

Provocateurs suspended...

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Photo: bed on floor side. 2011. © Andreas Koutas

Iron bed – *demir karyola* – ‘*gargola*’ as grandma and grandfather would say. Who was right? Who was closer to the truth of the iron camp bed?

Who died? Who made love? Who gave birth? Who wet the bed on the cast-iron camp bed? Indispensable piece of furniture of every home from cities to remote villages. Who slept under the stars? Under the mulberry tree in the yard? On the packed-down earth covered rooftop, listening to crickets or confused cicadas who lost track of time and the songs of the night. Who fell off in their sleep? Who had pillow fights stepping on the ever-moving, bouncy wire strings losing their balance shrieking with laughter? Who was tended to by a doctor brought secretly in the middle of the night, to remove a British bullet from the side of the chest, his heart-wrenching screaming stifled with a rag stuffed into his mouth, hitting his head on the iron bars, aged barely eighteen, reluctant fighter for a cause he barely knew, all for Maria’s eyes and cryptic smile reserved for a hero. He died at dawn... the priest said of lung infection, the doctor silent. Not as a hero shot by the British army...

She didn’t want the *gargola* in the house after her beloved son died on it. The mattress soaked in his flowing blood no one could stop.

Scribble scribble... scribble... scribble-scribble... scribblescribblescribble... the white delicately translucent sheets, recording the twists and turns of the bed suspended from the ceiling. Scribblescribble... creating charcoal thorns in a tight ball almost resembling the

links in the chain zig-zagging across the bed. A piece of wire, once a washing line, forced through the holes, stretches across the bottom to the other side and back again, twisted, wrapped around the other end to support the sagging original springs.

She gave birth on the metal springs. Screamed the place down. Her body, her face covered in sweat. Trying to pull herself up her fingers wrapped tightly on the iron head bars, knuckles going white, as she pushed down listening to the soothing words of Yiannoulla, the *mammou*, midwife from Nicosia, willing to come to Turkish villages to help them give birth. A Maronite but no one knew... they thought her Greek. Aleco's mother had given them the bed. Her brother Yusuf and he had spent their childhoods in-and-out of each other's houses most nights sleeping together on this bed on the roof counting stars making journeys without ends along the Milky Way to places unknown but imagined and longed for with tremors of secret fears and pleasures.

Scribble... scribble... the bed hung on the ceiling recording undecipherable stories. Helpless. Abandoned. A sacrificial lamb waiting to be skinned but already a skeleton of the past. *Scribble... scribble...*

A shriek... *ahhhhh! Look look! We used to have a bed like that... my grandfather used to sleep on it under the vine-trellis. We left it behind when we had to leave, for the north... as refugees... oh, I remember.*

Scribble scribble scribble

Hey bed! Stop showing off just because you're in a room of your own! And just because you're bigger than most of us. And because you are more evocative or open to suggestive innuendos just because you are a bed. Not all fucking took place in beds you know. I've seen plenty of action... me and my double here. Sizzling hot stuff... You should've seen these seats, leather, covered in sweat! Do you know what it feels like being drenched in salty sweat, fumbling fingers finding their way through the edge of the knicker elastic, sucking sounds, grinding arses as though they were trying to squeeze the life out of us, smells of bodily fluids washing over you, cunt juices, fingers dancing like crazy in and out of a cunt, arses grinding as though flaying our skin. Then suddenly the girl's body would be lifted onto the boys... now, could you take that weight? Two on top of you? Then out would come the cock fumbling to get inside her... she saying *no no no* but still grinding away on top of him with deep sighs. Him going crazy, the poor cock getting bent this way and that but never finding the way in... and finally he pukes it all out all over me with a deep groan almost regret that he hadn't managed it again, he didn't put it in. And he came too soon... again! And I'm covered in stinky sticky puke!!

Do you think it's easy being the seats on the back row of the cinema?

And for the fat stinky arsed men and women... don't even remind me! Ahhh! The little kiddies laughing away to comedy films on Saturday afternoon matinees... They were good. They were fun to cuddle especially the little poor ones who couldn't pay and used to sneak in after the film had started. Poor little ones with torn trousers and piss smelling pants.

Do you remember those days Marlon? He's Marlon and I'm Marilyn... we named each other. Nowadays we are showcase material in an artist's studio salvaged from a junkyard covered with dust and pigeon shit for over fifty years. Rats, lizards, weeds, cockroaches, beetles, cats crawled all over us, some gave birth in our laps, some shat on us, ladybirds hid in our crevices, spiders wrapped us up in tulle we felt like ghosts fluttering in the breeze... you name it, we've had everything. Didn't we Marlon?

And now finally fame! We're in an arts exhibition! In this grand old powerhouse, in the middle of Nicosia! Not Gilbert and George... but Marlon and Marilyn!

They only allowed them to take one suitcase, a shy voice, almost a rumble from the deep small dark room on the side. One step lower than the floor level with the smell of a cave.

One suitcase! A whole life to go into ONE suitcase! *You'll get the rest later*, they said. She took me. She climbed onto a chair and grabbed me from the top of the walnut wardrobe, in her family long before I had arrived to lie on top of it. A young woman newly married with beautiful almond eyes and trembling lips. She was three months pregnant. It hardly showed. I watched the twitches of confusion run across her face, trembling fingers touching everything, just butterfly touches of things already abandoned already no longer hers, putting in-taking out-putting back in again, holding for a short while... I heard her whispers to herself,

What do you take? Your grandparents, parents' photographs hanging on the walls? Your wedding dress? Your dowry? Your intricately carved dowry-chest left to you from your grandmother? Your childhood mementos? Letters from your lover? From your loved ones gone to foreign lands to make a living sending you what they could spare every month? Valuables? But you will be robbed on the way. Books? Diaries? Title deeds to your inheritance? Will it ever be yours? Your mother's, father's house? Your records? Toys? Your precious animals, pets? What makes you, you? What will you need to continue that you in another space, another geography, another time? And for how long?

Will you ever be back?

But we knew that was a lie, she said later... they didn't believe it themselves. They hid the lies of their eyes by becoming more and more angry with us barking orders ridiculing us shouting,

what is more important your lives or your belongings we are trying to save your lives and all you can think about is your pots and pans your trees and beds leave them leave them there will be more of those where you will be going hundreds of beds for you to choose from hundreds of pots armchairs mirrors gardens trees beautiful houses... you're going to paradise P-A-R-A-D-I-S-E...

Get a move on! The UN convoy won't wait for you forever! Move... move! Sing, sing! You're going to a better life...

Just one suitcase... and not all of them had one! I ended up in Lysi. A dusty village in the middle of the Messaoria plains. Chucked in a corner. The owner a collector of sorts, waiting for someone to choose me, amongst the beautiful but neglected objects he brought together from abandoned villages. His house packed from floor to ceiling. On the stairs, in the garden, with all sorts of stories. I learnt he was a refugee. From Stavrogonno, I heard him say. Paphos, to the west. He lives as though he will get up and leave at any moment. He owns nothing. One day, this artist asked him for an old suitcase... and now I am hanging here from the ceiling, one end up at an angle, at the other, an attached pen
scribble scribble scribble...

And there was the sound of the piano... from the open window of that house.

... the artist with her blue-bottle green dress breezes through her final round on her way to the party in the garden of the old power house and the curator gives the order for *lights out!*

Inspired by the exhibition of Elizabeth Hoak-Doering, "*things, witnesses!*" The Nicosia Municipality Arts Centre (NiMAC) at the Old Powerhouse, 2009.