

WELCOME HOME

by Victoria Avis

Welcome Home!

She escorts me to my room
heels echo on the tile floor
of an endless hallway

41 hours, 3 continents
home, for now
between two worlds
that know me hemispherically
one half at a time

2 blankets, 19 C°
home, for now
once the water temperature warms,
as the lights
stop their flicker,
until the wifi
reconnects, to share
my location
with some, to hide
my location from others

7 meetings, 16 days
home, for now
where soldiers
stop cars, check credentials
while I write memos about
policies to implement about conflicts to negotiate

2 holidays, 1 death
1 celebration of life
*Unlucky timing for that trip, huh. We wish you were here.
Can't you just come back early?*

Home, for now
where tear-stained pillow cases are replaced
each morning by housekeepers who keep sheets crisp
enough to remind me they're not mine

Welcome Home!

Thank you for your service to our country.
He nods approvingly, checking my diplomat passport
under the presidential portrait

I smile back, wondering
why he thanked me,
a colleague, a peer, a member
of the public we both serve
—maybe it doesn't matter
I smile back, humbled by
experiences unprocessed,
filed away where thoughts go to grow

For what does it mean
to walk outdoors
inside concrete walls,
a piece of the same sunny sky above the compound?

For what does it mean
to ignore armed patrols
surveilling between desks, while carrying on with peace
talks?

For what does it mean
to work for clients
at home and at home,
balancing what is and what ought to be
but what cannot be because of clients
at home and at home?

For what does it mean
to travel here and there
in body, mind, spirit?
My loneliest hours spent
thinking, wishing, waiting
in solitude on the airplane

Welcome Home!

Dad, teary this time
We saw the news
not knowing what it meant, but knowing it was why
I was there

You look good! Thrilled to see me as he remembered,
recognizable in form— though maybe not content

Stories unshared until documents declassified patch pieces
together

News clips tether my realities to big-talkers with opinions
grounded not in the soil
where the groundnuts grow under the watchful eyes of
women tending to families and crops together,
grounded not in the climate that punishes for daring to exist
in the places they have always called home

So, how was it?

Where to begin a story
with roots deeper than the trees growing in the only yard
he's ever known?

Between two worlds, illustrating realities with imagined
colors that
a mind's eye has not seen



ENTRE PIEDRAS • BETWEEN STONES

by Marco Herndon Melgarejo

yo te siento entre aeropuertos
donde las promesas de volver, nacen y se detienen
ahora te veo, con tus soleadas distancias
pausas de la eterna neblina
mis recuerdos se dispersan
veo esquinas donde viví años
otras donde solo deseaba volver
a las promesas de otra tierra

siento tu sol incansable
tus predios de concreto interminables
eres mi único constante pero
aún no me conoces
no quieres conocerme
te recuerdo a todos esos lugares
donde casi todos se fueron
sé que pertenecer sin permanecer
solo existe en mis mayores fantasías

tu serás mi constante pero yo no soy el tuyo
soy como tus aves sobre tus islas amarillas y secas
buscando refugio de todos los fríos
intento encontrar los lugares que dejé
algunos ya cerrados o con otros dueños
las personas que añoro tienen otros términos y condiciones
esta vez, no quiero recapitular todo lo perdido
no puedo recoger mis pasos como desea mi madre
solo logro estar entre los que llegan y se van
los que nunca retornarán

entre tus piedras costeras
escucho las olas de ají, limón y cebolla
ya no quiero encontrarme
ni intentar ser todo lo que quisiera haber sido
solo puedo estar en este pequeño espacio
entre salidas y partidas
entre desamores y amistades
solo quiero sentirte

i see you between airports
where promises to return are born and held still
now, in your sun-glazed distances
that pause the eternal fog
my memories drift with my gaze
there are corners where i lived years
others where i dreamt to return
to the promises of another land

i feel your insatiable sun
your interminable concrete buildings
you're my only constant but sometimes
you still don't know me
you do not want to know me
i remind you of those places
where everyone is and has escaped
i know: to belong without remaining
only happens in fantasies

you may be my only constant but i am never yours
like the birds on your dry and amber islands
who seek refuge from all of the colds
to find the abandoned places
some are closed, others repossessed
those that i long for have new terms and conditions
this time, i don't want to recapture what i've lost
i cannot retrace my path like my mother wishes
i can only exist between the arrived and departed
the ones that never return

Between your oceanside stones
i hear the waves of ají, lime and onion
i no longer find me, or attempt to be
all i wish i would have been
in this small space
of departures and arrivals
between letting go and holding on
i only want to feel you

*Notes on translation:

"to survive the borderlands, you must live sin fronteras...be a crossroads" - Gloria Anzaldúa

In the contemporary digital age, translation can seem archaic. Google Translate and other apps instantly translate any written text or speech. English now dominates the culturally and economically privileged West as the unofficial lingua franca. Yet we can all agree some things can't be translated. Original language hides the true meaning of a text, a verb, a song or even a name. The Argentine critic and writer H.A. Murena thought translating was "to take something beyond itself... into something else." I am not an officially trained translator, but as a native Spanish-English bilingual speaker, I exist in constant translation. Therefore, I chose to translate a poem I originally wrote in Spanish to English. The outcome are two separate poems, one in Spanish and the other in (translated) English.