

Essay

A Universal Nobody

Ilka Oliva Corado

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Yesterday I had an interview for a radio in Spain. Among other things they asked me what I feel to be published in the five continents and not in Guatemala. And that my writings are translated into other languages.

This question is recurrent and I never can answer it calmly because there are my emotions and feelings involved. Guatemala has hurt me since I was born, and still hurt me and will hurt me until the day I die. Because I have lived in flesh and blood, its humiliation, blows, classism and oblivion. And this anger and this rage is not particular, it is shared and felt by us the outcasts, the nobodies, those who are seen as the rot because of our ancestral origin and our social class.

My identity has never been Guatemala in general, not as a country; my identity has always been Comapa, Peronia City and the market vendors. And now as a dweller in a strange land, the undocumented immigrants. It is because the abuse, the humiliation and oblivion that I always emphasize that I am an ice cream girl and proudly say it so, not with regret. And I raise my face and look straight up because my honor as a human being, from the exclusion, has the strength of the oppressed. Guatemala classist and racist is indebted to his most faithful and worthy children. And it is still abusing and neglecting them. It annihilates them cutting off their soul all at once.

All my energy, all my love, my best effort I gave it all to Guatemala and there it was left behind. When I left the country I was more dead than alive. My greatest longings remained there as a frustration because Guatemala closed all the doors on me, it didn't hear my voice, my prayers, my cries, it was unable to appreciate my efforts. And I was discriminated as a pariah, as a black, as a woman. I have no guilty feelings, the most beautiful of my life I gave it to Guatemala.

I wanted to blossom there; I bet for my country, I gave it my blood, my heart and my dreams. In return Guatemala humiliated and rejected me, and opened an incurable wound that I would never be able to heal because it is an unfathomable void to be outcast in your own country. And I have experienced it since I was born, that contempt hardened my childhood, adolescence and my early adulthood. At 23 when I left my country, I was a wasteland.

What do I feel not to be published in Guatemala? I do not feel anything. I don't mind not to be published there. My writings are born from my chaos, they are not regional. They have no ties of any kind. My writings were born abroad while being a migrant. They are errant. If as a child I didn't exist in Guatemala -which needed the care of the system for a well-rounded education in the same way as the thousands of forgotten children- when my age made me vulnerable, much less I'm going to exist now as a migrant who continues to work as before in a thousand trades, and on top of that, undocumented. Although I made a last attempt, out of my love for my homeland, as a writer I wanted to return to my country, and knocked doors in all publishing houses, none wanted to see me. But which it hurt me the most was my alma mater, the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. It missed publishing a pariah who loves it madly and does not deny it.

My writings are flying around the world, they know no borders, know no differences of language, color; they are soul, devotion and heart. They are vehemence, anger, intransigence. They are frustration, delirium, are a constant catharsis. And when they fly around the world they also carry with them the authenticity of the suburban slum, of the people and the market. Although also a unique label, they are

the creation of the Guatemalan writer and poet, Ilka Oliva Corado. Guatemala has denied me since I was born, but the world knows that my writings are the labor of a Guatemalan. That's life ... is something I cannot get rid of even if I wanted.

It is clear that more than Guatemalan I am full blooded Comapense, homely from Peronia City, market vendor and undocumented immigrant. There's my identity and there is no need to look elsewhere.

What do I feel not to be published in Guatemala? What should I feel? Anger, frustration? No, out of that was my character made of; Guatemala had me 23 years of my life, and my life I gave to it in full. Regarding my writings, it is very frequent for me to say "my country" when referring to another country other than Guatemala. Since other countries have welcome my writings with love. Alright then, love is repaid with love. To the pariahs is my responsibility and they are everywhere in the world. I am therefore a universal nobody.

When I left my country, I was a wasteland. In response my writings have made me blossom and the world has opened its horizons to my expression. The writings of an ice cream girl.

To the health of my colleagues.

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