

It is said that the camera cannot lie, but rarely do we allow it to do anything else, since the camera sees what you point it at: the camera sees what you want it to see. The language of the camera is the language of our dreams.

—James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work* (1976)

This epigraph by Baldwin is lifted from his book-length essay & memoir concerning the racial politics of American cinema. This biased, dream-like act & method of seeing Baldwin names speaks to the camera-work of "CHIRAQ." In this poem, I seek to perform violence to the language which enacts genocide, dispossession, & occupation via euphemism, hyperbole, sarcasm, & what many may define as "lyric strategy."

I wish to make a critique of the lyric spectacle. Whether or not I've succeeded, I am uncertain as employing certain depictions of violence may reify violence. However, my intentions remain the same: I wish to murder the language which enables genocide, dispossession, & occupation — be it through tonal sarcasm, passive aggression, or employing other disingenuous modalities of lyric poetics. The lyric is innately violent, colonial, & anti-Black. Therefore, the reader's indoctrinated desire to look for a rhyming triplet or discuss the vibrancy of language within the poem is itself a violence. I do not pretend toward a fictive landscape where bodies are not directly impacted by the violence of language, nor do I attempt a Brooksonian kind of verse journalism. The syntactical gestures (or lack thereof) employed in the poem are facetious. These gestures are my attempt at enacting an aggression against the language itself & not the bodies that are so often travestied by media (a visible arm of settler colonialism & occupation).

the tenor
here is palpable
an aerial view
leads us to
the very dregs
of September
bullet-tendrils
sprout from
the mouths
of the young
dead rebels
bloody blocks
a red that whips
not-here whereas
the mothers
kiss the concrete
their darlings
go gone at
laying down
roses with lips
blistered by lament
cue the ululations
the glossolalia
of it all—
a mother's grief
turned Greek
comedy her
son's shield
an inoperative
star a lyric
so un-American
it must belong
elsewhere

CHIRAQ

"Chiraq, Drillinois,"
King Louie, 2011
(rap album)

CH-IRAQ, Spike Lee,
2015 (film)

How does Lee's lens occupy the terrain of Chicago (a landscape from which Lee is not native)? Lee's film nods to the convention of "signifyin'" common in Blaxploitation movies & the Greek comedy *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes. My poem most directly deals with the artistic & political failures of Lee's gaze. What happens when the aesthetic choices & cinematic desires of Black filmmakers flatten an entire ecosystem of Black life into minstrelsy?

How might a reader's programmed desire to search for Anglo understandings of lyric meaning make their reading an occupation of this poem in & of itself?

an epithet for Chicago, Illinois which refers to specific violent regions, comparing them to warzones; a portmanteau of Chicago & Iraq. It is also a violently inaccurate neologism which arose from a flawed single Iraq war statistic from 2003-2012. Amidst this nine-year period nearly 4,500 citizens were killed in Chicago which was a close approximate to the number of U.S. soldiers who were killed in Iraq. It is unclear whence the term derives, though it has been embraced by a younger generation of Chicagoans—mainly rappers—since its inception.