



Walking through cities, towns, border crossings and rural communities of Mexico, the United States and Canada, I ran into people that had to flee from the Global South and look for a new life in North America. I invited them to write a few poems. They spoke to me and I wrote down everything they said by hand. Each time they inhaled I started a new line. Nothing was recorded. We printed their books that day. The next day, when the circumstances allowed it, each person read their poems aloud in a round of nine chairs and gave the books to everyone who came to listen. In the beginning, during a get-together, spoken word becomes written word. In the end, poems occasion a gathering where the written word becomes oral. Poems are at last between two people instead of two pages.

Kiki (Cuba)
Maritza (Guatemala)
Delbert (El Salvador)
Njoud (Jordan)
Ahmed (Iraq)
Norma (Mexico)
Leonilla (Mexico)
Ceyla (Miccosukee)
Ronda (United States)
Luis Miguel (Guatemala)
Valeria (Mexico)
Roland (Haiti)
Alfonso (Venezuela)
Verónica (Argentina)
Sayak (Mexico)
Amarela (Mexico)
Alba (Colombia)



REUNIÓN: NORTH BORDER

DANI ZELKO

Reunión “Migrants are being constructed as political enemies” “Migrants are being incorporated into the discourse of war” “What’s new is not migratory movements, what’s new is this global regime of borders, this neoliberal fantasy of trying to govern human mobility” “Why can’t we understand that migration is the aftermath of colonialism and slavery?” “Migration is the very dispute of what we call borders!” “Migrant caravans are an uprising! A rebellion!” “The act that migrants are carrying out puts an end to an era, it invents a new historical and political moment” “To migrate is pure will of life” “All living beings move to where there is water, food, and light” “To migrate is to begin a new story for your life.”

Dani Zelko

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* Originally written in Spanish and translated into English by Bea Abbott, Bruce Gibbons Fell, Darius Runtanium, Elisa Taber, Edgardo Dieleke, Javier Rivero, Maia Pérsico, Rachel Engelman, Joseph O’Connell, Rita Pauls and Reunión.

Other editions of Reunión published by Gato Negro Ediciones:

Reunión: Season 1 and 2.

These books bring together the interventions carried out by the project between 2015 and 2017. They include the voices of the invited writers, texts by the spokespersons and some journal entries by Reunión. The participants range between eight and sixty years old. They come from Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Guatemala, Haiti, Cuba and Mexico.

Earthquake: Mexico City

2017-11-19 / 1:14:40 p.m.

On September 19, 2017, an earthquake measuring 6.1 on the Richter scale struck Mexico City 40 seconds after 1:14 p.m. Dani Zelko arrived in Mexico City from Buenos Aires on September 24, five days after the earthquake. During the next days, he set up a table with a computer in different boroughs of the city, taking along a backpack outfitted with a printer. He sat down and waited. There were signs behind him that read: “Memory Collection”, “Talk to me and read yourself”, “Tell your story today”, “The present is confusing”. Passersby dictated poems to him. He listened, transcribed the poems and printed them out immediately. He read them their poems and gave them the printouts as gifts. The age of the participants ranged between three and sixty years old. As the people heard their poems, they would nod and say: “Yes, that’s how it happened, just like that,” as if someone else had lived the experience or someone else had narrated it.

Juan Pablo by Ivonne:

A counter-narrative to the Chocobar Doctrine

On December 8, 2017, in the La Boca neighborhood in Buenos Aires, police officer Luis Chocobar shot Juan Pablo Kukoc in the back, killing him. He was an eighteen-year-old youth who had just stolen a camera from an American tourist. Since then, the State and the mainstream media have portrayed Chocobar as a hero, and the repressive policy of President Macri’s government has been known as “The Chocobar Doctrine”. I met Ivonne, Juan Pablo’s mother, walking around La Boca. We met one afternoon and drank Coca-Cola and ate croissants. We made a book together: she spoke, and I wrote down everything she said very quickly. Every time she stopped to take a breath, I started a new line. We made a fanzine from that manuscript, and it is now in circulation. Against the narrative of state and media’s power, the voice of a woman, sitting in her tin shack kitchen with her daughter.

Reunión is an on-going project by Dani Zelko (Argentina, 1990.)

Reunión is composed of various acts that involve conversation, reading and writing: daily actions –though at the same time out of the ordinary– that always involve being face to face. Dani Zelko writes down poems that others dictate to him. They dictate to him as the conversation develops and then finally ceases. After fulfilling his task as a listener and copyist, he edits and prints the books the following day. The books are presented to neighbors, family and friends of the writer in a circle of nine people. The writer reads his poems out loud, he listens to himself and the others hear him for the first time. The second part of the project consists of an extension of the first acts in other places. Writers’ poems are read out loud by spokespersons, emissaries and people who lend their body, eyes and voice to read in a round of nine chairs the poems of people who are absent. A chain of actions, subjects dictating and reading, a scribe and a listener, spokesmen and listeners, books and poems. Actions and procedures for being with others.

This present edition, called *North Border*, was made between September 2017 and October 2018, in different places around Mexico, the United States and Canada, such as Tijuana, Veracruz, Texas, Florida, New York, Princeton and Toronto. The cover photograph was taken just before the presentation of Maritza’s book. It took place in “The Line,” a border crossing between Tijuana and San Diego. Maritza read her poems aloud to her caravan friends; then they gave away some books to the people who were passing by, and they walked to the United States to ask for political asylum.

Maritza

I don't know where to start.
When I was a boy
I didn't have a father,
my mother
was due to have me
in three months
when my father died.
Then my sister
started dating this guy
and when I was seven
he raped me.
It went on and on
until I was nine.
So I told my mother
that I felt I was a woman
and that my sister's boyfriend
raped me
every day
since I was seven,
and she kicked me out
she kicked me out of my house
she left me on the street.

And I dedicated myself to work.
It's not easy to work at night
and least of all in Guatemala
on the street
just as you work at night
during the day, you have to pay
or they kill you
the Maras and other groups
organized crime groups,
they demand that you pay them to work
and even to walk around,
you have to pay them every morning
and if you don't, they kill you.
That's why I left
you can't live that way.

My whole body is marked
every inch of skin,
every attack and blow I received
you can see it
you can touch it.

This line here on my finger
is my first stab-wound
I moved my stomach and caught the knife.
This one here
on my hand
is from when they killed my best friend
in front of me.
They were going to kill us both
but again
I moved my stomach fast
and I ran away.
And this stab here on my chest
is from another time they wanted to kill me
and almost did
I almost bled to death
I ended up in the hospital
I saved myself by a miracle,
God doesn't want me to die
God wants me to be happy.
And these marks I wear on my forehead
are from the last attack:
they threw me on the floor
and kicked my head with a steel heel.
And here I am still
strong
I made it here
to Tijuana,
today I'm happy

today is the day when everything might change
I'm going to give myself up to the *migra*
to see if on the other side
I can have a better life.
No,
I don't want a better life
I want a new one.

I was always firm
in my decision to be a woman
I never doubted what I feel,
I had to go through hard times
but I don't need to cry
I won't cry
because my makeup will run
and today
I have to be really beautiful
a real woman
it's better for crossing,
today might be the day that everything changes
that the violence and the beating ends.

An LGTB organization here
put us in contact with a woman there
who support trans girls
and will meet me in the United States,
she will pay for my lawyer
because you don't get a free lawyer there
you pay for everything
I need to remember her name and her phone
I have the scrap of paper somewhere...
Let's see
How would you pronounce this?
Grace Aheron
540-580-9207
I really need to keep this scrap of paper
I'm going to write it on my arm.

I left my country alone
 I entered Mexico alone
 and Mexico is where the calvary begins
 it's very dangerous
 they kill you
 and if they don't kill you
 they use you as a sex worker
 against your will,
 I thought that it would be a little better
 in Mexico
 but when we were in Hermosillo
 I was standing in line to get food
 with other women
 and the woman serving told me,
 'Go to your line
 you're a man.'
 And I told her, 'I consider myself a woman,
 respect my choice,
 each of us is free to possess our feelings.'

When I was in Tapachula
 I heard about the caravana
 and met my girls
 and the trip changed completely.
 We are now a group of thirty-five trans girls
 we keep each other company
 we take care of each other,
 on the train we helped each other so much
 and believe me
 this train is less than a one star,
 hunger
 thirst
 assaults
 rapes

the train is really dangerous
 we travel on top of the freight cars
 if you don't hold on firmly you fall
 if you fall asleep you fall
 there's nothing to drink
 it's too hot and too cold
 there's no washrooms
 and the Setas and the Maras are there
 people that grab you
 and ask for one hundred dollars per person
 just to cross
 and if you don't pay, they rape and kill you,
 and sometimes they do it even if you pay.
 This happens in many states in Mexico
 in Tierra Blanca, Veracruz
 in San Luis Potosí
 and then when you arrive at the border,
 they call it a 'war tax.'
 Luckily we were part of the caravana,
 there were one thousand five hundred of us going north
 this hadn't happened in a while
 and because we were a big group
 we reached Tijuana.
 It wasn't easy but we arrived.

And now we are waiting
 to give ourselves up to the *migra*
 and request asylum in the United States.
 I don't really know what we're waiting for
 maybe a document is missing.
 I'm nervous
 and the hormones make it worse.
 We inject ourselves with hormones
 so that our breasts grow,
 and that upsets our nerves
 so today that we're crossing we're twice as nervous
 imagine.

Once we give ourselves up,
 they lock us in a prison
 while they investigate my case
 my story
 who I am
 what I've done.
 It can take three to six months
 a long time

but I don't care about time
I only care about my dream.
One day they will give me political asylum
and it will be great
I'll feel so proud
all this won't have been in vain.

A lot of women from Honduras and Guatemala
take contraceptives before leaving
because they don't know how many times they'll be raped on the way.
Thank God I don't have that problem,
I don't let anybody rape me
I only have sex for love or for money.
Some people don't understand our line of work
but work is always work,
we're poor
and all the poor serve their clients.

I have a house in Guatemala
it took me four years and six months to build it
it's made of concrete blocks
I built it and I furnished it,
I finished it with my partner
he's in the United States
we met two years ago,
he came to my work
and he asked if I offered my services
and I said, 'Yes'
So he asked me, 'How much?'
And I told him, 'One hundred and twenty dollars'
'I'm not paying that much'
'Then, no.'
And he gave me two hundred
and I gave him my Facebook
and we started to chat.
Now I'm going to meet him
in Greenwood, South Carolina,
when I'm in prison
he will send me the money
and I will go to him.
I didn't care about anything
not the sun, not the hunger
I came to look for him,
I don't care about anything
because I do love him.

I am Maritza, a trans girl. Age: twenty-seven, like you. I was born in Guatemala City.
I'm here because of the discrimination and the violence that exist in my country.

I was born in a family of artists
my father was a comedian
and my mother was working in art management
she left art when she started to be a mother
she gave us love
trust
confidence,
my father is Sufi
a sect of Islam
they believe in spiritual
they believe in god but they are not afraid of god
and my mother is like a tree
so warm.
We were the only black family in the neighborhood
a lot of people shouted at us, 'Hey, you are black!'
'Yes, I'm black, thanks for the compliment.'
I was taught that we were black because we were unique
and because we have a history
that is so rich
so rich,
my family came to Baghdad in the 12th century
and the first black revolution
happened in Iraq in the 13th century
that's when my family got the citizenship
and the land that they worked,
they were slaves before that.
Now we are a famous artistic family
my father, my sister, myself
all of us are working in the arts,
actually,
my family name
M
o
n
e

k
a
is the name of a drum,
we brought that tradition from Africa
music
drums
from the 12th century
and before
until now
music, music, music!

Let's talk about my life,
I studied art school
with fifteen years I got in
they accepted me
then I went to college
university
nine years acting in theatres
I worked as a professional actor
I worked in Morocco
Egypt
Jordan
Lebanon
Syria.
In 2012 I became the first black TV presenter
in the history of Iraq
all of that being so young
I'm still young
I'm twenty eight now
like you
but my work was always bigger than me
acting has given extra age to my age
I was doing good
I was doing so many things
my friend called me The Minister of Energy.

So, in 2011 they started to kill gay people in Iraq
and I made a movie about it,
they killed the gays in horrible ways
they put glue in their nose
their mouth
their ass
they crushed them in the head with blocks of concrete
they shot at them in the streets
they seduced them and then fucked them and then killed them,
and they tried to make every guy to do the same,

'We,
Iraqi straight guys,
must kill gay guys.'
It was terrible.
So I started to act against that
I wasn't even gay you know
but I'm human
and I'm an activist
and no one was talking about this
because people is scared
really scared,
and so we decided to make a film
a gay film
where I was the main actor.

The film was black and white
very psychedelic
it was a drama
about two gay guys
Mohamed and Ahmed
a friend and myself
we were a couple
but our families didn't know
and we were hiding
we were invisible gays
we tried to pretend that we weren't
we dated girls all the time
we were so scared of the situation
until the moment comes when Mohamed's father says,
'You have to marry.'
And they had to break up
we couldn't say anything about their love
because if we did
everyone was killed.

So we filmed it and we waited
we waited a lot
we was scared to screen it
we made it in 2011
and only in 2015
we screened the movie at Cannes Festival
and then in the Toronto Film Festival,
that was when I came with the film to Canada
and that's the reason why I'm here,
I'm stuck here in order to save my life.
It occurs that the movie

is the first movie talking about homosexuality in Iraq,
and the government
militia
mafia
they were so mad
and scared too
because we told everything that's happening,
so they went to my father
and they told him that if I ever came back to Iraq
they would cut my body in small pieces.
My family freaked out
and after that the militia started to watch my family
they started to chase them
until they forced my family to leave too,
everybody now is outside of Iraq
in Samsun, Turkey.
All my family had to exile
and so did I,
everything because of that film.

I'm still raising money
to bring them here
but at least I raised to visit them in December
I'll see them after three years and three months!
It's nice here
neighborhood is good
people make eye contact with you
they smile
I feel at home
the park is great
(we can go if you want)
I started to connect with the community
and I've met good friends
I met a musician and we started to play music in the street
make busking
and make money of it!
and we made a band together
called The Mosquito Band
and this band really helped me to connect more
because music is very easy for connection
is not like theatre
is easier
music helps me to integrate
to get involved,
even in theatre
through music I become part of the place.

Who knows?
I know what is going on with myself as an artist
but I don't know what's going on with my life
as a human being.
I hope this militia leaves
I miss Baghdad
my home
my friends.

I had to leave everything.
Sometimes I feel so guilty
but then I feel strong
very strong
and strength takes fear and guilt away.

War is fear all the time
war is so scary
war makes everyone confuse
it destroys the community
it destroys the system
it destroys the family
it destroys the air
it destroys empathy
it destroys compassion
war is so hard to describe
war is so harmful
war is so loud.

I was born in 1990,
the war between Iraq and Iran ended in 1989
then in 1991 Gulf War started
and US Army started to bomb us
they put the mind of the Iraqi people in a cage
people changed
mentality changed
attitude changed
everybody started hurting the other
all around there was hate and hurt
money stopped having value
the salary of a teacher was worth an order of eggs
so, lot of cheating
theft
misery.

But still we had a resistance
and that was the people that taught me how to be an activist
and how to be happy
there are so many amazing people in Baghdad
grateful people
strong people
people full of energy,

Baghdad is full of energy
the city is a mother
it feeds everyone
it holds everyone
it makes everyone keep going.
But still
all the bombs you see in TV
were over our heads
darkness
blood
buildings falling apart
people dying,
you get use to see that images
but the sound is terrible.

War is not something new for us
war, war, war, war
I'm sick of it
done
finished
I was born in war
then another war
then another war
I'm done
I want my freedom.
From 1980 till 2003
and then from 2003, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
civil war
they created mafias all around
and they were fighting each other.
2008, 9, 10
cars exploding everywhere
killing with no reason
2013, 14
ISIS starts attacking
2017, 2018
it never stops.

I have a frequent dream
that a big magnet
like a moon
stops over Baghdad and sucks up
all the guns away from my city.

I'm Ahmed Moneka. Twenty-eight. Artist, actor, performer. Iraqi, African and now Canadian.

Valeria

What will be?
What will be?
Mexico is very beautiful
my childhood there was equally sad and happy
I was raised by my grandmother,
what I loved most about her house was that she made tortillas with
firewood
tortillas of *palcate*
I also liked my uncle's fruit trees
my favorite was the fig
delicious
he had white and black fig,
I would grasp and climb the fig tree
the leaves were huge
and I imagined it was my house
that was my favorite pastime:
climbing trees and enjoying myself.

My father and mother only visited me sometimes
only on the weekend
they worked in Mexico City
and I stayed with my grandmother in Tlaxcala.
My grandmother planted corn behind the yard
my uncles and father had small houses there,
this familial environment was lovely
sometimes they grabbed a guitar
played, sung, and drank
we grew up there.
When I started attending school everything became sadder
at school, they say you need your parents' presence
and speak constantly of your mother and father, mother and father.
Here, in the United States, I learnt that it is called bullying
when children mock you:
that your parents aren't around during holidays
that they don't spend Mother's Day with you

Father's Day...
Why do people start offending each other?
I remember a girl that had it in for me
she picked on me
said I was an orphan
said my parents did not love me
said my family was a mess.
I knew I was alone
that I was always on my own
I had no one to defend me
and I didn't know what to do,
she was cruel to me
and tried to provoke other girls to hurt me.
But the moment I got fed up arrived
and so, I chose the day
I noticed her going to the bathroom alone
I asked to go too
and followed her to the bathroom
and caught her pulling up her underpants
and pow!
I often watched a soap opera called Viviana
and liked the way she slapped people
so, I imagined I was Viviana
and smack, smack!
I struck her twice!
and pulled her long hair and said,
'Don't mess with me again.'

One night we fell asleep
and I don't what happened
they woke us and our parents were there
and said, 'You either come with us or stay here?'
and we answered, 'What?'
We could not understand a single word
but, what can a child do?
but leave with their parents
even if they were never with us
one is supposed to be with one's parents,
so, we left
we followed our parents until midnight
on foot
crossing deep gullies fearfully.
We arrived our new home where my father only had one bed,
the room was fixed up
it was painted,
had flooring,

crystal windows,
 and a bed mat on the floor,
 and he said, 'Let's toss a coin to decide
 who sleeps on the mat and who on the bed.'
 My father cultivated corn
 everything was covered in cobs
 and it scared me because rats,
 even if everything is closed, enter
 you can't discover where but they enter.
 My sister and I won the coin toss!
 We slept on the bed that night but never again.
 The odyssey began there:
 we didn't have a radiator,
 we didn't have pan,
 we didn't have a sink,
 we didn't have a stove,
 we had to wash clothes with pieces of flat stone.
 Another room had a roof and a dirt floor
 so, at least we set down cardboard and plastic
 and adapted
 it was a hard change
 but little by little we began a new life.

Later: growing up,
 I discovered something odd
 I now learnt it's called domestic violence,
 the violence within a family,
 there was a lot of violence
 and there still is to this day.
 My father is a person that is sometimes sane,
 in control of his five senses,
 but after two or three months he starts drinking,
 getting drunk,
 and he doesn't drink one or two days
 he gives into vice and sometimes it takes a week,
 and he comes and goes, drinks and drinks,
 and something grabs hold of him
 he insults my mother,
 hits her.
 My mother doesn't know how to read or write.
 The most terrible thing occurred when she was pregnant again,
 five years after she had my youngest brother,
 and my father didn't agree.
 Before I was born, he already had two kids
 and upon meeting my mom he said, 'I don't want kids, I have others.'
 and my mother responded, 'You may have your kids, but I want my own.'
 While she was pregnant with me
 he left her
 my mother had to go to my grandmother's
 she didn't have a father because her mother was raped
 she didn't know who her father was
 her life was hard.

I also suffered a lot because of my father
 he didn't let me learn
 he didn't let me attend high school
 he said that women were only meant to marry and have children,
 and added, 'You're a fool, stupid, worthless.'

I got sick then
 I was ill with depression
 my friends came by my house and said,
 'Will you take the exam required to graduate?'
 'No, no, I won't.'
 My temperature rose
 I had a rash, provoked by my depression
 and because I had nothing else to do
 I met my first boyfriend,
 I don't know what I saw in him
 maybe the possibility of leaving home
 because he was a bad person.

I will tell you
 something sad
 it's the first time I tell someone
 no one here knows about it
 my daughters don't know either,
 there are times
 when I'm fine
 but I think that really did hurt me,
 oh,
 I don't know what I saw in him
 that person forced me to do things...
 because of him I endured prostitution.
 At first, he kept me at home
 and then
 he made me a sex worker.
 Today, that man is in jail.
 My father married me off
 when I was fifteen
 I was a girl
 and when giving me away
 (because that is how it is in small towns, you are given away)
 he said, 'From now on you're dead to me
 what happens to you from now on,
 if he hits or mistreats you, is your problem.'
 Oh,
 that kid hit me a lot,
 humiliated me all the time.
 He only let me go out
 when I went to work for a client.
 He didn't let my siblings visit,
 three years I endured
 of battering
 I even lost a child,

I didn't know I was pregnant
 until I had a heavy heavy hemorrhage,
 he refused to take me to the doctor.
 I wanted to die then
 I didn't eat
 I didn't want to eat.
 People may prostitute themselves out of necessity
 or because they want to
 but many do because someone like him forces them.

But at eighteen, I found the strength to leave
 I don't know where the courage came from
 but suddenly I was human again and I escaped.
 He took me to work one night and said,
 'I'm going to town to get something.'
 I checked that none of his people were watching
 and left only with the clothes I was wearing,
 I took none of my things,
 I earned quite a bit of money that day
 and used it to stay at a hotel
 to hide in a hotel.
 But I didn't know what to do
 a month passed,
 he searched and searched for me,
 and I had nothing left to do,
 no family, no one,
 I didn't know what to do.
 An older girl, a woman, used to ask me,
 'Why do you allow everything?'
 She saw me battered, abused
 and asked, 'Why do you allow it?'
 And I believe that her advice gave me the strength to leave.
 But money runs out
 and then it occurred to me to make money
 continue working as I did but for me,
 I thought he had stopped looking for me,
 and went to one of those places
 but all those people know each other
 and they called him.
 He didn't hit me that time
 because that elder woman had given me real strength,
 he appeared and I was panicked
 he insulted and yelled at me
 and insulted and yelled
 and I don't know where I found the strength to say,
 'I'm leaving you because I am a person!'

Because I'm a human being!
 And I don't want to be where I don't want to be!
 And still you mistreat me!
 Not once but for a long time!
 Years!
 I even lost a child!
 I even wanted to die!
 I started to tell him, screaming everything
 everything
 and people started to gather and even the police arrived
 and he said, 'Get in the car and let's go.'
 I didn't know my uncle had started a lawsuit against him.
 He had visited my family in search of me
 but I was not there, I had disappeared
 I would never return to my father
 my father inspired the same fear
 my father used to hit me with a wet rope
 and my mother was too afraid of him to do anything,
 my grandmother intervened once
 and my father struck also her twice with the lasso,
 our backs bled.
 How was I meant to seek refuge there?
 That place was hell
 but we remained standing there and I didn't know what to do
 I had no one to rely on.
 Everything occurred so quickly
 and he said, 'Get in the car, please
 and make them stop the lawsuit
 they sent a hitman for me, they think I killed you,
 please, stop causing me problems.'
 And I threatened him, 'They know everything,
 everything, everything,
 everything you've done to me
 I went to the police and told them everything.'
 It was a lie,
 but the woman, my counselor
 had told me to say that
 and he believed it
 and didn't harm me anymore.
 So, I arrived home and said, 'I'm alive.'
 My mother embraced me with all the strength she had
 my father remained still and serious at the table, he said nothing
 and suddenly he yelled, 'Why do you return?
 Go with your husband!
 and said to my mother, 'Don't hug her, don't hug her,
 she's a hore, don't hug her.'

Then, I answered him
 I don't know where I found the strength
 I confronted my father,
 'You say that we're worthless because we're women
 you're a chauvinist, you are just as horrible a man as him,'
 I yelled while I cried
 I confronted him crying
 thanks to all that I suffered I could confront him,
 and that was the day that those two men stopped humiliating me.

And I also found the strength to go to work in Mexico City.
 My sister worked at a restaurant there
 and I started cleaning dishes
 making money
 I liked to save
 and my life was nearly perfect
 but men approached me
 and I was so afraid...
 the years passed that way
 until I met someone, and he said to me,
 'Let's go to the other side.'
 'What's on the other side?'
 'Work and dollars and God knows what else.'
 And then a new adventure started,
 I arrived at the other side
 but it wasn't easy.

The first time I crossed
 I did so with people from my town,
 I tried to cross for a month
 for nearly a month I slept on the Tijuana border
 at the shore of the metallic walls,
 we went from nine at night until six in the morning
 we entered three times
 and those three times a woman broke her leg
 another man tore his brow and almost lost his eye to one of those metallic
 things.
 The third time we entered through the airport
 a field of tall grass grows there
 and we entered where the grass is tallest
 the *polleros* traced the route for us and made us roll on the ground,
 my body turned black black
 as though I had been hit all over
 battered black black
 and when we reached the other side
 we took less than ten minutes to be surrounded by the *migra*.
 They got us into their trucks and off we went.
 Three times they took me back,
 on the third try they knew me,
 and one of the *migra* said to me, 'If you try to enter again,
 we'll incarcerate you.'
 I found a corner with a blanket
 in the house of a compatriot in Tijuana
 and said, 'Well, what if I stay and find work here?'
 Walking I found a rotisserie and started working there,
 with a kind man,
 Carlos
 very very kind,
 he saw how sad I was and very politely started to talk to me.
 'So, you want to go to the United States?'
 'Yes, I came with people from my town
 eight of us

four entered and four stayed,
 the truth is that I have no money left
 might you have work for me, at least as a dishwasher?
 I don't want to speak of my family
 I don't want to ask for anything.'
 And to cut a long story short,
 I started working there.
 I met a woman that pools money for women,
 every week you give her money
 and they place five numbers,
 one per person.
 I gave her fifty dollars per week
 and she returned twenty hundred dollars to me.
 There, I held dollars for the first time in my life
 I was thrilled
 I said, 'Wow! you're earning so much money!'
 I was so excited.
 That money was mine
 and I hadn't suffered to earn it,
 then, I said, I won't cross,
 in the end, I'm well here, I'll stay here.
 I rented a small apartment and started to adorn it.
 I lived that way for eight months,
 until a fleet of people from my town arrived,
 and said to me, 'Hey, I already considered you a foreigner!
 Why didn't you cross?'
 'Oh, I saw so much at the border...
 the *polleros* don't work
 it's not my fate to cross.'
 And well, they were acquaintances and they cheered me up,
 I really don't know where the hell my head was, but they encouraged me.
 I sold everything I owned
 my bed, my furniture, my clothes,
 I lost the deposit to my apartment
 And off I went!
 And I crossed!

It was so funny
 I crossed through Tijuana but through another area
 and it was raining
 I wore shoes full of mud
 they get stuck and do not let go
 we were made into swine.
 A mother was with us
 that brought the virgin of Guadalupe on her chest
 she was already here, in New York

and returned only to bring her twenty-year-old son
to help him cross the border.
The son was a drunk and a stoner,
one day we were crossing, and she fell
And do you think her son stopped to help her up?
but it does not matter,
sometimes us, mothers give everything for our children.
That time we had to climb a huge fence,
I don't know how I did it
it seems to me that I was very thin,
but we crossed,
We crossed!
A truck picked us up at around twelve at night
we were laying on the floor, very dirty
very wet
and so cold,
trembling,
and it was raining.
They got us into the truck, piled up like swine
but we crossed
We crossed!
We arrived in Arizona to a secure house
they clothed us and let us shower
and from there we flew to New York
and arrived at my destination: Queens.

Actually, we arrived to Newark airport,
it was my first time in the United States
and I didn't speak any English
so I got on a train
and one of those that came with me asked,
'What do we do now?'
'Well I have no idea either,' I answered,
and saw the EXIT sign and said, 'Well, it's red,
it must mark the way out.'
We got on a metro train that was really very strange
and set off and arrived at 42 Manhattan.
Oh, I was so nervous!
Luckily, I didn't even leave the station
I found a public phone down there and called a number I had
and said, 'I have no idea where I am.'
'But how did you arrive there?'
'I don't know, I just followed the people.'
'What does the sign on the wall say?'
'It says 42 and the sign is blue.'
'Ok, don't move, we'll be there soon.'

It was the month of July '97
twenty years ago...
And they picked me up,
a man they call El Cholo welcomed me
and said, 'Do you bring money?'
'Only twenty dollars, I don't know how much it's worth to me.'
'Well, we'll buy you a simple jacket.'
It was my first time walking around here
around Roosevelt,
they took me to the 82
and bought me one of those long cheap jackets.
Oh, I felt so good
and once in the house they gave me sheets
that barely warmed me
and I laid on the floor and covered myself with the jacket.
On the first day I went to work to Jamaica station,
they explained how to travel and everything
But I was so nervous!
And they repeated, 'Be careful with the cops
be careful with the *migra*
don't let them stop you.'
My God,
I was so afraid!
So, the second day I was here
I went out and forget to take note of how to return home,
I said to myself, 'Well
it must be like Mexico.'
Oh, yes, of course, just like Mexico, how smart.
And guess where I ended up again?
42 Manhattan!
From Jamaica straight to 42!
And there I met a lesbian
that kind of tried to seduce me
and well, she explained how I could return.
After that I switched jobs
and there I met a bus driver
that took and brought back workers,
and I could tell he was a good person
we became friends
and coexisted happily
but I had been here for four years and said, 'That's enough
I'm coming back home.'
Everything was work and save, work and save
work and send money home every week.
People that have never been here think money is easy to earn
but they cannot imagine the sacrifice made for each dollar.

So, I returned to Mexico
 but I no longer liked life there
 I managed to buy a little lot
 but hadn't built a house yet
 and didn't want to be living with my parents
 absorbing their bitterness
 so I grasped my whole life and returned again.
 Another adventure!

This time I crossed through the desert
 I saw death there
 I saw death there
 we were fifty-six immigrants
 and two *polleros*
 the *polleros* were wasted, drunk, high
 didn't even know the route.
 The first night they made us sleep in the desert,
 at dawn you feel a cold of a thousand devils
 and during the day a heat I wouldn't wish on anyone.
 The first day that we could cross we didn't do it
 the second day they took us God knows where,
 they didn't know where to go
 they made us walk all day till we could no more
 our shoes fell apart
 they were leaving behind groups of four, five, eight people abandoned,
 I stayed with other eight people
 with a four-months pregnant woman
 with a big man and a very pretty young woman with diabetes
 the young woman had insulin but that man didn't
 a disaster
 the thing is that I already had experience walking
 I knew that were we saw tracks
 we couldn't go
 because the *migra* passed through there
 My God!
 How did I dare go through this again?
 How did I dare bring my sister?
 I didn't imagine it was such a risk to cross the desert!
 it's an impossible experience to retell
 there is no food, no water
 and an immense silence,
 just the cows and bulls at dawn
 Muuu!
 Muuu!
 And the wolves in the afternoon
 Auuu!

Auuu!
 And at night, we found rattlesnakes
 and tarantulas, like in the movies
 everything
 everything
 everything was terrifying,
 once I went to pee
 and was about to sit when I saw a huge spider underneath me,
 Oh!
 How I screamed!
 We walked all night
 at night you could make some progress
 'We must be led by the bulls,' we used to say,
 'There must be farms near them.'
 But there was nothing
 days passed and nothing, nothing, nothing.
 And after three days without food or water
 my body couldn't resist any longer
 I threw in the towel.
 They left us!
 They left us there!
 They left us to die!
 What were we to do?
 I don't know how we survived,
 I said to my companions, 'I'm very sorry,
 I cannot do this anymore.'
 I felt that everything was gone,
 all my strength,
 I'm not a catholic
 I was raised religious but didn't like to go to church and all that
 but still I said aloud, 'God
 I don't know what you are like
 but let me get out of here,
 I'm young,
 I'm a woman,
 I haven't had the luck to be happy yet
 to live in peace.'
 I thought so many things when I felt that weak
 and my sister said, 'I cannot walk further either.'
 And everyone said, 'Well, let us stay here for a while.'
 And then, a blessed helicopter overflowed
 but didn't catch us
 it didn't return.
 After a while we kept walking
 but when I definitely couldn't move anymore
 I said, 'Well, this is where I die.'

And I threw myself, nailed,
 I fell nailed to the ground,
 I remained belly up staring at the sky
 and saw a large red arrow,
 so I got up quickly and said, 'Let's walk that way.'
 We found a water trough surrounded by cows,
 it sounds like a movie
 a scene from a movie
 and us, the girls, took everything off
 Even our blouses!
 And I said, 'Don't drink too quickly, we've spent days without a drink.'
 Our lips parted
 you cannot imagine what it's like
 two of my nails fell off and never grew back.
 After refreshing ourselves we continued,
 it's alright, we hadn't eaten,
 but the water helped too much.
 We could hear the highway,
 that sound cars make when they drive very quickly.
 A highway!
 And we went and there were many many people,
 a group of about fifty-six people sitting under a small tree.
 We hugged each other
 we didn't even know each other's names
 but we embraced like we were family.
 Trucks went by but didn't stop.
 We asked, 'Are we already on the other side?'
 We were disoriented.
 'And if we walk together in one direction?'
 'Let's search for a phone and see if a family member comes.'
 And so we started walking again
 in route we found empty contained and filled them with water
 and walked for hours,
 until four or five black *migra* trucks arrived.
 There they separated us,
 women this way
 men that way
 and come on.
 But you know what?
 Surprise!
 They fed us Burger King!
 I never imagined that the *migra* arrived with burgers and soda
 and there were big containers full of ice water,
 you cannot imagine the amount of cold water,
 you cannot imagine the excitement seeing cold water provoked!
 But they kicked us out

back to Mexico
 and my sister said, 'What do we do now?'
 'Today we rest,' I said.
 And there a compatriot stuck to us and said, 'I'll go with you
 I asked a family member for money and they quickly sent it,
 we have enough for food and a hotel.
 I'll pay for everything, don't worry,
 you didn't abandon me in the desert
 I won't abandon you now,
 we're three siblings.'
 We ate, drank, and fell asleep.
 'And what do we do now?'
 'We cannot cross with those *polleros* again.
 Of fifty-eight, only one managed to cross,
 and he arrived in the hospital alone and dehydrated.
 And well, it turns out that we went to have breakfast at a tavern
 and a sixteen-year-old asked me, 'You want to cross?'
 And I stared him down, 'You?
 You'll help me cross?'
 'You think I'm too young?'
 'Yes, I really do.
 And I don't trust anyone anymore
 some *polleros* abandoned us in the desert and we nearly died.'
 'No mam, keep calm,
 put yourself in my hands and you'll see.'
 They called him El Ranchero,
 'At five in the afternoon we depart
 and if we don't run into gangs,
 at ten at night you'll arrive the secure house.'
 And as he said, it was
 we crossed quickly
 we couldn't believe it.
 The route was covered in underwear
 I never saw so much scattered underwear,
 El ranchero had told us, 'Gangs rape all the women
 and strip men of what they have.
 That is what we are risking.
 If they ask for anything, we give it to them,
 don't pretend to be brave.'
 And my sister said, 'We are going where
 they say we might be raped?'
 'What do I know.'
 And we arrived.
 We arrived!
 And they gave us clothes
 and they fed us dinner

and they let us shower
and they got us airplane tickets
and the next day we were in New York.
Each of these adventures made me stronger,
it was incredible.
But I'll never do it again,
I swear to you that I'll never do it again.

Well, I was back in the United States.
I returned to my first house here in Queens.
My feet were covered in blisters,
the desert was hot
the kind of heat that filters through your sneakers.
So, the people here let me stay for a few months
until my body recovered the energy to work.

And one day
running in the park
I met an old friend
a friend I met when we were sex workers
and we started to run in Flushing Park together
every morning
in the cold.
She wanted to rid me of my solitude
and said, 'Hey,
nearby they teach Zumba
for free.
Why don't we go?'
We came and went, too afraid to enter
but we entered and all the lights were off
it was dark
only the projector was visible
and we liked it
we danced and danced and danced and danced
and it was fun.
It was October,
I'll never forget,
five years ago this year.
Dancing saved me
what I cannot do
I make up
and what I cannot make up
I dance.

With this dancing women
we created a sisterhood,
we started workshops
and we began to do social work.
How I changed!
Before, I spent all my time crying.
Now I am myself.
In this group of women
my voice is heard,
I overcame my fear of speaking
I have rights.
My life is different.
The group is called Mujeres en Movimiento.
We are always together,
going from here to there,
always together we feel surer of ourselves
we are recognized
and that recognition feels good.

And I have a boyfriend now
we've been together for three years
we don't have children
we are happy together,
it was different from the beginning
I wasn't the way I was before,
from the moment we met I said, 'Look
I'm a woman that does this
and this, and this, and this, and this,
I work, I dance, I go to protests
I like to cook, I make piñatas
and if they invite me somewhere, I go
and I don't ask anyone for permission
and no one will stop me ever again
and no man will humiliate me ever again.'

And we are doing well
he always supports me.
A few months back
I think it was in September
I taught a workshop about plants to women and children,
medicinal plants and all that
and before we began, he said, 'Good luck.'
And when we finished, he said, 'I love you.'

Next year
I want to make my piñata project grow
I already made one with Donald Trump's face
and I'm now making one of Coco,
from the Day of the Dead movie.
Until a little while ago I only worked on commission
I sold a dozen the first year
but now I want to create my own brand.
It's on my mind now,
it has been for a while,
and now, everything that's on my mind
happens.

Sincerely, my real name is Librada Reyes, but I wanted to change it. The name I go by now is Valeria Reyes. When I arrived here, I wanted to forget everything, all my life there. So, I now go by Valeria Reyes, that's my artistic name. I spent half my life in Mexico and now I'm in Queens, New York. I'm part of the Mujeres en Movimiento group. I like to dance. I like to dress provocatively even if I weigh a few extra kilos. It makes me happy that my voice will be heard in this book. Not even my daughters know what I tell here. If you are on the other side and do not want to emerge from the shadows, find strength, search for your sisters, they will help you.

Njoud

I was born in a country
where being gay is illegal.
If you do it, you go to prison.
The past ten years I traveled around the Middle East
trying to make a living there
but it the same old story all over again.
I lost my job because I'm gay
I can't walk with my girlfriend in the streets showing love
showing any sign of love
one day a guy came up to us and he beat us!
A lot of people stopped talking to me because I'm gay
I wasn't allowed to go to certain places because I'm gay,
but I'm happy with who I am
I am a good person
I am good to people,
people sucks
but the universe will take care of me.

I was the best at doing my job
I was very high positioned
they loved me
they kept giving me raises again and again,
and the moment they realized I was gay
I just was nothing to them
disposable
they terminate my contract
without saying a word
and that's it.
Of course I couldn't do anything
If I wanted to do anything in a legal way I can't
because being gay is illegal
is literally illegal.
So I just had to live
and I was unemployed until I came here.
Ahman, where I was born,
is a small town

Njoud

words get around
and once they know you're gay
no one wants to hire you.
Then I had a best friend
we stayed friends for seven years
and one day I realized I wanted to open up for her
tell her I am gay
and she went mad and said, 'How could you do this to me!?'
I used to change clothes in front of you!
and I was like, 'No, it's not that way
you are my friend
me being gay doesn't mean I want to fuck you!'
But there was no case,
she stopped talking to me
after seven years of friendship
she never talked to me again.

Those are a few of the things I had to go through
in my daily life over there
it's a hassle
even if you are not gay being a woman is hard over there
so imagine being a gay woman
it's a disaster.
But I'm proud that I was born
I'm proud that I overcame all these things
I'm proud of who I am today.
Some people are gonna hurt me
some people are gonna harm me
but I am true
I am true to myself and to you.

I arrived to New York yesterday
 trying to live
 trying to build a life for me and my girlfriend
 I don't ask for much
 I don't ask for nothing big
 just something simple
 just a place where I can be happy
 just a place where I can be what I want
 where I can kiss my girlfriend in the street.

I met her in Ahmad
 We were at this street full of bars
 and the moment I saw her
 I knew
 I knew she was different
 I knew I wanted to be with her for the rest of my life.
 I know this sound stupid
 I don't believe in clichés like love at first sight
 I never did before...
 but she taught me love
 and love is faith.

Around a year ago
 her father walked in on us when we were in her room
 and she found out that his daughter was gay.
 I had to run away from her house.
 I went to mine and waited until I was able to get out
 and when she arrived
 she had a gun with her
 and she was so scared
 so scared
 she told me, 'They want to kill us
 they will come to kill us
 I brought this to protect us
 my brother and my father are coming for me and for you.'

And I told her, 'Wait, this is bullshit
 we can't stay here
 we can't stay in this country not even one day.'
 So we flew that evening
 to Lebanon
 to Beirut
 we stayed there for some time
 hoping things would calm down,
 And she negotiated with her dad
 and her dad said, 'Ok,
 but you have to stop seeing her
 and you have to get married to a man.'
 And she said, 'Yes.'

After a while we went back to Jordan
 and though he thought that I was out of her daughter's life
 he gave a lot of threats to her.
 A few months passed that way
 and a couple of days ago
 he found out that we were still talking
 that we were still seeing each other
 that we are still together
 and that's the reason why I had to leave the country two days ago.
 So he didn't kill me,
 so I can stay alive.

So I just arrived
 I arrived yesterday,
 as soon as I settle here
 she is gonna come here too
 and she will bring our dog.

Growing old in such a society was very hard,
 for years I thought something was wrong with me
 because loving a girl was wrong
 dressing like I did was wrong
 having dreadlocks was wrong
 drinking beer was wrong.

When I realized I am gay I was thirteen
 we had this neighbor
 a girl,
 I hung out with her a lot and chill
 and I started feeling for her
 something I was taught not to feel for a female,
 I was taught to feel that for a male.
 But I couldn't help it.

Then at fourteen, fifteen
 I was trying to deny that
 I said to myself, 'You're nuts,
 you're nuts
 try going out with a guy.'
 But of course it never worked,
 and then I went, 'Well,
 maybe i'm bisexual'
 I wanted to deny it so hard,
 I mean I loved my feelings
 they were strong
 but the culture I grew up in
 kept telling me to shut that off.

But then around the age of eighteen
 I was definitely sure
 I am a 100% gay
 I'm as gay as they come
 i'm twenty-eight now.

I want to talk about something else
 apart from being gay.
 Listen!
 Just until last year
 if your sister is dating someone you don't like
 you can kill the sister and kill the boyfriend
 and call it an honor crime
 by law.
 And you would get away with it.
 My god, that's horrible
 that's a really bad thing!

And there is this other law
 that really really needs to be changed.
 When someone gets raped in jordan
 the rapist has two choices:
 he either goes to jail
 or he marries the girl he raped.
 He gets to choose
 and she has to agree.
 Because of honor codes
 the parents would force the daughter and the rapist to get married,
 because virginity is everything in the Middle East
 and if the girl is not a virgin anymore
 none would like to marry her.
 There are lot of victims of this law
 lots of woman in my country had to marry their rapist
 and they have to live with them
 and they have to have kids from them,
 and that's how they are destined to live their entire life.

This happens until these day.
 Can you believe it?
 We have to do something about it
 is really wrong

I've heard so many stories
 I've witnessed so many stories
 friends, and friend of friends
 that had to go through that
 their lives!
 their lives!
 is a basic basic basic human right we are talking about,
 Marry your rapist?
 By force?
 that makes no sense
 people has to be punished for that,
 not having the privilege of choosing
 to spend the life with the victim.
 Is hard
 is hard out there
 you don't really imagine.

Most of the girls get married against their will
 even when they are not raped,
 woman desire doesn't matter at all,
 the marriages are arranged by men.
 Some marry very young,
 you can find a fourteen-year-old girl
 married to someone who is fifty
 against her will, of course
 just because her father said so,
 and if she refuses
 or she disagree
 she would be harming the honor of the family
 and she could be killed for it.

It's insane
 it's truly insane.
 I hope all these end some day.
 But is difficult
 people are afraid to say this things,
 bad things can happen to them if they do.
 If you try to speak up you go to jail
 or you disappear
 no one would hear about you again.

I tried to speak up
 I was an activist in the LGBT community there
 but most people stopped daring to do it
 because they were tortured for it
 they were locked up for it

they were bitten for it
 their family stopped talking to them
 they were kicked out of there houses.
 because i have the support of my family
 i was a bit stronger
 so I was able to do some stuff
 but it was very risky
 it is very risky to speak your mind there.

My parents are very rare in the whole Middle East
 they accept my behavior
 they accept me
 they love me
 they don't mind me being gay
 they would even attend my wedding i think.
 I'm lucky to have such parents,
 in the entire Arab countries
 you could count with one hand
 the parents who accept their gay sons.

I hope that one they I'll be able to do something
 with the voices of all these people
 all those voices that went through all these,
 and I hope that could change something.
 I will try to do that from here
 because I really couldn't do it when i was in my own country.
 You know?
 the people that have this mindset that I have
 are very very few over there
 they won't be more than one hundred
 across my whole country,
 maximum two hundred,
 maximum
 Imagine what the LGBT movement is like!
 So most of us we have to leave,
 I had to leave
 because even some people like me
 they are afraid to be around me
 because I speak my mind
 because I don't hide who I am,
 because I am publicly me
 because I am publicly gay.

Yesterday i walked around the streets here.
 It was my first day, it was cold.
 I couldn't believe the sounds of the city.
 In jordan, when you walk
 everything is sexual harassment
 you can't walk anywhere
 without hearing all this dirty words
 all this horrible people shouting.
 And once again, as you know now
 you can't do anything
 because you would be harming their honor
 and you could be killed.
 So your ears start to close themselves
 they close themselves slowly
 so you can walk.

Yesterday I walked around the streets here
 and I felt my ears started to open again
 that they could pay attention to what is happening around
 there are a lot of sounds in this city
 a lot
 everything sounds
 and listening it's nice.

If people go and visit jordan as a tourist
 they won't see all these
 because you can't go deep in the culture
 they'll see the bars, the restaurants, the malls
 it's a nice country from the outside
 we are not Saudi Arabia,
 we are kind of a free country within the Middle East.
 In Saudi Arabia,
 women were allowed to drive just a few months ago.
 I mean, drive a car!
 Imagine the rest.
 In Saudi Arabia you can't leave your house if you are not covered
 even if you are christian
 muslim
 whatever.

At some point of my life I lived in Beirut, Lebanon
 five amazing years of my life,
 it's more free than jordan
 but still, they are still trying to get
 some basic human rights.
 Lebanon it's the most open-minded country
 at least when it come to the people
 but not the government,
 governments are all the same
 all the Middle East they are the same.
 All around us there is war
 all is full of hate,
 we are the only country that doesn't have war,
 that's the only blessing we have,
 we are in the center of the middle east
 but we have no war.
 In jordan you can wear shorts
 or have a drink.
 In other arab countries there's no way.

I started smoking cigarettes when I was young
 I was about sixteen years old
 I was considered a whore because of that.
 Cigarettes and alcohol has 400% taxes,
 and the cheapest beer you can get is ten dollars.

But finally,
 I was lucky to be born in jordan
 because with all the bad things
 it's still way better than other arab countries.
 And I found the love of my love over there
 and that's a lot.

If you wanna get married in jordan
 there is only two ways
 the church, or the muslim way
 you have to chose one of those,
 there's no civil wedding.
 If you are a christian guy
 and you want to marry a muslim girl
 you must convert to islam.
 If the man is muslim
 and the woman is christian
 she could stay in her religion,
 but if they get divorced
 she loses the house, and the kids, and the money.
 And by law, converting from islam
 is illegal
 you have no right of quit being a muslim
 if you were born a muslim.
 Luckily I was born as a christian!
 so it's a bit easier for me.
 Just 3% of the population is christian
 all of them are muslim,
 and honor is everything for them
 but is not a personal concept of honor
 is just sexism and tradition.

Politically,
the government controls everything you say
everything you do
everything
you can't say anything
you can't do anything.

Economically,
it's extremely expensive
even more expensive than living in Dubai,
and the minimum wage is so low,
it can barely afford your transportation to and from work,
so we don't have middle class
we have millions of poor people
and some extremely rich people.

So it's hard to survive there
financially
and emotionally
and mentally.
But I made it!
I made it!
I'm so lucky to be alive!
So lucky to be alive!
All these years i was true to myself,
I believed in myself and I loved myself
and now the world will love me back.

I was born in Amman, Jordan. My dad is from Lebanon and my mom is from Armenia.
My name is Njoud Aghabi, and I'm Twenty-eight years old. No one from an Arab country
would have ever told you their real name. They would be scared. If this book gets to my
country they will screw me. They might kill me. But being strong is what kept me moving
all these years, so everything is ok.

People always ask
how is it that we do this stuff
how is it that we spent twenty-three years doing this
how is it that we keep it up
how is it that some women can get so organized
and create so much awareness.

We're surprised too
because these things never last
people last two years, three years
and that's it
they drop it.
I felt useless before
i served with my mouth
but not with action,
i was looking for that kind of feeling
how to be thankful for what i've been taught
how to be thankful for what i have
how to be grateful for my family
everything
it's a lot
I had to give something back
And how do you give something?

This experience is my faith
it changed me entirely
it made me more whole,
through our brothers the migrants
i feel good as a woman,
thanks to them
we discovered ourselves
it's not solidarity
it's an exchange
God gives for everyone
don't believe in the few that say otherwise.

Now with Trump it has decreased
 the number of migrants that come up North
 only a hundred or a hundred and fifty are able to get on the trains
 they put a lot of *migra*
 and loads of police officers too,
 though once in a while some huge caravans arrive.
 In 2010, eight hundred people used to come,
 we would feed them
 daily.

And one day
 after feeding them
 I went home
 at eleven-thirty,
 and a friend who lives near the train tracks
 came and she said, 'Norma,
 the train just stopped.
 there's about five hundred people'
 'Oh,' I said, 'there's no more food upstairs.'
 And then a man and a woman came running
 and knocked my door
 I was already in my pajamas,
 I got dressed
 and when I got out
 the woman kneels down and says to me,
 'For the thing you love the most, help us
 my husband is very sick'
 'Get up,' I said, 'I'll help you'
 'How bad is your husband?'
 'I don't know, he's really bad'
 'Ok,
 I'm coming with you
 you're coming with me
 we'll go together and help him.'

I got to the tracks and I saw the bunch of people,
 they freaked out,
 because they didn't know who i was.
 But the moment
 I stepped onto the tracks
 some sort of protection fell over me
 it can't be explained,
 It was like I was sheltered
 such a solid peace
 like a blessing,
 so much peace,
 and after a brief moment
 that protection was taken away
 and I never felt fear again.

I turned back to the woman and asked her,
 'What happened to your husband?'
 'Some guys wanted to rape me
 and he stood up for me
 as much as he could
 but he got stabbed.'
 Oh, my God.
 From Tierra Blanca to La Patrona
 it's a three-hour-trip
 this boy was bleeding to death
 he was feverish
 his wounds were infected
 he had fainted,
 I said, 'Get him off, quick!
 let's take him to the doctor'

I remember he was on the roof
 of one of those square tall wagons...
 and meanwhile everyone was screaming, 'Help us!'
 And I said, 'I can't help everyone
 but i'm going to help him,'
 and they told me, 'If you help him
 you're helping all of us.'
 They were already a brotherhood.

So they got organized
 and looked for the way to bring the body down.
 He turned out to be black
 very dark skinned
 and they started bringing him down, four of them

two fellows on top of the train
 lying face down
 were dangling him down from his wrists
 and two fellows on the ground
 were grabbing him by the feet.
 He was The Black Jesus,
 there was no Cross,
 but there was a wagon,
 he was Jesus.

Back then I didn't know that in Guatemala
 they have The Black Christ from Esquipulas
 it's a Christ with a very powerful story.
 To see how that body descended from the train
 how it was pulled down with so much care
 how those eight people were caring for him
 that was my faith.

We ran to the town's hospital
 and they told us that they couldn't help us,
 that the man was illegal
 and they could get into trouble.
 'But it's a human being!' I screamed.
 There was no use,
 so I went to my mother
 and she said, 'Let's go to Amatlán
 and we ask a doctor to help us.'
 We went to see him and again it was the same
 'No, I can't help him,
 that man is illegal.'

I knew a bit of about nursing
 I bought pertexil and Nemebulina
 to stop his infection
 and to lower his temperature,
 and I remembered an old friend from the Red Cross
 and I phoned him and told him about the case.
 He said, 'Bathe him in cold water
 clean his wounds properly
 put some salt in them so they will cauterize
 and put on some bandages.'
 I did so and gave him medicine,
 and while we were bathing him I thought,
 What if this person dies?
 we didn't know if we were doing the right thing

but he needed help
 so we didn't care,
 sometimes you have to act and there's nothing else to it.

That day I didn't go back home
 I stayed there to watch over him.
 At six-thirty he woke up
 and said 'Where am I?'
 Oh, we had come through the worst of it!
 It was the greatest test i ever went through,
 to find out for sure if I really wanted to do this work.

He stayed for twenty days
 he left in September
 and on December the 25th
 the phone rang
 and he said, 'Hi, it's me
 Do you remember me?'
 'Of course, it's you!
 And how are you?'
 'Well, we are fine
 we managed to cross the border
 thank you for what you did for us.'

Do you know when these stories come up?
when I'm having a hard time
and I start to doubt myself and my work
and I think I'm not understanding anything.
And these problems
these stories
come up and say to me
'Keep on going,
keep on going'

I'm not someone that spends all day in church
I've spent time with prisoners
and God is with them
I've been with the prostitutes
and God is with them
I've been with the sick
and God is with them.
God has many faces
it's just that we don't want to see them
because we don't want responsibilities
because when an encounter touches you
it doesn't let go
it makes you part of it.

We are women that tell the men,
 'This is our job
 this is was we like to do
 we won't leave this for anything.'
 And they try to frighten the women
 so those who work with us would leave the team.
 But even those men see everything we've done
 and they're surprised,
 because we walked a long way
 we learned a lot,
 and they are still the same
 living in gossip and watching soap operas
 which is what they want us to do
 but we don't have time for that.

The community helps the migrants very little.
 Migrants come down and ask in town,
 'Is someone helping over here?'
 'No, no one is here,'
 when everyone knows we are here.
 What happens
 is that there's a manipulation problem.
 Why do I say this?
 Because the community doesn't help
 because the church doesn't help,
 the priest has a lot of influence
 but he cuts us off.
 Everyone follows church like children,
 they go to every mass
 'We have to take care of the hungry
 we have to take care of the thirsty,'
 and then do nothing.
 By going to mass, you don't serve God!

We are autonomous
 no one is our boss
 the priest tried to control us
 but we said no.
 We don't owe ourselves to anyone
 but the migrants
 and God,
 the priest keeps saying what has to be done and what doesn't,
 but we don't ask anyone for permission.

I've also had to carry dead people.
Or they are stolen by the gangs that take whatever they carry
then throw them from the trains,
or they just fall asleep and fall off.
When a person dies on the tracks
a district attorney comes to take the bodies
and they call me
see if I can identify whether it's a migrant or not.
You can always tell by their faces,
they are so sunburnt
and very very dirty.
They bring luggage with them
they are sickly
they come with conjunctivitis
their eyes irritated
by the wind
by the dust.

When we go to take a body
We take a picture
and send the picture to other refuges
to see if they passed by and left some personal information
because sometime they carry IDs and sometimes they don't.
Then when the Caravana de Madres Centroamericanas comes
to look for their children
we show them those pictures.
The bodies are buried in a ditch.

The food bags we throw to the migrants
come with their own map
and with important telephone numbers
because many of them are new
and don't know the way.
Lots of young boys also come now
the twenty, twenty-two-year-old boys look more decent
but the younger ones, Oh no
they're scared out of their minds.

Here in the fields
fifty years ago
you could work very well,
now there's no work for the new youth
for the kids.

This is not just an issue of Central America
all the countries are being hit badly
it's time for us to start thinking.

I'm Norma, I'm Las Patronas' head coordinator and I'm a woman who is proud of all that
I've learned. No one is forcing me to do anything. This job has given me the opportunity
to get to know so many people. I wasn't expecting that. I was expecting to spend my quiet
life here and I've met so many people, ouf!

Leonilla

We started on February the 4th, 1995
a Sunday
at seven-thirty am.
Norma and I and another daughter
walked to get a bag of milk
and a bag of bread.
We passed the train tracks,
the ones that are right behind this place
and the train was coming up
and we saw some people passing by
clinging to the train like flies.

Where would these people come from?
They were skinny,
those guys were certainly not eating.
There were twenty or thirty of them
or maybe forty migrants,
and the people who were in the front
started to ask us for the food we had,
they told us they were hungry
and we didn't give them anything,
and in the middle of the train
they shouted to us the same thing all over again
and we didn't give them anything,
and the third time
almost at the back of the train
eight of them were coming and they shouted hard at us,
'We are hungry!'
And so we threw them our stuff
and that's when it all started.

Me and my two daughters
we went to get more bread and milk
we cooked two kilos of rice
two kilos of beans

Leonilla

and eight kilos of tortillas,
in bags we put
two spoons of rice
two tiny spoons of beans
and five tortillas,
and when the train came
we threw them,
and some of them would start to get better
but others would shout,
'Mother! mother!
I didn't get any!'

Then the next day I said,
'We're going to do more.'
We cooked kilos of rice
three kilos of beans,
but we had no more money
we would buy everything ourselves,
so we saw that right there behind the tracks
some white quelite was growing,
we pull that off
baked it, steamed it
and it came out to be very green
and we put those in bags
and that's what we gave them to eat.

After a while,
we did twenty kilos of beans
and twenty kilos of rice
in a big, big pan,
we went asking to see
who would donate bread or pastries,
and in the first train
everything was taken,
for the second one we did only
rice and bread
because it takes too long for beans to cook.

We spent seven years like this
alone
until one day
some students from Monterrey
released a documentary
and people realized what was happening here,
and they started coming to help
and brought rice and beans.

It was 2004
 loads and loads of migrants would come on the train
 about three or four hundred of them
 in two or three trains a day,
 we brought loads of food,
 and then in 2010
 seven or eight hundred migrants would come.
 So now we don't buy the stuff ourselves
 we just cook the food and throw it to them,
 first it was all from our kitchen
 but now it's everyone's job
 we just give away our time
 we just give our time to feed others.

When I was nine
 my father put me in school
 I went one year to school,
 it was the year they started giving vaccines
 and my papasito thought that the vaccine
 was so you wouldn't be able to have children
 and make a family,
 so he pulled us out of school
 and that's why I can only read a tiny bit
 and I don't know how to write
 I lack words
 I lack letters.

One year later
 my papasito went to see the principal of the school
 and he welcomed my brother,
 I was happy because I thought
 we were both getting in
 but he didn't sign me up
 because he said women didn't need school
 women are just to have children with.
 I cried, and cried, and cried,
 what a bunch of idiots.

At twelve I went to cut sugarcane
 and there I was
 cutting cane
 I turned thirteen, fourteen
 I used to cut one hundred bundles of sugarcane a day
 I cut and tied together
 I'd cut more than anyone
 everyone else cut just sixty or seventy.

When I was eighteen
 they took me to Amatlán to get me married
 then we came here and moved to a house with tiles
 my husband came to work and so did I,
 and then, kids
 and to raise pigs
 and children
 and then I went to Cordoba to do some washing
 and I saved some pennies
 and bought a baby veal,
 I raised her and she became a cow
 and it was such a gentle animal
 she seemed to glow in the dark
 she'd give me a bucket of thirteen liters of milk
 pure cow's milk
 I'd sell three liters
 and the rest was for the kids.

At some point I had fifteen cows
 and then pigs,
 but then they started to put herbicides in the canals
 the owners of the sugarcane
 and I went to feed the cows in the pasture
 and two of them died,
 and afterwards I could no longer have animals
 the water was so, so polluted,
 so we sold them
 and with that money we bought this little house.

The first house was on two ground lots
 it was made of tile and boards of wood
 eight meters, four meters wide
 wherever there was work to do, we worked
 and they sold us four more ground lots
 and we bought them for the boys,
 each of them chose a spot
 so they would build their houses,
 we had to get something for them to share and live,
 and now they are the owners
 they even have the papers.

When we sold the cows
 we made this new house
 five meters wide
 two or three corridors
 one... two... three rooms
 they are pink and yellow,
 the paint has drips,
 has already peeled
 but there's no money to paint it over.

Here you can get everything
 you just plant it and it grows,
 in April, March
 it gets very hot
 at four in the mourning,
 A mess!
 The bed gets so hot
 you have to give the plants so much water
 and they come back to life
 because now it's not raining much.
 And there are all kinds of trees and insects
 and we chop wood for the fire
 to make coffee and beans
 to make *tamalitos* and *buñuelos*
 to make *buñuelos*, you take the flour
 you do the kneading and you get a dough
 you beat it, and beat it, and beat it
 and you get the tortillas,
 you stretch them
 and you leave them in the fire a little while
 you have them with your coffee
 and you dip them in condensed milk
 or strawberry jam
 and it turns out to be super delicious.

It's so nice that you came to visit
 so nice to get to know you're alive
 it's not like seeing you on TV,
 you're always welcome here
 to your poor little house
 to see your brothers.

You are from Argentina
 and now you are here
 no one from Argentina has ever come,
 I feel that seeing you live -
 It can't be put in words
 it's not like someone else is telling you this,
 you are living it
 you are here with us.

I'm going to see
 I'm going to see
 I'm going to meet live
 I'm going to see, I'm going to see
 Wait for someone else to come and tell me?
 No!
 I want to reach you
 I want to see you live
 so you won't be just a hallucination.
 Life is being here
 talking.

My name is Leonila Vázquez Alvizar, I'm Norma's mother. Everything I have is because
 I've worked in the fields planting corn, beans, sugar cane. I live in Guadalupe, La Patrona,
 Amatlán, Veracruz. I'm eighty years old, I've been in this world for eighty years.

Ceyla

When we are growing up
when we are six or seven
we are taught how to cook around the fire
we're taught how to sow
we're taught how to hunt
we would learn how to hide
how to fish
not with the fishing pole
we make everything the cultural way
we use something like a spear,
we would be taught how to make a canoe out of a log
how to do big work with wood.
The tribe goes first
knowledge about our history and about the land
how did we survive in the Everglades
how we need to stay alert of other people.

We tell people about our culture
but nobody really gets the concept of it
so we say it is 'spiritual'
I can say that
but to me it's not spiritual
it's something else
but I can't explain it
I don't know the english word for it.
English is not my first language
it's not my children first language either
my first language Miccosukee.
We are a group that separated from the Seminole Tribe.
We came south from Jacksonville
because the soldiers of the government were haunting us
and they drove us that way
and we made it further south
and we were able to hide in the swamps
that's how we survived up there
by hiding in the swamps

Ceyla

and living in the swamps.
The Seminole received help to build their community
the Miccosukee no
we did it on our own.
I don't know if many people know this,
but when some decades ago
the government didn't want to acknowledge us as a tribe
so our leaders had gone to Cuba
and ask Fidel Castro himself to see us as a tribe,
he is the first one anywhere
to acknowledge the Miccosukee as a tribe.

It's hard to keep a balance now
between cultural history
and the new things that are coming.
Our culture is much different from the american way of living,
but keeping us separated is hard enough
living everyday life trying to do things one way
and being taught to do that a different way,
that's our struggle now
in the 90s a lot of kids didn't know the language
and some still don't
they are having a hard time picking it up
some kids don't even know it at all
some kids don't know how to sow
or how to do all the things that we are supposed to know,
and we have a story
that has been passed over our grandmothers and grandfathers
that once we lose our culture and our history
that's it
there is no more world
our lives are over
we are dead.
There was a time when all the grandmothers
would be proud of their grandchildren
cause all the boys and the man
they were doing what they were supposed to
but everything started going down
and nobody is really doing anything about it,
and drugs are introduced
and alcohol
and money
and nobody wants to do anything the cultural way anymore.

So now the community is all about modern houses
big modern houses and lots of cars

there is a school
 a health clinic,
 we even have a rehabilitation center
 a police station
 an administration office
 and we have a village
 we call it The Village
 it's a place where we show everything that we do
 but as a show
 I don't know how it's called in English
 a place for tourists.
 And we have a casino too,
 in the 80s we were using grants from the government
 and in the 90s we stopped using them,
 we needed our own money
 so we made the casino
 and that brings extra money to the community,
 it's built in the Everglades
 in Miccosukee land
 it's both far and close enough from Miami
 so people come,
 there's a dome where they have showings of the heat
 games and different events
 and then there is a hotel,
 the casino was built in the 90s
 the hotel was built in the 2000s,
 the income that come from the casino
 and from the touristic airbots
 is distributed between all the community members,
 we are more or less two thousands
 but we'll soon be less.

Today I got divorced.
 We've been separated for a while
 and I was trying to see
 if I wanted a divorce or to stay with him
 but the bad outweighed the good
 so that was a no-brainer,
 it's definitely happening now.

At the beginning it was fun
 it really was fun
 I had two previous kids
 they passed with my mother in an accident
 a month after my son Daniel was born,
 the car went into the water and they drowned
 people arrived on the scene ten minutes after it happened
 but nobody went into the water to get them out
 so a few hours later...
 my mother and my son weren't responsive
 buy my daughter was
 they flew her to the hospital
 she was put on life support
 but they said that if she made it through the night
 it was gonna be tough for her
 that she wouldn't be there
 she'd just be a vegetable
 so at seven o'clock in the morning
 me and her father
 (my first husband)
 decided to pull the plug
 and to stop CPR.
 June the 11th.

I didn't go to the funeral
 because I had just had Daniel
 and we have cultural beliefs

that said that as he was small
and I was vulnerable
my spirit and my energy were weak
and we could bring
death spirits back with us home.

To this day I'm not allowed to go to funerals
I mean, I can go if I really want to
but I'd have to do certain things to go
spiritual cleanses
cleaning rituals...
We're not supposed to go to cemeteries
or wonder about death
because since we're thinking about it
it's just gonna make it.
Usually we get only four mourning days,
my mother and my kids passed the same day
and I had only four days to cry for them,
afterwards you are not supposed to cry
or be sad for them
you can't be sad
you are supposed to keep happy memories
keep their presence within you.

It's very hard when you are a child
to grow up like that
how come I can't cry?
You get used to what you learn,
but it was hard.
Have you heard about the four stages of grief?
Or, how many stages there are?
who knows, however stages they might be,
I stayed in the mad stage for a while
I was forced to face a tragedy and I wasn't prepared
I felt responsible
just because I let them go that day
I mean, my mother was always taking them
always
she would come and visit us
not expecting to take them
but then my son would be like, 'Grandma! Grandma!'
and he would cry
and then my daughter would start to get jealous
and she would start crying too
and my mother would end up taking both of them.
That day she was supposed to come to get them around ten

but she didn't come till four
asking me if I still wanted her to take them.
Since Daniel was just born
my sleep schedule was everywhere,
so they left at four-thirty
and then I got a called in the morning
at seven o'clock
asking me where my kids were
I told them they were with my mother,
and they told me, 'You need to go to the hospital
we found your mom's ID on the road.'
My heart dropped
I just knew it
I already knew
so when I got to the hospital
I called their father
and I told him that there had been an accident
that our son didn't make it
that our daughter was barely moving.

In situations like that we have our own medicines
that we can use to heal some illnesses
but they didn't get there in time
usually we put a lot of hope and prayer
and things like that
but I just wasn't prepared
I wasn't prepared to lose my kids
I was kind of prepared to lose my mom
because she always said,
'I'm not always going to be there,
tomorrow when you wake up I may not be here.'
I mourned for my mother
but I was shocked for my kids
I couldn't understand it.

Our whole culture is based on spirituality
so in the tribe we try to keep death separated from it being sad,
it's only sad because we don't get to see them everyday
like we used to
but I'm pretty sure they are happy wherever they are at
because they don't have to deal with all the bad things in this world.
We see the world from different eyes,
that was one of the things that my husband and I fought over
when he got angry he would say mean things about my tribe
and I got really tired of it
he would only say it when he went mad

and then he would say, 'Oh, I didn't mean it'
 'Well, I don't care, you said it
 you can't take back what you said
 nobody can take back what they do
 is out there
 it's been put out to the world.'

I met my husband
 well, my former husband right now
 in the Miccosukee Casino Hotel.
 He's cuban
 so my kids are half cuban,
 half Miccosukee and half cuban
 it's a good mix.
 I had just came back from California
 but my flight got in at twelve a.m.
 so I asked a friend of mine if she could pick me up.
 She came, and I ask her if she could get me a room in the resort,
 but when we got to the hotel I wasn't tired
 so I asked her if she wanted to hang out
 and she said yes
 so we went to a bar that is not far from the resort
 and we got totally drunk,
 she left early
 but I ended up leaving to the resort at seven a.m.
 I rang the door
 I tried to get into the room
 but she didn't hear me
 so I went to the front desk and I got my own room.
 I went up and some people walked up behind me
 there were three of them
 they were loud
 I was getting a hangover
 I was in that part between hungover and still kind of drunk
 so I wanted to hurry up and get to the room.
 I waited for the elevator
 and as soon as I got into it
 the three people walked in
 and then one of them said something
 but I wasn't even listening
 I was too drunk,

and all of a sudden he repeated it
 and I was like, 'Oh, are you talking to me?'
 'Yes!'
 'Oh, what did you say?'
 'That where is the party'
 'Oh, no idea, I'm just going to my room'
 'Oh OK, so no more party?'
 'It's still early!'
 I think it was nine a.m.
 I told them what room number I was in
 and they said they would give me a call.
 I entered to my room
 layed down
 and fell asleep,
 then woke up and spoke to my friend
 she said, 'Where the hell are you?'
 I told her what room number I was
 and she said, 'Alright, I'll be there in a while.'
 I hung up the phone and then I get another phone call,
 it was one of the three guys
 and he said he would come by.
 I hung up and I call the room service
 I asked for two shots of Jack Daniels
 yes!
 I ended up falling asleep again for a little bit
 and then I heard some knocks on the door
 and it happened to be my children's dad.
 We started talking
 and then the shots of Jack came
 and he said he didn't want to drink right now
 and I looked at him
 and he said, 'Never mind, I'll take it.'
 And the rest of the story is as easy as ABC.

We stayed together at the resort for three or four days
 just hanging out
 gambling a bit in the casino
 then going to the room for a few drinks...
 We were good friends
 we told to each other,
 'I'm just getting out of a relationship'
 'I'm not looking for a relationship'
 We weren't looking for nothing
 so alright, let's just have fun.
 We were friend for not even six months
 and then I started to like him much more than I initially wanted to

and I told him
 that didn't want to love him but I did
 and we got together
 and about a month later
 I found that I was pregnant with Daniel.
 Too soon.

We lived in Miami for a while
 because not natives can't live in the reservation
 and he wasn't from the tribe.
 Miami wasn't that bad
 but I started getting that silly city mentality
 where you have to be on the rush all the time
 you have to be on a hurry even though you have nothing to do
 to shop at Publix
 to walk around the stores
 to get the car fixed
 to drive! to drive all the time!
 you have to drive so far
 that you enter a strange state of mind
 because your mind is not made
 to change places so quickly.

On the reservation is not like that
 everything is quiet
 it seems time goes by slower
 I got tired of the city
 I wanted my time back.
 So I went back to the reservation
 to my mother's house,
 my sister, the second oldest
 she lived there when I moved to Miami
 she wasn't taking care of the house much
 her boyfriend was using her for her money,
 that happens a lot on the reservation
 that's why it's so hard to get not natives to stay on the reservation,
 because most people, when they think about natives
 they think about money
 they think we get money from the government
 and we don't get money at all
 we got nothing
 that's the number one misconception about us.

Some people within the tribe
 say they don't like the casino
 because we were raised not to be like that

not to want money
 not to get money the way other people do,
 we were raised to work
 to work the land.
 The tribe has become more businesslike
 instead of remaining as a different way of life
 it came into business,
 that was a big controversy some years ago
 it was a whole big thing
 I don't know
 I don't care about money
 I don't even like it
 I don't care about money at all,
 the way they raised me in the reservation
 is that I can handle
 to live how I want without anything,
 from when we are little
 we are taught how to do things to survive
 in case we ever need to survive on your own,
 people still do that to this day in the reservation
 they still go out and hunt
 they still go out fishing
 they still make clothes
 they still do all that stuff,
 there are elders that don't speak english at all
 and there's children that only speak Miccosukee,
 but like everywhere
 it's getting mixed
 and it's getting harder and harder to hung on to our heritage
 it is
 I still hung on to the things my mother taught me
 but I'm starting to lose a lot of words,
 when trying to teach my children certain words
 I say, 'Oh my god, I forgot how to say this
 I forgot how to say that'
 you can feel it going away...
 I'd call my mom and ask her
 because my mother knew a lot,
 I ask my aunts and they say, 'I don't know,
 I would ask your mom if she were here.'
 Everybody asked my mother for help
 and even if she had a full plate
 she would still help everyone
 if you needed help to cook for a party
 to make clothes
 to do shopping

babysit
 language stuff
 everything.
 It's really hard when people talk to me like if I was her
 I know my limits
 I can't get involved if I don't know if I'll be able to handle it.
 But my mother did so
 I don't know how but she did.

Fifty miles away from here
 people can't do anything by themselves
 the american way of life is very different from what I believe
 it's like living in two different worlds
 you really can see the difference
 what is important around there is take over yourself
 and fulfill yourself
 and everything is yourself, yourself, yourself
 that lies everyone in the United States is taught,
 'You can do anything you want to'
 'Your life is yours,'
 there's no family
 no community
 no tribe
 And everything is so disciplined!
 so disciplined...
 I try not to tell my children no all the time
 they can understand me in other ways, you know?
 Everything for natives is through the mother
 everything is transferred through the mother,
 we all have clans within the community
 I'm a bird clan
 so my children are bird clan
 they are bird clan because of me.
 Anything having to do with the father doesn't matter
 the father's role is not that big within our culture.

Each clan is taught specific things
 because that is what that clan is meant to do
 within the community.
 there's bird clan
 there's wind clan
 there's panther clan
 there's turtle clan
 there's even a snake clan.
 The oldest woman in each clan
 are the most important leaders,

and then the medicine man
the man that can heal.
I really want to raise my kids the Miccosukee way
and I'm doing it!
They talk to fish in Miccosukee language
and they are free.

I am Ceyla with a C. Last name is Valiente. Middle name is Willy. I can't say my indian name because women, once we have kids, we are not supposed to say it. Men have their baby names and then they got their men name in a passage ceremony. I am twenty-eight. I was born in May. I live on the Miccosukee reservation. I currently have two kids. I got divorced today. My favorite color is purple.

I was born in a small town in Camagüey
called San Miguelito.
Then my parents decided to migrate to Havana
and begin a new life in the city,
but I had already learned the ways of rural life.
I was always fortunate with love,
even though I was poor
I always had someone to cry over me.
I broke many hearts
because of my inexperience
I would go from one relationship to the next
I wanted to know what existed beyond just one person
because no person in complete.

Then my sister died, the oldest
and I became depressed
because I loved her very much
and this became a problem:
I couldn't pass the military service trials.
I wanted to
I wanted to operate anti-aircraft artillery,
things you want when you're young
but I then realized
that all of this had nothing to do with me.
I still hadn't realized
that my passion were cockerels.
I got the chance to work for the government taking care of cockerels
and when you work in what you like
damn,
you don't work
you enjoy it.
Then a beautiful romance came my way,
she was my first love
but my hopes didn't last long,

the woman was married
 God interfered and didn't let me stay with her
 so that that way I wouldn't kill someone
 or get myself killed.
 Time passed
 I don't know
 real fast
 and I met another woman
 who spent her life with me
 and I with her,
 she grew old by my side
 and then came the moment
 where I loved her as a sister
 and not as a wife
 and I didn't know how to tell her
 that she wasn't the woman I used to want.
 She died from lupus,
 they cut off her legs
 and she never wanted me to see her like that
 she died looking older than she ever was.
 With her, it was a sad story
 because I was the love of her life
 but she wasn't lucky with me
 because my love wasn't made for her,
 my love was made for cockerels.
 I discovered the passion for cockerels
 and it was the most beautiful passion,
 a passion only comparable to the romance
 I had with that married woman.
 Oh, my guajira!
 I had many dreams about my future with her
 and she had dreams about her future with me
 we pictured ourselves together until the last day of our lives
 but it all shattered
 because she lived a very comfortable life with her husband
 and there wasn't any much money in her future with me.
 Her mother
 her sisters
 my brothers
 they all had a hand in me not being with her,
 they told her I was a madman
 with mental problems
 that couldn't even pass his military service trials.
 They weren't lying,
 but I'm a peaceful madman

not an aggressive madman
 they say I'm mad
 because I rather live loosely
 because I'm not afraid of getting bit by a serpent
 because I'm not afraid of the dangers of rural life
 because I'm not afraid of sickness
 because I'm not afraid of death.

In the country
 I find joy,
 in animals...
 my cure
 is the green in the trees
 the pure air
 the still loneliness
 and the people that share a bit of time with me
 and listen to my stories.
 Look
 you are the kind of person that brings joy to my soul
 and that joy cures me.
 When did I ever think I was going to make a book
 when there are people that have probably lived more than me
 and have never been able to?

I lived a very restricted life in Cuba
 I was brought up a Christian
 in a time when in Cuba
 religious folk had no place
 they didn't have a chance
 you had to be atheist and communist
 that was the first rule
 to not believe in God
 and I believed in God
 and I never hid that
 and I suffered a lot.
 At the end of the day
 no one understands a child
 not the government
 not religion
 they get inside the minds of innocent creatures
 they impose their beliefs with the absurd desire of forming them
 and all they do is hurt them.
 There was a time

when I was a child
 that I worked in a house
 and two little cockerels arrived
 and once I saw them
 I felt a fire inside.
 I saw the power a cockerel can have
 the fierceness
 and realized when I saw them
 that they could be trained to win.

It's strange for a cock to lose
 if you know how to train it,
 if you prepare it well, the cock wins.
 The training is hard
 you need to take off its feathers
 until their skin hardens
 that way you can see their wounds when they get hurt
 and apply antibiotics and alcohol.
 Then you get a palm leaf, and you make it exercise
 make them run in a circle
 for ten minutes:
 you use your hand for five minutes
 to make it move in one direction, then in the other, and again,
 to make its legs muscular,
 and then for five minutes, you throw it in the air so it can fly
 to make its wings strong too.
 Then you get it a doll
 or get it a cockerel called topetón
 so it can attack it
 and learn to attack with precision.
 The fierceness comes from the father and the mother
 from their blood,
 if you manage to crossbreed well
 cockerels don't feel pain
 and when they don't feel pain, they win,
 it's crucial for them not to feel pain
 because pain creates fear
 and if they're afraid they lose.
 They lose when they lie on the ground for over a minute.
 Most of the time people bet money,
 and this means that a poor man like me needs to know a lot
 and needs to train
 or else he'll be losing your whole life.

To train a cockerel

there are many phases you need to master,
 one phase is shearing it:
 make it beautiful
 take its feathers off
 this also helps you recognize it;
 another phase
 is knowing what cockerel and what chicken you need to pair up;
 another phase
 is training it
 making it strong, fast, fierce;
 and another phase
 is arm it
 put on its spurs
 which are these plastic weapons with a sharp point
 that they wear on their legs.
 It's essential that the spurs don't come off,
 because if they fall off, everyone that made a bet loses a lot of money
 and it can get you into trouble
 because they'll think you sold yourself out
 and they'll never call you again.
 To be a breeder of fighting cocks
 you need to be serious and talented and dedicated
 not everyone can get the cockerel to a zero
 zero fat
 zero weakness
 zero cowardness
 zero sickness
 zero parasite
 zero fear
 zero pain.
 If they feel pain, they won't have the chance of winning
 it gets pricked and then loosens
 it sees that they want to kill it
 and it doesn't want to get killed, so it runs out, and its comb raises
 which is the feathers on its head,
 and it folds its wings
 and it crows
 and that's when the judge resolves that it has lost the fight.
 Sometimes the judges get confused
 sometimes the cocks run out
 and run, and run, and run
 but just to gather resources because their opponent is strong,
 but if it hasn't folded its wings
 or raises its comb
 the fight is still on,

and when they less expected it
 it turns
 it gives a hard turn
 and kills the other cock.

I've learnt so much from the cockerels
 that I don't even have to make them fight to make money
 I get paid to take their feathers off
 so they can look pretty
 they pay me to train them
 they rent them for fights
 they buy their offspring.
 I master everything related to cockerels,
 except for genetics,
 because genetics are scientific
 genetics don't come from the country
 and everything I know I've learnt from the country.
 Scientists can do whatever they want
 If they want a chicken to give birth to thirty white cockerels
 they move the spermatozooids around
 and thirty white cockerels come out,
 it's pretty crazy.
 Cockerels fill the time in which I could be thinking stupid things
 or put myself at risk
 or put someone else at risk,
 that time
 is occupied by the cockerels
 and it also gives me some money
 to pay for the things I need to get.

I have a cockerel called San Cheque
 San because he's a cockerel who is somebody
 like saying Mister Cheque
 and Cheque because I rent that cockerel
 and money always comes in,
 he's a reliable cock
 he always wins
 it's like taking a cheque to the bank and getting the money.
 I've got him as a father now
 I've gotten chicks from good chickens
 and the little cocks have his characteristics.
 I've taken San Cheque to fight against people that have lots of money
 and who assume they are the best breeders of fighting cocks
 and when they don't know you
 they bet a lot of money

they think they'll beat you
 and they're mistaken
 and then they have to pay.
 They always lose with me,
 so, when they see me a second time they're cautious
 and bring me a better cock
 and then they lose against San Cheque again
 And then what?
 They want to buy the cockerel,
 because with this black man you just can't
 this black man is too much.

When I started working in Cuba
 They made me work in agriculture for the government
 I wanted to be a breeder of fighting cocks but there was no position
 available
 it was very tough
 I sowed beans
 sweet potatoes
 sugarcane
 corn
 and there I met that woman I told you about
 my guajira, the one that was married.
 They invited us over to drink coffee in their ranch
 and after I saw her, a romance was born.
 Those people had good amounts of money
 ranches, cars, money in the bank
 but she needed love
 and I had love I could give her,
 so, I went over for coffee
 and I couldn't drink because of how much I liked that woman.
 What a beautiful romance!
 They would send me on horseback to get lunch for the workers
 rice, stew, meat, milk or juice
 and since the woman's shack was near
 I crossed these fences
 and would meet her far from her home
 and she'd play Ana Gabriel
 and I'd get all romantic
 and we would spend a lovely time.
 We were in love.
 But one day she told her husband
 that she didn't want him anymore
 that he should learn from me
 because I was a true gentleman.
 And the man went to see me and said,
 'Why is my wife saying you are a true gentleman?

Did you fool around with my wife?
 And I said, 'No, I didn't fool around with your wife.'
 'She said you fooled around with her.'
 'No, no, no, you're wrong.'
 One day I was told,
 'Kiki, you have the chance of becoming a breeder of fighting cocks.'
 The breeders of fighting cocks in Cuba had the privilege of travelling
 abroad,
 to Mexico, Venezuela, Martinique, Santo Domingo
 in a time where leaving and entering the island was very restricted,
 you could travel to competitions
 and that was my biggest dream,
 my biggest dream was to be a breeder of fighting cocks
 a government breeder of fighting cocks.

So, they decided to put me to the test
 I had to train three cockerels for Guillermo García's birthday,
 he was the Commander of Flora and Fauna in Cuba
 he was the man who talked to Fidel Castro
 so that the cockerels wouldn't go extinct
 and could be sold for American dollars.
 To earn the right to be a breeder of fighting cocks
 I had to win at least two out of three fights.
 A friend gave me three cocks to train
 and I trained them well, and then came the day of the fight.
 They found me three cockerels from different professional breeders
 who were internationally recognized
 and spent the season abroad
 fighting with their cocks in Mexico, in Venezuela, in Martinique
 and many other places I hadn't heard of
 because I didn't have access to that information.
 My first cockerel came out
 the other cock pricked his eye quickly
 but my cock struck back, leaving its opponent on the ground
 immobilized.
 They let the minute go by
 and the audience clapped:
 my cock had won.
 The second cock
 received applause too
 quickly
 the judge was introducing the cockerels
 screaming, 'On this side is Andrés' cock!
 and on the other...'
 And the other cock was already dead on the ground!

and people screamed, 'Judge! Judge!
 Off with that, this one already died!'
 And for the third fight, they brought an old cock
 from a renowned breeder from Pinar del Río
 his name was Argudín
 he smoked a pretty big cigar,
 and that cock was strong
 but my chicken finished the other one off.
 And a Venezuelan came and screamed,
 'Hey! Bring me that chicken now, I want to take it to Venezuela!'
 That cock fought so well.
 So, a man came to me and said, 'That chicken stays here.'
 And I say, 'What do you mean he stays here?'
 and he says, 'Kiki, you know the rules.'
 And I say, 'No, no, no! I'm still under the rules of agriculture
 I won't follow the rules of breeders of fighting cocks until you give me the
 job
 when I'm a breeder of fighting cocks, you can talk about breeder rules,
 until that happens, don't mess with me.'
 Guillermo García came over and asked what was going on
 and I got a bad temper because they wanted to take the cockerel from me,
 and the fight got personal,
 and I said, 'If you want the cockerel
 you're going to have to fight me like those cocks fought each other,
 or else,
 my cockerel is leaving with me.'

And well,
 I passed
 and now the good part begins.
 There was a man who was a president for the party
 and he had the breeder of fighting cocks position occupied,
 but he was terrible
 he'd fight four cocks and would get six of them killed,
 and then that story I had comes back
 the one with the married woman who lived nearby.
 The woman's husband and this man were friends,
 Isn't life ironic?
 I was having a romance with the cook too
 the cook was very nice to me
 she saw herself in me
 and we kissed a bit
 caressed too
 and her husband was a policeman
 and by coincidence, at an event that night

they sent the husband to patrol the fence.
 It wasn't only the husband there
 there were many other policemen too
 and a man, who didn't like me,
 said to the husband, 'Man
 your woman is with Kiki in that room.'
 There was a closed room
 where all the cockerels were kept in wood compartments.
 I had beer in there
 and would call her and she'd come over to the room quickly
 and we'd make love.
 I already had my beautiful romance with my beautiful guajira by then
 but I was a bit of a crazy boy
 I didn't really care if it was one or the other
 what I liked about this one the other one had it
 what I liked about the other one the other one had
 what I liked about mine, mine had it,
 I had time
 there wasn't a cellphone that could control me
 we weren't at the stage of development there is now
 I'd go out, and that was it
 until I got back home, there was no way of finding me
 I owned my time,
 now they call you every three seconds
 they even call you with the camera on, and they look at you.
 Those were other times
 we've lost privacy because of development
 they used to be phones
 now they're computers with a phone.

Let's get back to the story because I always go off topic.
 It was the night of the event.
 The policeman comes and says 'Hey!
 They say you were in that room with my wife,
 what's this about you being with my woman?'
 and I said, 'Look,
 you're wearing a police uniform
 and you have a weapon
 go home
 change your clothes
 and then come talk to me.'
 'No, no, no, I'm not going home
 we're going to take care of this problem right now.'
 'Well, if you want to take care of this problem now
 let's go outside

because I'm at work,
 let's go out to the street, and we can fight or do whatever you want.'
 when he saw that we were going out to the middle of the hill
 he stayed by the door
 and the man in the lookout post
 who was at the ranch entrance
 sees me go out and they call the director,
 and they all come, the police comes too
 and I go outside, and he follows me
 and comes out to throw punches my way
 so, I dodged them
 and they all begin to shout, 'Hey!
 What's the problem here?'
 and I tell them, 'This turrucho is jealous
 I'm going to kick his ass.'
 They calm me down and take me back in
 and the husband of the other woman
 my beautiful guajira, that I was crazy about
 jokes and says, 'Hey Kiki,
 things are way different with me, eh?'
 and I thought, 'Oh
 if you only knew that things are going to be worse with you
 because I really really like your wife.'
 And my beautiful guajira calls me and says,
 'That whore!
 I know you're incapable of cheating on me with her
 because we honestly and purely love each other'
 'Of course I don't want her, my love,' I said,
 'that's gossipy crazy woman talk,
 you are the woman I love.'
 And the next week was when her husband
 came to my work and said, 'Kiki
 you are fooling around with my woman,'
 and I say, 'I'm at work
 let's take care of this problem during my lunch break.'
 When I go to her house, she puts on makeup
 and got super pretty,
 I arrive and say, 'I came to see what the problem is,'
 and he starts screaming at my guajira and says,
 'You tell us what's going on, you're involved with this black man.'
 'No, no, no,' she says,
 'I only told you to learn from him because he's a gentleman.'
 'No, you whore!
 What happens between us is for no one else to hear, damnit!'
 And I looked at the husband and said,

'Don't you go hitting her
 don't even try beating her in front of me.'
 A little while after he starts again, 'Whore, whore!'
 and I grabbed him and said, 'No, no, no!
 any problem you have
 you take care of it with me
 we are going to take care of it somewhere else
 far from her
 let's go to the middle of the hill
 bring a revolver
 bring a cannon
 bring whatever you want
 I'll be there waiting for you.'
 I knew he had a revolver
 and I was bringing a revolver too,
 and I waited for him on the hill
 and the guy didn't show up.
 But I wanted the woman for real
 and was crazy about her at this point
 and I went there, looking for her,
 and he was there, with her mother, her sister, her father
 they were all crying
 everyone was crying because of the situation,
 and when his husband sees that I have a gun in a bag
 I tell him, 'I've come to take her with me.'
 I just wanted to be with her
 and she just wanted to be with me
 and then the mother puts herself between us
 and the man jumps on top of me
 and we started fighting
 and I give my gun to my guajira
 handing it to her over him,
 and both us men were unarmed
 and we fought each other in the middle of the house.
 We broke the television
 we ended up in their bedroom,
 the father was pushing me around
 this dog they had bit my foot
 and that's how it went until they took me out of the house.
 My guajira puts the gun away and gives it to her sister
 but the sister was friends with the husband
 and they file a formal accusation
 because I had a firearm.
 That night the police show up at my house and knock on the door,
 I open and see the cook's husband.

'Fuck,' he says, 'It's you again!
 What is it with you man?
 Same problem all over again?'
 'No, no, no,' I say, 'this time is different, brother,
 I really love the woman this time.'
 and he says, 'Alright, I'm going to tell you something
 you are being arrested for illegal possession of a firearm
 which can lead to up to two years in prison,
 and this man says you threatened to kill him
 and he's very powerful
 so maybe they'll give you ten years.'

 I was fifteen days in a cell
 I had never been arrested in my life,
 the officer in charge of me
 was friends with the husband of my guajira
 and mistreated me a lot.
 I said that the gun was my father's
 that my father lived in a very dangerous place
 and that I'd show up at night, at different times
 and that I could get killed.
 It was a lie,
 I didn't have any problems
 I was always friends with criminals
 and friends with decent people too
 I didn't have a problem with anyone.
 The cell was dark
 you couldn't see a thing
 I was starving,
 there was a stench
 I couldn't bathe
 I slept on a stone bed
 fifteen days sleeping on a stone bed!
 There was a mentally challenged boy in there
 a black boy
 that was arrested for stealing a ball
 and all the prisoners abused him
 and I felt sorry for him, and I said, 'Hey!
 come up to the top bed
 (there were two beds, one on the top and one on the bottom)
 and I told the other prisoners, 'Gentlemen, I'm very sorry
 from now on, no one abuses the boy.'
 The cell was a square, smaller than a room
 and we were seventeen or eighteen men in there,
 and there was only one toilet

a hole where you squat and shit in.
 My foot was inflamed after the fight in the house
 and I was limping that whole time.
 After four days, a strong black man arrived
 dressed like a sailor
 he arrives and gets under one of the stone beds
 on the floor
 and sleeps.
 He didn't come out to eat the first day.
 The second day he didn't come out to eat.
 The food was a pancake the size of a finger
 and a little bit of water with two or three noodles inside
 the minimum you could eat and not die.
 On the third day, I call him and say, 'Hey sir!
 Hey you!
 What's your name?'
 'My name is Reynaldo.'
 'When did you get here?'
 'Three days ago.'
 'And why don't you eat?'
 'I'm not hungry'
 'And do you know when you're getting out?'
 'No, I don't know when I'm getting out.'
 'Then what are you doing down there?'
 Come out right now!
 be a part of this
 calm down
 bathe
 shit
 pee
 just like everyone else
 because you're going to get sick.'
 This happened in 1992
 so many years have gone by...
 and he says, 'Fuck you're right.'
 And he came out and everybody saw him.
 He was a big guy
 young.
 That time in the cell was something incredible
 incredible.
 One day a criminal came in
 troublemaker
 delinquent
 hoarder
 calculating

unscrupulous
 he was called El Jimagua
 which is like saying the word twin,
 and he was a guy with personal flaws.
 In prison, when someone lit a cigar
 the sixteen, seventeen men there would smoke a drag from it
 everyone shared
 when a visitor would come and leave cigars we all shared them too
 but this Jimagua didn't want to share
 he said cigars were for prison folk
 and that the only true prisoner there was him,
 we were around seventeen people in a four-by-four room
 there were four stone beds and the rest slept on the floor
 we cleaned the floor every day, so it was good for sleeping,
 and guess what, man,
 the moment Jimagua is going to hand over the cigar to me
 he tells me, 'No, you're not smoking from my cigar'
 and I told him, 'Listen up, man,
 from now on you don't smoke from any of my cigars
 everyone is going to smoke except you
 because you're nasty.'
 and I told Reynaldo,
 the man who had been under the bed,
 'When we leave here to go to Cordillera,
 which is the big prison,
 you join me
 because these people gang up
 and then they'll see what happens if they mess with us.'
 He wanted to make his own little group
 and I said, 'I'll have to kill you then,
 or we're both getting killed.'
 Everyone knew I was there
 because I had broken into a house with a firearm
 and it was also not a lie at all that I was somewhat deranged
 so, the prisoners respected me.
 And I asked everyone
 'Are you going to smoke with me
 or are you going to smoke with this asshole?'
 It's very important to stop these people
 in some moments in life, stopping others can save you
 or bring you down.
 Reynaldo jumps up and tells Jimagua, 'Hey!
 If you mess with Kiki, you're going to pay for it.'
 That's when I realized that Reynaldo
 that fragile man

who had been three days under that bed
 had been a prisoner before.
 He spoke English like you and I could never imagine
 because he'd been in the United States
 and had been involved in drug trafficking.
 He stole a lot of money and scammed people
 and was shot
 and a woman took him to Cuba on a boat
 when he was freshly wounded by the shots
 and they took care of him in Cuba.
 Then, he screamed at everyone and said, 'From today on,
 I'm Reynaldo
 and this man beside me is called Kiki,
 and everyone, I swear, is going to respect us.'

Time passes, and one day they call me and say,
 'You're free.'
 And I go home
 to the home of that woman who was older than me
 who took me in every time I showed up
 who loved me unconditionally.
 And one morning, not many days later
 someone knocks on the door
 and I bet you can't guess who it was,
 Reynaldo!
 A rat had bitten him
 and they took him to the hospital as a preventive measure
 and he escaped the hospital and went to see me so that I could protect him
 and call his wife and son
 who were in a place far from there.
 He said, 'Andrés,
 when you left, I missed you so much, my friend
 that I escaped and came to see you.'
 I told him, 'I have a room in Santos Suárez
 I'm taking you there right now
 you can hide there
 but you can't leave
 I'll bring your wife and your son so that you can see them.'
 He gave me the address, I went to get them, and I took them there,
 and I would bring them food every day.
 That's when I met another woman that I liked very much
 the woman I was with up until now
 she had an exceptional body
 a beautiful mulatta
 and I say, 'Fuck!'

This woman is heaven-sent!
 and I go to Reynaldo's, and I say,
 'Brother
 this is the last night you're sleeping here
 I don't know what you're going to do
 but I can't go back to that woman you saw me with
 I'm in love with this other woman now
 and I'm going to stay here with her.'
 I was still trying to forget my guajira from the hill,
 so, I took this woman to that room
 and we stayed together for twenty-seven years.

Another chapter begins here.
 I went back to the cockfight breeding job to get back my position,
 and they say, 'No Andrés,
 with that episode you had, we don't want you here
 the people you messed with are vengeful
 they are going to kill you.'
 They fired me from the job.
 And that's when the woman from the hill called me
 and would leave thousands of messages
 saying she was going to leave her husband and I don't know what else
 and I said, 'No
 if you didn't walk with me during the bad times
 you won't walk with me during the good ones either,'
 and I forgot her.

This woman I had begun to see told me,
 'We can't go on living in this country,
 we have to leave.'
 She put that idea in my head
 and we decided to go out to the sea,
 we decided to go out to the sea.
 We were still young
 we were only thirty-four,
 we wanted to get in a shrimp boat
 in a freezer
 me, my woman, and her two daughters,
 the eldest was fifteen years old
 and the youngest was seven
 but it was very dangerous because we could freeze in there
 like shrimps.
 It was the time of the 1994 Exodus
 When like a hundred thousand people got in the Venezuelan embassy
 and they all came to the United States,
 Fidel Castro had said that anyone who wanted to leave
 was able to leave,

that if the Americans didn't stop them
 they could go,
 and if the police saw you with a raft in your truck
 they wouldn't say a thing.
 The beaches were full of rafts
 and lots of people drowned
 because they'd even get in the water on a wooden door
 they'd go out on anything.
 So, one day I get a knock on the door
 and it was a friend of mine
 a man who knew a lot about the sea,
 and he says, 'Andrés,
 come and see the kind of raft I have on my rooftop
 maybe you want to come along with me.'
 and I say, 'Fuck, if I go I have to take my woman and the girls.'
 I had already tried to leave on a raft once
 and I almost drowned
 because I had tied myself to the raft
 and the raft sank
 and the knot I made on the rope was dragging me down
 and I couldn't get out
 and the waves got a hold of me
 and I could see people's feet underwater
 and there was one of those full moons, really pretty
 and I saw foam and, ugh,
 I was desperate
 until this kinda crazy boy that was there brought a knife
 and cut the rope for me.
 I walked away through a reef
 and it was full of sea urchins!
 my feet were full of urchins,
 but well, that's another story,
 let me keep telling you about that night.

When my friend took me to his house, man
 they were making a huge raft,
 it was like six meters long.
 But they were eight men
 strange men
 one had a scar on his face
 the other a bandit, a shameless man
 men of every kind
 and I thought, fuck!
 My woman and the girls among these men!
 But well, it doesn't matter

I'm a man too
 and I'm pretty determined
 so, they're going to respect me.
 They were looking for a motor but couldn't find it,
 and I said, 'I'll make the oars
 with my own hands
 and I'll bring the meat, the lemons, the sugar
 I'm going to bring all the food we need
 but my woman and the two daughters are coming with me,
 and let me tell you
 you're going to need me when you're in the middle of the sea
 I don't even know why, but I'm telling you
 You're going to need me in the middle of the sea.'

And then we made a deal with a guy who had a truck
 who was going to take the raft and get it on the water
 and the next day this guy comes to my house and says, 'Kiki
 the people you are leaving with
 came to get me to betray you
 they wanted to pay me to leave you here
 because they say they don't want to leave with women and children,
 but I'm not going to betray you
 you are my friend.'
 'Don't you tell me those fuckers did that!'
 I took an oar and went over to where the raft was
 and they were five or six, and I tell my friend,
 'I heard you wanted to betray me
 But, o you know what's going to happen?
 I'm going to beat the shit out of you and all those fuckers
 I'm bringing the food and everything
 and I made these oars with my own hands,
 so, you're coming with me right now
 you're coming home with me until we leave
 or else I'll kill you with this oar right now.'
 I took him home as a prisoner,
 no one could leave without me because I held their captain prisoner,
 I had him at my house for two days
 until the guy with the truck showed up
 and I got the captain and my woman and the girls,
 and after a while, we were by the sea
 with the raft on the sand.

It was four in the morning,
 everyone had got on the raft and we realized
 that the tiller had stayed in the truck

no one brought it.
 'Don't worry', I say, 'there's an oar that's longer than the rest
 we can put it in the back, and it'll work as a tiller.'
 We went out
 well, we wanted to leave but we weren't going anywhere
 we rowed and rowed, but all we did was stay in the same area
 no one knew how to row
 the people on the beach laughed at us
 they'd scream, 'Hey!
 Where are you going?
 It's over that way, not this way!'
 'Wait a moment,' I said, 'wait a moment,
 I had always seen that everyone rowed at the same time
 so, in a one, two, three
 one, two, three
 everyone must row at the same time
 and this thing will move forward.'
 And that's how we finally got moving,
 but then we got bad weather...
 such a bad weather!
 More than half the people in the sea that night
 they drowned.
 The sea wasn't letting us leave,
 we had got in the water at four in the morning
 and it was already seven in the afternoon
 and we were still stuck on the coast.
 'This can't be,' I said,
 'or we go back right now
 or we get to work.'
 'No, no, no Andrés, let's keep on,
 forward, forward
 we're not going back, not even to get a run-up.'
 That was at eight at night,
 you could still see the Torre Monumental
 and the lights in Havana were still blazing.
 But then everyone began to row
 and at one in the morning
 you could see the city lights
 the size of a little match head
 and very close to the water.
 So I say, 'Fuck!
 We're moving forward!
 We're really moving forward now!'
 The next day we couldn't see land anywhere.
 A giant bird flew by with its beak open wide.

We were very far
in the middle of the ocean
and there was a lot of people
a lot of rafts.

Some rowed that way
some rowed this way,
Oh, nobody knew where they were going.
Some rafts began to make signals with a little mirror
and everyone went in that direction
and when I get there, I see a raftman strike,
'We're not rowing any more,
Who do these American think we are?
Do they think we're idiots?
We're not rowing any more!
'These guys are crazy, let's go.'
The ships didn't want to pick us up
they passed right by us and went their way,
the airplanes didn't even throw us water
because Clinton had said that if anyone helped a raftman
he'd give them a fine of I don't know how many thousands of dollars
and that they'd take their ships from them.
Because of that law
lots of Cuban buddies voted for Trump now.
And then I see a guy coming over on a little raft that had a sail
he was fucking sailing at full speed
going from raft to raft, trying to buy food with some dollars,
Who is going to sell someone food in the middle of the sea?
That food is your life
money is of no use there.
And then he came up to us, and I look at his sailing system
I figured out his secret and said, 'Fuck!
This is what we need to do!'
It was ten in the morning,
I got the stick I used as a tiller
I placed it in the middle of the raft
I made a triangle with a rope and tarp from the truck
I tied the stick firmly to the top and the bottom
and placed an oar across it, at my height.
At two in the afternoon, I managed to finish the sail.
Everyone was fucking tired
and I said, 'Everyone sleep,
it's time for everyone to rest.'
We began to move forward, and the man who was supposed to be our
captain didn't sleep

he was looking at me from the corner of his eye,
and I put the oar in the water
and I could see the whirlpool far behind us,
Fuck, we're moving forward!
Around seven in the evening I look ahead
and I see a ship and get up to it to see if they'd pick us up,
I get right in front of it and it dodges us and passes right by me
and ruuuuuu, ruuuuuu,
'Go fuck yourself, you piece of shit!'
They didn't even give us water or anything,
they had the order not to pick us up.

At one in the morning, a big whirlpool.
We begin to spin, out of control
we couldn't control the direction of the raft with the oars or anything
there were some strange lights
a red one here
a yellow one there
and around here a green light.
I didn't know what that was
we rowed, and we couldn't row
and I said, 'Alright
the red light means danger
the yellow light means caution
and the green light means we should go in that direction.'
I woke everyone up and said, 'Everyone!
We're all going to row towards the green light!'
And my woman looked at me and said, 'We're going to die
we're going to fall into the center of the whirlpool
this shit is going to eat us up.'
It was the Florida Straight
where three different swells meet.
The whirlpool was enormous
so, every time the whirlpool took us towards the green light
we would row in that direction with all our strength
one time then another and nothing
until, Boom!
the current let us go
it simply let us go
and then, as if this wasn't enough,
two of the idiots on the raft began to fight
that this one isn't rowing, that the other isn't rowing
'No, no, no! Let's make it out of this one
or else I'm going to take this knife and I'll slaughter you both like dogs,
continue rowing,

that's the only thing we need right now.'

When the sun came up
 I see the color of the sea, and it was different
 the water was green now, and I could see seaweed
 and there was an incredible amount of ships
 luxury boats,
 we were right by the beach
 we had arrived.
 Then, we could see a small boat far away
 with a red line in the middle,
 and one of the men says, 'Guys
 I think it's the coastguard.'
 The boat came at full speed
 and it started getting bigger and bigger and bigger
 and in the end, it was a huge boat,
 you lose the notion of size in the sea
 and of distance too
 you get confused
 you see something on the horizon that looks like a can of condensed milk
 and it ends up being a huge boat,
 and it was coming towards us
 growing and growing
 Fuck!
 What is this thing!
 And they yell, 'Where are you coming from?'
 'From Cuba!'
 And one of the thugs grabs one of the girls and says,
 'We have children, we have children!'
 You'll see that this story isn't over yet.
 Before getting us on the boat, they fumigated us
 as we came up the stairs, they sprayed us with chemicals to disinfect us
 and your eyes begin to cry, and eye boogers come out, and your throat gets
 sore
 'And what the hell is all this!'
 I even left my shoes and everything on the raft
 thinking that when I got on the boat, I'd get shoes and all that.
 Once we got on the boat
 the coastguards shot at the raft.
 I saw it sink and said, 'Goodbye, beautiful,
 Thank you.'
 I didn't know that the journey hadn't even started yet.
 Those days I spent on the water were terrific,
 what was coming next was going to be hard.

We arrived in Guantánamo
 and the land was clean,
 a great golf course,
 with tents made of tarp
 cots
 and mines.

In each tent there were about twenty-five people
 there were places to get water and bathe
 and plastic bathrooms for us to poo.
 We were thirty three thousand people divided into different camps.
 My tent was tent A33
 There were like fifteen young people, a woman, and many old people.
 I told the cop standing outside,
 'I'm going to be the leader in this tent.'
 They put a chip on my wrist
 and I was the one who got food for everyone.
 The cops would tell us,
 'You are never going to travel to the United States,
 those are the president's orders,
 go back to Havana.'
 'No, no, no.'
 Three days later, some Cuban began a hunger strike.
 What do you mean, hunger strike? I have a family to feed!
 I went to the tent where they were organizing the strike
 and they had food under the beds
 they had set up everything for themselves,
 they had prepared for the strike
 while we, poor idiots, starve to death.
 I went in and said, 'Who the fuck is leading this strike?
 Who the hell is going to take my food away from my tent?
 Don't you see I have girls that need to eat?
 I went up close to him, and the guy took a step back,
 You give me the food that belongs to my tent or I'll burn all of this down!'
 Then the strike was over
 or, better said, I ended it.
 Two months went by, and no one said anything
 we didn't know if they were ever going to let us go,
 so, some guys call me and tell me that they are going to have a meeting
 because no one was talking about Guantanamo and its people anymore
 there was no talk about us, not in the papers or anywhere,
 and when I get to the meeting one says, 'Let's give them fire!

we'll make a big mound with all the tents and everything we've got
 and burn it,
 come on, these fuckers don't like fire.'
 But you could see the landing strips nearby
 and little windows that lead to God knows what,
 because this was a military base,
 and I said, 'But fuck,
 who knows what's down here
 we're going to play with fire and we're all going to blow up!
 Let's do something better,
 there's an airport up there
 let's break down the door, and we all go out through there together,
 in the airport there are reporters and policemen
 and they'll see us and talk about us.
 The next day, at ten in the morning
 I peek out my tent
 and there were like two thousand young people,
 And everyone jumped on the big door, and we ran away!
 I get goosebumps,
 I get goosebumps when I tell you.
 Everyone out there!
 We won the streets!
 A few guards ran after us with sticks in their hands
 they were like twenty or thirty, and we were two thousand
 everyone walking towards the airport
 and on the way, people from other camps yelled at us,
 'Hey, where are you going?'
 'To the airport!
 to the airport!'
 And they'd break the door as well, and everyone went towards the airport!
 Shit hit the fan in Guantanamo, brother.e
 But these Americans sure know what to do,
 they blocked every street immediately, with weapons and explosives
 they had men on the ground first
 behind them were men on their knees
 and behind them were men standing up
 all of them with huge firearms
 and clack, clack, clack,
 they were carrying their guns so that we would stop,
 and then they rounded us up,
 one next to the other, one next to the other
 and lead us to where they wanted us to go.
 They laughed at us
 I could tell they were bored and that this was fun for them,
 they were trained to kill

but they didn't want to kill us
 because they saw we were a people.
 You know where they put us?
 in a church.
 A man tried to escape through a river, and he got shot
 and they picked him up as if he were a little suitcase,
 and people threw rocks at the guards
 and the mulato screamed, 'Don't throw any more rocks dammit!
 you're hitting me!'
 He was still laughing,
 with the shot wound and everything,
 that kid was crazy.
 We were all in the church in Guantanamo
 and we began to hear a loud noise
 like elephants walking by.
 Even the men from the guard reserve started to get nervous,
 the Kanes had arrived
 they are these special troops,
 the shortest one of them was two meters tall,
 they were disguised
 their faces were painted
 you could only see their eyes
 you didn't know if they were black or white
 and they came running and screaming, 'Hao! Hao! Hao! Hao!'
 and the guards that spoke Spanish would say to us,
 'Everyone get in the trucks and go back to the camps!
 these people break bones
 these people don't believe in anything
 if they get the order, no one will leave this place alive.'
 A young guard knelt in front of my woman
 and said to her, crying, 'You could be my mother
 please
 go back to camp.'
 By the way, I was still barefoot
 I never got any shoes
 and this was a dry area
 there were cactus thorns all over the sand!
 I'd get a thorn in my feet every time I took a step.

There were neither cigarettes nor food,
 there was a road between the camps
 and we'd do business there
 'Throw me a cigarette!', they'd scream from one side
 'Alright, but you throw the pack with the money over here'
 'Alright, one, two, three!'

And we both threw them at the same time.
 Some people threw the packs with a brick inside
 sons of bitches
 those were the exchanges we made amongst each other
 that was the free market we had.
 And one day from the other side I hear someone yell, 'Kiki!
 Kiki!
 Kiki!'
 And you know who it was?
 Reynaldo,
 well-dressed, with the police
 and I say, 'Fuck, what are you doing here?'
 and he yells, 'Where are your shoes?'
 Isn't life a strange thing?
 I get goosebumps.
 'What do you need?
 Money?!?'
 And he threw twenty-five dollars in five-dollar bills my way.
 'Cigars, shoes?'
 Wait there, don't you move from there!
 We threw me a pair of flip-flops and like ten shoeboxes.
 Reynaldo,
 how about that?
 The prisoner that got under the bed
 that everyone saw he was about to die, and no one helped,
 life balances out,
 thanks to Reynaldo I had flip-flops now,
 and I didn't prick my feet anymore.
 He was a translator
 because he spoke English exceptionally well
 and no one there spoke English.
 That was the last time I saw him
 I don't know what became of him
 I think they didn't let him come over here,
 because whoever has been in the United States before
 and has been involved in a bloody event or crime
 is sent to Cuba and stays there forever.
 In Guantanamo there was a lot of crime too
 people went out to get marihuana that grew in the wild
 and they'd come back all high
 and there was also wine and lots of trouble
 and dead people and everything.
 These things didn't happen at first
 but soon they built a prison they called Camp X-Ray
 which was a tent surrounded by barbed-wire

like a concentration camp,
it was tough.
I'd tell the people in my tent,
'If we ever make it to Miami
we'll meet and drink up and have tons of parties
but not here,
not here.'

They started giving out paroles one day
which are the visas to go to the United States.
The first ones to get them were the children,
and that's how I got out,
because of the girls.
It took eight months of madness, but it happened.
It was very tough
very very tough,
many men had panic attacks
epilepsy attacks
all of it.
Once there was a guy called Andrés, just like me
he escaped one morning
he run out through the border and was killed by a landmine
because it's all minefield there.
But well,
the moment arrived one day, and the four of us were let out
we all came here.
They put us on a plane,
and guess what
to make it to that famous airport that we had tried to walk to
one had to cross a patch of sea on a boat for like twenty minutes.
As I sat on the boat, I'd look at the water and think,
Fuck!
I know nothing!
I was so wrong!

I've learnt to know humanity
but now I'm alone here
peacefully
in the country
in this house I built
with pieces of wood I gathered
in this occupied lot
no one's land
without electricity
without water
just me and my chickens.
This is my cure
I'm nothing
I never had anything
but I was born with something
charisma
and when I need to act
I act.

I am Andrés, and they call me Kiki Puntafina. Kiki because of a hat someone gave me in Cuba, which had the name Kiki embroidered on it. And Puntafina because I'm the one who makes the finest spurs in Miami, hard as an oar. Today, I'm one of the most thorough breeders of fighting cocks you can find. I master every speciality. If they legalized it, it'd mean a lot of money, and this place would be the cockfight mecca of the world. People would travel from all over to fight cocks in Florida. And that would bring hotels, tourism, and tons of prosperity.

Alfonso

It's really difficult
to ask someone from Venezuela to talk with you about something
and not hear about the country's situation.
I had a place that was taken from me
I had a life that now is gone.

Last year the situation was unbearable,
it's true that Chavez passed away
but even though he was still alive
I'm not sure it would be so much different.
There was a stark decrease in the price of oil
the economic situation was very bad
and the social situation already destroyed,
many people began to flee the country,
in 2015 around two million people left the country.
Oil was Venezuela's main source of income,
now the price is less than forty dollars a barrel
but it used to be one hundred and twenty!
And three million barrels a day were sold!
The math is easy, you can do it!
There was money to buy anything
food and materials
consciences and power.

The narcos also started growing
it's now a narco State
the very same high rank officers are involved in the drug trade.
Chavez had connections with the FARC
because they had political affinities
but the ones in power now took over the cartels
they own the distribution
the traffic,
it's an impressive spider web of drug trafficking.
Venezuela is just a transit site
there are no cocaine fields, nothing like that

but it's an important route for the dope
to make it to the Caribbean, Europe and the U.S.

Insecurity took over our lives
until the society just fell apart.
In the 80s it was like any other country:
you would know what barrio to avoid
(the barrio there means slum or favela),
In the poor areas, they murder people
there was confrontation
gangs
you would hear they killed a kid...
But always those stories came from afar.
It's terrible but that's the way it is all over the world.
Later on, those stories grew closer and closer:
you heard about a shooting in the bakery, here, nearby
then in the plaza nearby
then, the victim was your cousin's friend,
up to the point that Caracas changed forever.
A city that always had a nightlife
turned into a city with empty streets,
there used to be a lot of activity
shops,
entertainment
cinemas
parks,
all that ceased to exist,
the cinemas no longer have late night screenings
Why?
It's simple
because not only do you risk your life if you go to the movies
the employees do as well,
the bus drivers,
all the people involved.
So everyone just stays at home
Life in Venezuela now is all about staying at home.

Ever since Maduro took office it is a total decline.
All these people...
they are all puppets
Maduro is a puppet
they are ruled by other interests
by another 'hairy hand' as we say,
call it drug trade
call it corruption,
call it incompetence,

call it whatever you like
 but there are no good intentions
 they are not thinking about us anymore
 We had a life and it was taken from us,
 the city where I grew up
 the city where I studied
 where I started my family
 disappeared
 they took it from me.
 We waited and we waited
 we waited and we waited and we waited
 we didn't want to leave,
 but in the end we decided to do it.

Honestly, I left late
 I should have left earlier,
 it's not fair for any kid
 not fair for any human being
 to not have freedoms
 freedom to go out and return home
 freedom to ride a bike...
 but I didn't want to leave my country
 I wasn't interested in coming to the U.S, or anything like that
 there was no desperate need for money
 I only wanted for the situation in Venezuela to get better,
 and for us to have the life we used to have
 to return to be the country we were
 to speak with our people on the streets
 to go to the beach, for example
 In Valencia we were only half an hour from the coast
 and we stopped going because we were afraid of being killed,
 we would only go really early
 and return by three
 so we would be at home before sunset.
 Before we would go from Friday to Sunday and have lots of fun.
 Also every Friday
 I would leave early from work
 and we would go to the park with my son
 we went to different parks every time,
 at a young age he already knew every park in Valencia.
 And then we would only go once a month.
 'What's up daddy?', my son would ask me.
 Nothing ever happened to us
 but as the sun was setting...
 How can I explain this?
 I would start feeling uncomfortable
 sweating
 everyone around us feeling unease,

'Let's go kids, let's go!'
 Even I would change the way I talked to my kids
 Even I would become more violent with them
 that's what fear does...
 Every year that passed it became worse,
 thieves would interrupt cinemas in the middle of a movie
 they would terrorize everyone with pistols and shotguns.
 I would receive photos and videos everyday.
 Since I've been here I've stopped watching them
 because from here there's not much I can do.

There are people that might think this happens everywhere
 or that I'm against Chavez,
 but it's not like that,
 I cannot explain to you how it all changed
 there's no brain that can endure this
 your mental health is destroyed
 your entire way of life changes,
 at first, you don't realize it
 but when you do, you realize
 that you've stopped doing everything that made you happy.
 And like that
 bit by bit
 you start to dislike your country
 you don't feel at home
 you are afraid for your safety and your kids'
 you hold on, and hold on
 and you try to find a way to keep going on,
 if there is no ham, you eat baloney
 if there is no French bread, you buy sliced bread.
 We used to eat well
 then less and less
 and then the rice crisis occurred
 and then the toothpaste crisis
 and then the diaper crisis,
 and you keep hanging on.
 'We had no diapers for the kids', the grandparents would say,
 'We used cloth diapers.'
 But it was one thing on top of the other
 and then something else on top
 A full series of setbacks,
 and it's not a matter of money or of social classes
 It's not that you can't buy those things because they're expensive
 It's simply that they are not there.

Anyway,
 I don't think we'll reach levels of malnutrition
 I don't dare to ascertain this,
 but we are not an island,
 and no one can control the borders.
 No matter what kind of wall you build
 people will cross a river,
 and if you control the river
 it doesn't matter
 people will cross through the jungle,
 even if you put a guard every thirty feet
 people will find the way to cross
 you can't cover an entire border.

Have you done the math yet?
 Multiply three thousand barrels a day, times a hundred dollars.
 The result is three hundred million dollars a day!
 That was the country's cash flow!
 Every day!
 If you calculate the earnings for a year,
 You won't be able to utter the amount!

My father-in-law was in the U.S.
 he had started the legal process,
 most of Venezuelans here ask for political asylum
 this asylum grants you a protective status
 they cannot deport you right away.
 However, there is a terrible condition:
 You cannot return to your country for five years
 so those who opt for this
 close the option of to go back any time soon.
 This is a tragedy
 no one leaves the home country without leaving something behind
 I fled with my kids and no one else
 the rest of my family is back home,
 it's a tragedy to be away
 I don't want to be away,
 we Venezuelans are very attached to our families
 and this is a tie that's severed in a lonely and violent way.

In my case, we are dealing with two parallel processes.
 My wife is aiming at a work permit,
 which requires a sponsor
 someone who vouches for hiring you
 who validates your resumé and fills requirements
 here they are long and complex.
 The most important thing here is to get a sponsor,
 there's an advertisement they broadcast on Latino TV networks:
 a Latino lawyer that claims,
 'The fastest and most legitimate way to be here
 is through a work certificate
 It provides for everything!'
 And at the end of the ad, it says,
 'Well, all you need is a sponsor'
 Ah, yes of course, that's so easy!
 That is my wife's case.
 In my case, we have an academic application.

I am applying for a one-year English course.
 It also has requirements:
 You need a financial guarantor
 the approval of the language institute
 and you need an I-20 form.
 You can do it on your own or through a lawyer.

Neither of us have been gotten them yet,
 we started the process last year
 about two to three months after we arrived
 we arrived in September and we applied in November
 it has nearly been a year
 and still no reply,
 we have extended our tourist visas
 which was what we entered with
 we have done this twice already,
 you get a stamp with your entry date
 and six months later you have to leave,
 they allowed us to extend because we have applications in process
 but everyday is just waiting and waiting
 and it all got more and more delayed since Trump arrived.
 It's public knowledge that he doesn't like immigrants
 and that complicates everything,
 even considering that our situation is pretty favorable.
 Venezuelan immigration is still pretty legal
 still relatively protected
 the issue is more complex for those entering through the border,
 once you are here as an illegal
 it's almost impossible to change your status
 even if you die here,
 those crossing through the border
 and don't have their entry registered
 it's as if they don't exist,
 they can live here and work
 but for the country, they don't exist.

So, I cannot complain
 I arrived to the house of a relative
 I have managed to work here and there,
 I cannot work officially
 So I do some stuff under the radar
 because we need to eat,
 during the first months I helped my father-in-law in his shop
 there was a lot of work and I went to help out,
 those were the first months here...
 Then, in 2017 I was offered a job at a warehouse

a part-time job
 under the radar
 in the shadows
 you need to behave very quietly.
 If you're an immigrant and you run a red light
 you can get into serious trouble,
 even at the slightest issue
 they will ask for your license,
 even if you want to open a bank account
 they will ask for your license,
 everything is built for cars
 people don't matter here.
 So, if you happen to hit a car
 and you're stopped by the police
 they will ask for your license,
 and you'll tell them, 'I don't have any'
 and you'd show them your Venezuelan passport
 and that's it, you're screwed.
 Anyone is deportable.
 The law is clear
 for a red light they can deport
 And don't ask me what happens if you get a drink
 if you get a little drunk
 and we come with the Latin idiosyncrasy to drink
 to have fun drinking with friends
 to meet and drink with mates,
 but here that's impossible.
 Everything is work, work, work
 but they don't let you work either.

It seems to me very sad the radical position of Trump
 He could be a bit more...
 How to put it?
 He feeds on people's nationalism
 and this only fosters hate
 'Make America great again!'
 What is he talking about?
 Not everything is pretty here, of course
 but it's not that bad either.
 I don't like the health care here
 It's really bad
 what they charge is extremely high
 whether or not you have insurance
 what an MRI costs
 what an antibiotic costs
 if you don't have a plan you are doomed.
 There are many negative things here
 but you cannot imagine the relief
 that means to be able to be seated here
 talking to you
 not having to look around all the time
 waiting for someone to rob us with a gun.
 All the economic problems can be solved
 you start a small business
 a shop
 you sell this or that
 you choose 'from what tree you hang yourself'
 you manage your day to day,
 but you can't beat someone that's trying to hurt you
 someone that's pointing a gun at you.

Well,
 I only hope we get the chance to go forward...
 When I got here I had a conversation with my older brother
 he's been here for many years now

he works in construction,
 he told me, 'Don't worry chamo
 you'll find a way to provide for your family,
 here, even if you clean pools you are able to live a calm life,
 you won't be going to Paris every two years
 you won't travel the world
 but you will be okay,
 the first two years will be tough
 but you will settle in.'
 I have only been here for a year now,
 I don't want to complain
 but I keep remembering what I left behind
 y mother
 my father
 my younger brother
 my elder sister.
 But, really
 I wasn't able to live in Venezuela any more...
 I don't know
 I hope I've made the right choice

My name is Alfonso, I am from Venezuela. I have been living in West Florida, United States, for a year. I came here with my wife and my two kids. I hope we'll make it here. If Trump wants to kick me out, he will have to knock at my door and say it to my face. I'm forty-three years old. I send lots of love to my brothers in Venezuela.

Delbert

We came here escaping a Civil War
my story is not unique
not special,
it's the story of thousands of Latin Americans
who had to flee our countries in the 70s.
Civil war in El Salvador
was not a confrontation between capitalism and communism,
we fought for social change
regardless of its name.
We wanted human rights to be respected,
I saw how they murdered teachers -
teachers that were protesting peacefully.
I was nine or ten when war broke out
it was 1970, 1971.
The image of my parents saying, 'A lot of people have just been murdered'
is still stuck in my head.
One day, elections took place
and my mom used to work at the General Elections Council,
it was the time of the first IBMs
so that night my mom came home shaking,
and my stepfather asked, 'What happened?'
'The Military came
they took us all out
and destroyed the ballot boxes.'
Opposition
the *Unión Nacional Opositora*
led by Duarte
had won.
The Military had locked up all Council employees
and filled the boxes with new ballots.
Fraud.
The Military wins
and the following day
Arturo Armando Molina,
a military president,

was 'democratically' elected.
So people start a revolt
lead by universities
without guns
with a lot of force,
they take *Parque Libertad*
and all of them are murdered
Duarte is exiled to Venezuela,
they cut off two of his fingers.
The demonstration was so massive
the massacre was so massive
with bullets flying everywhere.
That was when the first guerilla group was founded in El Salvador
the FPL
they said, 'We have had military governments since the forties,
our only option is to arm ourselves and fight -
it is the only way.'
And me and my generation grew up
we went to high school.

And in 1975, 1976,
elections took place once again.
Ee were no longer kids,
we were thirteen or fourteen
and again the same dirty play,
only that time Romero became president,
but this new generation
remembered the massacre vividly
our older brothers had already prepared us,
our minds were embedded with revolutionary ideas
it was the time of the Vietnam war
and El Salvador was full of universities.
We were eager for knowledge
we were getting organized,
also the MERS appeared -
the *Movimiento Estudiantil Revolucionario de El Salvador*
and the ERP:
Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo.
All these movements had different ideologies
but all fought for social justice
they said that nothing can ever be accomplished without revolution
we were riled-up
we were determined
the Salvadorans, we are warriors
like the Pipiles,
and that was when the government said, 'Well,

We can't stand them any longer
we have to kill them all.'

And then some Cubans came
and they told us, 'You need weapons.'
So, who gave us the arms?
Cuba.
It was our last resource,
these motherfuckers have to learn
that bullets don't go only one way.
And that is how this war broke out
The guerillas start to destabilized the system
BOOM!
They cut the power of a huge factory
BOOM!
They cut bridges and highways
BOOM!
They attack police headquarters
BOOM!
We have to tear down this system that is destroying our country.

Meanwhile, I was in public high school
and I began to talk, and talk, and talk
in all the meetings, in all the gyms,
'Down with capitalism!'
Revolutionary Delbert was born.
And at the same time as *Los Orejas* appeared,
they infiltrated the movements and then notified the government,
'This kid is speaking too much.'
I was so, so riled-up.
There were four of us:
Vizcarra, alias The Devil
Ricardo
Salvador,
and I,
we were friends
we talked a lot about whether or not we should follow Cuba and Russia.
I wanted neither Yankee nor Russian imperialism,
we are El Salvador -
if they came looking for us, it was because they had their own interests -
nobody ever gave us anything for free.

One day the four of us were waiting for the bus
when an armored car stops in front of us -
a military blinded truck
the door slid open

and a sergeant and two soldiers get out,
armed to the teeth
and said, 'You four, motherfuckers,
get inside.'
They took us to God knows where
they gave us a good beating
Oh, did they punch us,
Uf!
I still have the marks.
See this mark in my wrist?
they hung me from there,
they started questioning me
where were we going to put the next bomb,
where were we hiding the fire guns,
I remember that at the time
they had me standing in front of the desk
with my arms open
and I felt a blow in the back that knocked me right over
it was with the back of a G3
they knew where to hit
I fainted instantly
and I woke up in a cell with my three friends
we were all so beaten up,
so beaten up
I don't know how many days go by when an officer comes
and says, 'We couldn't prove anything, but we'll be watching you.'
They dropped us at some street in the middle of the night
we looked for a phone to call our families.
Our mothers came crying,
we were only fifteen or sixteen years old
and we had been locked for five days
five days of torture,
but our mothers had started a commotion
at university
at the newspapers
and that's why they didn't kill us

A month went by,
And then one day
a normal day
I was at school
I hadn't seen much of Vizcarra over the last few days
maybe we didn't want to recall that episode,
and we were watching a basketball match
and, at some point, he comes over and says hi and goes away
and a few seconds later we hear a machine gun

it didn't stop
 all of us got on the ground immediately
 and some girls come in and say,
 'They killed Vizcarra!
 They killed Vizcarra!'
 I ran to see him
 fuck
 they were really determined not to let him live
 fuck men
 shit.

Two nights later, they get to Ricardo's house
 and, at the same time, they take Salvador -
 and to this day I still don't know what happened to them.
 I saw Vizcarra die
 but I know nothing about the other two.
 At that moment, I went into hiding
 I changed schools
 we were at war but I tried to live a normal life
 and also I was falling for Lilian,
 but I had to hide a lot.
 I graduated high school
 and two days after
 Salvador's mom called me,
 she said they had been in her house looking for me
 she wouldn't stop crying
 she said, 'Delbert,
 you have to flee this country.'
 And so I did
 it was 1982
 we looked for a coyote to take me to the United States
 and I left my country.
 I was twenty-one
 I was just a kid.

Another chapter starts here.
 I met the group with whom we were going to cross
 and amongst them was Roberto
 we became friends
 he was the coyote's number two -
 a classic Salvadoran: dark skinned and small
 but with such a brain!
 and such a power of speech!
 There were five of us,
 plus Roberto and the coyote, seven in total.
 We went through Guatemala without major problems
 but then we got to the Mexican border
 now, that's a strange country
 and their authorities are the worst,
 we were several groups with several coyotes
 they asked for our passports
 and twenty dollars each
 they told us that if we didn't pay
 they would tear our passports and put us in jail.
 Then I learned that Mexicans love the number twenty.
 Every so kilometers
 another stop
 and always twenty, twenty, twenty.
 Finally we got to DF
 the coyote was knocking back drinks non stop
 he was fucking the only woman in the group,
 and a taxi comes by
 and takes us to some neighborhood
 to some house,
 they feed us
 and Roberto says, 'This doesn't look good.'
 The next morning we wake up
 with five Mexicans on top of us
 with knives and all that
 trying to steal everything we had.

Roberto gave them fifty dollars and they let us go.
 Oh, Mexico,
 what a country.
 That night we left to Chihuahua by bus
 eighteen hours
 the bus was full so I was sitting on the floor
 So hungry!
 And suddenly
 I felt one of the sweetest caresses ever
 it was a Mexican woman
 she took my head gently
 and placed it on a pillow
 I fell asleep
 I was only a twenty-year-old kid
 thinking that I didn't have the guts because I was running away
 and now I think that I was alone
 going through that alone...
 That touch was so important
 I will never forget that touch.

We got to Chihuahua and there was no more money
 we slept in a motel that looked like a trash dump
 we were going to go to Ciudad Juárez by train,
 they said it was very dangerous
 that you had to go through a cold dessert
 and that Ciudad Juárez was fucked up.
 Roberto made me pick up a bag of cans and trash
 he told me, 'Just take it, you'll see everything is useful in the end.'
 So we went out with our backpacks
 and our bag of trash
 and we got on the train.
 A while later someone goes by singing, '*Pulque!*
Pulque!'
 Two, three pesos a glass
 a cactus licorice drink
 that looks like milk,
 it was a nice warm drink before night
 Oh, then it got cold as fuck!
 After that I became asthmatic
 I still am
 I developed bronchitis,
 That cold!
 How to describe it?
 it's different from the one we have here -
 you might have minus forty degrees here,
 but that cold gets under your bones

And then someone came with a pot heated with charcoal!
 Coffee!
 The best coffee I ever tasted
 It was boiling
 I can still feel it in my mouth.

We got to Ciudad Juárez
 it was scary
 your blood levels would soar
 you'd get nervous.
 You had to get out of the train quickly
 and if someone got hold of you
 the rule was never to rat on the group.
 Mexico isn't like the US where they deport you by plane,
 there
 if you get caught
 they send you from one jail to the next
 for several months
 until you reach the Guatemalan border
 and they leave you there to find out how to get back to El Salvador.
 I get out of the train and a migration officer comes out
 no one had told me not to make eye contact
 so I looked at him and turned quickly
 he caught me and I quickly said, 'I'm Mexican'
 'Yes, sure.'
 They took me
 I had my head down
 and noticed a pair of the nicest boots I had ever seen
 the guy was a tall man with chain necklaces
 he had his hand on his chest,
 'What about this one?'
 'He's illegal.'
 I turned round and saw Robert in the distance
 slowly closing his eyes and moving his head backwards
 I understood I had made a mistake
 there
 that was it
 I'd gotten caught.
 'Where are you from?'
 'El Carmen.'
 They had told me to say that
 because Mexicans from El Carmen speak like Salvadorans.
 'You lie. Where are you from?'
 'From El Carmen!'
 Then it got loud again,
 'What the fuck is going on here?'

It was Roberto,
 'Leave my brother alone!'
 He had a great Mexican accent
 and he showed them the bags of trash and said,
 'We were with some prostitutes and they stole everything from us!'
 He got everyone riled up
 and people started yelling, 'Leave the kids alone!'
 'Let them go!'
 I was speechless.
 So they let us go.
 Roberto saved me from the lion's den.
 'Did you think I was going to leave you?,' he said.
 He will forever be in my heart.
 We went out and went behind a McDonald's.
 'Wait a second,' he said.
 fifteen minutes later an employee came out the back door
 and gave us a giant bag of French fries
 French fries -
 the best food in the world!
 Then I understood what hunger was,
 what it was like to starve.
 And there we said goodbye,
 he had to go back and I had to keep going.

The next day
 at noon
 it was sunny
 and we crossed the river.
 You could see the US migration office on the other side
 and the gigantic US flag.
 We crossed and started to run across the alleyways as fast as we could
 until we got to a house and they told us,
 'Welcome
 to the United States of America.'
 Crossing just that small section was eight hundred dollars.
 We were there for two weeks
 until one day they took us to El Paso, Texas
 in the city the coyote went inside a shop and never came out.
 He left us there.
 We started walking aimlessly.
 I still had a terrible cough.
 We reached a group of religious people
 that had a shelter for the homeless,
 I had a bath
 I ate,
 and I slept in the upper cabin and got a deadly cough

I fell and almost broke my head.
 The next day I called a friend I had in New York
 and he said, 'Break away from the group and go to the airport
 I will buy a ticket from Delta for you -
 remember, the airline's name is Delta
 like the Salvadoran cigar.'
 I said goodbye to my friends and walked nine miles to the airport
 I left at six a.m. and got there at two p.m.
 They told me there was no ticket
 I didn't know a single word in English
 I hid in the bathroom,
 Airports in the South are complicated
 When I went out and asked again,
 an American took me and asked, 'Where are your documents?
 You don't have them, right?'
 Then and there he arrested me.
 A *chicano* had ratted me out -
 another Latino.
 They prosecuted and imprisoned me.
 The prison was called The pound
 there were cabins full of Hondurans and Mexicans
 they gave me a plate full of food,
 the guards told me, 'Watch out for your stuff, they steal everything here,'
 And the other inmates said, 'There is no need brother,
 they only say that to divide us.'
 It was December
 they told me I was going to be there for two years,
 no way.

I decided I would fake an epileptic seizure.
 A friend of mine from El Salvador was epileptic
 and I thought I could imitate him.
 So one morning
 while I was cleaning the cabin
 (they paid me one dollar a day to keep it clean)
 I had my first seizure,
 with screams, drool and everything.
 'He is possessed!,' they screamed.
 A real actor,
 survival is survival.
 They gave me some pills, I spit them up
 and faked another seizure,
 they were afraid I might die
 and someone would sue them
 so they let me go.

On December 10th
 I was out.
 They transferred me to another jail for five days
 I was alone in a cell with big lights
 I think it was the first time I prayed -
 I asked God to let me sleep
 and so I did
 and one day they came in and said, 'Hey! You're leaving!'
 'Have five days gone by already?'
 'No, they got you a ticket for today.'
 They got me on a direct plane
 to El Salvador,
 I had been deported.

I was home
 and my fellow citizens treated me like shit
 We arrived and the sons of bitches from customs said,
 'Let's see these illegal immigrants'
 And they took all our passports.
 Mine had thirty-five dollars inside
 the thirty-five dollars I had earned cleaning in jail
 and he slipped the money into his pocket,
 so I said, 'Hey,
 that money is mine'
 'Really?'
 Aren't you one of the runaway militant?
 Would you rather I called the National Guard?'
 Well, at least I was home.
 I came out
 I got on the back of a truck
 I lay there
 and looked at the stars.

I got home,
 my mom and Lilian were there
 they didn't care that I didn't get through
 they were happy I was alive
 I told them, 'I'm never going out of here again.'
 I got a job at a pharmacy
 and the military started looking for me
 once more,
 by this time I was with Lilian
 that's when we lost our daughter.
 Until one day they came to the pharmacy looking for me,
 then I knew I had to get out again.

We saved some money
 I had to leave Lilian
 but this time, I was the coyote

and a friend came along
 I didn't charge for guiding
 I was only putting into practice all I had learned
 You learn a lot from those moments.
 We were a nice group of Salvadorans
 and some Mexicans got us some IDs
 We came back to Ciudad Juárez,
 but this time we crossed through Brownsville
 Río Bravo
 like Vietnam
 from the distance the river seemed peaceful,
 But as soon as you put your foot in the water
 you could tell there was a strong current!
 We were marking the depth of the river with a stick
 we were in our underwear
 and we carried our backpacks high on the stick
 but the river was so deep,
 everything got wet anyway.

We reached the other side at one in the morning
 Cri, cri, cri
 Very strange noises
 It was a rat's nest
 luckily the rats got scared and didn't attack us.
 We walked for hours
 hours
 hours
 we hid in a garage
 then a motel
 then a restaurant owned by some Mexicans who fed us,
 and one day we got caught again
 not a chance.
 This time we got a good lawyer
 we asked some friends for money to pay for the bail
 and in two weeks I was in New York.

At that time I worked like crazy
 I didn't stop working for one second
 I worked in landscaping and in cleaning
 I had to bring Lilian
 and I wanted to bring her by plane
 because there is no way you want someone you love
 to go through that border by land
 I wouldn't wish it upon my worst enemy.
 It cost thirty-five hundred dollars
 plus the ticket
 around fifty hundred dollars in total.
 I got the money
 and Lilian came in July 1984.
 I had arrived in January or February.

I was applying for asylum,
 and my son was born
 so we went to the judge,
 and he said, 'I believe you, but Reagan's administration
 says in El Salvador there is no civil war,
 no dictatorship,
 I can't go against my government
 my hands are tied.'
 So they gave us a work permit
 and then we could see how to legalize our situation.
 One year later, the Simpson Mazzoli law was promoted
 Simpson and Mazzoli were two senators
 the law said that anyone who had come before 1982 received amnesty
 but we had got there in 84
 so we couldn't make it,
 then my lawyer
 who worked for an organization that helped refugees
 told me, 'Delbert,
 you will be the first to be deported
 because you are in the system,

they already know everything about you -
the kid can stay because he has papers, but you will have to leave.'
Imagine our despair
we even considered leaving the kid with his godmother.

The day after the president signed that law,
I went to the Canadian Consulate
and, in a broken English, I said, 'I want to go to Canada.'
And they said, 'Okay,
here you have the papers for you
these are for your wife
these for your son
and these for your friend.'
We filled them there and sent them.
My lawyer couldn't believe it.
They had allowed us entry
and let us choose between three countries -
Australia
Switzerland
or Canada.
I had no idea which to choose
so I called my father
and asked him, 'What do you think?'
He said, 'If you go to Australia
we'll never see you again.
If you go to Switzerland, third world war is coming.
Canada is America
it's freezing cold
but at least it's close.'

And this is my home now
My kids don't like it
they are resentful
bittered,
this country is getting worse
everything is mortgage and debt
rents are unpayable,
I don't like it so much either
but this country gave me more than El Salvador
and I'm glad not to live in the States
even more so now with fucking Trump.
I don't renounce Latin Americans,
but this country gave me a chance to live.
People are so cold
my daughter is pissed at this society
they are very superficial

and there is a lot of racism and discrimination,
everyone pretends there isn't, but there is,
and neoliberalism is at a maximum
it erases the principles
it erases the stories
I've read so much about Latin America!
I fought so much for Latin America!
And look at where I live now...
But I fled war
I saw my friends die
so I'm grateful.

I'm neither from here nor from there
neither are my children
they don't even speak Spanish,
so we don't have many Latino friends,
they think we are ashamed of being Latino,
but it's not that
honestly,
we worked so much that we didn't have time to teach them two languages,
nor for Spanish to be our speaking tongue
I would be happy speaking Quiché
or Mayan
Spanish is the language of our murderers
fuck the Cross
God is in our bodies
in our history
in our food
not at church,
there I become radical again
fuck the Bible
it's the opposite of holy.
Here they ask me, 'What is your religion?'
And I say, 'Free thinker'.

I am Delbert Zepeda. Salvadoran. I live in Toronto. Only my wife knows these stories.
If life some day brings us together again I can tell you more about them. One of the most
beautiful songs I know is from Argentina: '*Yo adivino el parpadeo de las luces que a lo
lejos van marcando mi retorno ... La, la, la ... Volver... Con la frente marchita...*'
That song is me.

Ronda

I grew up on the border
near Del Río
which is in Mexico
and then in Nuevo Laredo
and then I also lived in El Paso.
We always had Mexican farmers in the ranchos
they speak such good Spanish
but I speak muy poquito,
I should be ashamed of myself.
I was engaged to a Hispanic for five years
Sergio
rico y suave,
he was great
we went travelling in Mexico and I never worried about a thing
it was so wonderful.
But he was a heavy drinker.
We were about to get married and go to Greece for our honeymoon
and we had a car and a boat,
and all of a sudden, I realized:
Do I really want to be with a heavy drinker for the rest of my life?
I almost fell into what a lot of women fall into
I kept having this inner voice telling me,
'Just go and marry him,
you spent so much money on that wedding'.
And I said, 'Hell, no!'

I left him
and worked for a company called Philip Morris for a while,
you probably know it
Marlboro cigarettes.
I'm a non-smoker.
I was a big hypocrite,
but they paid me so well!
At such a young age!
They give you a vehicle

Ronda

they give you expense money
they give you free gas
free everything
great insurance
and that's not easy to come by!
That's how they do it,
that's how everyone starts working for them,
and so did I.

Have you seen any animals yet?
 We have lots of movement.
 We have goats
 we have cheap rams,
 there are corrals around and around,
 and there are mountain lions
 that appear at night at the top of that mountain.
 We also got mulled deer,
 you'll see some
 their ears are so large.
 Texas has white tail deer primarily
 but in this part we have mulled deer.
 They are really good to eat!
 Did you ever have deer meat?
 It's a country thing.
 Now is deer season
 there's a lot of people coming by
 and shooting the deer.

I'm not a hunter anymore.
 I grew up with a big hunter
 in a very large ranch
 and all that ranch style
 is all about going out
 and killing deer, and killing snakes, and killing coyotes.
 Through the years I've completely gone the opposite way,
 I have so much love and care for animals
 I can't shoot a deer anymore.
 I have a friend that will soon try to shoot a deer here on my property,
 we'll use every part of it
 to me it is almost a spiritual thing at this point,
 the deer has been provided as a source of food,
 so let's use every part of it:
 you can use the skin for blankets, rugs and pillow cases
 all the meat you can fry up in different ways

you can make hamburgers, sausages, turkey,
 when you get in the intestine there are some foods you can make too,
 I have a hard time eating intestines but some people don't.
 We are so country out here
 it probably sounds funny
 but that's what we do.

I grew up on a ten-thousand-acre ranch,
 a cattle ranch along the border.
 Growing up hunting...
 you always had a gun in the back of the vehicle
 and you could hunt at any time,
 so we always kept our freezer full of deer meat
 which was quite nice, actually.
 One evening,
 my little sister and I were out hunting
 she was five years old
 and she had a baby gun
 and I had shot this deer
 and it was dying but it wasn't dead yet
 and she wanted to be part of the killing
 (this sounds horrible, please don't take this horrible)
 So before I cut the throat of the deer
 I let her get her baby gun
 and shoot:
 Bang, bang!
 She felt that she had killed the deer,
 she was so, so proud of herself.

My real dad was a world champion cowboy,
 he is in the Cowboy Hall of Fame.
 I was born the night that he got his Cowboy of the Year
 in 1967
 my mother was rushed down to the hospital
 and he got his award at the rodeo and then came down the hospital.
 That was up in Colorado,
 we lived here in Texas but we went for the award,
 my mom couldn't handle the altitude
 so she went into labor.
 Two years later he crashed a plane near Marathon
 and killed himself.
 Then my mother remarried four more times
 so I have five fathers.
 Yeah!
 I've lived all over
 like fifty places,

and people asked, 'Oh, are your parents in the military?'
 and I laughed and I said, 'No,
 it's my mother
 she marries frequently'.
 We were always moving
 always moving.
 Each father taught me a little something
 and had a big impact on the direction my life took
 both good and bad,
 when I was little it was great,
 at Christmas time I got so many presents!
 But in later years
 I realized that having so many moves and so many fathers
 created a lot of issues for me
 issues that I had to get through.
 When your mother shuts off a chapter of her life
 your chapter of life is cut off too
 whether you want it to be or not,
 you're supposed to love, love, love that father with all your heart
 and when she gets tired of him
 you're supposed to not like him anymore.
 That was very unfair,
 because my mother was a very hateful woman
 towards her ex-husbands and towards everyone
 there were no friendships.
 She taught me that I should cut everything off when it's over,
 so through the years sometimes it was easier for me to cut it off and not
 look back
 but that stopped me from establishing really good relationships
 and deep friendships...
 I wish I could go back
 and recover some of those friendships that I just cut off
 and go, 'Do you know what?
 I'm sorry
 we could have had a great friendship
 had I just put forth a little effort'.
 And I did not
 I did everything selfishly and just walked away
 with many men in my life.
 That's what learned when I was a kid
 now I'm learning to hold on to things.

Coming here to the desert
 being here for the last ten years
 has been a very healing thing for me
 I gained so many strong friendships
 that means I'm growing, doesn't it?
 It's very difficult to find many that are going to be there regardless
 and out here I've many good friends.
 If I got into a situation or needed a shoulder to cry on,
 I can name quite a few people that would be there for me:
 Ana!
 Then I got a woman down the road, her name is Bonny.
 I got another one!
 Callie!
 A lot of them are older women right now
 and I think their place is to mentor me,
 they realize I don't have a family to fall back on
 they took me in, into that mother, grandmother like care love of women.
 I'm fifty years old now
 and I'm going through this horrible change
 and I'm not understanding anything
 and they go and tell me, 'You're ok
 you're gonna be ok
 and I go, 'What!?'
 It's not the end of the world!?'
 Fuck!
 It's horrible!

I don't have a family
 I've been disconnected from my whole family for the last ten years
 and that's partly my doing
 and a big part, their doing,
 if a relationship is toxic
 you need to leave that relationship
 and sadly, my family would make me sick
 with them around I would never be in a good place,

you can try and be there for somebody
but when you're let down, and let down, and let down
separating is better.

I'll tell you some serious stuff, if you let me
I may shed a tear too.
Let me get some coffee.
My mother was still very judgmental of me
I had a very abusive mother
she had me at fifteen years old
she was still a child
I believe fifteen is too young for anybody,
so my mother wasn't ready for me
and then when I was two and my father got killed
she was pretty resentful of the whole situation.
We never got along
she did not have a relationship with her mother either
recently my grandmother passed away
and my mother wasn't even there to say goodbye
she's a very stubborn woman and very bitter
and a person that can never say sorry.
Now I'm learning not to be that way
it didn't work for me,
but I was that way for many years
I didn't blame me
I didn't know anything better
I didn't know anything different.

I never wanted children
and then I met a man from Great Britain
he was living in San Antonio
and I thought he would make a great father,
but I didn't want to be married
I don't want a full dad there.
I got pregnant and I lost the baby
and then I was pregnant another time
thinking that I was ready for a child
and I lost that one too.
I was going through dark times
and all of those times I called my mom
and she was too busy to help me.
Those type of things start to get into you
and that's just the tip
she was always like that.
I went through three divorces
and got really depressed

and I started drinking
and I got pulled over by the police.
They took me into jail
it was a nightmare
and the man that I was going to have the baby with
he called my mother and said, 'Hey,
we need to bill Ronda out of jail'
And she said, 'No, leave her there
that's what she deserves'.
Rick took me out
he paid the bill
and then my mother created a huge angry war within the family
saying that he had no right to take me out
that he had overstepped his boundaries.
Oh, I can't believe my mother did that!

There was another time:
years later I remarried one more time
to an abusive man
that was very toxic
we went to Austin
and I started to get more and more depressed.
Part of it was because I come from a very athletic background
and I ran a lot of marathons
and I had been training so much that last year
I ran three marathons in three weeks
New York, San Francisco and Washington DC,
and I ended up with a herniated disc
I went from extreme training
to zero
nothing.
So my body is aching and I just lost a baby,
and I'm drinking and I'm in a bad marriage,
and I was trying to leave him and move some other place,
and I called my mom and I said, 'Could you help me pack?'
'No way, I'm busy'.
So I was in Austin and I met new people
and one of those people introduced me to Meth.
That's the worst drug in the world.
But I was trying to cheer up
and give training lessons to children
and I said, well, I could use some energy.

I became totally addicted,
and this little group of people that loved me supposedly
they were addicts too

so it was very easy to keep our little circle.
 That went on for four years
 I'm lucky I have my teeth
 I'm lucky I still have my hair.
 One day I decided that enough was enough
 and that's when I started coming out here
 this was my escape
 that was eleven years ago,
 I would leave Austin to get away from that.
 My family thought I came here to do more drugs
 but no,
 this was all healing.
 The guy that I was dating,
 he rode a Harley Davidson
 and he was in a club,
 and my mother made a story
 that I was coming here selling drugs to drugs cartels
 and to the bandidos across the river.
 Really?
 Me? To the drug cartels and the bandidos?
 I was actually coming to Terlingua to get away from drugs
 because Terlingua doesn't allow that,
 everyone smokes pot,
 mushrooms and all-natural stuff
 but don't bring any other speed.

I was starting to think about moving here full time
 but I kept driving back to Austin
 because the drugs were there,
 so I would be here for two, three weeks
 and when I started to get a little fidgety
 I would go back to Austin.
 My boyfriend at the time was moving to Arizona,
 he said, 'Do you wanna go up there
 and get away from all these?'
 And I said, 'Absolutely'.
 But Meth is not alcohol, where you have physical withdrawals,
 you have mental withdrawals
 that's the scary thing of this drug.
 So I went up there not knowing about these withdrawals
 and I started to have anxiety attacks
 my moods were doing these crazy, crazy movements
 and I would end up in the emergency room
 and I went to a doctor there and said, 'What's going on with me?'
 He wasn't aware that I was using Meth at the time
 So he diagnosed me Bipolar.

He gave me Prozac.
 If you are using Meth
 Prozac intensifies the behavior.
 So he gave me Prozac and all of a sudden I'm crazier than ever!
 Oh, God!
 Crazier than ever!
 And I went to another doctor and he said,
 'let's change you over to these
 and let's add this pills to make your mood a little better'.
 Before you know it they got me on three or four medications.
 I had never taken medicine like that
 I started to feel totally crazy and zombie
 and doing some really bizarre, bizarre things.
 I started to get really forgetful,
 I knew something really bad was happening
 I couldn't remember what I was doing
 I would go days at a time not remember anything.
 And I called my mom.
 I said, 'This is our last hope.'
 I asked you many times in my life to help me out
 but right now I'm coming at you because I really need your help
 I never felt suicidal
 I never felt any of this
 but right now I don't know what I'm feeling
 and it scares me
 and I need some help'.
 They lived here in Texas,
 so they got their RV and they went to get me to Arizona.

This is where everything gets scarier.
 there are two weeks, while I was taking all that medication,
 that I don't remember,
 and that was when they were there.
 I can remember the face of my stepfather talking in a cloud
 I can hear some voices
 I can see my mother nagging at me constantly.
 And there was a night,
 they said I was very unstable
 so they wanted me to sleep in the RV with them.
 All this is what she told me later, I can't remember anything.
 She said they had a bottle of wine and I wanted a glass of wine
 and they said, 'You're taking so much medication,
 you can't have a glass of wine'.
 My mother, telling me what I can and can't do
 once again
 my whole life.

That pissed me off
 and apparently I went and got a glass of wine anyway
 and when she walks over...
 I never hit my mother
 she hit me so many times, so many times...
 And apparently I'd had enough of it
 and I beat my mother
 and my step dad stepped in the middle
 and he threw me down on the ground.
 They called the police.
 Police handcuffed me
 and asked them what they wanted to do with me.
 They said they could put me in jail, but that that wouldn't work
 that I would probably need to go to a psychiatric hospital.
 They agreed and the police said, 'Maybe the first days you shouldn't go visit
 so she can calm down',
 And they said, 'No worries,
 we won't go
 this night we're leaving, back to Texas'.
 They left me,
 they put me in a psychiatric hospital and left.

I tried to talk to her sometimes after that,
 she thinks I'm this horrible, horrible person,
 and she said, 'You're dangerous
 you'll always be a drug addict
 we don't want you'.
 I went through a good five years dealing with that
 I'm good with that
 even though I'm crying right now
 sometimes you have to let that stuff go
 you can fight it, fight it, fight it,
 but you know?
 I know that part of all my addiction
 and my behaviors of that time
 where due to my mother,
 and rather than blame her anymore
 or fight her anymore
 I realized I need her out of my life
 just shut her out of my life
 and since I did that
 my world has evolved in beautiful, beautiful ways.

I think last time I did any drugs was seven years ago
 I came here and I shouted, 'This is my new life!
 This is my new chapter!'
 I lived in the ghost town for a few years
 and I only bought this property two years ago,
 none of this was here
 I made it all myself,
 something beautiful happens every day here
 I won't take any day for granted anymore
 I don't stress over things anymore
 I'm sure life will produce what I'm supposed to have.
 These past two years I really got passionate about what I want
 it's so exciting
 Oh, I'll never touch that shit again!
 Ever!
 No!
 That's what gave me all that anxiety and that pain,
 now I feel my brain is going back to working normally
 and my smile is coming back too,
 Hey, my smile is back!
 Yes!

See this very large mountain?
 My great grandparents,
 back in the early sixties
 used to live in the ranch below it.
 I've never been there
 I wasn't born yet
 this was before there was even a road
 from Alpine to here
 so it was all desert.
 Now I can step out of my porch
 and look right where my great grandma was,
 knowing that she was just five miles away from me
 gives me goosebumps.
 Who would have ever thought that my land
 would be looking at their land?

Back then my mother married this guy
 who's no longer living.
 This was his favorite place on earth
 he came down to fish in the Rio Grande
 to hunt mule deer on the mountain
 to go into the cave and explore,
 back then there were no regulations anywhere
 so you could down go into the mining caves
 and there were a lot of Indians there
 and we would take lots of stuff from them.
 My sister got this case full of Indian toys:
 moccasins, pottery,
 old guns.
 It should be in a museum but she's got it.
 It's worth a lot a lot of money.

Do you know anything about the show?
 Oh my God!
 It's on National Geographic
 there are eight episodes called *Badlands, Texas*.
 They came out two years ago and videoed for this reality show,
 they wanted to highlight how we survived
 and I was just starting to live here
 and they wanted to see how a single woman could stand it here
 in the middle of nowhere.
 They were supposed to highlight all these way of living,
 but suddenly Glynn was killed
 he was one of my best friends
 that was a horrible, horrible murder.

When we went to court they were filming everything
 and everyone expected that the man who killed Glynn
 whose name is Tony Flynn and was also a dear friend of mine
 would go to jail for murder charges.
 But he got off, cleared of all charges.
 Unbelievable.
 That changed the direction of the show
 they all of a sudden thought, 'Wow, we got a murder on our hands
 this is going to be an even better topic!'
 And they put us to a side
 and forgot what our part in the show was.
 Sadly they got too into the murder
 and it got too repetitive, so people got tired of seeing it.
 If they would have shown the people that live here
 there would be a second season and a third season.

We grew up together with Glynn
 the one that was murdered
 we knew each other as kids in high school
 he was the one person that I had a connection with when I came here,
 I was working at his restaurant that is called La Kiva

I would waitress for him.
 La Kiva was a very known dive bar
 dive bars are real rough,
 you got rough people.
 you might have cockroaches on the wall and mice coming across
 and that's what people love,
 you can be in there
 and all of a sudden someone would ride his horse through the bar,
 one night we were there and all these naked people just came running in,
 it was very cool
 everyone smoked pot on the back porch
 in the kitchen
 wherever,
 another time, I was waitressing
 and I turned around and there was a guy with a unicycle
 just riding down the stairs and making turns
 and people are eating, and breaking, and laughing,
 you never knew what you were going to get
 it was a lot of fun.
 The restaurant is near the area that houses all the river guides
 river guides, they run the Río Grande
 it's quite seasonal for them
 in the summer it gets really, really hot
 so they go up north to Colorado and Canada
 and then they come back here.
 A lot of them don't have cars
 they sleep in tents near La Kiva,
 so they got off the river and they came in and got drunk
 we had a really great family atmosphere there among the river guides.
 Tony was a river guide
 at the time of the murdered was about two hundred and eighty pounds
 he was a big, big boy
 he'd been an ex football player
 real rough
 nice as could be,
 and Glynn was one hundred and fifty pounds
 he was a little guy,
 you can see the difference there.
 Tony was going through a lot of emotional things,
 of course, there was a girl involved.
 That night I was supposed to be working
 but for whatever reason I stayed home.
 Tony and Glynn closed the bar down
 and they stayed drinking together
 they had like eight or ten tequila shots,
 I know Tony was doing a lot of cocaine

and they were smoking a lot of pot
 and they were very stressed up,
 and we think that Glynn said, 'Hey,
 I slept with her too',
 and that just set Tony into a rage
 and he beat Glynn to death,
 he beat him to death, so severe...
 It was horrible
 I saw the photos and everything in court
 and I saw Glynn the next morning when he was still lying there.
 Tony bashed his column
 broke every rib,
 then picked him up,
 dragged him a hundred and fifty feet
 and there was this big oak tree
 and he picked him up and slung him into the oak tree
 like a ragdoll
 so Glynn had all these holes,
 I don't know if I should be so graphic.
 He broke every part of him
 internally and externally.
 I had never heard of something as drastic as this killing
 in all my life.

That morning I got a phone call
 and Ana said, 'Ronda,
 I don't know what to think
 someone said that Glynn might be dead'
 'What!?'
 'Just go and find out'.
 So I drove right to La Kiva
 with my pajamas on
 and when I got there the police was already there
 they had the whole place sectioned off
 and he was out there
 he was in his body bag
 it was horrible.
 It's just that we're here in the middle of nowhere
 so we have to wait for forensic people to get here,
 they had to drive all the way from El Paso,
 so he was out there laying in that parking lot for like seven hours
 and it was hot that day,
 I sat there in my pajamas the whole day...
 I know it's weird
 but I just didn't want him to be there by himself,
 and no one else was there except the cops.

It was a horrible, horrible, horrible day,
and to find out that Tony,
who was a very good friend of mine too
was the one who did it
was worse.

That divided our community immediately,
because there were still people that didn't believe Tony did it
and other people saying, 'Ok, he did it
but still we have to support him'.
Being a neighbor is like being a cop
the cops are going to take care of one another
or military guys
they're gonna protect one another
even if they did wrong.

It was a nightmare
for two years it's been a nightmare,
but I also gained a lot of strength
because I'm talking about it
in town
in the show,
Tony is a murderer
and I think that should not be forgotten
and if we don't talk about it
people are gonna forget.
It's not fair that he is out in Colorado
working as a river guide
living his life,
he murdered our friend
and he got away with it.

I remember when we left court
Tony, and his parents, and his sisters
were talking Facebook selfies
with these big smiles.
It was horrible.
Have some respect for the family that lost their son!
But no, they thought it was so funny.
The prosecuting attorney went for first degree murder
and that was a mistake
that is premeditated murder
and Tony didn't premeditate it,
he didn't do that.
In fact,
there is a video

ten minutes before this all happened
that they're hugging each other
and saying, 'I love you'.
The bartender videoed it right before she left.
That also appears in the show,
you can watch it in Badlands, Texas.

The safety out here
 living on the border
 being a female by herself
 is a big deal.
 Now there are all these thoughts about a border wall going up,
 what to think...
 This area is very different from other areas in Texas on the border
 this area is very safe
 we have such large mountains
 and so much open country out here that is untouched
 and two thousand foot canyons,
 the immigrants that want to come over from Mexico
 they won't take this route
 because it's too rough
 any of the Mexican people that try
 they die
 it's just too far
 the end up dehydrated,
 and we have mountain lions
 black bear,
 some of them also drown swimming the Río Grande...

For all this
 there's absolutely no reason to build a wall in this area
 we have a lot of people freaking out
 specially the National Park guys
 saying the wall will destroy everything
 the beauty and all that,
 but our governors are not going to go in and put a wall through here
 that would be pointless
 stupid,
 people think this wall is going to be this huge wall
 like the Wall of China
 and it won't be
 it'll be more like electric fences and drones.

It's a tough call though
 all this thing about the wall,
 I have to say that I'm on both sides.
 I don't think there should be a wall out here
 however
 I lived in the border of El Paso
 and Nuevo Laredo
 where they're killing women all the time
 all the time,
 and me
 as a single woman
 I couldn't live alone there
 building a business and a life
 because if they didn't kill me, they would take me into drug trade
 or sex trafficking,
 the shops are closing because nobody wants to go there
 The drug cartels are killing everybody!
 On this side too!
 It's too dangerous
 the numbers are there
 it's a fact.
 In that area, I think we do need a border wall.
 Is it going to keep everybody out?
 No, it's not
 but it's going to keep a lot of people out
 a lot of people that shouldn't be coming over.

People also discuss guns.
 I'm on the gun side
 I'm gonna carry a gun out here
 and you're not going to take it away from me,
 I'm a single woman
 and if you come after me
 I'm going to shoot you.

People is killing each other
 with guns
 with knives
 with trees
 with hands,
 Glynn was murdered and there was no gun
 so this whole war, 'Get rid of the guns,
 get rid of the guns'
 I disagree with it.

A lot of people really get aggravated with me
because I do promote the wall in other areas
and I do promote carrying guns.
They think that because of that I'm a horrible, horrible person
and I'm not
those people that say, 'No border wall, no border wall
no guns, no guns.'
They haven't lived down here like I have
they don't know.
I'd like for all of them to go
and stay a week or two in those areas
and then come back and tell me what they think.
They won't be able to tell me what they think
because they would get killed.

My name is Ronda Haberer. I'm a single woman. I live on a dead end street in Texas, on
the border between Mexico and the US. Terlingua is the closest little village, it's sixty-five
miles away from here. I'm literally in the middle of nowhere. These people that get to cross
the border out here, enter right on the other side of this mountain, right on the other side.
But most of them don't make it.

Racism is still here
it's still everywhere,
is like having a chronic illness,
the only thing you can do
is learn to live with it.
Once
when I was in Brooklyn
I was still a kid
I went to Manhattan Beach with my cousins,
we went riding our bikes
having fun
and we passed through an Italian neighborhood
and some guys started to chase us,
'Hey, niggers, get out of here!'
They were soon a whole crowd chasing us
and they had baseball bats and chains
and we sped up
we started to go faster and faster
and faster and faster
until a bus stopped and the driver shouted
'Come up, come up!'
And we got in and he took off.
That was one of the worst experiences
I had in my whole life.

I was born in Haiti
 came up here at an early age
 we lived in New York
 went to school there
 then I went to college
 community college
 I studied Biology.
 Life in New York was sweet
 back then
 family was fine
 they were strict
 made sure that you do what you are supposed to do:
 learn to do everything by the book.
 Then I got married
 kids
 four kids
 and then we went to Florida
 to Daytona Beach
 which was a crazy place to live
 jobs suck
 jobs suck over there
 they don't pay,
 I worked for waste management
 a sanitation company
 it's a garbage company
 we did recycling
 it didn't last too long
 I only stayed there a year and I left.
 So I went to apply for this rental car company
 they needed somebody to rent cars,
 I did the interview and everything
 and I was qualified for the position
 but then the woman told me what they would pay
 six dollars and twenty-five cents,
 and I said, 'Are you kidding me?'

This is no money!
 there's no way in the world I'm going to take
 six dollars and twenty-five cents from anybody,
 plus
 they had so many things for you to do
 for that six twenty-five
 not only did you rent cars
 you also had to pick up customers
 that had no way to get to the place,
 go to auctions to pick up cars that they buy
 go to the DMV to register the vehicles
 and when they didn't have anything else for you to do
 they wanted you to clean the bathroom.
 what!?
 I laughed and I walked away.

My father worked for the government
and back then
in order to leave the government
any position in the government
you had to do a hush hush thing,
nobody should know that you were leaving.
And that was how we came up,
we arrived straight to New York
and what I was expecting
it wasn't what I saw
everybody in the island thinks that if they come to America
they will find bars of gold in the street
but it's not that way,
you can achieve things in America
but you have to work hard for it
harder than they think.
I started working at an early age
I was like sixteen
I worked in this ceramic factory in New Jersey
where they make those soup dishes.
Back then it was eighty dollars a week
that was a lot of money
you could buy a gallon of gas for a Quarter
five loaves of bread for a dollar
so it was an easy life,
you could rent a whole house for fifty dollars a month
compare that to now
when you got to have at least twelve hundred dollars
to really rent a house,
money is completely different now
so life is completely different.

I grew up in Haiti
and we have this complex
that work has to be something
with suit and tie,
that's our mentality
but I've grown
and I don't mind what I have to do
as long as it's legal
I work.
I've done sales
work in offices and stuff
manager, supervisor,
but it gets boring after a while
suit and tie is not my forte,
what it really matters to me
is to work with people that are friendly
that's all that matters
friendship
that is what keeps you coming back everyday.

My dad left first
 then my mom left
 she left us with my older sister
 my mom had twelve kids
 two had died at an early age
 so that left us with five guys and five girls
 now we're down to four guys and four girls
 one of each died again.

I had became a little bad boy then
 studying karate and judo,
 I had this little friend
 that I used to practice karate with
 and he borrowed this kid's book
 a karate book
 he came home and we practiced
 almost everything in that book,
 and after that
 we were sitting on this porch
 and a merchant was passing by with a banana basket
 going to the market,
 and it looked good
 really good
 but we didn't have no money to buy none,
 and my friend said, 'I'll be back'.
 He left
 he came back with five dollars
 he gave me two-fifty
 he kept two-fifty
 and we bought food
 we bought bananas
 and we ate good.
 Then
 later on in the afternoon
 I was at school

and this other kid came over and said, 'Where is my book?'
 I said, 'What book?'
 I didn't know the kid
 he said, 'My karate book'
 'I don't have your book,
 I didn't borrow no book from you neither'
 And he kept calling me a thief
 and I said, 'Look, don't do that
 I don't know you
 you don't know me,
 we didn't have no deal',
 so he kept on doing it
 and I got upset
 so I jumped off the ground
 and he took off running
 so I ran after him
 for like six blocks
 and finally I grabbed him
 and I swung
 and I slugged him
 and I hit him.
 That was the day before I came to america.

As soon as I arrived to New York
 I asked my mom to send me back
 back home
 and she didn't want to do that,
 I figured if I went back
 I'd be a politician
 or a lawyer
 because I love to argue,
 but she didn't want to send me back
 so I stayed
 and then I really wanted to get into dentistry,
 my father was to pay my way to go to Mexico to do it
 so while I was in college in New York
 I was waiting for him to pay my way,
 but he never came through.
 Then he and my mom got divorced
 and he wanted to come back with my mom
 and I was against it
 I didn't want my mom to go back to him
 because I felt he disrespect us,
 he had his chance and he lost it
 so he was mad with me for
 and he didn't pay anything.
 Then he died
 and that was it,
 I still hate him a little bit.

The place where I lived in Haiti
 was a small village
 everybody knew everybody
 there was a lot of poverty
 a lot of people died of hunger,
 but also a lot of people were willing to work the land.
 Now they all want to come to America
 they want to just leave
 nobody wants a farm no more
 they want to sell everything
 to come to America
 by boat
 however,
 thinking they're gonna find bars of gold
 but when they get here
 they can't work with no papers
 How are you gonna work?
 So they end up getting fake IDs
 or getting with someone who has papers
 or doing prostitution
 a lot of them doing prostitution
 or doing whatever to earn a living,
 when they could have stayed home.
 Now there are a lot of them in Chile
 in Mexico
 in Guadalupe
 Martinique
 and, what's the other island?
 Barbados,
 all of them
 just want to get away from Haiti
 nobody want to stay
 but what they don't understand
 is that when you get to those places
 either you have papers

or you got no job.
Here is my problem with a lot of these people:
they won't take a broom and sweep the streets
in the place where they come from
but they will come to other places
to do that same job.
They do it in America
but they won't do it in Haiti
I don't get it
that is bad,
What is it about America
that everybody want to come?

Growing up back then I remember
we had sanitation trucks
we had people that would sweep the streets
pick up all the garbage and all that
and now we don't even have that,
there's nothing left.
What we have now
is some white folks out there
making millions of dollars,
they got these little plastic juice containers
that they sell for a dollar
and people drink juice
and drop the plastic on the ground,
so now these folks
are paying the same Haitians
like three, four dollars for the day
to go around and pick up the plastic
and bring it back to them,
so then they package them and send them back
to remanufacture them here
making millions of dollars
with something we are doing and consuming ourselves.

I'm Roland Theodore. Right now I'm fifty-eight years old. I live in Jersey. Brothers, just keep in mind that America is a country, not a path of gold. Just take a picture of my hand, I'll be the mystery man.

Luis Miguel

Ever since I came here,
I haven't gone back.
Ten years ago.
It's true.
And I don't know when I'll be going back.
You come here because your country is real poor
and you grow tired of poverty
you come because you don't want to steal
don't want to end up in jail
don't want to end up dead.
That's why I came to the US.
But sometimes I feel the urge to go back,
one lives more peacefully there
without problems
without money
breathing in the pure mountain air.
But I cannot go back,
I came here poor
I don't want to go back poorer.

You pay a lot of money to come here
I paid fifty hundred dollars
I was smuggled in through the desert of Mexico
hiding in the wilderness
starving
looking out not to get stunned or bitten by critters.
Lots of people die.
While walking
I saw a woman lying on the ground
bloated
covered with branches,
and the guide leading us said,
'Keep walking or you'll end up like her!'
You are very tired
and the people guiding you treat you awfully.

Two women came with us
we were three men and two women
women suffer more
because they have less strength in their legs,
and you have to walk a lot
and at night it gets very cold
a cold that is unreal
and in the daytime, it gets very, very hot
scorching
it's very hard to get here
so, when you are given the chance
you have to take advantage of it.

I had a cousin who came like I did,
and he stole
pulled out money from a bank
with a card that was not his
and when the woman who owned it realized,
they checked the bank's camera and he was there.
The police searched for him and found him here
a policeman came to the house and took him in
they put his hands behind his back
and deported him
took him to Guatemala,
I keep saying to him,
'If you know how much it takes!
Why did you do this?
This is just why we came here!
So we would not have to do this!'

I got very ill
I underwent heart surgery
I spent a year in the hospital,
an infection was rotting my heart.
They removed the damaged part
and replaced it with something made out of another material.
The thing with my cousin happened after I left the hospital.
He liked the easy life
he would get really cheap drugs
marihuana
coke
and sold it cheaper than the others
'As long as they don't realize it's ok,' he'd say to me,
'Fine,' I'd reply,
'But when you're dead
don't try to reach me.'

Life...
It's pretty
for those who can have it
but those who don't,
suffer.

When there's no work, I think,
what am I going to do?
I look for work in restaurants
in landscaping
in construction
just to avoid spending the day asleep,
it's very expensive here
they take advantage of us and overcharge
living here is hard
everybody thinks everyone has money
Princeton is supposed to be one of the best universities there is
it probably is,
because it's very very expensive.
I'm paying five hundred dollars a month in rent
for a room

How am I going to pay that?
When you don't pay the rent they kick you out on the street
and you have to go sleep on the mountain
on the other side of route 206.
It's a nice place for a walk
I like the mountain very much
when there is not much work
I go there to clear my head,
there are little lakes
I sit and watch people fish
I stare at the water,
I don't like being cooped up
there are three people living there already,
they have their little dwellings made from branches and their clothes
and they live like that.
If I had a place, I would invite them to live with me
but I am only scraping by.

Rent
food
phone.
I need to have around seven hundred dollars a month
and not for a luxurious life even
it's very stressful
sharing a room with people you don't know,

and sometimes you don't trust them.
 I used to live with a friend who brought another friend
 and he drank a lot
 and was mean.
 When he was drunk,
 he'd say he would go out and kill,
 he carried knives.
 I had a car back then,
 so, when he got like that, I would sleep in the car
 because maybe he would stab me in the middle of the night.
 It's hard to sleep when you think you might be stabbed.
 In the end they kicked him out too
 he was accused of raping a woman
 he spent three months in jail
 but afterwards came back to the house.
 And once, he got in a fight with someone and kept yelling,
 'I'm going to kill you!
 I'm going to kill you!'
 And the other guy called the police who were there in no time
 and they found him wielding a knife
 and put him in jail again
 and again he got out.
 When he was out
 the only thing he would talk about
 was finding that guy and stabbing him.
 He'd say it to everyone
 and well, he told it to the wrong person
 someone who was a friend of the aggrieved
 and they called the police again
 but that time it was not the police
 it was the detectives who came
 and they deported him back to Guatemala.

Sometimes it gets me down
 when things like that happen
 because they don't want us here
 they don't like Hispanos
 they don't like any Hispanos
 I work day and night and it does not matter
 they don't like us
 I get up at five in the morning and come back until seven
 and they give me stares
 and they all say, 'Fucking Hispanos!'
 'Fucking Hispanos!'
 I prefer to ignore them
 I try to be myself regardless of what other people tell me

I can't say the gringos are bad either
 they stare at you but also give you work
 but they treat you like less
 and you have to live with their loathing
 and I don't know if you've heard Donald Trump
 who keep saying that Hispanos are murderers
 that Hispanos do harm
 that they need to be kicked out of the country.
 Donald Trump talks a lot of trash
 but I don't pay attention to him
 he talks, talks and talks
 and doesn't do anything
 sometimes you can't even understand what he's saying
 I listen and listen and listen and ignore him
 he talks to frighten people.
 But it's also true that if he wants to kick us out
 they are going to kick us out
 he's from here
 and I'm from another country
 he's the president and I'm poor
 so, if he says get out, I'm going to have to leave.
 But in the meantime, I'm here
 and I don't like being talked at like that,
 I came here to fight
 I want to make it even though I'm not a gringo
 I want to have money
 and that's why I came to this country.

I want to share these things
 with my friends and brethren that are arriving,
 brothers
 it's a lot of suffering but you can do it
 take care of your job
 don't stray
 any little misstep and immigration comes
 and they take you away
 and what can you do?
 'Do you have an ID?' they ask
 and you give them your ID from Guatemala
 and they handcuff you and immediately take you to Guatemala.
 I've been living here in New Jersey for ten years
 without papers,
 do you know why?
 because I behave like they want me to
 because I work like a slave:
 from my workplace to my home
 from my home to my workplace,
 I don't walk around the street
 I bathe
 I lay down
 I turn on the TV
 and go to sleep
 and that's my life.

Saying goodbye to the family is tough
 because no one knows how the road will treat you,
 from Guatemala to Mexico you ride a bus
 in Mexico you walk a lot
 that's when the really hard part begins
 taxi and bus
 taxi and bus
 police pull over the taxis
 and ask you if you have an ID
 and you obviously don't,
 so many people arrange to have Mexican papers
 but in order to do that, aside from the money
 you have to learn to speak like a Mexican
 with the accent
 because if they catch you, they send you back
 sometimes you are halfway through in Mexico and they send you back.
 In Mexico, they caught me several times
 but I would pretend to be Mexican and that would be the end of it
 I can speak like a Mexican
 I came with a friend and they caught him
 I didn't have the courage to come here on my own
 so, I showed up and offered money to the policemen
 and they wanted to know why I wanted to save him
 'He's my friend,' I told them
 'He's going to give me a job, we came here hoping to live in Mexico.'
 It was a lie
 but it worked.
 We got to the US border after twenty-nine days of walking,
 the desert is the toughest part
 a part of it in Mexico
 and another in the US
 the desert
 the desert
 oh God
 you just can't take it anymore,

I had to carry a woman
because she couldn't walk anymore
everyone told me to ditch her
but we made it,
and in Phoenix some nice people gave us water
food and water
they kept us in their home for eight days
until we got fake IDs
and we were able to get tickets from Las Vegas to Newark
and my uncle who's been living here for a long time
went to pick me up
and here I am.

It was three years after I got here
that my disease began
I could not even eat
I would eat and throw up
eat and throw up
until one day I decided to go to the hospital
and they told me my blood was fine
no drugs or anything
they kept me there for a day and told me it was nothing
and sent me home.
It was Sunday.
The next day, I went to work
and the sky looked all black
I could see colored stars
red, blue, yellow
all the colors
and finally, I told the boss I was sorry
but I couldn't work like that
and he dropped me off at home,
he drove me himself.

Tuesday went by
Wednesday
sicker and sicker,
until my aunt called
and asked me why I hadn't been to work
I told her I was sick
and she asked me, 'Don't you want to go to the hospital?'
'No,' I told her, 'I'm fine here.'
She said, 'Ok then let's go for a walk in the mountain.'
We passed by the hospital
and she said, 'I have to pick up some test results,
come with me.'
She speaks English
so, she told the doctors about my condition

and a nurse came to draw blood from me
and she said it was infected
and about seven doctors showed up
and said they didn't know what it was
and then they said it was my heart
that I needed emergency surgery
that I had twenty-four hours to live.
I was thin
super thin
and then I don't know what happened
but my body got bloated
like a plastic doll
and I couldn't walk
and they said they needed to do emergency surgery on me
but that they couldn't because my body was so bloated
that they would have to wait
and they would have to do it in Philadelphia.
Until one day a Boricua arrived and told me,
'They sent me here to get you, they are going to do surgery on you'
'Great'
'Yes, but they don't know whether you will make it out alive'
'Well, God will know what to do with me'
'Aren't you afraid?'
'No.'

They took me down to surgery in a bed as long as a bench
with a blue sheet
and they had everything there
knives
scissors
injections,
and they injected me twice and I fell asleep.
When I woke up I couldn't breathe
I had three tubes inside of my mouth
I started to pull them out and the nurse said, 'No! No!'
And she got near me and I felt as if she were yanking out my insides
and then I pulled them out little by little
and when she realized I had already pulled them out.
They kept me there in the operating room for two days
then they took me to the fifth floor
and I was there for a month with injections
medicines
the government paid for all of it,
then they moved me to another building
and you could tell they had made a mistake
because there is one for elderly people and one for young people

and they took me to the one for the elderly
and every day and night the firemen would come in and take away dead
elderlies,
they set the alarms really loud
and you can't sleep
and their families come and cry.
I got very tired of that
ten months I spent in the hospital
without seeing sunlight
without walking on the mountain
so, although I was living for free
as soon as I could
I went back home.
Oh, I felt so free!
I walked around and my friends would greet me and say,
'You have more lives than a cat!'
'So glad you are back!'
'They said you were going to die!'
'Yes, but here I am,
stubborn, stubborn, stubborn.'

I really like soccer
I'd like to play all the time
but I can't
I don't get any days off.
We have a soccer team,
sometimes we play on Sundays
and Hispanos come
gringos
morenos
and we all play together,
and sometimes we have lunch together and it's very nice.
Sometimes I have a hard time running
because I'm so tired from work
but I like playing so much that I don't mind.

The cold is about to set in,
trees get very pretty
full of yellow leaves
and they send us to sleep more
because you can't work under the snow.
And then the trees lose all their leaves
and get skinny
everything gets colder.
I go to the mountain anyway
I take my food

make a little fire.
It's a way to calm myself down.
My hometown was full of mountains
dense, dense mountains.
I always lived on a mountain.
In my town you can listen to the roosters from your home
horses
birds.
If there are no mountains I can't live.
I came to New Jersey because I heard there were mountains here.

I'll give you my full name: Luis Miguel Gonzalez, from Mataquescuintla, Jalapa, Guatemala.
I hope the book comes out well. Thanks for listening to my words. I like stories a lot but
sometimes they are hard to tell. When I start talking, I begin in cero and go to a hundred.
Or more than a hundred! I can't stop, can't stop, can't stop.

I'm from Tijuana
and right now I'm very sad
because of what's happening with the Honduran caravan.
We are at a time in history that is pretty dystopian
and it surprises me how this dystopia
is built through a logic that is completely extractive
that is using the bodies of the migrants and the people from Tijuana
to create enmity
among the same populations that should be supporting each other.
This really speaks to me
because I believe that the effectiveness of the fascism under which we are living
has expropriated critical and vindictory languages from us,
and now it's doing the same with the time we make for doing the political.
During the last two weeks
a political subject has been built in Tijuana
and it is a fascist subject.
As *tijuanense*, I felt proud
that politics in Tijuana weren't built through an articulate language
that could be distorted or manipulated,
but through a politic of emergency.
I've always considered Tijuana to be a city that welcomes.
But right now I'm on the other side of that welcome.
That's what dystopia is,
this anti-welcome
an anti-welcome that reveals the deeply colonial time in which we are living.
It is as if we are turning our eyes to the colony
And how were ethnicity, race and class built?
the same way.
We are witnessing once again the production of the disposable subject and the victim,
with faces that we already know.

I believe this time we must not run away
we must not give up
we have to make a counterattack.
I think we will overcome,
that we will create a new way of making politics.
And that's why I have been thinking lately about a post-mortem politic,
a political that doesn't end in death
a political that goes beyond grief
a political that can give us space to think ourselves,
not as an after-the-political
but as an agency of that which can no longer be articulated.
There is a very strong qualitative change in terms of politics right now,
I'm still unable to fully grasp it yet, but I feel how it makes me shudder.
But everything that's going on in Tijuana
at this minute
doesn't end in this production of racism.
There are thousands of people helping and acting in the face of a political of emergency
people who do not surrender to this fascist *cooptation*
people who are receptive and affectionate beyond the logic of hospitality

the rational
the politically correct.

But let's think beyond this very present
let's take some distance from what is happening with the caravan today.
I do not want us to stay just there,
because all this is so very orchestrated.
As we all know fear is affective,
and this is all a theater, a performance, a staging,
a live campaign for Trump supporters to vote for him again
and for Peña Nieto to bequeath a catastrophe to the government that is about to assume power
a government that will have to juggle with grenades.

What I want to say is this:
We are witnessing the rise and the recrudescence
of a fascist immigration policy based on the most exacerbated necropolitics.
They are ruling through massacres and death,
with a form of control that is completely colonial
exterminating racialized populations
that seem redundant to the neoliberal project,
deploying the most explicit violence as a tool of *necro empowerment*.
And I think that to face this we have to take responsibility for our colonial history,
for our seduction by the master,
for our endoracism
for our self hate
for our love for white-washing.
We have to take responsibility for our desire to be both humanised and human
although we know that humanism is stained with blood
with the blood of each one of us.
Marx was wrong when he said that everything solid melts into air.
No, dear Marx:
everything that's solid in your world is built over our blood,
of the slaves, of the colonies, of the non-human.
'And why has fascism returned?' the Western World asks.
Fascism never left
Fascism is the heir of plantations.
The contemporary necropolitics of borders is the legacy of colonial fascism.
The work of exterminating poor and racialized populations
has always been part of the modern colonial project.
And nowadays that work crystallizes at the borders,
both geopolitical and racial.
And once again,
this new genocide that is about to happen
will not count as such.
Because it's not going to be humans killing other humans,
because it's not going to be whites killing other whites.

The border and migratory dimension is a political project of spoliation
connecting the colonial dimension with fascism.
Through nationalist arguments
rivalry is fostered and hospitality between communities is eliminated,
all in pursuit of safeguarding a national identity
that always hides colonial seeds.
To understand contemporary fascism
it's necessary to turn back towards colonial history
which continues to shape daily life so conspicuously
in our own territories and at our own borders.

It is necessary to lay our colonial eyes on the Global South,
and understand that what's happening
is not a strange exception to democratic rule,
it is the continuity of the most persistent form of fascism:
colonialism.

Angela Davis wonders,
'Why can't we understand that migration
is the aftermath of colonialism and slavery?'
We need America to stop legitimizing separatism
and genocidal logics within its communities.
We need to pay attention
to the knowledge of racialized and minority people.
We need to learn from migrants,
from their strategies of non-violent survival,
from their abilities that can create tools for transforming reality
and activate a collective awakening.
'We have to hit our minds,' as Cherrie Moraga says,
to hit our worlds, our rationalities
to put aside shyness, to get out of political correctness.
We need to create an organized network of transnational activism
a transfeminist, queer, anti-racist and anti-prison network
which generates encounters and takes public space
and thus makes us visible as political subjects
who in alliance aim to produce justice and well-being for all of us,
both within our territories and at the borders.
We need to combat the myth of minorities
so that our names, our genres and our stories are not erased.
We need to understand that life is not quantitative but qualitative,
that if they touch one of us, they touch us all.
We need to make visible those stories that have been hidden for centuries.
We need to transform urgently all the colonial narratives
that make America remain so racist,
fascist, misogynist, homophobic, xenophobic, aporophobic.

The migration issue, as a social problem
has had a negative and repressive emphasis
that has been accumulated and is being institutionalized.
Migrants tend to be persecuted, violated, pushed into precarity
and their discursive construction is always loaded with punitive emphasis
whose fullest expression is their valuation as illegals.
The persecution is not new
what's new is that that persecution
is being systematized more and more
and has been configured as a state policy.
And the most problematic thing
is that to produce this transformation
the migrant population is being constructed with a warlike emphasis
the migrant population is becoming a military and police target.
I think that's a key and fundamental point.
The migrant population is being incorporated into the discourse of war:
civilian populations as military targets.

This happens in an era in which the warlike emphasis
is being legitimized in the social imaginary and in institutions at high speed.
We can bring other contexts to the conversation.
In Colombia, for example,
during the siege
for most of the 19th and 20th centuries
the military authorities were the ones that judged civilians.
In Brazil, the militarization of the state of Rio de Janeiro
through a decree issued by Temer
is in the same spirit,
and now with Bolsonaro, the scenery becomes even more complex
if we think about the repertoire of powers that he will have
and his predilection for resolving public issues by military means.
In Argentina, Macri's decree
which sought to bring the military back into the orbit of internal security...
In short,
the executive power
in different countries
is taking this political decisions
by decree
in unison.
They are normalizing, naturalizing, standardizing and legitimizing
circumstances that used to be exceptional and circumstantial in nature.
This exceptional condition is being lost

it has been mutating until it seemed normal,
the warlike emphasis becomes naturalized
it's being incorporated into common sense.

Returning to the matter of migrants
we see on TV that Trump decides to send five thousand soldiers to the Mexican border
due to the last caravan.
Possibly this only aims to generate gains
in the legislative elections that are coming
in an increasingly reactionary and conservative environment.
Nevertheless,
it gives an institutional and legal framework to this offensive.
It legally enables
atrocious acts by the U.S. State against civilians,
acts whose main and dangerous antecedent is the so-called war against terrorism.
And even if they do not open fire
even if they remove the soldiers later
the State, as a regulator of public and social life
is empowering its citizens to use their weapons against migrants.
The migrants who cross Mexico are military and police targets:
'If they find you in the United States they deport you,
if they find you in Mexico they kill you,' says one of these stories.

What are the political, historical, social, and cultural conditions
that have made it possible
to construct migrants as military, police or para-police targets?
We are observing how the spectrum of those who are legitimately disposable
is being gradually expanded.
More and more, all over the world,
they are legitimizing and seeking to enable and legalize
the use of weapons against those considered 'others'
against the strangers
against the transgressors of internal order and its values.

I insist,
the most dangerous thing about this matter
is that migrants are becoming a military target.
Excuse me for repeating it so much,
but it's at the very heart of what is happening
it's a very important core.
What the Mexican police is doing, for example,
is the state practicing the physical elimination of the enemy.
The political enemy
as a public enemy
as a suspect without investigation
becomes sentenced to death
The radar that marks political enemies is always cumulative and expansive.
It widens more and more
involving people of different nationalities,
ethnic groups, genders, races.
The enemy's radar is always including more people,

more populations.
Every minute there are more people who are becoming political enemies.
This is happening all over the world.
And migrants are being constructed by the state as political enemies,
the ones that are being named and mediatized the most.
This state construction of the political enemy
seeks to enable its physical elimination.
States take up arms,
and thus their citizens consider themselves empowered to do the same.
And towards whom are those arms directed?
Towards political enemies.

Some time ago
I was surprised to hear an adviser to the Colombian president
referring to the victims of forced displacement
caused by the actions of legal and illegal armed groups during the internal conflict
as migrants.
I found it problematic.
Although the action is to migrate,
the nature of that migrating materialises in a borderline situation.
They are people
who cannot join the system of work and capitalist production of value.
They are people who suffer
from social, economic, political and cultural exclusions.
So, although there is an action which is migrating,
by calling them migrants
the genealogical references and the nature of those migrations are erased,
dehistorizing and silencing the fact that these people
are victims of forced displacement
and that in most cases they are running away from crossfire
or from possible selective or arbitrary physical elimination
or from the consequences of mining or hydroelectric projects
which endanger their lives in their territory.
These migration stories are stories of escape.
Extreme situations of violence are forcing these people to migrate.
We can recognize the origin of forced displacement,
as not only the actions of different armed groups,
but also other forms of exclusion
with race, gender, and of course, class patterns.
This class pattern
strongly impacts on the form of and reason for every forced displacement.
Let's agree that nobody who has money will attempt to just walk across a border.
And why leave?
What are the extreme situations
that lead people to go through this situation?
That's where the United States and its way of operating returns to centre stage.
On the one hand,
it creates wars and takes no responsibility for them,
wars that expel entire populations.
It happens in the Middle East, in Central America, in South America, in Africa,
it happens in the armed conflicts in Nicaragua and Honduras

where the United States sticks its nose in.
And on the other hand,
the capitalist system is constantly becoming more aggressive
profound social and political transformations are operating within it,
and violence is the key resource for these transformations
that we are witnessing again so clearly throughout the continent.
Violence
in a recurrent and persistent way
has operated for centuries as the great resource of the State.
Violence is one of the resources par excellence
which the State and the ruling classes have had and continue to have
to impose sociopolitical transformations
within the process of excessive capital accumulation.
The resource is already legal
and is constantly constructing political enemies
to refresh its legitimacy.
Terry Eagleton has already said it:
The main terrorist is the State.

What does it mean to think about migration from the bodies of labor?
What kind of geographies are being reorganized,
decomposed and recomposed
by these bodies of workers?
These movements need to invent a language
that is at the scale of everything they are challenging and displacing.

I think there are two ways in which migration is often looked at.
The first one, that sees migrants as victims to be saved,
and there is the whole repertoire of human trafficking and slavery.
If you track, who is financing the international agendas that focus on human trafficking?
You'll see that on the one hand there is the Vatican
and on the other, the U.S. State Department.
By finding and constructing that perfect figure of the victim to be saved
they try to turn migration into an economy of obedience.
In Buenos Aires, for example
many of the migrant workers
instead of being recognized as workers
they are recognized as slaves,
which, reassures those who seek victims to be saved
and paves the way for the economy of obedience.
And on the other hand, we have the second perspective,
the one that shows migrants as entrepreneurs in and of themselves
who risk everything
because they embody the neoliberal entrepreneurial discourse.
So,
migrants are enrolled in an economy of pure obedience
or they are enrolled in an economy that is strictly neoliberal.

I believe these powerful scenes of collective migration
that we are seeing today
bring together, at the same time
a dimension of autonomy and a dimension of hyper-exploitation,
a dimension that is ambivalent and antagonistic.
All of these areas intersect with a vital calculation
for a desire to escape appalling living conditions
that unfold under conditions of extreme fragility
I really like a category of a group of Bolivian women
called *Mujeres Creando*.
Almost twenty years ago
they already said that they were exiled by neoliberalism.
That way they managed to give their migration a political character.
You've seen that exile is usually of the '70s,
something very mythologized in political terms.
And at that moment, some people wanted to make it appear
that the movement of economic migrants wasn't politically charged.
So, very early they said,
'We are exiled by neoliberalism.'
How do we think about the political nature of these migrations?
These people are expelled from countries that are ruled by neoliberal policies

by a neoliberalism that is requiring more extreme devices of violence
by a neoliberalism that is not able to stabilize itself
by a neoliberalism that can only be explained by the struggles that confront it.
So, how to recognize in those desires of flight
an autonomy
that tries to affirm itself in completely difficult and critical conditions
and that in that precise action shows, makes evident that today,
work implies tremendously exploitative conditions?

The desire of flight that we are problematizing is always murky
it's impressive everything that these people risk when migrating,
but if you assume that risk
it's because you are fleeing a place that you perceive as unbearable.
This has been especially apparent in the stories of migrant women
who say that domestic violence was a concrete impulse of their decision to migrate.
This force, that the feminist movement has helped to raise as a key part of to the discussion
is fundamental.
Because on the contrary, there are some discussions
that tend to normalize some of the violence that is put into play in migration,
or to moralize it.
How can these women get on those trains
knowing they are going to be raped.
Those are tremendous situations that show, in a tragic way,
the intimate connection between sexist violence and neoliberal violence,
articulated by a level of racism and colonialism that is on the rise.

These dynamics of migration,
in economic terms,
deploy a laboratory of what workforce means today
in the most extreme sense.
Migrants assume the whole cost of what it means to be 'exploitable'.
But we cannot reduce these transits and these migrations
to a complete adaptation of these lives to capital
because that would imply a high level of disdain
for the bet that these people are making
and all the risk and the vital calculation that this bet implies,
and the critical force that its trajectories reveal
about the international division of labor, its geographies and assemblages.
There, a moment of ambivalence appears
a moment that is quickly moralized
that is put under a lens
that needs to hide its ambivalence to understand its political character.
And I believe it's important to move in the opposite way:
understand its political character by taking charge of those ambivalences.

There is another figure that may be good to think about
or to try to bring close to migration:
the figure of deserters.
Often deserters are a political figure.
Deserters of the militias, of the military services, of the plantations.
There too we have a political gesture to recover
to think about migration not only in sacrificial terms
but also to recognize that pulse
of deserting a situation that begins to be considered unlivable.
The more legal discourse of human trafficking
tends to fall short in recognizing the multiplicity of the desire to flee.
But, how can we also try to avoid romanticizing that desire of flight?
And, how do we avoid making ambivalence a rhetorical pirouette

a postmodern uncertainty that would make us lose the opportunity to think that we are facing a dynamic that is challenging the borders that capital has introduced the borders that materialize a racist way of managing the world.

What Capital puts into practice as an imperial dynamic
it's a permanent expansion of its borders of valorization.
Capital is constantly saying, 'This territory,
this field, this subjectivity, this difference,
can also be valued.'
And just like that, it does.
And in that movement, it produces the idea that there is no outside of Capital.
Capital incorporates all the spaces that seem to confront it
Or to be outside of it.
Capital's expansive colonial dynamic
is, precisely,
the voracious way by which it expands its borders permanently.
And what role does migration play in that context?
Migration is the very dispute of what we call borders.

Through these movements national state borders are challenged,
but at the same time, the other imaginations and geographic practices that migration creates
don't seem, at first glance,
to be in direct opposition with the way Capital creates value.
In that regard,
I believe that migrant movements are expressing in a concentrated way
our problem of how to redefine those struggles
that are not so clearly classifiable as anti-capitalist,
struggles that handle a level of ambivalence
that on the one hand, cannot be to discredited as struggles,
because it would be idiotic,
but at the same time, what do we do to avoid enclosing them?
How do we avoid projecting a language and a vocabulary that over interpret them?
There is an Argentinian anthropologist called Miguel Merino
who, for the case of Europe, takes the words of Fanon,
and says that what is happening is the colonial revenge.
The colonial revenge.
The subjects of the colonies 'invading' the metropolises.

The case of female migration is very complex.
As it has been analyzed a lot by collectives like *Precarias a la Deriva*,
there is a whole transnationalization of care services
that once again
draws a line between the women of the south and the women of the north.
The women of the south are those who migrate to care
the women of the south leave their mothers, their aunts, their sisters
to go to care in the first world,
in the houses of women from the North
who thus manage access to a labor market
that requires the transnationalization
that is to say, to make cheaper
the cost of care.
This transnational chain of care
shows a classist and racist segmentation.
And since we are talking about migration of women,
another point that I think should be problematized
is the role of debt as a drive to migrate.
Indebtedness is one of the fundamental drivers of migration,
especially for women.

We have to think about the device of debt that is attached to migration:
first, debt in the place of origin,
and then, debt from the migration infrastructure.
To migrate you have to make a number of arrangements that get you into debt,
to travel, to arrive, to get accommodation, to get the first job...
All that is paid.
And it's paid with debt,
that is to say, with future work.
There we have a fundamental relationship as well,
and the possibility of thinking about how the economy of debt
has everything to do with the economy of migration.
Now debt not only fixes you but also forces you to move!
The debt conditions the kind of work you accept,
and organizes a mode of exploitation,
a mode of future exploitation.
Debt is a specific type of confiscation of the desire for destabilization.
If you have to devotedly pay a debt
you'll have to stabilize your conditions
so as to be able to fulfill your obligation as a debtor.
Which, generates a subjective bet for stability,
and also generates conditions in which you have a specific threat
for which you will submit to certain conditions of work and exploitation.
And, once again we are in the same problem!
How to recognize these increasingly dense and perverse mechanisms
of exploitation and future obligation,
without losing sight of the vital calculation
these people make in their desire of flight?
It's hard, isn't it?
If you define yourself by one you have to put the other one under the carpet,
and if you hold both you generate a false point of equanimity.

The fundamental question that I ask myself is,
How is a desire for popular prosperity materialized today?
That no longer counts on the guarantee of salary,
that no longer counts on the guarantee of benefits given by the state,
but that at the same time doesn't resign itself to not living better.
For me, this is very powerful.
If we cannot read this as the engine of a dynamism of popular economy,
of the zones of contact between popular and legal economy,
of the new generations that decide to migrate,
of the trajectories that assume such a high level of risk,
if we cannot read this desire,
we are left with a very narrow grid
to think about why migrants do what they do.
We are left again with what we had at the beginning:
that migrants are slaves who don't know what they're doing,
or that they have internalized neoliberalism to such an extent
that they are willing to do everything in order to be exploited by capital.
If we stay in these two perspectives,
these migrations would be Capital's complete triumph.
Look at all the things these people are willing to do to be exploited!
But these perspectives erase all traces of dignity in these trajectories
and thus, lose sight of the critical capacity of migration
that is challenging the colonial dynamics of the world.
The feminist movement today
is giving us clues to read other economies, other forms of vitality,
other languages for these desires that don't fit into Capital.

On October the 13th
hundreds of Honduran families,
coordinated with each other through Facebook and WhatsApp,
and started walking towards the United States
with their children in their arms, a backpack, water, not much else.
During last month
seventeen thousand people-
half of them women and children-
have been walking in three different caravans through Mexico.
This Central American exodus is a collective action
which has no precedent in the world of human mobility,
walking en masse is a new form of transmigration
it's an exercise of collective self-defense against the terror industry.

Until now
Hondurans who were trying to cross Mexico
came scattered
across routes that have been clandestinized by Mexican immigration policies
that have neoliberalized violence against migrants, refugees and displaced people.
Today these migrants walk together
they are defying, with their bodies
nothing more than their bodies,
the borders designed for the region by Washington,
the state military operations deployed against them,
and the virtual migration industry
composed mostly of human trafficking networks.

These migrants are becoming political actors
who are dismantling the migration agendas of governments
and of the migration industry.
What is new is not the presence of thousands of displaced people
what is new is the way they are moving today:
en masse
together,
these caravans are a new form of migrant struggle
a new type of social movement
without explicit ideological slogans
without manifestly anti-capitalist forms of organization,
just a few thousand people who organize themselves to walk together
making migration a political strategy to preserve their lives.
This way of walking is changing the migratory grammar in Mexico.
It's not a caravan of migrants, it's an exodus of displaced people
and above all
it's a new social movement that walks for a livable life.

But last Sunday in Tijuana something changed,
the migrants went directly to the wall to try to pass
and they were attacked with tear gas.
I think this caused the caravan to lose the empathy
of a large part of Mexican society.

But how can we find a figure that shows
why what happened on Sunday is powerful?
When they passed through Mexico City
I met a Honduran comrade who told me, 'I was not dying of hunger
the gangs were not chasing me,
the dictatorship was politically suffocating me.'
We talked for hours and we gained confidence
and I said, 'Hey,
why are you going to Tijuana?
they are going to riddle you.'
He was about fifty years old.
And he told me, 'When I was born there was the Berlin Wall
I saw how they tore it down,
we are going to go to the border and tear the Trump Wall down
and force him to accept that they established a dictatorship within our country.'
Some say that it wasn't the plan to assault the wall,
others say that an infiltrating policeman sparked the idea
others say that people felt, 'We are going to tear down the fence
like we did in Tapachula
we are a lot of people.'

I believe that there are three main perspectives at the moment,
and none of them can understand why these people challenge Trump
and why they believe they can achieve their goal.
The first one, the realpolitik,
which is unable to think of migrants as an emancipated political subject.
Then there is an intermediate perspective that is the one of the church of the poor.
They are perhaps the ones who look to migrants with more dignity
because their eyes are trained to recognize themselves in the poor,
but they too do not recognize the emancipatory potential of the migrants,
they have that muscular reflex of solidarity that always says, 'Poor the poor'
and that pitying look doesn't allow them to see the power and strength of these people.
And the third one, the Leninist one
that is hurting me so much right now,
that looks at rebellions in an absolutist way
as having to be won or lost.

I think it is urgent that we look at this 21st century Holocaust.
Perhaps this caravan is the colonial version of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising
they were crushed but it was a very important rebellion.
I'm going to start crying.
I feel like this is the most critical thing that has happened since Zapatismo.
Thanks to the Warsaw Ghetto we know that the Jews did not surrender
that they fought for life by weaving community in the midst of extermination.
That's what the migrant caravan is.
An uprising, a rebellion.
I believe that the three points of view that I just told you about
don't manage to offer a global discourse that can read this rebellion
I think the only global view that can do that is feminism.

Yes!
Let's see, how do we read the walking en masse of the caravan in a feminist way?
How do we read the decision of these women who escape with their children in their arms?
How do we read the choice to do sex work in order to continue moving north?
How do we read the reasons for the exodus as feminists
the obstacles, the impediments
the tricks to go through the little gap left by the wall
the ways in which women settle their lives when they arrive?

How do we read the subsistence of a Honduran woman who asks for asylum
 and after being imprisoned for months is released in California
 and they put a bracelet on her
 and they throw her into the community
 and the community interprets her as monitored and as a monitoring drone
 that represents the risk of being discovered and deported?
 It's time for us to apply the feminist perspective to this migratory process!
 Let's build it right now!
 How can we look at migration as feminists?
 How can we interpret migrants' pursuit of life through the most radical feminism?
 What metaphors can we invent?
 How can we call what happened on Sunday?
 The migrants went to the wall and tried to tear it down by throwing stones!
 They wanted to be seen
 they wanted the Tijuanaenses, and Trump, and Joh to see them.
 How do we introduce a feminist perspective to the political exercise of a mother
 who goes with her 3 and 5 year old daughters to the most powerful wall in the world
 and tries to tear it down?
 What do we call that?
 I don't want to call it social movement anymore.
 How to resemantize words that have a shared linguistic code?
 Migrant struggles are expanding the liberal concept of citizenship
 we are transforming the liberal concept of citizenship.
 This caravan is an uprising!
 a rebellion of the victims of the Southern Border Plan
 which brings together years of accumulated social unrest,
 these people represented so miserably by neoliberalism
 are becoming enraged subjects
 those who are left over are pissed off,
 the violence that looms over us is so heavy
 we have been so trashed
 that we can't recognize in others the dignity that is denied to us.
 We are so busy recognizing our own dignity
 that we don't believe anyone who is near us.
 That is why these rebellions are headless, chaotic
 and don't have a clear political discourse.
 The manifestation is the act
 the act that migrants are carrying out today puts an end to an era,
 it invents a new historical and political moment.

They called themselves Walk for Life
 but after the amount of people trapped in Tijuana
 they say it has turned into a humanitarian crisis.
 I think that all that humanitarian crisis stuff
 is a concept for people who believe in human rightism
 but human rightism
 has been instrumentalized by the power in order to violate human rights.
 This is not just a humanitarian crisis, enough with that
 this is not just an exodus that denounces a dictatorship
 this is a rebellion
 Oh! What do we call this mobile refugee camp
 that they are building themselves while walking along the widest border in the world
 which is Mexico
 and that is now standing in the most dangerous city in the country?
 How do we call it?
 What was that thing you said before?
 That by making use of physical violence on the wall on Sunday
 these people are revealing that capitalism is effectively delimiting

the threshold of what is violent and what is not violent
 of what we perceive as violent and what we do not,
 and that on the other hand
 this can also be seen as an experiment on how to materially translate violence,
 on how to transform the colonialist and patriarchal violence of centuries
 into a violence that can shape new ways of living.
 It is like what Frantz Fanon says,
 violence is necessary and legitimate on the part of the colonized.

What's new in the history of humanity
 is not migratory movements,
 migration always constituted our human species.
 What's new is this global regime of borders
 what's new are the borders
 what's new is this neoliberal fantasy of trying to govern human mobility
 of trying to control how people move.
 The consequences of this global border regime
 are translated into millions of deaths and disappearances,
 it's really a genocide
 the desert shared by Mexico and the United States is a huge mass grave
 the Mediterranean Sea is a huge mass grave,
 the global border regime is killing millions of people
 just for doing one of the fundamental characteristics of the human being:
 moving to where there is water, shade, heat, food,
 moving to where there is a place to live.

The power is being efficient in meeting its objective
 it's true
 but I believe that in the stories that you gathered
 we can recognize the ungovernability that constitutes migration today.
 The death drive of capital is constantly challenged by migrants
 who move to get another life.
 We do not know if it will be a better life, but another life
 as Maritza says, 'I do not want a better life
 I want a new life.'
 It is important to bet on the emancipatory aspect that migration has,
 Maritza wants a new life
 and to achieve that
 she challenges a whole range of borders,
 borders that are not only military
 but that are social, cultural, political, economic,
 that are internal borders with other equals who see her as deflected.

The most powerful part of the migration, I think
 is that you decide the story you want to tell about yourself
 it implies a breakdown in the genealogy of violence
 it implies the breakdown of the stories that exhaust and suffocate us.
 That is the vital power of migration
 migration inaugurates another genealogy.
 She was an indigenous Nahuatl migrant
 and at the age of 8 she escaped patriarchal violence.
 That's where her story begins
 and that's where mine begins too
 in that escape
 in that moment when my grandmother decided to build the story of her own life
 through that flight
 through that migration.

Once I was in a national park in Costa Rica
walking with a guide.
He didn't know I worked in migration studies,
and at one point he said, 'Do you see those three trees together?
They are thousands of years old
but thousands of years ago they were far away from here
because these trees walk a few millimeters each year
to get closer to where there are more rivers.'
I'm talking about immense trees.
I was impressed.
How is it not going to be a necropolitical fantasy of capital
to govern migration
if even trees move, looking for life?
To migrate is to preserve life,
the ferocious perseverance of those who migrate is pure will of life.