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## Reflections

# Buildings in Foreign Lands

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This group of stanzas in haiku form explores the essential “outsiderhood” of the anthropologist, an experience that bears a lot in common with the emotional state that the Greeks called *ξενιτιά* (xenitia), the longing associated with sojourners and the uprooted, particularly those whose absence is not entirely voluntary. The first poem was written during one of the author’s many visits to Greece, where she and her husband yearn to do fieldwork but have never quite pulled it off. The second is a recollection of Nigeria, where they did do fieldwork. The third is set in the area near the Mayan ruins at Tulum, where they fantasise about being more than mere snowbirds. The fourth describes the author’s feelings when passing through a highly Jewish neighbourhood near her newly adopted home in Toronto, the proximity of which has forced her to confront the fact that she can neither escape her roots nor return to them without betraying the person she has become.

In the Pangrati poem, the speaker knows the district in Athens where she has rented accommodation well enough to recognise and be reassured by a landmark, but in no way can she claim it as home. In the poem about Benin City, she wishes to divorce herself from post-colonial privilege but knows that to do so would distort the very reality she has come to study. In the Mexican poem, she knows she is guilty of the sin of allochronicity, but she cannot help herself. In the fourth poem, she acknowledges that xenitia is likely her permanent condition, perhaps one she has chosen.

### **Pangrati Locksmith, June 2015**

A red neon key  
Flashes beside a small door.  
It promises home.  
Vertical letters  
On the door post spell “kleidia”  
But I own no keys.  
If I go inside,  
Will I find the door to Greece  
Or just the way out?

### **Government Residential Area, Benin City, Nigeria, 1983**

The girl begs us for  
A room in the old wrecked shed  
Still called “Boys’ Quarters.”  
Local boys hide there  
To play now, joining our son  
In forbidden games.

### **Winter Condo in the Mayan Riviera, 2013–who knows?**

We have all mod cons,  
Retired anthropologists.  
Ruins down the road.  
Faces from stelae  
Greet us in stores and cafes.  
What should we ask them?

### **Synagogues on Bathurst Street, Toronto, 2012–16**

Beth Tzedek, Holy  
Blossom, places as well known  
And lost as childhood.  
Here I know the words  
I must say if I go in,  
Except the word “Yes.”

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