

matrihaemoglobin
By Khairani Barokka | 1 February 2022

i.

i will not bear children. my hips wide and unyielding.

our arms, rivers of bloodline.

minangkabau—world's largest matrilineal society.

our continuation, padusi.

our joys, bundles of infants.

the choice to unmother in one way is a choice to mother other things.

is a choice for one body to extend the luck of breath.

stopping medication during pregnancy.

how would baby bear the pain i've learned to river.

how could i welcome a soul to womb with toxic shock.

how would i propel us both through eugenicist clouds blocking airpipes.

to recklessly induce another life, when bloodline

is asking me, eons of padusi in mitochondrial chorus,

back and back and back:

'onde mande, la laruik sanjo.

makin lamo hiduik,

makin banyak diraso.'

ii.

the land belongs to the minang woman.

more rarely said: the land is inside us.

i hoard the rustling quietude of tanah datar fish ponds.
pandemic-besieged in a flat in south london,
i close my eyes to the beat of bedug and the laughter
of thunder-voiced girls aged eighteen to eighty,
in rumah gadang lintau buo.

once, on a village visit, my brother
met a woman working in paddy fields
who said she'd held our uwo as a baby.

how could this land not be in our mouths
our glands, stoked granular whims, our legs
bathed in instinct, our hair thick and braided
my lost ones are soil embedded in skin
are the breadth of breathwork across rapid straits
are the way of return, the weight of migration
turned satchel that fits in the hand, compared to
the borderless country that lives molecular
speaking to vast populations of daughters
and bending oxygen into the forests
alive in our raucous eyes, the life ahead.