



Skin re-traumatises the sea

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“Water” by Koleka Putuma

The memory of going to the beach every New Year’s eve
Is one I share with cousins and most people raised black
How the elders would forbid us from going in too deep

To giggle, to splash in our black tights and Shoprite plastic bags wrapped around our new
weaves, forbid us from riding the wave,
For fear that we would be a mass of blackness swept by the tide
And never to return
Like litter.
The elders forbid us as if the ocean has food poisoning
I often wonder why I feel as if I am drowning every time I look out into the sea
This and feeling incredibly small
And I often hear this joke
About Black people not being able to swim,
Or being scared of water;
We are mocked
And we have often mocked ourselves
For wiping our faces the way that we do when we come out of the water-
Compare it to how they do it all bay-watch like
And how we so ratchet-like with our postures and kink.
Yet every time our skin goes under
It's as if the reeds remember that they were once chains
And the water, restless, wishes it could spew all of the slaves and ships onto shore
Whole as they had boarded, sailed and sunk
Their tears are what have turned the ocean salty,
This is why our irises burn every time we go under.
Every December sixteenth, December 24th and December 31st
Our skin re-traumatises the sea
They mock us
For not being able to throw ourselves into something that was instrumental in trying to
execute our extinction.
For you, the ocean is for surf boards, boats and tans
And all the cool stuff you do under there in your bathing suits and goggles
But we, we have come to be baptised here
We have come to stir the other world here
We have come to cleanse ourselves here
We have come to connect our living to the dead here
Our respect for water is what you have termed fear
The audacity to trade and murder us over water
Then mock us for being scared of it
The audacity to arrive by water and invade us
If this land was really yours, then resurrect the bones of the colonisers and use them as a

compass

Then quit using black bodies as tour guides or the site for your authentic African experience

Are we not tired of dancing for you?

Gyrating and singing on cue

Are we not tired of gathering as a mass of blackness?

To atone for just being here

To beg God to save us from a war we never started

To March for a cause caused by the intolerance for our existence

Raise our hands so we don't get shot

Raise our hands in church to pray for protection

And we still get shot there too

With our hands raised

Invasion comes naturally for your people

So you have come to rob us of our places of worship too

Come to murder us in prisons too

That is not new either

Too many white people out here acting God

Too many white people out here doing the work of God,

And this God of theirs has my tummy in knots

Him and I have always had a complicated relationship

This blue eyed and blond haired Jesus I followed in Sunday school

Has had my kind bowing to a white and patriarchal heaven

Bowing to a Christ, his son, and 12 disciples

For all we know

the disciples could have been queer, the holy trinity some weird twisted love triangle

And the Holy Ghost transgender

But you will only choose to understand the scriptures that suit your agenda

You have taken the liberty to colonise the concept of God

Gave god a gender, a skin colour and a name in a language we had to twist our mouths around

Blasphemy is wrapping Slavery in the Gospel and calling it freedom

Blasphemy is having to watch my kind use the same gospel to enslave each other

Since the days of Elijah We have been engineered kneel to whiteness

And we are not even sure if the days of Elijah even existed

Because whoever wrote the bible did not include us

But I would rather exist in that god-less holy book than in the history books that did not tell truth

About us

For us

On behalf of us

If you really had to write our stories

Then you ought to have done it in our mother's tongues

The ones you cut off when you fed them a new language

We never consent

Yet we are asked to dine with the oppressors

And Serve them forgiveness

How, when the only ingredients I have are grief and rage

Another one (who looks like me) died today

Another one (who looks like me) was murdered today

May that be the conversation at the table

And we can all thereafter wash this bitter meal with amnesia

And go for a swim after that

Just for fun.

Just for fun.

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