

On Exiles and Defeats.

Maria Eugenia Bravo.

Abstract

Poem by Maria Eugenia Bravo Calderara in her book Prayer in the National Stadium, exhibited in the 'Resistance, Rights and Refuge' exhibition at LSE and donated by Maria Eugenia to the Documenting Chile Archive at the Living Refugee Archive, UEL — Tanya Harmer and Gloria Miqueles.

On Exiles and Defeats.

No. It was not the bad time in Chena
nor the sudden grim prosecutions
in improvised war councils.

No. The rifle butt in my back
didn't defeat me,
nor investigation's black hood of horror
not the grey hell of stadiums
with their roars of terror

No. Neither was it the irons bars at the window
cutting us off from life,
nor the watch kept on our house
nor the stealthy tread
nor the slide into the deep maw of hunger.

No. What defeated me was the street that was not mine,
the borrowed language learned in hastily set up courses.
What defeated me was the lonely uncertain figure
in longitudes that did not belong to us.
It was Greenwich
longitude zero
close to nothing.

What defeated me was the alien rain,
forgetting words
the groping memory,

friends far away
and the atrocious ocean between us,
wetting the letters latest I waited for
which did not come.

What defeated me was yearning day after day
at Jerningham Road
agonising under the fog
at Elephant and Castle
sobbing on London Bridge.

And I was defeated step by step
by the harsh calendar;
and between Lunes-Monday and Martes-Tuesday
I had shrivelled into a stranger.

What defeated me was the absence of your tenderness,
my country.

London, April 1980.
Translated by Cicely Herbert.