

Bahian Food Mama

The colorful red paste you stirred in the crock cauldron
with that five-foot wooden spoon
seemed destined for my dry, foreign mouth.
So we ambled onward to your stall,
a simple white card table without walls or depth,
spindly legs bowed under the Bahian smorgasbord atop.
A stage set constructed with essentials only,
easy to tear down after the Gringo-meets-native scene.
Your bleached cotton dress and contrasted blue bandana
were landing strip beacons that guided my eyes to your
invisible dark skin toiling in Rio's languid night.
A motley row of crockery provided salad and sauce
to adorn the sumptuous falafel grouted with paste.
Your cotton shift remained church white
Amidst the riot of food aflight from bowls to sandwich,
immune and impermeable to spattering accidents of creation.
Do more shining garments hang in your steep hillside favela?
What other secrets, family, and miracles hug the mountainside?
Your sullen eyes acknowledged my mute confusion
among tourism, adoration, and hunger,
when I pointed at my camera, and pleaded wordlessly.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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