

### **At the break of dawn...**

The sound of a wooden broom scratching the concrete floor grates upon my conscience. Mothers cry out orders to their offspring: To wake. To clean. To cook. To dress. To learn.

These children, who will grow, who will leave, who will never return. These children who will seize opportunities that lay far beyond their Mother Island, the Sleeping Beauty, the woman who lays unperturbed by this exodus.

This exodus of intelligence and of ambition.

This exodus of hope and of reason.

Pushed by the love of a mother.

Pushed by sickness and by need.

Pushed by the desire for more, and by the fear of having nothing.

### **At the break of dawn...**

The Sleeping Lady continues to sleep, her contours, the sloping crests and troughs of her body, forming the mountains of the island. The depths of the jungle surrounding her like a nest of pillows.

The Sleeping Lady continues to sleep; this goddess whose body gives life to the island and to its inhabitants. This goddess whose maternal love continues to exist in the fertile lands that nourish her people. This goddess whose power was stripped by a foreign god, a god whose teachings erased history, a god whose teachings erased tradition.

### **At the break of dawn...**

The island, littered with plastic waste, styrofoam and tin, flagrant stains of globalization, comes alive. The “pop-up” stores along the streets open, locally-owned, but stocked to the brim with the colorful imports of America, of China, of Japan. The colors pollute the green of the island, the blue of the sky, the blue of the sea.

The ever-diminishing beach, continues to be engulfed by the water, ignorant of the shift from the darkness of the moon’s reign and the brightness of the sun’s.

The sea wall built to protect the land does little against the violence and the anger of the sea, whose waves rise menacingly. Its misplaced anger is fed by the hand of a first world that places vanities over sustainability, material riches over earthly beauty.

The waves break over the sand, constantly, stubbornly. The tides either a respite or a rapture. The cannibalism of nature upon nature.

### **At the break of dawn...**

The roosters sing, waking the island, a quotidian reminder of the German, whose ships brought them. A school bus traverses the village, carrying in its belly the privileged few enrolled in the only private school on the island - its side stamped as a “Courtesy of Japan”, leading to teachers that are “Courtesy of America.”

Cars gauge speed by kilometres, while road signs display miles, a crossroads between Japanese technology and American laws.

### **At the break of dawn...**

The light illuminates the aging walls and foundations of schools, of churches, of houses. Aged by the rain. Aged by the sun. Aged by the elements. The island is a body whose antibodies reject manmade things like they're foreign objects seeking to implant themselves where unwanted. The high school, built by the Chinese only a few years ago, is rusting and flaking, like a child dying of chicken pox, spotted and treatable, but no remedy available. Abandoned homes riddle the island. Concrete slabs left to the parasitic plants growing through their cracks. Walls warped and stretched into thin layers, sickly and weak. Tin roofs, collapsed by rain or wind, with gutters that drip in rusty-red hues, like blood diluted by rainwater. Families build anew, right next to where the abandoned remains rest, like crabs abandoning their shells because they are undersized or rotting. The hospital where I was born, where my mother was born, where my brother and my sister were born, remains twenty years in the past. Lacking space, lacking personnel, lacking equipment. The sick helping the sick. The blind leading the blind.

### **At the break of dawn...**

I wake up in a world different to that which I was born. A new world where I have grown, where I forget my childhood, where I forget my innocence. Where I have learned about the places and the people who live past my front door. Where the veil was stripped from my eyes. This new world, in which I now exist, that has inflicted irreparable damage to the refuge to which I once belonged. A refuge where the air still resonates with the laughter of children and their mothers. Where I lived blindly and blissfully unaware of the injustice of all those deaths so easily preventable in other countries and in my own. Where race didn't exist. Where love was familiar and pure. Where my home and nature coexisted peacefully and symbiotically.

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When I am still between consciousness and sleep, nostalgia overcomes me, filling me with a strong desire to return home. A utopia in my memory that opposes the reality of the frail society that remains. Yet, beauty is there amongst the deterioration and poverty, amongst the illness and the weakness. The desire for the island, for home persists and calls out like a siren's song leading me toward an uncertain future - a siren song only audible to those who have seen the beauty she holds.