

Homeland

By Katherine Antarikso

When you leave Her behind
A part of you remains
Like a long lost twin, or a chopped off limb
A phantom syndrome
A sensation of home

Back there,
Withered roots lay abandoned
Its body harvested too soon

Back there, in your Homeland
Where dirt gathered for centuries
To sculpt you into shape
And turn beads of rice into your eyes
Spun volcanic ashes for your hair
Melted sugar cane for your bones

Your Homeland
The one imprinted on your DNA,
The one who gave birth to you,
The one who calls to you in your dreams

For leaving Her, She has cursed you
To a life sentence of wandering
You will belong nowhere and everywhere
She says

Yet, you still search
And in each country you go,
you see glimpses of Her

In the palm trees of Rome you catch Her image
As you squint in the Mediterranean sun

In the muggy breeze of San Pedro, you feel Her breath,
Suffocating you in that sweet, tropical embrace

In the traffic in Cairo, you inhale Her scent
Transporting you back to childhood spent breathing in fumes
Of three wheeled scooters carrying whole families

In the plazas of Mexico City, you are finally one
in a crowd of brown skins, thanks to an ancestor of long ago
Closing the loop of migration out of Eden towards the Sun
Until we double back and meet as cousins once more

In those fleeting moments,
The phantom syndrome
The sensation of home

But deep down you know
You will never find Her again
Rome, San Pedro, Cairo,
They are not yours
They belong to someone else

Nostalgia, once a sweet memory
Reveals herself an illusion

When the moment came for you to return to Her
Twenty years later, instead of four
You are
A stranger in your own land

You, who were once the dreams of a silenced people
You, who have tasted freedom
You, who fulfilled destiny
To seize your own fate

You have become a grotesque figure
Misshapen by your new land
You don't speak softly
You are not sweet
You are too headstrong

You are not the things your people are

But it's me

I am your flesh

I come from you

But to Her you are a ghost

You should not have come back

They do not know you here

Not in your Homeland