

## Aliens & Utopias

I.

I wake up. It was not a dream.

Am I still dreaming?

I'm tired.

It is morning and I head to the toilet. I pick up a magazine from my small bathroom library and read an interview, which mentions the testimony of a Chilean film director, who as a twenty-year-old, felt trapped between the Andes and the Pacific Ocean.

He was told, "you will travel endlessly across the planet" by a tarot reader in the middle of Santiago de Chile. Later that year, his father gave him a hundred dollars and a third class boat ticket to Paris. His journey had begun. When I was twenty- years- old, I also lived between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes. I felt safe, not trapped. Nevertheless, at the same age as this young movie maker, left for Europe.

He had travelled extensively, but still wanted to reach 'that last frontier'.  
Me, I would also like to make my dreams come true.

The toilet *FLUSHES*.

This is the story of a journey that for a long time I thought was mine, and mine only. In reality, there was always something other than me: making all the decisions, marking all the borders, punctuating all the sentences. Today, I am in a different place than where I thought this journey would take me.

This is the story of the time when I realised I was seen as *alien*, and went through a 'naturalisation' process that failed.

Five years ago I arrived in Finland. Many things—big and small—happened from that moment to this day. But the issue of immigration was always there, present and watching. To be an immigrant—or rather to *become* an immigrant—makes you the target of a silent process of institutionalised harassment. It threatens to break you, in order to make you go away.

When I left home, I did not realise that I was moving away, and it was not really my intention. My aunt, on the other hand, understood this was a big event, and as I was packing my bags she said, “don’t be scared, you have sweet blood”. That afternoon, I jumped the huge pond of the Atlantic and after that—for one reason or another—I remained on the other side. Unknowingly, I made a life. I became ‘a global citizen’. I played a game of disguise: “You can see me, and you’d never guess where I’m from”.

But to *remain* does not necessarily mean to *belong*.

How long does it take to *belong*?

*Alienated from her mother culture, “alien” in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within her inner Self. Petrified. She can’t respond, her face caught between “los intersticios”, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits.*<sup>1</sup>

## II.

When I arrived in Finland in 2013, I found a job in a restaurant located in the outskirts of Helsinki. A cozy farm-themed bistro, specialised in traditional Finnish food. Despite my very poor Finnish, I was kindly put in charge of the breakfast buffet and the cash register. There, I learned how to make munkki and karelian piirakka, two of the most iconic Finnish pastries. Every Wednesday, hundreds of motorcyclists would gather around the restaurant, to drink coffee and eat a donut. I still remember the smell of gasoline, frying oil and sugar mixing with the moist autumn air. The scent of seasons was new for me.

In order to stay in the country, I applied for a working visa based on my new job. I had a full time working contract, which is a requirement for a working Visa. Nevertheless, some months later, I received a negative decision and was deported from Finland.

Just like that.

The shock of that moment numbed my feelings. Emotions came much later, years later.

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<sup>1</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera: La Nueva Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books: San Francisco, 1987 .p.48.

When I met the police officer handling “my case”, all the practicalities were explained to my partner at the time, in Finnish. He explained he would rather not speak to me, in case I became “aggressive”. He also said that my application received a negative decision because “any Finnish person could do the job I wanted to do”. Nothing I could say or do at this moment would change anything, so I remained passive. His desk was full of souvenirs from all over the world—flags and small objects carved in wood. I wondered if he had really travelled to all these countries, or if these were gifts from people who visited his office. He gave me the phone number of a person who would be waiting for me at the airport. I had to leave within thirty days.

The early morning of 9 December, 2013, I arrived at Helsinki Airport with clumsily packed luggage and sticky eyes. Light and warmth were nowhere to be seen or felt. A police officer was waiting for me beside the information screens. He was dressed discreetly in shades of brown, and I could not see the colour of his hair because he was wearing a hat. Without words exchanged or explanations, we walked through a section of the airport that was unknown to me. Because of the fast pace and the lack of information given to me, the whole situation felt ‘off the record’. I could not wait with the other passengers at the gate or go through the regular security check, never mind the duty-free. I was also the first one to arrive to the aircraft, and the pilot was waiting for us at the door. The police officer then gave him my passport and directed me to sit at the last row. As I melted into the seat with exhaustion, I felt relieved this weird formality was over. The only problem was that it wasn’t.

My flight arrived to Amsterdam at ten in the morning, and I was eager to catch my connection. However, as I approached the airplane door, I noticed two men were waiting for me. My passport was then passed from the hands of the pilot to the hands of the Dutch police. I was taken across the airport in a mini-van to an unknown location. It had been raining, and the asphalt of the runway was wet, and smelled like hot rubber. “The deportation from Finland does not mean you did anything wrong,” said one of the police officers, as he offered me tea and cookies inside a toilet-like waiting room. “No cookies for me,” I said. The tiles of that room were *beige*, and merged with the colour of people’s faces. Even though the situation in this room was calm in its surface, I felt a boiling tension in the room and inside me. I had no idea where I was or how long I was going to be there, I had no papers, and none of my friends or family members were aware of what I was going through. I couldn’t contact them from inside this room.

As I tried to make sense of this whole situation, the phrase “protocolary deportation” rang constantly in my head. This is the term MIGRI and the police used when describing a procedure, that required some sort of etiquette or standardized name, probably because of its abrasive nature. I thought about all the things are seen as protocolary in life, but actually involve violence to some extent. Something as simple as a visa requirement, contains in itself a big contradiction. We are sold a globalized world, where it is up to us how much we accomplish. Nevertheless, the moment we intend to circulate around it, we realize it is closed, and the keys are in the hands of only certain citizens.

As I was finally allowed to take my connection to Quito, I wondered how much these officers, this pilot, and the drivers that took me around Schiphol Airport knew about 'my case', and about me. We were strangers, nevertheless, they knew everything about me, and I had no control in how they could use my information. None of them ever informed me what was coming next in this deportation journey or why.

As I entered the aircraft, I felt relieved to go home and exit from this hostile place. I was lucky to have a safe home to go back to. I observed other passengers around me. Many of them were Ecuadorian and spoke a combination of Spanish and Italian. An elderly woman sat beside me, and told me she had migrated to Milan in the 90's due to the "feriado bancario" which froze the bank accounts of millions of Ecuadorians in 1999, and forced them to migrate. She remained in Milan doing domestic work and her children had grown up there. Her trip to Ecuador was for holidays, even though most of her relatives had already passed away. I thought about the harshness of leaving and the harshness of coming back. The bitterness of remaining in-between.

Papers. Borders. *The imaginary walls are higher than the real ones.*  
No. *The imaginary walls have become real.*

Five months after my deportation, I returned to Europe with new reasons to stay and fewer accents on my English. I felt confident. Nevertheless, the strange violence of this deportation remained deep inside me, like a splinter of wood under the skin. I almost forgot it was there.

Letter of deportation.



Itä-Uudenmaan poliisilaitos  
Vantaan pääpoliisiasema

ULKOMAALAISEN MAASTA  
POISTUMISEN VALVOMINEN 1 (1)  
 Oleskelulupaa ei ole myönnetty  
 Viisuminpidennystä ei ole myönnetty  
 Henkilö on perunut oleskelulupa-  
hakemuksensa  
 Muu valvottu maasta poistuminen

Henkilötiedot	Sukunimi, etunimet Mino Perez, Martina Adela
	Henkilötunnus 25.07.1990
	Kansalaisuus Ecuador
Matkustus- asiakirjatiedot	Laji ja myöntäjävaltio Passi, Ecuador
Maasta poistuminen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Varataan tilaisuus poistua maasta viimeistään 9.12.2013 <input type="checkbox"/> Saavuttava antamaan tietoja oleskelusta Aika: Paikka: <input type="checkbox"/> Esitettävä matkalippu tai annettava muu selvitys maasta poistumisesta Ulkomaalainen joka jättää noudattamatta ulkomaalaislain 130 §:n nojalla annetun kutsun saapua antamaan tietoja oleskelustaan, voidaan tuomita ulkomaalaisrikkomuksesta ulkomaalaislain 185 §:n nojalla sakkoon. Henkilön on määrä poistua maasta omatoimisesti (paikka, aika, lento, laiva yms.) 9.12.2013 klo 07.05 lennolla KL1164 Hki - Amsterdam, josta jatko lennolla KL0753. Matkustusasiakirja <input type="checkbox"/> toimitetaan / toimitettu passintarkastukseen <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> henkilöllä itsellään Matkalippu <input type="checkbox"/> toimitetaan / toimitettu passintarkastukseen <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> henkilöllä itsellään HELSINKI-VANTAA LENTOASEMA PASSINTARKASTUS PUH. 020 410 6260 TÄMÄ ASIAKIRJA TULEE LUOVUTTAA PASSINTARKASTAJALLE. *)
Päiväys ja allekirjoitus	Paikka ja aika Vantaa 22.11.2013
	Nimi ja allekirjoitus Vanhempi konstaapeli

\*) Passintarkastajaa pyydetään ilmoittamaan maasta poistumisesta, faksi 071 873 6735

Treccit: T2 lähtevät ison info-  
taulun alapuolella 5.30

P. 041 452 0123 Jouni  
(poikaystävä  
saattaja)

### III.

*What are your plans for the future?*

They ask me in a letter titled:

“NOTIFICATION OF POSSIBLE REVOCATION OF RESIDENCE PERMIT”.

Five years after my deportation, MIGRI came back to my life. As I was applying for Finnish citizenship—also known as *naturalisation*—they started to question my current residence permit, and threatened to revoke it. For me, it was clear that the prospect of accepting me in Finland indefinitely took them by surprise. Like an old acquaintance that had become a stranger, they asked me a lot of questions about my past and future. Our relationship became weirdly intimate. Answering letters, making phone calls, writing emails. I was in touch with them through every possible means of communication almost every day. I was in touch with them more than with my own family. Nevertheless, I always felt an inescapable vagueness in their answers. What do I need to do? Read between the lines.

My answers were never enough. They wanted more explanations, more reasons, and more quantifiable facts. They did not ask, but demanded. Once again, I felt I had no floor under my feet. “If they deported you once, what if it happens again?” asked my mom on the phone. I promised her this would not happen. But honestly, how could I know? I felt I was walking on thin ice. Slowly, this constant questioning of my worth as an individual and as a professional started eating me up from the inside. I went back to work and tried to move forward with my life. But something had changed. It was summer and the heat felt heavier than ever.

Panic attacks. Anxiety that made itself present in really peculiar ways. Pinches of pain and extreme fatigue. “You need to take a holiday, don’t take your computer”, the doctor suggested. I asked for a second opinion, then a third one. “Purge it all out, it’s all here in your stomach, you see?” suggested a young nurse, as she handed over a strong pill to clean out my toxic insides.

“Just vomit it all out”.

*Extract of questions in “Letter of possible revocation of Residence Permit”*

*In addition, answer the following questions:*

*What ties do you have in Finland (family, socialising, work, study)?*

*What ties do you have with your home country?*

*Where do you want to stay permanently, which country you want to live in?*

*Justify what your future plans are.*

*Do you have a residence permit for a different Schengen country? Where?*

*Where have you travelled abroad?*

*If Immigration Service considers it, your residence permit can be cancelled and you might experience expulsion or refusal of entry, what do you think about it?*

#### IV.

When does an alien become native?

According to evolutionary theory, ‘alien’ species cannot remain alien forever, as they will adapt to their new environment sooner or later. The new cannot remain new forever. Similarly, the environment and its ‘native’ species must adjust to other novelties as well. It is in fact the inability of the native species to “recognise” and “respond” to the novelty that often results into catastrophic relationships.<sup>2</sup> The alien might never become a native, but could remain as a hybrid, making it more challenging to categorise and control. In the book *La Paradoja de la Letra*, José Ramos remembers Leopoldo Lugones’ description of immigration as a crisis in the “national soul”, not only through receiving foreign bodies, but “tongues that contaminate” a national language considered perfect and complete.<sup>3</sup>

At twenty-eight years old, I try to find myself walking the streets of Europe confidently. “I have become a ‘global citizen’” I think to myself. This is true only on the outside. On the inside, and when my passport is open, I am an alien everywhere.

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<sup>2</sup>Alexandra. J.R. Carthey. Banks. B. Peter. When Does an Alien become Native Species? <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0031804>. Accessed June, 2019.

<sup>3</sup>Julio Ramos. *Paradojas de la Letra*. Venezuela: Editorial Excultura. 1996, p.8.

“Jussi, this is the jungle and I am the prey,” I say to my Finnish therapist.

“The status of Alien, the status of immigrant, is not who you really are,” he answers.

Jussi listens to me, and doodles stars and spirals on his square notebook. He is amazed that this morning I received the answer to my citizenship application but I haven't read it yet. As he lets out a big laugh, he asks: “So, you just left the letter on the table unopened?” “Yes”. “Whatever the result is, I hope it is the best for you,” he adds. I keep that line in my mind, and later that day I read the decision.

Months later, I revive in the Andes.

The mountains, they look after me. Their perimeters contain me.

Their shadow, darker than the night, understands this confusion.

“It's the lack of oxygen, why we Quiteños are so nostalgic,” my father reflects.

We stare at the city from a nearby hill.

The broken geography of this metropolis reminds me how life grows from fractures, and how homes emerge from a hole that has been filled with soil.

“In the next earthquake, the colonial city will collapse into itself, down the hole,” says my father, while frowning and staring at the old buildings without blinking.

Now, twelve thousand kilometers away from the land of the midnight sun, I remember the negative decision I received for my citizenship, and I try to understand how I feel about it.

Why did I want to become a Finnish citizen?

This question was answered by other questions:

Why did anyone make me feel this was something I had to deserve?

Who are the real citizens of a world without borders and who has the right to inhabit this utopia? How can we live in societies that are in a constant predatory state?

In this whole process of coming and going, remaining and not belonging, being pushed in and out, there is an invisible matter that must be taken into account: the mental health of immigrants. Who is held accountable for people's broken psychological wellbeing due to violent immigration processes? How much of myself will I have to give to build back the sense of security that I lost? It ends up being a lonely and silent process.

I hear and read, more and more, surreal testimonies from foreigners, friends and acquaintances that have experienced some sort of subhuman treatment from the Finnish Immigration Office. Many of them wait indefinitely for their permit, without a chance of leaving the country, sometimes for up to a year



and have no information on when their decision will be made. Others, have been called to meet in places like the airport, to inform them of their deportation, without previous warning. I specially empathized with Ibrahim's testimony, which was published on *Migrant Tales* last year. Here, Ibrahim recounted how after arriving as an asylum seeker and struggling for years to find a job in Finland, he voluntarily decided to go back to Iraq, even though it was not safe to do so.

"This country eats you up as you wait for months on end without knowing if you will get a residence permit or any permits that will give you the right to stay, or not (...) For my own mental health, it is important I leave before it is too late."<sup>4</sup>

It is scary to imagine what "too late" means.

V.

Today,

I am in Quito, finishing the writing of this testimony. I have just been given a new residence permit as a job seeker, that I am planning to use on my way back to Europe in two weeks; I haven't been there in four months. Even though I know my residence permit will expire next July and I need to start thinking on how to *remain* once more, I am calm inside myself. I have learned now how to keep myself untouched by a violence that doesn't really know me, but wants to hurt just because it is designed to do so.

I want to finish this text with a small reflection about failure. A very present feeling through my migratory experience.

Failure. What can we learn from "failing"?

Immigrants are condemned to be categorized as beings of failure and loss in front of the eyes of the immigration systems in "first world countries". We are an unwanted weight that could contaminate and break the balance of a seemingly

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.migranttales.net/ibrahim-of-iraq-finland-is-a-never-ending-long-dark-tunnel-without-light/>

perfect society. Failure teaches you how to adapt, and through that adaptability, how to resist and endure. To accept failure is to liberate yourself from expectation of success and its imaginary. It opens up a whole new world of alternatives, DIY solutions, and the most imaginative answers to the most complicated questions. It makes you know yourself. For real.

It is important to be willing to explore failure and the changes it might involve as part of the process of becoming wiser.

I wrote this to share my story on this subject. My story of migratory failures and what unimaginable knowledge and learning came out from them.

We must continue fighting the borders, fighting the institutionalized violence from Immigration Office, and advocating for citizens that want to relocate themselves in the world freely and safely.

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