COUNTRY I AM FROM

POETRY

Lethokuhle Msimang

We live in a rearview mirror. You can feel it as you drive by shards of glass from broken windows scattered on the road at the traffic intersection. The cars that stop meters behind the red light, the signposts standing in place of police officers: caution. This land is hostile. The air is too dry, the sun scorches. The winters break the skin around the eyes. Variations of thorny succulents grow behind the fences. To write, you need only to list all the ways this land has afflicted you. To survive you must find a way to shrink enough to prevent further harm. And the beautiful must be kept inside. And the beautiful must be kept inside or learn to wear the expression of the people whose pain is unaccounted for. The cursed stare of silent sufferers. Bruised and brooding in a sickle cell system. Whose wounds do not congeal but pour out like a prolonged period – bloodying the sheets, blood clots on a cotton pad, the musty stench of dead fish, the stained underwater. This life-giving pain. The strain of too much life, too much blood, too much flowing. A body that is chronically subjected. A body that betrays itself. A body loathed when dressed in clothes. Disappear me, country I am from.