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Selected Poems

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Selected Poems

by

Trangdai Glassey-Tranguyen

the peace generation

the world called us
"the peace generation"
those born after the fifteen centuries of war-torn Vietnam
after April 1975
an ending
of many beginnings
undecided

the end of a war without history
the end of an Asian tiger, of the Pearl of the Far East
the instigation of an era in exile
the instigation of humanity on trial

1975-1994
a nineteen-year fiasco
i discern the hues and chords of peace
mixed and matched

the peace my friend knows
fighting the smoldering sun
biking to school day in day out
two hours each way
taking in engine smoke, inhaling street dust

cohorts in my maternal hometown
walk three hours straight yet arriving at school
when the tide brims, it takes some away
they float in the river
no stiff in sight
kids in my town
read life, but not a half letter,
take charge of their daily excursion to catch miniature crabs
half is cooked for the family's meals
half is sold to feed to ducks

competing political convictions still unrest
warring ideologies at our backs
we dash, out of breath
only to be seized
in the noose drawing tight
the amorphous lariat

my friend
hay roof, mud wall
works the deep field, the low patch
her mother works the bike to teach in the other village
two hours through the soil path, one hour bobbing the rock road
now laid off
her father was in the 'bộ đội' reserved army
where he once got lost in the soil, unearthed thereafter
half mad half dead, a terrorist at home
the day she graduated high school
the mother found a match
to marry her off to an Australian expatriate
in hope of her better future
leaving her first love
my friend filed the immigration paper
till she can no longer bear it
and turns lunatic

the farmers in my town
plow and plant
a life of toil, poverty-struck
i mind not their backbreaking work
but the absurdity of their barren stomach
breaks my heart

life
- angst-ridden
when temples
turn commune's work place
shrines and tombs
serve as local headquarters
- troubled
when the domestic authority
seize the house of worship
during the canonization of 117 Vietnamese martyrs
keeping out church members, barricading them from visiting and praying
and at each solemn mass
plain-clothed cops mingle in the only church in town
to single out the faces of teachers and government workers
to execute elimination

my friends in Vietnam these days
still fight each other for the green dollar
still at odd with the rice pot everyday
my friends, the outstanding students of the whole province,
are occupied with earning enough to send Mom-home the monthly rice
a generation negotiating peace with bread and dress

how poverty lives well
since the French colonization
now evermore impecunious
farmers renting land,
farmers taxing life
lush rice fields
withered souls
they suffer in solitude
to give my generation an era of silenced peace

our peace is the rice seed
choked in the forestry of thorns
stunted,
putrefied
huffing

who said we have peace?
who said we have peace?
who said we have peace?

oh, peace, how do Thee define thyself?
would Thee ever reify my life…?

"no justice, no peace!
no justice, no peace!
no justice, no peace!"
the iron chain

“combating poverty, eliminating hunger”
he left Vietnam in haste
minding not the abysmal forests in Ukraine
gorging his life into car trunks to Poland
tattered at dawn
sun-scorched with hard toil
hope jumped the fence
one day, his family would be together again…

his heart thinned for thoughts of his kids
his womb pained for his wife
their union has been distanced
is her love still obliged?

he endured his lot
the State loves its people
in spite of his squalor
he wouldn’t hate the State

the pair of callous hands
the pair of addle eyes
the pair of withered legs
some words of blood and flesh

the noose has closed in on his neck
the fate has engulfed his life
his hair, knowing yet youth strength,
has now turned bitter-white

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1 “The iron chain” was inspired from the struggles of the undocumented Vietnamese immigrants at the Stadium in the Polish capital city Warsaw. The poem came to me when I was on the train going from the port Nynäshamm en route to center Stockholm, Sweden, having arrived via ferry from Gdansk, Poland.
2 A slogan by the Vietnamese government, urging the people to combat poverty without making the right conditions possible.
3 The Vietnamese government.
a poem for Con

A seed at summer’s end
An autumn home in the womb
Warm winter, filial karma
Blooming at spring’s start

About the Author

Trangdai Glassey-Tranguyen, an award-winning author, has conducted multi-lingual research across the globe, and contributes to critical and creative publications in Asia, Europe, and America. Born into post-1975 Vietnam, she was prompted to commit to the common good, peace processes, democratization, social justice, gender equity, and heritage discourses. As a 1.5er in Vietnamese and pan-ethnic Americas, Trangdai is a prominent pioneer in addressing the intra-group generational gaps and inter-community cultural issues through her relentless activism and acclaimed scholarship. Her works pertain to the human experiences and expressions, women’s issues, spirituality, and the Vietnamese Diasporas. She has authored over a hundred articles and essays in the print media and academic publications, and four multilingual poetry books.

Trangdai is widely recognized for her outstanding achievements, services, artistry, and research. She was honored by CSUF, Americorps, Anaheim YMCA, and the U.S. President, besides others, for her extensive community services. Trangdai’s academic trainings encompass several disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences. At CSU Fullerton, she earned a B.S. in Child & Adolescent Studies, and three B.A.’s in English, Asian American Studies, and Liberal Studies with Outstanding Awards from the latter two departments. She achieved an M.A. in Oral & Public History, also at CSUF, receiving two Outstanding Awards, amongst other accolades in 2004. She was a Winner at the 2004 Annual CSU-wide Research Competition with the entry "Orange County, Yellow History." Trangdai was accorded a Fulbright Full Grant with Exceptional Ranking in 2004-05 to study the Vietnamese communities in Sweden. During her Fulbright year, she paid her own way to conduct short-term fieldwork on Vietnamese communities in another ten European countries. She holds a master's degree in anthropology from Stanford University, and has worked towards a doctoral degree.

4 “Con” is “child” in Vietnamese