

Japa

We even had a name for it. A word for fleeing
our own land.

That is, we forced blood out of language. And
it was ours.

And we were drying in the Sahara. Days away
from knowing

slavery in all its skin. Days away from realizing
our dreams

were only dreams. There was no water so we
drank our piss.

We were starving and drying beneath the heat.
Starving and drowning

in the Mediterranean sea. Sometimes it was
Aegean. Sometimes

we were caught, of course, and sent back to
Mother.

And sent back to the country with teeth too
familiar.

From Purgatory to Hell, reverse and repeat.
But what of Heaven?

Tell me, was there none for black skin? Did
we not know everything

through the taste of salt; the sweat, the tears,
the sea? Even blood too—

you noticed it then, in the desert, when, for

want of moisture,

you bit your tongue. Even blood too, when
we curled loss out

of the mouth. Used what little we had to
rhyme, to name it *sapa*.

Because we had never felt that strain of
poverty before,

that death so alive, so hungry to live. Because
we had looked up,

and realized the roof was burning. We were
burning. And there was

no blood in us, only thirst. Only the
desperation to live.

As I did not choose the land of my birth. As I
will not sit in the flames

and wait for my death. Over there lies the
Atlantic blue

and quiet, the Atlantic cold and silent. To
her, let me crawl,

let me creep. If I conquer her, my misery ends.
If she conquers me,

my misery ends.

- *“Sapa” meaning poverty.*
- *“Japa” meaning the emigration of Nigerians, usually for economic opportunities.*