

LA BOOMBOX DE SONIA

[cassette-PLAY]

SG: This is Learning Departures, and this is for people that had to migrate when they were children

LEARNING DEPARTURES (Sonia Guiñansaca)

1.

Your tiny brown hands gripping brown and burgundy suitcases
 With gently packed memories
 The sorrows will poke out of the seams
 Only one stuffed animal toy will come with you
 Escoge uno, abuelita said
 The rest, you tell them you will be back
 You hide them under your bed
 Hoping they don't collect too much dust
 Too much resentment
 Becoming fragmented souls in the dark
 Like birds aching to fly with chipped wings
 Learning that they are not meant for the sky

2.

And you will land in a foreign airport
 The suitcases never make it
 With no belongings
 You take it as a sign
 That you will never belong
 Maybe you too are not meant for the sky
 And you learn resentment

[STOP - Cassette]

SG: Mi nombre es Sonia Guiñansaca. Vivo en los Estados Unidos, vivo en Los Angeles, pero crecí en New York.

I am a migrant artist... I've been living in the United States since the age of 5 and for the majority of it I wasn't documented and I was able to adjust this a couple years ago, and still on that journey of figuring out what this all means...

I think the best way to describe my journey, it's just like the word becoming, I haven't arrived anywhere yet, I'm just always becoming and exploring that.

GZ: Este episodio tiene muchos umbrales. Está en el cruce de idiomas y tiene una traducción no sonora en línea que pueden leer mientras lo escuchan. Está en los bordes de ser: niño, migrante, indocumentado, documentado.

Está, también, entre la narración y la poesía.

Sonia Guiñansaca migró a Estados Unidos desde la provincia del Azuay, al sur de Ecuador, cuando tenía cinco años, para reunirse con sus padres que habían dejado el país a inicios de los años noventa. Irse, implicaba dejar atrás a sus abuelos paternos, Alegría y Cosme, y a un Ecuador del que quedan algunas impresiones potentes de su infancia.

Sonia tiene el tatuaje de una grabadora boombox en su antebrazo derecho. Aunque tiene que ver con crecer en la ciudad de Nueva York y cerca de la cultura del hip-hop, a Sonia le recuerda a Ecuador. Es la imagen de una radio prendida en una casa en Cumbe, en la provincia del Azuay.

Le preguntamos a Sonia ¿qué suena en esa boombox, la de su memoria y su tatuaje? para entender el vaivén entre la transformación y la nostalgia y el desconcierto de la experiencia migrante en la infancia.

El sonido de esta grabadora tiene música, tiene recuerdos de risas, de encuentros familiares, conversaciones en la sierra ecuatoriana, en Harlem en la ciudad de Nueva York y tiene varios poemas.

Soy Giulianna Zambrano y esto es Crónicas al borde.

Uno: Migrar en la infancia

SG: Cuando yo era chiquita, I didn't have the opportunity to theorize or conceptualize migration. What I knew was my parents left me and I miss them,

pero mandaban dinero o mandaban ropa y esa era la comunicación con mis padres.

Mis padres decidieron... well, I'm not sure if it was like their dream to come to the United States and leave behind their home country or their family members, knowing that they may never be able to go back. But I think they made a hard decision to leave, in the early 90s, and my father left first, my mother left after a year of giving birth to me. About four or five years later they were able to save up all that money and then they brought me into the United States...

I came to know about the border through my parents or my family members when they told me: "cruzamos la frontera". And to me, it's like, as a child, I'm like... what is this?...what is this big wall? I grew up Catholic too so I am like is this like a big giant wall going to the heavens? And then also later on, seeing, like, Fox News, Univision, and or even CNN, the constant replay of, like, the video scenes of people jumping over or crossing or whatever, and hiding in the bushes of deserts. That's like my familiarity with like the border, but I don't have like the same familiarity, I came in a different way, I came by airplane...

I didn't know what was happening, I just knew that I was getting a haircut, a similar haircut to what I have to right now, I look exactly, like, how I came... which is very interesting... and I remember wearing my little overalls, which is something that I wear now too, and turtlenecks which I wear now too...

They tell me that I had to look presentable, that I had to, you know like, follow instructions, that I had to, you know, hold the person's hand, not get lost, but that I was going to see my parents, and that I had a lot of questions. Oh, one other detail that I do remember of the flight is that my ears popped, like my ears were hurting...

I remember my flight had landed a little bit earlier, so my mom and my dad were not able to pick me up at the airport. They actually had to pick me up from the person I came with, in Brooklyn, and I remember just sitting there, I was a little upset because my luggage got lost, they couldn't find my luggage so whatever I had, the little things that I had was gone. And that I was able to recognize my mom or understand her voice, but I did not recognize my dad.

Then they took me to Manhattan, and I remember just walking around, and then that's all I remember. The rest is like things...

GZ: Los recuerdos de Sonia sobre su partida a Estados Unidos no son muy claros, y se amalgaman con los relatos de sus familiares y fotografías. Llega a la ciudad de Nueva York después de un vuelo del que solo se le había dicho que debía seguir instrucciones, portarse bien y permanecer callada. De su llegada a Estados Unidos en los noventa recuerda el dolor de oídos en el avión, los peluches que la recibieron y el collage de fotos en la pared de su nueva casa. Poco a poco empieza a aclararse la distancia de sus abuelos paternos, de la sierra ecuatoriana, del idioma... y asimismo empiezan a aparecer los mecanismos para subsanarla: las llamadas telefónicas a larga distancia y más tarde, la poesía.

Dos: Ecuador en la memoria

SG: Soy kichwa-kañari. Nací en Cuenca. Tengo familia ahí. Tengo memorias de estar en Ecuador, pero migré a los 5 años, entonces, no hay mucho de recordar. Entonces, I think for me, my parents did as much as they could to ensure that I had memories of my grandparents, on my dad's side, who still lived in Cumbe, to remember the food, to remember some language, to find a way to stay connected, whether is like getting the calling cards, you know, and then you get the numbers and you call back home...

My artistry and my poetry for a long time when I was undocumented was trying to find a way to stay grounded, and to remember, and to fill in the gaps, and to find a way to just hold on to everything, hold on to the smell of my grandmother, hold on to the to my childhood little memories, my teddy bears, and I think that now... having papers, I'm trying to find ways to reconnect or rebuild my memory of Ecuador, to find a way to fill in the gaps that are still like big and open....

CALLING CARDS (Sonia Guiñansaca)

I.

Across Oceans And land

Working to connect

One phone line

With another

Like an umbilical cord

These \$5, \$10, \$20

Square cards are more than plastic

These calling cards

Have heartbeats

II.

We survive through phone lines
A cycle of dialing Numbers
On the other line waited abuela
On the other line waited memories
On the other line waited birthday wishes
That should have been given in person
While eating guava cake
But we were here
And you were there
On the other line we waited
By payphones we waited
For your voice we waited
That is all we had
My dad waited for you he still does

III.

How do you dial a loved one
When your fingers have work out
From weaving too many memories
When you voice has changed
Since the last time you saw them in person
Your bones have broken from their absence
Your lips have withered
Your face is the only clue left
Of what they might look like now
Perhaps it's best to not look into the mirror
Perhaps you are too ashamed of holding on to old memories

IV.

I can still hear Abuelita Alegria's voice
Abuelita, cómo está Ecuador...
Sí, sí, Abuelita, prometo que regreso...
And then
A long pause
You hear her shuffling the phone
Trying to remember which side to talk from
She is not familiar with this technology
I call it old school

Some call it poverty
 Abuelita's gentle voice
 Rocks me back to memories of when
 She carried me as a baby
 My face lays flat on her back
 She hangs up and I lay gripping on to her words
 Trying not to let go
 Never enough minutes

V.
 Calling cards
 Don't have Heartbeats Anymore
 They just hang in the store
 Teasing you
 Now, dad stops at the bodega
 For other reasons
 His mouth curls up around the rim of the bottle
 Longing for one more conversation
 I think he believes that with every beer
 He gets closer to heaven
 Closer to her closer to home
 (and secretly I wish that was true)

VI.
 The phone goes unused
 (like the passport in my wallet)
 No more dialing
 In his palms rests spaces where my grandma is buried
 And even then, even then the lines on his hands create borders
 Restricting him from getting too close
 Dad wants to hold my hand
 But mostly we look at each other hoping to find comfort
 He says that I look like Abuela

SG: I wasn't really surrounded by Ecuadorians and it was predominantly Caribbean immigrants, and it was predominantly Black American folks, and so it was just like... okay, this is not Ecuador. But I don't think when I was little I was thinking I'd landed, I'm in the United States...

I think it was more like I'm with my mom and I can get McDonald's, and I'm going to go pick her up from the factory work, and my dad has a car, and I'm going to go with him and drive. And then later on my uncle joined, most of my mom's family was already in the United States and so is like: all's good like everybody's here and we're all reunited, but I don't think I thought too much of it and even now, I don't think you ever like really process this migration and the pain.

It was really hard. Tenía un rencor, I think it's what you call it, a resentment, with my mom's family because all of her family were able to migrate. Most of her family, the majority of her family were able to migrate into the United States, and my dad's... half of his family was able to relocate to Chicago, but the majority of them passed away in Ecuador...

Seeing my dad missing his parents, which are my grandparents, it landed more heavier on me like the missing of them... my connection to even my indigenous identity is like heavily on like them, and is such a loss that I lost them, and that I was unable to go back, and it's also very comforting to know that you know his name is Cosme and I think of Cosmos and then her name is Alegria, and I think of joy and happiness.

At a young age I was carrying this like baggage, maybe suitcases, of like: oh my God I should have brought this grandmother instead of this grandmother or why did it have to be this grandma and not the other one, and it's like that wasn't something for me to carry, that's the whole...that's a larger immigration, that's the undocumented policies and all these different things, and I think that so many migrant children, so many young people, carry such a burden of like... we have to make it in life because, you know, our parents gave us the American dream opportunity...

GZ: Sonia no solo tendría que lidiar a temprana edad con la ruptura que implica su migración a Estados Unidos, sino también con el lento proceso de entender lo que su migración significaba. Sonia no tenía papeles, al igual que sus padres, y con eso venían otra serie de complejidades que solo entendería paulatinamente. Por 21 años no pudo regresar a Ecuador, moverse con libertad al igual que otras personas de su edad, e incluso que su hermano y su hermana, nacidos en Estados Unidos. Entederse indocumentade lleva a Sonia a otras reflexiones sobre su situación en el país y, finalmente, al activismo...

SG: Mis primeras experiencias de injusticias fue al ver a mis padres en diferentes trabajos y la forma en que los bosses los trataban. Sometimes they wouldn't get paid, there would be a lot of bad work experience, it wasn't safe and so one of the things that I realized was that... "Oh, my parents are migrants, they can't advocate because if they were to bring out like the police or if they were to bring out, try to find a way to fight a case against the workers, they are undocumented...and so, the fear was real". So, I just noticed a lot of that happening. I also lived in New York City, so there was police brutality, racism, other forms of anti-immigrant things happening across our communities and across the country...

I think that I didn't understand like the absence of papers, I would call them papers and then I thought in my mind it was like a certificate or something, which is funny because I collected all my certificates from first grade to like junior high school. And my mom has a big black binder and all of them are there, like perfect attendance and like participation, and I was like if I can get the most and as many as possible, this can prove how worthy I am out of existing and I how good I am, and maybe they'll give me papers, you know...

I didn't understand the system, I thought you just showed how you are a good citizen of the world, but I remember the first time that it was like, I think, I was in middle school or maybe in high school when we had the opportunity to go to Canada, and I was like mom like I want to go, you know, like I said I have the good grades and my mom was like... you can't go, and I'm like why?

So I think that's when I understood my mobility, of like I can't go cuz I don't have papers, and then I think, maturing later on, applying to jobs in high school, you got like your worker papers as a high school student and I was like: oh I'm going to apply, and my mom is like: you can't cuz you don't have a social security number, and so I'm like okay I'm not gonna to get a summer job now, and it's like okay... now my wages, and my payments, and how I'm going to make a living is going to be like impacted... then it was like applying to colleges when it hit me cuz I'm like: I've been waiting, my papers got to come by next week cuz then I have to apply for college and they never did come during that time, and I think that's when it was a very apparent to me like: I didn't have papers. And when everybody else was thinking about their prom, graduation dresses, I also was trying to do that, and enjoy it, but in the back of my mind and, like, in the back of all of that, I was like: Oh shit, like where am I going to go to college? What about all the scholarships? I was number 5 in my class, I worked so hard...

This is not just about not being able to get a summer job, this is now like I can't go to college, what is the future? Would I have to marry? How do I marry if I'm not even dating? like I don't even have a boyfriend, I haven't kissed anybody yet, and how do I also give my parents papers? and so like all of that then that led to my activism...

I don't how many of you are familiar with Dunkin' Donuts but America runs on immigrants is usually like a slogan on its commercials like "America runs on coffee" and so I just switch it around to say America runs on immigrants.

AMERICA RUNS ON IMMIGRANTS (Sonia Guiñansaca)

My mother works on the 23rd floor of a glass building in the middle of Times Square as a server of a catering company / My father rides the train home from work, in his backpack he carries a pair of Timbs with blotches of oil / Neither of them have eaten/ The thing about America is that migrant workers go days without properly eating so that America can function / My mother who goes by Maggy will stand for 8 hours straight bouncing on the balls of her feet to catch any demands by white professionals that for some reason know how to work a google drive but have no idea how to make their own coffee / My father who goes by Segundo ironically is always first to cook, first to burn his hands, first to serve, first to deliver so that men in suits can get their rush lunch order / My mother & father never get days off or paid holidays or bonuses or a 401k or healthcare / My mother & father depend on the power of Vicks, hot tea, and prayers to la Virgen / Sometimes my father and mother do not feel like mine - they feel like they belong to this country / My mother does not see father / My father does not see his brother / My siblings don't see mom or dad / America sees them at all times / America sees our parents more often than we do at 4am, at 7pm, at 11pm, and midnight / My 9 year old brother clasps his tiny brown hands to pray Diosito please take care of mom / My father carries our old school photos in his wallet, folded gently not to crease our faces, this is how he looks after us, this is how he holds on to us / My mother carries a large purse with all our documents because just in case / They both accommodate America's routine by moving around birthdays and bautismos and weddings / America is a spoiled brat wanting more and more and more / America screams Go Back To Your Country, Stop Stealing Our Jobs and simultaneously whines Where is my lunch?

Cuatro: Ser activista/De indocumentade a documentade

SG: The moment of agency, which is like when I decided to be an activist and like really be in the face of the government, and like protest, and wear my shirts, you know, disclosing my immigration status, and doing all these actions, I feel like that's so present because it's a reminder and I want to remind myself always up like the agency in the power that I had over myself. But there's like so much more there, that I think that as an activist, as somebody who is migrant, we are conditioned and we're taught, told and taught, to just think of our lives in association to our immigration status. But there's so much that happened around that, I was married, I have my artistry, I was in college, I was an activist in college too, outside of like immigration, I was in place, I used to play soccer. There's so much there that I often wonder that my incline to always retell my story of those 21 years is all about me being undocumented, but is also maybe that in a way that I'm following along this like colonial government and so forth, like you know of thinking about migrants in like one specific narrative..

Our goal is not to struggle, our goal is to have better lives, and to live and get liberated...but our goal is not to like always stay stuck in the struggle. And so, when I finally got to the point...and when I also noticed that my parents were getting older... that's when my then partner decided to petition for me and it worked...

Then my greencard came in the mail, and it came in an envelope that said: "Welcome to America" and I'm like, I'm already in America, bitches... like what the fuck? And there is a poem in there, I think is in there, no, it's not, it's in the book Colonize This! that I'm like I want to tell you, I want to tell the reader that when I got that envelope that says Welcome to America, that I ripped it, and I threw it in the garbage, and put it on fire...but that's not what I did, like I have that still saved with my mom and all her collections of paperwork...

I think when I saw my parents getting older, and they were still working, and they still didn't have health care, and all of these things were happening, I think that was the moment... I'm like okay... I have to think about what is my actual commitment to this movement, how do I also take care of my family, how do I let go of the shame that may come with having papers, because a lot of we are fighting for as undocumented people and coming out undocumented, like there's a moment that happens that that only becomes our identity, and letting go of that identity seems so vulnerable and seems so scary, like if that's all we know... that moment of trajectory, and a lot of the times we don't talk about that moment of adjustment, there's a lot of pain that happens when you transition out of an immigration status, although that's so common, a person goes can go

from temporary protected status into something different or seeking asylum and adjusting in a particular way.

There is no manuals, there's no books, there's no like lengthy things, there's scholarship and academic stuff, but there's no like very personal things...

There was a moment of...ok... who am I? What is my community? I also had to move back from a lot of those spaces, by undocumented people, because I do believe that it has to be run by undocumented people...

I'm still trying to figure out who I am, and that's just in the relationship in the United States, I don't know... I'm still exploring what it means to me my relationship to Ecuador, now that I can travel...

My first time going back I thought like...I've come back to the motherland, like this is my home, you know, and then it's like: "oh here's the American" And I'm like... American? You know, I'm coming from the United States where I'm not seeing as an American, and so now to be in Ecuador, and then everybody it's like that's the American and I'm like, what?

GZ: Ese salto entre no tener papeles y finalmente tenerlos le hace pensar a Sonia en la posibilidad de existir en los cruces, entre la construcción constante y la nostalgia...entendiendo al cuerpo como un espacio de resistencia frente a políticas que niegan, excluyen o silencian...

SG: There's no going around, my body is here, when you see me you see this, you see I'm brown, you see you know I'm 5 feet, you hear my accent, you're going to see probably me with my partner who is another queer person, so, I think anywhere I walk into, anywhere in the space that I'm into as a poet, as an artist, as a writer, I feel like, although is tiring at times, it's a place of resistance at all times, I can't negotiate it, I can't like take my head off and no longer be queer or no longer be femme or no longer be migrant. I'm always questioning that, so, I think that's always in communication and collaboration with like the poetry and the way that I perform, my activism. Being somebody undocumented and doing civil disobediences was like a political statement of saying: "You know what? This government, these legislations are not going to stop us, we are human beings, we are humane, and so... yeah, my body is a is a place of resistance, it's a place where I can show my agency, I can decorate it however I want, with like my white eyeliner or tattoos. It's a place of rest and a place where my activism starts, because this is like we can't negotiate that.

Everyone is still trying to figure it out, and I think that it's nice to be nostalgic and to be becoming, it's like a soft and tender space, it's a way to exist, rather than being forced to be one fixed thing or have an understanding of something very fixed.

I think that that's like the softness that we can offer, like migrant communities, instead of I think like this limbo, which is real, I think that in becoming and nostalgia, there's a little bit more agency, and there's a little bit more reflection, and there's a little bit more love, and limbo feels like the person is gone and it's just like a matter of legality or something...

GLORY (Sonia Guiñansaca)

SG: This one I wanted to write for my mom and for other queer women, other femmes, other trans femmes, to non binary people, and se llama "Glory", I'm going to share with you.

Mi mama se levanta
A las 7 de la mañana, se baña
Sus pies bendecidos en agua
Es divina
Después, empieza con su maquillaje
Her brown hands
Gently holding the black eyeliner
(for a migrant woman these are lines she welcomes)
She places her dark brown hair in a bun
Carefully placing bobby pins
Like carefully placing lipstick
Like carefully placing hope on land
Mami's knowledge teaches me that my wings
Are meant to be thick
Meant to take up space
(these are rituals I grew up with)
So I repeat
Every morning creating self into existence
Between lipstick and softness
Between borders and belonging (these are ways I survive)
So, I repeat
Arching my eyebrows

Jewelry over my neck
Red nails pointy enough to hold homes
Homes I am building (homes I left)
So, I repeat
Adorning all my genders
(like the gospels never sung at my church)
This becomes biblical
Let this be an ode to femmes of color
Whose celestial eye shadows crack the heavens
Whose thick thighs resurrect possibilities
So, I repeat
What glory we incite
What glory we create
What glory we fucking are!

GZ: ¡Gracias a Sonia Guiñansaca por la poesía y su generosidad!

Este episodio fue producido entre enero y mayo 2021 por Daniela Dávila Navarrete, Giulianna Zambrano Murillo y la iniciativa Arte + Activismos de la Universidad San Francisco de Quito. El guion es de Giulianna Zambrano Murillo. La edición de sonido de Nicolás Schwarzberg. La postproducción y diseño sonoro de José Rafael Subía Valdez. La ilustración que lo acompaña es de Sergio Silva.

En nuestra página web, cronicasalborde.com, pueden encontrar la traducción de algunos fragmentos de este episodio y del poema "Glory" que lo cierra.

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¡Gracias por escuchar!

QUESTIONS FOR ALEGRIA IN PUERTO RICO

SG: I kept thinking about my abuelita Alegria, who passed away before I was able to get papers, and so a lot of my poems are to her, she's my dad's mother so, and it starts with a quote by NoViolet Bulawayo, and it goes...

"We could not attend their funerals because we still had no papers, and so we mourned from afar. We shut ourselves up and turned on the music, so we did not raise alarm, writhed on the floor and wailed and wailed and wailed. And with our [grandparents] gone, we told ourselves, We have no home anymore, who would we go to see in that land we left behind?" -NoViolet Bulawayo

Woke up early to catch the sunrise at the beach
Spoke your name
Alegría
Sat on the sand watching the skies crack and mend
The most elegant of peaches and pinks
And there the sun poked out
Alegría

I ask
How do you start rituals?
How do you call in ancestors?
Alegría

No answers, yet
There is a Coquí singing to the wind
I'm left to look at these crashing waves

Waiting for a manual
A way to call you
To get your attention
A way to grieve you
Alegría

Can I speak your name this loosely?
Can I hold your name in my tongue even if scattered in my mouth?
Or is this reserved for nietas you raised in person

What happens to us the granddaughters who migrate
I thought about your son my dad
In a gray Honda Van, he used to take me to Coney Island and New Jersey
beaches
The one he used to drive for his newspaper route before it was stolen

He loved to swim deep in ocean
Alegría

I watched him closely out of jealousy
He was a good swimmer
Alegría
I watched him closely out of fear
Still a brown man with no health insurance in America

Alegría
While in ocean
Tell me if he called out your name
Parting the water in his arms
Was he reaching for you as he swam?
Was this his way of drowning his memories of you?
Was he trying to keep you afloat?
I never saw him pick up seashells

Alegría
I thought about your home in Cumbe
Not near an ocean
Did you ever get to see an ocean?
Are you a more of a river type of person?

There's a picture of you, Abuelito Cosme, and Señora Maria
At my baptism you held my hand
You with red pollera and purple blouse
Gentle face skin toned stockings
Alegría
I bet you remember more about this day
Alegría
I found a bunch of tiny seashells
Some cracked
Others just quite right
Like my learning to call you back to life
I called out your name this morning
Not in sadness but in jubilation
Dozen crashing waves hugging my body

Alegría
Meet me again in the shore.