



**Get Over Yourself—
What's Non-native Won't Harm You**

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It begins innocently
in the life of plants
so we don't notice
how or when it sneaks upon us.

Wounding words—
calling us pests, weeds, noxious
good-ugly poster people
scheming to wipe us
out of our newfound home.

In the woods I come across a call to preserve
*Our natural heritage against non-native invasive pest plants
taking over the native landscape.*
Taking over—as if by force. As if unnatural.

It gets worse: naming the plants Alien invaders
responsible for the murder of native plants.
Grandma used to say, Nature knows how to
take care of itself without human interference.
Makes me wonder who has appointed righteous
“natives” to uproot non-natives, the insatiable desire
to clean up, to preserve what’s considered pure as if—
there’s really such a thing.

It was like that in the Armenian genocide and
Turkey has yet to acknowledge its role in murder.
It was like that in the Jewish holocaust,
Rwandan genocide, Haiti-Dominican war,
and it is like that here when people pay
no mind but keep thinking or saying,
it ain’t like that. Could never be like that. No!
Not in a civilized nation, among a civilized lot, like us.

And oh—
About plants, it’s different.
For me, it’s the same thing.
The plants are *bad* because they weren’t born here,
Bad because they’re determined to be,
Bad because they grow lavishly,
Bad because they refuse to be tamed—

they rampage across native landscapes unchecked.

Remember what happened to the wolves?

Those who couldn't be broken into docile canines
were shot. Don't you know your history?

Don't say, oh, it's all in the past now.

Liberated

Long before we knew,

Communal shame was our hair.

We can fix it, we said, with chemicals

Suppressing the kinky,

Creating an unknown, afraid head.

Remember, remember, dismembering the curls

But I'm not telling you what we did to skin then.

Time came to turn the collective disgrace into Grace

Black won the day but not the debate

We did not mind. We do mind.

Today we revel in the rhythms and temples of our

Beautiful bodies and knotty hair, black hair, hard hair

Twisted and tangled like roots of a baobab.

Roots we are, and branches connecting to

Motherland where we began,
Before we were formed in our mothers' wombs.

Today we confront cognitive deficiency,
Social class, racial profiles
And we do have a good laugh!

Today we say, Respect.
Speaking in codes and reminding ourselves to
Shine everywhere, elsewhere, beyond the standard.

Today, we speak all languages and we rule.

Mildred K Barya is a writer from Uganda and Assistant professor at UNC Asheville, where she teaches creative writing and world literature. Her publications include three poetry books as well as prose, poems or hybrids forthcoming or published in *African American Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Ruminate Magazine*, *Tin House*, *Obsidian*, *poets.org*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Asymptote Journal*, *Matters of Feminist Practice Anthology*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Daughters of Africa International Anthology*, *Per Contra*, and *Northeast Review*. She's at work on a collection of nonfiction, and one of the essays—*Being Here in This Body*—won the 2020 Linda Flowers Literary Award, and is published in the *North Carolina Literary Review*, 2021. She received a Ph.D. in English from the University of Denver, MFA in creative writing from Syracuse University, and B.A. in Literature, Makerere University. She is a board member of the African Writers Trust and coordinates the Poetrio Reading Events at Malaprop's Independent Bookstore/Café in Asheville.

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