

EMISFÉRICA

Introduction

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The disappeared are, but not here.

The places they frequent are empty; they left and still haven't come back. Their everyday objects, the clothes that keep them warm, the beds that shelter them, are still where they left them, motionless, dispossessed, almost abandoned. Everything waits for its owner. Time does its job: it ages things, it covers them in mold, it transforms everything, makes it decrepit and useless. If something once had a life, it withers, dries up. Time creates a permanent winter.

The disappeared are, but not here.

They are underground or under inclement rain, they are hungry like us, they feel cold, they feel hot, they look at us but we can't see them, they speak but we can't hear them. They wonder about their future, a present that never ends. There they are, whispering, under that cantuta tree.

Those who are alive, who are here, those who never left, remember them and keep them on this side of the world, the everyday world. They think of them, talk to them, tell them their sorrows; the mother tormented by not knowing, the younger brother who never had an older brother to defend him, the sister he could never care for or protect. They understand each other, murmur unheard things, codes unknown to us. They caress their clothes, those they once made, washed and ironed. The threads whisper in their ears, the strands, the weave, the yarn, the stitches and the seams. Their colors are always bright, not even the implacable winter has reduced them to dirt stains. Those who are alive, who are here, bring back their disappeared, to a room, a school yard, a town square, a high plateau on an icy mountain.

"Could this be the sleeve that covers this bone? Could this bone be part of this arm? Could this be the tooth missing from this smile? We have to piece together, glue, set, but can we ever restore the life, smiles, and harmony to those shapes? Could we bring movement back to that arm?" There are no more pieces of world or people in the Putis of our country. Nowhere is there more pain and silence than in the depths of the earth.

Putis is Perú. A country, a space, a piece of land, a place of opportunities and longing, a tiny hell in a vast plain. A country of colors seen in black and white by the disappeared and their people, a flag against the sky, but not "at half-mast." We are in a cemetery. This is not a small corner, it is a land of the dead. Here, even the red flowers of the cantuta turn grey and dull.

Perú is Putis. Only we can restore its lost colors. Only we can bring warmth back to those trapped in that glacial winter where stoic grass grows, grass that not even the afternoon wind

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can wither. Only we can bring them back. So they can continue being, so they can be here, so that, even as bones, clothes or toothless smiles, they can be reunited with those who haven't given up hope of finding them.¹

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Notes

¹ From *Si no vuelvo, búsqüenme en Putis / If I Don't Come Back, Look For Me in Putis*. (Lima: EPAF, 2009). Translated by Marlène Ramírez-Cancio from the Spanish version.