

CLIMATE CHANGE: GEOPOLITICS BETWEEN THE EAST & THE WEST

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INTRODUCTION

This narrative, hidden inside a glass Coke bottle, was found in a government-funded archeological dig off Route 64. Although the identity of the author remains unknown, it has been suggested that this hidden transcript showcases the final moments of two Middle-Eastern women. Whether or not this piece is engaged in the larger academic debate of Occidentalism and Orientalism should be discussed in further academic reviews, as the structure, discourse, and struggle between the two women demonstrates the persisting cultural hegemony of the West that has continued until the present day. The extent to which the Eastern women are disenfranchised within this geopolitical framework has yet to be debated within academic literature.

NARRATIVE

It was May when the world tilted. Scientists were unprepared.¹ They watched as their freezers slid across the room and crushed the tight stacks of Petri-dishes. Broken glass, bacteria, and DNA puddled in the triangle that had once formed the corner between the inner wall and the floor. It had been the same corner that leaked bleach when the janitorial staff cleaned it, and the receptionist on the first floor had to cover her head with the business section of a newspaper to keep dry.

“What’s happening?” Bina² asked. Her fingers shook. The pipette she had been holding slipped onto the floor. Gravity slid it under the tables and into the growing puddle. The research lab had survived three hurricanes and two earthquakes unscathed, but this was different. It was as though someone had taken the axis of the Earth, fiddled around with it, and inserted it back in the globe—only through West to East instead of North to South.

“It must be the government,” Abia,³ the lab director, muttered. They were the only two who worked on Thursdays, and the dented freezers hummed in the still silence that followed. If only Abia had known about the tilt, then she could have prepared the lab for it. She could have strapped down the freezers and boxed the Petri-dishes. Now she would not only have to work with microscopes at an angle, but she would have to replace all the broken materials. The budget wasn’t large enough for that, and the equipment wouldn’t be the same. “What will be the consequences this time?”

Bina fished her pipette from the leaking puddle. It was the same pipette she had used for twenty-nine years. She most certainly wouldn’t leave it to a fate of watery stupor. “We will become the West,” she said it causally as if it didn’t matter. But it did. Bina readjusted her *hijab* and straightened her lab coat. If they had succeeded this time... Her cheeks flushed at the thought. “What’s our new longitude?”⁴ Bina knew little about geography and even less about why the government had not announced this day to the scientists of the

¹ Research suggests that meteorologists had predicted a disaster due to the shifting gravitational pull of the Earth. However, their estimates suggested that the tilt would not occur for another 3,000 years.

² Bina was a popular female name in the southern region of India formerly known as Kerala. However, the details in the story suggest that Bina lived in the Middle East.

³ Three archival records have been found referencing a politically active biologist named Abia. If this is the same woman, it appears she was imprisoned twice for political protests and fined once for an unpaid parking ticket.

⁴ It is suspected that their new longitude was in fact 62° 53' East and their new latitude was 67° 36' South.

world. But she did know the West meant innate privilege

Abia rubbed her eyelids with her thumbs and leaned against an angled wall. She was younger than Bina, but with the white threading her eyebrows, her age was beginning to show. “You see those fig trees out there?” she pointed to the two landscaped trees in the courtyard. “They are already starting to frost. They tilted us alright.”

“Frost?” Bina hugged her arms to her chest. Abia was right. The exact longitude didn’t matter. Just the frost was enough.⁵ Never had Bina guessed that they would come so far in her lifetime. Her people, her region, had frost. She wanted to pump her fist in the air. Frost, the radio broadcaster had declared last Thursday night, was one of the biggest factors of Western domination. “They say that frost stops diseases. We will never have to worry about sickness now. The mosquitoes will die, and the wind will carry them away. Imagine that.”

Abia pursed her lips together. “That is what they say.”

Bina took the cloth from the sink rack and began to wipe off the lab tables. She held the pipette firmly in her right hand in case the world tilted back again. She didn’t want it to be crushed this time. “You know the only reason the West was able to colonize us was their climate. If we have it, we are the powerful ones.” She didn’t tell Abia that her grandchild in all his mischief had woken her up with this unruly fact. He had turned the volume knob as loud as it would go on her public radio and then stood by her matt to watch her jolt up at the blaring broadcaster’s voice.⁶ He was just like his mother. If only she were still alive.

⁵ May, it should be noted, tends to be a month of delicate flowers and warmth in the western hemisphere.

⁶ It has been confirmed that climatic change was a frequent topic on public radios during this era. However, it is likely

“And just imagine what our land will be like in summer.” Bina clasped her hands together in elation. She could already imagine the Western sun’s gentle rays lapping her face as she walked her grandson to school, the lukewarm temperature that would turn her cheeks warm pink instead of red, and the sprouting of tulips instead of fig trees in her tiny plot of land.

Abia shook her head. “We are too old for that. Don’t tell me you believe everything you hear.”

“Old or not, it’s true.” Bina nudged the trashcan closer with her foot and shook out the cloth. Broken glass was caught in the thread. “Climate matters. Don’t you turn on your radio anymore?”

She knew the answer to this question. No, Abia did not turn on her radio. No she did not watch television. After the amendment to the constitution five years ago, Abia had snapped. Maybe someday she would become the citizen that she had once been, but for now, she lived in the margins. Her apartment was in the outskirts of the city where desert lined the sidewalks and children ran naked in the streets. She still bought Western products on the black market, and she still read those English newspapers that were filled with propaganda and slander. It was only a matter of time before the government found out.

“The West is not smarter than us. Not genetically different than us. We are the same except for one fact.” When she was a girl, Bina had spent many nights pondering this same statement as she laid on her matt. Back then, her notions were more radical, she thought that the West’s success was happenstance. But no, she understood now that was a mere child’s proposition. Nothing was left by chance.

Bina glanced out the window again. The fig trees had begun to ice and a thin

that government, conducting research on adaptability, would announce its research results in this public forum.

glossy sheet covered each of the leaves.⁷ Neither she nor her grandson had ever needed a winter jacket before. Bina shivered with cold and joy. A winter jacket. This was a day to celebrate. If only the buildings weren't crooked and the lab materials weren't broken. "We could turn on the public radio right now," she suggested. "I am sure the government has a plan to clean up this—"⁸

"Disaster," Abia finished for her.

Bina glared. "They will hear you."⁹

Abia threw up her hands. "Let them." Was it just five years ago that the government had declared all Western products undesirable? Now all the lab equipment had to be made and sold in the East. Did Bina not wonder why she clutched her pipette so close to her chest? They didn't make pipettes like that here anymore. The government had screwed up yet again. "As if tilting the world would make the difference." The cold had begun to seep in through the windowpane, and Abia's teeth were beginning to chatter. They weren't prepared for this weather. They would freeze if they weren't careful. She wondered what would happen to the children on her street. Their clothes were threadbare and thin, and their homes weren't sealed off the weather like the lab supposedly was. She doubted the government had a plan for that. Or for the rest of the world's anger.

⁷ It is remarkable how fast the water and fig trees freeze in this narrative. Did more time lapse than the author suggests?

⁸ The government's three main buildings collapsed, the prime minister was killed, and the National Guard was trapped inside its barracks. It is unlikely they had a plan in place or that they initiated the tilt.

⁹ During this era the government installed surveillance devices in all major research laboratories. The installment of these devices was common knowledge to all employees, however, it still remains unknown whether these devices were ever turned on or analyzed by government officials.

"You should be more careful," Bina rolled the word on her tongue. She knew it was one of the phrases that Abia hated. But then again, if Bina had had whiter skin, lighter hair, and blue eyes she could have been the lab director instead of Abia. "Where would you be if they knew what you thought?" Her words were sharp and barbed.

Abia blinked twice.

Never had she heard Bina so much as raise her voice in twenty-nine years. Maybe the cold *had* changed something. Maybe Bina and the government weren't so wrong after all. *Cold. Power. Climate. Climate. Power. Cold.* Abia wished desperately that her teeth would stop chattering. Then maybe she would know what to do with this mess. She rubbed palms on her cotton sleeves and shifted from foot to foot. If only they had more lab coats lying around, they could pile them on for warmth. Was it really this cold in the West? Or had the government been off a few degrees?

"You don't understand. Do you?"

Bina reached in her lab coat pocket and produced her public radio. Most mornings she left it at home by the metal tub of dirty dishes, but today with her grandchild's mischief, she had slipped it in her pocket. She set the black box on the angled table and turned the knob. Not only did her people now have more strength, but the government did, too.

Bina turned the radio knob, and the broadcaster's deep voice entered the room. Then she went over to the supply closet and searched for a ball of twine. Goosebumps the size of olive pits had grown on her legs. If only the cold weren't so harsh on her skin. But power, power always comes with a price.

"The government can't just reposition the world and get away with it. Someone will come after them. The North. The South. The previous West." Abia picked the radio and dangled it in front of Bina by

its metal rod.¹⁰ The broadcaster had begun to sputter. “Let’s go home, Bina. It’s too cold to stay and work. Take this with you.”

“How dare you hold it like that,” Bina grabbed the ball of twine from the top shelf and tied it to the knob of the supply closet door. Then she walked to Abia and around. “You are one of us remember?”

Abia could barely feel her fingers anymore, and her breath came out of her mouth in white puffs. “I still am.”

“You once told me there are insiders and outsiders. Some outsiders, the most dangerous ones, pose to be insiders and that’s how they squirm their way in.” Bina held the twine in her right hand. “Do you remember those words?”

“Let’s go home, go home before we freeze.” Abia’s toes had turned red, and it was painful to move them. She would have to layer herself with all the clothes she owned tonight to survive this cold. Already the leaves on the fig tree outside had cracked off, and the temperature in the room was colder than the freezer. She took one step and then another—

Bina caught her mid-fall. She pushed Abia upright and secured the twine. The puddle in the corner had already frozen over, and the receptionist on the floor was padding the business section of a newspaper in her sleeves to keep warm. “You can’t just run away. Listen. This is our future now.”

The broadcaster’s voice reminded Abia of the syrups she had to swallow as a little girl. It was smooth and bitter. She had to get home. Wasn’t it enough that the world had tilted? She tried to drop the black box on the tiled floor. But the cold had glued the metal rod to her skin, and her fingers no longer moved at her command.

“Shhh,” Bina said as Abia cried out in frustration and pain. “They are getting to

the best part.” Bina warmed some of the ice from the sink with her hands and dipped her pipette in it. She had used it for twenty-nine years, and it had not failed her yet. She dotted Abia’s lips with water droplets, spacing them out half a centimeter, and watched as they sealed her lips shut.¹¹

¹⁰ This radio, modeled on the Soviet radios of the 1960’s, was quite common at the turn of the century in Egypt, Qatar, and Jordan.

¹¹ Although this appears to be the final page of the narrative, some scholars have concluded that there was once an additional page that discussed the intimate details of these women’s deaths. This final scene, perceived as too gory for the future audience, was removed before the narrative was inserted into the glass Coke bottle. As to how this bottle landed in the landfill near Route 64 we have yet to learn.