Home Is a Woman

Before I enter the matatu
for the drive to Kampala then Lira
the driver stops me to tell me
he’s never seen me on this route
“you must live outside”
I remember I live outside my own country
I pretend not to hear
and he says it again, this time behind a cigarette and a smile
he asks me “who are your people? who is your father? your grandfather?”
saying he may know my people

I tell him my mother’s name and her mother’s name
and my great-grandmothers’ names
I tell him about the names of the land they could not inherit
unless their brothers or fathers or husbands gave it to them
I name and map the land, from that tree to the edge of the river
I tell him where my great-grandmothers were born
where my grandmothers were born
where my mother was born
I hum the names of the women in my family
over and over again like a forgotten prayer
a forbidden song
he asks again “who are your forefathers, you girl?”
I ask him “and who gave birth to them?” and I say the names of the women who gave
birth to them

our ride is silent from Kampala to Lira
he gives me a curious glance from the rearview mirror at my many faces
looking at me while I hold on to my suitcase
while I carry all the women living inside of me
I carry them home