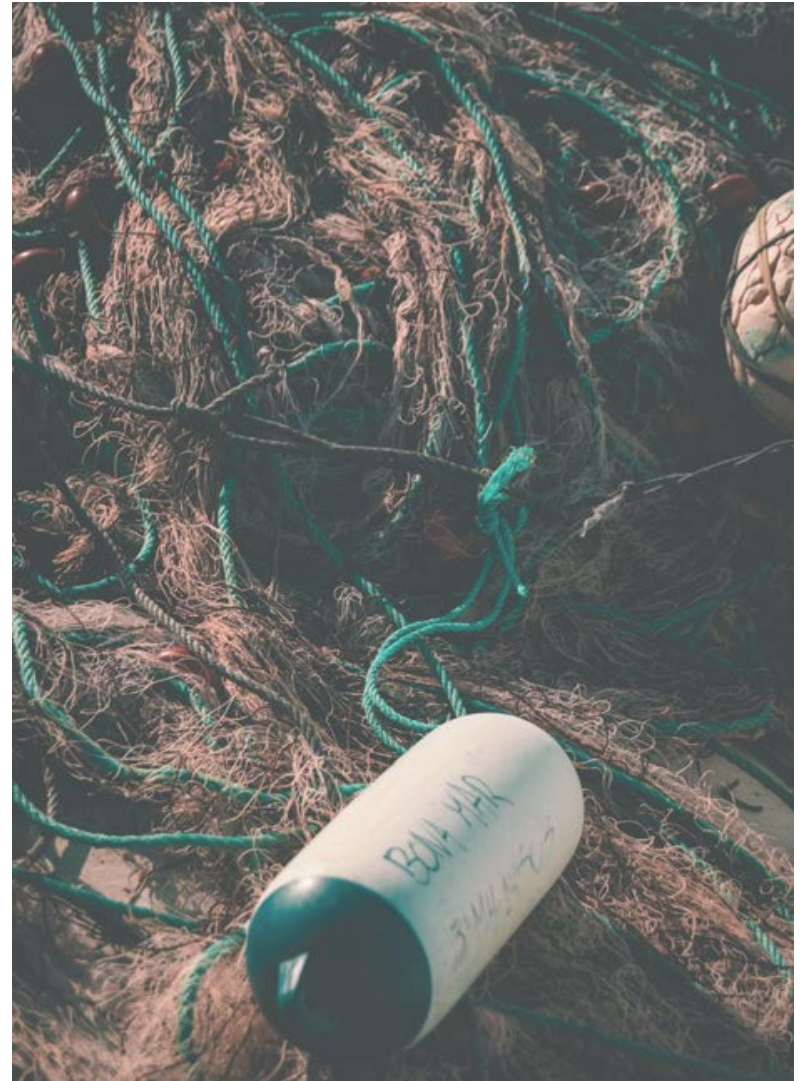
in name & in leiden

in paix / travaille / patrie

in the boy & his will to be better for all our Wouri children
washing ashore.

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