ESSAY

Glory

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"Balthazar" by Clemens Braun

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The speaker played all the songs listed for Song Of The Year, covering up the sizzling sound of the BBQ. It reached the “Local” category, and among the upbeat séga tunes came one that resembled reggae. *Laglwar* by The Prophecy started, opening with soulful trumpets before the lead singer came in, his voice raspy like a scratched vinyl.

It was New Year’s Eve, and like every year, I was at my grandma’s place. As 2019 was about to start, she was already using a cane to walk around. When midnight came, we didn’t light fireworks because our dogs would piss themselves, but the neighbours did put on firework shows. As we heard the first BOOMS, my grandma got up and grabbed my hand as she used it for support: she was on the hunt for the best viewing spot. That year, it was eastward, facing away from the beach. She didn’t let go of my hand as the fireworks went off. My palm was weighed down by her paper-thin skin. She kissed both my cheeks as we welcomed the new year, wishing me to do well on my final exams. It was already my life’s purpose to excel at those. So I did.

I forgot about *Laglwar* for a while afterwards but went back to it when I came to Canada. I never needed to seek local songs when I was in Mauritius, they just surrounded me: on the radio in the car, along supermarket aisles, booming from those little speakers carried by people on the streets… In Canada, my ears yearned for the cacophony of home. I needed a cocoon of familiar sounds so my ears could rest. *Laglwar* was one of those songs I could put on loop and forget about. It could play over and over, mashing into itself, playing like an endless succession of notes, till it became more sound than song.

The song’s title translates to “Glory” in Kreol, and isn’t that why I am here in the first place? With academic excellence being championed as the great equalizer, kids who perform well at school are expected to study abroad. A reputable degree offers a competitive edge. In the Chinese-Mauritian community, it’s even more crucial. When you make up roughly 3% of the population, academic prowess is not just “the way out”; it’s the way up. The phrase I heard the most before my high school exams was “Good luck, make us proud.” Maybe glory isn’t the word for it, maybe it’s honour. Regardless, the sentiment behind it is the same.

Once in Canada, *Laglwar* was always here to drown out outside noise or to fill up the static. It was here during my morning commutes and my all-nighters. I would put it on as background noise, but as songs often do, there was one line that always pulled me back into the song. One line that asked me to listen to it, to drink it in.

Lao paradi, isi anba se lanfer. Up there, it’s paradise. Down here, we’re in hell.

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On Earth, daily sounds clash with each other, compete for our attention. But the sky? The sky is big enough for fireworks. We hear them all the way down on Earth, after all.

I went back over the summer of 2022, which means it was a tropical winter at home. At a housewarming party, I stood in front of a wall with wooden cut-outs of the continents. My cousin had had Mauritius custom-made: a tiny piece of wood next to the gigantic continents. My 4-year-old niece told me this was the "world map wall."

She proudly pointed to Mauritius. East of Madagascar. South enough to be at eye level with her.

She then asked to show where I was attending "grown-up school". I pointed to Canada. She had to bend her head back almost ninety degrees to follow my index finger.

"Wow, all the way up there? It's so high!" she said, dragging out the last syllable in an *eee*.

Up there, paradise. Down here, hell. The line from *Laglwar* played in my head for the rest of the evening.

The same night, my grandma would be admitted to the ICU.

When she got out, she told me she'd dreamed of paradise. *There was a big house, and our loved ones were playing mahjong there,* she said. *It was glorious,* she said.

I woke up at 4 a. m. on the day of my grandma's funeral. It was December, and Canadian-winter-morning dark outside. I followed along to the pixelated version of the funeral on Zoom, my eyes too crusty to cry. I squinted through the yellow light of my IKEA lamp, making yet another mental note to get the white lightbulb next time. It was an open casket ceremony, but I didn't even get to see her face. The meeting ended as abruptly as it had started. The ceremony was over. I was left to imagine my mother accepting people's condolences as they all left church. I was supposed to go back to sleep after that. Instead, I listened to Phoebe Bridgers' album *Punisher*, drinking in every single lyric. I needed song, not sound. Something new to keep me distracted.

Hours after the funeral, I headed to campus. The bus driver thanked me as I got on the bus. He smiled too. I hadn't done anything, just tapped my card. It was 10 a. m. and I was not inside my body, just on autopilot. When the driver talked to me, it brought me back to Earth. He waited for me to sit down before starting the bus again although the traffic lights were

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green. For once, I was able to walk to my seat instead of stumbling into it.

I was ready to press play and let my mind wander, ready to have *Laglwar* on repeat while I went through the motions. My finger stopped before it touched the screen. I took my earphones out.

The rickety rhythm of the bus would direct the tune of my commute. The opposite of a requiem, like I had only started living here. I looked outside and there were no clouds, so the sky seemed taller than usual. Maybe there was something glorious about this place. A place where a bus driver thanks a girl who reeks of grief.

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