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Tsering Wangmo Dhompa

I began this poem intending to write about San Francisco, where I live. Having lived half my life as a 'refugee' in India and Nepal, I realize I will always feel unmoored. This is not an uncommon state of being, particularly as more and more people are able to transport themselves across oceans and islands, and at the same time stay linked to everything and everyone, seemingly at once and at all times. The more I am connected to my relatives and family inside Tibet, the more I feel the weight of history, its interpretations, and those liminal spaces where individual lives spin out of control or are kept firmly in place by state power and politics.

1

Rain foreshadows the assault on ants, patches of water's labor spreads as gossip does in our neighborhood of two.

I am building a nation
in my body whose color abandons
images for a symmetry
of emptiness. A strand of hair misplaces,
as we do. New platitudes dislocate armpits
for swamps, where green is a trope
to a future landscape. History recasts the image
of a goddess, but what of my homesickness—cracked
sole and bloated chest—resisting memorization
of a home.

The heart builds an army of metonyms to embalm
a sensation prefacing loss.

2

Begin across a river, under grass
bullied by graves for ordinary people
who are ordinary because they do not leave
with last names. Or begin with an idea
that fate has an internal measure
of justice. Here, there is no place
that is nothing, the heart knows
what it cannot have. In times of need,
memory's veil is cast in a language
where the state arrives as hero.
Intestines carve famine's scar.

Contradictions aim to conjugate,
I do not accept your version
in a language where efficacy issues poverty.
The world obscures
a word. *History*, she said,
and I saw her childhood's ruined map-hair extensions
and weekend specials-that never washed
the betrayals of home. A chasm corrodes a vein
in the left eye, it throbs gibberish
as though it has seen all it can take. If bodies shut
down at their point of weariness, at what level
would your rivers flood this landscape, escape?

3

Tribes read blood for brokerage. The irony of return
as dawn's expected but necessary miracle to read
the same text. The last recollected sentence waits within
a frozen everything; a permanent shrine where meaning is
managing a directionless pulse. Yet. Color
abandons window-frames. What I mean,
what is meant in rethinking, is that word is manipulation.
A father teaches his son to sing his father's song
suspending time's neglect of the simultaneity of all events.
This moment, plucked outside the shade
is a possibility translated into a nation; the center
of the ocean where a lotus blooms.
And I see the world from a position
underscored by circumstances of flight, not mine,
but someone like me. Transnational flexibility
does not blur the location of suffering; someone, like me,
is never coming home. What grouping of texts,
which images will speak for someone who is not me,
but like me, has no place to escape
from the place of belonging that is no more.

The inconvenience of memory makes feelings
 illocutionary; she lost her babies that same year.
 The first exile came with new words whittling everything
 to images of approximations. Desire of. Memory of.
 A deferral of concatenating absences emptying authority
 over self. Even *yes* or *no* translate uneasily in exile.
 And the brilliant man, who knows what we do not,
 says, *Let no lover call you by your name.* We are
 to our lovers, as unlike who we imagine to be.
 We are already to lovers, our never-selves. The rain keeps
 fingers idly clenched in a loose question
 inside pockets sewn for storage
 of homeless keys and pennies.

We are children of women, all of us. Rain again,
 worms rise to the top of the barrel where we gather soil
 to make better soil. We could build a country, barrel by
 barrel. We could move
 mountains and rivers closer to us,
 to dreams where space fulfills desire.

Tsering Wangmo Dhomba is the author of three collections of poetry: *My Rice Tastes like the Lake*, *In the Absent Everyday* and *Rules of the House* (all from Apogee Press, Berkeley). *My Rice Tastes like the Lake* was a finalist for the Northern California Independent Bookseller's Book of the Year Award for 2012. Dhomba's first non-fiction book, *A Home in Tibet* was published by Penguin, India, in September 2013. She was raised in the exiled Tibetan communities in India and Nepal. She lives in San Francisco and is pursuing a PhD degree in Literature at the University of California in Santa Cruz.