WRITING THE HYPHEN

Migratory Patterns

A work of fiction

and

"Nothing Stands By Itself"

Code-Switching in *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*

A Critical Analysis

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

The concept of hyphenated identities will not be a new one to most — in today's world personal descriptors such as "Bangladeshi-American" or "French-Canadian" have become a fairly common component of the current lexicon. Indeed, this portrayal of a compound ethnicity, first introduced as a derogatory description in America in the 1890s, (Higham, 1955) has become so common that the phrase "living in the hyphen" is now frequently used to describe the experience of occupying the interstitial space that is both between and encompassing different cultural identities (Nunan & Choi). This thesis examines the idea of hyphenated identity in two modes. The first is a creative work of experimental fiction that uses a series of vignettes similar in structure to short stories to examine the life of an American girl growing up in Malawi. The second component is a critical study that investigates the function of code-switching in two works of contemporary fictions where the characters are multilingual. In this way, this project aims to be both an example and an examination of the ways in which modern authors are portraying the experience of occupying and expressing multiple identities — the ways in which they are, in other words, "Writing the Hyphen".

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Process

The core of this thesis, is, in many ways, an exploration of duality. The creative project, a narrative of the life of Grace, an American girl who grows up in Malawi, centres on an exploration of Grace's sense of dual identity. The critical project, an investigation of the crucial role code-switching plays in two contemporary works of African fiction[1] — *Americanah* (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Tropical Fish* (2005) by Doreen Baingana — examines the duality of language. Given that the conception of duality is in many ways the fulcrum on which this thesis balances, it is fitting that the project itself should exist as a binary, a dialogue between a creative and a critical piece of work each of which informs, influences, and impacts the other. Though the two projects within this thesis can be considered separate endeavours, work completed on the critical consistently inspired sections of the creative, while questions arising from the creative project were processed through the critical project. It is therefore fair to say that one aspect of this project could not exist without the other.

The creative work of this thesis was originally intended to be a novel. Ever since living in Malawi I had been haunted by the ghost of a story that emerged distorted every time I put pen to paper. While narratives appeared with regularity in my mind, when I wrote them down the characters came out wooden, the plot advanced mechanically, and the language was

[1] The term "African fictions", of course, problematic, as it is not thoroughly defined. The Scottish-born, Sierra-Leonean-raised Aminatta Forma, for example, has questioned why one of her novels, which is set in Croatia, appears in the 'African Literature' section of bookstores (Selasi, 2015). One could similarly question what section *Tropical Fish* or *Americanah*, both set half in African countries, half in America, belong in. Despite its problematic nature though, the term "African Literature" or "African fiction" is widely used to refer to works by authors with substantial connections to the continent about works at least partly set on the continent, and so is one I am also choosing to selectively employ.

stilted and contrived. After each failed writing attempt, I swore off any future endeavours — I had a fulfilling career in journalism, I occasionally produced and published halfway decent pieces of flash fiction; it was enough. Except that, like a mosquito I could not successfully swat, the spectre of the story refused to leave. My parents lived in Kenya. I was an American who had lived in Malawi and then Scotland and then England. I was most comfortable in what Steven Vertovec has described as a state of "transnational belonging" (2004), oriented not toward my birth country or the countries I had subsequently moved to or even the country in which my parents lived but happiest with a sense of identity that incorporated them all. Lacking the language to articulate this, however, questions of culture and acceptance swirled incessantly through my brain, and I continually, if ineffectually, tried to process them through writing.

In the end, it was the creative-critical nature of the PhD that allowed me the space and theoretical grounding I needed to write the stories that had been haunting me for so long. Through the critical process I was able to thoroughly investigate conceptions of transnational identity, and through the creative project I was able to process what I was learning, and to construct stories that incorporated new concepts and ideas. The text that emerged from this process was not the novel I had intended. The creative work is, instead, a blend of styles that falls somewhere between a novel and short story collection. Individually, each story in this collection can be tailored to stand on its own. Together, however, I have shaped the stories so they build on each other, and operate in many ways like connected vignettes, or glances into particular moments on a single timeline. Though the work that emerged was not the one I had envisaged, it feels like the story I was meant to write, the physical manifestation of the spectre of that idea which haunted me for so many years.

Identity

Perhaps the most valuable opportunity provided by working on both a creative and critical project has been having the time and space to thoroughly investigate what is most often termed cultural appropriation. The year before I began my PhD, in 2016, the writer and advocate Yassmin Abdel-Magied wrote an opinion piece in *The Guardian* titled, "As Lionel Shriver made light of identity, I had no choice but to walk out on her". The Shriver speech mentioned was the keynote address at the Brisbane Writer's Festival, one whose core topic, as Abdel-Magied writes:

> Was — or could have been — an interesting question: What are fiction writers "allowed" to write, given they will never truly know another person's experience? … There is a fascinating philosophical argument here. Instead, however, that core question was used as a straw man. … Rather than focus on the ultimate question around how we can know an experience we have not had, the argument became a tirade. It became about the fact that a white man should be able to write the experience of a young Nigerian woman and if he sells millions and does a "decent" job — in the eyes of a white woman — he should not be questioned or pilloried in any way.

Abdel-Magied's final point in this section is a salient one. Though the question of cultural appropriation is frequently framed as one examining what writers should be "allowed" to write, in reality most criticisms of cultural appropriation in fiction centre on concrete faults within a work.[2][3] Myriam Gurba's viral criticism of the novel *American Dirt*, by Jeanine

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[2] The centering of this particular aspect of the discussion seems in many ways an example of global systemic racism. The permutations of questions of how writers should approach the "other" is most often one asked by white writers and publishers — often of writers of color, who are presumed to have a magic answer. The centering of this narrative has arguably been to the detriment of other, more nuanced aspects of the issues involved in cultural appropriation. For example, though it is (finally) gaining prominence, discussion of the urgent need to diversify the publishing industry has never received the same attention within the cultural appropriation discourse as the question of what white writers are "allowed" to write (Evaristo, 2020). This despite the fact that diversifying the publishing industry is critical not only to catching whether works written about the "other" may be appropriative, but also to elevating the voices of writers who are already telling stories about diverse communities.

[3] Another aspect of cultural appropriation that is rarely discussed is the responsibility *all* writers have in supporting and advocating for underrepresented colleagues. An excellent example is Deeshaw Philyaw and Denne Norris' conversation about supporting Black trans writers (2021). This conversation occurred as a matter of course, not because Philyaw's writing centers on trans characters, or because Philyaw herself is trans.

Cummins, for example, which sparked the most recent round of viral debate around cultural appropriation, is very specific in its critique:

> Rather than look us[4] in the eye, many gabachos[5] prefer to look down their noses at us. Rather than face that we are their moral and intellectual equals, they happily pity us. … To satisfy this demand, Cummins tossed together *American Dirt*, a "road thriller" that wears an I'm-giving-a-voice-to-the-voiceless-masses merkin. … Cummins plops overly-ripe Mexican stereotypes, among them the Latin lover, the suffering mother, and the stoic manchild, into her wannabe realist prose. (2019)

Gurba's criticisms are grounded not in the fact that a white woman chose to write about Mexican immigrants, but that she did so in a manner that portrayed the characters as one-dimensional, stereotypical tropes. In his explanation of the controversy around the novel in *The Guardian* writer Daniel Olivas made a similar point more overtly, explaining, "it's not that we think only Latinx writers should write Latinx-themed books. No, this is not about censorship. A talented writer who does the hard work can create convincing, powerful works of literature about other cultures. That's called art. American Dirt is not art" (2020).

While these criticisms do not argue that white writers should avoid writing about other cultures entirely, they do provide substantial evidence that white writers should proceed with caution when engaging with characters or settings outside their own culture. To do otherwise is to risk producing works that are not only bad, but that actively engage in the harmful reinforcement of stereotypes and cliché. Yet what does proceeding with caution mean for a white writer operating in an almost entirely white industry? In 2021's African

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[4] It's unclear who the 'us' in this statement is. Gurba grew up in California, but identifies as Mexican-American. The 'us' could be people of color, or it could be more specifically Mexicans, or even more specifically, Mexican immigrants. Gurba's ability to speak for these groups is yet another permutation in the cultural appropriation dialogue, in that it raises the question of who has the authority to speak for a particular group or culture (See Scafidi 2005, Kenan 2016). Perhaps the most recent example of this debate occurring publicly was the controversy over the pop-star Adele wearing a bikini top with the Jamaican flag on it. The photograph sparked a Twitter debate between Jamaicans and Black Americans over whether the top was an example of cultural appropriation, and if so, who had the right to raise the issue (see Smalls 2021, Joseph 2021).

[5] A term for "foreigner" or "white person" that is not entirely translatable. See the "Merely Metonyms" section in the critical for more detailed analysis of a similar vocabulary in Indigenous African languages.

Literature Association conference, Professor Vincent Odamttan, in speaking on the different iterations of censorship — including self-censorship and soft-censorship — declared that writers should focus on being aware. He noted that discomfort with our own ideas is in many cases productive — a process that keeps us questioning and reevaluating. When working on the creative piece, I kept three questions in particular in the forefront of my mind — questions the author Alexander Chee proposed writers ask themselves before writing about the "other" in any form: Why do you want to write from this character's point of view? Do you read writers from this community currently? Why do you want to tell this story? (2019). To these three questions I added a fourth, which Chee only recommends asking when a story includes stereotypes: Does this story need to exist?

I wrote this story from Grace's point of view because there is a dearth of literature featuring characters who are truly transnational, and because there are even fewer examples where being transnational is a positive experience. As someone who taught literature in Malawi and then worked for a bilingual literacy organization in Cape Town I have frequently been exposed to and do read writers from this community — both from Malawi and from the African continent at large — although I would like to read more.[6] I wanted to tell this story because so much of the literature by Western, white writers about Africa seemed to mythologize the continent, describing it in a manner that spoke in some ways more of an idea than a place. I wanted to write a story that reflected the experience I had in the more than a decade where the continent served as one of my homes — that it was a vibrant, engaging, interesting, but ultimately very normal place to live. As to the fourth question, to a certain extent I am still mulling it over. I have not yet decided whether I am going to try to publish

[6] This is another aspect where completing a project with both a critical and creative component was gratifying, as it ensured I was reading extensively about communities I was writing about throughout the project.

the creative work in its entirety. However, these stories are the culmination, as I have mentioned, of an idea that has haunted me for years. Now, finally seeing them written, I am glad they exist.

Language

The central point of conversation between the critical and creative aspects of this thesis is that of language. This focus was born of the belief that, as Oliver Wendell Holmes has poetically phrased it, language is "the blood of the soul … into which our thoughts run and out of which they grow" (1859, p. 82). In attempting a creative work — especially one that focused on the different permutations of identity and culture, language appeared the most crucial aspect of the endeavour. It made sense then, to undertake a critical project that would ensure the language of the creative project emerged from a process that was grounded in thorough study and careful consideration.

In addition to its relevance to the creative project, however, I was interested in pursuing a critical project focused on the use of code-switching in literature for its own sake. As someone who grew up bilingual,[7] taught English Literature in Malawi, and then conducted a sociolinguistic study into the benefits of multilingual reading clubs in the Western Cape, I had witnessed the veracity of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's description of language as, "the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated" (1989, p. 8). Understanding this relationship between language and power, I began examining the languages used in the literatures I was reading not just as an artistic device, but as a political one as well. I was especially interested in the ways in which multiple languages

[7] I attended a bilingual primary school, then took Spanish classes all the way through university, where I majored in Spanish and English Literature.

could be utilised in literature to both draw attention to and combat linguistic inequalities. Exploring the use of code-switching in *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* allowed me to pursue these questions, in addition to providing inspiration and guidance around how to deploy language within my own creative piece.

At every step of my writing process, the critical analysis of *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* fed my understanding of when, why, and how I wanted to deploy the English matrix text or Chitumbuka inlay codes. This critical analysis was especially influential in my consideration of two particular aspects of how I wished to utilise language in my creative work: whether or not to italicise inlay codes, and what level of translation to employ in relation to inlay codes. In my initial conceptions of the creative work, the inlay codes were not italicised. Much of the plot of my creative work takes place in Malawi; to italicise words from the languages indigenous to the country seemed to centre English, to "other" the inlay codes in a manner that was directly anathema to what I was trying to achieve, linguistically, with the creative work. However, after engaging with different perspectives on the issue, I was struck by Ru Freeman's statement that, "I choose to italicise the Sinhala words in my writing precisely because I want to draw attention to them" (De Leon, 2012) as well as Lysley Tenorio's opinion that, "italics can be useful, and at times necessary. … It may help [readers] to know that a particular word is in a non-English language, so that they're not stumbling or re-reading to make sure they haven't tripped up. That can pull readers out of the narrative" (*ibid*). Given these perspectives, I still chose not to italicise within the creative work, but to emulate the style employed for Indigenous[8] codes in both *Americanah* and

[8] When it refers to Indigenous African languages, I am capitalising the word 'Indigenous' to create a sense of equality between this group of languages and English.

Tropical Fish within the critical work, and to italicise inlay codes in that section of the project.

My critical analysis of the levels of translation present within *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* also had a profound effect on my decision over when and how much to translate inlay codes within my creative work. There are different levels of translation between *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish;* in the former words are almost never translated, while the latter provides more direct translations as well as frequently presenting substantial context for Indigenous codes. After writing about the critical implications of different levels of translation of codes within *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* I found myself in complete agreement with Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin's analysis that translating codes unavoidably, "gives the translated word, and thus the 'receptor' culture, the higher status" (p. 66). As this was inconsistent with my creative intentions, I chose to leave inlay words untranslated as much as possible.

While the linguistic influence of the critical project on the creative was expected, one of the more interesting, and, occasionally, frustrating aspects of study is that research can lead one down unexpected paths. For me, one of those unexpected paths in this project was a consideration of the language to be used in the critical analysis. My awareness of this issue first emerged, strangely enough, not from a critical source, but from a passage in *Americanah*. Toward the middle of the book the protagonist, Ifemelu, is speaking with her boyfriend when he asks her if she is considering going to graduate school. Ifemelu replies:

> Yes, but I'm worried I will leave grad school and no longer be able to speak English. I know this woman in grad school, a friend of a friend, and just listening to her talk is scary. The semiotic dialectics of intertextual modernity. Which makes no sense at all. Sometimes I feel that they live in a parallel universe of academics speaking academese instead of English (p. 185).

The perception of academic communication presented in this passage was concerning to me, especially given that Adichie portrayed it as a barrier to Ifemelu's desire to engage with critical scholarship, and a hindrance of her wish to pursue higher education.

What was most concerning about this description for me was that it reflected a growing recognition in the academic community that Academic English[9] ("academese" as Ifemelu terms it) can be exclusionary in several respects. In 2021, for example, a National Public Radio investigation into the TOEFL exam — which many American universities require as proof of English proficiency — found the test required a specific vocabulary and command of rhetoric devices that many individuals who fluently speak English as a second language may not be familiar with. In the article, an aid worker stated that she ensures the Sudanese refugees she works with know that, "TOEFL is not about English. It is a gatekeeping tool to enter middle-class spaces" (McCusker and Cohen, 2021).

Asao Inoue, an American professor of composition who advocates for antiracist modes of academic assessment, has also done excellent work bringing awareness to the racism that is coded within the language standards of educational institutions. Inoue notes that, "people of color have never controlled the standards in schools or disciplines. Standards of English have never come from us" (2019a, p. 366). Given this, he argues that in assessing academic works according to the metrics of Academic English, "you actively promote White language supremacy, which is the handmaiden to White bias in the world" (2019a, p. 359). In a 2021 keynote speech at a creative writing conference at the University of Glasgow, the writer Malika Booker spoke of linking racism in language specifically to the language of higher education, pointing out:

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9 "Academic English" is now recognized as a sociolect by many within the fields of both Education and Linguistics — see MacSwan, Inuoe, and Hewings for examples.

> The privileging of Standard Academic English can be seen as a form of exclusion and elitism, because it is equivalent to how a white man speaks, and so it privileges them. Attempts to prioritise other forms of English can be seen as a dismantling of this (2021).

In the passage on “academese" Ifemelu seems to cite one aspect of Standard Academic English as particularly off-putting — its tendency toward the orotund. Ifemelu’s stringing together of four highly technical words as examples of objectionable “academese” underscores this point. Again, Ifemelu’s perspective in this case reflects a problematic reality. A 2019 analysis of scientific studies, for example, found that the presence of jargon in these communications, “impairs people’s ability to process scientific information … leads to greater motivated resistance to persuasion, increased risk perceptions, and lower support for technology adoption” (Bullock et al.) This is contrasted with another 2019 analysis which found that abstracts which tended toward the orotund received increased funding from the National Science Foundation (Markowitz).

This real-world research and critical discourse supports Ifemelu’s fictional assertion that despite Academic English being valued by those within academia, it can in fact impede the comprehension and acceptance of scholarly ideas, in addition to creating barriers for those who would enter higher education. In writing this thesis, I wanted, as much as possible, to avoid perpetuating the exclusionary linguistic practices implicit in the use of Academic English. The critical section of this project, therefore, aims to emulate the writing of notable modern sociolinguists such as Jan Blommaert or Penelope Gardner-Chloros and employ an abrogated form of Academic English — one whose tone is sophisticated, but whose primary function is accessibility and intelligibility. This is a difficult balance to strike, and might not always be successful. However, I believe that creating a more accessible and equitable form of Academic English is imperative if the institution of academia ever hopes to confront the

racism, sexism, and socioeconomic exclusion that are embedded in its very foundations and fabric.

Creating Space - An Exploration of Gender

In addition to language, another vital point of conversation between the creative and critical aspects of this project was gender. This project began, like *Americanah*, as a narrative balanced between a male and female voice — in this case a pair of siblings, Grace and John. The more I read *Tropical Fish* and *Americanah*, however, the more I realised that one of the principal aspects of the works I appreciated was the focus on women. Reading through the passages of each work that focused exclusively on women — descriptions in *Tropical Fish* of Rosa speaking with her friends late at night in the dorm of her women's school, chronicles in *Americanah* of Ifemelu surrounded by women in a hair salon — the more I found myself drawn to these literary spaces. I therefore dropped my focus on John within my own narrative, and set out to steer my creative work in a direction where many of the stories were examinations of the places, and the places in time, where women create their own space. More than migration, identity, or language, the grounding theme of the stories, for me, became the familial relationship the protagonist, Grace, forms with the women around her. Through my writing I began to explore the belief that it is these ties, in some ways more than any particular geographic location, that serve as a form of home and identity.

While my interest in a critical analysis of works written by and about African women emerged partly from their potential influence on my creative work, I was also drawn to these particular works in their own right. In her introduction to the essay collection *Middle Passages and the Healing Place of History* Elizabeth Brown-Guillory writes:

> Since the early to mid-1980s, interest in women writers of color has become increasingly strong, and the publication of critical texts examining women writers from Africa and the African diaspora has not adequately met the demand from scholars in feminist studies, African studies, African American studies, diaspora studies, American literature, American studies, and postcolonial studies. … One of my motivations for making this collection available was to attempt to fill a void, one that begs for critical texts that explore the burgeoning field of black women writers from Africa and the African diaspora (2006, p. 2).

From my own readings, as well as my work in Malawi, I had begun to grasp how many talented women writers are working on the African continent, and how little mainstream or critical attention they receive. In focusing this project on two African women writers, my intention was to conduct more in-depth study on two writers whose work I love, but also to elevate both literary and scholarly voices that are typically underrepresented.

Despite the critical project's focus on women writers, however, I chose not to examine the role of language in *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* through a lens of gender studies. The first reason for this was one of scope. There is a wealth of information to be gleaned from studying the use of language in contemporary multilingual fictions by and about women. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have pointed out, women, "share with colonized races and peoples an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression, and like them they have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors. Women, like post-colonial peoples, have had to construct a language of their own when their only available 'tools' are those of the 'colonizer'" (p. 174). Fully exploring this aspect of language use, however, would take an entire thesis, and incorporating gender into this study in a way that was both meaningful and would do justice to the topic did not seem feasible.

The other reason this project does not focus on gender, however, has to do with the way women are frequently treated in academia, and in society at large. There is a section in

Black Skin, White Masks where, in speaking about the weight of racism and its constant othering, Frantz Fanon declares, "All I wanted was to be a man among other men," (1952, p. 112). Women are constantly subjected to a similar experience — always aware of their gender, and of others' perception of it, never just people among people. There was a strong pull then, to engage in a piece of critical scholarship that studies works by and about women without a strong emphasis on gender. After all, pieces of critical scholarship that focus on works by men and about men are rarely asked to interrogate the implications of gender, even though these are just as pronounced (if not more) in the artistic outputs of men.

Structure

One of the unanticipated points of conversation between the creative and critical aspects of this project was that of structure. As the creative project took shape, it became clear that the structure drew influence from the critical readings, as there are a number of pieces of contemporary fiction that deal with migration and identity which employ a similar "fractured" structure, where the narrative consists of discrete or divided sections. The most evident example of this format is *Tropical Fish*, where the narrative is divided into a series of linked short stories. However, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), which was marketed as a novel, follows a similar structure, where each chapter could stand on its own as a short story, and the narrative is interspersed with sections where plural voices, rather like a Greek chorus, narrate. Other migratory fictions including *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) employ a polyphonic structure where the narrative switches between characters and time frames from chapter to chapter. Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2017) for example, employs a polyphonic narrative and fragmented temporal structure, although the chapters function less autonomously than in *Garcia Girls*. Even *Americanah,* which is treated

as a traditional novel, to a certain extent breaks with traditional narrative style, as it features two protagonists — Ifemelu and Obinze — and a non-chronological storyline that is partially related through memories.

When working on the creative project, what most drew me to this style of writing was the sense of being able to engage with smaller vignettes, to focus on specific moments in Grace's life. Much of the exploration of Grace's story centres on the fact that she is processing the trauma of becoming increasingly more disconnected with the place where she grew up. In writing in vignettes, I was in many ways trying to reflect, stylistically, this nature of processing. Comparing traditional narratives to vignettes, Liz Prather notes they:

> [Require] the writer to have worked through all the pain of the memory and to have come out on the other side, bearing witness of the journey. … Vignettes allow them to remember something as visually and sensually as possible without unpacking and examining all the baggage (2014).

I also appreciated the idea of creating, stylistically, a piece of writing that follows the same pattern of recollection our brains follow — storing up individual stories of significance throughout our lives. As the Italian writer Cesare Pavese noted, "We do not remember days, we remember moments" (1952, p. 128).

The relationship between the critical and creative projects also allowed me to explore the form I wanted the narrative voice to take. Within *Americanah,* the narrative follows Ifemelu from her teenage years into her early adulthood, but is presented non-chronologically, through memories. *Tropical Fish* follows the Mugisha girls from their young childhood to early adulthood, but with stories in a chronological order. With my own narrative, I chose to mix the two. While the stories occur in mostly chronological order, the Prologue takes place shortly after the end of the regular narrative, but before the Epilogue. I chose this temporal structure to create the impression that the traumatic event depicted in the

Prologue causes Grace to look over and reflect on her life thus far. As in *Tropical Fish,* however, I also chose to employ a variation in the narrative voice throughout the stories as Grace grows, as I wanted the tone to reflect Grace's own thoughts and awareness as she matures, so that the reader could truly sink themselves into Grace's world and perspective.

Conclusion

In his 2003 essay "The Useful Pursuit of Shadows" on the history of the study of clouds, Graeme Stephens, head of climate sciences at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, argues against the conventional separation of artistic and scientific pursuits. Throughout his essay, Stephens manifests this theory, weaving into his text extracts of poems and images from paintings focused on clouds. After one excerpt by Percy Bysshe Shelley, Stephens comments on the ways in which creative work often illuminates more technical studies, finding:

> [Shelley] conveys one of the truly complex properties of clouds that thwarted early attempts at classification— their ability to mutate rapidly from one form to another in a smooth, fluid continuum within an evolving chaotic world of vapor. How could any classification, which by its nature suggests permanence, capture a sense of endless mutability? (p. 443).

Within writing, the creative discipline is often treated as an art, the critical as a science, and the two are thus frequently treated as separate. Yet this project, as with Stephens' consideration of the history of meteorology, argues for a more unified understanding of critical and creative works. Throughout my studies, the critical project fed my understanding of how issues such as identity, language, narrative style and gender should be approached in the creative project, and the creative project equally helped me to discover what I wanted to explore in my critical project. Ultimately, it is fair to say that within this project, the critical and creative projects have formed a type of symbiosis — though separate entities, they function best together.

MIGRATORY PATTERNS

I don't believe that only sorrow
and misery can be written.
Happiness, too, can be precise
- Edward Hirsch, "Happiness Writes White"

PROLOGUE

WAITING FOR THE SUN TO RISE

The night after her father's funeral, Grace cannot sleep. She lies, curled into the shape of a comma on the guest bed in her mother's house, and finds that her eyes will not close. She slept fine the night her father died. She came home from the hospital that evening with her mother, lay down on this same guest bed, and collapsed into a deep oblivion. She has slept perfectly every night since then, dozing off easily each evening around nine. She can see by the haggard looks her mother and brother and aunt wear each morning that the same is not true for them. Grace has felt, looking at their bruised eyes and sagging faces, that they are processing their grief in a way that is healthier, more appropriate than her. But tonight — after a lovely service, after connecting with so many people, after receiving all those heartfelt condolences — John and her mother and her Aunt Meredith are finally resting. It is only Grace who cannot sleep.

She could get up. She could go downstairs to the kitchen and make herself a cup of hot cocoa or read or curl up on the couch in front of the fireplace, snuggled under the thick blanket her grandmother knitted so many years ago, watching the embers left over from the evening's blaze as they slowly fade away. She feels too tired though, too heavy to move. So she lies on the bed, staring out at the space around her.

Her mother has gone full Maine on this room. There is a watercolor of a quiet cove to Grace's left, a photograph of a loon on a lake to her right, an old poster depicting all the buoys of the Monhegan Island lobstermen at the head of the bed. Strangest of all, there is a large crocheted moose head above the door. The head is even mounted on a board and hung up the way a real trophy would be. The only non-Maine artifact in the entire room is the photograph at the foot of Grace's bed. It shows three women, silhouetted against the rising

sun, large baskets balanced on their heads. The photograph is from Malawi. Grace knows, she took it years ago, when she was maybe ten or eleven, back when her whole family lived in a small village in the country.

The photograph wasn't here the last time Grace visited her parents. Grace wonders when they decided to hang it up, and why. Was it in storage and they just never had it on display? Or maybe they came across the negative while sorting through old boxes and decided to print it, hang it in this room. Grace will have to ask. In the morning, maybe, or tomorrow. She hears a creak from outside the room, and tilts her head back to see John, leaning easily against the frame of the door.

"I thought you were finally getting some sleep," she says, rolling over to face him.

"I was," he shrugs. "But I woke up about twenty minutes ago and realized that was it for tonight." He raises his eyebrows and she scoots back, making room for him on the bed. He curls up opposite her, his feet by her head, so they lie together like yin and yang. He stares at the crocheted moose head. "Is it strange that I find that a bit creepy?" he asks. Grace laughs. "I mean, it's weird to imagine mom with a hunting rifle, isn't it? To think of her out in those yarn forests, stalking stuffed hares, trying to trap a threaded turkey, pursuing a plushie pheasant." Grace shakes her head and hits him gently on the shin. He sits up slightly and faces her. "I'm serious Grace! She could have come across a knitted bear! What then?"

Grace wipes away the remnants of tears from her cheeks. "You're terrible," she tells him. He rolls over, so that his head is resting on her legs while he stares up at the ceiling.

"Remember when you used to have stars in your room? When we were children and you plastered glow-in-the-dark plastic stars all over the ceiling?" John asks, still staring upward. Grace can feel the vibration of the words as he speaks, as he chuckles slightly.

“Of course,” Grace smiles. She remembers getting the stars for her birthday, peeling the thin plastic backings off them one by one, and sticking them onto the ceiling, trying as best she could to replicate the actual night sky. “I loved them so much,” she says, wistful. “When Mom and Dad moved back to America I tried to peel them down and take them along.”

“No dice?”

“Nope. They just fell apart.”

John props himself up on his elbow, looking down at her. “How would you feel about getting out of here?” he asks.

“What about Mom?”

“She’s still asleep. I can leave her a note, tell her to call if she gets worried.” He raises his eyebrows. “Come on. What do you say?”

“What the hell,” Grace shrugs with a certain resignation, and rolls out of the bed, shivering as her bare feet hit the wooden floorboards. “Just give me a few minutes to grab my coat and boots.”

*

John has not said where they are going, and Grace does not care enough to ask. They have been in the car for about a half an hour, they are driving south, they are using the small winding backroads that crisscross the state. That is all she knows. After the first ten minutes of the journey, she kicked off her boots. Maybe five minutes after that, she shrugged off her coat. Her hat, her gloves, her scarf, all now sit in the well of the passenger seat. She’ll pick them up again if they’re needed. In the glass of the car window she can see her own reflection, spectral. She’s draped in the black dress she wore to the funeral, loose around her frame, and she has on thick stockings, with her legs crossed on the seat beneath her.

“Okay?” John asks, motioning to the temperature gauge on the dash.

“Perfect,” Grace confirms.

Outside the car, the air around them is thick and black. The moon, half-full in the sky, set hours ago, and there are no street lamps on these winding country lanes. John’s headlights, flipped to high beams, shine bright white on the asphalt before them, on the thin veil of fog in the air, on the trees that cluster tightly around them on either side.

“You’re okay on this side of the road?” Grace asks.

“Yeah,” John nods. “I switch back fairly easily. Reaching for a stick shift that isn’t actually there is my only problem really.”

Grace thinks about John, living back in Malawi now, driving around places that were once so familiar to them both — the lakeshore, the M1 highway, the bustling streets of Mzuzu. She feels a quick, tight stabbing sensation in her solar plexus, and turns to stare out the car window. The geographic history of Maine is one of ice. The hills and valleys through which they now drive were sculpted by it, millions of years ago. When Grace first heard this fact, back when she was four or maybe five, she found it hard to believe. The idea of glaciers moving across the land, scouring slabs of granite as they went, carrying boulders along in their wake, shearing off entire mountaintops, it was incredible. Looking out now though, across the dark night, she can see it. She can easily envision everything around them encased in frozen sheets, thousands of feet deep.

John’s watch beeps. Grace stares at the clock on the dash, which shows that it is just now five-nineteen, and tries to figure out why John would have an alarm set.

“It is astronomical dawn,” he says softly.

“What?”

“Astronomical dawn,” John points out the windshield. “It means it is no longer completely dark outside. There is a little bit of light.”

Grace stares out through the windshield. “I can’t see any difference,” she says.

“I know,” John stretches slightly, rolling his shoulders and flexing his fingers against the steering wheel. “But there is one.”

He leans over and flips on the radio. A slow melody, picked out on a mandolin, floats through the car. John starts humming along softly with the chords, gently tapping his fingers on the edge of the steering wheel in time with the tune. A violin solo takes over, and Grace leans back and rests her head against her seat. She knows where they are going now. A while ago, the landscape began to materialize into familiar shapes, forest interrupted by flat black swathes that look like clear patches of prairie but are actually the glassy surfaces of small lakes and ponds. Grace recognizes this area, remembers her father saying — as a throwaway thought maybe a year ago — that someday they should go to Cadillac Mountain and watch the sun rise. That in the winter it was the first place in the northeast where the sun came up. That it would be something to see, wouldn’t it? And they all agreed that it would and then they all forgot about it, just like that.

Grace looks out and scans the forest once more, searching again for movement. The problem with driving at this time of night is you do have to be careful of deer. They can be very active in the evening and early morning. They come out for food. There are sometimes whole herds of them grazing in the forest, only a few feet from the road. If you are not cautious, if you are not paying attention, they can jump out in front of your car with no warning.

Ahead of them, Grace can barely make out the vague outline of the Trenton Bridge. It is still small in the distance, passing low over the Mount Desert Narrows. Even from so far

though, Grace can see the broad contours of Mount Desert Island — the thick blanket of pines, the stark and jagged coastline, the rising peak of Cadillac Mountain. Leaning back in her seat, Grace closes her eyes. She can picture so clearly the familiar sights of Acadia National Park — the deep pink groves of blooming rhododendron, the hiking trails winding through dense forests, the clear waters of Jordan Pond. Just a few months ago they were there, the entire family, on a day trip they took right before it became fully spring. The air was full of a crisp cold and they wrapped up in hats and gloves and scarves and wore thick down jackets. They took bikes and rode along the gravel paths of the old carriage roads and absorbed every detail of the glittering snow-bitten landscape around them. Her father kept goofing around, taking his hands off the handlebars and trying to balance. “Look at me!” he would yell, his arms raised high in the air, the bike weaving uncontrollably underneath him. “Look what I can do!”

On either side of the road around them, Grace notices the greenery thinning. Soon, she can tell, they will be out of the woods. They are just now passing through the final stretches of forest. Grace takes a deep breath in, then lets it out slow. If you do see a deer in the road, you are supposed to hit it. That is the safest way. If you try to swerve to avoid the deer, you might crash into something else. If you brake to slow down, the nose of your car dips, making it more likely the animal will flip up onto the hood and into your windshield, which could kill you. So what you have to do, what it is best to do, is just hit the deer at full speed, head on.

*

The darkness has almost faded by the time they reach the mountaintop. In its place a pale blue pre-dawn light illuminates the granite crags, the tessellations of lichen and the clumps of rough shrubbery that sprout from the rocky gaps. Grace has her jacket and boots and hat and

gloves back on. It is cold, but pleasantly so. Around them, the ground and the leaves sparkle with hoar frost, and their breath hangs in the chill of the air. John has set up two folding chairs near the edge of the mountaintop. Grace and John sit on the canvas surfaces, heavy fleece blankets tucked around them, and look out. There are small crowds gathered all along the peak, drawn by the promise of prime fall foliage and a breathtaking landscape illuminated by the dawn light. Several groups have decided to picnic. They have got wicker baskets unfolded in front of them. They have tiny plates and cups and silverware laid out before them. They are eating small muffins, and mini-quiches, and fruit salads. They are drinking mimosas from thin glass flutes.

"Want any?" John asks, picking a thermos up from his side, unscrewing a small plastic mug from its top and offering it to Grace.

"What is it?"

"Spiced apple cider," John tells her. Grace nods, and John loosens the top of the thermos, and then pours the steaming liquid into her cup; she can smell the apples, the cinnamon, the cloves. Her first sip, the kick hits her hard. She comes up coughing and sputtering.

"Brandy," she manages to choke out. "You spiked it with brandy. You bastard." John grins, and takes slow sips of his own drink. Prepared now, Grace sips again. The cider is smooth, and sharp. She feels the warmth of the alcohol settle gently in her stomach, and a pleasant ease stretch through her limbs. Above them, John is staring at the dark aquamarine of the sky. "Is that Venus?" he asks, pointing to a bright spot of light before them, one of only about five points that can still be seen in the sky.

"Yup," Grace confirms.

“What about that one?” He indicates a much dimmer point of light, off to the right of Venus.

“Sirius,” Grace tells him, and then, preemptively, “You can see Rigel just over there,” she motions further to the right of Sirius. “And there’s Betelgeuse,” she points to the star just above and to the left of Rigel.

John shakes his head. “That is really quite cool,” he tells her.

Grace has always been obsessed with astronomy, ever since she was a young child. She was forever wandering off into fields and staring up at the blanket of the heavens above her. By the time she was ten, she could name all the constellations. Not just the easy ones, like the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper and Orion and Pegasus. She knew Auriga and Cassiopeia and even Camelopardalis, the giraffe. She made her parents buy her Ptolemy’s *Almagest.* Throughout her childhood she followed the journey of the twin Mars rovers, Oppy and Spirit, with glee, listening to stories about them on the radio. She would log in to internet cafes in the city to look at photographs from Hubble. She cried for days when the International Astronomical Union declared that Pluto, her very favorite celestial body, was no longer a planet.

The rest of her family never really got into it, but her father liked that she liked space. He went along with her to the fields. He helped her to set up her telescope. He helped her to puzzle through star charts, and got her posters of planets and galaxies and supernovas to hang on her wall. He bought her the glow-in-the-dark plastic stars for her birthday. He helped her decide what patterns she should follow when putting them up. They drew out the designs on grid paper together.

And now her father is gone.

Grace takes another deep sip of her cider. Unconsciously, she reaches over with her thumb to the base of her index finger, to worry the engagement ring that has sat there for the past year. The ring is gone now though, Grace removed it the morning after her father's death. Instead of jerking her thumb back though Grace continues to reach out, feeling the slight dip at the base of her finger where the ring used to be. Taking a deep breath, she looks out before them, taking in the entirety of the mountaintop. There's more light now. Out on the ocean, she can just make out the crests of waves and currents as they form and beat against the shore. Next to her, John is silent, and Grace feels they are both probably lost in the scenery, and the soft chatter of the groups around them, and their own particular thoughts.

John still does not say anything, but carefully he reaches down and removes a glove as well, extending his bare hand out to her, palm up. After a beat, Grace reaches down, and laces her fingers in his. In the cool of the air around them she can still feel the warmth of his palm against hers.

Grace blinks rapidly, and then takes off a glove to wipe her hand across her eyes. In front of them, there is a glow at the base of the horizon, a strong yellow light just above the waters of the ocean. Soon, Grace knows, the heavens will be streaked with ochre and crimson and rose. Soon, she knows, the colors will return to the earth and they will be able to see the blue of the sound, the green of the pines, the deep fire of the autumn leaves around them. Soon, she knows, the sun will come up and its light will wash over them. For now though she sits, hand in hand with John, and, like everyone else on the mountain top, looks out toward the east, waiting for the sun to rise.

PART ONE

AFTER THE RAINS

“Are you ready Gracie?” Tamanda asks.

Silently, Grace stares down at the bao game laid out in front of her. It is a bit rough. Even with all of their savings pooled together, the three of them, Tamanda and Mercy and Grace, do not have enough money to buy a real bao board. So they have made one instead. Tamanda did the holes. She used her hands to dig eight of them, shallow, while the dirt was still loose from the rain. She did this four times over to make the rows of the board. As she was digging Mercy went out and collected pebbles to use for the njere — the seeds or bao pieces.

“This side is yours Gracie,” Tamanda now says, pointing to the two rows closest to Grace. “And this will be mine. Since I went first last time, this time it is you who will go first.” Grace nods, and looks over the holes, each one filled with two pebbles. She needs to choose which hole will be her first move. This will be the hole from which she picks up her njere to start the game. She knows, by now, not to pick up the njere from the second hole. If she does that, her turn will end after just one round. So this time she picks up the three njere from her fourth hole, then begins spreading them around the board.

Tamanda is going to win. Grace already knows Tamanda is going to win. The problem is that Tamanda and Mercy have been playing bao for almost their whole lives, and Grace has just started to learn. She never played anything like bao before, when her family lived in Maine. She played many games, of course. She played Chutes and Ladders, and Checkers, and Uno and Chess. But those aren’t played like how bao is played. They aren’t even close. And here in the village, everyone plays bao. Grace sees people in the shade of the trees by the market during lunch, or on the porches of their houses in the morning, or on benches by the

side of the road in the evenings, their heads bent over the wooden boards, focused. They are all so very good at bao here in the village. Grace wants to be good too, to be able to play with them. Just once, she wants to be able to win.

She smiles when she lands across from Tamanda's njere and is able to eat them, to carry them back to her own side. She spreads Tamanda's njere, lands across from another two, and eats again. This time, when she lands, she is not across from Tamanda's njere, which means instead of eating, she must keep spreading her own njere. Grace takes a deep breath. This is the most time she has ever spent on one turn, and she has eaten more of Tamanda's njere than ever before. Carefully, she begins to spread the pebbles across the holes on her side of the board.

One day, Grace is going to have enough money to buy her own bao game, so she can practice whenever she wants. She is going to buy it from the big marketplace in Mzuzu, or maybe from one of the men who sell curios at the lakeshore. It will be a small board, but nice, wooden, hand carved, with good designs around the edges. She would like to get a board that folds when it is not being used, one that will seal shut with a small latch. She hasn't decided yet what she will have for the njere, because there are so many choices, but she is thinking on it. She thinks maybe she will have baobab seeds. She likes their shape, and the way they feel in her hand. For now though, she does not have a bao board to practice on, and so she eats only another four of Tamanda's njere before she lands in an empty space, and her turn is at an end.

When Tamanda moves, it is as if she is playing a completely different game from Grace. She does not pause to study the board, or to think. She just grabs the njere from one hole and moves so quickly that Grace can barely tell what she is doing. Grace watches her, trying to track her movements carefully, trying to see the reasons behind Tamanda's choices,

but it is hard. In the end, Tamanda takes nearly half of Grace's njere before her turn is finished, and Grace cannot even tell how.

On her next turn, Grace stares down at the board, and then takes the njere from the fifth hole. Tamanda is going to win again. Grace can already tell, almost certainly, that Tamanda is going to win again. But Grace has played smoothly. She has stolen a lot of Tamanda's njere, and she has not had to stop to ask for help, or about the rules. Above Grace, the sky is a cloudy grey-white because it is the rainy season. Every day now the sky is a solid grey-white that blocks the sun. Grace knows this should make her unhappy. It makes her parents unhappy sometimes. "Another lovely day," her father said this morning. His head was bent down, his mouth frowning, as he sat drinking his tea. But actually, Grace likes this kind of weather. She looks over and sees Tamanda smiling, and thinks that it really is a lovely day.

"Wait!" Grace calls out. "Stop!" Tamanda freezes, her hand poised above the board. "You cheated," Grace says. "You picked up some extra njere from my side, I saw you. That's cheating!" As soon as the words are out though, Grace slams her mouth shut, and wishes she could swallow them back. Now Tamanda will be mad at her, for accusing her of cheating, and Mercy will be mad at her too, and Grace will have lost her only friends. But when she looks over, she sees Mercy smiling.

"Very good Gracie!" Mercy exclaims, and Tamanda is smiling too. "This is a thing that people will do sometimes, try to steal more njere than they should. If you do not catch them, it is okay, it is just part of the game."

"You should practice," Tamanda tells her. "It is very hard to catch extra njere, but it is a very good thing to be able to do."

Even with Grace catching Tamanda, and making her return the extra njere, it only takes Tamanda five more turns to eat all of Grace's njere and win the game. Grace has lasted

two turns more than any other time they have played. “Well done Grace,” Mercy says in the end, shaking Grace’s hand. “You are getting better. You will win a game soon.” Grace does not think she will win soon, but she thinks maybe that one day she will, and that is progress. It did not feel like she could ever win when she started learning bao.

“One more game?” Tamanda asks. “Or is it time to leave?” Mercy twists her wrist to look at her watch, a small watch with Minnie Mouse on the front where Minnie’s arms point to the numbers to tell time.

“We should go back,” Mercy says. “So we can help the mother of Grace with dinner.”

Carefully, they clean the bao board up, putting two pebbles back in each hole, sweeping the dirt from around the edge of each hole. Then, when everything looks neat and in its place, they head off down the hill.

The village where Tamanda and Mercy and Grace live is at the bottom of the winding road that passes through Livingstonia town. Grace likes walking through Livingstonia town, because it has pretty brick houses, and shops which sell good sweets, and tall pine trees. She likes passing by the Old Stone House, which is where Dr. Robert Laws lived when he was here more than one hundred years ago, and she likes walking past the Mission Church with its stained glass window showing Dr. Livingstone meeting with the chiefs by Lake Malawi. She likes that they walk through the University of Livingstonia with its tall curved arches and long green lawns, and she likes that they walk around the small grey hospital building where her father works.

As the road to the village leaves Livingstonia though, the trees grow taller around it, close together on each side, almost like a forest. In America, Grace would be scared to walk along a road like this, one that is dark and has so many shadows. But she is not scared here. She knows, by now, most of the people who live in the houses along this path. She knows,

too, most of the farmers that greet them as they walk past, heading home for the day. She even knows many of the motola drivers, who honk twice as they drive away on their last run of the day.

As they walk, Tamanda picks up a large stick from the side of the road and begins swinging it, touching it to the ground every few steps. She does this a lot, and it always makes Grace think of her as an explorer, like the ones from the old books, brave adventurers who push through the dense jungles of faraway lands.

"Quiz time Gracie!" Tamanda announces, stick swinging. She turns to Mercy. "Mercy, may you administer the quiz?"

"Yes of course Madam Headmistress I will!" Mercy exclaims. Even though Tamanda is the pretend headmistress, Mercy is always the administrator of the quiz, because she is the most smart of all the three of them, and also because it is her mother who is teaching Grace Chitumbuka.

"Today's quiz," Mercy announces, and then pauses, letting the silence stretch out. "Is professions!"

"Professions!" Tamanda chimes, raising her stick high in the air.

"Professions," nods Grace, and prepares, trying to bring all the things Nyaphiri has taught her about jobs to the front of her mind.

"Okay," Mercy says. "Please can you Gracie, list for me… five careers."

Five. Grace thinks. Five. This should not be too hard. "Mbazi," she begins. Carpenter. Mr. Nkoto is the carpenter in the village. He makes people tables and chairs and beds.

"Very good Gracie," Mercy says, and Tamanda claps until Mercy cuts her off with a look. "You have listed one profession. Please list for us four more."

“Wakusona,” Grace says slowly. Wakusona — one who sews. In their village Madam Msiska is the one who sews, the tailor. She sits at her machine in the small shop in the marketplace and if you bring her a drawing and some fabric she will make you very good clothes.

“Excellent progress,” Mercy tells Grace, and Tamanda taps her stick on the ground one, two, three times.

“Three more careers,” she says. Reverend Munthali is the mliska, the pastor. Grace says this and Mercy nods while Tamanda beams. One village over, in Nkhombalo, is the polici, but that’s not the proper name for them. The proper name for them is… is… Grace releases her lower lip from her teeth quickly, realizing she has taken it in and been biting down too hard. As she unclamps, the word comes to her like an exhalation. Msikari. Policeman.

“Wonderful,” Mercy says, and Grace finishes with an easy one. “Doctola.” Her father is a doctola, a doctor. “Well,” Mercy tilts her head carefully to one side, and looks back at Tamanda.

“We do call doctors ‘doctola’,” Tamanda tells Grace. “But the more correct word is ‘ng’anga’.”

“Ng’anga,” Grace repeats, tasting it on her tongue.

“Very, very good Gracie,” Mercy nods. “Now, for the final question, can you tell me what Usambizi do?”

Grace knows this one, Mercy’s mother, Nyaphiri, who is an usambizi says it to Grace all the time. “Kusambizga!” Grace exclaims. Teaching. Teachers teach. This time both Mercy and Tamanda break out in applause.

“That was really very good Gracie,” Mercy says. Grace beams. This is important. She needs to be good enough at Chitumbuka so that she can understand everyone in the village when they speak, and so that she can speak to them in return.

“You are getting very good at this.” Tamanda says, and she joins Grace and Mercy’s hands in hers, and they skip the rest of the way to Grace’s house.

By the time they reach Grace’s house, the clouds have turned a deep, dark grey, and the small pieces of sky they can see are a nearly-black blue.

“Odi Amama!” Grace calls out as they walk through the reed fence that surrounds the yard. “Tabwera.”

“Yewo sweetie,” her mother acknowledges. She is outside in the kitchen, cooking. Grace can see her through the door of the small mud building, which she has left open so the smoke can escape. She is sitting on a wooden stool in front of a pot simmering over a low fire. On the porch, Grace can just see the top of her brother John’s head, can hear him making small ‘vroom’ noises as he plays with his trucks.

“Can we help you with the making of the dinner Amama Grace?” Mercy asks.

“Oh thank you Mercy,” Grace’s mother says. “The food is almost done, so I don’t really need help in here but could you get everything set out and ready? The mat and the plates and the cups?”

“Of course,” Mercy says.

“Are we eating panyumba or pawaro?” Grace asks. Her mother turns. She has pulled her hair back into a bun, and she is wearing an old chitenje around her skirt to protect it from the soot. Her face is shiny from the heat. She gives Grace a blank look. “Pa… whichever one means outside.”

“Pawaro!” Tamanda shouts out as they all head into the house.

“Yewo Tamanda,” Grace’s mom says, but the way she says it she doesn’t actually sound thankful.

Tamanda picks out the black and white plates for them to eat on for dinner, which are Grace’s favorite. They are all made of clay, and they each have a painting on the front of a young boy chasing after a wheel with a stick. Sometimes, Grace takes one of those plates out and sets it on the table just to look at it, not even for eating. She does not know why, she just likes it.

Besides the plates, they get out the purple and tan woven bamboo mat, and the pink and blue and yellow plastic cups, and the large bottle of orange Sobo. The bamboo mat is just wide enough that it fits inside the porch when unrolled, and they weigh the edges down with the four small stones that are kept on the windowsill, putting the plates and cups out around the mat, and the Sobo out in the center. All the time they set out the plates and the cups and the mat John sits on the other side of the porch, playing with his trucks, which is really all he ever does, because he is still very young. When they are done laying everything out, Tamanda and Mercy and Grace go over to John, and they pick up some of his trucks and cars, and they make vrooming noises like John does and then they run the trucks and cars up and down his arms and legs while he laughs and laughs and laughs.

Grace’s father comes home just after sunset, and her mother brings the food — beans and greens and nsima — up to the porch in large warming dishes. Then everyone washes their hands in the washing station Grace’s father set up long ago at the edge of the porch, and then they all pray together, and then they all eat. When her family first moved here, Grace found eating very hard, because there are no forks and knives and you have to eat with your hands. Now though, she likes balling the nsima up with her fingers, likes picking up the beans or greens and mixing them with the nsima before putting it in her mouth. She thinks it

is better that there are no forks or knives actually, because it means there is less to wash when they are done with the food.

"What did you girls get up to today?" Grace's father asks.

"We helped Grace with language," Tamanda says loyally. "We gave her a quiz on professions. And then before that we were up past Livingstonia, by the cave playing bao." Grace takes a ball of nsima, dips it in the beans, then pops it into her mouth.

"That's the game played on the wooden boards, right?" her dad asks. "The one with the marbles or seeds?"

"That is bao," Mercy confirms. "We should teach you."

Grace breaks off another piece of nsima, this one she eats with a pinch of greens. "I would like that," her father says. "It would be really fun to learn."

"It would," Grace's mother echoes.

"You know we used to play games with marbles," Grace's dad says. "When we were children. You remember that Ruth?" He smiles over at Grace's mom and she smiles back.

"What games did you play with marbles?" Mercy asks.

So Grace's dad explains. He talks about how they would draw a wide circle in the ground, how players would put small marbles inside it, how they would stand back from the circle and shoot a bigger marble into it, trying to knock the other marbles out. Grace leans back against the edge of the porch, looking around at the group while she listens to her father speak.

It is cool tonight, with a little breeze that blows over them. When they first moved here, four months ago now, there was no breeze. It was hot and there was no air conditioning and no fans. The ground was dry then, because it was before the rains, and everywhere Grace looked was brown and dead. Back then Grace would get so sweaty and so sticky and she

couldn't even take a shower inside. She had to go to the stupid bafa and take a bucket bath. She was unhappy then, unhappy because her parents made her move and leave her friends and her school and her house which had an apple tree that was good for climbing in the back. For a long time back then, Grace wanted to run away. There is a small piggy bank on the bookshelf in her room shaped like an actual pig with a little curling tail and every night she would drop her spare kwacha into it. She was trying to save up enough money to be able to take a bus to Lilongwe. She was trying to save up enough money to buy a plane ticket home.

Then the rains came, and after that the roads weren't so dry and cracked, and it got a bit cooler, and small grasses and plants began growing around the fields. This was around the time when Grace started noticing in her studies with Nyaphiri that she could actually understand people when they were speaking Chitumbuka to her, and she could say a few words back and sometimes could even form full sentences. This was also when she started to be actual friends with Tamanda and Mercy. After that, things weren't so bad really, and so she stopped trying to save up so much money to run away, and instead decided the money would be for a bao board one day.

Above Grace now the clouds have cleared, as they do sometimes in the cold air of the night, so that she can see the stars. Here, in the village, the sky is full of more stars than she has ever seen in her entire life. They make the whole world look twinkling and shiny. For Christmas, Grace's dad bought her a book that talks about all the constellations and all the planets and all the really big stars you can see in the sky, so now Grace can recognize Orion, and the Southern Cross, and the Coal-sack and the Milky Way. Beside her, Tamanda and Mercy lean back against the porch wall too. "I can see Jupiter," Tamanda says, pointing up.

"And there is Pegasus," Mercy points low in the sky.

Grace looks around. Stretched out over them as far as she can see in any direction, the sky is now bright and calm and clear.

A MEDITATION ON CHICKEN

Afterwards, after the names of all those accepted to university have been read out over the radio and Chimwemwe's name among them, Grace feels as though the air around her has gotten lighter.

"My sister is going to university," Tamanda says in a singsong voice to Grace and Mercy as she skips into the yard around Grace's house. Mercy and Grace are sitting on the porch. They are smiling. They are feeling the cool breeze of the coming cold season wrapped around them. Inside the house, Grace's mother, and father, and Nyaphiri are all talking, laughing. Grace can hear the tone of their voices — low and slow and easy — but not the exact words they are saying. Down the road, someone is playing a radio and the rapid-fire Chichewa of the MBC host spreads through the village. Even further along, from Kondwani's Bottle Store, dance music plays below the sounds of people joking, and laughing.

Out in the yard, Grace's chicken, Charles, is feeding. There is a small winnowing basket filled with dried kernels of corn at the edge of the porch and every now and then Mercy or Grace will reach a hand down and toss a few kernels out to Charles, who walks up to them in her strange hop hop way, her head moving forward and back, giving out the occasional 'bok'.

"Does Chimwemwe know what she is going to study?" Mercy asks, as she throws out a few kernels for Charles.

"Yes," Tamanda replies. "She is going to study accounting."

"That is good," Mercy nods, as Charles pecks one of the kernels on the ground and then eats it. "Accounting is good. Then she will be able to work in a bank." When the kernels are all gone Charles looks up at Grace, turning so her head is tilted a bit to one side. She is a

good chicken, Charles. She is pretty and brown and she follows Grace around the yard sometimes and she lays an egg almost every morning. Grace reaches into the basket next to her, and throws out a few more corn kernels, scattering them near Charles.

"If she works in a bank she will probably be in the city," Tamanda sighs. "I would like her to live in Blantyre maybe. Then when I visit we can shop at Game and go to a movie in a theater and I can eat so many mafreezies."

Charles hop hops over to the base of the steps, to where Grace has thrown a few of the kernels.

"I would like to live in a city maybe," Mercy nods. "When I am older."

Charles reaches the kernels and leans down, pecking at them one by one, eating them up. Grace reaches out carefully, extending her fingers until she is petting the feathers on Charles' neck, which are so soft. Charles does not move, or bok, or spread her wings to try to bat Grace away. She just waits for a few seconds, letting Grace pet her, and then walks off again.

"Me, I would also like to live in a city," Tamanda says. "I think Mzuzu. I like the big market when it is just opening. I like to go between the stalls and see all the vegetables and the spices and the fruits as they are being put out. If I lived in Mzuzu, I would go to the market every day, and buy peas, and peppers, and those apples from South Africa that are so so big."

Grace watches as Charles walks back across the yard over towards her coop. In addition to Charles Grace's family has five other chickens and one rooster and although they have not yet given any of the others names they are good chickens and they lay many many eggs. Back before they moved, back when they lived in America, Grace's family did not have chickens. Instead, Grace had a hamster and John had a fish. Grace's hamster - whose name

was Hamm - was fine. There were little plastic tubes sticking out from his cage that he ran around in. He also had a hollow plastic ball, and he could be in the ball and race around the house. He died though, after just two years. Still, he was better than the fish. The fish didn't do anything at all really, and it died before it even turned one.

Tamanda leans back on the porch, smiling, her arms at her side, the sun on her face, her eyes closed.

"You are happy for your sister," Mercy says.

"I am happy for my sister," Tamanda confirms. "Chomene happy she is going to university."

Grace thinks back to earlier in the day, back when the village was quiet and the air felt very heavy. Everyone was sitting by the radios then, and you could hear the drone of these radios, all over the village, loud over the silence of the people. Grace was in her house, with her mother and father and John. Mercy and Nyaphiri were also with them, listening to the radio. Tamanda was at her own house, with her sister and her auntie, and the minister and the headmaster were with them in the room as well. The headmaster was tense, Tamanda said, his hands clasped so tight together, his mouth a thin thin line. The minister was praying the whole time, muttering softly, asking God to see his way to granting Chimwemwe admission to university.

Grace tried to do other things while the radio announcer read off the names of the students who were accepted to university, to make the list go by faster. She worked on her new coloring book, on the picture of a mermaid under the sea. It didn't work though. Grace kept looking up, or pausing, or not being able to concentrate, so she only colored a bit of the tail. But John, who was next to her, finished his whole picture of a unicorn flying through the clouds. While they were coloring it seemed to Grace like the announcer kept reading names

without going further up the alphabet, he kept repeating C names for forever. Finally though he reached the K's. When he said Kapira at first Grace thought that it meant Chimwemwe had not made it to university, because he said Kapira, Benson. Benson Kapira had been accepted to university. But then he said Kapira again, Chimwemwe, and then Grace could not hear anything else because the whole village was filled with cheers.

"We will have a party now, for Chimwemwe, yes?" Grace asks.

"Of course!" Tamanda sits up again, and ticks items off on her fingers. "We will have Fanta, and mandazi, and nchunga and then we will dance for so long."

"And chicken?" Grace asks, because that is a rule, she is almost certain, that you cannot have a party without chicken.

"Of course," Tamanda says again.

"Of course," Grace nods. Out in the yard, Charles looks towards Grace, tipping her head slightly to one side. They will not kill Charles, Grace knows, because Charles is an egg-laying chicken. But they will kill some chickens, and it has been more than three months now, since Grace has eaten chicken. It has been more than three months, in fact, since Grace has eaten any meat at all. She has not told Mercy and Tamanda of this yet though. It is the first time she has ever kept anything from them, and thinking of this secret makes her stomach hurt.

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"What is the first rule?" Grace's mother asks.

They are standing on the edge of the forest, Grace and her mother and Mr. Nyirenda, the wildlife officer. Grace and her mother are wearing the bee-keeping suits they sewed themselves, together, from the heavy canvas of used maize-bags. The ends of the suits are

tied at their wrists and at their ankles, to prevent bees from getting in, and they each wear a large hat draped with mosquito netting that is tucked into the neck of their suit. Mr. Nyirenda, as a wildlife officer, has an actual professional bee-keeping suit that he bought in the city. They have heavy gloves on, all three of them, and Grace carries a can filled with brush for smoking out the bees, while her mother carries a bucket into which they will put the honeycomb. It is Mr. Nyirenda who carries the dull machete they will use to open up the hive and then remove the comb.

“Go with love," Grace says softly but firmly.

“Very good," Mr. Nyirenda tells her, and Grace thinks that underneath his bee helmet, he might be smiling.

“Yes,” Grace’s mother confirms. “We always go with love, and with respect. We are going into the bees’ forest, we are disturbing their hives.” Carefully, she shifts the bucket into her right hand.

“And if we get stung?” Mr. Nyirenda asks.

“We do not panic,” Grace says, her voice still calm. “We do not wave our hands. We do not go toward the hive. We just walk away.”

"Very good,” her mother nods.

In her whole life, Grace has only been stung by a bee twice, once in America, and once here. Here she was only stung on the arm and that was okay. Back in America though, she was stung on her bottom lip, and that hurt, quite a lot. The hurt was not enough though, to stop her from coming out to the hives.

“Ready?” Her mother asks, and when Grace nods her netted hat slides slightly forward on her head and she giggles before pushing it back up into place. As they walk into the forest they go slowly, carefully. Even though it is already late enough in the morning that

most of the bees will be out searching for food, there will still be plenty of workers still at the hive. Grace always feels a strange mix of nervous and excited to go to the bees, so that her stomach is kind of bubbly and sometimes her hands shake just a bit. She still goes into the forest though. She just takes deep breaths, and throws her shoulders back, and tries to walk as if she doesn't know what it is to be scared.

They have three hives here. Grace's mother put them up last year, with help from Mr. Nyirenda, while Grace looked on. Together her mom and Mr. Nyirenda strung up the boxes, which are sort of triangle shaped, between two trees, using strong wires. They put the combs in carefully, one by one, and then lastly fitted on the tops. The bees moved in soon after that, and now, for the first time, they will be able to collect the honey.

Above them, a bee flies slowly, lazily past. It does not pause, or seem to notice them and so Grace grips the handle of her can tighter, and continues walking into the forest. Carefully, Grace listens, trying to pick out, from all the sounds of the forest, the hum of a hive. She knows immediately when she hears it. There is a very particular sound to the hum of a hive, a vibration in the air that lets you know you are near. Grace likes this hum. It makes her feel happy, somehow, to hear it, to see the air filled with bees, flying back and forth, busy as they work.

As the bee hum increases, bees begin to fill the air. There are many of them, flying back and forth, and if Grace follows their path through the trees, she can just see the outline of the first hive. Grace's mom stops, because they should not get too close to the hive just yet, and they put their tools down on the ground carefully.

"May you get the smoke ready Gracie," Mr. Nyirenda says evenly. "So we keep the bees calm?"

Grace nods, and strikes a match carefully, then opens the lid of the metal can and lights the brush inside on fire. She waits with the lid open until the fire has really caught, and then she closes it carefully, so that smoke pours out the nozzle. Grace read all about beekeeping before her mother put up the hives. She knows that when the bees are alarmed, they put out a pheromone. She knows that when the pheromone spreads to other bees, they all become alarmed, and aggressive. She knows that the smoke interferes with the pheromone, so that the bees stay more calm.

Carefully, Grace walks toward the hive, the smoking can held out before her. She walks around the hive three times, holding the can out away from her, so that the smoke fills the air. Around her, she thinks she can hear the humming of the bees getting softer, but maybe this is just her imagination. After the smoke has run for a while, Mr. Nyirenda steps forward, takes his machete, and begins prying the lid of the hive off. Grace raises the smoker, holding it near the parts of the hive where the lid has come loose.

Gently, Mr. Nyirenda pries off the lid, lays it on the ground. This is maybe Grace's favorite part of beekeeping. She loves looking into the hive, loves seeing the hidden world inside, loves looking at the bees as they crawl over the combs. Carefully, Grace's mother steps over and pulls the first comb from the hive. It is full of honey, and capped with wax. Gently, Grace's mother brushes the bees that are still on the comb away. Once the bees have gone, she lowers the comb into the bucket. The next few combs are not so full, so Grace's mother puts them back in the hive. The last three, though, are good, so those go in the bucket. This part is always a bit scary, when someone is reaching into the hive, and so the bees are not so happy and everyone is surrounded by a buzz that always sounds to Grace a bit angry. Grace thinks about love though and respect. She sends love out to the bees as her mother removes the last combs, and when she has taken the last comb out, and Mr. Nyirenda has

placed the lid back on, Grace sees her mother rub the edge of the hive just lightly, as a way of telling the bees thanks.

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Back at the house, Grace's father is sitting on the porch with John, playing bao. It is her father's turn now. John is staring down, watching the movement of their dad's hand as he shuttles the pieces around the board.

"A triumphant return!" Grace's father calls out, as they walk back into the yard, Grace's mother balancing the bucket of honeycomb on her head now, instead of carrying it in her arms, because it is heavy.

"Do you need my assistance in processing the honey?" Mr. Nyirenda asks.

"I do not think so," Grace's mother tells him. "But we are just in the kitchen, we can call out for help if we need." Mr. Nyirenda nods, and as Grace and her mother step into the kitchen, Grace sees him sit on the edge of the porch, to watch as the bao game proceeds.

Inside the kitchen, the air is warm. The bricks that make up the walls still hold the heat from this morning's cooking fire, which has now burned down, the last of its embers turning slowly grey in the mud stove Grace's mother made. It is Grace's job to prepare the honey filter while her mother prepares the honey combs. Preparing the honey filter is quite easy, Grace just takes a section of untreated mosquito netting and ties it around the top of a blue plastic bucket, identical to the one they used to collect the honey comb. She watches then, as her mother picks up one of the honey combs, holds it over the bucket, and begins peeling back the raw wax caps that hold in the honey with a dull knife. It is really beautiful, watching the honey be processed. Grace likes the hexagonal shape of the cells in the comb, she likes seeing the wax come off, likes watching the golden liquid slowly flow down into the

bucket. She likes the smell of the honey, deep and sharp so she can almost taste it on her tongue.

After Grace's mother has poured the honey out from one side of the comb, she takes the knife again and peels the remaining wax from the comb off, letting it sit on top of the mosquito net so the rest of the honey can filter down. It takes about a half an hour to prepare all of the honey in this way. Afterwards, Grace and her mother sit on the floor of the kitchen, watching the honeycomb as it settles on the top of the mosquito netting filter, listening as the honey drips down. Later, Grace will restart the fire. She will use the mud to bake some cookies. She is trying to create a good recipe for honey ginger cookies. She wants to bring them to Chimwemwe's party, as a present. They grew the ginger in the garden this year, there are small roots of it, drying, on the top shelf of their kitchen cabinet, above the carrots and potatoes.

This is something that is different between America and Mzuri village. In America they would go to the grocery store and buy all their food. Except for the blueberries they could pick at Long Run Farm, or the apples that grew on the tree in their backyard, almost everything came from Mr. Market or Hannafords. The vegetables were in the vegetable aisle, the fruit was near the checkout, and the meat came from a freezer, where it sat in small slabs wrapped in plastic. It was easy to eat that meat, the meat that came from a store. It is not so easy here, where the dead chickens for eating in the marketplace still look like chickens. Grace used to be able to do it, used to be able to eat those chickens. It was only when her family got their own chickens, and Tamanda named Charles, and declared her Grace's chicken in particular, that Grace stopped. With Charles in the yard, she just couldn't eat meat anymore.

“Mommy,” Grace says, dipping her finger into the honey comb that still sits on top of the mosquito netting. “You know Chimwemwe’s party?”

“Yes?” her mother asks, dipping her own finger into the comb.

Grace opens her mouth, ready to tell her mother that she is worried. That she is afraid if she refuses to eat chicken at the party people will notice, and that this idea of people noticing scares her, a lot. Somehow though, the words don’t rise, so instead she says, “Do you think people will like my cookies?”

“Of course they will,” her mother says and leans down and kisses Grace on the top of her head, and Grace sticks her finger in her mouth, and tastes the flavor of the honey they have just harvested, thick and sweet.

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There are speakers set up for Chimwemwe’s party. As Grace walks down the street with her mother and father and John, she can hear music coming from Chimwemwe and Tamanda’s compound so she knows there are speakers. The music is good, the melody is bouncing and happy and loud. Grace is wearing her very best dress, one she has worn only a few times before. It is made from a dark blue fabric with yellow droplets decorating it. It was Grace who picked this fabric out from the market, Grace who drew a design of the dress on a paper for the tailor to sew. In her hands, Grace is holding a large box filled with honey ginger cookies. She thinks they are good. Last night, when she tasted them, it seemed like she had finally gotten the honey-ginger recipe just right.

They pause as they pass Mercy’s house, and Mercy and Nyaphiri emerge. Mercy is wearing a nice dress, like Grace, but Nyaphiri is in full national wear — a gold shirt and skirt decorated with red circles like the sun. Grace thinks she looks very beautiful.

“Monile monse!” she calls out cheerily.

“Monile,” the family choruses back in return.

“Matandala Amama, Adada,” Mercy greets Grace’s parents politely, and Grace’s father answers “Tatandala Mercy,” with a smile.

When they begin walking again they break off naturally into pairs, with Nyaphiri and Grace at the front, Mercy and Grace’s mother behind them, and Grace’s father and John at the back. “Are you excited for the party?” Nyaphiri asks.

“Yes,” Grace says, in a voice that she thinks does a very good job of sounding excited. Nyaphiri pauses though, and looks over at her, and says, “Are you sure?” And Grace, who has seen a small stone on the ground and raised her foot to kick it but then remembered she is in her nice shiny shoes, stops and then looks up at Nyaphiri and says, “Pachoko waka.”

“For why?” Nyaphiri asks.

“If I do not eat chicken at the party,” Grace asks. “Do you think people will notice?”

“Maybe,” Nyaphiri says. “Why would you not eat the chicken? Mwadwalla?”

“No,” Grace shakes her head. “I do not feel sick. I just-” she pauses, breathes in sharp. “I do not eat meat anymore.”

Nyaphiri does not look like this is a thing that makes sense to her, but she nods anyway.

“I could eat the chicken still,” Grace says. “At the party. It is Chimwemwe’s party. I do not want to cause offence.”

“I do not think you would cause offence,” Nyaphiri tells her. “It can be that people may wonder why you are not eating the chicken. But I do not think this would be a cause for offence.”

“Okay,” Grace nods.

Nyaphiri looks down at Grace, carefully. “It is okay?” she asks. And Grace shakes her head. Because it is not okay. Everyone in the village eats meat. The only people who don’t eat meat are the tourists who come from far away and stay at the eco lodge in Livingstonia. “It is just, it is maybe a very mzungu thing to do?” Grace says. "To not eat meat?”

“Maybe,” Nyaphiri says, and she leans down a bit, so that her shoulder touches Grace’s. “But I think the better question is whether it is a very Gracie thing to do.”

“I do not know,” Grace says, and she thinks about it. Does she, Gracie, not eat meat? Or does she, Gracie, only eat some meat, like maybe from guinea fowl, which are stupid and annoying, and so it is not as sad when they die. Or does she, Gracie, mostly not eat meat, but then maybe sometimes she does — like at parties and funerals. She has not thought about the question of eating meat this way before, but actually, now that she has begun, it seems a much better way to think.

The music from Chimwemwe’s party has gotten louder now, as they get closer, and up ahead of them on the road, Grace can just see Tamanda standing next to Chimwemwe at the entrance to their house, greeting guests as they arrive. Grace thinks that Tamanda is smiling and that Chimwemwe maybe is laughing by her side, but she is a bit too far away to tell. Behind her, Grace can hear Mercy and her mother chatting happily although she can’t tell about what. Behind them John and her father are softly singing “Wagon Wheel” together, because it is one of John’s favorite songs.

Above them, Grace can feel the heat of the sun on her face.

“It is a good day for a party, no?” Nyaphiri asks.

“Chomene,” Grace confirms.

Nyaphiri looks down at the plastic container of cookies Grace is carrying. “Is this for the party?” she asks.

Grace nods. “It is biscuitti,” she says. “I made them. Do you want to try for me? To tell me if they are good?” Grace pries just a bit of the lid off, just enough so Nyaphiri can reach in and take one cookie. Nyaphiri pops it into her mouth, and then gives a loud exclamation of “Eh-ah!”

“Gracie you made these?” Nyaphiri asks, turning to her. “All by yourself? Very well done. These are good! These are really very good.”

GENERAL PATTERNS OF MIGRATION

It is raining here, but it is the wrong kind of rain. Grace can hear the wrongness in the sound the rain makes on the roof and on the windows, a hard *tak tak tak* that is like many fingers tapping all over the house, trying to get in. When the airplane landed her mom looked out the window and said "Oh, freezing rain," in a way that told Grace this is normal, this is okay, but even so Grace does not like it. Even now, even though she knows she is safe in this house and safe in this room and safe in this bed still she has pulled her quilt all the way up to her chin which helps her feel better about the *tak tak tak* noise.

Back in the village, back in Mzuri, the rain is nice. It comes down on the roof in a heavy and even drumbeat that drowns out all other sound and sweeps away the heat of the day. There is a particular smell in the village after the rain has fallen, like everything is new and fresh and clean, and Grace thinks of it as the smell of water, but she has never told anyone else this, because they might laugh. The rain in Mzuri is never ever freezing, it is never ever made up of small cold droplets mixed with ice that fall sideways in the wind and get in through cracks in your clothing that you didn't even know were there and then tap an annoying *tak tak tak* all over everything once you get inside.

It would be better, Grace thinks, if she was back in her old house, in the house they lived in before they moved to Mzuri. She loved her room there. It had light blue walls just like the sky and there was a picture of a cat hanging up, and another picture of a humpback whale and the last picture which was of Pluto which is still her favorite planet even if the astronomers say it is not a planet anymore.

But she is not in her old room. They don't own that house anymore. Her parents sold it when they moved to Mzuri and Grace tried very hard not to cry when they drove away from the house in the car. In the rearview mirror she could see the apple tree she always loved

climbing and she could see it for a very long time as they drove and it wasn't until many blocks later, when they went over a hill, that she couldn't see it anymore.

Now though, she is not in her old room, in the old house. Instead she is in the small office of her Aunt Meredith's house. She is sleeping on a day bed, which means it is kind of a bed but also kind of a couch. One nice thing though is that Aunt Meredith has put Lizzy, Grace's old stuffed lizard, on the day bed. When they moved to Mzuri, Grace was only allowed to bring two stuffed animals, her bear named Bear, and her purple hippopotamus Hippy. But Aunt Meredith kept Lizzy so that Grace could have her whenever they came back to America to visit, and even though she thinks maybe she is getting a bit too old for stuffed animals, still she is happy Lizzy is tucked in next to her.

"Grace?" She turns in the daybed to see John standing in the door of the office, holding his pillow to his chest. He is wearing his Thomas the Tank Engine pajamas. Maybe a year or so ago they were his very favorite pajamas and he wore them every night. Then, a few months ago, he switched. He started wearing these rocket ship pajamas that were mostly black with blue and red rocket ships all over them. When they were packing to come visit America though, he insisted on bringing his Thomas the Tank Engine pajamas with him instead of the rocket ship ones, even though the Thomas the Tank Engine pajamas have become just a bit too small. Grace can see how the sleeves stop just short of his wrists, how his ankles are visible below the end of the pants, how the shoulders cling to him, just a bit too tight.

"Can't sleep?" Grace asks. John shakes his head, and Grace can see that the pillow he holds is bent almost in two he is grabbing it so tight.

"Do you want a story?" Grace asks. The books of their childhood are stacked here, in the bookshelves of the office — *Blueberries for Sal* and *The Country Bunny* and *The Velveteen Rabbit* and *Miss Rumphius* and *Where the Wild Things Are*. Before they moved,

Grace was just learning to read and sometimes, for practice, she would read the books to John. She's memorized some of the stories now. Even in Mzuri, sometimes when he can't sleep John will crawl into bed with her, and Grace will either read him one of the stories they have in the house — like *Kuchengera Kwa Lwivi,* or *Eddie Ndlovu* — or she will tell him one of the English stories from memory.

"Can you read one to me?" John asks, and he walks over to the bed, and slides in next to her, curling into a small ball at her side.

"Which story?" Grace asks.

"Bunny story," John says softly.

"Which bunny story?"

"The one with the lost bunny," John says, and so Grace begins reciting *The Runaway Bunny* to him. She begins by explaining that there was once a very little bunny who wanted to run away. And as she speaks, describing a little bunny telling his mother he will turn into a rock on a mountain, she feels John's breath slowly begin to even out. As the mother rabbit is telling the little bunny that if he becomes a rock on a mountain she will become a mountain climber to reach him, John's legs stretch out on the bed, and he unfolds so that he is not curled up in so tight a ball. By the time the little bunny has become a sail boat, and his mother the wind, John's eyes are fluttering closed, and Grace lowers her voice. She finishes the story in almost a whisper, telling John that the little bunny has decided he will just be a bunny after all.

"Gracie?" John mutters. Around them, the rain has stopped, and there is no more *tak tak tak* on the windows or the roof.

"Yes?"

"It is a bit weird here, isn't it?" John murmurs, still burrowed into her side.

"A bit, yes." Grace says, and listens to the soft click as a vent in the ceiling opens, and then a slow whir as the central heating comes on, and warm air is pumped gently into the room.

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In the morning it is bright, bright in a way it does not get in the village. Grace creeps out of bed, careful not to wake John, and pads out in the hallway to look out the window. When she pulls open the shades, she sees a world all glittery bright. There is ice everywhere. It covers the roofs of the houses so that rows and rows of icicles hang down from their edges. It covers the telephone wires and the fences and the branches of the trees. It even rests on the grass, each blade glittering in the clear sun.

In the living room Aunt Meredith is kneeling down in front of the fireplace, trying to start a fire. This is one thing that Grace likes better about America — the fireplaces that are indoors. She has never liked the smokey kitchens in Mzuri, has never understood why they don't just build chimneys like the American houses have, such a good way to carry the smoke from the fire up and up and out of the way. In their kitchen in Mzuri when there is a fire blazing in the fire pit the whole building fills with smoke — even if the door is wide open — and makes it hard to breathe.

Aunt Meredith is having trouble lighting the fire. Grace can hear her grumbling every time she lights a match and it doesn't fully catch.

"The wood got a bit damp I think," she tells Grace, looking up from the fire and rocking back onto her heels. "I didn't have it covered well enough on the porch."

"We have that problem a lot," Grace says, looking at the materials in the grate. Aunt Meredith has set the fire up right — logs on top, small sticks underneath, crumpled up newspapers lowest of all.

Aunt Meredith stands up, rolling her head gently back and forth and stretching her arms up in the air. “I think I just need to accept that this fire is not going to get lit.”

“I could try if you want,” Grace says, turning to the fireplace.

“Are you allowed to work with fire?” Aunt Meredith asks.

“Of course,” Grace tells her. “It is my job to light the morning fire on Tuesdays and Thursdays back at home.” For a minute Aunt Meredith just looks at her, and blinks. Then she shakes her head and says, “Of course,” and hands Grace the matches. The matches aren’t what Grace is used to. Grace is used to matches that come in a small packet and you have to unfold the packet, take a match out, and then fold the flap back over, trapping the match in the back fold and pulling it out really fast to light it. These matches though, are bigger and longer and they come in a box with a strip along the side that you can strike to light the match. Carefully Grace reaches into the fireplace and feels the logs and the sticks. Aunt Meredith is right, they are a bit wet — wet enough that the newspaper probably won’t provide enough heat to light them.

“Do you have a plastic bag?" Grace asks. “A really small one like you would use for putting beans in when you shop at the store.”

Aunt Meredith looks at her, her face twisted in thought. “I don’t think we do that here,” she says slowly. “But the small plastic bag the Chinese restaurant gave me for my takeout might work.” She goes off to the kitchen, and comes back with a small white plastic bag in her hand. “Will this be okay?”

The bag is bigger than the blue bags from the market that Grace usually uses to light the fire. Still Grace takes it, and then tears it in half. Grace parts the logs a bit, so that she can reach the sticks and newspapers. Then, carefully, she lights a match and holds it under the plastic bag, watching as pieces of the plastic catch on fire and drip onto the sticks and newspaper, where they continue to burn. Slowly, the flame catches the newspaper, and then

the sticks. Grace carefully feeds the flame more small pieces of wood, building the fire slowly up until it is big enough to dry the larger logs and catch them in the blaze.

“Thank you for that," Aunt Meredith says, sliding a glass screen over in front of the fireplace to stop any sparks from coming out. She tilts her head slightly to one side. “But is it... safe?" she asks. “Healthy?”

"I do not think so," Grace tells her. "When we first moved to Mzuri Dad was always lecturing people to try to get them to stop using the plastic bags for starting fires but it didn't work, and then Mom made him try to start fires for a week in the rainy season without plastic bags and after that he stopped saying anything.”

Grace sits back, snuggling into the living room carpet. She likes this living room carpet. She likes that it is so big and so soft that she sort of sinks into it, very comfortable. In Mzuri, the floor of their house is cement, and while Grace likes how smooth it is, and how cool it is in the hot season, it might be nice to have a carpet. They do have two carpets in the house in Mzuri actually, one that sits under the dining room table, and another in their living room, but those carpets are small and a bit thin. In this carpet, Aunt Meredith’s living room carpet, Grace feels like she could fall asleep and it would still be comfortable.

Sitting on the carpet, Aunt Meredith and Grace lean back against the couch. Beside the couch there is a basket full of newspapers, and Grace picks one up, flipping through the pages until she gets to the comics. They are in color in this paper, because it is a Sunday paper, and there are five full pages. Slowly, Grace flips through each of the sections, looking at the drawings. They are exactly the same, mostly, as when she left. She reaches her finger out and traces the figures. There, at the top of the lefthand page is Sherman the shark, speaking to Fillmore the turtle. She scans her eyes down to where Hagar the Horrible is leading another siege on a castle and then further down to where Beetle Bailey is napping under a pile of autumn leaves. At the top of the righthand page is Grace’s favorite comic, Non

Sequitur. She loves Danae and her talking pony Lucy, but her favorite of the strips are the ones that take place in Flo's diner in Whatchacallit, Maine. It's fun to see a comic set here, in Maine, even if it's not in a real place. A lot of times Captain Eddie, the lobsterman, sits at the diner, with his cat Paulie sitting on his shoulder like a pirate's parrot. Captain Eddie's exchanges with Flo are Grace's favorite part of any comic strip, ever.

As Grace slowly reads over the comics, Aunt Meredith goes to the record player, and puts a record on. Grace hears the faint scratch of the needle, and then the beginnings of a soft voice singing, a band playing in the background. Grace pauses reading the comics, and listens for a bit to the music. The piece playing right now sounds like a sad song, but not too sad a song, which is good.

"Who is this?" she asks Aunt Meredith. "I like it."

"Nanci Griffiths," Aunt Meredith says, coming back down to sit next to Grace, spreading a large knitted blanket over them. "I like her too."

Grace laughs at Brewster Rocket, who is about to accidentally cause a huge electrical issue on his ship, and snuggles closer to Aunt Meredith "This is nice," she says, motioning to the blanket. It has different patterns running through it, and is made of yarns with different colors and thicknesses, but it is still pretty, and soft and comfortable.

"Your grandmother made it," Aunt Meredith tells her. "Whenever me or your mom's sweaters would get old or ratty or too small she would unravel them, roll the thread up into a ball, and then when she had enough she would knit it into a blanket." Grace snuggles down further under the blanket, and turns the page of the comics. "Ooh, the 'Dear Abby' column!" Aunt Meredith says, pointing. "Do we want to read it?" This is something Grace and Aunt Meredith would do when Grace was younger, back when they lived a few towns away and her family would visit Aunt Meredith many times in the year. Grace would get up early, and they would snuggle under a blanket, just like this, and read the morning paper together, just

like this, and Aunt Meredith would read out the advice columns to Grace, and then they would say the advice they would give to the letter writer, and see if Abby's advice was the same as theirs.

"Yes," Grace says now. "What do they say?" So Aunt Meredith nods, and lifts the paper up.

"This letter is from Miserable in Minneapolis," she tells Grace. "Miserable writes, "Dear Abby, I have a stepdaughter I am very close to, but in recent years she seems to be growing more distant from me."

*

That afternoon, they go out to Eddie's Lot and pick up a tree. It is not too tall a tree, with thin branches, but it has good leaf cover, and it looks nice in the corner of the living room at the house. Aunt Meredith has their ornaments, all the ones from their old house, stored out in the garage in a large box. She and Grace's mom bring them in, and set them down on the living room floor with a clink.

About half of the ornaments in the box are fancy ornaments, glass globes or pieces of art her parents bought over the years. Her parents tell the stories about them as they hang them up — a small hand-carved airplane they got at that wood shop in Vermont, a tiny painted landscape of Niagara Falls, a small hummingbird whose wings twirl when you blow on it that is from some street fair they can't remember. The other ornaments are the ones made by Grace and John. There's the reindeer whose antlers are an outline of John's hand aged three, the small macaroni wreath Grace made with her dad, the elves whose bodies are made from old toilet paper rolls. They hang them each on the tree while Christmas carols play on the stereo.

Last Christmas, in Malawi, they went to the beach. They went down to one of the resorts on the lake and they sat in chairs on the sand and listened to Christmas carols. On

Christmas Day, after they opened all their presents, they took kayaks out onto the water and went out to this small collection of rocks out where the water was deep and they climbed up on to the rocks and then jumped off, doing cannonballs and jackknives and flips into the lake.

In the kitchen, Grace's dad has used a deep pan to cook popcorn, she can hear it as it *pop pop pops*. He brings the popcorn into the living room in a giant bowl, and they all take needles and thread and try to form the kernels into long strings to drape around the tree without breaking them. Outside, Grace can see small white flakes of snow falling fast past the window pane. "Isn't this fun?" she says to John, who has managed to string ten popcorns onto his strand.

"It's cold," he says, looking up at her, and his face is kind of pinched, the way it used to be when he was little and he hadn't had a good nap. "That's not right. It is supposed to be warm for Christmas."

*

That night, after dinner, because Grace and John are still not tired, Aunt Meredith takes them out to search for owls. It is a clear night, with a full moon, large and glowing. As they walk along the snow, their bodies cast shadows on the glittering ground. There are no streetlights around, no cars, no buildings. It is just them, the forest and the moon. The top of the snow is hard. As they walk across the field their boots crunch through the top layer of the snow and then sink down deep. Nobody else has come crunching through the snow like this. Grace can tell. Theirs are the only footprints here.

At the edge of the forest, Aunt Meredith turns back to Grace and John, to check that they are okay.

"Everyone warm?" she asks, "Not too tired? We can feel our fingers and toes?" John nods. He looks like a marshmallow. He is wearing a thick hat on his head and a scarf around

his neck, and a poofy jacket and pants, with snug snow boots and woolen mittens; really the only part of him Grace can see is his eyes and when he tries to speak it all comes out as a mumble. He waves his hands at Aunt Meredith, first one then the other, to show her he is fine. He cannot wiggle his fingers like Grace can, because he is wearing mittens not gloves. All of the winter clothes John is wearing used to belong to Grace. That jacket he is wearing? The green one? That was hers. The mittens and the scarf ? Hers. Even the knitted hat with the bobble was once Grace's.

Grace has a hat on too, one with little flaps over the ears. Because she outgrew all her winter clothes, she is in Aunt Meredith's clothes from high school. They had to get them down out of the attic and because of this they still smell like mothballs and wood. The clothes fit pretty good though. They had to roll the sleeves of the coat up a bit, and also the pants, and there's some padding stuffed into the toe of the boots and her fingers don't quite reach to the edge of the gloves but it's still good. It still works.

Since everyone is okay they keep going, into the woods. It is nice in the forest, underneath the trees. They are on a path now, which is good. It is not so loud when they are walking here, with no thick snow to go crunch. The forest they are in now is made up mostly of pine trees. They rise up, tall and straight, all around Grace and Aunt Meredith and John. They have a particular smell, pine trees. Their smell comes from terpines, which are in the sap of the tree. When the bark is broken the sap seeps out and that is where the smell of pines comes from. They're good for the trees, the terpines, they keep beetles and bugs and other things that might eat it away. In Livingstonia, up near Mzuri village, the pine trees smell this way too, smell exactly like this. It makes Grace feel good, this connection. It makes her somehow happy, to know that the trees in both places smell the same.

This is the third time Grace has gone with Aunt Meredith, looking for owls, and it is always difficult. You have to look up, in amongst the branches, paying special attention for a shadow, or a shape. But you also have to look down sometimes, to avoid tripping over a root. There are nine types of owl you can see in the state of Maine: Eastern Screech Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, Snowy Owl, Great Grey Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, and the Northern Saw-whet Owl. Of these, Grace has seen two species, the Eastern Screech Owl and the Northern Saw-whet Owl. Both were in trees, low down in the branches, hidden behind some leaves. You have to concentrate when looking for owls. Even with the light of the moon it can be hard to see in the forest with so much shade and shadows. They sit on the branches or in holes in the trunk and they are brown like the trees and their feathers look rough so they can be hard to see. But it doesn't look like there are any owls tonight. Grace and John and Aunt Meredith walk for nearly an hour, slowly, along the winding path through the woods, eyes sweeping up and down, quiet, but there is nothing. Aunt Meredith doesn't say anything when it is time to turn around, just inclines her head and wordlessly the three of them turn, begin the walk back.

Grace doesn't mind so much that they haven't seen an owl. This is how it is sometimes. There is no guarantee with owls. The forest is still nice, the walk is still nice, being with Aunt Meredith and John, listening to the sound of insects around them, their boots crunching on the frozen ground is nice. They are out of the forest, back to the fields of snow when Grace sees it. Immediately, Aunt Meredith stops them, putting her arm out in front of them. She points over to a hill a little ways in the distance, to the owl. It is not brown, this owl, or small like most of the other owls Grace has seen. It is large and white with a small dusting of black feathers, Both Grace and John raise their binoculars and through the lenses Grace can see the individual feathers. "Snowy Owl," she breathes.

"Snowy owl," Aunt Meredith whispers in confirmation.

"Wooooooow," says John, stretching the o out long.

They are rare, snowy owls. Not so rare that Aunt Meredith would get a bird alert on her phone if one was seen, but rare enough that you wouldn't expect to see them on a casual owl walk. Now, as Aunt Meredith and John and Grace watch the owl spreads its wings and begins flapping, taking off into the dark of the night.

Later, when they are all back at Aunt Meredith's house, sitting around the kitchen table cradling large mugs of hot cocoa with a single giant marshmallow bobbing in the middle Aunt Meredith brings out her bird book, and they look up Snowy Owls. John traces out their range in the book, dark blue for non-breeding range, light blue for breeding. The shades stretch from the Arctic all the way down to New Hampshire. "Russia," John says, pointing to the countries in their range that he recognizes. "Canada, Iceland, Sweden, Norway."

"Very good," Aunt Meredith tells him. "You know irruptions of Snowy Owls have been found as far south as Georgia."

"Eruptions?" John looks up. "Like a volcano?"

"No, irruptions, with an I, it means a sudden growth or presence of an animal. What happens with Snowy Owls is all of a sudden these groups will just appear in really southern states."

"So it's like they move?" John asks.

"Exactly," Aunt Meredith says. "They move, or migrate, have babies, and then go back to the Arctic."

"They can do that?"

"Yes, they are very good flyers."

“No, I know but I mean…” John pauses, thinking. “They can live in two different places? In their lives?”

Aunt Meredith laughs. “Of course. There are many birds who live in different places all over the world.” She flips a few pages back in the book, to the Arctic Tern. “See, the Arctic Tern migrates all the way from the Arctic to the Antarctic. And the Loggerhead Shrike migrates from Canada to Mexico. There’s migratory birds — and migratory animals for that matter — all over, on every continent.”

“I want to see more,” John says, and so Aunt Meredith continues, flipping through the book, stopping every few pages on a species, outlining the general patters of migration, where a bird comes from, where it goes to, how long it spends in each place. John just sits there, at the table, a hot chocolate mustache resting on his lip, as with his pointer finger he traces line after line of the route each bird takes from one country to the next.

THE FLAVOR OF MANGOES

By nine in the morning the motola is almost full, and so Tamanda asks them to run through the security protocol one last time.

"Step one," Mercy intones. "We ride Mr. Gondwe's motola down to the Chitimba roadblock at the lake." She motions to the motola in which they currently sit as she speaks, to demonstrate how well they are already doing.

"Step two," continues Grace, and she holds up two fingers. "We go to Mr. Banda's shop, where I pick up our new bao board." She grins, and Mercy applauds lightly.

"Step three, we eat lunch, probably at Madam Msiska's restaurant," Mercy notes.

"Step four, we go swimming if there is time, and then we return to the roadblock to catch the motola back," Grace finishes.

"By…" Tamanda begins.

"By three o'clock at the latest," Mercy cuts her off, and then smiles triumphant at Grace.

"And if there is any trouble?" Tamanda asks.

"We call the parents," Grace says, pulling a cell phone out of her bra cup. She has only recently begun wearing the bra, and it was nice to discover that it is, besides being an indication that she is growing up, a very good place to store things.

"Or," Mercy adds. "We call on Madam Bloch at Zuwa resort, who will be very happy to help."

"Very good," nods Tamanda. "I declare us ready for our first solo trip to the lakeshore," and together they all cheer, but softly, so as not to disturb the other passengers who surround them, filling the motola.

It is, Grace thinks, a very good day for visiting the lake. It is hot; so hot that even this early in the morning the air rising off of the ground can be seen in shimmering waves. It will be nicer down by the lakeshore, where the air is not so still and the breeze, when it blows, carries with it a coolness that comes off the water. There will be soda down by the lake — cold Coca-Cola and Fantas fresh from the fridge whose carbonation tickles you when it hits your tongue. There might even be mangoes. Right now, in the village, the mangoes in the trees are small and hard and green. But mangoes come earlier to the lakeshore. Down there maybe they are already nice and plump and ripe and a beautiful orange-yellow-red. Grace loves the flavor of mangoes, the sharp sweetness of every bite, the richness of a juice so plentiful, it runs down your chin.

From inside the cab of the motola, Mr. Gondwe beeps the horn twice, to signal they are ready to leave. He calls out loudly, “Chitimba tieni sono Chitimba!” And when no one else comes running, he pulls out from under the shade of the tree, drives out toward the escarpment road, and they are off.

Grace loves riding along the road that winds down the escarpment from Livingstonia to the lake. It goes through the forest and has around twenty switchbacks — the exact number depends on what counts as a switchback, and what is just a curve. A few times, riding down from Livingstonia to the lake, Tamanda or Mercy or Grace have tried to count the switchbacks, but they always came back with different numbers. Eventually, after a few fights, they got tired of trying to find the exact number, so they agreed they would just say there are ‘around twenty’.

As the motola slowly lumbers down the road, Grace can feel the wind on her face. They are in the forest that lines the escarpment now, so the air is not so hot, and even though the corner of the plastic crate full of Carlsberg behind her digs into Grace’s shoulder every

time the motola lumbers over a bump in the uneven road she is still smiling. Below them she can see the thin strip of the lake nestled in the land, blue and clear and long. From inside the crates Grace can hear the gentle clink of the Carlsberg bottles the truck is carrying down to the lakeshore to refill, and she can see Tamanda at the front of the motola, having managed to balance herself on top of one of the crates, sitting on it like a throne.

Grace likes, sometimes, to look out over the side of the motola as it goes around the switchbacks, likes to stare down the face of the escarpment to the ground below. It is fun, sometimes, to see how close the wheels are to the edge of the cliff, to feel your stomach do a little flip inside you when you look down to the very bottom, and see that it is so far away.

Looking up again, Grace spots a family of vervet monkeys in the clump of trees they are just now passing under. As Grace watches they swing and run easily around the trunks. A few of the monkeys have small bald babies clinging to their stomachs. Grace smiles watching them, taps Mercy on the shoulder, and points, and they watch as the monkeys hop from branch to branch. “What is it?” Tamanda asks, looking up as well. But they have come to a break in the trees now, and the monkeys are receding behind them. As they stare skyward though, a turaco that has been perched on a small bush to their right takes off and flies low over their path, bright green feathers fading into a deep blue at the tail with black-ringed eyes and bright scarlet under the wings. He’s so close, and as he passes overhead, feathers flashing, they all breathe in together, at once, a sharp inhalation of awe.

They are coming now to the part of the escarpment path that sometimes scares Grace. This one time, when she was headed down to the lakeshore with her mother and father and John a black mamba appeared on the path in front of them. It must have been sunning on the road when the vibrations of the car disturbed it. They did not see it, a sandy colored grey against the sandy colored dirt of the road and it was not until they were nearly on it, and the

snake reared up, its head nearly level with the windshield that they realized it was there. Then Grace's father, and her mother, and Grace and John all worked quickly, turning the knobs on their doors to roll up the car windows, which before had been opened. It was all fine, and they were never in any danger, but still when they pass by the space where the mamba once was, Grace always feels her heart begin to race.

"Almost there!" Tamanda smiles, as they pass by the mamba's spot, and reach the flatter part of the escarpment.

"Almost there," Mercy says, and Grace sees a smile beginning to blossom on her face, just behind her eyes.

*

There is a vibrancy to the lakeshore that Grace has always found exhilarating. There is always a hum, a buzz, in the air. In addition to the restaurants and shops there are the men and women who wander up and down the sides of the M1 highway, selling sugarcane and mandazis and groundnuts and freezies and grilled maize. There's a smell that fills the air from all the different food stuffs, a delicious mix that makes Grace immediately want to buy everything she can. Grace likes, too, watching the drivers stopped at the road block, waiting for the police to wave them through. Many of the drivers here have come down from Tanzania, or from even further abroad, and it is fun to look at the different cars and trucks on the road. Grace has seen enormous fuel trucks here, or trucks carrying large metal beams for buildings, and even one time a truck piled high with a mountain of bananas.

She stands now with Tamanda and Mercy at the road block and breathes it all in. "Where do we want to go first?" Grace asks.

"To the shop for the bao board?" Tamanda proposes.

"To the shop!" Mercy exclaims.

Even though the road is not busy at this time of day, still Tamanda, Mercy, and Grace walk on the grass well to the side of the street, to avoid the heat of the tarmac. The grass down by the lakeshore is very different from the grass in the village. Down here it is light green, not dark, and it grows in clumps and patches, rather than in the even and dense fields they see up at the village. The ground too, is different here, looser, dryer, and a pale tan rather than a deep red.

It is cassava drying season now. All along the side of the road woven bamboo mats are laid out with row after row after row of tiny triangular piles of cassava pulp set out in the bright morning sun. On the lakeshore side of the road they pass a shop with soda bottles and biscuits sitting out on its shelf and Grace thinks maybe they will have time to buy some snacks on the way back from getting their bao board. Maybe they will buy some sodas and biscuits and sit by the lake and eat and drink and then go swimming.

“Hey, hey you! Mzungu!” Grace turns to the sound and sees three white people sitting in the shade of a tree. They are backpackers. Grace can tell by their loose clothing and long hair and the way each person leans against an enormous bag — packed to the brim.

“Why are they sitting here?” Mercy whispers. “Should they not be down by the roadblock?”

“Yes! Yes! You hello!” The man who originally spoke to Grace, the tallest of the three, is coming over to her, waving. He is wearing short trousers that fall just below his knees, and there is a tan line around each ankle where he has clearly previously worn socks. He is wearing sandals now, and Grace can already tell from the reddish tone of his skin that his feet are going to burn.

“Do you know him?” Tamanda asks of the waving man. Grace shakes her head. In the field to their left a woman is grinding cassava with a large mortar and pestle, while to their

right the street is still lined with shops. There are many people here, who could help them if they need it, so Grace is not afraid. By her side, Tamanda and Mercy each take a step toward Grace, protective.

The man stops about a foot from Grace and leans down, his hands resting on his thighs, to speak to her. His words carry a heavy accent, but Grace does not know from where.

"You are English?" the man asks.

Grace shakes her head. "American," she says. "But I live here."

"Oh!" The man is clearly surprised, but he smiles and says, "Good! Very good! We," he motions to himself and to his two friends sitting under the tree behind him. "Go Nkhata Bay. Nkhata Bay is where? Is how?"

"Oh," Grace nods, and then points to the roadblock behind them. "You want to go to the roadblock," she says. "You can catch a motola to Mzuzu." She points to the line of white vans and pickup trucks that sit behind the road block.

"Mzuzu," the man repeats nodding.

"Then from Mzuzu, there are many motolas to Nkhata Bay."

"Okay," the man says. "Is good. Yewo." He smiles, clearly proud of his use of Chitumbuka. "And price?" he asks.

Grace has no idea what the fare to Mzuzu and then Nkhata Bay is. "The driver will tell you the price," she says.

"Yes but…" the man pauses, seeming to struggle to find the words. "Right price? Correct price?"

"The driver," Tamanda says, speaking slowly and very carefully, like some of the NGO workers do when they come visit to talk to the children at school. "Will tell you the price. Driver." She mimes someone driving. "Tell you." She points to her mouth. "Price." She

holds her hand up, moving her thumb and fingers together in a gesture meant to represent money.

"Yewo," the man nods, but he is no longer smiling as he leaves them, and goes to join his friends under the tree.

"That was strange," Tamanda says. "To the shop? To the bao board?"

"To the bao board!" Grace and Mercy chorus, although Grace's voice is a little softer now. Still the bao board, when Mr. Banda hands it over, is perfect. It is small, expertly carved, with smooth metal hinges and a small wooden clasp to seal it shut when folded, and the three of them smile to see it, and wrap it carefully in a chitenje before heading off to the lake.

*

Afterwards, after picking up the bao board and eating lunch and then buying sodas and biscuits, Grace sits perched on a rock at the edge of the lake and slowly finishes the last of a mango, watching while Tamanda and Mercy swim and splash in the water. It is a good mango. They picked the fruit fresh from a tree just a few meters away and Grace was happy to find it perfectly ripe. It is a nice afternoon, too. Grace has always liked it here, along the lakeshore. Where they are is quiet, in one of the many coves tucked in away from the road. Down the shore a little ways, Grace can see a few fishing huts, and canoes that have been dragged high up onto the sand in front of the houses. There are a series of drying racks, too. High bamboo structures with nets draped over them, and hundreds of small silver usipa spread out along their length, still in their fishing nets, drying. You can't see the road from where they are, just the escarpment, and the deep dense green of the trees that grow all along the steep ridge of the plateau fill Grace's eyes whenever she looks back.

In front of Grace, Mercy and Tamanda are practicing floating. They each take turns taking deep deep breaths and rising to the surface where they stay, bobbing gently on the water, for as long as they can. Below them, the water of the lake is blue, and nearly transparent. One of Grace's favorite things about Lake Malawi is that it is meriomictic, which means that unlike most other lakes around the world the different layers of the water — the monimolimnion and the chemocline and the mixolimnion — do not mix. This makes the water in Lake Malawi nearly completely clear. Even now, as Mercy and Tamanda float, Grace can see tiny cichlids — brightly colored fish in flashes of blue and black and yellow and pink and purple and orange and red and gold — as they swim around beneath the girls.

Grace looks down at the bao board, sitting in her lap. It is everything they wanted. Most of the bao boards in Mr. Banda's shop feature the "Big Five" — Lion, Elephant, Water Buffalo, Rhino and Leopard. You can't even find some of those animals in Malawi, but still Mr. Banda carves them on nearly everything — plates, bowls, chairs, spoons, statues. "It's all the mzungus want," he told Grace. For their bao board, the girls asked him to carve fish on one side, fish under the water. Grace runs her fingers over the tiny shapes now, seeing the stripes and dots of patterns Mr. Banda has carved into each shape, the texture he's added to mimic the water's waves and the fishes' scales. On the other side he has carved a landscape, Livingstonia falls, the cataract rushing down from the top of the board to land in a pool at the bottom, the trees of Livingstonia's forest carved along the side. Carefully Grace opens the board, noting the smooth grain of the polished wood that makes up each hole, the baobab seeds sitting in small clusters inside. She closes the board again, then opens it. Closes it, opens it, and closes it once again.

In the lake, Mercy and Tamanda are now doing handstands, their faces scrunched up under the water as they hold in their breath, their feet perfectly pointed, stretching toward the

sky above the surface. In just a few months, they will all be in secondary school. When they were younger, Grace would always stare at the students walking to secondary school as they passed by her house on the way to class. Unlike the light blue of the primary school uniforms, the secondary school students wear deep green dresses or trousers, with smart brown shirts so well kept they have creases in them. They carry their notebooks and pencils in plastic bags, and they look so tall and confident as they walk to school, chatting easily with friends. Grace does not feel old enough, yet, to be one of those girls.

Grace finishes off the last of the mango, and tosses the seed into the woods off to the side. It was not as tasty, in the end, as she thought it would be. Maybe it is just that the mango crop this year is not as good as it normally is. Sitting on the rock, Grace finds that the face of the tall white man keeps popping into her head. She keeps hearing his voice as he called out "Mzungu!" keeps seeing his smile as he asked her, "You are English, yes?"

"Gracie!" Tamanda calls out, then laughs as Mercy splashes her from behind. "If you are finished with your mango you should come into the water."

So Grace climbs down slowly from the rock, and wraps the bao board and phone up in her chitenje, placing them in a hollow at the foot of the rock, so that you cannot see them unless you are well inside the cove. "I will be there sono sono," she says to Mercy and Tamanda, and she picks her way carefully into the trees to change into her bathing suit. As she stands in the forest changing, the tall man's face comes to her again. What she remembers most about him, what really stood out in the time they talked, was that he never looked at Mercy or Tamanda, even when Tamanda spoke to him. In fact, he only ever really looked at, only ever really spoke to Grace.

Grace comes out onto the beach in her swimsuit, and Tamanda and Mercy cheer. Carefully, she wades into the water, which is cool, but not too cool, because it has taken in

much of the heat of the warm dry-season air. Grace ducks under the water, eyes open, and watches as the fish, blurry blobs of color now that she is underwater, swim by her face.

"Floating competition!" Tamanda declares once Grace has resurfaced, and carefully, Grace inflates her lungs with air, feels herself gently rise to the top of the surface of the lake. A few days ago, late at night, Grace heard her parents talking, and her father said, "I do not know, maybe we are being selfish. Grace is going into high school now, John to the upper levels of primary school, maybe it is time to think about moving back."

And Grace's mother said, "But they are happy here."

And her father said, "I know, but is this really a place where we should be raising two kids?"

Grace lowers her legs and slowly stands up in the water. In the dimming light of the afternoon she can see Tamanda and Mercy, eyes closed, floating peacefully on the surface. The curve of Tamanda's belly, slowly growing, is just visible now above the water's edge. Grace thinks about her parents' words and stays there, standing, looking out at her friends. There is no wind, there are no currents, and yet, looking at Mercy and Tamanda on the surface of the water, Grace cannot get over the feeling that somehow they are both floating slowly away.

PART TWO

Chiefly About Witches

The witch's airplane appears in the center of the market square sometime in the darkness of the night.

It is a typical witch's airplane, a large winnowing basket decorated with black scraps of cloth, feathers, and small painted-black perfume bottles. Long black marks all around it on the ground make it seem as if the winnowing basket fell to earth and crashed, charring the dirt. By morning almost the entire village has gathered around to see it, gawking. Grace stands among the crowd, watching too, Mercy and Tamanda by her side.

"What do you think about this, sister?" Goodson, the bully of their class, calls out over his shoulder. He gives a snort of laughter as he looks at the object sitting immobile in the center of the throng, then turns back to Grace, sneering. "You don't get planes like this in America, do you?"

"Iwe choka!" Tamanda snarls, laying a proprietary hand on Grace's shoulder.

"Ignore him," Mercy tells Grace, staring disparagingly over at Goodson. "He is nothing."

Around them, Grace can hear the persistent murmur of the crowd. Clusters of people stand in front of the stall where Nyashali normally sells her bananas, hover around Nyabanda's shop, throng together at the small restaurant where Mr. Mnthali makes chicken and chips and where the men play bao underneath the shade of the large mango tree. All around Grace, heads are dipped slightly down, everyone deep in conversation.

"What will happen now?" Grace asks, turning to Tamanda and Mercy.

"I do not know," Mercy says. "I think we will write to the traditional authority. I think we will ask to hold a trial."

Grace can feel her sense of worry forming into lines along her face, pulling her shoulders in tight, clenching her hands.

“Gracie,” Tamanda moves in just behind Grace, so Grace can feel the warmth of her. “It will be fine. This is not a thing that needs worrying.” She speaks easily, her voice light.

“Mfiti,” mutters a man in front of them, staring intently at the witch’s airplane. Then he spits on the ground and walks away from the crowd. Out of the corner of her eye, Grace sees Mercy reach up tentatively and finger the small cross that hangs always from a thin gold chain around her neck.

*

“Explain witches to me again,” Grace says to Nyaphiri that night. She is standing in the pocket of warm air that surrounds the doorway of Nyaphiri’s kitchen. She is watching the smoke twist and curl through the air. She is holding the baby, Temwa, in her arms.

Nyaphiri is inside the kitchen. She sits atop a small wooden stool placed in front of the fire. She is watching the contents of a huge iron pot balanced on three large stones above the crackling blaze. She is stirring the nsima in the pot gently, with a long wooden spoon, monitoring the mixture of maize flour and water as it bubbles and steams.

“You know witches Gracie,” Nyaphiri says softly. “They are the ones who call on the powers of Satan to practice dark magic. They are jealous, so, with herbs or powders or magics they hurt people.” The whole time Nyaphiri talks she cooks, grabbing handfuls of maize flower from the winnowing basket beside her, adding them to the pot and stirring, forever stirring in her slow rhythmic way.

“And to fly,” Grace says, “the witches sit in a winnowing basket naked and use their magic to travel?”

Nyaphiri nods. In Grace's arms Temwa squirms slightly, and so Grace rubs her gently on the back, rocking her, murmuring soothing sounds. A few feet away, through the smudged glass of the living room window, Grace can see Tamanda and Mercy. They are sitting at a long wooden table, their profiles silhouetted by the light of a single oil lamp. Their heads are bent together in concentration. They are staring down at their books, studying.

"So why," Grace turns back to Nyaphiri while shifting her weight gently from one foot to the other, rocking Temwa, "if witches can fly anywhere they want, do they not just stay there?"

Nyaphiri shrugs. "Because they are naked," she replies.

"Well, why do they not pack clothes? Or steal them? Or beg them?"

Nyaphiri roots herself more deeply on the wooden stool below her, re-gripping the long spoon so she can stir the thickening nsima mixture more effectively. Underneath the pot, the tongues of the flame flicker and dance while embers jump up into the air. "Beg clothes?" Nyaphiri laughs. "And what would they say?"

Grace stares at her. "Anything," she says. "They are witches."

In answer, Nyaphiri simply shakes her head. In Grace's arms, Temwa gives a small, sharp cry which turns into a soft, hiccoughing sob. Nyaphiri looks up at the baby. "Ahn-ahn iwe," she says coaxingly. "Shuu, ashuu, shuu." Grace bends her knees gently, trying to bounce Temwa a bit. The baby shifts, then snuggles more tightly into Grace's shoulder, mouth open, drooling on Grace's shirt as she drifts back into sleep.

"Mwana kulira chomene sono," Nyaphiri observes.

"Chomene," Grace agrees on a sigh. "She is teething." Grace uses her free hand to motion to the tiny white dots poking through Temwa's pink gums. "She is only quiet when

she is held. We are taking turns with her, so that one can study." She motions to Tamanda through the window.

"It is good," Nyaphiri nods. Through the window of the house, Grace can see that Tamanda is now chewing on the end of her pencil. She only does this when she is very frustrated. Mercy is motioning to the textbook, trying to explain something. Against Grace's shoulder, Temwa blows a small spit bubble. Nyaphiri chuckles slightly. Turning back to the kitchen, Grace watches as Nyaphiri reaches both hands to the edge of the pot and lifts it, removing it carefully from the fire, setting it down on the ground beside her. She picks up a small wooden spoon from a hook on the wall, this one wide and shallow, and uses it to scoop the nsima out from the pot and into small patties, which she places in a large warming bowl that sits on the floor of the kitchen.

"Mercy said there might be a trial," Grace says. "For the witches."

"Yes," Nyaphiri nods. "It is only right to hold a trial."

"For pretending witchcraft?" Grace asks. That is the law, she knows. You cannot be tried for witchcraft, which is not a crime, but you can be tried for pretending witchcraft, which is a disturbance of the peace.

"For pretending witchcraft, yes."

On Grace's shoulder, Temwa continues to breathe deeply, and Grace keeps a hand on the baby's back, rubbing gently. "I cannot imagine anyone in this village is a witch," Grace says.

"No," Nyaphiri shakes her head, and she motions to the girls in the house. "You see only the good in everyone, you three." And to Grace her voice sounds strangely pained. In front of Nyaphiri, the warming dish is now full of neat nsima patties. "Can you go inside?" Nyaphiri asks Grace. "Let the girls know that supper is ready?"

Grace nods, and holds Temwa tight against her shoulder as she walks into the house. Both Mercy and Tamanda are still bent over their books, they have the radio on softly in the background, and from its speaker Grace hears the three-tone chime that heralds the reading of headlines on the BBC World Service. Grace reaches over and easily flicks the radio off. Tamanda and Mercy look up. "Dinner?" Mercy asks. Grace nods. Tamanda stands, and inclines her head to Temwa.

"Should I take her?" Tamanda asks.

"If you want," Grace says. "But I can keep her for a bit longer. She seems fairly settled now." Tamanda nods.

"We are going to have to pray," Mercy tells them. She motions out to Nyaphiri in the kitchen. "Amama will have us pray. Before dinner. To make sure we are safe from the witches."

"Palije suzgo," Tamanda says, waving her hand as if brushing away any concerns. "If she wants, we will pray."

As they walk back to the kitchen Grace shifts Temwa slightly in her arms, and is struck once again by how acutely tiny the baby is. Temwa turns, nestling her head in tight under Grace's chin, so the air from her breath just brushes against Grace's skin.

*

The next morning, before they go out to gather wood, Grace checks Tamanda's chitenje. "Is that good? Does that fit?" she asks, pulling gently on the bolt of cloth tied around Tamanda's back and knotted in the center of her chest.

"Yes," Tamanda answers, shifting experimentally back and forth, while Temwa, sleeping in the chitenje, is nestled against the curve of her spine. "Yes I think it is alright."

The cloth is tight, but no matter how many times Tamanda carries Temwa, Grace can never shake the feeling that the baby will somehow fall.

"It will be fine," Mercy says gently.

Tamanda nods. They each have an old faded chitenje wrapped tight around their waist to make sure their skirts are not stained by wood dust, and in their hands, they each carry pieces of cloth twisted up in a ring that they will set on their heads as protection against the wood.

They take a winding path down out of the village into the forest. The rains are late this year, and so the ground beneath them is firm and made up of cracked tessellations. In the air, Grace can taste the slight overtones of ash — left over from the brush fires that the men have been lighting for the past few weeks to clear the bush and prepare the ground for planting.

"How was the studying last night?" Grace asks as they wind their way down the path. She poses the question in Chitumbuka. She is more careful to speak the language now. Now that their school is all in English, and she speaks with her parents in English, being with Tamanda and Mercy is sometimes the only Chitumbuka she can get.

"It was just okay," Tamanda answers.

"Same same," says Mercy. "Just okay."

"Bodza iwe," Tamanda laughs. "I know you already are studying some of the material from form two. You are advancing!"

Mercy does not respond.

"It is this maths," Tamanda says. "I hate it." This is not the case for Grace. For her, there is an order to maths. She looks down at the page and it just makes sense; angles, sums, equations, it is all so easy. It is literature she cannot stand. She likes books, but not this trying

to read a story and then tear it apart, analyzing who did what and why, trying to find this "symbolism" to ferret out secret meanings in the text. No.

Around them, the fields that lie on the outskirts of the village have been formed into neat ridges and furrows, awaiting both seeds and rains. Grace stares over at them, nervously, trying to divine from the dirt whether it will be a good planting, a good harvest. The rains are late this year. It happens sometimes, that the rains are late, but it is always unsettling. Throughout the village now, there is a vague tension that comes of waiting. Grace knows that even though it is fading into the past, every time the rains do not come people remember the drought and then the famine of ten years ago. Grace's father has said that though a drought may come, a famine will not happen again, that the hunger was caused because the government was made to sell off its food stores, and because aid groups did not listen when people told them that food was running short, that they should send help. The aid groups did send food eventually, but by then it was already too late.

"They would listen now," her father says, a strange look in his eyes, but Grace is not so sure.

Grace, Mercy and Tamanda stop at the bore hole halfway to the forest, taking turns pumping the water so that they can each stand at the spout and cup their hands to catch the water to drink, and to pour over their head and neck.

"Kuthenta," Mercy says, exhaling heavily as they head back down toward the forest again.

"Enya," Tamanda nods. "Was it so hot last year?"

"No," Grace says. "It feels like it has been hotter, these last few years."

The clearing where they are gathering firewood is at the bottom of a small hill, with trees that are not too tall, and have large branches and are evenly spaced out. Already, there

are some sticks on the ground, so they start there, picking up the small branches that are scattered around the ground first, placing them into three neat piles. When these have all been gathered, they reach up into the trees to break off larger branches, using their weight to bend the branches down, to snap them at the point where they join with the tree, twisting them, wrenching at the cracks until they break free. Then they place the branches in three neat piles, trying to make sure each pile is even.

"They have set a date now, for the witch's trial," Mercy says.

"Enya?" Tamanda asks.

"Eh. Chisulo. Not the one which is just coming, but the one after that."

"Will you go?" Grace asks, walking gently around to pick up the remaining branches.

"Ine yayi," Tamanda shakes her head. "This one keeps me so busy," she motions to Temwa. "Any time I have I must be studying."

"You are true," Mercy nods. "Gracie?"

"The Saturday after next?" Grace thinks about this. "I cannot. We are going to Nyika then."

"Ahn-ahn! Vacation!" Mercy exclaims.

Grace nods. "Pachoko," she says. "Amama convinced Mr. Nyirenda to tell Adada our help is needed for the wildlife survey so that he would take time off from the hospital. He is…" Grace tries to think of how to describe the expression she sees so often now on her father's face. "Always tired," she finishes, inadequately.

"Eeesh," Mercy hisses through clenched teeth.

"Ndithu," Tamanda nods. "He works too much, that one." She is peeling thin strips of bark off the smaller branches and then wrapping them around the piles of branches on the ground, she is lashing them together.

“It will be good for him to go away.” Grace waits until Tamanda finishes tying the last strip around the group of branches, and then the three of them stand their piles of wood upright, placing the tight spirals of fabric on their heads. They bend down so that their cloth-covered heads are pressed firmly to the middle of each pile, with their arms wrapped around the outside of the branches. Despite the presence of the wrapped chitenje as protection, Grace feels the rough ridges of the wood against her head, grips the sides of her pile tightly and stands slowly upright, the branches balanced above her. When they are upright all three start back up the mountain path.

Mercy and Tamanda can balance any number of things on their heads without using their arms — piles of tomatoes, buckets of water, bunches of books even. Despite having lived here for so long Grace still lacks this skill. She tries though, even now. She can manage walking hands-free for barely a second before the wood pile slides sideways on her head, so eventually she gives up. Instead, she places both her hands on her head, holding the wood in place and listening to the sound of the girls’ footsteps on the ground, the sound of their breath, the sound of the baby stirring, just slightly, on Tamanda’s back.

As Temwa moves more in the chitenje Tamanda reaches one hand behind her and gently pats the baby’s back softly, muttering “shhh, shhh, ashhhu”. Temwa quiets again and yet Grace can hear her the entire walk home, the baby’s quick breath coming even against Tamanda’s shoulder blades.

*

“Denham’s Bustard,” Grace says to Mr. Nyirenda, training her binoculars on the thin neck and angular head sticking up above the tall grass. “I am not sure if it’s in Malawi or Zambia though.” She turns the focus dial and scans around the bird. They are in the bottom

righthand corner of their quadrant, at the part of the Nyika Plateau near the border between Zambia and Malawi, so that Grace cannot tell which country the bird is in.

"It does not matter," Mr. Nyirenda says, training his own binoculars on the bird. "It is in the park, so we count it." He pulls out a notebook, licks the base of his pen, and writes 'Denham's Bustard' into a new row.

Grace beams, and then takes her hat off, wiping the back of her arm across her forehead. The sun, which was barely peaking out above the horizon when they set out for the count in the morning, has now risen halfway up the sky. Grace's long trousers, which she wears under a chitenje and which mercifully kept her warm in the early hours of the morning, have begun to get uncomfortable.

"Maji?" Mr. Nyirenda offers her a water bottle and Grace drinks from it gratefully. "Soon there will be rains," Mr. Nyirenda says, pointing to the low white clouds tinged with grey that have started to crowd the horizon.

"I hope so," Grace nods. For now though, it is strange to be up on the plateau in the dry season, where the air feels so heavy, and the hills that are normally unending green are instead a drab shade of brown. They are following the road now, walking in between the two shallow ruts carved by trucks passing through, day after day. There are no zebra around them, which Mr. Nyirenda says is normal for the dry season but which to Grace is strange, because she is used to seeing so many herds wandering in clusters all over the park. There is a roan antelope off to their left though. Grace can see it standing on a slight hill, close enough for her to note the black and white mask of its face, the rough ridges of its horns. There have been duiker too, visible every now and again off in the distance, small smudges grazing, or running in that strange hopping manner that they have. The road has curved around again

now, and Grace thinks they have reached the point where the road itself serves as the border between Zambia and Malawi.

"Do you want to see something funny?" Grace asks Mr. Nyirenda, who nods, and gestures for her to proceed. She does so, leaping to the left. "Zambia!" She calls out, from a patch of earth that is technically part of the other country. She then leaps back to the right. "Malawi!" She says, having landed in the country once again. "Zambia!" She jumps to the left. "Malawi." She calls out, jumping back to the right.

"You travel between countries so quickly," Mr. Nyirenda laughs softly as she returns to the road. "How was the trip?"

"Oh marvelous," Grace says, affecting a British accent. "Lovely weather, smooth travel, and I saw so many things. I would have preferred to spend more time in each country though, you know?"

"I do, yes." Mr. Nyirenda nods in mock seriousness.

Grace laughs then, before catching a bit of movement out of the corner of her eye. "Pipit," she whispers softly, holding her binoculars up with one hand, and pointing to where the bird is with the other. "I can't tell what type."

Beside her, Mr. Nyirenda is quiet, lifting his own binoculars to his eye. "Striped Pipit," he says finally. "Do you see how the stripes go all the way down the stomach? And if you look carefully, very carefully, you can just see the yellow on the edge of the wings."

Grace focuses and sees the stripes on the stomach, but she can't tell if she sees a tint of yellow, or just imagines it there.

"I need better binoculars," she mutters, as Mr. Nyirenda marks the pipit down and they continue back to the motola.

“Still, you have a good eye,” Mr. Nyirenda says. He smiles. “Do you know what the British call birds like that?”

“No, what?”

“Little brown jobbies,” he throws back his head and laughs, and Grace joins him.

“Little brown jobbies,” she repeats, a gurgle of laughter at the end. “What does that even mean?”

“I do not know, but we had a group of British here just before the cold season last year. They were, what do they call themselves? Let me see. It was a very strange name. Oh yes! Twitchers. Because they twitch when they see the birds. Very funny. Very odd. But nice.”

“That is good,” Grace says. In the distance, she thinks she sees an eland, but it’s hard to tell. They are the only animal here that scares her, eland. Well, eland and leopard, but the leopard is only out at night and Grace has never seen it, even though she’s gone on several evening drives. So the eland are really the only animal that are scary. They are so big. This one, though, is far enough away that Grace stays relaxed. Beside her, Mr. Nyirenda is walking slowly, easily, his hands in his pockets, and Grace realizes they must have exited the quadrant now, that their counting is done for the day.

“I hear you have witches in Mzuri village,” Mr. Nyirenda says.

“Yes,” Grace tells him. “It is strange.”

“I imagine it is not pleasant,” Mr. Nyirenda says. “Do you have witches in America?”

“I do not know,” Grace tells him. “I asked my mother the other day and she said, ‘Well, not like they do here, exactly, but I would not say no’.” Grace wrinkles her nose. “I am not quite sure what that means.” From beside her, Mr. Nyirenda does not comment. In front of them, Grace can see the outline of the motola waiting for them, sitting on top of the hill.

She can see John in the motola, waving to them, a small figure at this distance, but still she waves back.

"Vulture," Mr. Nyirenda says suddenly, and Grace freezes, looks up and sees it, in the lower branches of the tree that sits at the edge of the forest.

"Lappet-faced vulture," she breathes. Grace knows that many people do not like vultures, think they are ugly, but she is not of their number. Now, staring at the huge bird, at its curved beak, its purple and pink face, its collar of feathers around its bare neck, she thinks once again that vultures are, in fact, quite beautiful. It is rare to see a vulture like this, so close. Normally she sees them wheeling so high up in the sky, in a flock.

"Awesome," she says, uttering the word in the sense of its original meaning. Impressive. Daunting. Inspiring great admiration. Looking over at Mr. Nyirenda, she sees that he is smiling, but that his face is slightly sad. She knows they are disappearing, vultures. Poachers. Cars. Companies buying up their land. They are such a rare sight now.

"Vultures are so good," she tells Mr. Nyirenda. "Why do we not protect them more?"

Mr. Nyirenda shrugs. "People are not always good," he says to Grace, sighing.

"I wish we were better," Grace tells him.

"As do I," Mr. Nyirenda says, and then he kicks a stone that lies in front of them lightly, so that it bounces a few times before rolling gently off the path.

*

Grace is sitting between Mercy and Tamanda at the long wooden table in Nyaphiri's house when she hears the first drops of rain on the ceiling. They are not much, just a small drizzle, but still it is a relief that they have finally arrived. Grace puts this into the letter she is writing to her Aunt Meredith. Beside her, Mercy and Tamanda are still pouring over their notes from class, intently focused as they read by the soft candlelight. Nyaphiri sits at the head of the

table, marking tests from her Standard Three students at the primary school, while Temwa is sleeping in the corner, curled up on a woven mat with a small blanket tucked in around her. Though she knows Nyaphiri wants better, Grace loves this house. She loves the sound of rain on the thatched roof, loves the spackled mud walls, loves working by the light of the candles with Mercy and Tamanda.

"We are all," Grace begins her next sentence to her aunt in a neat cursive hand, then pauses. She thinks about the village, and the witches' trials. She listens to the sounds from the roof, as it is repeatedly struck by rain. "Fine," she finishes the sentence, before writing on about the recent trip to Nyika, and the walks she and John went on, and the flowers and wildlife they saw.

"Love you," she writes at the bottom of the letter, underneath her name. "Miss you" she writes, underlining the words three times. In front of her, the candles flicker slightly. Next to her, Mercy and Tamanda are beginning to stretch, to shut their books, to pack their things away for the evening.

"We will need to pray before you and Tamanda walk home," Nyaphiri tells Grace. She is marking papers from the primary school. "For your safe journey back."

"Because there could be witches?" Grace asks. Nyaphiri nods. Grace folds the letter up into even thirds, then slides it into an envelope, licking the glue along the edge before sealing the flap down. "I thought we were finished with evening prayers," she says. "I thought there was a trial. I thought all the witches were gone."

Nyaphiri shakes her head gently and looks up at Grace from her marking. "There are always witches," she says.

Enough

Aunt Meredith had cancer.

Their mom tells Grace and John this while they are all at dinner at the Sunbird hotel in Lilongwe. They are sitting outside in the courtyard, at a table in the shade of a broad umbrella surrounded by tall palms, an ornamental fish pond, and red hibiscus bushes in full bloom. Grace is eating pizza that was cooked in a real wood fired oven, the melting cheese laid on so thick that some of it stretches down in thin strings as she lifts each slice from the plate. At her mother's news though, Grace sets her slice of pizza down and stares across the table.

"Why didn't you tell us?" she asks. Next to her, the hotel fountain bubbles pleasantly, circulating water through the fishpond.

"I did tell you," her mother said. "I told you just now."

"But why didn't you tell us earlier?" John, who is not usually one to press a point, asks softly.

"Because I didn't want you worrying," their mother says. She is still calmly eating her grilled chicken, cutting easily into the soft white flesh. "She had a very mild form of breast cancer, they caught it early, and she responded well to treatment the entire time. There wasn't really any reason to tell you." Grace opens her mouth, ready to protest once again, but her father shoots her a look that says to drop it and so, reluctantly, Grace closes her mouth again, goes back to eating her pizza in silence.

In the evening though, after they've all gone to their respective rooms for the night, Grace slips down into the business center. Even though it is the cold season now, the hotel has the air conditioning on full blast. It is so cold inside the building that Grace needs a

sweatshirt to sit comfortably in the business center. Grace clicks on the Netscape icon, and waits while the internet slowly loads. Once the browser is on screen, she searches for breast cancer, clicking on the first article to appear, from the American Cancer Society, and then moving slowly from hyperlink to hyperlink across the internet, reading article after article after article, until she looks up at the large clock over the computers and sees that more than two hours have passed. When she arrives back at the hotel room, she throws herself on the twin bed occupied by John, who is sitting up and reading *Dune.* She knocks the novel from his hands, koala hugging him over the covers.

"Jeez Grace," he exclaims, glaring at her. But after a minute he pulls one arm out from under the covers and gently hugs her back.

*

It is cold in Maine when they land. It is cold and Grace is under-dressed. Back in Malawi, where it is still the cold season, Grace thought she had prepared appropriately for bad weather. She forgot that in Maine it can rain any time, and that this adds to the chill. Now, they are caught in a slight misting rain that falls mostly sideways, penetrating even the side of the airport overhang under which they rest. As a result, even though the temperature is still in the upper-forties, it seems like it is freezing. The combination of this and the clouds, and the wind, and the slight fog in the air leave Grace shivering, her teeth clattering hard together as she stands with her family on the cement concourse outside of the arrivals lounge, waiting for Aunt Meredith to pull up in her car.

"It is so nice to be back," Grace's mom says, smiling as they huddle under the airport's overhang. "I love Mzuri, but I just miss it here sometimes, you know?" She gestures to the drab day around them as if it is something miraculous. She is eating goldfish from a carton she picked up at the airport store, and she is smiling. "There is something about the air

here," she says, inhaling deeply. Grace does not mimic her, already bothered by the slight scent of gasoline that wafts over them with the breeze. "You know?"

"It is cold," John says dourly. "Why do we ever come here in September? It is always cold and it is always cloudy and it either rains or snows. Do you know what they don't have in Mzuri right now? Clouds. Rains. Snow." He is standing hunched over, his elbows pulled in tight to his sides, his shoulders raised almost to his ears, and he looks accusingly at their mother.

"That is true," their mom says. "But don't you find that there's something kind of nice about cloudy days. Something almost reassuring?" John glowers, but doesn't say anything. Out of the corner of her eye, Grace sees Aunt Meredith's car, one of the new white hybrids. She can see Aunt Meredith in the driver's seat, smiling and tapping her hands on the steering wheel in time to some tune that must be playing on the radio.

She has short hair now, Aunt Meredith. It looks great but Grace knows, realizes with a punch to her gut, that this is because all her hair must have fallen out when she was undergoing chemotherapy, and it is just now growing back. She doesn't seem sick though, Aunt Meredith. She helps them load their suitcases into the car and fires off a steady stream of questions once they are all packed in and heading down the highway toward home — how's the village doing, how are they feeling, how was the flight. Everyone smiles at her from their respective seats, and answers each query in bright tones.

"Just look at all these colors," Grace's mom breathes as they drive along the road. "I thought we were going to miss it this year. I thought it would be too late, but no." And it is true that even though some branches are bare for the most part the trees are lit up spectacularly, even in the dim light, their leaves an array of brilliant red and gold and purple. "Fall," she sighs. "That's what I miss most of all in Malawi, the feel of it, the look of it,

just… fall. What do you guys think?" She looks over at Grace and John, who stare back, mute. "What?" She asks.

"Ice cream." John says. "I miss ice cream the most."

"Nice cheeses," Grace nods. "I mean like the really, really fancy stuff you put on snooty crackers."

"Obviously," John says, still staring at their mother.

"Like, duh Mom," Grace echoes, before staring back out the window.

"Well excuse me," their mother mutters.

By the side of the highway Grace can see now a huge mall. It wasn't there before, the last time they were home. Grace distinctly remembers that there was a huge field there. "That's new, isn't it?" she asks.

"Not really," her aunt says, brow furrowed. "Been there for maybe a bit over two years now." She pauses. "So I mean yes, I guess for you it would be new."

*

Aunt Meredith has a cat now. Her name is Georgie and she is a calico cat, mostly white with mottled patches of orange and black fur on her face and orange and black segments on her back. Grace pets her in the morning as she sits in front of the fireplace with Aunt Meredith, a small fire burning in the grate, John and her mother and father sleeping upstairs.

"She's very friendly," Grace remarks as Georgie rubs her face against Grace's hand. When Grace pets her, Georgie purrs very loudly.

"She wasn't when I first saw her," Aunt Meredith says. "When I went to the shelter she would hiss at anyone who got too close to her cage and I thought two feisty girls like us belong together, but then it turns out she's a big old softie." Georgie purrs some more, and

then wanders over to Aunt Meredith's lap, making muffins on her legs before spinning in a circle twice and settling down.

"Enough about the perfect cat," Aunt Meredith says, petting Georgie absent-mindedly. "Tell me everything that's happened since you were last here."

"I have photos," Grace says. "Do you want to see photos?"

"I would love to see photos." So Grace runs upstairs and grabs the bag full of pictures she had developed before they flew here, when they were staying in Lilongwe. She takes them out of their envelopes and begins showing them, roll by roll, to her aunt. She has a series of official photos of her form two class, everyone all serious and standing in front of the school building. She has photos of the women's group at church, and of the wildlife club, processing honey from the hives. For Christmas this year Grace's parents got her a waterproof camera, so now Grace can show Aunt Meredith all the pictures she has taken from under water in the lake - photos of the rocks and the clear blue waters, and the schools of vibrantly-colored fish, all flashes of bright blues and purples and orange.

She has a whole roll of just her and Mercy and Tamanda. There are photos of them on the beach by the lake, photos of them cooking, photos of them studying after school. Aunt Meredith flips through picture after picture, slowly, staring at each one, letting Grace cut in every now and again to explain what was going on in a particular moment. Then she gets to the envelope that is mostly photos of Temwa. Temwa giggling, Temwa playing, Temwa making faces, Temwa looking adorable while sleeping. She can run now, Temwa, so there are photos of her outside, running around, chasing after bubbles that John blew for her. Grace's favorite photo is one where you can't see John, or the bubbles, all you can see is Temwa looking up and slightly away from the camera, hands reaching, the whole picture slightly blurred by the haze of the bright sunlight.

“She’s so big,” Aunt Meredith remarks, flipping through the photos. “She is growing up so fast.”

“I know,” Grace says sadly. On the one hand, it is fun seeing Temwa grow up, seeing her personality emerge, but on the other hand, it is strange how big she is already, how much she can do.

“You have quite an exciting life you know,” Aunt Meredith says, pausing on a photo of Grace standing among the tall tall grasses of the Nyika Plateau, pointing to a herd of zebra in the distance.

“It is really fun,” Grace says, looking down at a photo of her and Mercy and Tamanda splashing around with Temwa in the pool at the base of Livingstonia falls. “I wish I could have been here though, when you were sick.”

Aunt Meredith reaches over, and puts and arm around Grace’s shoulders, drawing her in close. “Sometimes so did I,” Aunt Meredith tells her. “But I knew I would see you this fall. And I knew if I called your mother and asked you would all come back, and that was enough.”

Grace wonders if it was actually enough, or if this is just something you are supposed to say.

“I was thinking that maybe I would come over to you guys one of these days,” Aunt Meredith says now, flipping through some more photographs. “Come see some of these awesome things you keep showing me. How would you feel about that?”

“That would be the best,” Grace replies, and it would, it really would.

*

“Do you want to sing *Nine to Five*?” John asks. He’s paging slowly through an enormous binder filled with page after page of song lists.

"Ehhh," Grace shakes her head, and then detaches a small section of tortilla chips, cheese, refried beans, guacamole, sour cream and salsa from the pile of nachos in front of her, shoving it all into her mouth.

"I think *Nine to Five* could be really fun," John says. He's gotten very into folk songs lately, John. He has started listening to albums on their father's old record player, playing Lucinda Williams and Brandi Carlisle and even a Dolly Parton over and over and over again.

"It could be," Aunt Meredith says, taking a sip from the enormous drink in front of her. Grace isn't sure exactly what it is, but it's pinkish-red, half frozen, and on the side of the glass sits a strawberry with a tiny pair of plastic sunglasses stuck onto it. "But do we maybe want something with a bit of oomph in it? Something a bit, I don't know, rock and roll?" She takes another sip of her drink.

There is a group of women onstage, five of them. They are young but not so young, maybe four years older than Grace. They are a bit drunk, Grace thinks. As they stand looking at the karaoke screen they are half singing, half laughing to *It's Five O'Clock Somewhere.*

"What about James Taylor?" John asks, turning another page in the giant binder. "Do we maybe want to sing something James Taylor?" Grace shovels more nachos into her mouth, revelling in the explosion of salt that breaks across her tongue.

"Nosh nuff oomph," she says, mouth still full.

"Ew Grace gross," John tells her, wiping a bit of chip off his cheek.

"Sorry," Grace swallows hard and downs the nachos. "Not enough oomph." She enunciates.

"Alright," John says and flips a few pages forward.

On stage, the girls finish up their song, and bow while the audience in the bar claps and laughs. They have painted nails, Grace notices. Earlier today, Aunt Meredith suggested

she and Grace go get manicures, down at the mall but Grace declined. The mall is odd. It has three floors full of shops and when you walk in there's a mix of so many strange smells — perfume and leather and the riot of scents from the food court. There are two glass elevators in the mall, and two up escalators and two down escalators for every floor. Whenever they go there Grace gets distracted by the overly bright lights, the sound of voices echoing off the hard walls, and all the people clutching multiple shopping bags as they rush around.

Sometimes there are boys wearing loose jeans, in the mall. It's the fashion here now. Sometimes the jeans slip so far down Grace can see their underwear, more than just the waistband. Even though when she returns home she and Tamanda and Mercy giggle when they whisper about the loose-jean-boys late at night when they are alone together, actually seeing them makes Grace feel strange, in a bad way. She doesn't like the nail salon either, really. It smells strange, like chemicals, and it feels weird to have someone massaging her hands, filing her nails. But she likes coming here to the bar. There is something nice about it. Cozy. And it is fun to sing karaoke.

There is only a single person on stage now, someone who introduces themselves as Sam. Sam has short hair and wears a loose t-shirt, loose jeans, and speaks softly, sounds kind of shy. The crowd of the bar talks louder now, laughs sharply, so that Sam's voice is mostly drowned out, and Grace feels bad that this is what it will be like when Sam is singing, everyone talking, no one really able to hear.

"What about *Don't Stop Believing*?" Aunt Meredith asks. The girls from the stage are sitting at a table a few spaces away from them now, laughing, talking, drinking.

"*Don't Stop Believing* could be good," John says.

The girls from the stage are all wearing different colored sweaters with the word "Bowdoin" written across the front in a curling font. Bowdoin is one of the colleges Grace is

looking at. She got a brochure for it, about two months back. She slowly flipped through pages of photographs of tall, imposing, red brick buildings, of snow-covered landscapes, of wooded areas lit by the bright colors of fall. It was all very pretty but after looking through it once she shut the brochure and tucked it under her bed and hasn't looked at it since.

"But what about the high notes?" Grace asks.

On stage, Sam has started singing. Grace picks up the strain of the Rolling Stones' *Wild Horses*, hears Sam's voice, tremulous at first, but then picking up strength. There's a bit more of a hush around the bar now, and the people who were smiling and laughing aren't smiling and laughing so much any more, they're just staring at the stage. As the song continues, the chatter around the bar gradually dies, until it's a low murmur, and the words and the notes and the tune of the song fills the room. Sam's voice is low and mournful, but with a thread of steel running through it that everyone in the bar can somehow feel.

"What about the high notes?" Aunt Meredith asks.

Grace looks over at the girls from Bowdoin college at the table, tries to imagine herself as one of them, out at a karaoke bar for a night with her friends, but somehow she can't. Looking over at Aunt Meredith sipping her drink, with her chic short haircut, Grace imagines her in the cold rooms of a hospital, alone or maybe with a friend. She gets a feeling that comes to her more and more frequently now, which is that her life is turning out to be very different from what she thought it would be.

"The high notes are really difficult," Grace says now. "We will sound screechy singing them. We won't be any good."

On the stage Sam is finishing up, and there's a rare silence in the bar in the wake of the song.

“We will be good enough,” Aunt Meredith says softly, and covers Grace’s hand with her own.

Then the bar is applauding madly and Sam blushes a bit, and then walks off stage. Next there is a group of guys singing a Backstreet Boys song and laughing, and then an older couple who sings *I Got You Babe* and then a bit after that Grace and John and Aunt Meredith themselves get up and sing. They belt out *Don’t Stop Believing* in voices that are as loud as they are off key. And the singing makes them hoarse, and it makes them tired, and when they get to the part with the high notes their voices do indeed become screechy and sound a bit like cut glass. Still they sing loudly, and with joy, and all together. And Aunt Meredith was right, Grace will realize afterward. Sometimes that is good enough.

LOSS

The morning of the funeral, Grace stands in front of the mirror in her room, and tries to arrange her hair into a perfect braid. She stands in the light of a single candle, staring into the glass, and sees all the braid's flaws - the flyaway wisps of hair, the loose weaving of the strands - and undoes the latest attempt, shaking her head so that her hair falls free and she is ready to start again.

Beside her, the glass coca-cola bottle that serves as a stand for the candle is covered in wax. She has let too many candles drip down without cleaning the bottle. After this candle she will need to pry the excess wax off, to place it in the small basket in the kitchen so that it can be used to help start the morning fire. At the back of her head, she holds the strands of hair in her hands and weaves them, over under, over under again. She holds the braid at the bottom and then turns, staring at it in the mirror. Still too loose, still too many flyaway wisps of hair. She exhales sharply in frustration and lets the hair go, shakes it free, and takes a deep breath. She will try just once again.

Outside her door, there is a small cough, and a gentle 'odi'.

"Fikani," Grace calls, and Tamanda enters the room. "I know," Grace says, before Tamanda can speak. "I know, we're going to be late, I'm sorry, I'm trying. But I can't get my hair right." She motions to the tangled mess that floats around her head, and feels her eyes prickle. Tamanda will understand though. Propriety is important. It shows respect. Grace has been very careful this morning. Her shirt is cleaned and perfectly ironed, her chitenje is immaculately tied, even her shoes shine. But her hair. She cannot get her hair to behave, and a messy braid will signal such disrespect.

“I keep trying. I just… I can’t.” There is a slight pressure squeezing her throat, her chest, like the feeling when an airplane takes off, before your ears pop.

“Palije suzgo,” Tamanda says softly, and she reaches over and takes the brush from on top of the dresser, and runs it gently through Grace’s hair. “I will do it.” It has become hard to take in air, so all Grace can do is nod. “Okay,” Tamanda says, gently pulling Grace’s hair into three even strands. “Okay.” She braids them over under, over under, tight, but not so tight it hurts. “There. Chiweme?” Her hands resting on Grace’s shoulders, she turns Grace slightly sideways to the mirror, so that Grace can see the perfect braid, falling down to just between her shoulders.

“Do you think I should coil it on my head?” Grace asks. “I have some pins…”

“No,” Tamanda squeezes her shoulder gently. “You are just okay. Like this. It is good enough.”

“Okay,” Grace nods, takes a deep breath, and the air comes in a bit easier. Tamanda reaches over, and takes one of Grace’s hands in both of hers, chafing it slightly, rocking it back and forth. “Makola?” she asks.

“Enya,” Grace tries for a watery smile, and makes it about halfway.

“Yewo. Tieni?”

“Tieni.” So they step outside into the day. To join their families. To walk over to Madam Nyirenda’s house. To attend Mr. Nyirenda’s funeral.

It is bright outside, so bright that Grace has to tip her head down slightly as they walk, to shade her eyes from the sun. It is the end now, of the rainy season, and around them, the world is a mass of green. The grasses grow high and tall on either side of the road, the corn stalks flower in the fields, and the trees are lush and dense with leaves. They walk together in a group, Grace, Mercy and Tamanda at the front; Chimwemwe, Nyaphiri and Grace’s mother

next — Temwa asleep in a chitenje on Chimwemwe's back — and John bringing up the rear, holding hands with their father. He has grown so fast these past few years, John. He is in his final year of primary school now, and it won't be long, Grace thinks, before he is taller than their father. Yet today he looks like a child again, dressed up in his formal black suit, holding their father's hand. The sun is still low in the sky, this early, so that as they walk their shadows trail, long behind them.

The adults are speaking about the election. It is not until next year, but already the candidates have begun their campaigns.

"She cannot win," Chimwemwe is saying of their incumbent president, Joyce Banda. "Look how they tried to stop her from becoming president after Bingu's death. She, the vice president! She will not receive enough votes."

"Because she is a woman?" Grace's mother asks, to which Chimwemwe just snorts.

"Because she is not a Chewa. Show me the man who will vote against his own tribe."

"So you think it will be Peter wa Mutharika then?" Grace's mother says.

"Ahn-ahn," Nyaphiri tsks. "Will we put in place the brother of our former president? He was full of corruption, that one."

"Do you think he was like that when he started?" Grace's father asks. "Bingu I mean, not Peter. I remember I thought his policies good during his first term. I thought he was a good president. A good man."

"Me, I also thought this," Chimwemwe agrees. "But his second term…"

"Ahn-ahn," Nyaphiri voices her disapproval again. "Something happens to these people when they gain power. They start off so good, and then…"

"What of this Lazarus Chakwera?" Grace's mother asks. "He who just resigned from Assemblies of God to lead the MCP? Do you think he has a chance?"

Last night, before they knew of Mr. Nyirenda's death, Grace and John and their mother and father sat around the table in their house playing cards. They were playing gin rummy and John was winning and they were all smiling and laughing when the knock came on their door.

"I do not know," Nyaphiri says. "The MCP, it has always been powerful. It can be that maybe he has a chance."

Grace's father answered the door, to find Mr. Chikoza, the headmaster, standing on the other side. It was later in the evening, when the knock came, but it was still not so unusual, to receive a visitor at that time. It happens that people will sometimes come after dinner, especially if the moon is full and the night is warm and it seems like a good time to talk and have a drink. And so Grace's father greeted Mr. Chikoza warmly, and was about to invite him in for a Carlsberg and maybe to join the game of cards. Then maybe it was that he saw the expression on Mr. Chikoza's face, or maybe it was that the man was standing there, his hat held between his hands, but Grace remembers that her father became silent.

"Do you think he is a good man, this Lazarus?" Grace's mother asks.

"He speaks of gender equality," Chimwemwe says.

"He speaks too of being against corruption," Nyaphiri adds.

"They all say they are against corruption," Chimwemwe scoffs. "But what do they do? What do they do?"

"Sir," Mr. Chikoza had said to Grace's father, but looking back at Grace's mother and at Grace and John as well. "I regret to inform you that our dear friend, Mr. Nyirenda, has gone."

Grace remembers that her mother gasped and said, "Oh my God," and raised her hand halfway to her mouth before just kind of freezing there. John leaned his head down onto the

table, and then covered his ears with his arms. Grace drew her knees up to her chest, so that she was curled up very tight, into a little ball.

Her father though, just stood in the doorway, frozen.

"Gone," he finally said to Mr. Chikoza. "Gone where?"

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Grace hears the funeral before she sees it. The sound of people keening, singing, wailing, crying floats down from the town towards them. This is a difference between funerals in America and funerals in Malawi. In America, when they buried Grace's grandfather when Grace was still small, Grace remembers sitting up straight against the stiff wooden back of the pew, remembers the stillness around her. And it was okay, that stillness, but it is nice too, here, to feel the grief of everyone coalescing around you, to know your feelings are shared.

As they approach Grace can smell burning, can make out the small puffs of grey smoke from the large fires over which the food for the funeral will even now be cooking. This is another difference between America and the village. Here they will cook during the funeral, and in the weeks to come they will cook for Madam Nyirenda still, as around dinnertime she will find herself invited to a rotating set of kitchens. Grace remembers that after her grandfather died people in the neighborhood all brought Tupperwares full of casseroles which they left in the freezer and in the fridge. But then all the people left and Grace's grandmother was just in her house, alone, and Grace and her family flew back here and then six months later Grace's grandmother, too, was gone.

"Alright, let's go," her father says, and he sort of pauses for a second, and then squares his shoulders and together they all walk through the courtyard to the Nyirendas' house. Inside, Madam Nyirenda is sitting in a large chair, flanked on either side by her

children, with family members Grace does not recognize behind her. They all crouch down as they approach Madame Nyirenda so they are at eye level with her.

"Asisi," Grace's father says, his voice half caught in his throat. "Pephani. Pephani chomene." He reaches out and takes one of Madam Nyirenda's hands in both of his, rocking it slightly back and forth in a gesture of grief and comfort, while also passing her a 500 kwacha note to contribute to the condolence pot which will help to pay for the funeral, and for upcoming expenses in the wake of Mr. Nyirenda's loss. As they exit the house, they stare out at the division throughout the yard, the men sitting to the right, the women to the left.

"I guess this is where we leave you ladies," Grace's father says. Beside him, John has stepped closer to his side, is almost trembling. "We will see you tomorrow." He gives them a slight wave as he and John head out to where the men are sitting, while Grace and her mother go towards the women. Grace notices that her father has his arm around John's shoulders, and is squeezing tight.

By silent consensus, their group walks to the far edge of the compound, where they roll out two woven bamboo mats under a mango tree. They sit together on them, adults on one mat, children on the other. Chimwemwe takes the sleeping Temwa off her back and hands her to Tamanda, and the child stirs slightly in the passing, then wakes so that when Tamanda finally takes her she sits up on her mother's lap, leaning against Tamanda's chest and blinking slowly.

Grace sits between Tamanda and Mercy on the mat, crossing her ankles carefully underneath her and leaning to one side so her knees are discreetly covered like everyone else's. Whenever someone passes by the mat they bend slightly, uttering the muttered "Mwawuka" greeting to which the girls always respond with a muted, "Pachoko" while the original greeters nod sympathetically.

The Traditional Authority is at the funeral. It is a great distinction, and Grace feels pride for Mr. Nyirenda, for his family, that so high a Chief should have come. Grace watches as he makes his way around the funeral, stopping to talk with each of the small groups of people gathered. He is an older man, with white hair and a white beard, and he is in his full traditional regalia right now, with flowing robes and a flat cap. “A great man, our Mr. Nyirenda,” he says time after time to group after group. “Chiuta has taken him from us too soon.” And even though what he is saying is maybe a bit trite his voice is sincere and Grace feels that he means it.

When Grace was at her grandfather’s funeral, all those years ago, she had a strange moment when, walking down the corridors of the church to sit beside her family in the pew, she thought she saw her grandfather out of the corner of her eye. When she turned, of course, there was no one there. Still, she was revisited by the feeling throughout the service — as they sang hymns, as the minister spoke, as they walked outside of the church into the sunlight. She feels something similar, today, now, with Mr. Nyirenda, as if he is here, at his own funeral, hovering, somewhere just out of sight.

She feels his presence during lunch, as she eats nsima and beans and rape leaves. She remembers a conversation they had over a retirement dinner for one of the teachers at school when rape leaves were selected as the dende once again. “Ahh rape leaves,” Mr. Nyirenda had said, lifting a small pile from his plate and peering at them through his round wire-rimmed glasses. “Etymology derives from the Latin word for turnip, which is rapa or rapum, rather unfortunately. Poor leaf.” And then he had smiled cheekily at Grace as he ate a bite of the leaves and rice.

She can hear Mr. Nyirenda’s voice as the village chief reads out the amounts of money that have been given to Madam Nyirenda for the funeral, and for her support in the

wake of his death. She imagines his low murmur of approval at the amounts the villagers all give. “Very proper,” she can hear him saying as the totals are slowly listed. “Very proper indeed.” She feels his presence, most of all, just as the sun is setting, when the coffin arrives. As they move to the burial ground, as everyone begins ululating and crying anew, moving and shouting and sobbing until they are hoarse, Grace senses Mr. Nyirenda once again. He is there, staring around at the profusion of trees spread throughout the expanse of the cemetery, protected from felling because they grow on sacred ground. He is appreciative, Grace knows, of the forest. He deeply believes that this is a good place to rest, here, in the woods, under the shade of trees. Yet he is also angry, frustrated, because he wants more, wanted to do more.

“We do not value this,” he told Grace once, staring up at the place where fresh clean water falls in a cascade toward the village from off of the top of the Nyika Plateau. “God gifted us a paradise. And we do not treat it as we ought.” Grace can hear him now, looking around at the cemetery and saying, “Why just this land? Why is it only here that we protect the land, when everywhere is sacred?”

The coffin is placed into the ground as the last light of day leaves the village, and then, silently, they all turn, and head back down the hill, back to the Nyirendas’ house. You never become accustomed to death, Grace thinks, as they make their way slowly down the winding path back from the forest. No matter how many funerals you attend, each feels as deep as though it was new. Grace remembers one time a few years ago when they were attending church back in America, her mother was explaining to someone that it had been a particularly bad year for malaria — that many, many people had died. “Well yes,” the friend said. “But then, I suppose that is just normal for them.” Grace had watched as her mother’s face became frozen, as her eyes hardened and her lips pursed.

“No, not really,” she said finally. “I wouldn’t say that.”

The funeral party emerges from the forest as light descends and the moon rises. Back at the Nyirendas' house they curl up on the bamboo mats and Grace snuggles under blankets and closes her eyes and tries to sleep.

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In the middle of the night, a feeling of movement wakes Grace, and she turns over to see Temwa staring at her, eyes wide open like a fish.

"Chimbuzi," Temwa whispers softly to Grace, and Grace nods. Carefully, Grace rubs the back of her hands over her eyes, and then stretches, trying to wake a bit more. Beside her, Tamanda stirs slightly. "Go back to sleep," Grace whispers. "I'm just taking Temwa to the chim." Tamanda mutters something incoherent, and then rolls back over. Grace takes Temwa's small hand in her own, and leads her out the back of the funeral, toward the stand of pine trees and the two square bathrooms that sit just behind it.

There's enough moonlight to see by, but even still, Grace finds the world a bit strange just now, cast as it is in black and white. The roar of the funeral has died down to a quiet murmur, to slight, indistinct conversations held around the small fires that remain lit. The moon is bright enough to throw shadows this night, and as she and Temwa walk Grace finds herself stepping unconsciously around them, her path weaving a bit as she tries to stick to the patches of light. At the edge of the bathrooms, Temwa informs Grace that she will be okay on her own, so Grace stands, leaning against a tree a few feet away from one of the structures, and watches as Temwa walks, slightly ungainly, inside.

"Hypothermia." Grace hears her father's voice, and for a minute, thinks that she has imagined it, that she is still half-asleep, and this some fragment of a dream. "That was what bothered me the most," her father's voice says, and Grace knows that she is not dreaming now. She turns and sees, through the trees, the shape of two men sitting on a bench by the

side of the road. One of the men is the Traditional Authority, Grace can tell by the shape of his robe and cap, imposing even in silhouette.

The men have cigars. Grace can smell them, can see the smoke curling slowly up into the night air. Grace has another moment of questioning whether it is really her father sitting there. Her father does not smoke. She has heard him, so many times, rail about the evils of tobacco. It is a lecture he reserves for America, since so many people in the village depend on the income from the tobacco leaves they grow, but when they are in America his utter antipathy could not be more clear. Yet here he is, sitting on a bench, smoking.

"You see some pretty sad cases working at a hospital," her father is saying now. "Children, that's always tough. People with violent deaths, those are hard. But it was always the hypothermia that got to me. We have people who are homeless in America," Grace's father explains, as he always must here, in the village, where everyone has a roof under which to sleep. "People who don't have houses, people who sleep out on the streets." And Grace can see the Traditional Authority shake his head that such a thing should be possible, and in a country so rich as America. Next to the Traditional Authority, her father inhales deeply from the cigar, exhaling a cloud of smoke. "Every year a handful of these homeless people — not a lot, but, really, enough — they would die of hypothermia. We would get them in the hospital after the ambulance picked them up, and they were already dead sometimes, or sometimes just close." Another inhale, another puff out. "Those were the deaths that always bothered me the most. Because those are the deaths that should not happen. We could stop them, so easily. But we just don't care. At least, not enough."

"This can be difficult," says the Traditional Authority, and he also takes a puff on his cigar, so deep Grace can see the red embers of its edge glowing in the night. "These past few years here," he says now. "When you came, and some years before that," he shakes his head.

“It is a time we thought to never see, and we are burying those who should be carrying our coffins.” He taps his cigar on the edge of the bench, shaking the ashes from it.

“Auntie Gracie.” Grace feels a small pull on her chitenje and looks down and sees Temwa standing beside her. She is almost four now, Temwa, and yet in this moment, standing in her bare feet in the cold night air, she looks so impossibly small.

“Tabwera?” Grace asks.

“Enya,” Temwa nods her little head.

“Bo,” Grace says, and picks the girl up. And even though Temwa has recently been protesting this move, has been informing her mother and Auntie Gracie and Auntie Mercy that she is a big girl now, still she buries her head firmly in Grace’s shoulder, wraps her arms around Grace’s neck. And Grace carries her like this, arms wrapped around Temwa’s waist, supporting her, holding her so tight, until they are back at the funeral, until they are lying down next to Tamanda and Mercy once again, until, in their company, Grace feels something a bit like being safe.

The Mbulika

“Are you ready Gracie?” Tamanda asks. She sits, her posture confident across the bao board from Grace, straddling the concrete wall of the porch on which they perch. She is smiling in the darkness, her face cast half into shadow by the oil lamp that hangs from a beam above them.

“I think so,” Grace says. It is her turn to go first. Carefully she picks up the njere from her fourth hole, and begins spreading them across the board, stealing Tamanda’s njere as she goes. This is the optimal first move in boa, the fourth hole. Grace has calculated it. She calculated it long ago. Every other starting move — every single one — steals only six seeds from the opponent. But this one, the fourth hole, steals eight. Grace spreads her njere carefully around the back row and then carries them around, emerging once again into the front row to steal from Tamanda. As she takes the last of Tamanda’s njere, Grace smiles, dropping the final njere with an audible plink onto her side of the board, absentmindedly brushing away a mbulika that has flown over, drawn by the light of the lamp.

“Your turn,” Grace says. Tamanda nods, and stares down at the board. Tamanda’s best move is the second hole. Grace knows. Grace calculated this one out as well. But Tamanda does not choose the second hole, instead she chooses to move njere from her back row into her front row, and then steal from Grace. Tamanda is like this, always making unpredictable moves. Even though she only steals two njere from Grace, still Tamanda is smiling triumphantly as she finishes her turn. As she places the last njere down in an empty hole, two mbulika land on Tamanda’s arm. She laughs slightly, leans forward, and blows on them, so that, feeling the movement of the air, they fly away.

“Have you begun picking out the classes you want to take?” Tamanda asks. “For college?”

“No,” Grace replies, staring at the holes in front of her, trying to count out which move will steal the most njere from Tamanda.

“Gracie,” Tamanda says, her tone chiding. The school year has not ended yet. It is not even the end of the rainy season. Yet Tamanda keeps reminding her that soon they will all — Tamanda, Mercy and Grace — head off to university. Tamanda is going to the forestry college, in Dedza, Mercy is going to Kamuzu college of nursing, in Blantyre, and Grace is going to Bowdoin college, in Maine. Grace stares harder at the board. It is humid tonight, the air warm and heavy around them. From around them throughout the village, Grace can hear the sounds of people listening to the radio, laughing, chatting. She can see small points of light from fires that still burn in kitchens, or from lamps and candles that have been lit around the porches and throughout each house.

“Gracie,” Tamanda repeats. Grace exhales heavily. This is the part of bao where she becomes lost, a bit. It is easy to know what the best moves are in the first and second round, but by the third round it becomes hard to calculate. Everything is dependent on how many njere your opponent has stolen, and from which holes. Sighing, Grace picks up the njere randomly from a hole in her back row and begins to spread them around

“No,” Grace says. “I have not thought about classes yet.” As Grace moves around the board with her seeds, a small swarm of mbulika, no more than ten or fifteen at the most, flies past them, a group of children running behind. “Ine!” the boy at the front yells. “Ine, ine, ine!” And he jumps up, both his hands coming together to cup the mbulika swarm, landing with at least five or six captured as the children behind him cheer. Grace pops that last of the

njere she is spreading in an empty hole, and then leans back, giving Tamanda full access to the board.

“Are you not excited about the classes?” Tamanda asks. She grabs, almost without thinking it seems, a handful of njere from one of her largest piles and spreads them quickly, with assurance, around the board, stealing Grace’s njere easily, and then moving again.

“No I am,” Grace says, and this is true. The enormous book of classes Grace could take at Bowdoin college arrived a week ago, at her family’s post office box in Livingstonia. Grace has been fascinated by the pages and pages full of list after list of classes she could take — classes on different periods of literature, different aspect of science, classes in math, anthropology, religion, history, languages, linguistics, psychology. Yet every time she stops reading the descriptions for fun, starts trying to think of what she actually wants to do, what she wants to study, which classes she will in fact attend, next year, in Maine, her mind spins, and her brain freezes, and she can’t.

Tamanda is still proceeding around the board, stealing Grace’s njere as she goes. “You should really begin thinking about your classes,” Tamanda says, as she lands in an empty hole to finish her turn.

“I know,” Grace tells her. She only has njere left in three holes in her front row, plus another five in the back. She has not lost the game yet, not by any means. It is so easy to turn the tide in bao, for control of playing to flip from one player to the next, one almost winning before the first player stages a comeback, and takes the lead. Still, the next few moves will be crucial. Out by the street another group of children run past, chasing a large cluster of mbulika. The children jump, grabbing for the mbulika, tearing their wings off when they have caught them, and dropping them into the small baskets they hold. Grace looks down at her side of the board, calculating.

Always fascinated by math, Grace has been reading about combinatorial game theory over the past few months. She loves that there are equations to actually calculate every single possible move for some games, that there are ways to work out mathematically, every possible course of play. In tic tac toe, for example, thanks to board symmetry, there are a maximum of just one hundred and thirty-eight terminal board positions. That's it. If X goes first, X will win ninety-one times, O forty-four times, and three games will be a draw. Grace looks down at the bao board now, and grinds her teeth slightly in concentration. If only bao were more like tic tac toe.

In front of Grace, Tamanda makes a face, and Grace turns around to see an enormous swarm of mbulika heading right toward them. Grace covers her face with her hands and ducks. Even folded over, she can hear the children chasing the mbulika into the yard, can hear their yelling and their laughter as they grab for the insects, trying to capture them and put them in their baskets. Grace peaks through her fingers, and sees the thinning swarm of mbulika moving away, the children in hot pursuit, some calling out 'pephani!' over their shoulders as they run away.

Grace stares down at the bao board once again. She has three possible moves, but only one will actually eat any of Tamanda's njere, so she takes it, capturing the njere from two of Tamanda's holes before landing in an empty space. Grace is fascinated by the games where the outcomes are still evading calculation. Checkers, for a while, was a mystery, until computers became powerful enough that they were able to run all possible scenarios, and figure out that there are five quintillion potential moves. Chess is still being worked on. The exact number of games possible isn't known, but the lower boundary is ten to the power of one hundred and twenty and the upper boundary is two times ten to the power of forty.

Someday, maybe though, the exact number will be known. Maybe that is what Grace will study at college — combinatorial game theory.

After Grace's move, Tamanda carefully picks njere up from her back row, and begins spreading them around.

"Will you play bao in America?" Tamanda asks. She has stolen two of Grace's njere, so now just three njere with holes remain on Grace's side.

"I am not sure," Grace says. "People don't really play bao in America. There is a game sort of like bao, Mancala, but it is not quite the same."

Tamanda goes around once more, stealing Grace's seeds twice over again, so now just one hole remains.

"Maybe you could teach them," Tamanda says. "If you take the bao board with you. Then you could bring bao to America." She sews her njere once more, lands in a hole across from Grace, and thus manages to capture the last of Grace's njere. "Pephani Gracie," she says, as she plunks the last of Grace's njere over on to her side.

"It is okay," Grace says, as she begins to pick up the njere, to pack them away. "I am used to it. Maybe if I teach the Americans to play bao, I can at least win against them."

Grace does not think it will ever be possible to calculate all the moves for bao. The problem is that pieces are not removed from the board. Since the pieces just pass from one side to the other, Grace is pretty sure there is no upper limit on the amount of moves for any particular game, and thus the amount of potential moves in bao is infinite. That means, theoretically, if you played a game of bao just right, it could go on forever.

Carefully, the njere all placed back in their bag, Grace folds up her bao board, and closes it, securing it with the small clasp. "Will you play bao in college?" Grace asks Tamanda. "Down at Dedza?"

“Of course.”

“Will you beat them all?” Grace asks, smiling a wicked smile.

“I hope so,” Tamanda says, grinning at Grace right back. Looking at Tamanda there, smiling in the lamplight, Grace has the sudden sensation of seeing her friend as though she were a stranger. Yet the geography of Tamanda’s face is one she knows — the nose slightly crooked from when she banged into another girl while playing netball, the scar at the corner of her mouth from when they were younger, climbing trees, and a branch broke and hit her — her eyes, staring into Grace’s, so bright.

“Do you ever worry about what it is going to be like when we graduate?” Grace asks, her voice a whisper. “How our lives will be?”

“Of course,” Tamanda says, and she lifts her hand, reaches out toward Grace.

“Amama! Amama!” Temwa runs into the yard, her face split by a smile, holding a basket of fried mbulika in her hands, Mercy trailing behind. “Nili na mbulika chomene!”

“Chomene chomene!” Tamanda says, and she retracts the hand that was reaching out to Grace, hooks her daughter under the arms, and lifts Temwa onto her lap. Proudly, Temwa holds up a basket overflowing with piles of golden mbulika. “Karibu?” She offers, proffering the basket to Mercy and Tamanda and Grace.

“Yewo chomene,” Grace says, and reaches in, taking a small handful of the fried insects, and popping them into her mouth. Across from her, Tamanda hugs her daughter close, and Temwa glows. This is Temwa’s first year chasing the mbulika. She would, of course, chase them through the yard when she was younger, and jump to catch them, and tear their wings off, and throw them in a pan of hot oil, sizzling over the fire to cook. She was never before allowed to run around outside with the other, older children though. She was never allowed to tear through the village after the swarms of mbulika, never allowed to stay

up far past her bedtime, never had enough mbulika to offer them around. Not until this year. Grace takes another small handful of the bugs, and pops them into her mouth. They are good, the skin fried perfectly, the whole snack exactly as crispy and as salty as it should be. The mbulika have always reminded Grace of popcorn, they have a similar flavor and crunch.

Temwa is chattering now, telling them about a particularly difficult swarm. She is describing how the bugs stayed in the air, just too high to reach, but she and her friends kept after them, running, following, hoping they would fly just a little bit lower. They never did though, Temwa finishes, and so they were not caught. Grace likes this ending to the story, the mbulika flying away, and Temwa recounting her experience not because it was a great triumph, but because the process was fun.

"We caught many others though," Temwa informs them. And looking at the basket Grace says that yes she did, she did very good indeed, and Temwa beams.

She will be in primary school next year, Temwa. Already she is in nursery school. Already she is learning English and she can say her full name, and where she lives, and the most basic greetings like hello and how are you. When greeted in English she can respond, and say that she, Temwa, is fine, thank you for asking. She wears a uniform to go to nursery school — a tiny little blue shirt paired with a maroon skirt with pleats.

Grace tries to envision Temwa in primary school. She will be living in Dedza then with Tamanda, and that will be different because Dedza is not a village, but a town. Grace wonders how different Temwa and Tamanda's life will be. They will have electricity, and so will not have to study by lamplight. Temwa's school will have running water, and a library, and maybe even a computer lab. Grace wonders if people visit each other's houses, in town. They don't in America. You have to plan visits. You have to text or call, it needs to all be

prearranged. Grace wonders if they stay out late at night during the nuptial flight of the termites in a town — Grace wonders if the children chase after the mbulika.

Temwa is now explaining how she helped to cook the mbulika. She is describing how she and her friends went back to Nyaphiri's with Auntie Mercy — that they went out to the kitchen where the fire was just down to embers and the pan was hot and she, Temwa, put oil in the pot, she dropped the mbulika in, she salted them, she watched them pop, she poured them out onto a cloth to dry and soak away the extra oil and aren't they good, aren't they so good?

"Have you thought more about what classes you want to take Grace?" Mercy asks.

"She is still thinking about it," Tamanda says.

"It is still a while, yet, until I have to choose," Grace tells them.

"Plenty of time," Tamanda mutters easily, waving a hand when Mercy shoots her a look.

"Temwa, can you catch?" Grace asks, and she begins throwing the mbulika toward Temwa's mouth. Temwa opens wide and dodges left and right, trying to catch the insects, Tamanda and Mercy and Grace all clapping furiously when she manages the trick.

Around them, the air is still dotted with small flying insects. Grace can see them, shadowy, ghosts in the air, as they fly about individually or in small swarms. They are alates, these termites on the wing. Over the next several weeks, the males will mate with the virgin queens and then die, while the queens will settle, start a colony, begin the process again. Across from Grace, Temwa has snuggled into her mother's chest, and her eyes are beginning to flutter softly, starting wide open, and then gradually shutting, springing wide open, before falling softly closed again.

“Do you remember when we were her age?” Mercy asks softly, motioning to Temwa. “Do you remember how we would run through the streets as children, screaming and jumping, and grabbing the insects out of the air.”

“Of course,” Tamanda says, her expression soft.

“I used to love chasing the mbulika,” Grace says. Her parents were afraid, she remembers, that she would be frightened of the ritual, would be sad about catching the insects and cooking them. But in the end, she was as bloodthirsty as everyone else, and some of her clearest memories from childhood are of the nights when the mbulika swarmed, when her bedtime was extended, when she ran through the village giggling and laughing and shouting while the adults looked on indulgently instead of yelling.

“We would stay up so late,” Mercy asks. “Insisting we were not tired.”

Grace nods, thinking of the night air wrapped around them like a blanket, of gathering around warm fires, of listening sleepily to gossip, of the sound of the mbulika crackling and popping in the pans, of slowly sliding down into dreams.

Temwa’s breathing has turned heavy now, even.

“Do you remember when the last time was?” Mercy asks. “How old were we when we knew we would not chase the mubulika again?”

“Yayi,” Temwa says softly.

“Yayi,” Grace confirms.

“No, nor me,” Mercy nods.

Grace does not remember when she stopped being one of the children who chased the mbulika. All she remembers, when she looks back on that time, was what it was like. The tense watchfulness after the rainy season had begun. The staking out of your particular termite mound, waiting. The feeling of excitement, elation, adrenaline as the winged swarms

burst from the ground and you set out after them. Most of all what she remembers though, what she remembers is the feeling. The sense that you were the first people in the world who had ever run around chasing mbulika, that you were the only people who ever would, and, when you were right in the middle of a good run, chasing down a particularly large and evasive swarm, like the night, and all its attendant joys, was going to last forever.

PART THREE

FUNCTIONALLY EXTINCT

There used to be lions here. Not many people know that, Grace thinks, as she takes a deep drag on the joint she holds between her middle and index finger. It is true though; there used to be lions in America. Grace exhales the smoke from the joint into the night air in a smooth thin stream. They walked in prides, the lions, stalking savannahs and grasslands just like this one, thousands of years ago. Their land was large, they roamed from Alaska to Mexico, Maryland to Alberta. They could be found all over, these American lions, except in areas of dense forests. They are all gone now, of course, the manifold prides. They were extinguished along with most of the Pleistocene megafauna — the Woolly Mammoth, the Beautiful Armadillo, the Camelops — during the Quarternary Extinction Event. They were killed possibly by the receding of the ice age, or possibly by the arrival of the Clovis, the first Paleoamerican culture. All the theories are highly contentious, hotly debated, and will likely remain so for years to come. Whatever the reason though, the lions are gone now. Only their bodies and bones remain on display in various museums. Those that weren't excavated are buried deep in the soil, centuries down. Sometimes though, like now, when Grace sits with the bare soles of her feet laid flat against the ground she thinks she can feel them, the lions, the remainder of their presence rising up through her skin like echoes in the earth. Grace looks out over the plain stretching out in every direction around her. In a few months, this area will be turned into an apartment complex. The construction company has already moved its machinery in. They are going to bulldoze this land and build block after block after block of residential towers. Here. On this field where the lions used to roam.

As Grace is staring off to the horizon, out to the West, Mavi walks from underneath the sunset, out toward Grace. She glides over to where Grace is sitting, in one hand a stack of

three circular food warmers, in the other two bottles of soda. She sits down on the ground cross-legged, next to Grace, and she puts the food warmers in front of them and sets the soda bottles in front of them too, standing them up side by side like soldiers. Mavi sits there quietly, looking out over the landscape, while Grace looks at her.

"I think it is a good turnout," Mavi says finally, and in the cool of the night air her words become clouds, hanging suspended above their faces before slowly fragmenting, disintegrating into nothing.

"It is a good turnout," Grace agrees, looking out at the people dotted over the land. There are many of them, silhouetted against the night sky. There are tents, too. At this distance they seem to Grace just vague shapes, shadows, curled like the backs of dinosaurs across the plain, sleeping for a millennia or more. The people have lit fires. Grace can see them in the distance, a play of waves and sparks. Whenever the people pass in front of them they become dark, like shadows. There's a philosophical allegory about that somewhere. Something about a cave, and people, and shadow puppets in front of a fire. It's all a bit jumbled in her head right now, and Grace can't remember what it is supposed to mean. She takes another drag on the joint and then opens her mouth, pushing her tongue forward and watching the smoke slowly roll out.

"You did not want to join in?" Mavi asks, motioning to the small groups of people before them.

"Not tonight," Grace says, dropping the joint to the ground, watching it to make sure the end is fully extinguished against the earth. She looks out at the crowd gathered on the plain. Some of the people around the fires are people she knows, they are the other rising college sophomores, students just like her, who sat in the circle of Mavi's introductory International Development and the Environment class at Bowdoin. Many of those gathered,

though, Grace does not recognize. They are strangers who heard about the protest and cared enough to come. “Tomorrow maybe,” Grace tells Mavi. “Tonight though, tonight I am just a bit too tired for all that.”

‘All that’, as they both know, is the process of having to answer a barrage of questions about what it was like, growing up in Africa. It is a gauntlet Mavi faces nearly immediately, as soon as her voice - a smooth indeterminate mix of crisp upperclass British vowels combined with flattened American tones spoken in a lilting rhythm — prompts the inevitable ‘where is that accent from?’ For Grace, the process is more delayed, but equally inevitable. There is just too wide a vocabulary, a shared set of experiences, that she does not have. There is always some universal touchstone — Sesame Street, Chuck-E-Cheese, Jaw Breakers — that leaves Grace clueless when it is mentioned. The situation always leads to Grace proffering the explanatory ‘when I was six my family moved to a small village in Malawi’ as a justification for her obvious confusion.

“Hungry?” Mavi asks, motioning to the food warmers.

“Starving,” Grace tells her. Mavi nods and takes two plates out from underneath the warmers, passing one to Grace. When Mavi uncaps the first of the food warmers it steams. The familiar smell of nsima, or nshima as Mavi calls it, rolls out over Grace, causing a wave of homesickness so intense she has to momentarily turn away. “The food is what gets you,” Mavi told Grace, the first time she invited her over for dinner, maybe two weeks after Grace had moved back to America. “Long after you find yourself walking around in those short shorts, and adopting American phrases, and driving comfortably on the wrong side of the road, you’ll still be craving nsima.” Grace hands Mavi a water bottle and a small bar of soap from her backpack, and they wash off their hands, and then reach in for a patty of nsima each. It takes Grace three tries to pick up her patty of nsima. The bottom of the patty, where it

touches the rest of the nsima, is still so hot, she keeps reaching out, then having to pull her hand away, then reaching out again.

"Ehn-ahn mzungu," Mavi teases, bumping lightly up against Grace's shoulder. "America has made you so soft." Frustratingly, Mavi reaches out, and manages to pick up her own patty of nsima in one go. Mavi uncaps the other two food warmers, revealing beans and greens.

"Amazing," Grace says, and carefully grabs a few handfuls of the greens — spinach, if she had to guess — and then pours a small pool of the beans onto her plate.

"And now Gracie," Mavi says, lifting up the two bottles of soda. "A test. Can you open one of these bottles, with only the materials found here, around you, on the land?" And she sweeps her arm out over the scenery, all-encompassing. Grace considers the glass bottles in Mavi's hand, one Fanta passion, one Coke, before selecting the Fanta passion. She spots a small boulder behind Mavi and smirks.

"Easy," she says. She walks over to the boulder and places the Fanta passion so that the lip of the metal cap rests against a slight crevice on the boulder's edge. Carefully she knocks the flat of her palm firmly against the top of the cap so that it pops off cleanly. "Told you." Triumphant, she holds up the bottle for Mavi to see.

"Okay, okay." Mavi pops her own top off using the boulder and then clinks her bottle against Grace's. "Cheers!" Carefully, Grace breaks off a piece of the nsima and forms it into a ball then dips it into the beans. The food that Mavi makes is close to what Grace would eat with her family, back in the village, but not quite. The nsima is made from the ugali flour sold by Mr. Mwangi, who runs the Ugandan food stall at the Sunday morning farmer's market in Brunswick. The taste is generally right, but to Grace the texture always seems a bit off. The ugali is just a bit finer, a bit lighter, than the nsima flour she is used to. The beans, too, suffer

for being cooked in Mavi's slow cooker, rather than boiling for hours over a fire while constantly drowning in an ever-replenished supply of oil and salt. Not the healthiest, of course, but oh so delicious. And even though it is still good, she has not yet quite adjusted to eating spinach as greens instead of pumpkin leaves or rape leaves or mustard greens or whatever else happens to be in season. The thing is, it is not just the food, Grace thinks as she breaks off another piece of nsima, rolls it into a ball in her hand, and dips it into the greens. It is not just Malawian food she misses, it is all of it — eating outside in the fresh air with family and friends, using your hands instead of unwieldy utensils, eating food that you picked straight from the garden, or bought that morning at the market place. There's a distance to food in America. She read somewhere that for every calorie on your plate here, at least ten calories was spent on transport. Grace almost feels she can taste this sometimes, the slight overtones of the extra dust and gas peppered lightly over everything she eats.

"Blueberries," Grace tells Mavi.

"What?" Mavi looks up.

"That's what I missed most, when my family first moved to Malawi. Blueberries. When I was a kid, I mean a very little kid, I used to go out and pick them from bushes. I used to put them in this little metal pail. Have you ever read the book *Blueberries for Sal*?"

"No," Mavi shakes her head.

"Well, it's this children's book about this little girl who picks blueberries, and when she puts them in her pail they go plink plink plink. I was exactly like that girl, putting the blueberries in my little pail all plink plink plink." Grace laughs. "And then I would take the blueberries I had just picked, and I would cook blueberry pancakes with my father. There was this little blue stool even, I would have to stand on it to reach the stove I was so small. And I

would stand on my little blue stool, spatula in hand, and flip the pancakes. And that's what I missed."

Mavi gives a slight huff of a laugh. "It's cute to think of you as a kid."

"Mmmm," Grace smiles ruefully. In front of them, the encampment seems strangely calm. People are sitting now, speaking in hushed tones. "Can I ask how you are feeling about tomorrow?" Grace asks.

"Good. I think?" Mavi shrugs. She's eyeing the signs and banners that are piled up in one corner of the encampment. There are bottles of water there too, in case the police come with pepper spray. There are gas masks to defend against smoke bombs, first aid kits in case of rubber bullets, and they've already had sessions to talk about their rights, reminders to always have cell phones out and ready when they are around police. "I don't know if it will make any difference, in the end," Mavi tells her. "But I think it is important to be here. To try."

"Yes," Grace nods. She looks out over the vista in front of them, the unbroken expanse of the plain. She has been reading *West With the Night* lately, Beryl Markham's autobiography about her life in Kenya. In the most recent chapter, Beryl is describing her experience as a pilot who scouts elephants for hunters. In the beginning, she writes, when the elephants would hear the plane's engines they would gather in a group around their young, to protect them. But gradually, as time went on and more hunters came out, the herd — on hearing the sound of a plane's engine — would gather around the elephants with the biggest tusks instead. That's when Beryl Markham started thinking that maybe they shouldn't be hunting elephants. Grace blinks her eyes shut tight against the thought.

"Do you ever wonder why it is that we seem to thrive on destruction?" Grace asks.

“Always,” Mavi says. “Do you think it is true of all people?” She asks. “Or just the west?”

Grace thinks back to a moment in the village she tries often to forget, the time when a hawk, having hit an electrical wire, hopped through the main street, dragging behind it a broken wing. Some of the men in the village, drunk, threw rocks at it, and beat it with sticks, until Nyaphiri, coming out of her house brandishing a machete, chased them all away, and put the hawk out of its misery with one quick stroke that separated its body from its head.

“All people,” Grace whispers softly.

“All people,” Mavi echoes, and her eyes flash in such a way that Grace knows that she, too, has seen something like the men beating the hawk.

There is a small ding from Grace’s pocket, and she pulls out her phone to see a message alert attached to a small photograph of Temwa, playing with her friends in the early morning light of the day.

“Your best friend’s firstborn?” Mavi asks, looking over at the screen.

“Yes,” Grace confirms, though this linguistic remove is strange to her. She wants a word that directly describes her relationship to Temwa. ‘My niece’, ‘my Goddaughter’. Something stronger than ‘my best friend’s child.’

“She looks so free,” Mavi says, and there’s something strangely sad, wistful in her voice. She dips her head down so that her face is hidden, resting on her knees. Grace feels like a climber whose grip has suddenly slipped. “I have to tell you something,” Mavi mutters, her face still buried in her knees. Grace can see her take a deep breath, can see the ribs on her back expand. Mavi turns her head, so that she is facing Grace now. “I’m leaving,” she says on a quick exhale. “I’m moving back home.” Grace cannot speak. Her mind is tripping over memories of dinners at Mavi’s house, of conversations conducted in a mix of Chitumbuka,

Nyanja, and English, of being bathed in the sense — just for those evenings — of not having to explain herself, of just being able to exist.

"When?" Grace asks.

"As soon as I finish my post-doc," Mavi says. She is speaking more evenly now, she is sitting up again. "We will still keep in touch," she says, her voice full of conviction. "We'll Skype. We'll text. Malawi and Zambia aren't that far at all really. You can come visit anytime."

"No, of course," Grace replies. She feels like she might be speaking unnaturally fast. "Of course. We're so connected nowadays. There's no reason to fall out of touch." An uncomfortable silence rolls over them. To break it Grace asks, "So when did you decide? That you would move back home I mean?"

Mavi chews her lower lip. "Do you remember when we had the active shooter drill at school?" Grace does. Vividly. "It started around then," Mavi admits. "I found myself standing in a classroom and charting different exit routes, trying to figure out how I would keep my students safe." She shakes her head. "And then with the police," Mavi's voice trails off. "I guess I just realized I was tired of living somewhere I always have to be on edge, aware, alert. I just want to be."

"That makes sense," Grace says. She was about to say, "I get it," but then checked herself, realizing, belatedly, that in this instance she does not.

"Do you ever think about it?" Mavi asks Grace. "What you'll do after college? Do you think you might go back? Live there? In Malawi?"

"I would like to." Grace folds her hands over her knees so that she can rest her cheek on her forearms. "But I don't see how I could. I would have qualified for citizenship in Malawi, when I turned eighteen, because I lived there for more than seven years. But Malawi

doesn't allow dual citizenship, so I would have to give up my American citizenship, and I just… couldn't."

"Ahn-ahn," Mavi shakes her head. "It is a shame you cannot be both."

"Yes," Grace acknowledges, and leaves it at that, feeling a familiar closing in her throat that comes whenever she thinks about the subject too long.

Grace looks once again out over the landscape in front of them, at the smooth contours of the even plain, at the slight textures of the grasses waving gently in the wind, at the signs and medical kits piled high in the corner. Grace has seen lions, many times. She would see them lazing around in the grass when her family went on safari in Tanzania or Zambia. She liked to watch the mothers in the grass, playing with the cubs, who always resembled large tawny kittens. One time though, Grace saw the lionesses at night, as they were going out for the hunt. They were in a safari vehicle, and they parked well behind the pride as the females stalked out. What Grace remembers about the lionesses then was their form, the way they moved, powerful; Grace had trouble connecting that image to the one of the lazy figures of the day. One of the lionesses turned back while they were stalking away. She turned back and the moonlight caught her eyes and she stared straight at Grace, fierce, before stalking away. Tomorrow Grace and Mavi and everyone else here will protest. They will do their best to impede the progress of the clearing of this land, the first stages of construction. They will sit or lie down on this very ground, and some people will chain themselves together, or to the equipment itself, and some groups will even try to be arrested.

"You are lost," Mavi says, bringing a finger up to Grace's cheek and gently using it to turn her head. "Your thoughts are taking you far away."

“Do you ever think about Lonesome George?” Grace asks. They learned about the tortoise in Mavi’s class, about how goats introduced to Pinta Island ate all the vegetation, so that all the other Pinta Island tortoises died, and Lonesome George was the only one left.

“Not really. Do you?”

Grace nods. She does think about Lonesome George. A lot. She thinks about what it must have been like for him, and she thinks about all the Lonesome Georges of the past and those that are yet to come; individuals who are the only one of their kind left on earth, still around, but only as the last remnant of a species that is functionally extinct.

“I try not to focus on what is past,” Mavi says. She stretches, yawns, and reaches her arms high into the sky before lowering them and shaking her head. “I do not think it is very worthwhile. Not when there is so much we still need to do.” She yawns again. “Pephani,” she tells Grace. She looks up. “It is getting late now I think,” she sighs. “I am going to go to bed. Busy day tomorrow.”

“Yes,” says Grace, eyeing her own tent fondly. “Good idea.” But even after Mavi leaves Grace does not go into her own tent, at least not right away. Instead she sits there, out on the plain in the cooling night air, spending the longest time surveying the peaceful landscape that is, other than the vague shadows of bulldozers and backhoes lurking in the distance, completely undisturbed.

UNDER A FADING STAR

“Marshmallow fluff,” Grace says, and Tamanda and Mercy stare at her with identical questioning looks.

It is raining outside. It is raining real rain, the kind Grace rarely sees now that she lives in America — large plentiful drops that fall in a steady rhythm and form a curtain of water that flows down from the tented aluminum roof of the shelter in which the three of them are huddled. They are engaging in their annual tradition of listing the single weirdest thing they have experienced in the past year away from the village — in the city, at university, or, in Grace’s case, in America. Last year Tamanda, the environmentalist and wildlife-officer-in-training, listed flushing toilets.

“Everyone keeps saying to me, “Oh, you are from the village, you must be so grateful for indoor plumbing. What grateful? We are using fresh water to dispose of our waste!” And Mercy and Grace nodded along with her complaints because yes, composting toilets are fine if you care for them properly, and yes, sometimes the water in the city is shut off, and where are you then? In a building without a working toilet is where you are.

This year, Tamanda has chosen air conditioning.

“We have lived our entire lives with no air conditioning — even those old bwana ministers and the MPs with their fat stomachs only had fans for so long a time. But now, oh now we need buildings so cold? Why I ask you? So that these men may dress like mzungus in a suit with a jacket all proper?” Mercy and Grace still nod, even though Grace, guiltily, thinks of all the cold winters where she has cranked up the heater, and of those few hot

summer days in July and August when she has flicked the air conditioning on. But only to the point of making it bearable, she comforts herself. Not to the point of excess.

Mercy has chosen backpacks for this year. A future nurse down to her very cells she sits up primly and lists their faults — bad for the shoulders, bad for the neck, bad for the spine. “Head carrying,” she counters, the method that has always traditionally been employed, the method where you can safely carry sixty percent more weight. Why have they all abandoned it in the city? Grace, remembering how everyone stared during her walk to a picnic last year, basket balanced easily on her head instead of lugged awkwardly beside her, wholeheartedly agrees.

Last year, Grace had chosen Twitter as her weird thing. She thought a friend was joking the first time they explained the social media site to her. “You just describe what you are doing in one hundred and forty characters,” the friend said. And Grace had silently reflected that this was the stupidest thing she had ever heard. Giggling, Mercy and Tamanda, who have only had brief forays onto the site, agreed. This year though, Grace, has chosen “marshmallow fluff” a stand in for all of the truly crazy foods she sees decorating the aisles of the grocery store.

“Explain,” Tamanda says now.

“So you know what marshmallows are,” Grace tells them. She is aware, of course, that they do know what marshmallows are. They know, because Grace’s family used to bring marshmallows and graham crackers and chocolate back after visits from America and late at night they would sit around a fire and all make s’mores, their hands becoming sticky, and their faces slightly smeared with chocolate. “Marshmallow fluff is like many marshmallows,” Grace explains now. “Chomene chomene marshmallows. Except that someone has pressed all the air out of them.”

“Gracie… no… please,” Mercy groans.

“It sounds like it could be okay,” Tamanda says cautiously. “What is the taste? How do you eat it?”

“You can use it in a sandwich,” Grace says. “Cover one piece of bread with this marshmallow fluff, another with peanut butter, and you eat them together.” Tamanda is nodding now, and Mercy says that this does not seem so bad. “Or you can just eat it with a spoon,” Grace finishes, and she mimes taking a spoon and eating straight out of the jar, while Mercy dips her head into her hands.

“Gracie, no, I beg.” Mercy is looking a bit green. Tamanda is laughing though, and Grace is laughing with her, and soon Mercy is laughing with them as well. Grace loves this ritual, the sharing of the ridiculous. She feels, in it, a strengthening of the connection between them, a bond that extends as a bridge into and across their new worlds. She wonders though, if there will be a time when all this sharing stops, if they will run out of things they find strange about these new lives that are becoming less new as the years pass.

She worries, too, that there will be a time when the pendulum swings further, when they go back to the village and see the marketplace with flies hovering over the fruits and vegetables and fish, and wonder how they ever could have shopped there, a time when they look at the process of starting fires each day for cooking and heating, and marvel that it was something they were ever forced to do. Grace has seen people like this, people who come back to the village from the city only to turn their noses up, to scoff at what is asked of them. It is something she does not want, but already she is terrified this is someone she could become. Outside, the rain is still drumming consistently on the shelter roof, the water flowing down, yet in the distance, over one of the far ridges of the plateau, Grace can see the clouds

lightening, can see the sun, trying to break through. Through the lessening curtain of rain she can look around them now, and see the vague outline of the rolling hills of the Nyika plateau.

"Okay," Tamanda says, and she pulls some laminated sheets of paper out of her bag and lays them down onto the cement floor of the shelter, spread out in front of them. Grace looks over the sheets and sees a rough aerial outline of the space in which they are sitting, sketched out in black and white. "Let us talk about the plan for today," Tamanda says, and Mercy and Grace nod, and stop laughing, and sit up straight.

"The pine plantation is here," Tamanda says, and her finger circles a dense dark grey clump on the map that Grace vaguely recognizes as the Chelinda pine plantation. She glances over to where the clump of dark green pines stand, growing just a few feet away from Chelinda lodge, the only tourist accommodation on the Nyika plateau. The pines were planted in the fifties, by the colonial development corporation, as an experiment to see if a pulpwood industry could thrive on the plateau. But the area was too hard to access for transport, and so the project was abandoned. By the time Grace first visited the Nyika plateau with her family the Department of National Parks and Wildlife had already begun their project of cutting back the trees, trying to reduce the plantation to the point where it supplies the lodge with firewood and nothing more.

"I've marked the area where the pines used to be but have been cut back with this dotted black line," Tamanda is saying now, pointing to the line. Grace looks at it, then looks around at the park, trying to superimpose the area she sees on the map onto reality. "You can see the transects I've marked out in solid lines." Tamanda slowly traces the grids that she's marked through the area where pines have been cleared. Each transect is labelled with either an M, a T or a G depending on who it is assigned to. "As soon as the rain clears," Tamanda

says. “We will begin our surveys of the transects. I am not sure how many we’ll get done today. The most important part is just to mark down every plant you see.”

Grace opens up the pocket-notebook Tamanda has given her for the project. On the front page are the three questions they are trying to answer with this study: What is the plant diversity in transects that have been cleared of pines? How many plants in cleared transects are invasive? What is the composition of the soil in cleared transects? It has been more than ten years now, since the pines were first cleared away, yet this will be the first comprehensive study of the biodiversity in the cleared areas.

“I thought it might be helpful to review some of the most common invasive plant species,” Tamanda says, and she pulls out five illustrations, printed onto A4 sheets and laminated, and sets them out in front of everyone. Grace looks at the pictures, laid out on the concrete floor. They show black wattle, Himalayan raspberry, bracken fern, a small seedling of a Mexican yellow pine, and a Khasi pine. Unlike the pines, Grace is not sure how any of these other plants came to be introduced to the park. She has heard a story that Scottish settlers introduced the bracken, because the plateau reminded them of home, and with the bracken the area would look even more like the mother country. She is not sure if that story is true though, it is just something she has heard.

Tamanda has told them there are separate projects going on to analyze the effect of the other invasive plants on the plateau — how fast they are spreading, whether they are crowding native plants out. So far bracken seems the most threatening. Tamanda says that one of her friends who is working on the bracken project thinks that it covers nearly fifteen percent of the park. The only response Grace could think of when Tamanda told her this was, “That’s a lot”. This is why Grace likes working on the pine project though. She likes the idea of helping to figure out what is threatening the park. She likes, too, the idea of studying

something that is being done to help the park, of seeing if the efforts are working. The rain is receding now. It is not so much a curtain flowing off the roof as a few distinct steady streams, hammering softly on the metal above them before dripping down.

Together, the girls step out from under the cover of the shelter onto the plateau. Grace looks around the rolling grassland. Up here, on the plateau, there are no buildings, no houses. She has no cell phone in her pocket because there is no service. There is nowhere in the world like the Nyika Plateau. She used to think this, as a child, stepping out into the rolling hills and seeing herds of zebra and eland and roan antelope grazing. She had a small thought, even then, that she only felt this way about the plateau because she lived so near it. She thought maybe once she travelled more, it wouldn't seem so special. This has not turned out to be true. She has travelled now, and the more she travels, the more she realizes that small, childhood Grace was right. There is nowhere in the world like this. Sometimes, when Grace thinks about this place, and about other places like this all around the world, being threatened, she feels a squeezing in her chest, and finds it hard to breathe. In response she inhales deeply, heads over to her first transect, and squats down, beginning to study the plants.

*

"Twenty-three species," Grace says. She breaks off a ball of nsima from the patty and dips it into the mix of soya pieces and tomatoes that are serving as the evening's dende. "Only twenty-three species of plant, on average, per transect where there used to be pines. That's less than half the species diversity of the transects that never had pines."

In her mouth, the soya pieces taste strange now. Back when she lived here they were fine. She ate them at least once a week, doused, as they are now, in a soupy concoction of tomatoes and onions and oil. It is not the cooking that has changed their flavor, she knows. It

is the time spent away, the fact that now she routinely eats tofu salads with a light soy dressing, and jack fruit tacos with tomatillo salsa. With all those flavors so recent, all she can taste of the soya pieces now is salt, and the slight rubbery feeling as she chews them down.

"The numbers are not so bad," Tamanda says, and Grace turns to her in shock. She had expected Tamanda to be the most disappointed, the most angry of them all. Yet now she sits beside Grace, eating calmly.

"Not so bad!" Grace exclaims. "These numbers prove that the pines are having a continued negative effect on species diversity, even well after they have been removed."

Tamanda shrugs. "It has not been so long since the pines were removed," she says. "It takes some time for the land to recover."

"I expected better," Grace says, sighing over the transects' fate. "I thought we would find more."

"Maybe you should not have gone into this expecting things," Tamanda says, and there's a strange sharpness to her voice. Mercy keeps her eyes resolutely down on her plate, avoiding the tension.

"But it has been ten years since the pines were cleared. More really," Grace says. "I knew the biodiversity in the cleared sections would not be the same as the control sections. But I thought the numbers would be a bit closer."

"The only reason you can think that," Tamanda says. "Is because you have not been working here for the past two years. You have not been studying this area. I have. And I am very pleased with these results." With that she picks up her plate and stalks off to the pump to wash it. Across from Grace, Mercy just shrugs.

*

“You can go to bed,” Grace tells Mercy as her watch shows the time nearing midnight. “I’ll wait up for her.” Tamanda disappeared hours ago, stalking off to spend time in the small cluster of houses that serve as homes for those who work on the pine plantation, those who work for the tourist lodge.

“You don’t need to,” Mercy says, but Grace just shakes her head.

“I wouldn’t be able to sleep anyway,” she says, and Mercy nods, and heads into the small cabin where they are sleeping.

Tamanda does not come back, still, for another hour, which is later than Grace thought she would be. Grace has begun to worry by the time her silhouette appears on the path. Grace is still sitting out, in front of the remnants of their fire.

“Iwe,” Tamanda says softly, sitting on a spot of packed earth next to Grace. “You know there has been a leopard around these last few days.”

“I am in front of the fire,” Grace points out. “I am not the one who has been wandering around in the dark.”

“I was just near,” Tamanda says sulkily.

“Fine,” Grace says, and they sit there for a bit, silent, watching as the flames from the fire dance and spark and fall. Around them, Grace can hear the vague hum of the night — the chirring of insects, the soft chorus of the many toads and frogs. They are sounds she does not hear often in America, muffled, as they are, by closed windows, the noise of the air conditioning, the heating, the cars passing by outside. “Those weren’t good numbers for the transects.” Grace says finally.

“No,” Tamanda admits. “They were not.” In the night sky, the moon is nearly full, its silver light so bright that it lights up the world around them, blocks out the stars above them. “And the bracken fern is a threat as well. The results from the latest study just came back. It

could take over the entire park in forty years if no suitable interventions are found." She dips her head down onto her knees.

"Jesus," Grace whispers. There is a small herd of zebra on the hill maybe a half mile away from them. Grace can see them, silhouetted against the sky, nibbling on the grass, can hear their short snorts if she listens closely enough. "So why…" Grace asks, and then leaves the question unfinished, not sure exactly where the words are for what she wants to ask.

"I have to believe," Tamanda says, and there is both steel and desperation in her voice. "I have a daughter. We live here. This," she motions around the park, but Grace knows that the gesture incorporates more than just their immediate surroundings. "Needs to be okay. There is no other alternative to me."

"I have to believe too," Grace says.

"No," Tamanda shakes her head, and then holds up a hand when she sees Grace about to interrupt. "No, you want to believe. Because you have lived here. Because this has been your home. Because you love being here. Me, I know this. I am not arguing this. But you do not need to believe. You have a choice. You can leave. You may not want to, but still the choice is there."

In the light of the fire Grace sees Tamanda's face, hard and determined.

"Now that you know fewer species grow where the pines used to be, what next?"

"Well, now that we have measured the amount of species in the transacts we can start figuring out why the biodiversity has decreased, and what to do about it."

"Any theories?"

"Yes," Tamanda nods. "I am thinking that maybe the soil Ph is different now. Maybe the nearby trees still influence the growing conditions. We know that unless we continue to address the pines they try to reseed, even though the mature seeds have been removed. The

trees were here. They changed things. But if we can increase the diversity around the pines, then, I think the damage can be minimal. The bracken though…" She shakes her head. "That I do not know."

"You'll figure it out," Grace says and Tamanda laughs slightly.

"You have so much faith?"

"In you?" Grace says simply. "Yes."

In front of them, a nightjar swoops down low through the air. There are five species of nightjar found on the plateau, and Grace cannot tell which one this bird is. Except for the Pennant-winged nightjar, which is easy to identify because of its trailing primary feathers, nearly all of the nightjars look alike.

"What are you thinking?" Tamanda asks.

"Nightjar," Grace explains. "Gone now." Tamanda nods. They sit there then, side by side, their knees pulled up to their chests, their arms wrapped around their shins. When they were children they would sit in front of a fire just like this, and cuddle in close together. They would rest their heads on each other's shoulders, and entwine their arms and their hands. Sitting here, now, those days seem to Grace so impossibly far away. So they stay still, not making any move toward the cabin, but also not moving toward each other. Just sitting there, in front of the fire, watching as it slowly dies.

THE BORTLE SCALE

From her spot in the soft patch of moss on the forest floor Grace looks up critically at the leaves of the striped maple above her, and then down to her sketchbook, and then back up to the striped maple again, trying to memorize the shapes of the leaves, to render them accurately on the page. The charcoal of the pencil she holds has stained her hand slightly, there are small black smudges on her thumb, her index finger, and along the trailing edge of her wrist. Carefully, she sketches the curve of the leaf onto the paper, watching the strong thin mark form as it forms on the page. Even though it is fall, she is pleased by the stark black and white simplicity of the drawing — the coarse texture of the tree trunks, the riot of foliage spread out above her, the few stray leaves that have already fallen to the ground. She feels that rare thread of artistic pleasure when looking at this picture, the sense that it is right.

Later, she may decide to add color. She's been experimenting recently with chalks. She likes the effect you get when you dip the chalk very briefly in water. The colors come out smoother with this method, richer. But then again she also might keep this picture in black and white. There is something to be said for leaving it to the viewer to project the colors they want onto the picture, to let them imagine their own shades of golds and purples and red. She could compromise too, make it a bit impressionistic. Add just a little bit of tint, some shades here and there, not quite within the outline of the trees, more a suggestion of color than a faithful portrayal. She blows on the image now, trying to make sure the paper is dry, free of dust and any other particulates before she turns the page.

She flips carefully back through the rest of the drawings she has made during this vacation week away in Monhegan. There is one of the bed and breakfast at which she and Simon have been staying, a traditional New England cottage, slate roof, green walls. There

are many pictures of the rocky shoreline of the island, the cliffs drawn from different angles, the sharp edges of their promontories stark on the paper, clumps of pine trees balanced on the top of the ridges. She has made a few vague sketches of the lighthouse, the tan stone of the column sitting next to the white and red house, a wooden rowboat out front. She flips one more page back and stares down at the image. It is a fairy house, one of the first ones they found on a hike through Cathedral Forest. Set into the roots of a large birch tree, it's not particularly prepossessing, architecturally speaking, just a few twigs stacked up with a long bark roof and some fern leaf decor. Still, Grace took a photograph of it at the time, and has now spent hours sketching it. She used to build fairy houses just like this when she was young. She and John would build them on their rare visits back to the United States when they came out to the island.

"Seal," Simon says from behind her. He is facing away from Grace, away from the forest. He is sitting on the wide strip of grass that tops many of the cliffs on this island, and he has binoculars pressed to his eyes as he looks out to sea. Grace swivels around so that she, like Simon, is now looking out at the ocean. It is a relatively calm day on the water, calm for here at least. There are vague ripples and creases in the ocean's surface, but no white caps, and the waves that roll up against the rocks below are gentle and slow.

"Can I see?" Grace asks, reaching out a hand to take the binoculars from Simon.

"It is nearly straight out," he tells her, handing her the lenses and pointing to an indeterminate spot on the water. "You want to look at about twelve-fifteen, twelve-thirty." Grace trails the binoculars as if following the hands on a clock laid down flat over the water, and stops just a few degrees to the right of where noon would be. She can see it there, the seal. It is a harbor seal, its grey head almost blending with the water. She rolls the knob on

top of the binoculars into focus and watches as the outline of its nose, its muzzle, and the shine of its round black eyes come clearly into focus.

Grace hands the binoculars back to Simon. Simon is not searching for seals on the water. He enjoys seeing them, but they are not, primarily, what he is looking for. He is watching for whales. They are rare, but you can see them sometimes off this coast of the island now, in the time between the end of summer and the beginning of fall. You can see the curve of their back or occasionally the spray from an exhale as they surface for air. Grace and Simon have been sitting here for hours, though, without any sign of them. Still, Simon has sat contentedly perched on the grass the whole time, binoculars pressed to his eyes, scanning the water for whales. Grace likes this about Simon. That he is ever patient, that it is impossible to kill his hope.

"Want to give it another five minutes and then head out?" he asks. Grace responds in the affirmative and begins to pack up their stuff - her art supplies and the remains of the picnic they ate.

Before they leave she looks once more out to the ocean. It is strange that the surface can appear so peaceful, so calm. Underneath it is, she knows, a roil of currents and rip tides. The waters are so volatile that in the record of the past one hundred years of shipwrecks, no one who has gone overboard on this side of the island has ever survived.

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"What do you think?" Simon asks, and Grace turns to see him holding up a large wooden bowl with two salad tongs, smiling. Grace looks over at the bowl. It is expertly turned, even Grace can tell that, and the wood is dark, the grain mottled.

“Isn’t the cherry wood lovely?” the shop owner asks. “Those are turned here on the island, by a woodworker who lives on the northern end.”

“Do you think I should get it?” Simon asks Grace. “I was thinking it would be cool in the apartment.”

“Mmmhmmm,” Grace nods. Ever since she agreed to move in with Simon for their senior year of college he has been obsessed with furnishing their apartment. Already on this trip alone he has bought a lamp shade, two oven mitts, three throw pillows, a scented lavender sachet for their bathroom, and even a patchwork quilt. The Monhegan artists’ colony has pretty much been a dream for him. Every day they have browsed through the shops while Simon handles blown-glass paperweights, and carved wooden cutlery, and handmade ceramics.

“I think I might get it,” Simon is saying now, holding the bowl up to the light and tilting it up and down. “I can just see it, you know? I can imagine having friends over, serving them a nice salad in this, or maybe putting it out on a table, full of fruit.” He places the bowl in the wicker shopping basket he picked up at the store’s entrance and moves over to the counter where the cheese boards are.

Grace is walking around the perimeter of the store, where the art is hanging. She’s always loved browsing the paintings on the island. She has always been drawn to the landscapes here — the subtle pastels of lobster buoys floating in the harbor, the light watercolors of sail boats tacking across the sea, the deep oil paintings of waves crashing onto angry rocky shores. Right now though, she finds herself examining something quite different — a simple rectangle of cloth hanging from the wall. It is an appliqué quilted piece, a mosaic of small bright fabric scraps sewn together to form a slightly tessellated picture. The base is differing shades of green fabric pieced together to create an impressionist collage of grass and

trees. In the center, small tan pieces are sewn together to form the shape of a deer, looking directly out at the viewer. It is unlike anything Grace has ever seen.

“Beautiful, isn't it?" Grace jumps slightly at the voice of the shopkeeper behind her. The woman smiles apologetically.

“Is this supposed to be Cathedral Forest?” Grace asks, pointing to the quilted cloth. “With the tall fir trees?”

“Well spotted,” the shopkeeper says.

“It looked like it,” Grace nods, motioning to one of the broad trunks. “I just, I didn’t think there were any deer on the island.”

“Oh, there aren’t anymore,” The shopkeeper laughs. “But there were. Before the new millennium. They were introduced, somewhere around the fifties I think. Real pests though, destroying plants all over the place, spreading lyme disease. We voted to get rid of them in the mid-nineties, and they eradicated the last of them in ninety-nine.”

Eradicated. Grace is still captivated by the deer that stares at her through the fabric squares. There’s something about its stance, its size, the way it looks out at her.

“How much is it?” Grace asks on impulse, knowing the piece will be far too expensive, but wanting it anyway.

“Oh I'm so sorry,” the shopkeeper purses her lips slightly, and puts her hand over her heart. “I’m afraid that particular piece is not for sale. It was a personal gift from the artist. We keep it in the store as advertisement for her prints.” She points down to a box full of posters that sits below the square. “Those are high-quality giclées.”

Grace browses carefully through the prints. They are all quilted images like the one that hangs above. One is a view of the sun rising over the island, another is a still life of lobster buoys hanging on a wall, a third the sunrise over the ocean. They are all lovely, but

staring at the glossy matte reproduction of the fabric just doesn't engage Grace's emotions the way the original did.

"I don't think so," Grace says. "There's just something about this one," and she points up to the wall hanging.

"Isn't there?" The shopkeeper is now smiling at her conspiratorially. "Would you like me to contact you if the artist decides to sell any other pieces?" She asks.

"Yes," Grace says. "Please." And she writes her e-mail down on a scrap of paper and hands it to the shopkeeper.

"What do you think about these?" Simon says from the back, and Grace looks over to see him standing at a counter, holding up a wooden salt and pepper shaker. "I'm thinking of buying all of it," he motions to the basket, now full of things for the apartment. "Do you think it's too much?"

"Are you excited about moving in with Simon?" Grace's Aunt Meredith had asked just a month ago, when they stood at Pemaquid Point, looking out to the sea at the waves crashing against the rocks.

And Grace had said "I guess so."

"You don't sound very convincing," Aunt Meredith told her.

And Grace said, "No, it makes sense. We spend most nights together anyway, and this way we can split the rent." They were quiet for a while then, watching the sea. The surface of the ocean was full of ripples in front of them, a sign of the swirling eddies underneath. "You remember how when we were kids John and I used to swim on the beach here?" Grace asks, and Aunt Meredith laughs a bit and says yes, she does. "I remember we would be out there in the water, and we would start drifting with the current, and it wasn't until maybe twenty

minutes later, when we had gone almost around the bend and were nearly out of sight that we would even realize that the whole time we had been slipping away." Grace recounts.

"I remember," Aunt Meredith said again.

"Were you ever worried about us?" Grace asked.

"No," Aunt Meredith replied evenly, easily.

"Why not?"

"Because I knew you could swim."

Grace looks at Simon now, standing at the counter, staring at her expectantly, a wooden salt and pepper grinder in his hand, a hand-turned salad bowl and a hand-carved cheese board sitting in his basket.

"No," Grace says, trying to smile lightly. "No, I think it's okay."

*

"What do you think about Boston?" Simon asks. He is sitting close but not too close as they recline on a picnic blanket on the level lawn at the back of their B&B. The night sky is clear above them, and the moon set long ago so that, lying back as she is, Grace can see the stars.

"Boston is nice," she tells Simon, thinking of swan boats on the Common, and the winding cobblestones of the Freedom Trail, and simple wooden New England churches with shaded cemeteries behind them, faded headstones hundreds of years old. She shifts her thoughts to focus on the sky. It is dark here. Back on the mainland, even in Brunswick, which is a small town more than a city, the sky does not get dark, not really. There, Grace stares up in the night and sees a scattering of pinpricks of light in the sky, and a firmament that is not black, but a very dark grey. But here it is dark, and the stars are legion.

“I was thinking we might want to live there,” Simon says. He has his hands clasped behind his head, and he is staring up at the sky as well.

“Live where?” Grace is studying Pegasus. She can see the Andromeda galaxy, one of the Messier objects visible tonight. It is there, in Pegasus’ rear leg, so bright it can be seen by the naked eye.

“Boston,” Simon says, pressing himself up briefly on one elbow so he can look at Grace. “I was thinking we could live in Boston next year, after we graduate.”

“Oh,” Grace pauses briefly, looks away from the galaxy above her. In her mind, she tries to shift the lens through which she views Boston. She tries to see it, not as an interesting city to visit, but as a place to live. She tries to picture herself — with Simon — in one of the apartments on the outskirts of the city. It feels like trying to bring a pair of binoculars into focus after one of the lenses has been knocked slightly loose — she feels as though the image should be clear, but trying to look at it, to make sense of it, makes her feel dizzy, and slightly sick.

“It’s just an idea,” Simon says. “But I thought it might be nice.”

Grace stares back at Andromeda. To her naked eye, it appears as a slightly reddish light. In reality, it is a barred spiral galaxy with roughly one trillion stars. The galaxy is named for Andromeda, the Ethiopian princess who married Perseus. Grace has read a lot about her, about how she was chained to a rock as a sacrifice for a sea monster, rescued by Perseus and taken to Greece, to rule. Grace has read story after story, but she has never found out what she really wants to know, which is whether Andromeda was happy.

“No,” says Grace to Simon now. “No, I’m sure Boston would be nice.” She looks back up at the sky. The sky is upside down in America. It is one of the first things she noticed, traveling back and forth between Malawi and America — that here, the sky is upside

down. In Malawi, Pegasus rises with his hoofs pointed toward the earth, his head to the heavens, and he faces West, so that as the night goes on he gallops gracefully down toward the horizon and eventually disappears. In America, it is his head that faces downward, while his hoofs are pointed up toward space, so that he floats through the sky, ungainly, looking at any moment like he will topple to the ground. It is a change — this upside-down sky — to which Grace has never adjusted.

"The Malawi Parliament has voted to allow individuals to hold dual citizenship," Grace tells Simon finally. It is a thing she has been meaning to tell him for months.

"Oh!" Simon exclaims. "That's great! Do you qualify? Because you lived there for so long? Or through your parents?" His words are happy, but his tone sounds strange.

"I might," Grace says. "But I would need to move back for a while."

"Oh," Simon's voice falls. "For how long?"

"Seven years I think." It is in fact exactly seven years. Grace has looked it up. She has been doing research ever since the law was passed.

"That's too bad," Simon says now. "But hey, that means John can get dual citizenship, right?

"Yes."

"That's great!" Simon exclaims.

"Yes," Grace says, again. She stares back up at the dark sky. It is, she would guess, a three on the Bortle Scale. In Mzuri, the sky was a one on the Bortle Scale, an excellent dark sky site where you could see the contours and shadows of the Milky Way, all the Messier objects were visible, and even the airglow of the planet's atmosphere could be clearly seen. A three area, like this one, is classified as a typical rural sky site. Some light pollution is visible, but only on the horizon. The Milky Way is there, but without its numerous contours. There

are stars, but not quite so many, and you can still see some Messier objects — the ones that are very bright. Boston now, Boston would be a city sky, an eight on the Bortle Scale. Even at its darkest, the sky will only ever be a light grey. In Boston, Grace will only be able to see the brightest of all the constellations. And she won't be able to see Messier objects, like the Andromeda galaxy above.

"It doesn't have to be Boston," Simon says. "There's plenty of places we could live. And we don't have to think about this now. We still have plenty of time."

"No," says Grace. "It is good to think about these things." And she means it. But as she looks up, she wonders how much she will notice the sky, if they live in Boston where it's an eight on the Bortle Scale. How often does she look up at what's overhead? How much does she care? And they could easily move somewhere more rural. Somewhere where the night sky is good enough to be a four or even a three. If they went really rural they could get pretty close to a one, just not as perfectly dark. Would she even notice the difference then? Would she care?

"What are you thinking about?" Simon asks.

"Oh," says Grace. "Nothing." And as she turns away from the sky, she props herself up on one elbow, and looks over at Simon with a smile that would probably be classified as a two on the Bortle Scale.

Ephesians 2:14

The morning of the goodbye party, John decides they absolutely must go to Livingstonia one last time.

He knocks on Grace's door just after dawn to tell her this.

"Go away!" she yells groggily, slamming a pillow over her head. He does not go away though. Instead, he knocks on the door again.

"Gra-ace," he calls out, stretching her name into two syllables. "Mom says we can go to Livingstonia, but we have to leave now so we are back in time to help with party prep." Grace takes the pillow off her head and rolls over to stare at the ceiling.

"I hate you," she calls out to John.

"Great," John yells back. "Meet me outside in, what, about five minutes?"

"I wish I was an only child!" she yells, but can't tell if he hears her or not. Grace stays in her bed for a beat longer. She lies there and looks out at the suitcases stacked neatly in the corner, at the blank walls of her room where the faint outlines of all the posters that were stuck up on their surface still linger. She stares up at the little plastic glow-in-the-dark stars that she tried to pry off her ceiling but couldn't. Then, with a groan, she rolls out of bed and begins fishing around in the top suitcase, trying to find a pair of jeans, her tennis shoes, and an old chitenje that she won't mind getting dirty.

The house looks strange to Grace in the early morning light. Gone is the furniture she grew up with, the wooden tables and chairs, the long couch in the living room, the sideboard with the record player on top. In their place sit numerous cardboard boxes stacked in haphazard piles. These are the pieces of furniture, the clothes, the artifacts from their life here that her parents will be shipping back to America. The rest — what they didn't want — has

been given away throughout the village while their most personal items are packed in suitcases ready to be taken onto the plane. Grace picks her way carefully through the morass and opens the door to see John standing, beaming at her, at the edge of the porch.

It is, at least, a beautiful day. The graded tan dirt of the road is smooth underneath their feet and the tall grasses growing on either side of the path wave gently in the cool breeze. Grace inhales deeply as they walk. In a strange way she likes being out this early in the morning. She likes wandering through the village as it wakes up. All around them, the air is filled with the faint scent of smoke and burning wood from the fires that are lit in nearly every kitchen. There is a pervasive chatter that fills the air as families greet each other, as friends call out good morning. Along the road Grace and John continually pass men with hoes slung over their shoulders, heading out to their fields, and women with large buckets of water balanced on their heads as they walk back from the well.

In the center of the village, there is a scattering of motolas parked outside the market square. Inside the market, men and women are preparing the stalls for the day. The men unlock the shop doors, erect the tables for display; the women unload their wares from the motolas, setting out the baskets of tomatoes, piles of onions and bunches of bananas. Then they position themselves on the benches or inside the stores, ready for customers to arrive.

Grace and John stop off at a shop on the corner, since their mother has instructed them to pick up a couple eggs for Mr. Gondwe, to repay for when he lent her some the other day. Mr. Gondwe lives at the edge of the village, in the space where the houses begin to give way to farmland and fields. As it is deep into tobacco season now, squat bushes with broad leaves dominate the landscape on the fringes of the village, turning the world around Grace and John a particular shade of pale green. Nearly every field contains a tobacco hut, set up in preparation for the drying. Grace has so many memories of playing in those structures when

she was young. She would huddle down under the low crossbeams with Tamanda and Mercy and they would all pretend they were in a large fort which had to be defended from invading armies, or that they were explorers, lost in a dense forest and desperately searching for a way out.

Already, some of the families they pass have harvested portions of their tobacco. Under the eaves of his thatched porch, Grace spots Mr. Gondwe sitting next to a large pile of leaves. He is preparing them for drying. He clasps a small sheaf of leaves in one hand, a large needle and long thread in the other. As Grace watches he carefully draws the needle through the stems, tying the leaves together. When he is finished, he cuts the thread and puts the bunch down, opposite the pile of loose leaves. After he has sewn all the leaves together into small bunches, Grace knows, he will hang them in even spaces along the crossbars of his drying hut, taking them out again only when the sun and the heat have turned them thin and wrinkled and brown and they are ready to be packaged into large bags and sold at the auction house.

"Mwawuka," John calls out as they approach Mr. Gondwe's house.

"Johny, Gracie," the man looks up to see them, and sets his leaves down on the ground. "Tawuka. Kwale imwe?"

"Tawuka," John affirms. "It looks like a good harvest." John motions to the plants.

"God willing," Mr. Gondwe nods.

John proffers the eggs. "Thank you for letting us borrow."

"Palije suzgo," Mr. Gondwe takes the eggs and sets them beside his chair. "But where are you now going?" he asks, taking in Grace and John's faded clothes.

"Livingstonia," John tells him. "We just wanted to visit."

“Of course, of course,” Mr. Gondwe nods. “So you are going back to America tomorrow,” he says.

John shakes his head. “We are going to Lilongwe tomorrow. We do not fly out until Tuesday.”

“Ah,” Mr. Gondwe nods. “We will be missing you.”

“Naneso,” both Grace and John answer together, and their voices sound to Grace as though they are slightly strangled.

Behind Mr. Gondwe a small boy, maybe three or four years old, pokes his head out from the inside of the house. Mr. Gondwe gestures for him to come over and the boy does, slowly, staring at Grace and John the whole time, his eyes wide, two fingers stuck in his mouth. Mr. Gondwe pulls the child up into his lap.

“This is Chisomo,” he says to Grace and John. “He is staying with me for a bit. He is the son of Nelson, my last born. You remember Nelson?”

Grace does remember Nelson. He was a few years ahead of her in school. For a while he worked as a conductor on a motola that ran between the village and Mzuzu. He moved away to Blantyre fairly recently though, to work as a bank teller there. With a frown, Chisomo ducks his head into Mr. Gondwe’s chest, turning away from Grace and John. “Mzungu,” he whispers to his grandfather.

“Mzungu yayi,” his grandfather says, deliberately using the soft negative so that the rebuke is not a scold. “Wakhala kuno.” And he points down the hill to where John and Grace live. At the intelligence that John and Grace live in the village Chisomo turns away from his grandfather’s chest to face them again, but he does not take his fingers out of his mouth. Grace reflects on the present tense that Mr. Gondwe has used — wakhala kuno — they live here. Tomorrow it will be past tense — wakakhala — they lived here.

“You are coming to the party tonight?” John asks.

“I will be there,” Mr. Gondwe says. “This one will join me if he is not too shy,” he chuckles and smiles down at Chisomo.

“That will be good,” John nods. “I hear there will be sweeties at the party,” he says, directing the latter statement at Chisomo.

“Masweeties?” Chisomo looks up at his grandfather, who laughs.

“We will see you tonight,” he tells Grace and John.

“Tiwonana,” John says.

“Tiwonana,” Grace echoes, waving goodbye to the pair as they continue up the path to Livingstonia.

As they come over the crest of the hill on which Livingstonia sits, Nyeri Primary, their old school, comes into view on the right. It is a slightly dilapidated building — no windows, no doors, and dirt floors — but it was a good school, a good place to learn. Grace remembers so many little details about going to Nyeri Primary. She remembers that she always carried six small notebooks in her hand as she walked to school, one for each subject. She remembers that she always had three pencils, newly sharpened, and a rectangular pink eraser. She remembers that the inside of the classroom always smelled of chalk and wood and books.

Grace was one of those children who loved school. She liked seeing the lessons written out on the chalkboard. She liked the feeling of learning new things, especially math and science. She liked the excitement that came from opening her exercise book to take notes. What she liked best of all though, was story time. Even now, she has vivid memories of Nyaphiri reading to them all from what rapidly became young Grace’s favorite book, *Kuchenjera Kwa Lwivi*. The colors in the illustrations were so vivid and so bright, the tone of

Nyaphiri's voice so light as she read over the rhythm of the rhyming words. The story — of Lwivi, who was such a clever lizard he outsmarted all his friends — kept Grace enthralled every time. She makes a mental note to look through the bookstores when they get to Mzuzu, to see if she can pick up a copy before they leave the country.

Grace is keeping her old primary school uniform. Her parents, she knows, gave John's away ages ago. Grace should probably have asked them to do the same with hers. Yet she has not. Even knowing she will almost certainly never use it again, and even with limited suitcase space, still she took it and folded it and packed it neatly away a few days ago. A small, small smart blue dress with a white collared shirt, that she is now taking back to America.

As they crest the hill, Livingstonia comes into view. Grace has always thought Livingstonia the perfect sized town. It is large enough to have electricity so that as a teenager, Grace could take her phone up to a store to have it charged, or she and Mercy and Tamanda could go to the video store to watch a movie. Yet it is not so big as a city like Mzuzu or even Kasungu. It is not a place with crowds, or people who are just passing through. It is a place where people know each other. As they walk down the streets, Grace and John pass by the sites which are so familiar to them — the hospital where their father used to work, the mission church with the intricate stained glass window, the brick buildings and grassy lawns of the University of Livingstonia. When Grace was younger, she used to think that she would go to college at the University of Livingstonia. This was probably before she went to secondary school, before she was ten she would guess, back when she thought she would be able to stay in Malawi for college.

Carefully John guides Grace through the town, clapping his hands twice and dipping his head in a casual greeting as he passes people by. They walk past the small brick houses clustered on the edge of the town, out to the back, to where the plateau of Livingstonia gives

way to the escarpment, and then drops off into valley. There, John sits down in the dirt a few feet back from the edge of the ledge, his legs stretched out before him, propping himself up with one arm. From here Grace can see the Old Stone House Museum to their right and the Post Office to their left.

"I've always loved this spot," John says softly beside her.

"Me too," Grace agrees. She has always liked looking out over this edge, seeing so much of northern Malawi spread out before her, the blue of the lake glittering in the sun, the pale tan sands of the shore, the winding black tarmac of the M1 highway leading to Tanzania, the patchwork quilts of the farm fields. She looks out now at the dense green of the valley stretched out below them and leans over and touches her shoulder gently to John's. Instead of pulling away, as he has typically done ever since he became a teen, he leans over and rests his head on her shoulder. In front of them, Grace can just barely see the edge of a white stone. "Do you remember those?" Grace asks, motioning to the stone with her foot.

"Of course," John laughs shortly. "I knew they were around here somewhere, I just didn't realize we were sitting so close."

Grace stares over at the stone. It has been years, years and years really, since they last came to see the white stones that still sit on the edge of town. They used to come here all the time, back when they were very young their father would take them. He would bring them up here, and tell them the story of these stones, the Bible stones. Grace remembers. She can remember almost every inflection of his voice. How he would become so serious explaining to them back, back just over fifty years ago countries all across the African continent were fighting for their independence. During that time, he told them, British administrators sent a message to the missionaries who were in Livingstonia. The message told the missionaries that a plane would fly over the town the next day. If they felt safe being in Livingstonia still,

they were to put a letter ‘I’ on the ground for the pilot to see. If they felt threatened by the unrest across the continent, however, they should put down a ‘V’, and an evacuation would be arranged.

Instead of putting down either and I or a V though, the missionaries collected stones and formed them into a single word and two numbers. They then painted the stones bright white so the message stood out against the ground. When the pilot flew overhead, what he saw, spelled out below him in white stones, was the message “Ephesians 2-14”. Grace still knows the verse by heart: “For he is our peace who has made the two groups one, and hath destroyed the barrier between us, that dividing wall of hostility.” The white stones are still there, still to this day, broadcasting their message. They have remained on the ground this whole time. The missionaries though, are gone. Presumably they all moved back to Britain after Malawi gained its independence.

“Do you remember when we first moved here?” she asks John now.

“Not really,” he tells her, grimacing a bit. “Too young I think.”

“I thought that might be the case,” Grace nods. “Did Mom and Dad ever tell you about the house?” John shakes his head. “Well someone had gone through with pieces of colored chalk and written ‘welcome’ on every single ceiling beam,” Grace tells him. “They had put firewood in the kitchen, and vegetables in the pantry. The house was all set up, all full of stuff, welcoming us. And on every door they had written, ‘Please be at home’.”

“That sounds nice,” John says.

“It was,” Grace tells him. “It really was.”

“When do you think we’ll be back?” John asks softly.

“I do not know,” Grace replies. It is a question she has been studiously avoiding. She thinks it is likely that John, attending the University of Cape Town in the fall, newly-minted

Malawian passport in the pocket of his jeans, will probably be back fairly frequently. But as for her… She will move to Boston with Simon in the fall, will work as a research assistant at MIT, will keep her eyes open for jobs with an international connection — especially to Malawi, or, failing that, somewhere else in Southeast Africa. As Simon said, just because her job now is in domestic health research doesn't mean it will always be. Even knowing this, when she tries to think about when she will next return here, the thought sits like ice within her.

In front of Grace and John, a lilac-breasted roller glides overhead then lands on a branch and sits, preening its feathers. They are common, of course, lilac-breasted rollers. Grace and John have both seen them countless times perched on tree branches around the village or on electric wires in town. Still they are magnificent to look at. This one is sitting at a slight angle, so they can clearly see its blue head, purple breast, the gentle aqua of its torso and tail. For the longest time Grace and John just sit, silent, staring at the roller, watching it until it turns to the right, cocks its head, then ruffles its feathers, gives a slight hop, and takes off in front of them, flying low and away.

"Come on," Grace says, rising and shaking her chitenje to clear it of the dust. "Time to head home." She stretches her hand out to John, to help him up. She feels his fingers clasp around her and they stand there, together, hand in hand, at the top of the escarpment.

"We should be getting back," John says finally.

"I know," Grace agrees.

But neither of them moves, and nor do they release their hands, they just stand there, rooted to the spot, hands clasped, for at least a few minutes more.

EPILOGUE

SUNRISE

The morning after the wedding, Ruth sits curled up on a wicker couch at the bar area of the beach resort, sipping a tea. Even though it is early in the morning, even though the sun is not yet up, she can still tell it will be a good day — not too hot, not too cool, just pleasant. It is one of the things Ruth misses most about the time she spent living here in Malawi, the reliability of the weather, the neat divisions between rainy season, dry season and cold season. In Maine, the weather blurs. It snows when it should be spring, rains without warning, and she has seen more than one warm November. Here though, she feels on firm footing.

Exhaling gently, Ruth relaxes further back into the cushions. They chose a good time for a wedding, John and Mercy. The rainy season has just passed, and everything is in bloom - the jacaranda tree above her, the hibiscus bushes that line the walkways of the resort. Later, the sun will rise to a bright and cloudless day and Ruth will maybe go for a swim, or maybe take a kayak out on the water, head to one of the nearby islands, or possibly she will stay here, on the grounds of the resort — find one of the hammocks strung up between two trees, pick up a good book and just read.

For now, she is enjoying sitting on the couch in the bar area, sipping her tea. She likes this time of day, when the sun's rays reflect out over the atmosphere from below the horizon and the world is suffused with a muted blue light. It is a quiet morning so far. The fishermen were just coming in for the day when she first woke up. Ruth remembers when her family used to live here, back when they used to go on vacations to the lake, she would stay up late at night to watch the fishermen go out. She would watch them lashing the lanterns to the prows of their wooden dugout canoes, would watch them throwing the nets into the bows,

and finally would watch the small bobbing lights as the canoes slid over the dark water, stopping just shy of the horizon, where the fishermen would earn their trade.

This morning the fishermen came in with nets half full — the fish, Ruth knows, are becoming scarcer now, a result of long-term overexploitation. As the fishermen finish docking their canoes, and head in for the day, Ruth can hear the easy chatter and laughter of the women, going off to the market. Here on the beach, though, it is quiet. Most of the wedding guests are still in their rooms, sleeping off the effects of a late night and, for more than a few probably, a hangover. Not Ruth. Ruth found herself wide awake while the world was still fully dark. Maybe it was the jet lag, maybe the excitement of last night, but she knew, as soon as her eyes opened, that she was ready for the day.

The girls are awake too. They are out on the beach, the three of them. Grace and Tamanda are sitting on opposite sides of a fully laid out bao board. Mercy is sitting just behind them, spectating, and John is just behind her, his arms wrapped around her. The girls. Ruth still thinks of them this way, even they are fully grown now, graduated from college, working.

"Are you ready Gracie?" Tamanda is asking now. "It is your turn to move first."

"I know," Grace is replying, a hint of a challenge in her voice. "I am ready."

In the sky above the kids, three birds are wheeling around on a thermal, high above the blue waters of the lake. They look almost exactly like the crows you see all the time in America, only with white shoulders and chests, as if they are wearing a t-shirt. Ruth knows these birds, she would see them all the time when they lived here, they were especially prevalent in the city, you would always see them eating small carrion in the road, or perched on the power lines, or huddled on the roof of a building. They are so very familiar to Ruth,

yet she cannot remember their name. She wracks her brain, trying to call the word up, but no matter how hard she tries, it will not come.

A slight movement on the periphery of her vision catches Ruth's attention, and she turns to a clump of trees and bushes that sit behind the bar, just off to the right. A few of the leaves in one of the bushes are still fluttering. Ruth stares into them, squinting her eyes to bring the picture into focus. There seems to be a slight smudge of color, something that doesn't quite belong. She focuses in and the disparate pixels of the image come together so that she sees - yes - a small braid with a large pink barrette on the end. Ruth knows that barrette, has seen it before many times in photographs and most recently yesterday on its owner's head.

"Temwa?" she calls out. The braid moves slightly, freezes, and then after a minute a head pops up through the break in the foliage, facing Ruth, and smiling.

"Mwawuka Auntie Ruth!" Temwa calls out, her smile projecting a perfect picture of innocence.

"Tawuka," Ruth greets her slowly. "Mukuchita vichi?" The sounds, stale from years of disuse, feel strange on Ruth's tongue, yet she is impressed by how many Chitumbuka words and phrases she has been able to call up on this trip. They have remained, like perennials, buried in the soil of her mind, but now awakened, rising slowly to the surface as Ruth needs them. In the bushes, Temwa looks behind her, as if searching for another child who Ruth's question could have been directed toward.

"Me?" she says finally. "What am I doing?"

"Enya," Ruth confirms.

"I am foraging for passion fruit!" Temwa says, holding a small round passion fruit up for Ruth to see as proof.

“Ah,” Ruth nods. “Would you care to share?” And she pats the vacant cushion next to her on the wicker couch. Temwa tilts her head for a bit, considering this, then finally nods, and disappears amongst the leaves once again, before emerging from the greenery, her chitenje doubled over to form a basket that is absolutely full of passion fruit. When she reaches the couch, Temwa unfolds her chitenje and pours the fruit into a neat pile that rests in the small space between the two couch cushions. Then, Temwa hops up onto the couch, taking her seat by jumping up over the back and slowly sliding so that she is next to Ruth, but upside-down — her head resting on the seat cushion, her legs draped over the couch’s back. Ruth had forgotten this about children, their tendency to twist objects away from their intended purpose. It is a quality she loves.

Temwa turns her head and looks out onto the beach, toward the lake. On the sand Tamanda and Grace are bent over, fully absorbed in their game.

“They are playing bao?” Temwa asks.

“They are,” Ruth confirms.

“And is Auntie Gracie losing?”

Ruth squints, trying to see out to the board. It is hard to tell, but it does indeed look like Tamanda is starting to possess more of the seeds. “I think she is,” Ruth confirms.

“She is always losing,” Temwa says, shaking her head. “I do not think she is very good at bao.” Then she looks up at Ruth guiltily and adds a perfunctory “Pephani.”

“No,” Ruth sighs. “No, you are true. She has never been very good at the game, and she does not get to practice much now.”

Temwa stares up at Ruth from her position lying across the seat, and begins picking her way through the pile of passion fruit, presumably searching for the perfect one to eat.

“Muli na chomene,” Ruth says, eyeing the large pile. “You know your mother and aunties used to collect fruits just that way. They would go into the forest behind the village and come back with their chitenjes doubled over, full of ntochis and mangoes and marula.”

“Ni kumanya,” Temwa nods, she has already begun eating one of the passion fruits, and an errant drop of juice is sliding across her cheek. “Auntie Chimwemwe said they were trouble.”

“Maybe a little,” Ruth acknowledges. “But they were like you,” she says, gently pulling on Temwa’s ear and eliciting a giggle. “Good trouble.” Temwa nods at this, and points to the pile of passion fruits. “Karibu,” she says.

“Yewo.” Ruth looks down at the pile, and chooses what seems to be the most promising of the fruit. She can tell immediately that Temwa has picked the passion fruit at exactly the right point of ripeness, their skin is the perfect deep purple, firm, yet with a bit of give. Carefully, Ruth pinches the middle of the fruit between her index finger and thumb until it cracks and splits, revealing the bright yellow gel and black seeds inside. She tips the fruit into her mouth, and the flavor, both sharp and sweet, takes her back years, back to sitting on the porch of their small house in Mzuri village, passion fruit vines twining up the porch columns, their purple flowers vibrant against the porch’s white paint, their vines heavy with the small raw green fruit growing slowly amongst the leaves and curling reaching tendrils.

“Chabwino chomene,” Ruth tells Temwa, wiping an errant drop of juice from her chin.

“Mmmm,” Temwa agrees, her own mouth full of passion fruit. She swallows, and turns herself so that she is sitting semi-upright, leaning against the arm of the couch. “Do you have passion fruits in America?” She asks.

“Do you know, I am not sure,” Ruth says. “Maybe we do? I could see them growing in the south. In Florida possibly? Or California? There will certainly be grocery stores that sell them, I just don’t know which ones.”

“So you have not had passion fruit since you moved away?” Temwa asks.

“I have not.”

“Shame,” Temwa says, picking up yet another passion fruit from the pile and cracking it open.

“Yes,” Ruth agrees. “It is.”

Temwa turns herself once again so that she is now sitting up even more, propped against Ruth’s side, her feet dangling over the edge of the couch instead of thrown over its back. She looks out onto the beach, toward the lake. On the sand Tamanda and Grace are bent over, fully absorbed in their game, while John and Mercy look on.

“It is nice that you are here,” Temwa says.

“We like being here,” Ruth tells her. She can feel Temwa’s small shoulder blade, Temwa’s hip, Temwa’s elbow, all pressing slightly into her side. The child is becoming taller, thinner, as she grows. When Temwa was a baby, Ruth used to call her roly-poly because she was so beautifully chubby, with rolls at her elbows and wrists and dimples on her cheeks and chin. Temwa was happy then as she is happy now, smiling frequently and laughing at the slightest thing. “I think I am going to try to visit more often,” Ruth says, and Temwa nods, and leans a bit more firmly into her side.

“You know they are moving to South Africa,” Temwa says, motioning to Mercy and John. “Now that they are married and Uncle John has a stupid job there.”

“I do know that, yes.”

“I do not want them to leave,” Temwa says.

“It is always hard when people we care about are further away,” Ruth tells her. “But I know that they will come back and visit very often.”

“It is not the same,” Temwa complains.

“I know,” Ruth says, and she puts her arm around the girl’s shoulders. “But Auntie Grace will be moving back here, are you excited about that?”

“I am yes,” Temwa acknowledges. Her legs, hanging off the edge of the couch, aren’t long enough to touch the ground and she is swinging them absentmindedly back and forth. “I think Amama is happier when Auntie Grace is around.”

“That is good,” Ruth tells her. “I think Gracie is happier when she is around your mom.” Ruth looks out toward the lake, and sees that the crow-like birds have returned. They are flying slowly across the horizon, gliding along in the pre-dawn sky.

“Pied crows,” Ruth mutters softly, their name coming to her suddenly from the ether of her mind.

“What?” Temwa asks.

“Oh nothing,” Ruth says, pointing up. “The birds. Pied crows. I just remembered what they are called.”

“Oh,” says Temwa. “Yes. That is right. Very good.” And she pats Ruth’s knee. A minute later she clicks her tongue in a slight display of disappointment, and points out to where Tamanda and Grace are sitting, huddled over the bao board on the beach. “She is about to lose,” Temwa notes, nodding her head at Grace, who has only a few beans left on her side.

“Yes,” Ruth sighs. “Yes unfortunately I think you are right.” She is not really watching the board though, instead she is studying Grace, and the way the light hits her daughter’s face, and the way, even though she is about to lose, her eyes seem to contain a smile. This is perhaps why, when Grace shouts, “Oh my God, look at that!” and points over

Tamanda's shoulder, Ruth is the only one who does not turn. And this is why she, out of everyone, sees Grace reach over to Tamanda's side of the board while all the others are distracted, and gently tip the board up, so that all the beans slide out of their holes, and onto Grace's side. It takes Tamanda a minute, confused over what made Grace exclaim, to turn back, to see what has happened.

"Iwe…" she gasps, staring out at Grace.

"Cheating is part of the game!" Grace exclaims. "You told me that, when I first moved here, when you were first teaching me how to play. You said cheating is part of the game. I win!"

"I said cheating was part of the game if you do not get caught!"

"And you did not catch me," Grace tells her.

"Did I not?" Tamanda asks, a dangerous glint in her eyes, and then she is off running, chasing after Grace, who is tearing down the beach. It takes Tamanda not even thirty seconds to reach Grace, who is trying to dive into the water. Tamanda grabs her, laughs, and pulls her into the lake. "I caught you," Tamanda crows. "Say it, I caught you!"

On the beach, Mercy has risen, laughing, and with John looking on, she removes her chitenje and walks into the water, standing back from Tamanda and Grace so as not to get caught by their splashing. "She caught you!" Mercy yells to Grace, and now she is splashing, splashing at Grace. "Admit it!"

"Never!" Grace is laughing, ducking into the water, swimming away.

Beside Ruth, Temwa looks up, a question in her eyes. "Oh go on then," Ruth says, making a slight shooing motion so that Temwa breaks into a grin, drops her chitenje and runs into the water, still fully dressed in her trousers and t-shirt and all.

“Where did you come from?” Tamanda asks as Temwa splashes over to the girls in an ungainly doggie-paddle.

“From the couch,” Temwa says, and Tamanda picks up her daughter, throwing her into the air so that she squeals, then grabs her nose and plugs it at the last second, squeezing her eyes closed before she splashes back into the water.

“Can you believe this ridiculousness?” John asks Ruth, walking over to her and wrapping his arms around her waist, exactly as he used to do when he was just a little boy.

“Shameful,” Ruth nods, clicking her tongue and laughing. From inside the hotel rooms she can hear the sounds of people waking, stirring, stepping outside. In the lake, Grace and Tamanda and Mercy are all laughing like children, giggling and splashing, occasionally picking Temwa up and tossing her over to one another while she laughs and laughs and laughs.

“I was worried about her you know,” Ruth says, voicing a concern she has kept locked away for so many years now.

“Who, Grace?” John asks.

Ruth nods.

“You mean after Dad died, when she and Simon split?”

“No,” Ruth shakes her head. “Before that even. Maybe since she first left here, moved back to America.”

“That long?” John says, and Ruth just nods again. “But no more?” He asks, and Ruth looks out once again at the girls, floating in the lake, together.

“No more,” she says.

“Good,” John says, and together they turn to the horizon, to where, at the edge of the water, just above the girls, the sun has begun to rise.

“Nothing Stands By Itself”
Code-Switching in *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*

INTRODUCTION

Parler une langue, c'est assumer une culture, un monde.
- Frantz Fanon, "Peau Noire, Masques Blancs"[10]

In an inaugural lecture at the University of Port Harcourt, the Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi described language as "the soul of literature" (1991, p. 5). Given this critical role language plays within works of literature, it is understandable that countless academic hours have been spent assessing and analyzing the subject. Works including *Language, Literature and the Construction of a Dutch National Identity* (2018) and *Epilepsy Metaphors: Liminal Spaces of Individuation in American Literature 1990-2015* (2017) and *Culinary Linguistics: The Chef's Special* (2013) all point to the manifest angles from which the importance of language in literature can be studied. One angle in particular that has recently gained prominence within the field is the study of multiple languages, or code-switching, within a single literary work. After all, if language is the soul (singular) of literature, how should literary works written in more than one language be analysed and addressed? How does the amount, placement, and presentation of each language affect the literary style? How does the balance of each language influence commentary on equality, inequality, and identity?

Americanah (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Tropical Fish* (2005) by Doreen Baingana, are just two multilingual works which demonstrate the diverse and significant ways code-switching can be deployed within a work of literature. Both books are Bildungsroman set on the African continent and America. *Americanah,* which is perhaps the most well-known of internationally-renowned author Adichie's works, tells the story of Ifemelu, who grows up in Nigeria, moves to the United States when she is nineteen, and then chooses to move back to Nigeria more than a decade later. *Tropical Fish,* the Commonwealth

[10] "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture". Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, 1967.

Prize-winning collection of linked short stories by Ugandan author Doreen Baingana, is in many ways similar, despite being set in a country more than three thousand miles away. The book follows three sisters — Christine, Patti and Rosa — as they grow up in Entebbe, Uganda. Christine, the youngest sister, moves to America and back again, just as Ifemelu in *Americanah* does. Both books are set in multilingual societies — between them, Nigeria, America, and Uganda are home to speakers of more than nine hundred languages (Ethnologue). In *Americanah,* Ifemelu is bilingual, while in *Tropical Fish* Christine, Patti, and Rosa are trilingual. Within the books, both Adichie and Baingana employ code-switching to realistically depict the linguistic inequalities inherent in many African societies, to push back against those inequalities, and to challenge and complicate existing conceptions of language politics and hierarchies.

Any effective analyses of these works must first situate them within the historical context of critical language discourse on the African continent, however. Within this discourse, perhaps the most prominent debate is that of the so-called "African language question". This crucial and ongoing discussion has its roots in a 1963 issue of *Transition* magazine, where the Nigerian politician and writer Obi Wali put forward what remains to this day a controversial proposition: in order for a work to be considered a piece of African literature, it needs to be written in an Indigenous[11] African language. In an essay titled, "The Dead End of African Literature?" Wali argues:

> The whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture. In other words, until these writers

[11] As this is the term most used by Wali and other public figures within the debate, it is the term I am choosing to use. In using it however, I am still acknowledging that there are problematic elements to the term. Achebe perhaps summed these problematic elements up best when he wrote, "What is a non-African language? English and French certainly. but what about Arabic? What about Swahili even? Is it then a question of how long the language has been present on African soil? If so, how many years should constitute effective occupation? For me again it is a pragmatic matter. A language spoken by Africans on African soil, a language in which Africans write, justifies itself." (1965, p. 90)

> and their western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity, and frustration (p. 14).

In a subsequent issue of *Transition,* the noted Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe penned a response to Wali's article. While acknowledging the problematic nature of English in that, "it came as part of a package deal which included many other items of doubtful value and the positive atrocity of racial arrogance and prejudice, which may yet set the world on fire" (1965, p. 3) Achebe also defended English as a medium for African writing, stating:

> A national literature is one that takes the whole nation for its province and has a realized or potential audience throughout its territory. In other words, a literature that is written in the national language. An ethnic literature is one which is available only to one ethnic group within the nation. If you take Nigeria as an example, the national literature, as I see it, is the literature written in English; and the ethnic literatures are in Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Efik, Edo, Ijaw, etc., etc. Any attempt to define African literature in terms which overlook the complexities of the African scene at the material time is doomed to failure (p. 2).

These discussions, begun in the sixties, have continued throughout the years as colonialism has turned to independence to neocolonialism to globalisation. Twenty years after Wali's initial article, the eminent Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o wrote *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986a) and thus became perhaps the strongest modern proponent for African literature written in Indigenous languages. Ngũgĩ argued that by having African authors write in English, "what we have created is another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature" (p. 102). Instead of this, Ngũgĩ declares that:

> I would like to see Kenya peoples' mother-tongues (our national languages!) carry a literature reflecting not only the rhythms of a child's spoken expression, but also his struggle with nature and his social nature. With that harmony between himself, his language and his environment as his starting point, he can learn other languages and even enjoy the positive humanistic, democratic and revolutionary elements in other people's literature and cultures

> without any complexes about his own language, his own self, his environment (p. 104).

Ngũgĩ therefore continued and amplified Wali's argument that only works written in Indigenous African languages could be labelled as "African literature". Ngũgĩ also argued that the unequal relationship between colonial languages and Indigenous ones would only be ameliorated when African authors chose to write exclusively in Indigenous languages, and have those works translated for a foreign audience. Other contemporary authors however, have disputed this notion, contending that for post-independence[12] writers, the English language can be a powerful tool. The noted Indian novelist Salman Rushdie, for example, writes in his collection of essays *Imaginary Homelands* (2013):

> Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free (p. 17).

Both Adichie and Baingana have addressed their choice to use English as the dominant languages in their works within this discourse. In some ways, however, they have in fact turned the discussion on its head, or marked a new period in the discussion, by declaring that for them, there is no choice over which language to use. Adichie broached the subject most famously in a 2008 interview at the Women's Caucus of the African Literature Association (WOCALA). Adichie was asked why she, as an African fiction writer,[13] chooses to write in English. Adichie told the caucus:

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[12] Commonly in academic scholarship post-independence peoples are referred to as "post-colonial". However, Isaiah Ilo (2013) has argued that this term privileges the colonial episode, and that the epoch should more correctly be referred to as "post-independence". I agree with this assessment, and therefore, will use the term "post-independence" throughout this essay.

[13] The interviewer used this terminology, and Adichie did not dispute it.

> I'm not sure my writing in English is a choice. If a Nigerian Igbo like myself is educated exclusively in English, discouraged from speaking Igbo in a school in which Igbo was just one more subject of study (and one that was considered 'uncool' by students and did not receive much support from the administration), then perhaps writing in English is not a choice, because the idea of choice assumes other equal alternatives (p. 2).

One of the most striking aspects of this statement is Adichie's assertion that she is a Nigerian Igbo. Given that Adichie is a critically-acclaimed best-selling author, it is widely known that she is originally from Nigeria. Less-discussed, however, is that Nigeria — itself a geographic area carved out by British colonisers — consists of more than three hundred and fifty different tribes or ethnic groups. By asserting her identity as a Nigerian *Igbo*, Adichie foregrounds a selfhood that predates colonialism, but also subtly draws attention to her linguistic background, as Igbo is not only the name of a people, but also of their language. The contrast with the second half of the sentence, where Adichie notes that she was educated "exclusively" in English is therefore all the more stark because Adichie predicated it by foregrounding her identity as an Igbo. Adichie's disclosure that her education was conducted solely in English echoes the linguist Ayo Bamgbose's assertion that education policy across the African continent, "provides the best illustration of what has come to be known as an *inheritance situation*: how the colonial experience continues to shape and define post-colonial problems and practices" (1991, p. 69).

Perhaps the most poignant aspect of Adichie's statement, however, is her discussion of the power of choice in relation to language. Adichie bookends her entire paragraph by indicating that the interviewer's question — which is frequently put to writers from the African continent — may in fact be flawed. The interviewer, and indeed society at large, might assume that African writers have free choice in their creative endeavours. Yet Adichie reveals that even though she was in many ways raised bilingual, she does not speak one of

the languages — her mother tongue[14] — well enough to feel she can effectively write in it. The references to being "discouraged" from speaking Igbo in school, the note that Igbo was considered "uncool", even among her peers, and the explanation that Igbo is still treated as merely a "subject" in the education system, rather than as a dynamic living language and cultural touchstone, all indicate that the choice over which language to write in was stolen from Adichie by the lingering consequences of colonialism.

Baingana expressed a similar sentiment in an essay written for "The Africa Report" when referencing her childhood:

> My mother [spoke] to us in Runyankore, our father's language, which is very similar to Rukiga, her mother tongue. We answer[ed] back in English. … [Our parents] didn't think they had to teach us Runyankore or Rukiga. They came to it naturally and so would we. We did not. We went to a primary school in Entebbe that prohibited anything other than English. We carried the policy home (2009).

The language Baingana uses to describe her experience with Runyakore and Rukiga in many ways mirrors Adichie's. The use of the word "prohibited" especially speaks to the strength of the treatment of Indigenous languages at school, indicating that even casual conversations in these languages would not be allowed, and also carrying implications of punishment if the forbidden languages were spoken. Evidence of how this upbringing has affected Baingana's relationship to Indigenous languages can be found in the acknowledgements section of *Tropical Fish.* There Baingana has written, "Thanks also to Douglas Mpuga, who edited the Luganda and Runyakore phrases" (Baingana, IX). This simple acknowledgement indicates to the reader that Baingana, like Adichie, is not entirely comfortable writing in her own mother tongue(s) despite the fact that she lived in Uganda until the age of nineteen.

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[14] There is some debate as to the appropriateness of the term 'mother-tongue' with bilingual individuals, as it might be difficult or even counter-productive to speak of a 'primary' language with these individuals. In this case however, the term seems appropriate, as it references the language of Adichie's home, and the primary language of her parents.

Another difficulty in attempting to situate *Americanah* or *Tropical Fish* within the context of the African language question as it is typically understood is that both books contain a significant quantity of Indigenous languages. Therefore, to frame the books as being written in one single language — as any analysis of "where" the books fall on the African language question must inherently do — is to marginalise the other languages. It seems more fitting to take the tack first proposed by Isaiah Ilo in *Language and Aesthetics of Modern African Drama* (2013) and reframe the African language question, "as a continuum in which the major constructs on the issue are acknowledged as different theories that have influenced present practice of [writing] in Africa" (p. 1). Adopting this approach involves accepting a diachronic view of language and literature on the African continent — evaluating the situation as one that evolves over time, rather than treating it as static. In utilising this framework, it is possible to situate Adichie and Baingana within an African linguistic continuum and to examine the importance of *both* Indigenous languages and English within their works as crucial and complementary forces.

Yet, historically, the multilingual aspect of Adichie and Baingana's work has rarely been explored. Both authors are seldom asked about the use of multiple languages in their fictions, and their code-switching is hardly ever interrogated as a stylistic or political choice, with scholarly papers on the subject making up a frustratingly small percentage of the critical examinations of either work. This gap in discourse and critical literature is not unique to these two books, and is especially disheartening given that the practice of employing multiple languages within literature is not a new one. The record of code-switching is nearly as old as the record of written language itself, and dates back to at least the third millennium BCE when widespread bilingualism developed between the Sumerian and Akkadian languages in Mesopotamia (Deutscher, 2000). Written records show that code-switching has continued as

a stable phenomenon throughout history all around the world. Spells recorded on the Greek Magical Papyri in the first millennium BCE from Graeco-Roman Egypt include, "documents that were bilingual — some of the spells were written in Greek, others in Egyptian, all within the same texts and all for use by the same magician" (Johnson, 1997, p. LV). There are records of bilingual Old English and Latin poems in the early medieval period, while there are, "hundreds of bilingual and some trilingual poems dating from the 13th century to the end of the medieval period" (Schendl, 2015, p. 236). In modern times examples of bilingualism and code-switching in literary endeavours abound, from children's book such as *I Love My Dad/Eu Amo o Meu Pai* (2019) to genre works like *Unmarriageable: Pride and Prejudice in Pakistan* (2019) all the way to critically-acclaimed literary fiction such as *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). These works show that multilingualism — both in society and in literature — is not a novel phenomenon. Yet academic study of it is, frustratingly, mostly a recent endeavour.

Partly, the gap in multilingual scholarship is an ideological one. In their examination of code-switching and literature, Penelope Gardner-Chloros and Daniel Weston (2015) have pointed out that:

> The modern expectation that literature will be monolingual has emerged as a result of the dissemination of western language ideologies, with their origins in the 19th-century emergence of the nation state (Anderson, 1991). Within this ideological framework, uncompromisingly bilingual texts are less likely to be read, or evaluated positively by critics (p. 197).

This ideological framework is one that is rife among academics and scholars, as seen, for example, in Mier Sternberg's assertion that literature is "normally unilingual" (1981, p. 226) or Mark Sebba's analysis that scholars tend to "specialise in languages, so we tend not to study written texts of multiple languages" (Sebba, 2012, p.3).

However, it must also be acknowledged that the dearth of scholarship on code switching in literature is also in part due to the logistical construction of academia. The use of multiple languages in creative works falls between sociolinguistics and literature as a field of study. Rather than attracting overlapping research, it has unfortunately been more commonly ignored by all parties involved; Gardner-Chloros (2009) has described a situation where, "sociolinguists have tended to neglect literary evidence" and "literary scholars have been equally remiss in exploring multilingualism, despite the fact that this has been a resurgent feature of the language of literature in both the 20th and 21st centuries," (p. 184). By focusing on the nexus between literature and sociolinguistics, this project aims to help fill this gap in critical scholarship. Examining the methods by which multiple languages are employed within literary works can provide many insights into the field of sociolinguistics: likewise, examining works of literature through a "sociolinguistic lens", so to speak, can provide substantial illumination on the artistic and literary messages of a particular piece.

In the same WOCALA interview in which Adichie admitted that for her writing in English is not really a choice she also made a strong statement about her generation's relationship to languages. Adichie told the audience:

> I come from a generation of Nigerians who constantly negotiate two languages and sometimes three, if you include Pidgin. For the Igbo in particular, ours is the Engli-Igbo generation and so to somehow claim that Igbo alone can capture our experience is to limit it (2).

This idea of multilingualism being needed to fully capture the lived experience of individuals growing up on the African continent today is central to both *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*. By drawing on multiple languages, Baingana and Adichie are able to demonstrate the literary and cultural importance of Indigenous languages, they are able to subtly subvert the hegemonic power of English, and they are able to explore the changing dynamics of the

relationship between Indigenous African languages and English. For both writers, the use of multiple languages is a crucial and integral aspect of the creative endeavour; their works show how significant individual lexical choices are in shaping a text, and make a strong case that code-switching within fiction should receive more scholarly attention.

SECTION ONE: INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio.[15]
- Antonio de Nebrija, "Gramática de la Lengua Castellana"

Twenty-four pages into *Americanah,* in a sentence written mostly in English, the reader notices something different — an interjection in Igbo, one of the main languages spoken in Nigeria. The interjection is *kedu,* a shortening of the phrase '*kedu k'imere'* which roughly translates to "how are you?" On just the second page of *Tropical Fish,* a similar phenomenon occurs. Christine teases the family's house-girl, Rusi, about the neighbor's *shamba-boy*,[16] a term which is a mix of Runyakore and English, and refers to yard workers. Though brief, interjections like these occur throughout both texts and are illustrative of an important point: while these works may be written *primarily* in English, they are not written *exclusively* in English.

In incorporating multiple languages, both books follow the matrix/inlay system first identified in Nigerian anglophone literature by Michael Onwuemene (1999). Onwuemene described such literature as typically:

> consist[ing] of two types of sentences — unadulterated standard English sentences, which constitute the overwhelming bulk of the text, and macaronic sentences (Igbo English, Ijaw English, Yoruba English), [which make up] a small fraction of the text. The former type of sentences will here be termed the macaronic sentences, which are as it were inlaid among the matrix sentences like jewels on a ground material (p. 1061).

This matrix/inlay system is employed in many famous classical works of African fiction, including *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Chinua Achebe, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi

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[15] This phrase has often been translated as, "Language has always been the perfect instrument of empire". When one takes into context the sentences around the phrase, it is clear that De Nebrija is speaking of language as a tool of empire, and so the translation can be considered just. However, I like the more literal translation, "Language has always been the partner of empire". I feel it better maintains the poetry of the original, while still encapsulating De Nebrija's point.

[16] My father was working and living in Ugandan for much of the time I was writing this thesis, so all translations are from my own knowledge of Luganda, or, occasionally, from asking his co-workers.

Dangaremgba, and is the structure utilised by Ngũgĩ in his English translation of his novel *A Grain of Wheat* (1967). This same structure continues to be popular in contemporary African literature. NoViolet Bulawayo employs it in her novel *We Need New Names* (2013) as does Taiye Selasi in her book *Ghana Must Go* (2013). The format is even utilised in genre fiction such as South African writer Deon Meyer's crime series (1994-2019), where the matrix Afrikaans is interspersed with other Indigenous South African languages.

In *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*, employing a matrix-inlay system allows both authors a significant amount of control over how multiple languages are deployed within their texts. Using this structure Baingana and Adichie can choose, for example, how many indigenous code words to include in the text, how often to include these codes, whether they are included overtly or covertly, as well as the level of translation. These choices in turn have a profound effect on fully and realistically portraying the linguistic inequalities inherent in the societies in which the books are set, as well as in pushing back against these same inequalities.

Measuring Codes - Multilingual Classifications and Linguistic Strata

Despite featuring a mix of languages, *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* are most often described as being written in English. This description is a reflection of the high ratio of English language matrix words that appear in both books in comparison to Indigenous language inlay codes. There are roughly one hundred and forty-four codes in *Americanah* and roughly one hundred and forty-eight in *Tropical Fish*.[17] As *Tropical Fish* is one hundred and forty-seven

[17] Although apparently objective, these numbers are in fact subjective, as there are differing definitions of what should be counted as an inlay code. Should discourse markers count, for example? Or loan words? Or sibilants that are present in Indigenous languages but not English? In counting inlay codes, I have used a very liberal definition — essentially, any verbalization that would not be present in an English-language work of literature, I have counted as a code.

pages long, the reader will encounter some form of inlay code roughly once every page.[18] *Americanah* is five hundred pages long, which means the reader encounters a code roughly every three pages. Given this ratio of inlay codes to English, both books can be described as what the sociologist John Lipski has categorized as Type I multilingual works or, "monolingual text[s], perhaps with a handful of L2 words thrown in for flavor" (1982, p. 195). To qualify as a bilingual text on Lipski's framework (or a Type II text) a work needs to feature "intersentential code switches, where entire lines of poetry or entire sentences of prose are produced in a single language, with switches occurring at phrase/sentence boundaries" (*ibid*). While engaging with this understanding of both *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* as mostly monolingual works is useful — especially in conceptualising their linguistic construction — it also carries limitations. In particular, in classifying both *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* as monolingual, it is possible to inadvertently diminish the import of the inlay codes within both books.

One example of this can be seen in Lipski's description of Type I works, where he refers to the inlay codes as being "thrown in for flavor" (p. 195). This use of the word "flavour" to describe the inserted codes trivialises them, indeed, it even carries implications of pandering, almost insinuating that the words are included as a form of linguistic or cultural "authenticity" on the part of the author, rather than being integral to the work. Lipski is not alone in this analysis of the function of codes in Type I works. In Katherine Hallemeier's examination of postcolonial Nigerian literature, for example, she refers to the language of *Americanah* as, "manifestly of the locally flavored standard international English that is a mark of the new world literature written in conditions of US hegemony" (2015, p. 135). The

[18] This, again, is a rough approximation. Some pages contain more than one code, some none at all. The rough ratio presented here, however, is useful for understanding roughly how the languages are balanced throughout the book.

phrase “locally flavored” closely echoes Lipski’s own description, and exemplifies the disparaging of code words that is implicit within Lipski’s classifications.

In writing generally about attempts by Nigerian authors to weave indigenous linguistic elements into what would be classified as Type I texts, Onwuemene has noted that:

> The various types of transliteration artifacts discussed above can best be looked on as innocuous sociocultural "seasonings" [emphasis his] with which Nigerian writers made their continued writing in standard English palatable to themselves and to those of their compatriots who were aware of what they were doing (p. 1061).

Onwuemene’s deployment of the term “seasonings” closely echoes Lipski’s and Hallemeier’s use of “flavor", and reinforces this same deprecation of inlay codes. In these cases the employment of food metaphors reflects a critical view of Indigenous linguistic elements as relatively trivial. The references to “flavors” and “seasoning” allude to fairly inconsequential parts of a meal, small garnishes that may in some minor way alter how the diner receives it, but not substantially so.

Yet within *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*, inlay codes are a critical part of each work, and play a crucial role in conveying linguistic oppression and stratification. Both *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* are works of literary fiction set in highly realistic worlds. In *Americanah* that world is Nigeria, America, and Britain in the 1990s until roughly the present, and in *Tropical Fish* it is Uganda and America in a similar time period. As with most post-independence African countries, both Nigeria and Uganda are diglossic societies — in any given region a local Indigenous language exists alongside the lingua franca of English (Bamiro, 2006). Within both Nigeria and Uganda, English and Indigenous languages occupy different linguistic strata — a situation that frequently develops where groups speaking two (or more) languages come into contact. Linguistic strata are a hallmark of colonisation (Tristram, 2007) as “one of the main features of imperial oppression is control over

language" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1989, p. 7). The linguistic strata then manifest in such a way that:

> the 'high' language is used in writing, education and government, legal institutions, public and formal situations. I.e. in those domains which are under the control of the ruling class. 'Low' languages are ones used by everyday populations in their private and formal interactions (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, p. 33).

Within Uganda and Nigeria English has emerged as the "high" language, while Indigenous languages have become the "low" languages.

Both Baingana and Adichie depict these linguistic strata, and the separation of the high and low languages, within the plot of *Tropical Fish* and *Americanah*. In *Americanah*, for example, Adichie alludes to linguistic strata within the first conversation she portrays between the two protagonists, Ifemelu and her love interest, Obinze. Discussing literature, Obinze tells Ifemelu she needs to read "proper books". Ifemelu replies:

> "Aje-butter! University boy! That must be what your professor mother taught you."
> "No, seriously." He paused. "I'll give you some to try. I love the American ones."[19]
> "You have to read proper books," she mimicked.
> "What about poetry?"
> "What's that last one we did in class, 'Ancient Mariner'? So boring." (p. 64)

Adichie's choice to focus Obinze and Ifemelu's conversation on their English class, and especially on the texts they are reading is an allusion to the fact that, "literature was made as central to the cultural enterprise of Empire as monarchy was to its political formation" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, p. 3). The reference to *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* in particular is an example of a situation where, "romantic, nineteenth century, English literature

[19] This reference to "American ones" is also significant, but not related to this particular exploration of post-independence linguistic strata. Instead, it is an allusion to the neocolonial dominance of American English, which is related to the cultural imperialism exerted by the country. This neocolonial dominance and its relationship to linguistic oppression is discussed in section two, chapter two. America's cultural influence, and especially Obinze's interest in it, is discussed in section three, chapter one.

is privileged by its place in the colonial education system" (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, p. 95). Adichie's deliberate choice to have Obinze refer to these works as "proper" — a word that is defined, according to the Oxford English Dictionary,[20] as being "right, appropriate or correct; according to the rules" is also significant. In utilising this particular word, Obinze is indicating to Ifemelu that only very specific literary works, such as poems like *The Ancient Mariner* or American literary fictions, qualify as appropriate or "proper". In this way, Obinze is manifesting a colonial "privileging norm" that provides a "template for the denial of the value of the 'peripheral', the 'marginal' and the 'uncanonized'" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, p. 3) — in other words, colonial and post-independence languages and literatures.

Baingana also touches on similar themes in *Tropical Fish*. In the story "Passion", for example, the protagonist, Rosa, tells the reader:

> We have to do one Shakespeare play for the A-level national exams. Ours is *King Lear*. But who wants to read about the travails of a stupid old man who gives everything away? Serves him right, I say (p. 50).

As in *Americanah,* this portrayal of education, and of literary education in particular, offers a rich environment in which to explore the echoes of colonial oppression and linguistic strata. Rosa's invocation of *King Lear* in particular alludes to Shakespeare's frequently referenced position as the greatest writer of all time, a hagiography which demonstrates that "once works of mainstream American and British literature are canonised, it is difficult to challenge them" (Talib, 2002, p. 16) — another echo of the "privileging norm" of colonialism.

As significant as the reference to *King Lear* itself is, however, the references to the language in which the work is written are also telling. Rosa informs the reader she is studying *King Lear,* mentioning the title in English. Following this, she complains of *King Lear's*

[20] Given that it is British standards of language that are being interrogated in this section, using a British English dictionary for the definition of "proper" seemed the most fitting. Those interested in an analysis of the debates of language evolution in different dictionaries, especially between "liberal" and "conservative" dictionaries, are highly recommended to read David Foster Wallace's essay "Authority and American Usage".

"ancient, unclear so-called English" (p. 50). This allusion to both an English title and description of English words signals to the reader that Rosa's class must be reading *King Lear* in English. This reference takes on more significance when Rosa notes that one Shakespeare work is always included in the A-level national exams. With these references, Baingana is demonstrating to the reader that not only are Rosa and her peers forced to study a literary cannon that is in many ways a perpetuation of English linguistic and cultural standards, they are also being tested on their knowledge of western literature in a country-wide exam, an exam that is, the reader is later told, the gateway to study at university.

With these scenes, Adichie and Baingana are depicting linguistic stratification within the plot of their books. However, their strategic deployment of Indigenous language codes also helps to portray this linguistic stratification, and specifically to depict the separation between "high" and "low" languages. In "Passion", for example, when Rosa is narrating reflections on her English curriculum for the reader, Indigenous inlay codes are noticeably absent from her account. As Rosa is narrating in and about school, a location where the "high" language of English is employed, this absence becomes a textual manifestation of linguistic stratification. Similarly, while Ifemelu and Obinze are discussing school, Ifemelu includes the Indigenous inlay code "aje butter"[21] in their conversation. Though Ifemelu and Obinze are discussing school, theirs is an inter-personal conversation, and so the presence of the inlay code can be read as signaling the presence of a "low" language.

Therefore, while a paucity of inlay codes in an English matrix-language book has typically been read as indicating the books are largely monolingual, it is also important to consider the stylistic and symbolic significance of the ratio of codes within the context of the plot and messaging of a particular work. In choosing to depict linguistic stratification within

[21] This is a reference to someone who is spoiled, as aje butter is a skin cream used by the upper class.

the plots of *Tropical Fish* and *Americanah*, Baingana and Adichie are priming the reader to consider the linguistic choices within each book as a reflection of the linguistic hegemony extant in many African societies — including those detailed in *Tropical Fish* and *Americanah.*

Missing Codes - A Case of Semiotic Absence

One crucial method by which both Baingana and Adichie utilise the paucity of inlay codes in *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* as a method of conveying linguistic oppression is through covert code-switching. For example in the story "First Kiss" in *Tropical Fish,* Christine asks her mother if she can go to a party with her older sisters. She tells her mother:

> "The Pattis said I could go with them to the Bajambora party."
> "Since when, at your age?" Maama talked to the children in Runyakore, but for some reason they answered her back in English. Probably because they would have been punished at school for speaking their own language (p. 30).

Even read on a purely superficial level, this scene is one of the most powerful in the entire book. Nearly every aspect of it is meant to be striking, is meant to grate. When Christine reveals, offhand, that she would be "punished" for speaking Runyakore at school, there are many implications encoded in the word. This particular lexical choice is reminiscent, for example, of a scene in Ngũgĩ's collection of essays, *Decolonising the Mind*, where he wrote that growing up in Kenya:

> One of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment … or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY (p. 386).

Even though much of Ngũgĩ's story is shocking (with its reference to being called stupid for speaking an indigenous language, its note that African students were compared to animals, its

suggestion of corporal punishment) Christine's comment can be read as equally appalling. Ngũgĩ is relating an episode that occurred during the colonial era. Christine is not. With the scene between Christine and her mother, Baingana is depicting that, even half a century after colonialism ended, many of the attitudes cemented during that time endure.

Another poignant linguistic aspect of this scene is Christine's reference to Runyakore as "their own" language. The use of the word "own" paired with Runyakore here is significant, as with it Christine, who is fully bilingual, is staking a claim over the Runyakore language, and associating it with her selfhood and identity. There is never any similar ownership expressed over English, either in this passage or throughout the rest of the book. The use of "their own" in this case effectively contrasts with the reference to punishment to underscore that in being prohibited from speaking an Indigenous language Christine is being separated from something that intrinsically belongs to her, something that is a part of her.

The sociologist Claire Kramsch (2019) has referred to this divorce from language as a form of "cultural erasure". This cultural erasure, in turn, was a direct goal of English-language education within many colonies. As Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote in his infamous 1835 Minute advocating for English language education in India, the purpose of introducing English and divorcing individuals from their own language was to create, "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (p. 6).[22] With this sentence, Macaulay is making it clear that the policy of introducing English education to colonies was not simply one of language, but also one of cultural erasure — of replacing Indigenous languages and culture with the presumed superior English language and culture.

[22] A "Minute" in this case, is a memorandum recommending a course of action. In this particular minute, Macaulay was recommending that English-language education be implemented in what was at the time the Indian colonies.

Baingana's lexical choices in this scene portray just how devastating the effects of colonialism and its lingering consequence of linguistic hierarchies can be. Yet perhaps the most profound aspect of this passage is not which words Baingana chooses to include, but rather which words she chooses not to include. When Christine tells the reader, "Maama talked to the children in Runyakore" she is exhibiting a perfect example of covert code-switching. Covert code-switching is when an author relates to the reader that a language is being spoken, rather than showing it overtly (Bamiro). Covert code-switching is extremely rare in *Tropical Fish*, and any examples of this style are highly significant.

Here, Baingana's method of drawing attention to the absence of any Indigenous languages is reminiscent of sociologist Jan Blommaert's (2010) hypothesis that in some cases the semiotic function of words is more consequential than their linguistic function. Blommaert formulated this theory after seeing a sign for a chocolate shop in Tokyo labeled "Nina's Derriére". Noting the unfortunate word choice, Bloemmart realised it wasn't the meaning of the words on the sign that was important, but rather their inherent *Frenchness*. He therefore concluded that:

> [The sign's] Frenchness was *semiotic* rather than linguistic: important was not its linguistic function as a denotational sign, but the *emblematic* function it had in signaling a complex of associative meanings, the things I captured under the term French *chic* (p. 29).

In choosing to present Runyakore covertly in this section, Baingana is utilising the *semiotic absence* of the words to mirror Christine and her sisters' forcible distancing from a language that belongs to them. By having Christine refer to her mother speaking Runyakore covertly, Baingana is encoding into the very structure of this section what she is describing in the plot — that the society Christine lives in forcibly shuts her off from a language she considers her own.

In *Americanah,* Adichie similarly uses an absence of Igbo to stress her characters' separation from this language, but she does so far more subtly than Baingana, and she takes a slightly different stylistic tack. For example, in the section where Ifemelu's Aunty Uju announces her pregnancy, she begins the conversation with Ifemelu's family in Igbo:

> "*Adi m ime,*" she said simply.
> Ifemelu's mother burst into tears, loud dramatic cries, looking around, as though she could see lying around her, the splintered pieces of her own story. "My God, why have you forsaken me?"
> "I did not plan this, it happened," Aunty Uju said. "I fell pregnant for Olujimi in university. I had an abortion and I am not doing it again" (p. 87).

It is significant that the portion of the conversation with the most emotional import is expressed in Igbo, with the entire sentence overtly related for the reader. The presentation of this statement in Igbo represents a consistent style choice where Adichie has characters convey information of great emotional significance in their mother tongue. For example later in *Americanah*, when Aunt Uju tells Ifemelu about her son's suicide attempt, the narrator relates that:

> Aunty Uju was incoherent, talking and sobbing at the same time, Ifemelu thought she said that Dike was dead. But what Aunty Uju was saying was *o nwuchagokwa, Dike anwuchagokwa.* Dike had nearly died. "He took an overdose of pills and went down to the basement and lay down on the couch there!" Aunty Uju said, her voice cracked with her own disbelief (p. 380).

Adichie's choice to have scenes with strong emotional resonance be related in code is well thought out and deliberate as code-switching in literature "is not the result of confusion or inability to separate the languages, but rather stems from a conscious desire to juxtapose the two codes to achieve some particular literary effect" (Lipski, p. 191).

In this case, Adichie's decision to portray scenes of great emotional import in Igbo functions in much the same way as the phrase "their own language" in the scene between

Christine and her mother in *Tropical Fish* — it depicts a closeness to, an ownership over Igbo that isn't similarly mirrored with English. Yet in each case the conversation rapidly switches to, and is subsequently carried out in, English. While this could be seen as a necessity in a book where a monolingual English audience is expected to make up a substantial portion of the readership, Adichie could utilise covert codes to explain to the reader that the conversation was still occurring in Igbo, while actually relating it in English. The overt switch from Igbo to English here therefore serves as a structural reflection of how low languages get sublimated in diglossic societies, and how the preference for high languages in an official capacity can influence language use in interpersonal situations as well. The switching of languages in this case, which highlights a semiotic absence of code, can be read as another way in which Adichie is helping the reader to both visually and viscerally understand how much linguistic stratification is affecting language use within Nigerian society. This device functions because, as much as the semiotic presence of codes will strike the reader, so, too, will their semiotic absence. In *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*, therefore, it is evident that the semiotic presence and absence of codes is a crucial method by which Baingana and Adichie physically show the reader, through the text itself, just how detrimental and dominant English has become in their characters' lives.

The Trouble With Translation - Codes As Subversion

While the semiotic choices of when to include Indigenous codes and whether to present them overtly or covertly are important in both *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*, so too are the linguistic choices of which words to present as Indigenous codes, and what level of translation to employ with those codes. Within *Tropical Fish* and *Americanah,* both Baingana and Adichie prime the reader to be aware of this issue of codes and translation through subtle

cues within the plots of their books. For example, in the same conversation where Ifemelu and Obinze discuss the literature they are reading in school, they also discuss their own reading preferences. Describing how she first caught his eye, Obinze tells Ifemelu:

> "I saw you holding a James Hadley Chase, near the lab. And I said, Ah, correct, there is hope. She reads."
> "I think I've read them all." [Ifemelu said]
> "Me too. What's your favorite?"
> "*Miss Shumway Waves a Wand."*
> "Mine is *Want to Stay Alive*? I stayed up one night to finish it."
> "Yes, I like that too."
> "What about other books? Which of the classics do you like?"
> "Classics, *kwa*? I just like crime and thrillers. Sheldon, Ludlum, Archer" (p. 64).

The "Sheldon" in this sentence is Sidney Sheldon, an American writer of suspense novels perhaps most famous for producing the hit television show *I Dream of Jeannie* (Fox, 2007). The Ludlum is Robert Ludlum, a best-selling American thriller writer whose books include the Jason Bourne trilogy (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021). "Archer" refers to Jeffrey Archer, a British novelist whose books have sold more than two hundred and seventy-five million copies worldwide (Crick, 1995). When pressed, Ifemelu admits that *Miss Shumway Waves a Wand,* by British author James Hadley Chase (1977), is her favourite.

Within this conversation, Adichie is once again depicting how much of Ifemelu's life is conducted in English. Within this passage she is reading not just school books, but recreational books, in English. From these episodes it is clear that Adichie is showing the reader how the stratification of languages can spread from the public realm, into the private — affecting something as fundamental as the books individuals choose to read. Ifemelu's experience in this case is a realistic one, and is reminiscent of Adichie's own experiences as a child where:

> I read a lot of British children's literature, and I was particularly enamored of Enid Blyton. I thought that all books had to have white people in them, by

> their very nature, and so when I started to write, as soon as I was old enough to spell, I wrote the kinds of stories that I was reading. All my characters were white and had blue eyes and played in the snow and ate apples and had dogs called Socks. This, by the way, at a time when I had not been to England and had never seen snow and was more familiar with mangoes than apples. My characters drank ginger beer, a staple of Enid Blyton's characters. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was (2008, p. 42).

Here, Adichie is referencing issues of codes and translation, but not codes and translation as they are typically conceptualised. Adichie mentions within this passage several common codes that would appear in English stories, but not Nigerian ones — including ginger beer, snow, and dogs called Socks. In his discussion of cross-cultural reading, Ilo has noted that works of literature frequently contain references to items like this — items that are common in the author's culture, but may not be present in the reader's. Ilo designates these codes "cultural signs" (p. 52). Typically, the question of how to handle cultural signs would be one addressed by a translator. It would be a translator's responsibility to decide whether to translate a term such as "ginger beer" for example, or to try to find a Nigerian equivalency. As the books Adichie described reading were in English, however, they remained both culturally and linguistically untranslated. Within Ifemelu and Obinze's conversation, Ifemelu alludes to this same childhood experience of reading stories that were never translated — either linguistically or culturally.

While Adichie only briefly explores the subject of translation in *Americanah* — referencing Ifemelu reading English works, but refraining from examining the specifics of the lack of cultural or linguistic translation — Baingana delves far more deeply into the matter. In the story "First Kiss" in *Tropical Fish*, for example, Christine reflects that she is bored, having:

> Spent the whole day in bed reading a Georgette Heyer romance. They were best read all the way through, at once, to keep up the excitement. To keep

> believing, hoping, fantasizing. Fantasy was so much better than real life. Christine became the plucky heroine waving her fan, singing, "*my ship sailed from China / with a cargo of tea…"* as she strolled through spring gardens or the drafty halls of Rossborough Castle. She inevitably fell in love with the hero, the tall, dark (African?) Lord Wimbledon, long before he won the heart of the rebellious witty heroine, Lady Thomasina" (p. 29-30).

In contrast to Ifemelu's reference to books she has read in English, within this text Baingana has Christine describe specific passages of her reading material. It is significant that while Baingana cites the name of a popular British author in this section, she invents the particular book Christine is reading.[23] It is notable, then, that there are several Western cultural signs referenced within the extract Christine is "reading", including the "spring gardens" and "drafty halls of Rossborough Castle". In contrast to *Americanah*, here Baingana is deliberately choosing to depict these cultural signs for the reader, thus emphasising their presence, and their problematic nature.

Perhaps the most poignant section of this description, however, is not in the cultural signs, but in Christine's conception of Lord Wimbledon, who Christine imagines as '(African?)'. In writing of global literature, Frantz Fanon noted, "In books, the bad people, the savages, are always black or Indian" (1952, p. 146). Though Christine's reading is set at least forty years later, she is undergoing a similar experience. There are no "savage" Black or Indian characters in the book Christine is reading. However, the reference to "(African?)" in conjunction with Lord Wimbledon's name demonstrates that Christine must project a different race, ethnicity, and nationality onto characters in order to imagine a hero who is like her. The parenthesis and the question mark around the word "African" additionally indicate that though she is a young child, she is still aware of this need for projection. Coupled with Christine's encountering of untranslated cultural signs, and Ifemelu's description of her

[23] As the author of this thesis knows, having, like Christine, spent much of childhood reading pretty much every single Georgette Heyer novel "all the way through, at once".

favourite books, within these sections Baingana and Adichie demonstrate how their characters are consistently "othered" by the books they read.

In writing their own books, however, Baingana and Adichie have, to a certain extent,[24] the opportunity to reverse this power dynamic. Both authors take full advantage of this opportunity. In "First Kiss", for example, Baingana describes Christine imagining walking down the street. Baingana depicts a scenario where:

> Christine could almost see those early morning scenes: most of the slasher women had babies tied onto their backs, who slept peacefully even as the women swung up and down, up and down with labor. The women wore old, faded *busutis* and head scarves wrapped shabbily over their hair. They were barefoot or wore thin rubber *sapatu* (p. 37).

Within this scene, there are three cultural signs: "slasher women" "*busutis*" and "*sapatu"*. Of the three cultural signs, two appear in Runyakore[25] and Baingana provides no English translation to assist a Western reader. Additionally, Baingana does not provide direct contextual translation for any of the cultural signs — including those that are in English.

Instead, in order for the reader to understand the words slasher women, *sapatu* and *busuti,* Baingana provides minimal cushioning, or context. From the cushioning, a reader unfamiliar with Ugandan culture would still understand that slasher women are some form of worker, that *busutis* are an article of clothing, and *sapatu* a form of shoe. They would understand from the description of the *busutis* as "old, faded" and the head scarves as

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[24] The qualifier "to a certain extent" stands in place here to acknowledge that though it is outside the purview of this thesis, the market dynamics of the publishing industry still very much favor Western nations, and more specifically America, meaning that Baingana and Adichie's power of expression, even within their own books, is subject to these market constraints. Although this is a crucial and fascinating topic that should be further explored, it could be its own thesis topic, and would therefore be difficult to fold into this one. Just to note one specific example of how these market dynamics effect multilingual authors, however, Toni Plummer, an editor at St. Martin's Press, has noted that, "Our house style dictates that we italicize foreign words" (De Leon). Plummer added later that it is within her discretion to give authors the choice of whether or not to italicize, but the fact that there is a house style over something this crucial shows that these types of choices may not always be at authors' discretion.

[25] While the third cultural sign "slasher women" appears in English, this is because it has become a loan word in indigenous languages, with machetes commonly referred to "slashers" as are those who wield them.

"wrapped shabbily" and the note of the "thin rubber" of the *sapatus* that the slasher women are probably impoverished, and engage in a form of menial labor. Not knowing what a *busuti*, *sapatu*, and slasher woman are would therefore not materially interfere with their understanding of the plot.

However, a reader familiar with Ugandan culture — or a Western reader willing to engage in some research — would know that a *busuti* is a floor-length dress introduced by missionaries and *sapatu* are cheap slip-on shoes or flip-flops, and that "slasher women" are women who cut the grass using a machete (or slasher). They would therefore have a slightly deeper understanding of the scene than someone unfamiliar with Ugandan culture. In this way, Baingana is once again undermining English language hegemony by reserving some of her text for a reader familiar with the Runyakore language and cultural signs, while also creating a cultural uncertainty for Western readers similar to the cultural uncertainty she portrays Christine as being subjected to when reading the Georgette Heyer novel.

Adichie employs a similar strategy in *Americanah*, but in some ways takes it a step further. At one point Adichie describes Ifemelu recalling that, "Once, their former house help, Jecinta, had come into the kitchen and started clapping quietly, and told Ifemelu, "You should have heard your father's big word now. *O di egwu!"* (p. 52). As in *Tropical Fish*, due to the context Adichie places around it, a failure to understand the phrase "*o di egwu*" will not substantially interfere with a reader's grasp of the plot. However, not understanding *o di egwu* will mean that the reader misses having a deeper understanding of this section and of how Ifemelu's father appears to others. That is because of one crucial piece of information: *o di egwu* is used in sarcasm (Anamelechi, 2009). Therefore, though a reader without an understanding of Igbo culture might be able to gather from the description of Jecinta clapping slowly that her admiration for Ifemelu's father's "big words" is not genuine, it is her muttered

"*o di egwu*" that makes this clear. However, since there is no indication for the reader that the exclamation is sarcastic, and no explanation or context given as to the meaning of the phrase, a reader unfamiliar with Igbo culture might completely miss the full import of the section. In leaving this phrase untranslated, Adichie is including elements in her novel that are only intelligible to an audience that has a thorough understanding of Igbo — enough to pick up colloquialisms and sarcasm.

By choosing not to translate many of the inlay codes that appear as cultural signs within their works, Baingana and Adiche are therefore asserting the status of Indigenous codes as equal to, and perhaps even greater than English. They are additionally employing a lack of translation as a method for subverting the English hegemony they portray their characters growing up with, forcing Western English-language readers to grapple with untranslated cultural signs the way many African readers must as a matter of course.

Merely Metonyms? - Codes Constructing Reality

Yet Baingana and Adichie's choice to present most cultural signs in code has more profound implications than the initial lack of translation even would suggest. In the title story of *Tropical Fish*, for example, Christine tells the reader that she got "into a *matatu*" (p. 93). A *matatu* is a short-distance minibus that carries commuters around cities, or from villages into cities. While there are many equivalents to *matatus* around the world (*motolas* in Malawi, *tro tros* in Ghana, and *Jeepney*s in the Philippines) there aren't any Western counterparts. Public busses, while in some ways analogous, have enough substantial differences as to not be an adequate equivalency. The word *matatu* in this case, then, is actually an accurate representation of what a *matatu* is. While substitutes may exist in other languages, there is no direct translation.

Untranslated cultural artefacts appear in similar contexts in *Americanah*. When Ifemelu goes over to Obinze's house to meet his mother for the first time, a scene is described where, "they cooked together, his mother stirring the soup, Obinze making the *garri*, while Ifemelu stood by drinking a Coke" (p. 74). *Garri* refers to a mixture of cassava flour and water, which is a staple food in West Africa. As with *matatus*, while there are linguistic and cultural equivalents of *garri* on the African continent (*nsima* in Zambia and Malawi, *ugali* in Kenya) there is no English language equivalent, either linguistically or culturally. Adichie could refer to *garri* as a "cassava porridge" but again, this would not convey the full import of what *garri* is.

In analysing untranslated cultural signs, Ilo asserts that they are, "merely metonyms for vaguely perceived cultural differences" (p. 52). While Ilo's analysis offers valid insight, within the context of Baingana and Adichie's consistent use of codes to represent cultural signs that lack a direct translation, it is worth interrogating the concept that they are "merely metonyms" further. In employing an inlay code to represent an untranslated cultural artefact, rather than trying to find a translation, Baingana and Adichie are supporting Penelope Gardner-Chloros' observation that:

> There are concepts which, if not wholly lost in translation, are at best clumsily expressed. Bilinguals, with their access to the cultural background of two languages, can and do subconsciously switch between languages when searching for such *mots justes* (p. 197).[26]

If Baingana wished to provide an English word for *matatu*, or Adichie for *garri*, neither author would be able to find a direct translation, and would instead have to use an

[26] In employing the very strategy she discusses with her use of *mots justes*, Gardner-Chloros is demonstrating why bilinguals might engage in such a strategy. There is no direct translation for *mots justes*. Someone wanting to convey the sense of *mots justes* in another language would therefore have to try to find a substation that would convey much of the idea, but not all. In employing the actual phrase *mots justes*, however, Gardner-Chloros is able to engage in a linguistic precision that would not be available in English, and also employing stylistically within the text the very strategy she is describing.

equivalency.[27] The act of finding an equivalency to match an untranslated word is a process Onwuemene refers to as “transliteration”. Those who read a work where transliteration has been attempted are able to, as Onwuemene poetically describes it, “experience the poignant aesthetic illusion of the source language prancing in an English garb” (p. 1059). His opinion of the efficacy of such a strategy is self-evident.

Yet transliteration can actually be read as far more detrimental than even Onwuemene’s poetic portrayal suggests. To understand why, it is necessary to reexamine one of the core suppositions about language. In general, language is assumed to be a system of words used to define a given reality. Yet Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffins invert this conventional conception when they argue that in actuality, “Language constitutes reality,” by “[providing] some terms and not others with which to talk about the world” (p. 44). It is for this reason that untranslated cultural artifacts, rather than being “merely metonyms” are highly significant. By its very nature translation must involve a certain amount of transliteration to represent “foreign” concepts or words to an audience that does not understand them, and must therefore subtly alter the constructed reality. In leaving the words untranslated, Baingana and Adichie are going beyond simply employing linguistic precision, and are in fact asserting a particular construction of reality.

One notable example of this is the Igbo word *dibia.* Though often translated as “medicine man” or “healer" or “traditional doctor”, as Juliet Okonkwo has pointed out, these translations in many cases, “oversimplif[y] the functions and status of the *dibia* in Igbo traditional society” (2003, p. 94). Revisiting Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s point, to refer to a *dibia* by another name, even for the purposes of translation, is not simply a matter of

[27] The same would be true of any further translations of the work. By placing cultural signs as inlay codes *among* the English matrix language, Baingana and Adichie are preserving them from not just English translation, but *all* translation, as translators will almost certainly choose to leave the inlay codes in place in their source language.

switching languages, it is an act of changing reality. Supplying a translation for the word *dibia* subtly helps to alter its meaning, to create a world where the understanding of *dibia* is based not on the longstanding cultural history and depth of the term, but on a conception easily intelligible to Westerners.

Given this interpretation, it is significant that in *Tropical Fish,* in the story "Passion" Baingana chooses not to translate a word similar to *dibia*: *juju*. Within the story, *juju* typically appears on its own, with no translation and minimal cushioning. While Baingana does offer some form of translation for *juju* just twice throughout the story, both times there are caveats. In the first instance, Baingana has Rosa, the protagonist of the story, refer to *juju* as "Black magic" but the words are in quotes, which is the only time quotes are ever added to a translation, conveying a sense of disdain for how the term has been interpreted in the West, and also a sense of interrogation, an undermining of the accuracy of the translation that is then passed on to the reader. The second time, one of Rosa's friends refers to *juju* as witchcraft, but Rosa responds by describing it as, "the honored traditions of our ancestors that you have been taught to call "witchcraft"" (p. 54). Here, Baingana has Rosa overtly challenge the translation, pointing out that the Western definition has derogatory connotations. In challenging the translation, Rosa is also creating an alternate conception of *dibia* for the Western reader through her formulation of the term as "honored traditions of our ancestors".

Adichie engages in a similar practice with the word *oyinbo*. Throughout *Americanah*, the term *oyinbo* is one of the few Indigenous codes that is repeated within the novel. Roughly translated, *oyinbo* is a term that combines the concept of "white people" and "foreigner" and "rich person". As with *matatu* and *garri,* there are cultural and linguistic equivalents to *oyinbo* throughout the globe (*mzungu* in Eastern Africa*, gabacho* in Mexico) but there are no equivalents in English. Throughout *Americanah*, the word *oyinbo* is never translated, and is

given minimal cushioning. The reader is left to determine what an *oyinbo* is not from any definition or explanation provided, but from the context in which it is used. As with *dibia*, this lack of translation helps to accurately construct reality, as it avoids supplanting the word with a less-accurate Western conception of what an *oyinbo* might be.

In using untranslated codes and cultural signs to construct reality, Baingana and Adichie are subverting the conventional Western construction of reality, and specifically the Western construction of an African reality. This Western construction of an African reality occurs because typically, accounts of African countries are presented from the perspective of Westerners looking in. Binyavanga Wainaina comments on the stereotypes this has engendered in his satirical essay, "How to Write About Africa":

> Avoid having the African characters laugh, or struggle to educate their kids, or just make do in mundane circumstances. Have them illuminate something about Europe or America in Africa. African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life—but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause (2006).

Wainaina's essay shows how easily Western control over narratives about Africa has led to one-dimensional, clichéd conceptions of the continent. In not translating *oyinbo* or *juju*, Adichie and Baingana are helping to flip this narrative, privileging the perspective of Africans looking out from the continent, rather than Westerners looking in. The lack of translation of cultural artefacts also elevates the Nigerian and Ugandan lexicon above the Western one. Understood within this context, Adichie and Baingana's choice not to translate cultural artefacts is a crucial one, key to how readers engage with and interpret their works, as well as to how readers understand the world the authors have created. By refusing to translate critical words, Baingana and Adichie are presenting a more accurate portrayal of the environment in which their characters live for the reader as well as challenging traditional linguistic power structures.

Conclusion

In analysing a quandary faced by many post-independence writers Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin noted that, “Control of the means of communication by the state gags the voice of the individual. … Even those postcolonial writers with the literal freedom to speak find themselves language-less, gagged by the imposition of English on their world” (p. 84). This perspective on linguistic “gagging" can perhaps be seen reflected in analyses of multilingual literature that closely follow Lipski’s classifications. There are overtones, certainly, of the conception that it is only through Indigenous codes that writers can fully express themselves visible in the deprecation of multilingual literatures which contain a certain paucity of Indigenous inlay codes.

Yet within *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*, though Indigenous inlay codes may be less prominent than English throughout the works, they are no less important. Instead, Baingana and Adichie deploy Indigenous codes within each work deliberately. Within both books, Baingana and Adichie use the very paucity of codes that is oftentimes derided to great effect — conveying the linguistic stratification inherent in Nigerian and Ugandan societies. The absence of codes serves a crucial function within this depiction, encoding, physically within the text, the linguistic oppression Baingana and Adichie are depicting within the plot of each book. However, the codes also serve a crucial function in subverting the very English hegemony the authors have portrayed. In refusing to translate codes, Baingana and Adichie assert their importance as equal to, or even greater than, that of English. Additionally, this lack of translation helps to undermine the nominal English-language, Western construction of an African reality, asserting a perspective that emanates from the continent outward, rather than outward looking in.

SECTION TWO: ENGLISH

You taught me language, and my profit on 't is I know how to curse.
- Caliban, "The Tempest", William Shakespeare

In a 1977 essay, Achebe wrote, "Let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English, for we intend to do unheard of things with it!" (p. 139). The sentiment, expressed nearly fifty years before *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* were written, nevertheless applies to the books. While both Baingana and Adichie are considered in their choice of where and how to deploy Indigenous inlay codes — utilising them to great effect to subvert English linguistic hegemony — they are also equally considered in their choices of when and how to deploy English within their works. Their use of English is crucial to effectively portraying the effect of linguistic oppression on the characters within the books, to challenging this oppression, and to complicating traditional conceptions of linguistic hierarchies.

In employing English — the language of oppression — as a method of countering this very oppression, Adichie and Baingana are asserting their ability to engage in linguistic reappropriation. In their study on the reappropriating of hate speech by targeted groups, Carmen Cervone, Martha Augoustinos and Anne Maass have noted that, "there is still a lively debate around language reappropriation" (2020, p. 91). Anne Armitage, in particular, has observed that within this debate, and especially within the sociolinguistic discourse around languages in literature, there are questions, "about the ability of one language to express ideas specific to another culture" (2000, p. 52). Contention over African reclamation of the colonial language of English is certainly no exception to this critical debate. Yet many critics and writers, including Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin; Achebe; and Rushdie have argued for the possibilities of reappropriating a colonial language. Or, as Ilo has phrased it, "if the white man has used English for domination, Africans can return it for resistance through literature"

(p. 6). Through their use of English with *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish,* Baingana and Adichie support and manifest Ilo's assertion that English, long a tool of linguistic oppression, can also be used as a tool to undermine this oppression.

Copying Colonialism - The Manifestation of Mimicry

In both *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish,* Adichie and Baingana utilise English itself to demonstrate and emphasise the manifold ways in which the English language is linked to oppression. One fundamental method by which both authors portray English as linked to oppression is through descriptions of characters engaging in colonial mimicry. Homi Bhabha has described colonial mimicry as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (p. 126). In *Americanah*, the first reference the reader sees to a character enacting this colonial mimicry is Ifemelu's father, who is clearly engaging in mimicry through the affected style of English he employs. Looking back on her childhood, Ifemelu recalls that her father was always speaking:

> A formal, elevated English. … Sometimes Ifemelu imagined him in a classroom in the fifties, an overzealous colonial subject wearing an ill-fitting school uniform of cheap cotton, jostling to impress his missionary teachers. Even his handwriting was mannered, all curves and flourishes, with a uniform elegance that looked like something painted. He had scolded Ifemelu as a child for being recalcitrant, mutinous, intransigent, words that made her little actions seem epic and almost praiseworthy. But his mannered English bothered her as she got older, because it was a costume, his shield against insecurity. He was haunted by what he did not have — a postgraduate degree, an upper-middle-class life— and so his affected words became his armor. She preferred it when he spoke Igbo; it was the only time he seemed unconscious of his own anxieties (p. 52).

Adichie's deployment of English throughout this section is crucial to the reader's understanding of mimicry, and to their ability to read this passage as an example of linguistic oppression. In having Ifemelu imagine her father as an "overzealous colonial subject" and

referencing his “jostling to impress his missionary teachers” Adichie is priming the reader to understand that Ifemelu’s father speaks a form of English meant to impress colonisers — not his fellow countryman. These references dovetail with the metaphor of the ill-fitting school uniform — which conjures up a sense of discomfort or inauthenticity — to remind the reader that Ifemelu’s father is speaking an assumed English, and that he has adopted this assumed English as a direct result of oppression. Through the invocation of the missionary teachers, Adichie is able to reference a desire inherent in mimicry where the colonised are determined to, as Fanon has phrased it, “prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect” (12).

The specific vocabulary Adichie employs in this section also emphasises for the reader the fact that Ifemelu’s father is engaging in mimicry, and is doing so as a result of oppression. Ifemelu’s reference to her father’s handwriting as “mannered” for example, is striking, suggesting, as it does, an association with an image of respectability and propriety. Yet when the invocation of “mannered” is paired with the previous sentence’s references to colonial subjugation, the reader becomes aware that the standards of respectability and propriety Ifemelu’s father is striving for are those dictated by the intrinsically oppressive colonial norms. Additionally, the scolding words Ifemelu recalls her father using during her childhood invoke a sense of the performative. Words such as “recalcitrant”, “mutinous”, and “intransigent” do not appear in typical conversations, but instead smack of elitism and even pretentiousness, and allude to Fanon’s analysis that an African who, “wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is” (p. 25).

The metaphors Adichie employs throughout this paragraph are also crucial to the reader’s interpretation of this section. When Ifemelu imagines her father’s English as being, “a costume” the metaphor conjures up a sense of an item that is consciously adopted —

carrying, as it does, associations of a piece of clothing that can be put on or removed. Through this metaphor, the reader perceives that the English employed by Ifemelu's father is also assumed, while the metaphor itself directly invokes mimicry, as putting on a costume implies the assumption of a different and inauthentic identity — a form of mimicry. The reference to Ifemelu's English as a "shield against insecurity" and an "armour" link to this sentiment, but they also create the sense of distance between Ifemelu's father and the English he employs, as shields and armour are transitory items, hard and unyielding, used to ward off threats.

In explaining that Ifemelu's father "was haunted by what he did not have — a postgraduate degree, an upper-middle-class life" Adichie is echoing Tristam's analysis that while mimicry results from colonial oppression, colonial subjects will engage in the practice, "because of their desire to partake in the prestige, social advancement and economic success of the elite, and above all because of their desire to gain access to the social benefits associated with prestige status" (p. 202). The use of English in this section is therefore crucial to the reader's understanding that the English Ifemelu's father employs is a manifestation of mimicry. The choice of English phrasing, of adjectives, and of an affected vocabulary all underscore this analysis. Additionally, the specific English vocabulary Adichie utilises helps to create, in the reader's mind, a connection between the process of mimicry, colonialism, and oppression.

Baingana also explores mimicry in *Tropical Fish.* This exploration occurs almost entirely in the eponymous story, "Tropical Fish" through a portrayal of Christine's relationship with Peter. Christine begins sleeping with Peter, a white British ex-pat living in Uganda, for many of the same reasons Ifemelu's father speaks an orotund English: she wants access to many of the privileges Peter has as a matter of course. While sleeping with Peter

Christine is able, to a certain extent, to access Peter's social benefits. She enjoys, "bright batiks on clean white walls, shiny glass cupboards full of drinks and china," and the knowledge that, "everything worked: the phone, the hot water taps, a dustbin you clicked open with your foot. No need to touch. As soon as the power went off, a generator switched itself on automatically, with a reassuring low hum" (p. 84). This desire on Christine's part is not criticised. Far from this, Baingana creates a sympathetic portrayal of Christine's wish to escape from oppression, narrating that in Peter's house Christine didn't, "have to squash myself into clothes, pull in my stomach, tie my breasts up in a bra, worry about anything" (p. 86).

What is problematic about Christine's relationship to Peter, as Baingana portrays it, is that she begins to see herself as separate from and above other Ugandans because of it. After she is teased at a bus station when Peter kisses her she ignores the jibes, thinking, "A girl like me didn't spend her time in the streets arguing with *bayaye*" (p. 88). The word *bayaye,* which roughly translates to thugs, is clearly used dismissively by Christine, implying that those teasing her are of lower status. What is striking here, however, is how Baingana uses English to create a division physically within the text between Christine and the people she refers to as *bayaye.* Christine's thoughts here are portrayed in English, except for the one word she uses to think about those who are teasing her. Because of this linguistic division, her derision of these individuals, and her separation from them, is expressed in the language of the text itself, further reinforcing the point for the reader.

The depiction of Christine's derision of others becomes much more stark, however, through the representation of Christine's relationship with Deogracias, Peter's houseboy. Christine views Deogracias as, "an old man with crooked spindly legs attached to big bare feet like boats. Black on bright pink" and notes that he speaks "in Luganda, but not to Peter,

of course. As if we were at his houseboy level" (p. 84). This view of Deogracias reiterates and reinforces the opinion Christine expressed of the *bayaye*, and again shows that Christine's relationship with Peter is engendering a sense that she is distanced or divorced from her countrymen — viewing them as lesser or inferior. Again, this sense of division is emphasised by the use of English. In employing English and especially colonial terms — such as the dismissive "houseboy" — Christine is manifesting Bhabha's analysis that, "the fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place" (1994, p. 63). In attempting to occupy the master's place, however, Christine is also attempting to wield the master's oppression.

The derision Christine expresses is perhaps most powerfully manifested in her negative views toward indigenous languages. Christine expresses this negative view by associating Deogracias' Luganda with his "houseboy level". Within this sentiment, Christine is directly linking her derision of Deogracias to his use of an Indigenous language. As striking as this is, however, what is most striking is that Baingana has Christine present Deogracias' speech to the reader covertly. Christine does not relate any of Deogracias' words or phrases to the reader, instead, she merely tells the reader that he spoke in Luganda. As discussed in the first section, any appearance of covert codes within *Tropical Fish* is rare, and incredibly significant. In this case, by speaking to the reader in English and refusing to relate Deogracias' Lugandan speech, Christine's mimicry is causing her to wield English in the same manner as a colonial oppressor, and to silence Deogracias for the reader. The use of English throughout this section then, is crucial for both portraying and emphasising how mimicry emerges from the oppression of colonialism, but can also become, in itself, an act of oppression.

Shifting Centres - The Metamorphosis of Mimicry

While Baingana and Adichie use English as a tool with which to convey English oppression through mimicry, they also describe situations which deviate from prevailing notions of mimicry, and in doing so disrupt conventional conceptions of linguistic hierarchies. Adichie explores this subject with her portrayal of Ifemelu engaging in mimicry — a mimicry that differs substantially from that of her father. Ifemelu chooses to engage in mimicry shortly following her move to America, in the wake of a meeting with an orientation volunteer named Cristina Tomas. After hearing Ifemelu speak, Cristina Tomas responds to her in slow, broken English — a reaction to Ifemelu's Nigerian accent. Encountering this response from Cristina Tomas, Ifemelu:

> Shrank like a dried leaf. She had spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate; she should not have cowered and shrunk, but she did. And in the following weeks, as autumn's coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent (p. 140).

Ifemelu's choice to adopt an American accent follows the traditional conception of mimicry almost to the letter. Fanon notes that:

> The Negro arriving in France will react against the myth of the R-eating man from Martinique. He will become aware of it, and he will really go to war against it. He will practice not only rolling his R but embroidering it. Furtively observing the slightest reactions of others, listening to his own speech, suspicious of his own tongue—a wretchedly lazy organ—he will lock himself into his room and read aloud for hours—desperately determined to learn diction (p. 20-21).

In dropping her accent, Ifemelu is in many ways mirroring her father's erudition. Ifemelu is trying to get Cristina Tomas, and others like Cristina Tomas, to stop judging her. Like her father, she is changing herself to be more acceptable to others, speaking in the way they "want" her to speak, making herself more intelligible according to external standards, taking the burden upon herself to change, rather than forcing Americans to accept her as she is. Yet

unlike her father, Ifemelu is not altering herself in an attempt to mimic a colonial power, but rather an American one.

In depicting Ifemelu mimicking American English, rather than British English, Adichie is referencing "the changing social status of linguistic codes across social and geopolitical domains" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 202). Ifemelu's linguistic codes — her British-Nigerian-English — carries a different social status in America than it did in Nigeria. In choosing to adopt an American accent, Ifemelu is reacting to this change in social status by altering her own linguistic codes. Through this portrayal, Adichie is demonstrating how mimicry can subtly shift over time, responding to changes in global politics and power. Yet in describing this linguistic change, Adichie clearly depicts that though the social and geopolitical influences may be different, Ifemelu's choice to engage in mimicry is as much a product of oppression as her father's was. The language Adichie uses to describe Ifemelu dropping her Nigerian accent is crucial to this portrayal.

In referencing Ifemelu's switch from a Nigerian accent to an American one, Adichie's employment of the simple sentence "And in the following weeks, as autumn's coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent" (p. 179) is profound. With this description, Adichie adopts a form of covert coding to portray Ifemelu's accent switch. As explored in the earlier analysis of *Tropical Fish,* covert coding, especially when the reader has become accustomed to overt codes, can be incredibly significant and poignant. Bloemmart notes that one of the reasons people drop an accent is because of a sense that, "The existing accents are wrong" (p. 56). In internalising this "wrongness" of her own accent and adopting an American one, Ifemelu is sacrificing a part of herself. In doing so, she is manifesting Blommaert's note that moving between accents is, "not just about acquiring a new accent, but even more about getting rid of another accent" (p. 56). The absence of

Ifemelu's direct speech in this case stylistically mirrors her silencing, her loss of voice that is occurring in the plot. Likewise, the actual process of Ifemelu practicing an American accent is elided. In its absence, the idea of the accent seems to serve a semiotic function in much the same way as the presence of codes occasionally does. It is not the accent itself that is important — what it sounds like or how Ifemelu forms the words — but what the accent represents. By choosing not to show either a Nigerian or American accent, Adichie is keeping the focus on the representational aspect of the accents, rather than their phonetic function.

Adichie does, however, depict the effort Ifemelu puts in to speaking with an American accent. This description in many ways mirrors the portrayal of mimicry carried out by Ifemelu's father. Considering her new American accent, Ifemelu notes that it "creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. It took an effort, the twisting of lip, the curling of tongue," (p. 179). As with Ifemelu's father and the invocation of metaphors such as "costume" to describe his English, the deliberate word choice here conveys clearly to the reader that the American accent is not authentic to Ifemelu. The use of the term "creaked" invokes images of something old, under strain, about to collapse, and this descriptor is then paired with the term "consciousness" hinting fairly broadly towards the semiotically close "self-consciousness". The deep description of the effort it takes to form the language here also mimics, phonetically, the effort Ifemelu is making, helping the reader to understand just how hard the adopting of the accent really is, underscoring its inauthenticity. Adichie's employment of English here is crucial, conveying to the reader the strain of engaging in mimicry, and once again stressing the oppression that precipitates the decision to take on this strain. Therefore, though Ifemelu and her father engage in substantially different forms of linguistic mimicry, Adichie emphasises the parallels between both forms of mimicry, and makes it clear that both are rooted in oppression.

Baingana also depicts the changing nature of mimicry through her representation of Christine's friend, Zak. Christine describes to the reader that Zak, "had convinced himself he was a black American. We laughed at the nasal way he talked, the slang from videos, his crippled-leopard swagger" (p. 81). Similarly to Ifemelu, Zak's mimicry centres not on a colonial English, but on an American one. In this way, Zak's mimicry, like Ifemelu's, reflects shifting linguistic hierarchies. Yet as opposed to Ifemelu's choice to adopt an American accent — and even as opposed to Ifemelu's father's grandiose English, or Christine's silencing English — in choosing to engage in an American form of mimicry, Zak is engaging with a code that is not employed in his own metropolitan centre. In this sense, Zak can be conceptualised as an example of Blommaert's analysis that we may need to start examining:

> patterns of oppression and dominance not so much in terms of languages as in terms of particular resources, some of which may (but do not have to) overlap with languages as conventionally understood. Perhaps it is not 'languages' that are oppressed, but their deployment over specific genres and registers — for instance, their use as a language of instruction in schools or of political debate in the public arena. (p. 134)

Ifemelu and Zak are not examples of individuals trying to copy the verbal standards of a colonising country. They are characters navigating specific oppressive situations using the linguistic resources at their disposal. In depicting characters trying to alter themselves to fit a new centre of global power (America) and showing mimicry occurring across different linguistic registers, Baingana and Adichie are in some measure divorcing the act of oppression (mimicry) from the language in which it is executed. In this way, Baingana and Adichie are demonstrating that it is not necessarily languages in and of themselves that are oppressive, but, as Blommaert points out, that languages can overlap with oppression. In this representation it is the act of mimicry, the desire for mimicry that is oppressive; English simply happens to be the vehicle through which that act is deployed.

Asserting Agency - The Power of Abrogation

Even as they show the amount of linguistic oppression taking place through the depiction of characters engaging in mimicry, however, Adichie and Baingana also assert that English can be wielded as a tool against oppression through the medium of abrogation. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, "abrogation is a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning 'inscribed' in the words" (p. 38). Both Adichie and Baingana depict their characters engaging in abrogation.

In *Tropical Fish*, Baingana first portrays characters engaging in abrogation in the story "Passion". In the very first sentence of the story, Rosa, who narrates in the first person and talks directly to the reader, asks of her audience, "You know how we're taught to throw superstition aside and move forward into the modern world?" (p. 45). From the absolute beginning of "Passion" then, Baingana is showing a tension between cultures, one where traditional Runyakore beliefs are derided as merely "superstition" while Western beliefs are portrayed as superior, the way of the future and dominant, a hallmark of the "modern world". Though this sentence does not specifically relate to language, it primes the reader to the cultural dynamics that lead to Indigenous languages — such as Runyakore — being derided and viewed as inferior to English. This cultural oppression is what leads Christine to engage in mimicry as depicted in the titular story "Tropical Fish". Yet in "Passion" Rosa, who is Christine's sister, follows a very different path. The reader sees this primarily in Rosa's English class, where the students are studying Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Far from being impressed with the play, Rosa admits to the reader that she and her classmates, "called Goneril 'Gonorrhoea', and Regan 'Reggae'" (p. 57). While this may not be the most mature

admission, it does show abrogation. In calling Goneril “Gonorrhoea” and Regan “Reggae” Rosa and her friends are denying the privilege of English, effectively indicating that they do not view the works of Shakespeare as inherently high quality, simply because they were written by a man considered to be the pinnacle of European literary culture.

Baingana does not simply show Rosa and her friends denigrating *King Lear*, however, she also shows them engaging with the work critically and in some ways more effectively deprecating it in this way. When discussing a section from *King Lear*, Rosa asks, “How can these two princesses act like this? It’s.. it’s, well, not primitive, but … no, in fact, it *is* primitive and hard to believe,” (p. 58). As with Baingana’s descriptions of mimicry, the use of English in this section is very deliberate. Although Rosa code-switches throughout “Passion” she does not do so in the classroom, and her English is perfect. In having Rosa critique Shakespeare, Baingana is placing Rosa on more equal footing with the bard, pushing back against conceptions of his cultural superiority and Rosa’s inferiority. In portraying Rosa employing an elevated language register for this critique, Baingana is also subtly reminding the reader that the conception of this linguistic style as more sophisticated is subjective: “‘Good’ or ‘proper’ English was developed purely as a result of socio-economic dominance of certain regions” (Talib, p. 14).

The use of the word “primitive” to refer to the behaviour of the princesses — and to the work of a man widely considered to be the greatest English writer — especially speaks to this point. It is clearly a deliberate undermining of tropes that view African cultures and languages as “primitive”. This idea of the inherent undeveloped nature of non-Western cultures and languages was one of the principal points underpinning the argument for English language policy in British colonies. In his Minute, for example, Macaulay asserted that:

> All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them (p. 2).

Though the word "primitive" does not appear directly in this missive, Macaulay is still clearly categorising the languages as inferior. The references to the "dialects" spoken in India, for example, belittles these languages, and implies a level of primiviteness. Additionally, the description of Indigenous Indian languages as incapable of carrying literary and scientific information, and also as "poor" (in this case meaning of inferior quality) as well as "rude" (as in roughly made or done) allude to non-Western languages' apparent unsophisticated status. Therefore, by having Rosa use the English word "primitive" to describe an element of Shakespeare's writing, Baingana is depicting Rosa as very deliberately and specifically undermining the assumed primacy and hegemony of English, while also undermining the very conceptions that led to that same English hegemony on much of the African continent.

Adichie also describes Ifemelu as engaging in similar acts of abrogation. Even while Ifemelu is engaging in mimicry by dropping her accent, there are hints of abrogation. In thinking about the injustice of Cristina Tomas judging her on her accent, for example, Ifemelu reflects "she had spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate" (p. 140). As with Baingana and Rosa, the vocabulary Adichie chooses to employ here is very deliberate and extremely significant. There are many indications in this sentence that Ifemelu possesses great intelligence and erudition. In reflecting on speaking English her whole life Ifemelu is established as bilingual, and her English skills are placed on equal footing with those of her mother tongue. To further emphasise the point though, Adichie has Ifemelu reflect on leading

the debating team — thus denoting her faculty with the English language even compared to her peers. The use of the word “inchoate”, though, is perhaps the most notable part of this sentence, as it obviously points to Ifemelu’s intelligence, and contrasts with Cristina Tomas’ linguistic assumptions.

What is most striking about the use of “inchoate” in this instance, however, is that it is far more grandiloquent than any word Ifemelu has used up to this point within her inner narrative, and demonstrates for the reader that Ifemelu’s command of English potentially surpasses Cristina Tomas’. In addition to its symbolism as a sophisticated word that underscores Ifemelu’s grasp of the English language, however, the word “inchoate” also serves as a challenge to the linguistic power dynamics at play in this situation. The definition of inchoate is “just beginning to form and therefore not clear or developed” (Oxford English Dictionary). As with Rosa’s use of the word “primitive” in “Passion”, the term “inchoate” in this situation inverts cultural and linguistic assumptions. While Cristina Tomas judges Ifemelu’s accent as unsophisticated, Ifemelu expresses similar feelings, internally, about the American accent.

In this way, while Baingana and Adichie use English to portray the linguistic oppression their characters are subjected to through their depiction of mimicry, they also use English to show their characters’ agency, and their ability to reappropriate English to undermine the very oppression they are subjected to.

Authorial Abrogation - On Agency, Oppression and English

It is important to note that while Baingana and Adichie present their characters as engaging in abrogation and undermining the linguistic hegemony of English, in doing so, both are also engaging in their own form of abrogation. Adichie’s portrayal of Ifemelu reclaiming her

Nigerian accent is one example of this authorial abrogation. Ifemelu's decision to reclaim her American accent occurs towards the middle of her time in America, after a telemarketer tells her she sounds American and she thanks him. Following the incident, Ifemelu begins to feel, "the stain of a burgeoning shame spreading all over her, for thanking him, for crafting his words "You sound American" into a garland that she hung around her own neck. Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American?" (p. 181). Unlike the scene where she adopted an American accent, which is expressed covertly, the scene where Ifemelu chooses to reclaim her Nigerian accent is then described overtly, and vividly so. Speaking with her accent again, Ifemelu, "Felt a rush of pleasure from giving the *t* its full due in "advantage," from not rolling her *r* in "Haverhill" (p. 181). What is most striking about this section is the representation of Ifemelu pronouncing the phonetic elements of each word. The representation of phonemes is completely unique in the entire novel, and gives a vibrancy and a presence to the sounds that they wouldn't normally have. This is in stark contrast to the scene where the reader is told of Ifemelu's decision to practice an American accent, and then immediately subjected to a time-jump, a disjointing that mirrors Ifemelu's separation from herself. In the depiction of Ifemelu's linguistic reunion with her Nigerian accent, the description both of the sounds and of the feeling of pleasure that accompanies them mirrors Ifemelu's breathing life back into her accent by allowing the reader an in-depth understanding of not only what the accent sounds like, but what if feels like to speak.

The description of the sounds also asserts the presence and power of the Nigerian accent in much the same way the use of Igbo codes asserts the presence and power of Igbo itself as a language. One function of this deep description is that it highlights the differences between the English Ifemelu speaks, and the more standardised American version. However, the way the accent switch is described goes beyond highlighting the differences between the

two varieties of English, and in fact places Ifemelu's Nigerian accent above it the American one. In describing Ifemelu as "giving the *t* its full due", Adichie is directly engaging in abrogation, refusing the assumed "correct" pronunciation of the t and instead elevating the Nigerian non-privileged English above the English usually presumed superior. Notably, it is the use of English that allows Adichie to assert this power and presence of Ifemelu's Nigerian accent. In manipulating the English language to elevate the claims of a traditionally Nigerian mode of speaking, Adichie is aligning herself with African Francophone writers who have asserted that in wielding French, in "using it as a literary tool, they argue that they can confront the Other in his own language" (Armitage, p. 43).

Baingana engages in a similar form of abrogation through the story "Lost in Los Angeles". In the story, Christine, who has recently moved to America, narrates an exchange with her boss:

> "Are you done?" My supervisor asks.
> "Done? How?" He rolls his eyes then raises his voice and slows down to his drawl.
> "Are you *finished* with that file?
> "Oh, yes, yes." (p. 102)

Here, Christine's boss clearly judges her on her Ugandan version of English, showing that he considers it inferior. The fact that he "rolls his eyes" and "raises his voice" and "slows down to his drawl" all demonstrate for the reader the condescension with which he is treating Christine. Yet Baingana's choice of vocabulary here reveals that Christine is actually the one with the "better" language skills. While "done" has worked its way into the American lexicon as a synonym for "finished", the two are not in fact supposed to be interchangeable. Grammatically, "done" should only be used as an adjective to refer to food which is cooked[28], "finished" is the correct adjective for tasks which have been completed.

[28] Hence the oft-repeated parental mantra "Turkeys are done, people are finished".

In depicting Christine's boss as erroneously belittling her linguistic skills, Baingana is conveying to the reader that the judgements being rendered in this section are more about cultural associations than linguistic ones. Christine's boss derides her English not because it is inferior by any standard of grammar or vocabulary, but because of who is speaking it. As Blommaert has pointed out, "language statuses and norms are predefined. Prestige languages of the West (I.e. English) are of a higher scale, while languages in underdeveloped communities (I.e. Swahili) are of lower scale" (p. 5). Her boss judges Christine's English precisely because of where she is from. In portraying this to the reader, Baingana is also subtly interrogating and undermining these judgements, allowing the reader to consider whether the Nigerian accent should be assumed inferior to the American accent, simply because it is associated with the African continent.

Baingana also engages in more overt abrogation in her depiction of the American accent. In describing her coworkers, Christine tells the reader they:

> Don't seem to say what they mean and are too agreeable. Their voices stretch out every vowel to its limit and slide and slip over every hard syllable. No *t*'s, no *d*'s, too many *r*'s overemphasized. Heads move too eagerly above bodies that are stuck fast (p. 101).

Baingana's method of detailing the American accent here — her focus on the individual phonemes — closely mirrors Adichie's portrayal of American English. Similarly to Adichie, in presenting individual sounds of the language in this way, Baingana is able to show Christine analysing and critiquing them. Christine's conclusion that American speech contains "no *t*'s, no *d*'s," and "too many *r*'s overemphasised" reveals the subjectivity inherent in language analysis, and undermines conventional linguistic hierarchies which place American accents above African ones.

In this way, through their depiction of characters who deny the inherent privilege of the English language, and through their depiction of Nigerian and Ugandan English norms as superior, both Adichie and Baingana not only show their characters engaging in abrogation, but engage in a form of abrogation themselves.

Altered Accents - Challenging Traditional Conceptions of Linguistic Hierarchies

What is perhaps most striking about the way Adichie and Baingana engage in this abrogation of English, however, is how it challenges and broadens conventional critical conceptions of linguistic hierarchies. One of the most notable ways Baingana and Adichie complicate the prevailing understanding of linguistic hierarchies is in their representation of accent as a locus for linguistic prejudice. In the titular story in *Tropical Fish,* for example, when Christine hears Peter complaining about Uganda she thinks, "I wanted to tell him I knew he was lower-class. Cockney, and doing much better here, practically stealing our fish, than he ever would in Britain" (Baingana, p. 87). What is striking about the presentation of this section is that Christine identifies that Peter is a lower-class British person on the basis of his Cockney accent. While in many cases studies of linguistic prejudice focus solely on the judgements that occur respective to language, Blommaert has noted that accents, too, carry many of the same linguistic associations as a particular language. Given that accents, as well as languages, are the result of a language learning process in a particular region, an accent, "displays all the sociolinguistic diacritics we know: age, gender, class, educational background and so on" (Blommaert, p. 57). In recognising these sociolinguistic diacritics in Peter's accent, Christine is bearing out Blommaert's assertion that, "a Cockney accent does not only identify one as being from London, it also carries class, gender and other cultural indexicalities" (p. 68). In judging Peter based on his accent, Christine is deriving conclusions

about him as a person based on a social and economic status that is evident not from *which* language he speaks, but from *how* he speaks it.

Adichie presents a similar situation in Cristina Tomas' judgement of Ifemelu's Nigerian accent. Ifemelu's English accent is a product of English learned in Nigeria. It is also a reflection of Bhabha's note that because colonisers would never accept colonial subjects as equal, mimicry "must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (p. 126). Or, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin point out, "Though British imperialism resulted in the spread of a language, English, across the globe, the english[29] of Jamaicans is not the english of Canadians, Maoris, or Kenyans" (p. 8). In reacting to Ifemelu's accent the way she does, Cristina Tomas is associating Ifemelu's English with Nigeria. She is picking up on the diacritics from Ifemelu's accent, and judging her on them. When Adichie portrays Cristina Tomas judging Ifemelu in this way, she is, crucially, portraying Cristina Tomas as judging Ifemelu on her English. This diverges from a traditional conception of English as superior and Indigenous languages as inferior. Instead, it depicts a more complex picture of linguistic strata and hierarchies.

This presentation of linguistic strata and hierarchies linked to accents is further complicated by questions of identity and ownership. In *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*, both Adichie and Baingana present Ifemelu and Christine as claiming ownership over their Nigerian and Ugandan accents. In *Americanah,* for example, when Ifemelu reclaims her Nigerian accent, she thinks, "This was truly her; this was the voice with which she would speak if she were woken up from a deep sleep during an earthquake" (p. 181). Adichie's lexical choices in this section stress Ifemelu's identification with her accent. Not only does

[29] Throughout *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin use English with a capital E to refer to the base language, and english with a lowercase E to refer to the different englishes that have developed around the globe.

Ifemelu reflect that the accent is "truly her" but the more detailed description of it being the language she would use in a confusing ("woken up from a deep sleep") and panic-inducing situation ("an earthquake") all stress the genuine strength of Ifemelu's connection to her Nigerian version of English.

Baingana depicts Christine as similarly having a sense of identity that is intrinsically tied to her Ugandan accent. As Ifemelu does in America, Christine encounters resistance to and judgement of her Ugandan accent. She narrates for the reader that the situation is so difficult that, "I have to repeat myself two or three times; it's easier not to talk. Even black people don't look straight at me or talk, gesture, or act the way I do" (p. 101). Yet unlike Ifemelu, and unlike her own experience in "Tropical Fish" when Christine adopted a derisory attitude toward other Ugandans and toward the Runyakore language, here Christine seems to have dropped much of her sense of displacement, and is confident in her own, accented English. She tells the reader, "I've heard Africans who've been [in America] too long talk in the same nasal way; it grows on you, unbidden. I swear never to, if I can help it. Like a good colonial subject, I like to think I have a British accent, the proper one" (p. 102).

In raising the spectre of its British overtones, Christine is touching on a complex facet of an accent she claims as part of her identity — namely that it emanates, at least partly, from the atrocity of colonialism. The question of whether English — any English — is capable of carrying the experience of African peoples, of becoming, in a certain sense, an African language, is one that has been a subject in critical discourse for many years. As early as 1975 the South African author Guy Butler was already speaking of an "African English". Yet Ngũgĩ has been clear in his discussion on Indigenous African languages that English cannot be considered an African language (1986a, 1986b, 2017). In challenging this assumption, however, Gabriel Okara argues that:

> Living languages grow like living things, and English is far from a dead language. There are American, West Indian, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand versions of English. All of them add life and vigor to the language while reflecting their own respective cultures. Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way? (p. 16).

Joseph Schmeid (1991) also asserts that in arguing against the Africanization of English Ngũgĩ may, "have overlooked the fact that English is now an African language in some sense, and accepted as such by many Africans" (p. 120). In a recent essay one of those Africans, Biodun Jeyifo (2017), argued that the presence of important documents (such as the Arusha Declaration or the South African Constitution) written in English, as well as the existence of literature, of scholarship, of journalism, in English on the continent all speak to the fact that the language has already become in many ways African. Challenging the notion that English cannot be an African language precisely because of its oppressive role, Mohamed Bouya Bamba (2017), the first Mauritanian to write a novel in English, notes that many languages considered inherently African have also been oppressive, observing that, "arguing that English is inherently oppressive is much easier for Africans who are not dominated by other African ethnic groups or castes". While Wanga Gambushe (2017) responded, "as long as I have to take a test to demonstrate my English competency to get into a British university, English is not and cannot be an African language".

Within these debates there is a core supposition that is challenged in both *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* — namely that it is African peoples alone who will determine whether English is considered an African language. When Cristina Tomas judges Ifemelu on her Nigerian accent, she is recognising a form of English as being intrinsically African. Likewise, Christine's boss and other individuals she encounters in America are similarly judging her on an accent they view as inherently African. As Gambushe points out with his observation that

he needs to take a test to prove his English competence, this African English is perceived as inferior to Western forms of English, but it is still an English associated with the continent. In depicting these external judgements, Baingana and Adichie are subtly indicating that while the discussion occurring on the African continent over whether English can be considered an African language is important, the views of those external to the continent may be equally important.

In presenting Ifemelu and Christine as being judged on their accents, Baingana and Adichie are complicating conventional conceptions of linguistic hierarchies. They further complicate these conceptions by presenting characters whose sense of identity incorporates English to a certain extent, invoking existing critical discussions over whether English can be considered an African language. Yet it is in their portrayal of external perceptions — of others viewing Ifemelu and Christine's accents as inherently African, and judging them on these accents — where Adichie and Baingana truly challenge traditional conceptions about linguistic hierarchies on the African continent in general, and English in particular.

Conclusion

While the choice of how to deploy inlay codes plays a critical role in both *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*, so too do the political and artistic choices associated with the English matrix language. Through their depiction and deployment of English, Baingana and Adichie portray a world with multiple and shifting centres, each with their own overlapping linguistic strata made up not just of which language is spoken, but also how that language is spoken and in what accent. In this, they are in some ways aligning themselves with Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's analysis that:

> The syncretic and hybridized nature of post-colonial experience refutes the privileged position of a standard code in the language and any mono centric view of human experience. At the same time however, it also refutes the notions that often attract post-colonial critics: that cultural practices can return to some 'pure' and unsullied cultural condition, and that such practices themselves, such as the use of vernacular terms or grammatical forms in english literature, can embody such an authenticity. (p. 42)

This idea of resisting polarities of power and prejudice, of reaching beyond the narratives of centre and periphery has complex implications for their characters' identities, but Baingana and Adichie utilise English ultimately to create a more nuanced conception of these identities and of modern day linguistic power dynamics. Critically, the English language functions in these endeavours in a way Indigenous languages could not.

SECTION THREE: SYNTHESIS

I have never thought of language in binary terms.
To me this is not an 'either… or…' choice.
- Elif Shafak, "Advice to Young Writers"

In complicating conventional conceptions of linguistic hierarchies, Adichie and Baingana are alluding to a complex facet of language and linguistic power dynamics — their evolution over time. Writing in 1986, for example, Ngũgĩ movingly portrayed the disjointing engendered by the atrocity of colonialism and its inherent linguistic stratification, describing it as creating:

> a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualization, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community. It is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person (1986a, p.103).

Ngũgĩ's lexical choices, his deployment of words such as "separating", "disassociation" and "unrelated" make it clear that he views colonialism as creating an insuperable linguistic divide between English (the language of formal education) and Indigenous languages (the language of daily interaction). Yet writing just over thirty years later, in 2017, Jeyifo took an almost diametrically opposed position — asserting that English is now an African language. Jeyifo's contention rests on the principle of linguistic evolution. English *has become* an African language, Jeyifo affirms, due to its presence on the African continent "for centuries" and its contemporary role as "the leading language in virtually all areas of life" (p. 135).

In considering this perspective on the evolution of linguistic power dynamics in the wake of colonialism, however, it is worth more closely examining the title of Jeyifo's article, which is bilingual: "English is an African Language — Ka Dupe!". In the opening paragraph, Jeyifo reveals that a literal, uncomplicated translation of the Yoruban phrase "Ka Dupe" might be "let us give thanks". In explaining the choice to code switch rather than to include

the English translation in the title, however, Jeyifo elaborates that the simplistic "let us give thanks":

> Ignores or erases the complex etymological and discursive uses and history of the phrase. … In choosing a title for this response to Ngũgĩ's lecture, I tried to think of a word, a phrase, a trope in the English language that could do the work of 'ka dupe' in relation to the declarative statement that 'English is (now) an African language' but completely came up short. This left me no choice but to resort to our phrase, 'ka dupe!' In other words, the declaration that English is an African language now is the fundamental basis of my commentary on Ngũgĩ's paper, but only in close relation to this complexly allusive and elliptical Yorùbá phrase could I make this declaration, this claim (p. 1).

The words "in relation" are crucial to this statement, as they indicate it is the two languages, *functioning together,* that enable the title to work. This explanation, perhaps more than the content of the article itself, provides an indication of how much Jeyifo views language politics on the African continent as having evolved. Rather than simply debating Ngũgĩ's perception of a permanent and unassailable linguistic divide engendered by colonialism, Jeyifo encodes a contradiction to this perspective directly into the title of his article. Yet this title also serves as evidence of the evolution of linguistic power dynamics Jeyifo is describing. Even a cursory study of historical linguistics reveals that the hallmark of colonialism was a stratification of languages. Contemporarily, however, it was only by combining two languages that Jeyifo could truly convey his impression of the state of languages on the African continent.

Within *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* both Adichie and Baingana also explore the implications of this evolution of linguistic power dynamics on the African continent. Having used Indigenous inlay codes to convey and challenge linguistic oppression, and English matrix codes to complicate conceptions of linguistic hierarchies, like Jeyifo, Adichie and Baingana turn to a synthesis of languages to explore this linguistic evolution. While

acknowledging the linguistic oppression inherent in colonialism and even post-independence, Adichie and Baingana still posit that the evolution of languages and linguistic power dynamics on the African continent does not need to — and in fact should not — lead to a concomitant devaluation of Indigenous African languages. It is critical to note that Baingana and Adichie do not employ either English or Indigenous codes alone to communicate these ideas. Rather, as with Jeyifo's title, it is the interplay between languages that is crucial to conveying these conceptualisations, allowing both authors to manifest within the text concepts that they are expressing within the plot of their novels.

Proverbially Speaking - Language Interplay and the Linguicidal Hypothesis

When describing the members of Ifemelu's social circle growing up in Nigeria, Adichie writes that they are enamoured of American culture, narrating, "Everybody watched American films and exchanged faded American magazines. Everybody watched American shows" (p. 71). On its surface, this portrayal can be read as a depiction of oppression. The obsession with American culture Adichie describes can be seen as a commentary on the evolving nature of imperialism on the African continent, an example of the power exerted by what Amir Mufti has described as the "world empire" created by the "non-territorial imperial structures of US-led global capitalism since the middle of the twentieth [century]" (Mufti, 2018, p. 3). This invocation of American imperialism, in turn, carries intrinsic implications of English oppression, with Ifemelu's American-beguiled social circle a seeming reference to the fact that currently on the African continent, "The supremacy of English may have more to do with the American empire than with the British" (Marrin, 1998). Additionally, the extent to which Adichie describes the American cultural influence over Ifemelu's peer group carries echoes of Fanon's fears that, "however painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I

am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white" (p. 12) Adichie's portrayal of the evolution of English linguistic influence in Nigeria — first via British colonialism and subsequently due to American imperialism — also touches on the so-called "linguicidal hypothesis" which posits that, "where English occurs, indigenous (and especially minority) languages are threatened, first with attrition and eventually with language death (Blommaert, p. 182).

Yet Adichie breaks with these dire linguistic predictions of the consequences of western influence on the African continent through her portrayal of Obinze. Of all Ifemelu's contemporaries, Obinze is described as the most American-obsessed. He is depicted as someone who, "knew about Lisa Bonet leaving *The Cosby Show* to go and do *Angel Heart* and Will Smith's huge debts before he was signed to do *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*" (p. 71). In addition to this interest in American culture, however, Adichie also describes Obinze as heavily invested in Igbo language and culture. In Obinze's first conversation with Ifemelu, for example, the two speak about the villages where their families are from — which are very close to each other:

> "How often do you go to your village?" [Obinze asked]
> "Every Christmas."
> "Just once a year! I go very often with my mother, at least five times a year."
> "But I bet I speak Igbo better than you."
> "Impossible," he said, and switched to Igbo. "*Ama m atu inu.* I even know proverbs."
> "Yes. The basic one everybody knows. A frog does not run in the afternoon for nothing."
> "No. I know serious proverbs. *Akota ife ka ubi, e lee oba.* If something bigger than the farm is dug up, the barn is sold."
> "Ah, you want to try me?" she asked, laughing. "*Acho afu aid aka n'akpa dibia.* The medicine man's bag has all kind of things."
> "Not bad," he said. "*E gbuo dike n'ogu uno, e luo na ogu agu, e lote ya.* If you kill a warrior in a local fight, you'll remember him when fighting enemies."

> They traded proverbs. She could say only two more before she gave up, with him still raring to go.
> "How do you know all that?" She asked, impressed. "Many guys won't even speak Igbo, not to mention knowing proverbs."
> "I just listen when my uncles talk. I think my dad would have liked that." (p. 66)

Within this section, Adichie asserts Obinze's investment in Igbo language and culture. In having Obinze state that he visits the village — an oft-cited symbol of traditional African culture — five times a year, Adichie is utilising conventional conceptions of African identity to establish Obinze's bona fides, so to speak, as someone invested in Igbo culture. His assertion that it is "impossible" Ifemelu speaks Igbo better than him speaks to his connection to the language, and his confidence in his linguistic abilities. With this description of Obinze, Adichie is proposing that an interest in Western (American) cultural imperialism does not inherently equate to a diminished investment in indigenous African cultures or languages such as Igbo, and that therefore both English and Indigenous African languages can coexist on the African continent.

It is the medium in which Ifemelu and Obinze carry out their language battle, however, which underscores this point: he doesn't just best Ifemelu in an Igbo contest, he beats her in a contest of Igbo proverbs. This is especially significant due to the well-established symbolism of proverbs in literature, and in African literature in particular. Proverbs have long been associated with a sense of culture. Speaking of Achebe's work, Austin Shelton has noted that proverbs "not only 'Africanized' the stories, but indeed 'Igbonized' them" (1969, p. 110). Shelton also found that, "in Achebe's novels educated characters use proverbs less frequently. This suggests that they have lost the gift of poetic speech because they have become acculturated by contact with and adoption of European values" (*ibid*). Ilo, too, links proverbs to notions of traditional African culture — and African

literary culture in particular — when he observes that, "the resources of traditional African oral literature, such as myths, legends, folk tales, poetry, proverbs, and other forms of African languages, constitute the background of African writers whose imprint they must impose on the colonial language" (p. 4). One can certainly argue against these analyses, and particularly against the central concept that any particular rhetoric device is capable of "Africanizing" a piece of literature, but the fact that it is proverbs that are viewed as serving this function is significant. Adichie would be aware of these critical interpretations of the use of proverbs in literature, and her choice to utilise proverbs in this case is therefore significant, a cementing of Obinze's connection to Nigerian and Igbo language and culture.

Crucially, the section where Obinze and Ifemelu trade proverbs represents the single largest block of Igbo text within all of *Americanah*. It is notable that when writing this section, Adichie chooses to present four full proverbs through overt codes. Adichie only switches to covert codes at the very end of the section, when Ifemelu relates that, "they traded proverbs". The fact that much of the section contains overt Igbo proverbs that are full sentences also makes this one of the few sections in the book where Adichie engages in intra-sentential, rather than inter-sentential code-switching. The amount of Indigenous codes present as well as the intra-sentential code-switching means that this section in particular would be viewed as Type II or fully bilingual literature under Lipski's categorisations of multilingual literature.[30] In this way, the structure of the text itself asserts that an interest in American culture is not necessarily oppositional to Indigenous African culture, or Indigenous African languages.

Adichie's choices around translation in this section also serve to emphasise the weight of the Igbo segments. While Adichie does provide literal English translations of the words

[30] See Chapter One, Section One.

within the proverbs, she does not provide an indication of their meaning. As Onwuemene has noted as an example, "the Igbo idiom *Were ire go gut eye go,* which means the same as the English idiom *Read between the lines* can be introduced into an English text as "count your teeth with your tongue". The Igbo words are replaced by equivalent English words, but the idiom remains an Igbo cultural artifact" (p. 1057). In presenting proverbs overtly but leaving the cultural sense of their meaning untranslated, Adichie is therefore allowing the proverbs to stand as untranslated cultural artefacts, thus asserting the power of the Igbo words and phrases within this section. Therefore, in a section where Adichie is making a point, in the plot, that the evolution of languages and linguistic power dynamics on the African continent does not need to engender Igbo erasure, she makes a similar point, stylistically, with the very text of the story — evenly placing the English and the Igbo so that the two appear in concert. Crucially, this stylistic point could not be made with one language alone. It is the interplay between the two languages, the balance between them, that reinforces this concept.

Baingana similarly uses the interplay between English and Indigenous languages within *Tropical Fish* to interrogate the linguicidal hypothesis — especially as it relates to migration and the diaspora. This interrogation is most evident in the story "Lost in Los Angeles", with Christine's move to America. In America, Christine is described as open to and interested in the country and its cultures. Toward the beginning of the story she informs the reader, "I want to be here, in Los Angeles, in America, whatever this means" (p. 109). By the end of the story, Christine is portrayed as largely embracing her host country. After hiking up a mountain with a friend in Los Angeles, Christine looks out over the sweep of land below and when her friends says, "This land is all mine" Christine responds "Mine too," before ending the story by thinking, "What the hell?" (p. 119). Within this paragraph, Christine becomes an embodiment of the aspirational American ideology that the country belongs to

anyone who is willing to claim it, and equally to all who inhabit it (Wuthnow, 2008). While reality diverges sharply from this principle (Wuthnow), Christine's participation in this collective dogma denotes a strong sense of affiliation with America, and this, combined with her choice to take advantage of winning the "visa lottery" to move to America, can be read as a nod to American cultural imperialism.

Similar to Obinze, however, Christine's newfound affinity for American culture does not result in a correspondingly diminished sense of identity as an African, Ugandan, or Banyakore — or to a diminished investment in the Runyakore language. Christine references this overtly when she looks at the Americans around her and thinks, "I can never be who they are, so I don't even have to try. Nor do I want to be" (p. 115). Here, even though Christine is interested in America and American culture, she is clarifying for the reader that this does not imply that she wants to be American. Compared to her sentiments in "Tropical Fish", where Christine engaged in mimicry, was derisive of other Ugandans, and attempted to abjure much of what would identify her as Ugandan and African (including, most notably, Indigenous languages), this sentiment represents a seismic shift. This divergence between the Christine of "Tropical Fish" and the Christine of "Lost in Los Angeles" is further accentuated when Christine muses, "What do I know about African, I only became one after I left, I think but don't say. I am a Munyakore, but who here knows what that is, or cares? (p. 117). Here, Christine is specifically invoking the common theme that despite the African continent being made up of fifty-four countries, individuals from the region are typically thought of by Westerners as simply "African". Yet Christine delves further into this issue by invoking her identity as a Munyakore. As Adichie did during her WOCALA interview,[31] here Christine is citing not her nationality, but her specific tribe as the source of her geographic and ethnic

[31] See introduction

identity. This reference to a tribal identity that predates the formation of Uganda as a country is reminiscent of Obinze's reference to how often he visits the village — a deliberate reference to cultural elements associated with the "traditional".

In depicting Christine's cultural identity in this way, Baingana is presenting Christine as what the sociologists Amelie Constant, Liliya Gataullina and Klaus Zimmerman (2009) have labelled a two-dimensional ethnosizer. Constant, Gataullina and Zimmerman assert that traditional sociological research relating to migration often, "assumes a one-to-one correspondence or a zero-sum game" where "the more an individual commits to and feels for one country, the less he or she commits to and feels for the other country" (p. 276). They classify this model as presenting individuals as "one-dimensional ethnosizers".[32] In contrast to this, Constant, Gataullina and Zimmerman propose a model where individuals are understood to be two-dimensional ethnosizers. Under this model, within the individual, "commitments to two different societies can coexist and influence each other in several ways" (p. 277). In presenting Christine as accepting of American culture without rejecting Ugandan and Runyakore culture, Baingana is endorsing the two-dimensional ethnosizer model. This model, in turn, helps to challenge dichotomous and linguicidal conceptions of language, as it holds that a commitment to one language will not interfere with a commitment to another.

The word "Munyakore" within Christine's expression of identity is also worth analysing in this instance, as it both is and isn't an example of a code word.[33] Munyakore is the proper noun that denotes the tribe to which Christine belongs. While proper nouns do

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[32] While Zimmerman's analysis in this case applies to migrants, I would argue that it is also appropriate for postcolonial situations, where a host culture has been introduced, and stands in contrast to an origin culture in much that same way that the migrant introduces themselves to a host culture that stands in contrast to an origin culture.

[33] Or "Munyakole" since L and R are interchangeable in most Bantu languages.

occasionally undergo forms of translation where they are "modified to fit the phonological/ graphological system of a target language"[34] (Saleh, 2012, p. 836) Munyakore has not been subject to this process. Baingana therefore does not have the option of presenting a coded word or a translation to refer to Munyakore. She does, however, have the option to italicise it or not, and chooses not to do so. Given that italics can be seen as, "a visual clue as to how foreign the writer perceives a given word to be, or how foreign s/he wishes it to be perceived" (Gardner-Chloros, p. 197) by choosing not to italicise Munyakore, Baingana in many ways treats it as a piece of English vocabulary. The absence of any contextual cushioning reinforces this notion, creating a sense for the reader of Munyakore as proceeding fluidly along with the English words, non-disrupted. With this presentation, Baingana is effectively asserting the term Munyakore as both an English and Runyakore word. In this sense, "Munyakore" serves as a symbol of the evolution of languages and linguistic power dynamics — a reminder that words, like people, migrate. Yet within this presentation of linguistic migration, Baingana is also asserting the power of Indigenous African languages by presenting Munyakore not as being taken over by English, but as remaining a Runyakore word adopted into the language. Finally, the sense of Munyakore as both an English and Runyakore word, much like Jeyifo's bilingual title, serves as a structural support of Baingana's challenge to a dichotomous view of Indigenous African languages and English.

Both Baingana and Adichie, therefore, present characters who maintain a strong investment in both Indigenous African and Western languages and cultures throughout the evolution of languages and linguistic power dynamics described in both books. This balancing of cultural interests inherently alludes to linguistic hierarchies and English oppression, challenging the so-called "linguicidal hypotheses". Code-switching is crucial to

[34] "Mexico" in English in place of the Spanish "Méjico" for example.

how both authors portray this to the reader, as with code-switching they are able to physically confront, within the text, the concept of linguistic separation and conflict, and to create instead an alternative sense of multilingualism.

Linguistic Utility - Bilingualism and De/Territorialisation

Baingana and Adichie's portrayal of stable multilingualism relies on the premise that their characters strongly value Indigenous African languages — as Christine and Obinze clearly do. Yet throughout *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* both Baingana and Adichie acknowledge that Christine and Obinze's sentiments toward Indigenous African languages are not universal, and explore the effect linguistic bias has on Indigenous African languages — especially as it relates to linguistic utility and the territorialisation/deterritorialisation of languages. In *Tropical Fish*, Baingana portrays Christine grappling with attitudes towards the Ugandan language of Luganda in the collection's final story, "Questions of Home". Following her move back to Uganda from America, Christine encounters individuals who doubt her continuing multilingualism. One day at her work, for example, Christine relates that the secretary, "Nnalongo asked them what they would have for lunch. Musozi [her boss] repeated the question in English" (p. 137). Musozi's questioning of Christine's faculty with Luganda in this instance creates a sense that the language is undervalued — especially by those who have lived abroad. Musozi articulates this directly to Christine when he tells her, "Some people forget [Luganda], or try too. You young people who go abroad, you come back with all sorts of airs. My nephews too!" (*ibid*).

With this portrayal, Baingana is depicting perceptions of Luganda's value as linked to its utility as a resource. Musozi is expressing the sentiment that because Luganda is not perceived as a useful international resource it is therefore discarded by those who travel

abroad. Musozi is reflecting, in this analysis, the view that Luganda is terrotorialised, tied geographically to Uganda. Musozi's views of the territorialisation of Luganda are closely aligned with a critical perspective in which:

> People's mother tongue (L1) is perceived as 'territorialized language', alongside orality and the use of dialects. All of these forms of language emanate locally. Conversely, deterritorialization stands for the perception and attribution of values to language as something which does not belong to one locality but which organizes translocal trajectories and wider spaces ('scale-jumps' in the terminology developed earlier in this chapter). Second or other languages (L2) as well as lingua francas and diaspora varieties, standardized varieties and literacy are seen as 'deterritorialized language', language that does not exclusively belong to one place (Blommaert, p. 46).

In his assumption that Christine will reject the territorialised Luganda, Musozi is engaging in an "attribution of value" of languages based on their deterritorialisation.

Yet Baingana has Christine reject Musozi's supposition with the simple statement, "And by the way, I know Luganda" (p. 137). In so doing, Christine is maintaining that even though she has lived abroad for many years, Luganda has remained important to her. In expressing this sentiment, she is challenging the notion that Luganda is an exclusively territorialised language, but also simultaneously challenging the bias against Luganda due to its perceived territorialisation. Christine's sentiments in this section echo Adichie's call for a valuation of language that extends beyond utility and deterritorialisation when she observes that "the people of Iceland value their language. They know it is a small language that does not generate any economic power but they do not say 'kede be di e che' because they understand there are other values that language has beyond the material and economic" (2019). In depicting Musozi's interrogation of Christine's multilingualism, Baingana is acknowledging that a language's worth is in many ways determined by its global utility, its deterritorialisation. Yet, in depicting Christine's continuing multilingualism, Baingana is also challenging both the concept of Luganda as exclusively territorialised, and the concept of

deterritorialisation as a measure of linguistic worth. Instead, she is asserting that the valuation of languages can be based on other criteria, such as their ability to engender and express a sense of identity.

Stylistically, Baingana then mirrors this point within the structure of the text through her presentation of code words. There are more Indigenous language inlay codes in "Questions of Home" than in any of the other short stories in *Tropical Fish*. In fact, the number of codes in "Questions of Home" is more than double the number in every other story except one.[35] In including a large number of codes in this section, Baingana is stylistically challenging notions of linguistic value as associated with utility or deterritorialisation. The codes in this story do not serve as a useful international resource. In fact, Ilo has asserted that for most international readers such codes, "cannot be truly appreciated and irritatingly impede full comprehension. Contextually monolingual readers therefore prefer to encounter as few of such signs as possible" (p. 52). Yet, in employing a large number of codes within this story, Baingana is demonstrating that they have a value beyond their utility as an international resource. The codes in "Questions of Home" serve to stylistically assert a greater balance and equality between Indigenous languages and English. In this way, through her utilisation of codes, Baingana is drawing on their stylistic, if not their utilitarian value. Therefore, throughout "Questions of Home" Baingana posits that though Indigenous African languages may never be considered equal to English in international prestige, they can still be considered to have a value equal to, or even greater value than English by those who speak them.

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[35] The exception to this is the story "Passion", which has thirty-one codes compared to the thirty-three in "Questions of Home". The reason for the heightened number in "Passion" is because it is a letter between characters, and therefore the entire story is a form of speech, which is a form that will include more codes than narrative.

Adichie also similarly questions the valuation of languages based on international utility and deterritorialisation through her depiction of migration and bilingualism. While Ifemelu is having her hair braided in an African hair salon at the very beginning of *Americanah*, for example, Aisha, Ifemelu's stylist, challenges her on her multilingualism in a nearly identical manner to Musozi's questioning of Christine. Aisha asks Ifemelu, "You talk Igbo?" (p. 44). With the question "You talk Igbo?" Adichie, like Baingana, is referencing how pervasive global linguistic inequalities are. Within this section, Ifemelu has previously told Aisha that she has lived in America for fifteen years. In questioning whether Ifemelu still speaks Igbo, Aisha is assuming that either Ifemelu will have forgotten Igbo in the fifteen years she has lived in America, or is assuming that she never learned the language at all. The phrasing of her question, "You talk Igbo?" leaves this point ambiguous. Both interpretations, however, speak to an assumption that Igbo is territorialised and that English is valued above the language due to its international utility. It is also significant in this instance that Aisha is herself from Senegal. Aisha's questioning of Ifemelu's knowledge of Igbo is therefore rooted in a concrete understanding of the attitudes toward Indigenous African languages. The fact that Aisha is then questioning Ifemelu's knowledge of Igbo alludes to the links between linguistic oppression and territorialisation, even for those from the African continent.

Adichie also explores these biases through her presentation of Ifemelu's Aunt Uju. When Ifemelu is at her Aunt Uju's house, and her cousin Dike calls out from the bathroom, she answers him in Igbo. Her aunt then chides her:

> "Please don't speak Igbo to him," Aunty Uju said. "Two languages will confuse him."
> "What are you talking about, Aunty? We spoke two languages growing up."
> "This is America. It's different." (p. 144)

Here, Uju is reflecting a common historic view of multilingualism where it "has often been derided as illiteracy and poor linguistic competence" (Montes-Alcalá, 2012, p. 68). Yet in stating that she and Uju both grew up bilingual, Ifemelu is addressing the fallacy in Uju's argument, noting that Uju's opinions may be based in bias against Indigenous African languages rather than a true objection to bilingualism. Adichie clarifies this point even further for the reader when Obinze is in Nigeria, discussing with friends where he will send his child to school. Speaking of one particular school a friend tells him, "Of course they teach in French but it can only be good for the child to learn another civilized language, since she already learns English at home" (p. 34). This conversation makes it clear that bilingualism of two deterritorialised languages is accepted, because they are more valued than territorialised languages. The use of the descriptor "civilised" to refer to English and French emphasises that it is not bilingualism that is an issue, but rather, which two languages are being learned. Adichie therefore depicts a close relationship between the perceived territorialisation of languages and their oppression. While it was acceptable for Uju and Ifemelu to be Igbo-English bilinguals in Nigeria — where Igbo is territorialised — it is not acceptable for Dike to be similarly bilingual in America, where Igbo is not territorialised, and consequently not valued.

Despite these examples of oppression, Adichie portrays Ifemelu, like Christine, as forceful in her assertion of her multilingualism, and her valuation of languages beyond their territoriality. In the hair salon, for example, when Aisha asks Ifemelu about her English she responds, "Of course I speak Igbo," (p. 44). This response not only stresses that Ifemelu has retained her Igbo, but that it is important to her, as indicated by her use of the phrase 'of course' emphasising her insistence to Aisha that she speaks Igbo. Ifemelu's subsequent defensiveness in her "wondering if Aisha was again suggesting that America had changed

her" (*ibid)* makes it clear that Ifemelu views her retention of Igbo as a link to Nigeria, and to her own sense of self as an Igbo. In this sense she is reflecting the analysis that, "Language constructs, indexes, and reveals identity" (Sebba, Mahootian, Johnson, 2012, p. 194). Here, Igbo is clearly depicted as a part of Ifemelu's identity construction. While she has lived in America for over a decade in this section, Ifemelu still values her identity as an Igbo, and her expression of this identity through the Igbo language.

Adichie also advocates for this valuation of languages beyond their international utility and deterritorialisation in a critical scene between Ifemelu and Obinze. Newly returned to Nigeria, Ifemelu is sitting with Obinze in a car when:

> Obiwon's "Obi Mu O" started and she sat still and silent as the words filled the car: *This is that feeling that I've never felt ... and I'm not gonna let it die.* When the male and female voices sang in Igbo, Obinze sang along with them, glancing away from the road to look at her, as though he was telling her that this was really their conversation, he calling her beautiful, she calling him beautiful, both calling each other their true friends. *Nwanyi oma, nwoke oma, omalicha kwa, ezigbo oei m o"* (p. 456).

What is most interesting about *Obi Mu O* in this case is the mix of languages it contains. The song lyrics Obinze and Ifemelu are singing to each other begin in English, then switch to Igbo. Adichie has both sets of languages included overtly in the text, giving them equal weight and importance. It is symbolic that Adichie uses this song, with its combination of Igbo and English, to represent the love Obinze and Ifemelu feel for each other. Obinze and Ifemelu have substantial ties to both their Igbo Nigerian heritage, but also to English, both due to growing up bilingual, and due to their experiences in America and the UK. In selecting a bilingual song to represent Ifemelu and Obinze's love — which is the central plot line of *Americanah* — Adichie is imbuing both English and Igbo with substantial, and equal, value.

In this way, while both Adichie and Baingana demonstrate an understanding of linguistic bias emerging from a global system which values languages for their utility, both authors also advocate for a system of linguistic valuation that moves beyond this conception. In depicting characters who clearly view multiple languages as intrinsic to their sense of self, Baingana and Adichie are presenting the possibility of a more nuanced system of linguistic valuation, one in which languages are prized for their cultural and personal importance, not their international utility and deterritorialisation.

Beyond Boundaries — Multilingualism and Monolithic Conceptions of African Identity

It is important to note, however, that in exploring the evolution of languages and linguistic power dynamics on the African continent Baingana and Adichie do not merely focus on the relationship between English and Indigenous African languages. Instead, they allude to the broad linguistic diversity of both Uganda and Nigeria, and explore how this diversity affects and is affected by the evolution of linguistic power dynamics within each country. Adichie engages with this process from the very start of *Americanah.* The first time the theme is explored is at the opening of the novel, when Ifemelu is sitting in the African hair salon in America. In the hair salon Aisha says that her boyfriend has told her Igbo people don't marry outside of the tribe. Ifemelu responds, "Igbo people marry all kinds of people. My cousin's husband is Yoruba. My uncle's wife is from Scotland" (p. 21). With this scene, Adichie is asserting the cultural and ethnic diversity of Nigeria. The reference to her cousin's husband being Yoruba is an allusion to the tribal diversity present in Nigeria — where there are three major tribes (Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa) and more than three hundred smaller ethnic groups (Ethnologue). Ifemelu's reference to her uncle's marriage to a Scottish person is also important, as it confronts the fact that "In an attempt to stress cultural differences between

native and non-native English speakers, identities have literally been imposed on cultures, and we seem to have determined that there is an unbridgeable gap between native and non-native cultures" (Qu, 2014, p. 68). In having Ifemelu reference a Scottish-Nigerian marriage, Adichie directly challenges the notion of an "unbridgeable gap between native and non-native cultures", and aligns herself more with Eze's assessment that "African identity, like that in many other parts of the world, is shaped by elective affinities due to cultural and racial intermixing" (Eze, p. 235).

Adichie's presentation of language throughout *Americanah*, and especially within the hair salon, reinforces this conception of diversity on the African continent and even within individual countries. This begins with Ifemelu's description of African hair salons as a collective, her reflection that:

> They were in the part of the city that had graffiti, dank buildings, and no white people, they displayed bright sign-boards with names like Aisha and Fatima African Hair Braiding, they had radiators that were too hot in the winter and air conditioners that did not cool in the summer, and they were full of Francophone West African women braiders, one of whom would be the owner and speak the best English and answer the phone and be deferred to by the others. … The conversations were loud and swift, in French or Wolof or Malinke, and when they spoke English to customers, it was broken, curious, as though they had not quite eased into the language itself before taking on a slangy Americanism (p. 14).

In this section, the African hair salon functions as a heterotopia — a concept Foucault used to describe places that are both physically present in a specific reality, but also representative of other spaces. In this case, the African hair salon, as a business that caters specifically to African women, is a socio-cultural heterotopia, a location physically inside of America, but culturally representative of Africa, and of the female African experience. Referencing this heterotopia allows Adichie to explore the diversity of the African continent within a small contained setting in America.

In the specific case of the hair salon, the description of the conversations occurring inside the salon creates a sense of the diversity on the African continent, with the reference to conversations in "French or Wolof or Malinke". The reference to French in this case is an allusion to the French colonisation of West Africa in particular, and the endurance of the language. Wolof is a language spoken widely in Senegal, and less commonly in the Gambia and Mauritania. Malinke is a language spoken in Mali, the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. In referencing these languages, Adichie is once again underscoring for the reader the diversity of the African continent. In contrast to other occasions where Adichie employs covert codes, here, the lack of overt spoken Wolof or Malinke is not meant to emphasise a linguistic separation or schism, but rather to specifically convey linguistic diversity to a reader who may not recognise the difference between Wolof or Malinke on reading the languages.

While Adichie uses descriptions of language in the African hair salons to depict diversity on the African continent, she also uses language at different points in *Americanah* to explore the ethnic diversity inherent in Nigerian society. For example, when Obinze visits Abuja, he speaks with a businessman who discusses a few of the different Indigenous languages in the country, and the attitudes towards them, saying:

> "A Hausa man will speak Hausa to his fellow Hausa man. A Yoruba man will see a Yoruba person anywhere and speak Yoruba. But an Igbo man will speak English to an Igbo man. I am even surprised that you are speaking Igbo to me."
> "It's true," Obinze said. "It's sad, it's the legacy of being a defeated people. We lost the Biafran war and learned to be ashamed."
> "It is just selfishness!" Edusco said, uninterested in Obinze's intellectualizing. "The Yoruba man is there helping his brother, but you Igbo people? *I go-asikwa.* Look at you now quoting me this price" (p. 467).

From this segment, the reader understands immediately that there are multiple Indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria. Yet Adichie also chooses to include an overt code in this

section. Since Adichie does not specify the language of the code, for a Western reader, who will not know if '*I go-asikwa*' is Yoruba, or Hausa, or Igbo, the phrase stands as an overt representation of the linguistic diversity of Nigeria. For a Nigerian, or someone who knows that *I go-asikwa*[36] is written in Igbo, the phrase can be seen as a Hausa man using Igbo to more forcefully chide an Igbo man. While the use of this language is a natural method by which Edusco can show that even though he is Hausa he still knows Igbo, the fact that a Hausa man is speaking Igbo also references the linguistic diversity of Nigeria. In this way, Adichie's overt inclusion of a coded phrase alludes to the linguistic diversity of Nigeria for both those who do and don't speak Indigenous Nigerian languages.

Thus, though *Americanah* is focused on Nigerian Igbos, Adichie subtly highlights the linguistic diversity on the continent throughout the book. Using language, she emphasises that Nigeria is not a monolithic country, but rather one with multiple tribes and corresponding multifaceted senses of ethnic identity. In this way, Adichie indicates to the reader that in Nigeria, as in many other countries, mixing between cultures, nationalities and ethnicities in a manner that would affect one's identity is not uncommon, and that this diversity effects the evolution of languages and linguistic power dynamics in the country beyond the conventional "native versus non-native" dichotomy which is typically explored.

Within *Tropical Fish*, Baingana also explores the multiplicity of identities and cultures that are present in Uganda, and code-switching is a crucial aspect of this exploration. Baingana most overtly broaches the topic in her presentation of one of the Ugandan ex-pat parties Christine attends in "Lost in Los Angeles". Speaking about politics in Uganda, Christine relates that:

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[36] Translation kindly provided by my Nigerian office mate.

> The debate shifts to whether Asians, as we call Indians, should have been allowed to return to Uganda after all these years. Amin summarily expelled them in 'seventy-two. This is always a hot topic. "Let's be honest, Amin saved us from the Asians. You can call him a murderer, a cannibal—" Loud laughter. "— What not, but he did that one good thing." The group laughs again, some in assent, some in refusal.
>
> "But the Indians were Ugandans—"
>
> "With British passports!" More laughter, grunts, and head-shaking.
>
> …
>
> "But now they're back, these *Bayindi*!"
>
> "Ah, but now they've learnt. They are more humble, careful."
>
> "What careful? Their money does the talking. See how they bribe the ministers!"
>
> "Are the ministers forced to take the money? And what Ugandan businessman doesn't bribe?"
>
> "Then the *Bayindi* are very Ugandan!" (p. 106).

Baingana's focus on Asian-descended individuals in this conversation challenges the dichotomous notion of native versus non-native identities on the African continent. Those of South Asian descent first came to Uganda in the late-1800s, to work on the Ugandan Railway. They were later joined by others who came to take advantage of the economic opportunities the country offered. In 1972, Idi Amin ordered all Asians[37] out of the country (Lacey, 2003). Throughout the eighties and nineties many returned, and as of 2019 there were an estimated 30,000 people of Asian descent living in Uganda (High Commission).

Within the conversation between the Ugandan ex-pats in America, the debate around whether those of Asian descent living in Uganda count as "Ugandan" raises questions about conventional conceptions of what constitutes an African identity. Specifically, it speaks to Bamba's commentary that there has long been a conception of African identity that, "equated Africanness with Blackness and with resistance to colonial powers." Yet, as Bamba also notes, "Not all Africans are Black, and there are plenty of examples where Black Africans aided the colonial powers for personal gain." The fact that in protesting the notion that those

[37] The order was specifically directed to those from South Asia — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh etc.

of Asian descent are Ugandans, one member of the ex-pat party cites not the amount of time they had been living in the country, or their country of origin, or even whether or not they had Ugandan citizenship, but rather the fact that they held British passports speaks to Bamba's argument. In this scenario it is the association with colonisers that prevent the "*Bayindi"* from being truly Ugandan. The fact that Baingana chooses to have Ugandan ex-pats living in America pass these judgements indicates that she is aware of the complexities and irony implicit in these conceptions. In raising these topics, Baingana is also posing a subtle challenge to the dichotomous "native versus non-native" conception of the evolution of language and linguistic power dynamics on the African continent, as she is interrogating the very concept of what constitutes a "native" African.

The language which Baingana uses to present this section — and particularly her deliberate employment of code-switching — is crucial to this challenge of monolithic conceptions of African identity. When speaking about individuals of Asian descent living in Uganda, the members of the party use the term "*Bayindi"*. Unlike the names of African tribal groups, this code has been altered to fit the target languages (in this case Ugandan Bantu languages). *Bayindi* is a combination of the prefix "ba" which is used to refer to people,[38] and the word "Indian" which has been altered to more closely fit the Bantu lexical structure. Baingana's choice to show the members of the party using the coded word, and her decision to present it in italics are both highly significant. The choice to translate a proper noun is a difficult one, but one consideration is whether cultural meaning is encoded into the proper noun — in these cases, there may be more incentive to translate (Zarei, 2014). In this instance, in presenting the term *Bayindi*, Baingana is highlighting some of the racial

[38] In most Bantu languages the mu/ba class refers to people. Mu is singular (Munyakore, mzungu) and ba is plural (Bantu - people).

overtones that come with grouping all peoples of South Asian descent under a term very closely aligned, linguistically, with "Indian". Additionally, by presenting a coded word in italics among the English words, Baingana is creating a sense of separation within the text. This stylistic choice mirrors the fact that many of the Ugandan ex-pats don't view those of Asian descent living in Uganda as Ugandan, despite the fact that they may be Ugandan citizens born in the country. In this way the term "*Bayindi"* carries automatic and subtle cultural references to an innate sense of foreignness.

Baingana also addresses linguistic oppression within and between Ugandan tribal identities. Baingana explores this oppression early on in *Tropical Fish*, in the very first story, "Green Stones". Christine, who is at this point a very young child, passes by a photograph of her grandparents. She narrates for the reader that, "I greeted them silently in Runyakore: *Agandi, basebo*" (p. 4). What is important about this section is that Baingana has Christine specify for the reader that she is speaking Runyakore. Runyakore is one of forty-three living languages spoken in Uganda (Ethnologue). It is spoken by roughly 3.4 million people, primarily those living in the south-western region of Uganda, making it one of the minor languages of the country — compared to English, Luganda and Swahili, which are more widely spoken (*ibid)*.

Baingana begins to delve into the politics of these language histories in the story "Hunger". In the story, Rosa at one point stays behind in the cafeteria of her boarding school to finish her food, noting that:

> It is only the most *maalo* girls who stay behind: the villagers, the greediest ones, the ones who desperately and completely clean their plates of the so-called food. Everyone else stares and snickers at us as they walk out. Us versus them. *Maalo* versus posh (p. 23).

Though it is not explicitly stated in this story, speaking Runyakore is part of being *maalo.* Those in Entebbe, the metropolitan capital, would speak Luganda. In depicting this power dynamic between Indigenous languages, Baingana is challenging simplified conceptions of linguistic politics on the African continent which portray the struggle as the monolithic David of Indigenous languages against the Goliath of colonial languages.

Baingana also touches on this in the story "Questions of Home", using code-switching as a crucial tool by which to explore these power dynamics. Christine, returning home, greets her family at the airport. The third-person narration notes that:

> The sisters greeted each other in Runyakore, but jokingly. It was their language, but they didn't use it. Patti then switched to Luganda, the language of central Uganda, including Entebbe, where they had grown up. *Kulika, bambi!* Finally, Patti said in English, their Ugandan version of it, "How's everything? (p. 122)

Again, the presence of a covert code in this instance is extremely significant. Baingana has the narrator state that Runyakore is being spoken, but does not include an example. In this case, the covert Runyakore is being overridden or silenced by two languages, Ugandan English[39] and Luganda, both of which appear overtly in the text. Likewise, the use of the descriptor 'their language' to refer to Runyakore is crucial in this section. Phrases like 'the language their parents spoke' or 'the language they spoke as young children' both would have been appropriate descriptors, but imply distance from the language. The phrase 'their language', however, creates a sense of closeness, and therefore engenders a subsequent sense of divorce, or rupture, when Christine admits Luganda and Ugandan English has mostly replaced Runyakore for her. By introducing the dynamic between Runyakore and Luganda, Baingana not only asserts Runyakore's presence as a language, she also once again

[39] The distinction between this and standard English feels important to note given that Baingana herself highlights it in this section. Ugandan English (or Uglish) is a recognized variety of English spoken in the country. Since Baingana noted that this is what the characters are speaking, I'm keeping the reference in throughout the analysis to clarify that it is not standard English being discussed.

challenges conceptions of the evolution of linguistic power dynamics on the African continent as a binary struggle between colonial languages and Indigenous ones.

Thus, in presenting the diverse permutations of ethnic and national identities present in contemporary Uganda and Nigeria, Baingana and Adichie are demonstrating that these countries, like many others around the world, have multicultural populations. This multiculturalism, in turn, both affects and is affected by the evolution of linguistic power dynamics within the two countries. Code-switching serves a crucial function in portraying this, as with the stylistic tool Baingana and Adichie are able to overtly present the linguistic diversity extant in the countries, and also explore the implications of this diversity in ways they would not be able to if they simply utilised one language.

Ever Evolving - Hybrids, Creoles, and Language Influence

Baingana and Adichie also explore how the evolution of languages and linguistic power dynamics over time can lead to a linguistic hybridity that makes a separation between languages unclear — and complicates attempts to assign power dynamics to individual languages. In *Americanah,* Adichie portrays this linguistic evolution first through her description of Ginika. When Ifemelu speaks with her old friend Ginika in Philidelphia the narrator notes that "Ginika had lapsed into Nigerian English, a dated, over-cooked version, eager to prove how unchanged she was. … She was saying "shay you know" and Ifemelu did not have the heart to tell her that nobody said "shay" anymore." (p. 127) Here, although Ginika and Ifemelu both employ a mixed discourse in each other's company, their mixed discourse is slightly different. Ginika, who left Nigeria early in her teens, utilises slightly older phrases. Her mixed discourse marks her not only as belonging to a particular geography, but also to a particular time within that geography. Ginika's speech in this section

is a reflection of Blommaert's analysis that, "sociolinguistic life is organized as such: as mobile speech, not as static language, and lives can consequently be better investigated on the basis of repertoires set against a real historical and spatial background" (p. 173).

Later, in America, Ifemelu hears her black American boyfriend, Blaine, speak Ebonics to a black doorman. Ifemelu remarks on the fact, telling him she doesn't even think she's heard him use the sociolect before:

> "I guess I've become too used to my White People Are Watching Us voice," he said. "And you know, younger black folk don't really do code switching anymore. The middle-class kids can't speak Ebonics and the inner-city kids speak only Ebonics and they don't have the fluidity that my generation has" (p. 355).

Here, Blaine is speaking explicitly about code-switching to a different form of discourse in order to express his own identity within an in-group — in this case switching from the Standard White English he uses with his colleagues at Yale to Ebonics. Yet Blaine also notes that this form of code-switching is shifting with time, dying out. As with Adichie's presentation of Ginika's older mixed discourse, Blaine's comment is a reference to the fact that it is not just single languages that evolve — multiple languages can evolve together, and forms of mixed discourse can similarly evolve. However, the description of shifting ebonics also serves as a reminder that linguistic evolution and change happens all over the world — not just on the African continent.

This approach to the combined evolution of multiple languages over time also disrupts traditional conceptions of linguistic hierarchies on the African continent as it treats contact with other languages, including English, not necessarily as contamination, but as combination.Adichie further explores the effect of these combinations in her use of transliteration. At one point at a party the General tells those gathered of his son, "He looks like me o, but thank God he took his mother's teeth" (p. 90). Here, Adichie is employing

syntactic fusion, the practice of taking the syntactic elements of one language and imposing them on another, to accurately depict a linguistic shift. This stylistic device allows Adichie to portray English and Igbo impacting each other, and challenges the idea that African Indigenous languages should be static when no other languages are. As Qu notes, "Without Latin, French, Norse, and many other languages, could English have developed into its present shape?" (p. 150).

Adichie also touches on this question of blending and the evolution of languages through her elevation of Pidgin throughout *Americanah*. As a mix of English and Bantu languages, Pidgin is a clear example of linguistic evolution and languages influencing each other — to the point that the separate languages have become indistinguishable. When Obinze first hears from Ifemelu again after a long silence:

> He was sitting in the back of his Range Rover in still Lagos traffic, his jacket slung over the front seat, a rusty-haired child beggar glued outside his window, a hawker pressing colorful CDs against the other window, the radio turned on low to the Pidgin English news on Wazobia FM, and the gray gloom of imminent rain all around (p. 24).

Though widely used throughout the country, Nigerian Pidgin has not been granted official status. This section, however, depicts its wide application as a lingua franca by showing that it is used to communicate the news on a national radio station. The language has even become to an extent deterritorialised, which Adichie highlights when Obinze, on a train in England, "noticed that all the people around him were Nigerians, loud conversations in Yoruba and Pidgin filled the carriage" (p. 269). The elevation of Pidgin here to the same level as Yoruba places its status as equal to that of other Indigenous languages spoken by ex-pats amongst each other. Therefore, within this section Adichie portrays how linguistic evolution is not just about languages impacting each other, it is also about languages influencing each other — occasionally in ways that make the boundaries between them unclear.

Baingana also explores this theme in *Tropical Fish*, but more overtly and in-depth. In fact, the topic is given such importance that it occupies the entire final scene of the book. The scene starts with Christine in a matatu, calling out her stop to the driver:

> "Awo, ku *Queenzi*." She forced herself to pronounce "Queens" in what she and her sisters had called *maalo,* village-ish, back when they were kids. But it wasn't just a different pronunciation; it had become a *kiganda* word, like how money was *cente,* from the word "cent". If she pronounced "Queens" properly, the driver wouldn't understand, or would refuse to understand what to him was an affected way of speaking. She, luckily or not, had been to a "good" school, where she had been taught to speak English properly, that is, like an Englishman, which, of course, was impossible for her to do. Not that the English themselves spoke their language in one "proper" way. Nor was it theirs alone anymore. English was no one's and everyone's now. Or so the unloved step-children to the English tribe insisted. … The words and accents in all their wrongness and rightness were the sounds of home. They made sense here, and she understood how, in a way no foreigner could (p. 141).

Christine's analysis of the alteration of English to fit in a Ugandan context is reflective, in this instance, of Bloemmart's assertion that:

> In all english variants the characteristic identity of the linguistic culture is continually being constructed by the invention of 'neologisms' which are invariably dismissed as 'colloquial' or 'idiomatic', mere ephemera revolving round a 'Standard' English. But what makes a characteristically Indian, Australian, or Trinidadian english is not the embodiment of some kind of cultural essence, but the use of language in a particular place and time (p. 72).

In Christine's conception of language, like Bloemmart's, the word 'Queenzi' has become Uganda not because of innate grammar or vocabulary characteristics, but because it is used in Uganda, by Ugandans. The way Christine describes the language emphasises this point, as she notes that *Queenzi* and *cente* have become Kigandan words. Kiganda is not in itself a language. Rather, the word refers to things that are Ugandan. In describing the words as "Kigandan" Christine is assigning them not to a particular tribal group, but rather to the entire country of Uganda.

As in *Americanah*, this linguistic mixing also points to a hybridity that has emerged over time, and requires a hybrid linguistic approach to describe and convey, artistically. Baingana in many ways sums this approach up through Christine's reflections in the very last section of *Tropical Fish.* Out in her family's garden, Christine thinks:

> She should dig deep down into this mud with her bare hands until she couldn't remove it from her fingernails. Merge with it, like day had smoothly become its opposite, night. Christine sat on a huge stone between the road and a garden. The words she had heard the whole day were like that too: *Queenzi, Leeke, cente,* and so on. A new language formed by old ones running underneath and over one another. An ever-changing in-between. Christine could accept this fluidity as she now accepted the night creeping up over her, this blanket of warm dusk (p. 147).

In this conclusion of *Tropical Fish*, Christine experiences a sense of change and fluidity brought about by her cultural experiences in both Uganda and America. Yet Baingana uses code-switching to take this sense of change and fluidity and uses linguistic syncretism to manifest it. In this sense, Baingana is utilising code-switching in a method described by Carla Johnson, who notes that in some cases in literature code-switching "allows for the reflection, construction, and reconstruction of a hybrid/third space identity, which is fluid and in transition" (2005, p. 254).

In using code-switching to write about the evolution of languages over time in this way, Baingana — like Adichie — is reflecting a present reality on the African continent. In creating characters who reflect this reality, they are challenging monolithic conceptions of identity on the African continent, and showing that in countries in Africa, as in many countries around the world, the concept of identity is one that is complex, multifaceted, fluid, and consistently in flux.

Conclusion

Blommaert has described a situation in contemporary sociolinguistic studies where language is perceived in certain aspects as static — with perceptions about its temporality, locality, and level of oppression fixed. Commenting on this critical framework, Blommaert notes it:

> Sounds more or less acceptable, at least when some aspects of reality are conveniently overlooked. A rather disturbing aspect of contemporary reality, as we know, is mobility. In contemporary social structures, people tend to move around, both in real geographical space and in symbolic, social space. And all of these processes of mobility appear to display complex connections with language (p. 45).

In exploring the evolution of language and linguistic power dynamics in Nigeria and Uganda within *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish*, Baingana and Adichie depict this mobility, and explore its nexus with the evolution of language and linguistic power dynamics on the African continent. In so doing, Baingana and Adichie assert their characters' agency in a manner that questions the sociolinguistic "linguicidal hypothesis", argues for a valuation of languages that extends beyond a measure of their deterritorialisation, portray the diversity extant in both Uganda and Nigeria and finally, in exploring the hybridisation of languages, demonstrate that in many cases the boundaries between formerly colonised and colonising languages are now far from clear. The synthesis of languages is crucial to these endeavours, as it allows both authors to truly manifest these assertions and explorations within the text of their books.

CONCLUSION

Ko si ede t'olorun ko gbo[40]
- Yoruba aphorism

In a 1989 interview with the German scholar and writer Ulli Beier, Achebe referenced one of his favourite Igbo proverbs, "nothing stands by itself". Explaining the proverb, Achebe elaborated, "it's again the idea that you don't stand in one place; that we don't hold to one belief" (p. 165). While the proverb was intended to encapsulate an Igbo philosophy, it is also an apt description of code-switching as well as the contemporary state of language on the African continent. Taken literally, the proverb embodies the essence of multilingualism, the actuality that within code-switching, no language stands by itself. Yet Achebe's explanation of the proverb's meaning — the concept of not standing in one place throughout life, of not holding to one belief — is also reflective of the evolution of language and could easily describe the trajectory of languages and language politics on the African continent.

Typically, the discussion of language and literature on the African continent, while not necessarily holding to one belief, has revolved around a single discussion — the so-called "African language question" of whether African literature should be written in Indigenous languages or colonial ones. Yet with *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish,* Adichie and Baingana to a certain extent disrupt and challenge this discussion. Their use of code-switching, in particular, complicates this question, as it involves writing in *both* colonial and Indigenous languages. While historically code-switching in literature has been understudied and overlooked, within *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish* it is a crucial element of the writing, contributing materially to both the artistic and political construct of the books.

In analysing code-switching in literature, Mahootian explains that it "is used for one of four different ends: A call for globalization and a deterritorizing of identity, to highlight

[40] There is no language that is unintelligible to God

and challenge the social/power imbalances and call for change, to highlight an ethnic identity, to throw a spotlight on the bilingual community" (p. 196). Within *Tropical Fish* and *Americanah*, Baingana and Adichie employ code-switching for all four purposes. Through their strategic use of codes they highlight the social and power imbalances within Uganda and Nigeria that have led to the oppression of Indigenous languages, demonstrating that these languages are in many cases devalued, their use discouraged. Yet Baingana and Adichie also use both codes to challenge and subvert these same social and power imbalances, asserting the power and presence of Indigenous languages. Both authors then use English to challenge conventional conceptions of linguistic hierarchies and power dynamics. This challenge then leads to an interrogation of current notions about the evolution of language on the African continent, and an assertion that a deterritorialisation through an interest in different languages or cultures is not a threat to the modern African identity, but in many cases an integral part of it.

Yet these endeavours leave unaddressed one crucial question about Indigenous languages on the African continent: what is their future? As in many societies around the world, on the African continent, pluralism is the norm (Gardner-Chloros). However, there is no denying that, as in many societies around the world, these languages appear threatened by the spectre of globalisation. In examining the trajectory of the English language on the African continent, Schmeid has concluded that, "English is normally not replacing the African languages (and will probably never do so for the vast majority of Africans) but is rather an additional language for the wider domains beyond those for which the mother tongue is habitually used" (p. 171). Yet both Baingana and Adichie have expressed the opinion that Indigenous languages are fading from Ugandan and Nigeria (2009 & 2018) while Ngũgĩ has pointed out that, "ironically, in some countries, the colonial period had a

more progressive language policy, which ensured basic literacy in mother tongue" (2017, p.125). The denigration of Indigenous languages that both Baingana and Adichie portray in their books is especially concerning as, "the outcome of language in contact situations is determined by social and economic variables: the relative prestige of one variety as opposed to the other, or its association with a more powerful or up-and-coming group" (Gardner-Chloros, p. 42)

Both Adichie and Baingana have spoken publicly about their appreciation of Indigenous languages, and their own deep connection to these languages. In a speech given at the seventh International Igbo Conference at SOAS, speaking to the theme "Memory, Culture and Community", Adichie told the students:

> I do believe that language matters. When I had my daughter, I made the conscious decision to speak only Igbo to her. She is now two and a half and she speaks Igbo. I also love the English language, and sometimes I miss not speaking it to her at this young age. But I know that she is growing up in a world that is not steeped in Igbo. And even when we are back in Nigeria her relatives in Nigeria don't speak Igbo. "Ima ndi Igbo: I must speak English."

Within this speech, Adichie touches on the trepidation she feels surrounding the sentiment toward indigenous languages in Africa. Adichie's declaration that her daughter is "growing up in a world that is not steeped in Igbo", for example, or that "her relatives in Nigeria don't speak Igbo" convey these fears. Yet Adichie asserts her own linguistic agency in two ways within this speech. First, within the text of the speech she describes the importance of passing on Igbo to her daughter, and in doing so asserts that others possess similar agency, similar ability to pass on Indigenous languages if they desire. Secondly, however, she also code-switches within the speech. The quoted "Ima ndi Igbo" is but one instance where she draws on the Igbo language to convey a particular message, and in so doing, asserts its importance.

Baingana similarly discussed Indigenous languages in a 2009 essay, writing:

> My wholehearted embrace of books and English gave me a fine appreciation for its nuance and poetry. It is no accident that I am a writer. English has worked for me. But what have I given up in the bargain?
>
> This is not just about language, but about all aspects of culture we receive and choose to embrace and pass on: what stories we are told as children, what songs we learn to sing, what food we eat and how we cook it, what rituals we internalise or not, the way we think. Shall we leave this up to chance or make calculated decisions?
>
> I have not given my son an English name and I will not baptise him, to the horror of my relatives. I speak to Kamara in rudimentary Runyankore, and my mother and sisters laugh at me.

As Adichie did, Baingana does not shy away from referring to the linguistic inequalities present in modern day Ugandan society. Her musing, "But what have I given up in the bargain?" Alludes to the fact that in many cases Indigenous languages are undervalued and even subject to complete erasure. Yet her choice to endow her son with a non-English name, her insistence on speaking to him in rudimentary Runyakore in an effort not only to recapture the language, but to pass it on, echoes the sentiment of linguistic agency Adichie expressed, and which Baingana infused into the characters of Rosa, Patti, and Christine.

In writing *Americanah* and *Tropical Fish,* Baingana and Adichie are creating a realistic portrayal of the complex linguistic situation extant on the African continent, but though not referencing it directly, they are also arguing for a more linguistically equal future. In writing in English and Indigenous languages, Baingana and Adichie are envisioning a world in which English coexists on the African continent, not at the expense of Indigenous languages, but alongside them. They are envisioning a world in which individuals' language use is as varied, multifaceted, and a crucial component of their identity — because it is only when Indigenous languages are valued in this way that their future will be assured. As

Weiguo has noted, “We cannot change the world with a language. Languages change with the world” (p. 74).

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