
THREE POEMS

ROXANA CRISÓLOGO

On my shoulders a backpack pockets things never opened
silences that accumulate
like compulsive shopping to forget
The thread of smoke that spirals in the gestures of two people
who can't understand why I'm wandering alone at this hour
of the night and of life

Time accumulates the Bank takes everything
Time illuminates me with its lantern
and I look small and lost

What I'd like most is to stay in a hotel
packed full of happy people
but they only have one room left here
and the extortionist at the desk hesitates to hand it over
to a woman who is traveling alone without a husband

The Indian woman would like to have an Oriental on her trip
Soldiers don't notice Oriental women
Orientals are harmless

the soldiers only ask Oriental women
how much they'll have to pay for their company

People pay to see a country
but here there are only stones clinging to themselves
and a white thread on the verge of breaking
a shortcut and a temple with a checkpoint and a hill
above the rooftops a threat of rain
and the brass antennas
with messages from the future

One day my need for the sea will leave me and I'll return
to Hebron believe me
beneath all we've piled in our hearts
a country is also piling up

Could we pretend we're traveling to Brazil and imagine the sea?
One day I'll leave without taking anything
With my hands I draw him a being even bigger than the Sun
I tell him this is its mouth more or less
This is how big the Sun is in South America and inside my chest
the ocean is just like this
I rip out everything the cement has hardened in me
I go through the wall and I go through myself
the driver says

He asks if there's beauty
in Brazil
if I've ever lost my voice screaming for a goal
or if there's no poverty because there shouldn't be any sadness
in such a beautiful place
He wants to know if everyone in my city is ready to leave
which is the same thing as being ready to die
or to scatter

Kites flew I brought them with me along with the dust
and a cough in my chest
half of the birds disappeared in Ramallah
a forgotten and lonely road

Translated from the Spanish by
Kim Jensen &
Judith Santopietro

The mosquito militia from an endless war
pulses in the light of the lavish hotels
The light of luxury is what leaves us blind
the other one drums on the spectral replica of the windows
and settles upon the remnants of the true fruits

I had to choose between Kim Il Sung
or to lose myself on Lenin Street

to pull the Great Wall of China down from the wall
and the Christ figure who is pointing his finger at me

I had to push my body as though it were construction material
looking for a place to nail itself ~~in order to~~ establish a city
I had to fill potholes with a conversation about just how far
we are from the world

To remember one of my heroines
and name an imaginary street after her
To explain that I did it on my own

that I changed the world because I ordered it with my words
that I don't have enough words
to exhume shadows and ignite the lamp of revolt
that now I'm now writing about a country called ex-colony of Portugal

I land upon the high seams of the horizon
upon the glassy waves

The difference between a thick slice of octopus
and tiny chicken hearts
shouldn't spoil our appetite

And what does this darkness have to do with the sea of small islands
enclosed

French colonies glowing in the light of their hotels

That's why no one cares that the streets have been given these names
although there are plenty of birds and music is a language
why superheroes anchored to their capes fail to take flight
when they close their eyes
I reject memories that don't have windows or stairs
in case someone suddenly bursts in
I fervently love that which is forming in my chest
the bare hulls
of multi-family apartment buildings like a storm that doesn't explode
like a vigorous and beautiful body that the sun unravels
*a luta do povo é a luta do povo*¹

People will never get used to being in the dark but

if you get closer you will see the city you love
You will learn to know where you stand
You will learn to get in touch with yourself
To seek the invisible in what you touch
To find yourself again in your eyes
To feel

that the Indian Ocean is made of particles
of small things that have begun to grow
and find their rightful place

Translated from the Spanish by
Kim Jensen &
Judith Santopietro

1. *the people's struggle is the people's struggle*

[Lisbon]

These women who must be adopted and saved from the enemy |
are the enemy when they travel alone
they're the first to board the plane the last to get off
she's going to Morocco has called this trip a journey toward herself
Time has given her six hours of her life in Lisbon
that's why she is the protagonist of this trip
She'll roam Lisbon opening its streets with a can opener she'll eat sardines
She won't see only what her eyes swollen from having seen almost everything force her to tell
She made up her mind that the fear of confusing one language with the other won't stop her
and that she'll speak in the Portuguese that she learned in Rio Grande do Sul
without feeling guilty for not having the northern accent
Once again she felt that the north was to the south of everything she wanted to say
and that in order to explain geological faults and other disasters
she'd have to turn the map upside down
There was once a time when her words were incomprehensible
from talking too much thinking too much sleeping too little
it's very simple go toward the center the woman with a Maghreb accent tells her
with a gentle wave of her horned-adorned hand
a mechanical movement a scene that's probably repeated
a million times a day for every tourist who asks her where to go
And now it's my turn I'm putting six hours of my life into her hands

She's sick of Spanish and she says this in English
I'm sick of English and answer with my eyes
I've seen all the ways a horizon can be arranged on a plate of fruit
some Germans photographed themselves in Zanibar putting ping-pong balls
on top of the Sun

You don't want to see colonial architecture? No
Do castles trigger a feeling of suffocation and gloom? Yes
Are you interested in gastronomy movies pastries? Do you like shoes?
She sees her as an immigrant and asks if she's looking for an immigrant job
If under any circumstance she'd sell herself
She pictures her surrounded by piles of shoes perpetually on sale
She sees herself as overnight unable to breathe
I remind her that I'm six hours ahead
at school they taught her that there are backwards countries with no future
At home they told her that the future is not where it wants to be
She is not where she should be
She forces me to compare everything to the beauty of flavoured soup

and talks about the tomatoes in the soup very sensibly
She tells me forget it there used to be colonial powers and now just eat your soup
She frees her from longing for a past and smashes me into the present

She gets onto the bus thinking of a sea that like her can never agree with itself
an image makes her freeze: her daughter getting ready to ride the most dangerous wave
The tsunami the only forecast in a long list of prophecies that have yet to come true
is perfect in retreat it erases the imprint of its own disaster
A tsunami is nothing more than a great cleansing wave

There's something that pulls her away and brings her closer to danger and happiness
Justagosta her to the cliff where we throw plastic and woods
She lets go of the city that turns her back to it she leaves behind
"Esta gente não se vende" "Fora terra"² in the shade of the jacaranda trees
In Portugal you can still sign with the hammer and sickle
The driver asked an English couple if life would've been better
and more stable without the euro
These are two very different things the woman said but they prefer to not talk politics
on vacation This is what Portugal has become
a tourist destination

She saw a bridge that reminded her of the one in San Francisco painted red
it looked like an invasion
A sea or a skin of sea the waves barely lifting their torso
there weren't any smuggling rafts or drowning people
the things that attract crowds of bystanders mosquitoes and journalists
It was a sea that had to grow up beneath a horizon it shares with Africa
She heard this from a tropical guide she assumes he comes from ~~some~~ tropical country
because unlike her he makes sure never to step a foot away from the sun
She thought it was just the opposite
Africa was forced to grow up under a horizon that no one wants to share

There was something sad in that view of the pristine sea something shattered and perfect
like shards of glass trying to find each other like *o solido* that doesn't have
only one translation like the little giggles of two short *alecrim*³
trying to find themselves in the reflection of a window

Most people returned to the plaza to take pictures with the statue of the great conquistador on horseback
A sea that held no tragedy a sea so clear and clean not long ago
a story began and ended here
She knew that story but didn't know the sea

She asked a woman like her out of focus
to take the only photograph that she keeps from that trip
It is the third time she has been asked if it is possible to live *no estado do Maranhão*³
She says Peru it's Peru

Translated from the Spanish by Kim Jensen &
Judith Santopietro

|

2. "This country is not for sale" "Fora terra"

3. in the state of Maranhão