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Forty–Five Years On: Two Poems: Coexisting & Again(st) Deportation, Again

Trangdai Glassey-Tranguyen
vietamproj@gmail.com

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Creative and Literary Works

Forty-Five Years On: Two Poems

Trangdài Glassey-Trànguỹễn

POEM 1: COEXISTING

1. First Space: Deep Memory

'my father was born

in a country that no longer exists'

9:30 am on a sun-dazed morn'

we sat on the lacquer wooden floor

during jukumite

her unanticipated words seized my thoughts

her hapa hair in a ponytail

the pensive streaks of youth dangled on her forehead

her gentle eyes gazed into a far-off world

how deep does consciousness gush

in the torrents of intergenerational trauma and memory?

it was the forty fifth April

she, barely nine

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(A demonstration in Little Saigon, CA, on January 12, 2019. Photo by the author.)

2. Second Space: Fresh Wounds

a Việt deported to a homeland s/he didn't know
and killed by thugs

stirs in the rest

the fear of dispossession

from a 'most powerful country'

in which you might live but don't always belong

even if you are not 'deportable'

- shame by association -

- damned by coexistence -

deportation is a triple curse

that threatens to cut open fresh wounds

our family has lived for generations

of colonization, separation, dislocation, isolation, defamation,

persecution, forced migration, discrimination, marginalization, incarceration,

losing loved ones, losing homes

losing, losing, forever lost

we wouldn't dream of disturbing the honor of our folks

but somewhere midstream

a leaf turned and the truth spoke

imperialistic greed and untold deaths

will guarantee your return home

from the diasporic dreamland

(Screenshot from Facebook.)

3. Non-Space: Acknowledgement

the past cradles our today

and the present scoops our tears up with fears

we have no tomorrow

should we fail to listen to the manifestations of

the wombs that hold us between the walls of fire and bombs

we carry our maimed memories in our muscles

and the collective memories might, at times, become a fleeting armor

against discrimination of all sorts

we-the-SEA-seeds, we-the-driftwoods

from the other shore, we-the-reclaimed-FOBs,

making home on borrowed land and shrouded truth

- while several of us called the ocean floor home for good -

we have grown into the sequoia

that survives any raging fires,

even when we're burnt front, back, in, out

coexistence is the acknowledgement of differences

in a verdant search for inclusion, respect, compassion

gesturing toward a new beginning of consciousness

intra-selves

inter-selves

(A diagram conceptualized and hand-drawn by the author for a pro-bono workshop in August 2018 to advocate against SEA deportation. The workshop aimed at helping cross-ethnic community organizers think about how they might position themselves in relation to deportation and immigration issues.)

POEM 2: AGAIN(ST) DEPORTATION, AGAIN

2008: *The M-O-U*

they clandestinely signed a note
the two former foes, freshly friends
deciding the lives of people

who were once rejected by their birth country,
persecuted by virtue of ideological affiliation,
now deported from the country that once claimed them as refugees

- **they are refugees no more!**

the USA, the mighty, mighty USA
had purged those who had no ties to the homeland they had lost
how does one find one's way back to a place that no longer exists?

"no father, no peace!

no justice, no peace!" *

** These were the last two lines from the poem entitled "no father, no peace" that the author recited, as pictured, when she spoke against deportation with the Southeast Asian Collective (SEAC), UC San Diego (La Jolla, CA) on April 23, 2008 at the Free Speech Zone in front of Geisel Library. The participants were encouraged to wear red and white. Photos by Hiếu Trần.*

2018: *The I-LOVE-YOU*

The fight gets harder but stronger 10+ years later...

"Bảo Vệ Gia Đình" - "Protect the Family"

"Đụ ICE" - "Fuck ICE!"

ICE Cút khỏi OC - "ICE out of OC"

"Family Belongs Together - Defend Refugees"

"Defend Sanctuary cho Cộng Đồng Việt Nam"

"Stop SEA Deportation!"

"Free Them ALL!"

voices rising in solidarity,
feet forward in resistance,
hearts praying in unity,
hopes against all odds,
hopes against all hopes,

incarceration splits the family
deportation kills the chance to heal and remake

in the Californian "golden gulag" *
the Southeast Asians incarcerated are cheated of their own history
they pop up like criminals without a human past
that led to the prison industrial complex

know ourselves!
that's where we will rise from...

* "Golden gulag" is a term coined by the scholar Ruthie Gilmore to connote the Californian prison industry.

(Below: Ethnographic fieldwork photos by the author when she led an interactive anti-deportation workshop entitled "Riding the New Waves: Inter-ethnic Advocacy for Inclusion of Culture, Language, and Family" at the annual Student Organizing Summit Conference hosted by the UC Student Association in Pomona, CA, August 2-5, 2018. The workshop aims at engaging student leaders in cross-ethnic advocacy on shared issues impacting immigrant students and communities, particularly against deportation and family separation.)

About the Author

Trangdai Glassey-Trần Nguyễn, Ph.D. (trangdai.net) is an award-winning multilingual author. She is the sole scholar having conducted hundreds of oral history interviews and multi-sited ethnographies on the Vietnamese diasporas in the U.S., Europe, Australia, and Asia since the 1990s. Trangdai is widely recognized for her advocacy, leadership, and community services. As the first scholar to conduct extensive ethnographic fieldwork and oral history projects in Little Saigon, Orange County, California, Trangdai received several awards for her studies. She won the 2004 CSU-system Student Research Competition, Graduate level in the Humanities, with the entry “Orange County, Yellow History: An Intimate Encounter with Vietnamese American Lives” based on her

groundbreaking Vietnamese American Project. An exceptional-ranking Fulbright scholar, she started the very first ethnography and oral history project on the Vietnamese populations in Sweden in 2004 entitled “Home in Stockholm: Vietnamese Narratives of Transnationalism.” Since 2004, Trangdai extended her fieldwork to ten other European countries to gain a pan-European perspective about immigration and minority communities there. She initiated the Vietnamese Berlin Project in 2005 entitled, “Squatting in Racialized Berlin: Vietnamese Diasporic Subjectivity in a Climactic Double Division.”

Trangdai holds an M.A. in History from CSU Fullerton with two campus-wide outstanding awards, an M.A. in Anthropology from Stanford University with a thesis focusing on brokeraged Vietnamese brides in Taiwan, and an M.A. in Southeast Asian Studies from UC Riverside focusing on undocumented mobilities of Vietnamese immigrants in Berlin. She holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from UC Riverside with a dissertation on Vietnamese American political subjectivities in Orange County, CA.

Her research has been supported by 2001 NAFEO Fellowship, 2003 CSU-system Graduate Equity Fellowship, 2004-05 exceptional-ranking Fulbright Fellowship, 2005-06 Stanford University Graduate Fellowship, 2007 Luce Foundation Grant for Civil Liberties and Faith, 2011-2012 California Endowment for the Health Journalism Fellowship, 2014-16 UCR Dean's Distinguished Fellowship, a 2016 Melon Grant, among others.

A celebrated and syndicated bilingual author, Trangdai has published over 3,000 poetic, creative, translation, and critical works in/as academic journals, K-12 texts, anthologies, edited volumes, and the media worldwide. She has authored five books of bilingual poetry, and her poems have been translated into thirteen languages. Trangdai has taught, researched, published, and presented in Vietnamese and English on topics and in programs pertaining to the Vietnamese language, culture, and diasporas for the last twenty-seven years at K-12 and university levels. She has diligently advocated for dual immersion Vietnamese-English education in public schools

and has served as a bicultural bilingual consultant for biliteracy programs. In early 2015, she published over 50 Vietnamese texts with audio recordings for Kindergarten and first grade levels with NRCAL at CSU Fullerton.

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