

First Fierce Steps

for Audre Lorde & May Ayim

You inspired Afro-German women poets in Berlin
to take what is theirs: their Germanness, their mother
tongue, their skin, rise up, rise through the corrosive myth
that German=white=purity=go back to where you came from

| Ich bin von hier.
Wie du bin ich im Mutterleib gewachsen.
Wie du war ich von Brot & Wasser &
der gedämpften Musik
einer deutschen Frauenstimme
ernähert
die sprach & sang & flüsterte in ihren Träumen
über mein Werden

Ich gehöre hierher.
Nirgendwo anders.

| I am from here.
Just like you, I grew in a woman's womb.
Just like you, I was nourished with bread & water &
the muffled music
of a German woman's voice
who spoke & sang & whispered in her dreams
about my becoming

I belong here.
Nowhere else.

-María Luisa Arroyo Cruzado. *Destierro Means More than Exile*,
27.

living on marble street in the '70s

in a home with no books in spanish or english, papi's tongue lashes the air
mami's murmurs float & pop like burbujitas

en español, they swallow their "esses," leave syllables dangling pa' ná'
their rush to speak making words rise like mami's incense
rising & slipping up through the kitchen fan

the rounded countertop radio out of my reach hurls spanish bolts of words
too quick for me to catch and color with crayons I hide
from little brothers who stuff anything into their mouths

at five, i see & listen to sesame street, sound out slowly the muppets' english
with no "esses," no broken words, letters slow enough
for me to trace on the TV's fat bubble screen

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in preschool with no books in spanish, i learn my abc's with no "esses," no
broken words, no spanish rs for my first or last names

my american preschool teacher holds my right fist around crayon, shapes
my first letters only in english, makes me mimic her voice
only in english, the only language that counts
for me to survive

-María Luisa Arroyo Cruzado. *Multiplicity Magazine: A Nonfiction Literary Magazine*, Issue 4, Spring/Summer 2022. Online.

arrancar

i
como niños aprendimos
a arrancarnos la lengua
de nuestras propias bocas
y tirarlas afuera de los salones
de nuestras maestras ellas listas
con lenguas postizas de inglés

ii
¿qué sabían mami y papi
trabajadores desde niños
de la miseria cordial
de la lingüicidia?
noches no notaron
el vacío en las cuevas
de nuestras bocas

arrancar: to yank

i
as children we learned
how to yank our own tongues
from our mouths, to throw
them outside of the classrooms
of our teachers they ready
with prosthetic tongues in english

ii
what did mami and papi
workers themselves since childhood
know about the cordial misery
of linguicide?
nights they did not remember

the emptiness in the caves
of our mouths

María Luisa Arroyo. *Multiplicity Magazine: A Nonfiction
Literary Magazine*, Spring 2020 Special Double Issue.
Online.

man dast-haye shoma-ra bus mikonam: I Kiss Your Hands

In the front courtyard between Mamani's house
& the ten-foot high wall to protect men's eyes
from us women, we spread futons, hang
pashebands on lines so that mosquitoes can't prick

our skin. My first overnight outside.
The stars salt the sky. I cannot sleep.
Mamani sighs to my left, one sister-in-law
warms my back, the youngest curls at my feet.

I have no room to move. Roaches thick
as scarabs hiss from the toilet dark.

After chai the next day, when the sun burns
above 100 & our bodies slip into naps, sleep
claims me like a drowned woman. After night three,

I call you in America to learn
how to ask your mother permission
not to sleep like four pistachios in one shell.

I learn to kiss the palms & backs of Mamani's hands,
ask her to let me sleep alone inside, a different way
for her to show me her eshgh, love.

-María Luisa Arroyo Cruzado. *Calyx: A Journal of Art and
Literature by Women*. Vol 29, issue 1, Winter/Spring 2016.