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**No, I'm not from Athens
or By the paths I have walked****

Abstract

Based on Percy B. Shelley's phrase "we are all Greeks," this text refers to journeys, memories, and forgetfulness of facts that took place in the territory named Latin America since the Portuguese and Spanish occupation. The guiding thread runs through journeys and how they affect the perception of the world, erasing or making visible routes and their reports.

Keywords

Memory, Forgetfulness, Wars, Migrations, Latin America

Incalculable layers of life, countless paths, and journeys would have been fulfilled in this vast territory once called Abya Yala before being named Latin America. The reflections shared here are part of a research project about Latin American women who work with cinema and the audiovisual. The interest is in knowing about the stories they tell, their tales, journeys, and sensitive experience.

As a starting point, I remember Percy Bysshe Shelley, an English romantic poet who lived between 1792 and 1822, a scholar and enthusiast of Greek culture. He is renowned for the famous expression "we are all Greeks," published in his work "Hellas: a lyrical drama" (B. Shelley 1822). His statement has reverberated among many thinkers, intellectuals, and artists since the first half of the 19th century. Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of the rare cases when the wife is better known than the husband, was married to Mary Shelley.

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Some literary critics and historians suspect, perhaps suggest, that her signature novel, “Frankenstein” (Shelley 2020), or “The Modern Prometheus,” a work of international recognition, may have welcomed influences from the poet in its conception.

Such questions aside, it is necessary to move a little further, paying attention to the few criticisms formulated since then to the attribution of universal validity to the worldview articulated by the Greek culture that still reverberates in the contemporary context. “We are all Greeks” is a recurring idea even today among researchers, artists, and intellectuals from various fields of knowledge. With particular emphasis on studies about aesthetics and the philosophy of art.

Seeking to establish connections between this thought and the idea of travel, with attention to its aesthetic dimensions, I resort to the founding journey of Ulysses, narrated in the epic poem attributed to Homer (2017). I also resort to a more recent reference: “The Penelopiad” (2005), written by Margaret Atwood. In it, the story of Ulysses is retold in an approach very different from the classical one. Atwood evokes Penelope’s point of view, giving her centrality and protagonism in the narrative. By doing so, she provides an in-depth review of the constructed idea of a supposedly dedicated and faithful woman, capable of, for decades, weaving during the days to unweave at night, waiting for her husband, even when he was presumed dead.

Switching between Homer’s and Atwood’s narratives, I imagine Penelope sitting on a balcony, absorbed in her weaving. From time to time, she pauses briefly to look at the firmament. Perhaps she is looking for some loose thread, forgotten by the Fates, busy weaving the destinies of the gods and humans. The balcony and the bucolic atmosphere that make up the scene are part of the landscape of my childhood home. Primarily, they are anchored in the memory of the balcony from which I used to watch the dirt road almost a kilometer away. It used to pass one or another car, truck, a few buses at more or less regular schedules, equestrians, herds of cattle, or carts. On the other side of the road, far beyond, was the sunset in the west, where Paraguay was located. On my back, the sun was rising in the East, illuminating lands that I could not imagine what they looked like and located long after the forests that covered the horizon. Up north, about 30 miles away, was located the only citadel I knew. It was a kind of outpost for people who intended to move further into the country, just like my brothers did when they left, seeking to build their stories based on other landscapes far from there.

From the south, located to my left, came so many people. How would the place where they lived be? What have they come to do in these lands around here? I had never been to those places. But I knew that my paternal grandparents and maternal great-grandparents came from the South in the first decade of the 20th century to settle in the region. They came in small, fragile caravans on trips from seven months to more than a year.

The reports of these journeys register situations of vulnerability, much pain, and many losses. My paternal grandparents traveled in a caravan from the country's far south and other friendly families. They brought their two oldest daughters, still girls. Part of them traveled on horseback, another part in oxcarts. They carried the bare minimum necessary for survival, crossed native fields, and opened trails in virgin forests. Their daytime journeys were paused for an improvised night rest. There were no Sundays or holidays marked in the imaginary calendars. Nor clocks dripping time in seconds-minutes-hours-days. The cycles were settled by alternating days and nights and by climatic conditions. Exposed to lousy weather, they faced rain and sun, animals of various sizes, some predators, others not, insects of all sorts.

My aunts, the two girls, did not survive yellow fever, an endemic in the region. The little bodies were sheltered in precarious graves. My grandmother would have preferred to die in their place. She mourned the loss of her daughters. But there was not much time for mourning. It was late, and the caravan needed to move on. The graves became more and more distant, entrenched in the woods, already out of sight. Little by little, the landscape swallowed them up. They were lost in time, vanished in memory.

But some came to the light of this life during these journeys. My maternal grandmother was born halfway. So, it forced the family to settle temporarily in some districts where they were no more than foreigners. They stayed there until they were able to resume their journey. In the meantime, my great-grandfather found some piece of land to plant as sharecroppers, while my great-grandmother took care of the family, the domestic animals that were also part of the entourage, and the temporary residence. Several pairs of months were added to the estimated date of their arrival at their destination.

Overall, these small caravans were formed by poor farming families. They responded to the State's call for a project to occupy the border. They came in search of the promised land. Their mission was to occupy it and make it productive. They were ready to participate in the trench to protect the country's territorial delimitation. Perhaps they were not very clear about this. Instead, they were looking for a place to settle down and ensure their survival.

Therefore, my childhood home was built in a Paraguayan territory before the Great War (Nepomuceno 2002) in the second half of the 19th century. With the war waged by the Triple Alliance against Paraguay, Brazil advanced the line of its geopolitical limits, annexing that piece to its territory. It established a barracks for the armed forces, farming families, mainly from the south, a railroad line, and a railway station.

The Great War had, on its battlefields, enslaved Brazilian men fighting against Paraguayan soldiers of Guaraní ethnicity. It is reported that about 90% of the adult Paraguayan male population was killed during the war. The female population was not spared either. In the aftermath of the war, in the so-called Battle of Campo Grande, better known as the Batalla de Los Niños, or Acosta Ñu, Brazilian soldiers advanced against thousands of boys no more than 15 years old. Such a radical reduction in the male population strengthened the patriarchal foundation of Paraguayan society.

Battles and the journeys involved in wars are always painful, devoid of glamour. In the Great War, Brazilian enslaved men were not from those territories. They came from elsewhere. They would have traveled long distances to reach the battlefields. Elevated to the condition of soldiers, they fought for the vague promise of a charter of freedom. Many stayed behind along the way. Some did not survive the adversities they had to face. Others founded quilombos, landmarks of resistance to slavery, and a rejection of war.

However, before being soldiers, the Paraguayan people were part of a nation that inhabited those territories since ancient times. Some historians highlight that the Guaraní population, whose occupation extended between Brazilian and Paraguayan territories, constituted an essential factor of resistance to the processes of Ibero-American colonization (Golin 2014). In this regard, it is also necessary to remember that the war and the redrawing of the resulting geopolitical frontier were part of an erasing process of other territorial designs prior to the arrival of Europeans. In those fields, references to the millenarian territorial occupation of the Guaraní, Kaiowá, Kadiwéu, Guató, and Terena peoples, among others, were lost.

Therefore, my childhood house had been settled in a region occupied by some of these nations since distant times, long before it was recognized as Paraguayan and later Brazilian. The house was settled in the middle of a route, a complex path called Peabiru, which connected the Brazilian east coast to the Andes region (Bond 2009). The Guaraní ethnicity peoples organized themselves territorially around this road, which is, above all, a flow of migrations. Journeys.

The geopolitical borders demarcated by the nation-states constituted by the Portuguese and Spanish invasions ignored the territorial designs already established there. They tried to disqualify and erase these occupations in many ways: physically, humanly, politically, economically, and, in particular, symbolically.

In the Great War, the Paraguayan soldiers fought for borders that were not their own. Instead, they fought for their survival. Brazilian enslaved soldiers fought in the war for charters of freedom promised by the emperor. They killed each other in the name of interests, not theirs but of other landlords.

There, on the front porch of my childhood home, thinking about the remarkable journey of my grandparents and great-grandparents, the journeys of my siblings, and the many stories I heard, I was astonished at the possibility of others' reports of other worlds, other times, other landscapes. And the many possible lives.

The indecipherable mystery that travelers carried hidden in their gaze and luggage moved me and still moves me. Moreover, I had impulses also to follow the road. Maybe it was Peabiru's call. And then I followed. I took the red dirt road and went by train tracks, paved roads, and air and water routes.

Wherever I have been, I have not let go, even today, of the questions that were never answered: Where do all these people live? What do they do? Where do they go? What secrets do they carry in their luggage? What are they going to do at their destinations? Why do they travel? Why do I travel?

Of the places I have been and lived, of the metropolises where I let myself get lost, no travel destination was as remarkably transformative as the months lived among the Hahaintesu, Negarotê, and Mamaindê groups, of the ethnic group registered by academic institutions and by public policies under the general name of Nambikwara. I consider this an indelible experience of diving into the possibilities of alterity, of meeting with the other, and thus, with my paths. The impact of experience (Dewey 2005) the power to modify is in the world from an immersion through the senses, which unfolds in the body's language before entering the realms of the logos itself.

I took the bus to Cuiabá, where I stayed long enough to visit the Chapada dos Guimarães. Then I boarded another bus towards Vilhena. I presented myself at the FUNAI's head office in the middle of the morning. By radio, they talked to the head of the post. They agreed that he would pick me up in the afternoon at the Posto Comodoro, on the same road I had come from, about 120 miles back. Another employee was willing to drop me off at the appoint-

ed place. We drove in an old pickup truck to the crossroads. He continued on a dirt road, inward Chapada dos Pareci, heading east. I sat on a rock on the banks of Highway 364, looking at another minor dirt road that disappeared into the woods of Vale do Manairisu to the west.

I stayed there for a time that cannot be counted. The waiting and the sensation of vulnerability increased the feeling of loneliness. There, motionless, the loneliness gained weight, leaning against that rock, side by side with me.

It was far past mid-afternoon when I spotted the other truck, dusty and jerking. My host was driving it. He would be responsible for supervising me at the Hahaintesu Indigenous Post. He was joyful. The radio played the song “Yolanda,” sung by Chico Buarque and Pablo Milanés. He sang with them.

Also joyful were the people of that community. They welcomed me into their daily lives as if I had been a long-time acquaintance. The word hahaintesu means “people who sing.” One of the few tonal languages in Brazilian territory, their language is also music. First, one learns the melodic line of words and phrases. Only afterward are their phonemes pronounced.

The recurring image of the children in the indigenous village has stuck to my memory like a tattoo. I can still hear the trill of their laughter.

children play naked in the lagoon
 clay bodies and yellow butterflies
 every place is always the same
 and a lifetime doesn't occupy the smallest fraction
 of a single beat of the eternal...¹

(Martins 2016)

In the vicinity of those territories, still in the 18th century, there was the Quariterê Quilombo. Formed by black and indigenous people, it was located on the margins of the Guaporé River, wherein more recent times, it has been located in the small Vila Bela da Santíssima Trindade in Mato Grosso. Teresa de Benguela led this quilombo for a long period (Lacerda, 2019). The community deeply respected her, primarily her actions that established resistance to external threats. In the end, she was arrested and murdered by agents of the Brazilian state.

¹ “crianças brincam nuas na lagoa / corpos de argila e borboletas amarelas / todo lugar é sempre o mesmo / e uma vida inteira não ocupa a menor fração / de um único compasso do eterno...” (Martins 2016).

Little is known about Teresa de Benguela, Queen Teresa, as her people called her. Little is known about the many female leaders who established resistance forces against the violent processes of colonization throughout the centuries that followed the European occupation. Their actions have been erased, just like the paths, the roads, the territories, the millenary cultures pulsating in Abya Yala, Pindorama, Anahuac, Tawantinsuyu, and many other names attributed to these lands before they were called America.

The trip to the Manairisu Valley territories took me back to my childhood home. I could perceive it differently, as well I understood many of the points of view of its original inhabitants and of the others who joined us in the mesh of that community formed by settlers installed there since the beginning of the 20th century.

Positioned there by the balcony, I reviewed its cardinal points and the movements-flows in these various directions: North, South, East, West. In particular, I realized the many layers of erasure necessary for constructing narratives that prevail over others, that overlap others. I also realized that it took many trips to erect the multiple layers of narratives, making them visible, thus.

During the celebrations for the bicentennial of Paraguay's independence, Paraguayan filmmaker Paz Encina undertook a dive into the so-called Archives of Terror, a collection that gathered material related to political repression in the country between 1917 and 1989. With this material, she made a set of video installations called *Notas de Memoria* (Encina, 2012). In one of these works, *Los Pyragüés*, the informers, she projected extracts of denouncements and photos found in the archives on the windows of the Investigations Building. In another work, *El Río*, she projected onto the Paraguay River images of people who disappeared during the Stroessner dictatorship.

A few years later, she made a video installation entitled "Hallazgos." In it, the environment is marked by obscurity. In the dim light, some hands dig the earth with tools. In addition to the sound produced by the activity, barking dogs can be heard all around, mixed with incidental sounds. Portraits of men and women are alternately projected onto the stirred earth. They are the faces of men and women who disappeared during the long dictatorship of Stroessner in Paraguay. The projection of the video in which the earth is being stirred up is completed with photos of the missing people found in layers of memory. *Hallazgos*.

Memory and forgetfulness. In an exercise that is also an excavation almost archeological, unfinished, and doomed to failure, I scavenge fragments that I might be able to gather to retrace some of these stories and paths.

I scour traces of the Peabiru path. I search for clues about the territorialities and displacements of the Guarani, Kaiowá, Kadiwéu, Guató, and Terena communities. I am eager to recover what has been erased by the war and the colonizers' occupation. What would have remained of the caravans of my grandparents and great-grandparents, unreported, lost in the memories of the older adults who have already died? And of the sweet guaviras, destroyed in the fields overturned by planting pastures for the cattle? I draw, in my memory, the silhouette of the centenary Jatobá tree, the native grass trees, the bamboo that blooms every 30 years, all fallen and replaced by small soybean plants, whose cycles do not last six months.

I can feel that pulses in me the cries of pain of those who died in the Great War, in wars, dyeing streams with blood. This is how Sanga Puytã, the tiny red river, was named. The weeping of the women who lost their folks, then got up, shaking their clothes, fixing their hair to continue their lives reverberate in me. I feel the tiredness of men and women who traveled for months, years, searching for the promised land, on the border, without caring about the conflicts.

I return to Ulysses, to Penelope, to Percy Bysshe Shelley. It must be made clear: no, I am not from Athens; I have never been to Ithaca. The place I come from is called Yauareté, the real jaguar. The color of the forest behind my childhood home was an intense green. From peak to peak, it was marked by the flowers of the tajá amarillo, the yellow ipê. The road from where I started my journey had the marks of jaguar footprints. My footprints also marked that red ground of the road. Moreover, my feet were dyed with its dust. This road stayed with me.

This is how I got here.

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