

If History could set me Free

by

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I stumbled upon some glorious pages
that read *la facultad* the other afternoon,
some inbetweenness theory –
just like a heart that if you cut in half
remains the same
on both its different sides –
They say they can see below the surface.

Can I see below the surface too?
I'm an amalgamation of some people from some places,
I'm the ecotone were roots meet.
My children might kill me softly in different languages:
Σ' αγαπώ μαμά, I love you, mommy.

But what would my *γιαγιά* say?
Γιαγιά should know better,
she's lain in the same bed as pain,
her dialect silenced, she cannot interfere,
but she had found peace and love
in a 60's one-bedroom town shed she called her kingdom.

And what about *la Virgen*, Virgin Mary, Παναγιά?

I'm not a believer, but what would she say as a woman?

She did deviate and became a legend.

Is she another master narrative to be torn apart?

Yi-Fu Tuan's got it right.

Place is my culture

and culture my place,

if history can set me free.

I cannot have all the families I'd like where my family has planted me

because people can say words

and words can hurt.

I need to find a place to fit in.

Is place my own time?

Is place my own narrative?

A room of my own to paint in red,

blue,

yellow,

green,

orange,

purple,

if history could set me free.

Like the Chicano people,
 I will possess
 the power to believe,
 the power to change,
 if only history can set me free.

I have always been fascinated by the idea of liminality—of existing in a space that resembles a border between two different realities. Such physical or mental spaces have been proven rich and fertile ground multiple times. “If History could set me Free” is mostly inspired by my grandmother’s personal experiences and how these relate to mine several years later. A woman who grew up in poverty and war, she escaped to the city to the dismay of her family, suppressing, but not forsaking her origins. She has been living in-between worlds ever since. As Gloria E. Anzaldúa writes, such people—“the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign”—possess “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities” (38). Amidst all the pain, however, liminal spaces can also offer solace, as “[p]lace supports the human need to belong to a meaningful and reasonably stable world” (Tuan 44). Can place be our culture through the meaning we assign to it, the experiences we have in specific spaces, the memories we create? Does our own personal history, or even our family’s history interfere in this process, and to what extent can it shape narratives of the present? Such are the questions the poem above poses, leaving the answers to the reader, probably as a poem should.

Works Cited

- Anzaldúa, Gloria E. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. “Place and Culture: Analeptic for Individuality and the World’s Indifference.” *Mapping American Culture*, edited by Wayne Franklin and Michael Steiner, U of Iowa P, 1992, pp. 27-49.