

how do you describe a genocide?

(Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970)

with a line adapted from Kristin Chang

- a) pogroms¹
- b) a police action²
- c) incursion³
- d) starvation⁴

1. my country/grows into the slaughter/it was born for/i storyboard origin:/where a group of foxes is a troop/& sometimes a skulk/where a group of men is a military/ & also/a rape/because i'm Nyamiri/i disaster/a mixed race of bloodthirsty hawks/ calls my mother's body vermin/& it will kill to prove it/

2. i translate my *deadeadeadeadeadeadead* back into weapons. once, i watch my cousin's sister spit blood in her sleep. i listen in on her dreams: the train solid with bullet-baptized bodies, severed arms & legs, decapitated heads & fallen ears. in another town, every nook & cranny is a gospel of teeth carving our bodies & bones into commas

3. envy is just like hate & a flood climbs our house like a fever. i used to dream we lived in a mud house in *Sabon Gari* & at the window is the man who pruned away my brother's arm like branches to the ground. in another city, my uncle sits in front of the TV, watches a news report where houses go up in smoke & a Hausa mob turns into a flood & swallows my tribe & calls it *revenge coup*

4. & i built my little brother into a war exhibit. all my dreams of the war involve children with their tender skeletons revealed. hunger haunts their bodies & i feel the spikes in my belly—the spongy ache of their gums. in Umuahia, my grandmother says in some villages the three-year-olds have lived entirely without maize, sugar, & salt. there are so many ways to die: for three days, my sister refused even water after she contracted cholera