

David Anuar

### Migration, the face of a city

Roots. At some point in our life, we start thinking about them. As a child, I heard my mother had been born somewhere else, maybe in a nameless town near the capital city of Mexico. The mother of my mother also came from a different place: a little miner town amidst the mountains filled with pine forest and monarch butterflies. Angangueo was the name, and for me, it sounded like a legend. And if I dug a little bit further, I would discover my indigenous heritage: a great-great-grandmother who was a Mazahua.

The story was not any different on my father's side. He also hadn't been born in my hometown, Cancun, and if I dug far enough, another indigenous ancestry, a Nahua, would appear: Filiberta, my great-great-grandmother. My father and his family were from Acapulco, Mexico's first city dedicated to sun and beach tourism. They were penniless and wanted new opportunities. In our talks about this, he always tells me that the name of Cancun started sounding like a rumor, like a remote place where you could start over and change your life, and your economic situation. That is how my father and his elder brother decided to migrate on the 26 of August in 1974. Back then, Cancun was still a young city. Founded by the Bank of Mexico, it was formed by a couple of hotels and two dusty roads surrounded by the jungle and crocodiles. The living conditions were harsh: no hospitals, no schools, no entertainment, no markets, everything was to be made.

Migration has been part of literature since ancient times; the tales of the Jewish people in the Bible, the Homeric adventures of Odysseus, the tales of the Aztecs in the *Tovar Codex*, and how they migrated from Aztlan in search of a new and promised land, Tenochtitlan. But migration it's not just part of history or ancient literature. It is still a deep and significant human experience that affects thousands of hundreds of human lives nowadays, whether they are struggling with warfare, economic, political, or social issues such as narcotraffic. Literature still talks about migration as an individual and self-discovering experience linked to identity and adaptation, for example, Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Lucy* or Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis*. But also, literature has addressed migration as a social issue, as depicted by Juan Rulfo in "Paso del Norte", included in *The Burning Plain* (1953). In this short story, the author displays the poverty of a middle-aged man who tells his father he will go up to the North (the United States) in search of work. The specter of the son comes back to tell the father that he was peppered to death with bullets while crossing the river. This social phenomenon has also found voice in recent Mexican poets, such as Balam Rodrigo with his *Libro Centroamericano de los Muertos / Central American Book of the Dead* and Armando Salgado's *Red Border*, both depicting the horrors of Mexican and Central American migrants who have been butchered in the train called La Bestia (The Beast)

"He who wants to follow me to the United States  
leave his family, abandon the maras, the violence,  
the hunger, the misery, and forget the infamous  
caciques and oligarchs of Central America, and follow me";  
and even as he fell, even before the mutilations,  
before they took him to the morgue in pieces  
to be buried in a mass grave like any other  
Central American, as the hundreds of migrants

that every year die butchered in Mexico.

I don't want to talk about the horrors of migration which are very well known. I return to my birth city and its peculiar migration process, where the intimate and the collective blend into one. Everyone in Cancun is a migrant. There are no natives. The city was founded in 1970, and before that, it was an unspoiled landscape, where only a ranch of coconuts existed, miles and miles of dunes and palm trees. After that, migrants such as my parents started arriving. Therefore, Cancun does not have a long history nor a strong identity. The only common ground that the inhabitants share is migration. So, for us and our local literature, migration is some cornerstone, the collective myth to build our history. One of the first authors – a migrant, of course – to talk about this in his poetry was Miguel Ángel Meza, originally born in Mexico City. I would like to end with a fragment of his poem “Ten strokes for another mask” collected in his book *El rostro que habitamos / The face we inhabit* (2015)

You walk in the city and you do not recognize yourself. Its mirrors do not recognize you. Its concrete mangroves, its sky within the reach of the hand, the air with its humid skin, the blinded light of so much light: everything floods your still foreign eyes. Nostalgia sprouts in every corner. As if stones here just born resonate in your steps from far away that still you can listen. Unfair compared to the splendor that is given away. Versus the morning that opens its fan like a new peacock. Who are you before these smells of warm ripe fruit in the humidity? Faced with this laughter of sun and fermented salt in the Caribbean? In the face of this renewed loneliness? You try to find yourself. You only see the gesture of your mask: nostalgia of your nostalgia.