I Have No Ocean

Nicole Arocho Hernández
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Odio el mar, que sin cólera soporta
Sobre su lomo complaciente, el buque
Que entre música y flor trae a un tirano.

I hate the sea, who without fury supports
over its complacent back the ship
that brings, between music and flowers, a tyrant.

— “Odio el Mar” by José Martí,
translation by Nicole Arocho Hernández
As I tell Siri I want to die since Puerto Rico is dying

Did I ever tell you
I am an unincorporated territory.

My grief hugs the chair,
spooning me hostage.

Did I ever tell you
my parts are not available.

Mutts do not get repairs.
Instead, they burst into glitter.

Did I ever tell you
where my wishy-washy comes from.

My land swallows birth’s
breath. No need to wallow for
a death meant to happen.

Did I ever tell you
I have never been to prison.

A hospital replaced my bones with
Did I ever tell you
I want to be a brown bag.

My sister, la trigüeña. Her skin reaps warmth. I am toast with no butter.

Did I ever tell you
I wish I had collected dioramas.


Did I ever tell you
my Horatio lives as a ghost.


Did I ever tell you
I have a metabolic problem.

Pills have no effect. My breast tickles. My feet moan. I walk without my sea.

Did I ever tell you
the problems come with white dirt.
Trampled. Soles de la gente de razón.
A mattress with no name. Because
it’s for us. Soiled soil.

Did I ever tell you
my sun grates their teeth at night.

In an island without power,
even stars worry. It shall metastasize.

Did I ever tell you
the beaches died long ago.

The government pours
alcohol right before daybreak.

Did I ever tell you
there are no eyes in the clouds.

Tears thunder from the dead.
Tears merrily streak from disaster
capitalists. In the eye of the storm, no one
waits for whimper. Everyone
expects song.
Rosary prayer to hurricane María before landfall

Creo en juzgar a los vivos
y a los muertos.
Creo en el espíritu
de los infiernos.
Creo en el poder del cielo y la tierra, concebido
bajo la derecha de dios.
Creo en la comunión de la carne,
que nació santa por obra y gracia de la resurrección
del hijo de los muertos.
Creo en los pecados que han de venir
al tercer día con la vida eterna.
Amén.

Padre, tu reino y tu voluntad
nos ofenden; tu nombre no es nuestro.
Danos el cielo y nosotros
perdonamos tu reino.
No dejes caer el pan; líbranos
de los que nos ofenden.
Que nuestras ofensas sean
el amén de la tierra.

María,
en la hora de gracia,
tu vientre es el fruto
Oración del rosario al huracán María antes de que tocará la orilla

I believe in judging the living
and the dead.
I believe in the spirit
of many hells.
I believe in the power of heaven and earth, conceived
under god’s right side.
I believe in the communion of the flesh,
birthed holy due to the labor and grace of the resurrection
of the son of the dead.
I believe in the sins of those that shall come
on the third day with eternal life.
Amen.

Father, your will and reign
offend us; your name is not ours.
Give us the heavens and we
will forgive your kingdom.
Do not let the bread fall; release us
from those that offend us.
May our offenses be
the amen of the earth.

María,
in your time of grace,
your womb is the fruit
de nuestra muerte.
María,
los pecadores rogamos:
salve a las madres, benditas.

Las mujeres
llenan el ahora
con tu amén
o
contigo
es el ahora
que tu amén llena.

Gloria a los siglos.
Santos los hijos de siempre.
El padre solía ser el principio.
Ahora amén para el espíritu. Por siempre.

Oh cielo mío, líbranos
de tu fuego.
Lleva tu infierno
a jesús.
Todas las almas
necesitan misericordia.
Especialmente las que
perdonan con pecados.

Oh
Oh
of our death.
María,
we the sinners beg:
save the mothers, blessed.

The women fill
the present with
your amen
or
with you
is the now
that your amen fills.

Glory to the centuries.
Blessed the children of forever.
The father used to be the beginning.
Now amen for the spirit. Forever.

My darling, free us
from your embers.
Take your hell
to jesus.
All souls
need mercy.
Especially those
that forgive with sins.

Oh
Oh
Reina María,
muéstranos la misericordia
de este destierro.
Tu vientre
vuelve a nosotros
este valle de lágrimas.
Llamamos a nuestra abogada Eva;
nuestra esperanza no es dulce.
Ea, pues, piadosa Señora
de frutos que gimen y lloran,
somos hijos sin clemencia ni bendición.
La dulzura de la vida—
¡dios nos salve!

Oh dios, ellos prometen
imitar la vida.
La bienaventuranza de Jesucristo contiene
un amén misterioso:
si es eterno es la muerte,
si es unigénito alcanza
al mismo santísimo.
Los que meditamos
merecemos un premio.

Concédenos una explicación, señor.
Resurrección para todos, María.
Queen María,
show us the mercy
of this banishment.
Your womb
returns to us
this valley of weeping.
We call on our advocate Eve;
our hope is not sweet.
O, thus, merciful Lady
of fruits that whimper and weep,
we are children without clemency or blessing.
The sweetness of life—
god save us!

Oh god, these men promise
to imitate life.
The beatitude of jesus christ contains
a mysterious amen:
if it is eternal it is death,
if it is an only child it reaches
christ himself.
Those of us who meditate
deserve a prize.

Give us an explanation, lord.
Resurrection for everyone, María.
You were just seven inches away from redemption—
Oh, sorry, I meant a good fuck—
Oh, sorry, I meant no good luck!

When in doubt smile and show the yellow brine
I shower with both yours and mine all this grime:
Have me for dinner!

I haven’t touched my foundation in months
Commute this! Commute that!
Excuses that smile as my teeth hang from the sky

fall one by one on my chest, on my hair, on my pubes: the collage is reborn.
I have the smile of a winner!

When the whites scream, say move on to sunbathing
topless and obsessive.
I clean this body with possessive
pronouns. aren’t we excessive:
Have me, a skinner!
Maybe the thing I trust the most is my anger

I want his hand when you

to be my oracle
do not

rub my back follow

plant a spell momentum

grow a blossom it’s hard

harvest a forest to inflict

have this nature oral

populate my body punishment

It’s scary to let yourself be feral
(no hay título)

Don’t worry
I imagined as much

...

They are making a census
post-María

and they will pay me

...

and the keys
that are reservations
that nobody goes to

...

Niiice
que brutal
I have no ocean.

I have no tongue.
I write with spilled wreckage.

With this wet language
I try to make eye contact
see my pupils in glass cups
“Remember what you’ve lost.”

“Give me
every letter
that built
your dream.”

With the sunset, you
watch my freckles
become periods
my sentences estranged lovers
of a face, or is it a creek, or is it a finger lake
or is it

What do I think about
on rainy days?
I admit I went too fast.
Absorbed the absence.
Abscised my mouth with crisp air.
Took to Longinglés.
You are a visitor, standing
on an island rimmed with sky,
framed in blue.

Is it me
who wants to write?
Is it you
who barters for lines?
We are
a Spanglish slut
selling lips for drippings.

Quiero beber de la fuente que regala vocales.
I want to drink your lush vocals. Become my fountain.
Allá, donde las lluvias son magras.
Take me where the rains are starving.
Dame tu voz, tu tejido, tus pupilas. Ya me cansé de las mías.
I shall create a voice, a tissue, a pupil so erectile we will never get tired.
Cuando llegue el verano, tomaré de tu agua e inventaré una madre sin noche.
I am a motherfucker of invention; I have no intention of letting them drink my summers.
It is time to listen to my word: with villancico

I do not have your stretch marks, empire—
my curves are more broken homily
a parking meter that does not take quarters

My white lines do not look like a tidal wave
like those of mothers
like those of cream
which is to say
I look gringa
and so what, why
do I have to
brincar el charco
to live in

alegría alegría alegría /
alegría, alegría y placer /
because María /
has been born /
convalescing
without faith

I scream to you, Judas without flavor in his eyelashes
my kidnapper my deity my seller
plantain and
rust and
wind
that I want to eat
fuck, I want to eat

You ask for a chunk to toss around
what, you want to come back this round
has no victor

do not ask
for TheShepherdsAreNotMen sermon
do not ask
for TheyAreNotWomenWith thunders

Let’s get out of FEMA.
Let’s get shoes off our hillsides.

and they’re mine,
they’re mine /
only mine,
living without skin /
because they are my
enemies /
the memory and
the living
Give your birthright to the revived
if you don’t have a guide
if you have a split spine
here’s homework
miles of verbs
join me
join me
join me
join me
join me with
join me now

hacia el Caribe se encaminan
María con su amante mar
llevando en su compañía
a una Diosa prodigosa
Guabancex, Guabancex, Guabancex
Guabancex, se nos olvidó
que la Virgen eres tú
de paso a la venganza
American conscience

6  King-President

Some epiphanies take dimes
I think as a ruler.

I’ve made it here thanks to
restraint in
reshaping beauty.

I am performance:
justification
attention-seeking
famine.

Blame me for all the pain!
I will be your absolute goal. Now chew
this troll-sized smile.

5  Politician

There is a different language
around my bravery. It’s aware
of its quadruple consciousness.
Let me tell you
people like to bury the dysplasia in us.
All we had to do is say *take a joke*.
The media will take care of it.

4 Abuela

The dogs cannot talk back to me.
I look out the window.
How do I connect my TV?

Talk front to me, use
my space for renewal and
disgust; discuss—
nothing else, just glass spots.

3 City

Can you not talk about my red lips?
Yeah, you, Eyeballs Glazed.
You’re the spitting image of subway trains and
Somewhere Else.
Damsel in Stress

When can I return to my form
Please allow me to vex
before sex

Mujerzota y Macharrán (become one by talking over each other)

Mu: I'm usually: ask him for permission to go ahead for myself
Ma: This is something but not yet—

Mu: Despair immediately!
Ma: Devour the sounds of vaginas!

Unison: Spare me the disperse.
Mu: When Inanimate compliments me I say
Ma: How come, doppelgänger? Please describe my luxury to the masses.
Since you never ask

*After Carl Phillips and Richard Siken*

It’s as if colonia never had color. Armed with dreams for yellow metals and land without soot, white landed and landed and landed and landed and landed and who I was back then, light like the sand of coastline rimmed with blue, drowned. White had blue in its eyes but no sea. I can hear the fear as bodies named red rust with disease. White domination comes with Black imprisonment—if only the sand was not made of bones. White birthed the colonia and the colonia birthed me. Are the screams high-pitched in your dreams too? Do you see the ghosts colored by emptiness? I should have a memory of weeping while looking at the sea. While standing on ocean floor, my skin camouflages. Tears are the color of mercy. What does that even mean? I may be rebirth or sword, tongue or greened roots. Is there a storm worth embracing? Maybe I missed it left it on the plane maybe I have tarnished flowers left behind what if I am nothing more than a dried yellow flower a useless sun for this nameless graveyard—
An abridged story // Ode to Lx Guillotinx

The bark made of tears
waves their body over bricked roads.
They listen to the chatter about
the protests, the steps that pierced
their flag stripeless, black.
They tell how the people
live with dreams of retribution
that don’t bend the ground because
the people don’t sleep, nena.
The people can’t close their eyes.
Every detail counts.

Lx guillotinx,
having just been born,
has not seen
the lion’s den
up close
the unsplintered skin
the unspeakable voice
the uncalloused feet.

Lx guillotinx
needs other people to move them
but doesn’t ask for help.
*at some point they’ll move me*
at some point they’ll need me
they created me for a purpose, ¿verdá?
I can just wait for the right time, ¿verdá?
They cannot help but think
colonia without bodies on the line.

Lx guillotinx
knows there’s peril
raining over their creators.
Faces reflect the familiar
sweat of desperation.
They know their destiny
is to kill. ¿But what?
¿But who? ¿But how
many?

Lx guillotinx
sees their reflection
in a puddle:
how tall they are
the chasm they make
how hollow they look
and wished to change
their body. ¿Can I
be human?

Pero en un dos por tres
people lift them.
They walk on the shoulders
of everyone in the crowd
they listen to the music
they listen to the wound
and learn of the medicine
the clamor that does not end.

Lx guillotinx comes with razor-sharp ears
floating above, feeling the hands
of dozens; many, some, more
that beg:

expire those ________________
their by-date has passed
#PresosTodos
give them their last hit
your face travels the world
unlike our own.

The hands
the songs
the dances
the cacelorazos:
everyone
teaches Lx guillotinx
that a human being’s warmth
is worth more
than blood money.
Lx guillotinx learns how
to make a scene.
Lx guillotinx knows:
Flesh can go to jail.
Their message
cannot make it to CNN
without a symbol.

Lx guillotinx
stands
naked
black
full of pride.
Uses
their voice
for the first
time.

Here I come, here I go
Yo soy la guillotina.
You don’t see me in dreams, no, no
You see me in broad daylight
Cutting the politician’s tongues.
I am your lies, carved
I am the people, irate
I am the dead
I am the dying.
Visiting you, looking at you
Telling you: why
Why did you make me live
Without food
Without refuge
Without temples
With rising seas

We will haunt you
Until our families
Can breathe
Without grief
Without lack
Without uproot
Without empire.

//

Guillotinx
You who never sleeps
I want you to spit
My pain on
Uncle Sam. Please grant me
This prayer.

Guillotinx
The one that shines for the people
Do not let me get away with
Indifference.
Guillotinx
Ceiba that became a boat with jaws
I want to ink your body
For all eyes to be
hold.
Reversing grief

How dare you
step
on me.

Do you
wish
to die?

Do not
take me
with you.

How dare you
take
from us.

How do you sleep
while taking
from us.

Do you
wish
to live?
Do not take us from here.

How dare you take us from dreaming.
Rompecabezas / It’s puzzling, isn’t it?

Ahora desprende las vendas
de las ventanas. She is not your
vendor of choice, but what other
venting can you do. Estoy
aquí entusiasmada, relishing the
vinegar
She carries more powder in her than
pockets for eyes than flies keep growing become a food
sé la pauta
yo no sé como ella pausa antes de sumergirse is she fun. to watch
comes with power. Salió sin manchas. Ella me dijo, dame

otra razón para quedarme. Yo le dije, quiero
quejarme. This flood was

predetermined, honey. Let yourself flow.
Take pride in lunares. Drive far with your symptoms. How long can it be to make it to the moon.
De momento veo kilómetros de aguacates.
I follow roads flushed green with confía
With so much pregnancy in green, when will I see otoño?
Oh wait—
eran mangoses, canopies cloyingly orange. Rotten fruit by my feet.

I cannot trust you any more. Steps in crevice. There lie las herramientas y sus suspiros:
herraduras para delirios!
herrajes sin respiros!
anís
mora
duro
mature
nature
sure
ensure
privilege
village
villano
I wore rings
without colors.
Blemishes of all kinds
on my knuckles.

North!

Respite: is it attainable?
Respiro: ¿puedo atarlo?
Dame más
de lo que tienen
las nubes.
There are no clouds left in our home.

If there is no more rain
do I evaporate?
Trapped as flies do
happy with leftovers

Lóbulos y estrías
plasma sin sabor—
he perdido mi calor—

I taste test my shower water
is it depreciated
am I absorbing red clay
do I smell bleach
—We sit by the beach
no raise no steaks.

I want to show you
my stake
I sleep with the machete
by my side
ready for the stretches
oh, mercy
don’t come in.
¡Bienvenidos a la parranda!
¡Sientan el clamor de los cielos!
Truenos     relámpagos     y
azul     cielo     por     la
peseta
no     estoy     pa’     ti
si
fue     la     luz     que
yo     tengo     pitchea
para     calentar
un poquito     de
guarapo     del     pai     eso     da     y     sobra
para     calentar
al     mundo     entero
aa
nda     pal     si
llamar     a     la
maí     que     me     parió
ay
tiene     cubitos     de     piragua
ahora
qué
válgame
llegará     tu
estás     bien
vecino
si, si
te     puedes
esta
casa       está
bendita
crece     con     las
los
inocentes.
Notes

The titles of the poems in this collection are set in Spanish case.

“As I tell Siri I want to die since Puerto Rico is dying” (pg. 9):

“Gringüeño” and “trigüeña” are grammatically incorrect, since they do not need the dieresis. What first started as a typo ended up showing me that language is more than what is defined for us. While wrestling with racist categories of skin color in Puerto Rico (trigueña), my rusty Spanish led to this new configuration. Urayoán Noel enlightened its meaning by connecting it to cigüeña (stork). I’m hoping that by creating new soundscapes, we pay close attention to the racism embedded in language and find ways to move past it. This might be a naïve and unfounded hope, but still, I want to hold onto it.

“It is time to listen to my word: with villancico” (pg. 24):

In Taíno mythology, Guabancex is part of a triumvirate of gods who create hurricanes. Guabancex was the leader and controlled wind. Her male accomplices were Guatauba, god of thunder, and Coatrisque, god of flooding.

Taíno is the name given to the Arawak people inhabiting part of the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico, when Christopher Columbus begun his murderous imperial-colonial crusade in the region.
“An abridged story // Ode to Lx Guillotinx” (pg. 31):

“An abridged story // Ode to Lx Guillotinx” is a gender-neutral expression of La Guillotina (The Guillotine). This poem was written in response to the January 2020 protests in Puerto Rico where a wooden guillotine was brought to La Fortaleza, the governor’s mansion. The Puerto Rican people were protesting the disastrous recovery efforts after a series of earthquakes that gravely affected Guánica and other municipalities in the island’s south, as well as the discovery in Ponce of a warehouse full of three-year-old, expired emergency supplies from hurricane María relief efforts in 2017. Puerto Rico had a non-elected governor in 2020. The guillotine continues to be a symbol of resistance in Puerto Rico.

I chose to use the “x” as gender-neutral language instead of another common practice, that of substituting “a” and “o” in gendered nouns and adjectives with an “e.” This practice can make words sound and look French; for a poem tackling protests against colonial politics, I did not want to allude to the language of an imperialist country. I also wanted to have a grammatical connection between “Guillotinx” and “Guabancex” to link them as symbols of resistance and reconfigurations of Puerto Rican identity.
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This chapbook is being published a little more than a year after a 4-year hiatus from writing poetry. I want to thank myself for not giving up on poetry and poetry for not giving up on me.
About the Author

Nicole Arocho Hernández is a poet and translator from Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. She has a BA in Writing from Ithaca College and is pursuing an MFA in Poetry at Arizona State University. Her poems have been featured in *Great Weather for Media*, *Variant Literature*, *Acentos Review*, and the podcast *VS*. Her spirit never left Puerto Rico. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram: @nimaarhe.
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