

INTRODUCTION

My poems draw from testimonies of migrants and refugees I met while working in a mission in Guatemala. I first arrived at the mission a few years after the 1996 Guatemalan peace accords were signed, bringing an official end to over thirty years of fighting, much of it genocidal and waged against the indigenous majority. The accords, however, meant little to most in the country, as had the 1992 peace agreements in El Salvador. In both countries, as well as in neighbouring Honduras, used as a campsite and bunker by every faction in the regional conflicts, the wars lived on in other kinds of violence -- gang turf battles, organized crime, entrenched poverty. That violence has made life difficult, if not impossible, for many in the region and, today, fuels migration north to Mexico and the United States. The poems speak to that flight. They are about trying to leave what war destroyed and about the hardships of escape.

exodus

Olivia Ruiz Marrujo

For months we have been dragging the dead behind us –
their hands, their feet, their tears
everything, like roots,
grabs the earth when we pull.

These hands and feet of firmament, of tears
unwilling to leave the milpa
and walk past the dead
asleep with the sun
jumping out of their mouths.

We hear them, the old ones,
shouting up through the stones when we pass.
Even the ax weeps
for the arm, the finger resisting,
their love caught in the dirt.

What will become of this hunger, its wells,
when the last of the living
packs his hoe,
her beauty and birds
and steps out of the day?

water and bones

Olivia Ruiz Marrujo

It is useless this way.
All water and bones,
without even the palm of a hand,
how can we say goodbye?

To faces turned against the sun, youth,
all that will never rise again;
to mothers, once shining against death,
released to animals of pain.

May we not forget
as we set fire to the bones,
walk like a tender protest through the water,
shape a temple and river
out of the dirt of war.

These trees and skies of whole bodies
suffering the touch of the world,
burning crazily,
in everything we breathe.

Dedication: to a man remembering his sister

Olivia Ruiz Marrujo

He remembers the girl, her voice a fever in his ear
like a striking of wings and hammers

as words and ruptures of words, her pleas infinite biologies of pain,
stoop and limp beside her.

This blood beginning of woman
screwed to the dirt, smelling of dust, dispossessed of

her gardens and youth
the vital organs of her innocence snapped

violated, her ribbons and Communion bells
when she sank under the hardness

under the guns and decimation of the hardness
that is the testicles and rubble and column of fire of this country

of dreams, where the man dreams of the girl
and climbs the memory and its affliction,
a man exiled from his capacity as a man to endure

as he holds down her skirt with his heart
when she cries out against the beasts,
against the broken horses of love

as he pushes hope through her lips
whispers to her wounds
with the music and bread of love.

the mystery of hope

Olivia Ruiz Marrujo

Before hope crushed him he had years to die,
of malaria, a stillborn harvest,
of hunger and war, the mania and metal of men.

Today he shadows the planet, his spirit caged
in yearnings he wore
throughout that naked half life.

What was his death but the footprints of
loss, departure, fate – youth wagered
as he would a pig or a bushel of corn.

What was his longing to go north
but a thirst he mistook for private fortune
gambled against his last breath

stolen in the heat of a tank of steel
where he lay sealed in, gasping across borders,
until the mystery of hope released him.

Olivia Ruiz Marrujo

Olivia T Ruiz Marrujo is an anthropologist in the Department of Cultural Studies at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. Her research addresses associations of undocumented migration with risk and vulnerability at Mexico's northern and southern borders. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in literary journals and books in the United States, Spain, Colombia and Mexico.

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