Revolts, Stories

Youth, Diversity, and Human Rights

Text by Edgardo Bermejo
Illustrations by John Marceline

INE
Instituto Nacional Electoral

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COLECCIÓN ÁRBOL

Presentation

Revolts, Stories. Youth, Diversity, and Human Rights is a literary project that the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE, National Electoral Institute) has made available to young readers as part of the **Árbol** collection, with the intention of promoting the joy of reading through texts that introduce us to topics related to civic education and democratic values.

This publication is part of the Estrategia Nacional de Cultura Cívica 2017-2023 (National Civic Culture Strategy 2017-2023), which seeks to contribute to the strengthening of our democracy, recognizing the need to create the conditions for a more active participation of citizens in issues of public interest, so that they become the main actors in the political life of Mexico, as indicated by our constitutional rights. This objective is even more pertinent in the context of the celebration that most concerns us this year: the centenary of our Constitution.

This volume brings together four stories inspired by the lives of women who, perhaps without realizing it, became defenders of the fundamental rights of some social groups: Asadeh Mirbali is an official in Iran's electoral council; Jane Obinchu runs a small rural school in Kenya; Nélida Ayay Chilón is a lawyer who lives in an Andean region in northern Peru, and Bekki Perriman is a London-based photographer and visual artist.

Besides their youth, what do these four women, living in such remote and dissimilar places, have in common? They embody an ancestral tradition: the one informing us that youth is not only a biological stage, but also an attitude of life, a brave and vital time in which the social commitment to improve the conditions we live in, the defense of our rights, as well as the resistance against what is unfair, summarize and edify the youthful temperament. Youth, interculturality, human rights, and empowerment are elements that run through these stories. Each page reaffirms the statement by American writer Ambrose Bierce that youth is the period of possibility.

Through this publication, we also offer educators a guide for group reflection and analytical work. In these examples of action, we want young Mexicans to discover that they are subject to human rights and active managers of these, in accordance with constitutional guarantees, and to participate in improving the national context to build a better future for all.

INE
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The Vote Collector

The day was barely breaking on the island of Abu Musa when the distant noise of a twin-engine plane broke into the peaceful and misty morning of this small island located in the eastern limits of the Persian Gulf, also known as the Strait of Hormuz. With barely a thousand inhabitants or less, Abu Musa is one of the most remote and isolated geographical points in Iran.

From his guard post, on one of the beaches in the southern portion of the island, a soldier watched the scene. Once the small plane has enough confidence of being flying over solid ground, one of its hatches opened and something resembling a box attached to a parachute was thrown from the heights. Nasim Abidi, the young militiaman who had not stopped watching as the plane approached, jumped up and ran as the parachute continued its slow trajectory to the ground, almost weightlessly.

Nasim finally reached the package when it had barely touched the ground and proceeded to open it with the confidence of someone who knew its contents. He opened it with the aid of a hammer and a screwdriver and extracted from it a bag full of papers and a small white cardboard box with a slot at the top. It was the morning of February 18, in the year 2000, and parliamentary elections were being held throughout the territory of Iran. What the young soldier had just collected were the ballots and the ballot box sent by the authorities for the inhabitants of Abu Musa to exercise their right to vote.

It was not a common election day. The reformist and moderate group led by Mohammad Khatami was leading the polls. If they gained control of Congress, it would be the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that a non-conservative political group had come to power. Despite the importance of this election day, almost no one in Abu Musa knew about it.

In spite of its few inhabitants, the island is crisscrossed by different languages. Most speak Farsi or Persian —the country's official language—, but there are also Azerbaijani, Kurdish, and Arabic speakers. Abu Musa is a tiny sunny patch of dry land surrounded by a calm sea, but it is inhabited by as many ethnic groups and languages as a miniature Babel.

The militiaman was heading back when he saw that a black dot had appeared in the distance and was growing and becoming clearer to his gaze. He did not know it yet, but it was the apparition of a young woman from Tehran, Asadeh Mirbali, covered from head to toe in a black chador. Panting, she was pedaling her bicycle towards the guard post at barely eight in the morning. Nasim did not know it either, but the woman who was approaching was the person sent by the Electoral Commission to take charge of collecting the votes of the island's inhabitants. At the young age of 22, Asadeh—which in Farsi means "freedom"—had arrived by boat the night before to carry out her role as an electoral official. She was studying at the University of Tehran, and it could be said that she was a worthy representative of the new times in the country.

It was a great novelty that a woman had been appointed to such a role, and that was the first thing that caught the attention of the uncomfortable militiaman, who was expecting the arrival of a man to take charge of the task. Although he resisted at first, he had no choice but to reluctantly comply with his orders and perform his duty, which was to accompany her and transport her across the island in a military jeep to collect the votes. Electoral processes in Iran are very flexible but complicated. In most of the national territory, it is possible to install voting booths for voters to attend; however, the collection system provided by law still remains in isolated and remote areas. This effort that the country makes, despite all the political and religious phenomena that have occurred since the 1979 Revolution, is only possible thanks to the participation of volunteers. Now it was a female volunteer... a young woman who had come to fulfill her mission.

So, Nasim grumbled as he slung his rifle over his shoulder. Catching sight of his somewhat faded olive-green uniform in the mirror as he took the wheel of his battered vehicle, Nasim thought to himself that a difficult day lay ahead. Spending hours with a woman from the capital was something he was by no means familiar with, much less did he imagine that this woman would give him orders. He didn't even dare look at her when they exchanged words; he felt utterly uncomfortable.

Asadeh, on the other hand, was hurried and restless. It was getting late, and there were dozens of places to visit designated on a map in search of voters. She gathered her chador as best she could to sit in the back of the open-top jeep, placed the ballot box and the ballots, and they set off.

Abu Musa seemed like deserted territory. With no paved roads, they stumbled through

sun-kissed grasslands and rocky limestone terrain. From time to time, the sea breeze refreshed them a little, every now and again, a bump in the road made them jump, and little by little, they relaxed, gradually striking up a conversation.

To tell the truth, Nasim did not quite understand what the heck is the point of voting. He was 26 and had spent five of those years as a militiaman. Most of that time he had spent without doing much at his guard post watching the sea. Political matters were alien to him.

"Why do we have to vote?" he asked.

"We don't have to," she replied. "It's not an obligation, it's a right, and if we elect those who govern us, we can then demand that they solve the problems we have and that they fulfill what they promise."

He nodded rather incredulously, looking thoughtful. After a while, he asked again: "So, the smugglers and thieves who prowl these roads can also vote?"

"Everyone," Asadeh said. "The vote is universal; as long as they are citizens of Iran, have identity cards and are of voting age, everyone can participate today."

There was a long silence again, and the only thing that could be heard was the engine of that old piece of junk that moved miraculously. Suddenly, on the side of the road, they saw a man running in a hurry, as if fleeing from them. Nasim honked the jeep's horn several times, then stopped the engine, got out of the vehicle, grabbed his rifle, and shouted for him to stop.

"What are you doing?" she yelled at him. "You don't collect votes like that, not with a gun in your hand! That man must be terrified!" Meanwhile, the man did indeed stop running; he froze in fear and surprise. It was Asadeh herself who walked up to him, apologized, explained the situation, and invited him to vote.

She took a very simple ballot out of the bag, just a piece of paper cut out with eight names printed on it, and asked him to choose two names, fold the ballot and put it in the ballot box. The man agreed to vote on the sole condition that the military man stay away.

"The vote is secret," he said, calmer now. Then he showed Asadeh his identification: he was a rural teacher from Isfahan, he had studies and knew his stuff, he didn't run from anyone, he was just hurrying his steps to get to the mosque on time. Asadeh put a stamp on his identity card as soon as he deposited the ballot. That was the first of the very few votes that she would collect during the day.

The soldier and the young woman resumed their journey and, shortly after, they were

overtaken by a truck from which a dusky-skinned man with a splendid mustache got out. "Are you the election agent?" he asked. Then, about 15 women of all ages got off the back of the truck, all of them with hijabs covering their heads and some even with the traditional masks of bandari women, which is the most conservative way for them to go out into the street and not even their faces can be seen by anyone but another woman. The man with the mustache had the identity cards of all of them in his hand and was going to simply tell each one of them who they should cross the ticket for, but Asadeh stopped him. Each one would have to vote secretly and freely.

There was, however, another problem: most of them were illiterate and some did not speak Persian either. Asadeh had the solution for the first obstacle: these cases were foreseen, so another way of voting was using another type of ballot that showed the faces of the eight candidates, so that voters could cross the photos of their choice. One of the women helped translate the electoral agent's instructions from Persian into the Arabic language, which is spoken in the Persian Gulf. They lined up without ever revealing their faces and finally voted.

In line was a little girl who showed her identification. As she was 12 years old, Asadeh had to explain to her and her mother that she was not of voting age; the minimum age was 16 years old.

Later on, Asadeh and Nasim resumed their route along the coast and arrived at a dock, but the fishing boats had already set sail and they had no choice but to get on a boat and row out to sea to collect the votes of the mariners. This task took over an hour, but that was the way the route was laid out, and Asadeh was not willing to deprive anyone of the chance to vote.

When they returned to land, a large group of voters, all of Kurdish origin, were already waiting for them, so Asadeh had to ask an interpreter for help. As in all cases, she took out the list of candidates and the ballot papers, explaining that the names authorized by the Electoral Council appeared on them.

The Kurdish group went through the list from top to bottom over and over again. "Our candidates don't appear here," one of them explained to the interpreter, who in turn told Asadeh in Persian.

"Sorry, they are the authorized candidates, there are no more," she explained.

Disappointed, the entire group turned and left. The Kurdish minority in Iran had been excluded from the political game for a long time, and this was an issue that remained unresolved.

This is how Asadeh spent the rest of the morning and well into the afternoon, lugging the white ballot box around, exposing her slight body to the rays of the sun, with a confident look and a smile on her face that she offered to each person she asked to exercise their vote. She didn't even

take time for lunch; she spent most of the day drinking only water, wrapped, as she was, in that black chador that must have suffocated her with heat. She knocked and knocked on doors every time the militiaman Nasim's jeep put her in front of one of the many hamlets spread throughout the island. Many times, people did not open the door, other times they left her talking to herself. On the way, she met a group of women goat herders. "We can't vote," one of them replied. "We don't have our husband's permission." Asadeh didn't press any further, instead she accepted a cup of fresh goat's milk and continued her task.

Then, on the way, she came across a rustic and almost ruined hovel inhabited by an old man. Nasim couldn't believe that she wanted to stop here too; her obstinacy was beginning to make him desperate, but he had to stop. Rather than insist, she ordered him to stop, something that really disturbed him.

The old man turned out to be devoutly religious. "Only God can change the destiny of people," he told her. "No politician, no party, can be above God. Why vote, if God's will is unique?" Despite everything, the old man kindly agreed to enter the hovel for his identification, take a ballot in his hands and vote. Then he crossed out the names of the eight candidates with a stroke of the pen and at the top of the ballot he wrote, "I vote for God; he is the only candidate I know."

One of the last points marked on the map of the electoral authority was a group of houses on the western end of the island, whose appearance was noticeably better than the rest. Let's say it was one of the more affluent neighborhoods: a group of 10 or 12 houses where children and a few women were taking a walk. As soon as they saw the military jeep arrive, they all ran to their homes. Only a young man who was wandering around explained to Asadeh that Grandmother Gudu, the matriarch of those families, ruled that place; nothing happened there without her consent. Asadeh asked to speak to her, but was told to wait, as she was unwell. While they were waiting, from time to time, women full of curiosity peeked through the doors and windows. After almost an hour, when it was almost time to leave and end the tour, the young man came out again with a bundle of food.

Grandma Gudu had sent her some lunch, but she warned her to leave, since no one would go out to vote as all the men in the community were out working. Asadeh accepted without question and returned to the jeep where the militiaman was waiting impatiently. "¿What happened here?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied. "We have to go, there is no point for them to vote here as they already have their own government."

Both were already very tired, and they still had one last stop on their way to go: a cement factory in the center of the island. "You won't

get almost anything there," Nasim told her. "Almost all of them are foreigners, Afghans, Yemenis, Iraqis…, very poor people who break their souls for a few rials."

"It doesn't matter," she replied. "If it's just one more vote, so be it." When they finally arrived, Nasim preferred to stay in the jeep. He saw her get out with the ballot box in her hands, as always, and walk to the entrance of that small factory, so noisy that he couldn't hear what she was talking to the foreman.

The man was walking up and down without stopping, while Asadeh walked a few steps behind him, trying to explain the reason for her visit. It was evident that the man did not pay attention to her and that he was annoyed by her presence. A woman who shows up with a box in the middle of the job must have seemed totally foolish to him. Nasim watched her give up, turn around, and head back to the car, furious. "Let's go," she said. "This man didn't even want to listen to me". A feeling

of solidarity suddenly rose up in Nasim and, instead of starting the car, he took his rifle and prepared to get out to face the foreman. "We have to go! I tell you, there is nothing to do here. Please, let's go!" Asadeh pleaded. So, they left.

Late in the afternoon, they had to return to Nasim's guard post; Election Day was about to end. On the final drive, exhausted but confident because she had done her duty, Asadeh estimated that she had collected just under a hundred votes in the entire day. She thought about how difficult it was to promote the vote, and that organizing elections is not enough to build a democracy; citizen participation is required, and it is necessary to think of a way to include everyone: all women, all ethnic groups and all regions. She was beginning to fall asleep when they returned to the starting point.

So, they said goodbye. She had already strapped the ballot box to her bicycle and was about to get on it when Nasim called out to her. "Wait!" he said. "You're missing something: you're missing my vote. I haven't voted yet."

"It's true!" she said. "You haven't voted. What time is it?"

"It's ten to six."

"So, you can still vote, voting closes in ten minutes." She took out another ballot paper.

Nasim preferred to fill out the ballot inside his guard booth. After two minutes, he came out with the paper in his hand and said: "Here, this is my vote, I want you to see it."

"I shouldn't," she reminded him. "The vote is secret."

"Please take a look, I beg you."

So, she accepted and unfolded the ballot. He had crossed out all the candidates and at the top he had written: "I, Nasim Abidi, vote for Asadeh."

"But I'm not a candidate," she told him.

"It doesn't matter, you should be."

A Teacher in Kenya

Going to school was almost impossible for a Bantu girl from the Gussi tribe like Jane, the daughter of a modest fisherman in the Nyanza province of southwestern Kenya and the eighth in a family of 13 children. She was born in 1979, almost two decades after her country had achieved independence from Great Britain; however, only 55 percent of the population could read and write by then.

Kenya had been an independent nation since 1963, but divisions and clashes persisted between the various tribes that populated the place many centuries before British colonization. Added to these conflicts, the costs left behind by decades of foreign exploitation and the looting of its natural resources, as well as the accelerated growth of the population, which went from 8 to 18 million inhabitants in the first decades of independent life, had mired the country in a situation of poverty and inequality as part of the African landscape in the post-colonial era of the second half of the 20th century. This complicated scenario was not the most conducive for Jane to receive a formal education.

And yet she went to school. Her mother was illiterate, and her father had the most basic knowledge to do addition and subtraction operations and write his name on a piece of paper, and not much else. At home, the language spoken was Gussi, the language of the ethnic minority to which she belonged, but at school, which she was able to attend when she was eight years old, classes were taught in Swahili and in English, the two official languages in Kenya. Her father also had to pay a fee for her studies, a low amount, but ultimately an additional and onerous burden on the family.

"I didn't go to school," her mother told her, "but everything you learn, you can come and teach me later." "Never stop learning," her father

told her, "one should only stop learning when there's dirt in their ears." But her mother died a few years later, and, with "dirt in their ears," she didn't have time to learn the alphabet.

Of Jane's 12 siblings, four died before she was born. Her three older sisters were not as lucky and were never able to go to school. Two of them were married before their 15th birthday and the eldest of all stayed at home to help the family in the absence of her mother. Jane, two of her brothers, and the youngest daughter were able to go to school.

One of her brothers barely finished primary school and moved to Nairobi, the capital, to work first as a bricklayer, and then as a bus driver. The other stayed with the father in the fishing business. So, Jane was the only one who finished elementary school; then she had to move to Eldoret to go to middle school at a boarding school for girls sponsored by a German Christian organization. Against all odds, with the help of her brother who lived in Nairobi, she later managed to travel to the capital to enroll in the school for teachers when she was 17.

She received her teacher's diploma at the beginning of the new century, at the age of 21. She was accompanied to the ceremony by her brother with his wife and three children, and her boyfriend, David Obinchu, whom she would marry that same year, adopting his last name. David was a boy from the capital who had managed to graduate as a lawyer at the University of Nairobi and, from a very young age, worked in international development organizations.

Her world had changed. The girl from the little Kisii town had become an elementary school teacher; she lived in a simple but pleasant neighborhood in the Kenyan capital, she had foreign friends and a hard-working husband who was open-minded to the world. David and Jane decided not to have children, so they could focus on their professional careers.

Then, there was a notable change in her life: the Ministry of Education decided to send her as principal to a rural elementary school in a remote village in one of the most depressed areas of the country, populated mainly by the Massai tribe. At the end of the year 2000, Jane and David, who at the time worked for a Danish humanitarian organization, had to accept that they would live apart for a while.

This is how Jane, at the age of 22, came to take charge of the Kapkenduywa Primary School, near the city of Eldoret where she had studied middle school. At that time, very few children attended the three modest classrooms made of wood with asbestos roofs, in an arid and dusty flatland in the middle of nowhere. The small fee that families were still charged to enroll their children in school greatly inhibited attendance.

The lands in that area had not yet recovered from one of the worst droughts in the region's history, which two years earlier had hit the so-called Horn of Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia, and

Somalia). The few livestock in the area looked skinny and were surrounded around at all times by carrion birds. Health was a no less serious issue in the country: half of the beds in all hospitals were occupied by HIV-infected patients.

It was a challenging time in Kenyan history: terrorist attacks in major cities after the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York; the ravages of drought; the environmental crisis in Lake Victoria, one of the main sources of food for Kenyans; and in the midst of all this, a tense electoral process. However, these elections in 2002 allowed Mwai Kibaki to assume the presidency. He was a candidate who was in opposition to the old regime, a moderate and conciliatory political leader whose main campaign promises were to launch a strong battle against corruption and violence.

Such was the scenario and context in which Jane would have to face her teaching assignment in that remote village in the arid areas of Kenya.

The country's course changes began to be noticed very soon: the same year, for example, a law was approved to prohibit genital mutilation or ablation, which for cultural reasons was still practiced on girls from rural areas, indicating a criminal punishment to those who insisted on carrying it out.

And, even more significant for the story told here, forty years after Kenya had gained its independence, free and universal access to basic education was decreed for all Kenyan citizens in 2003, which was a social achievement that had already been a reality for decades in many parts of the world. Despite the delay, it finally reached this African nation, which had one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world.

Jane and her three teaching colleagues reminisce about those days after the official announcement. At first, they had to go out to the villages near the school to convince parents to enroll their children. But after a few weeks, the news produced a reversal: families approached by the dozens in trucks, on foot, on bicycles, ready to exercise their right to free education for their children.

In January 2004, when courses began at the Kapkenduywa school on the outskirts of Eldoret, 207 children crowded into those classrooms for the first time since it had been founded. In its three classrooms, attended by students from five to 21 years of age, equipped with barely 50 desks per room, the first generation of Kenyans to benefit from free and compulsory education provided by the government crowded together.

However, it was not completely free. Those families of impoverished peasants and starving herdsmen had to manage to buy uniforms, notebooks, and pencils for their children.

That was precisely the first thing they asked Kimani Nganga Maruge, when he approached the school in those days—with the official decree in hand, which he could not read but whose content he knew—to demand a place in first grade classroom. 'Don't you know that you have

to wear a uniform and bring school supplies to enroll in school?' one of the teachers asked him somewhat rudely.

The least of it was that Kimani Nganga Maruge, instead of wearing a uniform, approached the school covered only by a blanket of raw wool, cloth breeches, and time-tested sandals; nor did it matter so much that, in fact, he had no money for notebooks or pencils. What was really remarkable about the situation, what was unusual, was that Kimani Nganga Maruge was demanding his right to learn to read and write when he was 84 years old.

Maruge was so old that three of his grandchildren and a great-grandson were among those newly enrolled in the school. He moved slowly, supported by a cane. He limped when he walked because one of his feet was missing several toes. A few strands of white hair clung above the pronounced baldness. Although he spoke sparingly with a quavering tone, he was still clear about what he said, and what he said he repeated over and over again: "I want to study and learn to read and write, the government says that we all have the right."

Teacher Jane Obinchu could not believe what she was seeing. She was moved by the old man's request, but the reality was that there were a lack of places for many other students in the midst of that effervescence caused by the government announcement. She asked him in the kindest possible way, almost tenderly, to return home. It was a school for minors; if he wanted to study, Maruge would have to go to an adult learning center in Eldoret, almost an hour's drive away over dirt roads.

That night, on the phone, Jane shared with her husband what had happened. She felt like crying. "Concentrate on getting more desks for your children," David told her from their home in Nairobi. "Don't fight battles you can't win."

A few days later, as the bell was about to ring for recess, Jane was asked to look out of the makeshift door made of logs and twine that served as the entrance to the school. There he was again, standing expectantly, firmly, old Maruge; but this time he was wearing a uniform with a blue sweater, white shirt, and shorts that he had made himself from used clothing that he had bartered for a goat. He also had two notebooks under his arm, a set of new pencils, sneakers, and colored socks that reached his knees. "Let me learn, I'll work very hard, I'm not going to let you down," he told her.

Jane then made a decision that would change the old man's life, her own, and, in many ways, the history of Kenya itself. She admitted him as a student. They didn't know it then, but Maruge had just became the oldest first grader in history.

When the teacher made space for him on a bench at the back of the classroom and asked the children to squeeze in a little more, Maruge begged her to sit him as close to the blackboard as possible: his eyesight was very bad, one ear was useless, it was totally atrophied, and he heard little through the other one that remained usable.

There was a powerful reason for the old man's limp and partial deafness. And that reason is the story behind this story, the part that Jane would come to learn shortly after authorizing his enrollment, assuming full responsibility and the consequences of her most difficult decision as the young principal of the school.

Kimani Nganga Maruge was a forgotten representative of Kenya's battles for independence and against the tyranny of its colonizers. He belonged to the Kikuyu tribe, the largest ethnic group in the country, the same one that between 1952 and 1959 led a resistance movement against the British oppression that had produced a great deal of violence and many deaths in the country.

That attempted revolution for independence, known as the Mau Mau Rebellion, was fiercely fought by the British army and the local militia in the service of the Crown.

After six years of battles and persecution, the movement was defeated and thousands of its participants and top leaders ended up in detention camps where they were tortured. One of them was precisely Maruge, who was barely 31 years old when they mutilated the toes of one foot and completely damaged one ear as part of the ordeal; and his first wife was murdered in front of his eyes.

He barely participated at the beginning of the revolt. So, he spent almost the entire war prisoner in three different concentration camps. In the end, he was released, without trial or sentence, without any compensation, without any form of pardon. An anonymous hero, a victim without justice, deprived of his land, his freedom, and his human rights.

That was Maruge at 84: sitting in the front row of teacher Jane's first-grade classroom. And under the uniform, on the skin of his back, were the marks of the executioner's whip, as if he had been a slave from another century. This was how the old man began his education, with scars on his body, with his memory trapped in pain, but his eyes on the blackboard and the first letters of his alphabet.

What motivation could someone like Maruge have for wanting to read and write when life was already slipping away? "I want to read the Bible with my own eyes," he told his teacher as his only explanation.

After all, Maruge's story was one of forgiveness, but not forgetting. He forgave his country, his own life, and while clumsily grasping the pencil, he also took in his hands the minimal future that his age granted him, to seek a goal at the end of his days. Half joking, half truthful, he used to say that he hoped to have enough time to finish elementary school, continue with his studies, and graduate as a veterinarian.

Jane now knew that her decision had been the right one: denying the old man the right to take a class was like turning her back on her country's own history. But many other battles still awaited her on the way to his acceptance.

Many people in that place did not like an old man occupying one of the hotly contested seats in the Kapkenduywa school, they thought Maruge was crazy. The area inspector did not think the decision was correct either, in fact, he got angry and expressly ordered Jane to desist.

The inspector argued that allowing Maruge to enroll would encourage other adults to apply, and the situation could get out of hand; but Jane knew that behind the inspector's resistance loomed another old evil of her country: tribal disputes. While Maruge, as we have already said, was a Kikuyu, the inspector belonged to the Kalenjin tribe, which during the Mau Mau Rebellion had collaborated with the British government, causing a historical enmity and much suspicion between the two tribes. "We have to put the past behind us," Jane told him. "Today, we are all part of the same country."

Jane had no choice but to go to the Ministry of Education in Nairobi to seek support. David, her husband, helped her to get an appointment with a high official, to whom she explained the story of Maruge and the reasons that motivated her to accept him as a student. But she ran into a wall again. The arguments were the same: there was no room for exceptions, otherwise others could request the same and overwhelm the feeble free education system that was barely underway. No exceptions, they repeated to her. The officials she met could not understand the ethical context, much less the humanitarian one, of her decision as principal of the school.

Jane then came up with a temporary solution: she couldn't go back to school defeated and just ask the old man to stop coming. She asked him to become her assistant in class; there was no legal impediment to it and Maruge had already shown signs of being on good terms with the children in the class. More than a partner, they saw him as a grandfather.

In those days, the case of Maruge reached the ears of the local press and very soon the information circulated not only in the local media, but also became international news: the New York Times, the BBC, and many others recounted the events.

The situation began to change. Very soon, the government in Nairobi realized the value of Maruge's story in furthering their educational plans, and even a photo of him featuring him as a great national example appeared on billboards in various cities and highways across the country.

Journalists and television cameras came to the small school in search of an exclusive report. Jane, her fellow teachers, and Maruge himself made rather timid and surprised statements to the press, which later had the widest circulation, and this aroused the suspicions and ambitions of other residents of the area. Some believed that Jane and Maruge were receiving money from the media or the government and demanding that they distribute it. For a region like that, debased by misery and lack of opportunities, a rumor of this type really stirred people up and aroused unsuspected ambitions or envy.

Jane started receiving threatening and intimidating anonymous calls, as did her husband; there was already a lot of tension, and it was not a minor issue in a country where violence was rampant. One day, a group of destitute peasants even staged a protest and threw stones and insults at the school. Jane and Maruge protected the children, and the violent ones withdrew after a while.

Then came a cunning blow to Jane, the order from above—orchestrated by the inspector—for her transfer to another school in an even more remote area, on the other side of the country. She had no choice but to accept the transfer or give up her position and return to Nairobi with her husband. They both discussed it at length; they knew that Maruge's story now had the sympathy of local and international opinion. In fact, although the government had taken advantage of it for propaganda purposes, a blind and arbitrary bureaucracy persisted in the background alongside a local environment that fostered hatred and intolerance.

No, Jane was not going to quit. Her teaching vocation was stronger than the complex reality she faced. That afternoon, after David had once again accepted that their marriage would have to endure further distance and separation, Jane visited Maruge at his shack to inform him of her decision to accept the transfer and say goodbye to him.

For several weeks the school remained without a principal, until finally one day the inspector showed up with the new teacher who was to replace Jane as principal. But no one expected the reaction of the students to her arrival. In a surprising twist, children and young people from different tribes: Kiyuyu, Massai, and Kamba, put a padlock on the school door and protested with shouts and whistles. "We want Jane back!" they chanted, euphoric and determined. "Jane, Jane, Jane…!" was heard in the midst of that unexpected student revolt.

Maruge was unaware of the protest because he had set off for Nairobi earlier that day. His steps, tired but firm, took him to the doors of the office of the minister himself. He did not stop, he crossed doors and corridors, to everyone's surprise, until he managed to get into the office of the main person in charge of national education while he was holding a meeting with several of his officials. That was the gesture and action that ultimately allowed Jane's return and reinstatement as principal of Kapkenduywa Primary School.

Jane returned to her work and then began to seek help for other students in precarious situations. Her public fame allowed her to get different kinds of support here and there to buy furniture for the school, or pay for the uniforms, or food, or medical services for many of her students. Since then, David has devoted himself to obtaining international funds in support of education, women's rights, and the defense of human rights in his country. A rural teacher and a lawyer committed to their surroundings, they

are a young Kenyan couple who represent the best of their country and its history.

Maruge, for his part, managed to study up to fourth grade. Already a legend, he was invited to deliver a speech in favor of education at the United Nations headquarters in New York; it was the first time he had gotten on a plane. By then, he had not stopped attending classes for a single day. He was 86 years old.

Incredible as it may seem, even with all this recognition, Maruge was not exempt from other tragedies. In 2007, a violent post-election conflict in Kenya caused his house to be destroyed by one of the groups protesting against the results. He lived out his final years in a nursing home in Nariobi with the protection of the government; shortly afterwards, he fell ill with cancer and died in 2009.

The story of Jane and David Obinchu, of the children and the teachers of the Kapkenduywa school, sum up the spirit of a century like ours, in which the past and the present, tragedy and hope, inclusion and injustice coexist, are intertwined, and make us seek new paths.

Mother Water

I

When Nélida Ayay Chilón was a child, she was told a legend by her grandmother. Nelida was born in 1984 in the small town of Porcón in the Andean region of Cajamarca in northern Peru. Her grandmother's story, like many others she heard from her Quechua family, took root in her imagination and nourished the profound relationship of love and respect she felt for Mother Nature, who had watched over her as she was born and grew up among valleys, mountains, lagoons and rivers.

A long, long time ago, at the beginning of everything that is today, there was such a great drought in the Andes Mountains that the plants died and even lichens and mosses disappeared in the intense sunlight. As the trees died and the land was left without shade, it became drier and drier and deep cracks formed. The earth was thirsty. The legend tells of how even the qantu flower, found in the most arid lands, felt its petals dry up. The last cocoon clinging to life did not dare open out of fear of being calcined amid so much drought and heat. However, it could not stay closed much longer as it would die before it was born.

Thus, using all its limited strength, the cocoon struggled to cling to life... and then something very strange happened: as it opened, its petals turned into wings. The tiny, winged flower felt something close to happiness as it fluttered its delicate petals that had become wings and finally broke away from the parched plant in the form of a hummingbird.

Then it flew towards the mountains and, exhausted, came to Wacracocha, the great mother lagoon. It was very thirsty, its wings barely responded, and it felt that if it stopped to drink some of the last water left in the world, it would drown helplessly. It kept on flying. Using all the strength remaining in its tiny body, it flew on towards the summit of Waitapallana, the great mountain that had towered over everything since the beginning of time.

It was moved by instinct, the inexplicable miracle of being alive and in motion, it only felt the need

to get to the top. Finally, exhausted and dying of thirst, it settled on the wind-frozen summit and, with its last breath, begged Father Waitapallana for mercy, to save the land that was about to be consumed by drought.

Then the hummingbird died. Waitapallana was pained to observe the devastated landscape and the barrenness of the earth. The sweet scent of the qantu flower coming off the little dead hummingbird still floated in the air; he loved these flowers that used to clothe him and bring color to his celebrations. The realization that the end was near caused him such pain that he cried two enormous stone tears, which fell onto Wacracocha's surface and, because of the force of his tremendous fall, cracked the lagoon and the torrent of refreshing water made the world tremble.

The water's roar and Waitapallana's stone tears reached the bottom of the lagoon and woke up the Amaru, the great winged serpent of the Andes, which lay coiled at the bottom. Not understanding what was happening, it began to uncoil while the earth beneath its scales shook violently.

Then the Amaru came to the surface. Its head rose through the foamy, rushing water like that of a llama, its eyes bright and crystalline and its snout reddish like that of a dragon. Its body was that of a winged serpent, topped with the tail of a fish and the claws of a condor.

Wide awake and furious at being disturbed, the Amaru rose into the air, darkening the sun with flames of anger from its eyes. Thousands of brave warriors wearing armor and brandishing spears appeared out of nowhere and took it on.

The fight was one-sided. The Amaru wielded great power: its snout emitted a thick mist that blanketed the hills, and the thunderous, violent movements of its wings caused torrential rainfall. Thus, rain fell on Earth once again.

Its fish tail, swelling among the clouds, made it hail. Thus, there was ice on Earth once again. And the rainbow was born from the reflections of its beautiful scales. The seven-colored rainbow, which we call Kurmi, is the celebration of the union between water, sunlight and earth.

The warriors perished in an act of heroism as grand as that of the hummingbird. Everything that happened in this chain of events was necessary. Their deaths were not in vain. Thus, life was reborn when it had seemed extinct, the land became green again and the lagoons between the hills were filled with clear water. The Amaru, satisfied, laid itself down to rest and returned to its timeless sleep.

The Quechuas know this. Everything is written in the Amaru's scales and feathers: lives, incidents, stories, realities, and dreams, which is why the great winged serpent always knows what it is doing. So, there was a time when life in our world almost disappeared, and it was water that brought back our hope. Water is the blood of Mother Earth, whom we call Pachamama; furthermore, water is our second mother, Yacumama.

Nélida, the Quechua girl who heard this and other legends from her grandmother, to whom it had been passed down from her forebears over the centuries, is the young protagonist of this story.

If anyone inhabiting this planet understands the importance of the relationship with nature, it is the Quechuas. At present, they live at a high altitude among the Andes Mountain ranges in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia but, once upon a time, before the Spanish conquest, the Quechua civilization grew and developed for centuries in harmony with nature. The Quechuas maintain an ethical, deeply affectionate, working relationship with nature; they do not conceive of it simply as something physical, but as the universal mother, Pachamama, generator and creator of life.

At present, their world is threatened by climate change, extreme poverty, massive deforestation and, particularly, by the uncontrolled exploitation of hydraulic resources, which has caused pollution, the disappearance of lakes, or the rerouting of rivers to enable the intensive use of water in mining activities. The Andean zone continues to be one of the richest in gold, silver, and other metals, and it is an accepted fact that unsustainable mining practices always have a high ecological and social impact.

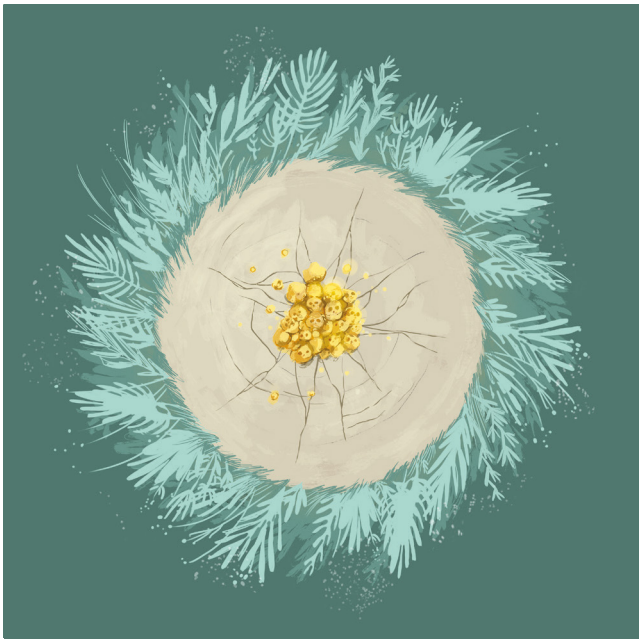
Currently, Nélida is a lawyer and social justice warrior. She defends the rights of her community because she has understood that respecting the environment is central to human rights and that biodiversity is a first cousin to multiculturalism. In other words, if human activities endanger an ecosystem, they also threaten the survival of entire groups of people, ancestral communities, and ethnic groups whose wisdom, language and customs are part of the cultural heritage of humanity.

II

Biology and the natural sciences have confirmed what the Quechuas have known for many centuries: the entire planet is one great living organism. Bodies of water like oceans and rivers, the ground with its subsoil and plant life, the entire animal kingdom, the wind, the clouds, the smallest microorganisms, the highest mountains, and everything that enables life on the planet make up a great, complex, interdependent system: a single living thing in equilibrium, unique and unrepeatable.

The Quechua worldview considers that nature, human beings, Pachamama (earth) and Yacumama (water) are an intertwined whole, destined to remain so forever. That totality, for them, represents a single living being. Human beings have a soul, a life force, and so do all plants, animals, rivers, seas, and mountains. And while human beings are part of nature itself, they do not dominate, nor do they wish to dominate, but to coexist with nature as a part of it.

However, what happens when this equilibrium and the worldview that sustains the passage of life in the Andes Mountains are threatened by human activity? This is precisely what has been happening recently due to gold mines, mainly belonging to large foreign companies. The



situation has worsened further in recent years as gold mines in other parts of the world have been depleting and the Andes Mountain range has become the focus of many business ambitions.

It is hardly everyday news, and we don't hear much about it, but typical mining methods consume at least a thousand liters of water and dynamite four tons of rock to extract a single gram of gold from the mines. Every kilo of gold needs to be treated with more than eight hundred kilos of sodium cyanide, which is highly toxic and contaminates the groundwater.

Moreover, for each kilo of mined gold, a thousand kilos of explosives are needed to blast away the ground.

The flora, fauna, and the health of rivers and lagoons are endangered, as is the health of the miners who often work under hazardous conditions.

Water pays the highest cost in gold mining. If the water used in mining were actually paid for in cash, gold would cease to be a going concern. This type of mining production radically transforms the environment, as it always has, while gold is still inexplicably regarded as a source of wealth.

It has been said that the mining industry builds roads, ports, tramways, and airports; it mobilizes workers from neighboring towns; it generates thousands of temporary jobs; builds factories, plants, and refineries. In other words, it makes certain contributions to development, but the social and ecological cost pay is very high.

Mining uses all the water available in the regions where it sets up its plants: it uses the pressure of aquifers to wash the metals and dumps its waste into rivers. Frequently, this waste accumulates on the riverbed, causing flooding in neighboring communities. Waters contaminated with heavy metals, nitrates, mercury, and cyanide harm the diversity of aquatic organisms and prevent the resurgence of life. A single day of mining requires the same amount of water that would be needed to supply a population of six hundred thousand.

In addition, any splendor and prosperity generated will only last as long as the mining operations themselves. After a few years, when the ground's inherent value has been dynamited away and every last piece of trace has been removed from the mountains, the business is closed down, leaving as its sole legacy a land in ruins and perhaps an abandoned settlement.

This has happened before and still does. Gold mining will leave behind enormous holes in the land like open sores; it will leave exploited areas deserted and barren; it will leave vegetation that is of no use; it will leave rainwater cisterns empty, rivers dry and aquifers poisoned; it will leave behind a different landscape…

What benefits does gold bring to our quality of life? It was food for thought for Nélida Ayay Chilón and the group of activists in Cajamarca, who finally decided to get organized and take action when a massive new gold and copper mining project in the Conga lake area, run by Yanoacocha, a Peruvian mining company partnered with a large US firm, was announced in 2011.

III

Nélida remembers the massive land-exploitation project run by a multinational mining company began in her region when she was seven years old. From that first project, many springs and lagoons in the area ended up being poisoned by the cyanide and arsenic used in the mines.

However, for her father and several of her uncles and cousins, the option of working in the mine at that time was an opportunity to earn a steady income. It was a new kind of work for them and, at first, they combined it with potato and corn farming and taking care of their animals. But as the men found themselves spending more time in the mines, the women and children of the town became increasingly responsible for harvesting the land and taking care of the animals.

Times were not too bad, and the family was able to give Nélida an elementary school education at the rural school in Porcón. Around that time, a Dominican priest established a parish high school in the town and Nélida was among the first to graduate. That man, Marco Arana, would give up the cloth shortly after to become one of the main environmental and indigenous rights activists in the Andes.

It was he who explained to Nélida the importance of continuing her studies and who convinced her in 2009, when she was 25, to study law at the University of Cajamarca. They had to turn to the law, and not to violence, to deal with the challenges on the horizon and to prepare the defense of their community and environment.

She still had two years of law school to do when the new foreign investment mining megaproject in the area was announced. The project would attract investments worth millions of dollars from multinational mining companies to exploit the gold in Cajamarca, which raised expectations for the country's progress. This announcement sounded the alarm for activists in the area. Water reserves would be insufficient: it was a death sentence for the Yacumama.

Social groups began to coalesce and sympathy for the Quechua resistance took root and grew in other parts of the country. The movement soon acquired national relevance and, in 2012, various organizations from all walks of life took part in the National March for Water, a large crowd ending up in front of the presidential palace in Lima, the capital. Nélida was one of the speakers that night. "Gold is not drunk, gold is not eaten," she said at the end of her speech in front of more than 20,000 people crowded into the square.

Months of struggle and toil followed. Tension grew, as did the efforts of certain government factions to protect the million-dollar investment. Things ended up getting out of control: some were injured in the riots and clashes between the activists and the security forces; five activists even lost their lives during the protests. Other leaders were imprisoned and later released, including Nélida's mentor and moral guide Marco Arana.

The water defense movement was also brought to the attention of the international community; voices were raised in support of the Quechua resistance in various parts of the world.

Nélida agreed to sit on the Board of Directors of the Cajamarca Environmental Defense Front. Then she sent the president of the country a letter that was a true treatise on dignity,

written with the simplicity of a peasant woman and the expertise of a law graduate. It was viralized locally and internationally. Rather than expressing threats and outrage, she submitted an ethical plea and constitutional arguments to stop the new mining project.

Nélida's activism led to reprisals against her father and other members of her family. Also anonymous threats; she also received anonymous threats; every move she did was watched, but she stood her ground.

As a result of this enormous effort to raise awareness and opposition, the project was eventually stopped and has remained that way; not so the threat that hangs over the Andean region and any other region, where the coveted gold is hidden in the ground.

In a world where science, technology, and the information society in the digital era have turned human economic activity on its head, it is surprising that gold and other precious metals and stones still enjoy the disproportionate and almost magical value assigned to them in antiquity. In the middle of the twenty-first century, gold is worth more than water, and diamonds more than land itself. Nélida and her people's struggle continues.

IV

Sitting on the shores of the Great Lagoon, on one of those afternoons when the breeze draws wrinkles and circles in the water that surrounds everything, it is Nélida's turn to tell her nieces and nephews and other local children of a legend. She is now 31 and has dedided not to have children for now, she prefers to concentrate on her work as a lawyer and defender of cultural and environmental rights in her community.

This story took place in the year 1532. It is said that a young warrior came to the lands of Cacheuta, a powerful cacique who was master of what is now the city of Mendoza and the adjoining valleys. The young emissary did not bear good tidings: the great Atahualpa, the Inca lord and heir to the Inti, had been taken prisoner. Their brother tribes were asking for help.

Cacheuta was an extremely supportive cacique and a great warrior, he spared no effort in organizing the campaign to obtain the Quechua lord's freedom. He demanded his subjects' collaboration and a few days later everything was ready: a group of llamas waited, loaded with leather pouches full of gold and silver. His men were ready to embark on the rescue mission.

The expedition set off. The plan was simple: gold and silver would be traded for the Quechua sovereign's freedom. But the road, which was narrow and risky to travel, was not so easy. The twists and turns of the mountain, which initially seemed disastrous, could serve as a protective shield against a possible attack. At that moment, they saw a handful of armed people who looked decidedly unfriendly in the distance. Sheltering behind a bend, the

indigenous people adopted a defensive formation and, just to be safe, quickly hid their treasure in a crevice in the hill.

The group that had seemed small from afar was not so small at all; the encounter was bloody. Cacheuta was killed. His vassals were brave but as they were outnumbered and outarmed, they were soon defeated.

Although the victors could not get a word out of them about the treasure hidden in the mountain, they soon found it. They were just about to take it for themselves when something happened: jets of boiling water erupted from between the stones, burning the traitors. They were killed immediately, right there next to the riches they coveted.

Cacheuta had died, but his indomitable spirit had made the water spurt out and do away with those who were standing in his way. For the locals, these waters are a symbol of human solidarity. They are imbued with the nobility of their origin: the brotherhood of freedom-seeking communities. Since then, they have been generous to those who come seeking relief from what ails them.

As you can see, water has played its part throughout the history of our people; water has

*given us life and has saved us when we have been in danger; we are sons of water; we are sons of the earth. Years will pass and it will then be up to you to take on new challenges to defend the place where you were born. When this happens, remember Cacheuta and everyone else who has fought to defend our other mother, Yacumama.**

* The oral traditions reproduced here in the form of legends are taken from folklore. Sources: http://lospiesobrelatierra.blogspot.com/2011/11/leyendas-quechuas.html?_sm_au_=iVVZjqsJVrDR1FtR and https://www.folkloretradiciones.com.ar/superstic_leyendas/sup_ley_98_1.htm

Where Did I Sleep Last Night?

It doesn't matter how easy or difficult the day is for most of us who live in a city. It doesn't matter how far we live from our place of work or how close we live to the school; if we should have taken a bus, ridden on the subway, or walked home. It doesn't matter if we live alone, with family, with a partner or friends in a tiny apartment, a large residence, or a room on the roof. In any case, sooner or later, whether we are in a great or a terrible mood, we all know that at some point, at the end of the day, come rain or shine, we will walk through a doorway into a place (big or small, spotless or messy, it doesn't matter) where a bed waits to comfort us.

A bed. It may be hard or soft, king size or just a plain mattress, but a bed all the same. Then it will happen that we will lift the bedcovers or knead a pillow with our hands, we might feel the coolness of a sheet on our skin and inevitably, without thinking about it much at all, get ready to slip our exhausted bodies into that unique, warm space to rest, to sleep, perchance to dream.

"To be or not to be," said Hamlet. "To die, to sleep, no more… perchance to dream… and by a sleep to say we end the heartache." Immersed in his misfortune, Hamlet saw hope, a promise of reparation, in the act of sleeping.

But what happens when there is no doorway to walk through, no bed to fulfil Prince Hamlet's wishes? What happens when there are no fluffy blankets, no cool sheets, no warm pillow to rest our dreams on? What happens, then, when you don't have a house, or a bathroom to wash your face and brush your teeth, or a table and chair at dinnertime, or a drawer to put things away? It's just that nothing happens, that life is lived on the street, just like that, on the street, that one has reached the limit of existence and has crossed not a door—hopefully—but rather the doorless borders of territories impossible to imagine for most

people—rich or poor, happy or unhappy—but who find, at the end of the day, a bed and a roof over their heads. Life without doors, life without windows, life without a roof.

That was me. For almost ten years, my house, my doors, my windows, my roof, and my bed were the streets of London. I was one of the homeless (also known as people without a roof). We are also called vagrants, paupers, clochards, and vagabonds; few of us have been, but we have all seen them and many have wondered how on earth they got themselves stuck in a situation like this.

And how on earth did I, literally, end up on the street? My name is Bekki Perriman. I am of uncertain age although I do realize that I am young—just over thirty, maybe less—and I am a visual artist who tries to give people "without a roof" a voice and identity through photography and site-specific sound installations. This is my story.

Where should I start? Maybe I should start at the end. It is September 2016, and in a few short minutes we will be inaugurating my photography exhibition and sound installation at the Southbank Centre, one of the most important cultural centers in my city, London. In my photographs, I portray doorways where I once slept rough: uncaring doors carved out of oak in Edwardian buildings in an area called the West End of London; or colossal doors from the Victorian era, when England ruled the world and Charles Dickens wrote stories of poor people like me; or Gothic church doorways inhabited by ghosts; or the simpler doorways of warehouses, stores, and commercial establishments in the cradle of capitalism which were once my ephemeral home; doorways I would never dream of walking through. Doorways may be a symbol of hospitality but, in my case, they were just the unwitting props in the cold theater of my nights without a roof.

I have another series of photographs portraying puddles, corners, park benches, rainy afternoons; in other words, the visual cartography of my wanderings through a city that was all mine while nothing actually belonged to me: not even a bed to sleep in.

Puddles, especially, caught my attention while I was walking (better put, wandering; better still, surviving). I liked seeing how the city was reflected in them. Those mirrors made of asphalt, mud, and water were also my mirrors. I saw myself reflected in them, or rather, I looked like them: dirty and shiny at the same time. In other words, we, the homeless, are the other puddles in the city, in whose faces are reflected the bewildering stories told by incomprehensible people.

I also set up a sound installation where people can listen to the life testimonies of many other people like me who live in London and other cities in the United Kingdom. You really have to listen to them to appreciate how aspects of life, hope and madness crop up in their stories. You need to go into the sound installation and hear the dull rumblings of the city intermingled with the fragmented voices of these stories to

discover people of flesh and blood with lost pasts and broken presents, but who are alive, complex, human.

No, I am not Dante, nor is my installation intended to be a trip to hell; it is not pain, or fear, or tragedy that inspires me. My work is driven by hope, the ability to understand, to tell a story that we thought had already been told, but this time from a different perspective.

Mine is less a painful denunciation than a hymn: a choir of voices we never pay attention to, voices that sing the most human music, voices of people who, despite all expectations, are alive and still here among us, even if they go largely unnoticed, smell bad, and are a blot on the landscape and a smudge on the tourist postcards in my city.

Let's stop saying that I want to empower people, which would be nonsense with respect to people who have given up all the trappings of power, including having somewhere to sleep. More simply, through my work I aspire to make us visible, for other people to turn around and look at us for a moment and… see us.

It so happened that I used to play a rather cruel game with myself during my years without a roof. The game consisted of stationing myself at any corner, at any time, as sober and as well turned out as possible given the circumstances (I had washed my face and run a comb through my

graying blonde hair) and simply asking passers-by to tell me the time. "What time is it?" I would ask. "Can you tell me the time?" or "Could you tell me the time please?" I tried different ways of asking politely and almost never got a reply. They would keep on walking or seem scared. I'm sure they weren't even listening. Or, instead of hearing "What time is it?", they thought they had heard me say "Give me money to get high" or "Look out, I'm about to steal your bag."

Then I started keeping count. If I got one response out of ten tries, I rewarded myself by buying a sandwich with the coins that I had begged for hours before. If I got fewer replies than that, I tormented myself by feeling even more invisible, non-existent, little more than a ghost. I wanted to die and traded the sandwich for a bottle of cheap whisky. I don't remember crying but, having already sampled the whisky, I reckon I would have been crying by the end of the game. Forgetting you cry is one of the kindest ways of surviving.

What time is it in London? No time. For me, that was the time in a country where the homeless number in the thousands. This is the twenty-first century in the United Kingdom, one of the great world powers, a country that has had an extraordinary history of achievement and conquest in all spheres and yet, here, in this European nation that is perhaps the oldest modern democracy on the planet, there are more than 100,000 homeless people living in shelters, in overcrowded conditions, or on the streets, sleeping rough on park benches, at train stations, bus stops, or in building doorways. There are also those who live in their cars, in tents, in deteriorated hotels. There are children, there are entire families of migrants, there are psychiatric patients, there are addicts; it's the fifth world inside the first world and it's happening in front of everyone's eyes despite the attempts of the government or civil organizations to do something about it. It happens in the United Kingdom, but it also happens in other developed countries, in many cities in Europe, and the United States.

Although there are those who actually try to do something about it, there are also those who try to hide it. I am referring to many places where what has been called "defensive architecture" has been built for some years now. What's that? Very simple: fences, bars, gardens, double doors, stakes, and spikes are added to the urban landscape; benches are purposely shaped to prevent people from lying on them; small, subtle boundaries are marked to define exclusive areas to which the homeless should not be given access.

However, those who actively fight it are far worse. Radical fascist groups are motivated by hatred of the homeless, whom they view as cancerous, as something that has to be wiped off the map. They attack and make fun of them. Especially on Friday or Saturday night, we had to choose where to sleep very carefully, otherwise we could end up being urinated on by a drunk leaving

a bar who, in an atrocious fit of rage, vented all his hatred and intolerance.

But I digress. Let me pick up where the story left off on the pleasant night I started writing.

One night a few years ago, I woke up at dawn near the famous Trafalgar Square to see that I was holding a camera: one of the first digital cameras. Had I found it? Had I stolen it from a bag? Had someone given it to me? Even now I don't know, but as things stand it's irrelevant.

The stories of homeless people cannot be told in a linear, intelligible biographical fashion. We have wandering, fractured lives and our stories are necessarily the same: a sea of chance and irrationality as irrational as our own lives.

So, one day—a day like any other—I found myself in possession of a small digital camera. I had never had one before. As a child, I had never dreamed of being a photographer or an artist, nothing of the sort. I don't need to dress up this text by making things up: this isn't fiction. It's a true story.

The fact is that I felt like I had just been given a new toy: a click here, a click there, and there you have it! I was mesmerized by the process of taking pictures, of turning apparently insignificant moments into moments frozen in time, into fragments of my own very special time, which seemed not to have a story to tell: a lost, delusional time.

I've already made the point that when you are on the streets, you think you have no history. The saddest part is that not only do we believe it ourselves, but everyone else does too. We become non-persons without a story to tell; we are aliens, some kind of intermediate entity between a biological being, an animal, and something incomprehensible.

I walked around like this for several weeks, taking photos everywhere I went. I enjoyed one day so much that I did something truly disturbing and original: walking along the banks of the River Thames, I asked a Chinese tourist to take a photo of me in front of the Tower of London. A photo like the ones tens of thousands of visitors take every day at these tourist attractions. I can still see the look on his face! Despite being uncomfortable at my request, he very kindly agreed. I flicked my hair back, put on my best face, smiled, and even made a V gesture with my left hand.

Believe me when I tell you those were good times for me.

At that time, I had a partner, Chris Evans. Together, we used to sell copies of the *Big Issue*, a weekly newspaper that is famous in London for helping the homeless, unemployed, and poor. We sold it on the streets for two pounds fifty and we kept half the money.

I remember a day when everything went really well. We sold about twenty copies of the weekly in a single morning. Later, we found a mountain of cardboard boxes abandoned in a school dump and used them to make a huge house we could

almost stand up in. We bought two-for-one pizzas with our money from the weekly and had enough left over for beer, wine, and ice cream. We really got it on! I went crazy snapping photos of our cardboard nest. The police turned up the following morning and told us to demolish our mansion. We had no choice but to move on.

Despite those happy moments, death was always around. A report had recently been released saying that twenty-one homeless people had died the previous year on the streets of London. It's incredible that someone should die so slowly and silently, lying in full view in a doorway or in a park.

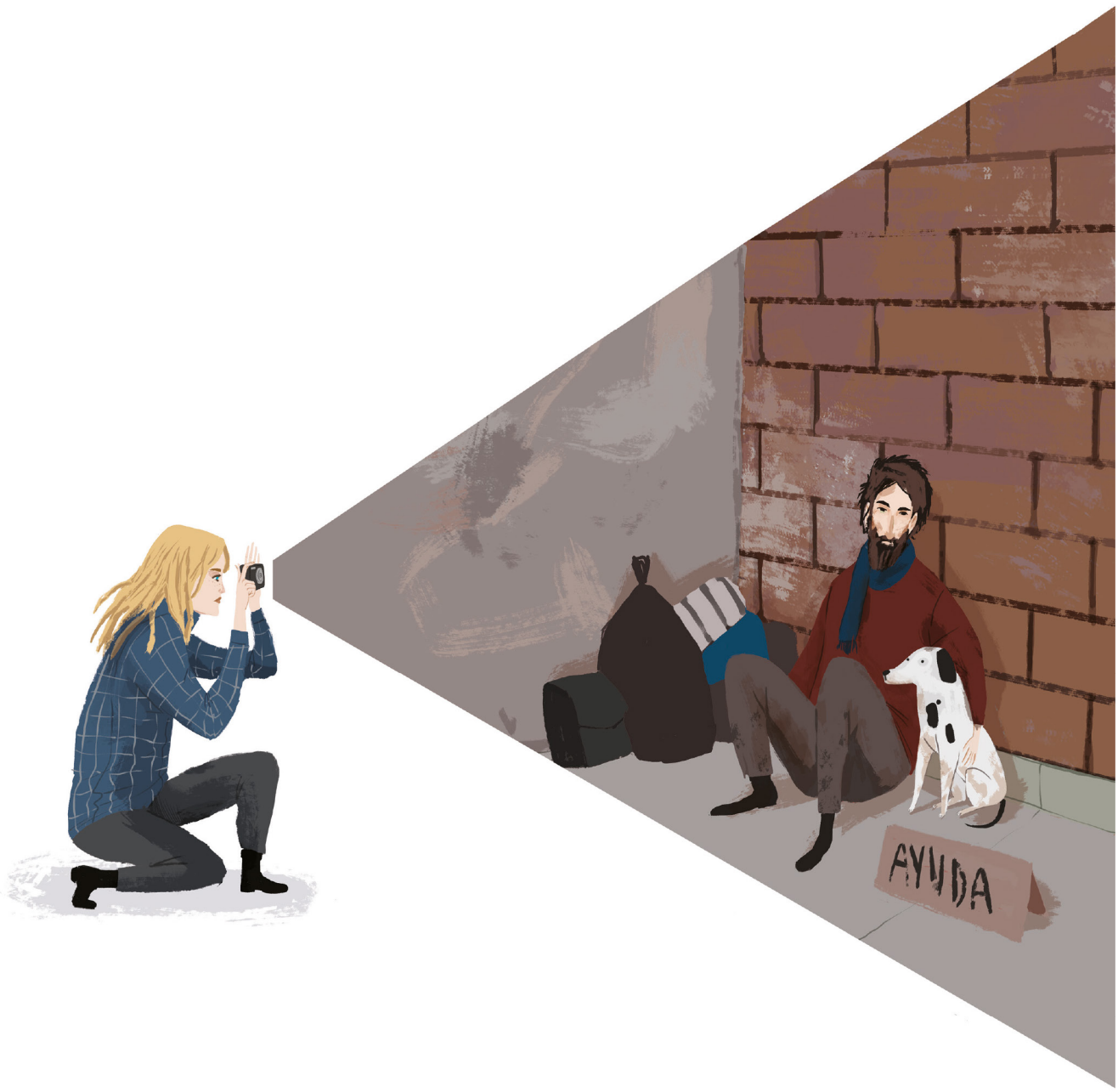
One day someone broke the news that Old George had died. Old George was a friend of mine. We called him old because of his bald head and gray beard, but he was only thirty-nine. George didn't hang around to die in a park; he preferred to throw himself into the river instead. He had tremendous alcohol and drug problems that plagued his existence. Then when he came down with Hepatitis C, he simply got fed up. When he was sober, he was a magnificent sculptor, and put together some formidable pieces with pebbles he collected on the banks of the Thames. George was our artist. Shortly before he took his own life, I did a very beautiful, simple, meaningful portrait of him: he stood in front of the camera and smiled at me with his crooked yellow teeth.

Around that time, a man who worked at Crisis, a British welfare organization for the homeless, came to see me and I showed him my camera and photos. That's how someone finally discovered there was more to the way I saw things, something behind my photographs that was more than a simple testimony. There was creation, freedom, reflection; in other words, something similar to what we call art.

I had found a way to abandon homelessness and discovered a sense of how to rebuild and reinvent my life. Art transforms lives for both, those who create it and those who enjoy it. Art can be a powerful tool. Art and renaissance; art and revolution.

Everything else came later: getting clean of the various forms of intoxication that the years of drifting had left; finding modest housing with support from Crisis and the City of London public services; making some money by first selling and then exhibiting some of my photos. At first, I showed them in places that were not proper galleries: community centers and care homes for the homeless. Slowly but surely, I achieved greater recognition for my work as a visual artist.

Then my friends at Crisis helped again by encouraging me to submit an application to a new program called Unlimited, which was about giving opportunities to artists from all over the country who had traditionally been marginalized from scholarships, awards, and festivals: people with physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities, or street-based homeless people like me. All of this brings me


AYUDA

here today to open the sound installation I have set up with the financial support of Unlimited.

Now I've had my work featured in various cities and festivals in the UK and will soon be having my first show outside the country. Life has changed for me but at the same time I try to find alternative ways to help the homeless through art. It is not an easy task, but sharing my story has been useful to recognize other dimensions of the problem we face: those that have to do with human rights, and with dignity, with life itself.

I believe in art as a way of communicating something that has been silenced, a phenomenon that society tends to turn a blind eye to and ignore. Through my proposal, thousands of people have come to my sound installations in various cities in the United Kingdom to experience the homeless phenomenon from inside.

It is enough to take some time out, look at the photos, and listen to the testimonies that I recorded. Then art takes over and makes reality visible; it deepens people's understanding and attracts the attention of specialized critics as well as the media, humanitarian organizations, and ordinary citizens. Better still, my personal story and the way I have managed to communicate reality through art have served as an inspiration to other people who are going through what I suffered for years.

Can you imagine? A street survivor like me becoming not only an artist but also the voice of a community that has been unheard for decades. I have given interviews to various media including the BBC, *The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph*, and many others. I have taken part in radio and television debates, I was even invited to the British parliament to speak about the topic.

Art has become my social warrior's weapon. It is a committed artform; I cannot conceive of any other way to explain my work. It never ceases to amaze me that something that started two years ago almost as an experiment has been presented at festivals and galleries in Edinburgh, Brighton, Liverpool, Glasgow, and London.

Every city I visit gives me the opportunity to reach out to local homeless; I have helped them manage cameras and recorders with the support of many organizations; have helped me show them how to use cameras and audio recorders; their enthusiasm to participate and contribute with new ideas and testimonials never fails to surprise me.

Not long ago, I collaborated with the international organization Civicus, which focuses on documenting cases of human rights violations, and the independent *New Internationalist* magazine to organize a photography contest for homeless people living on the streets.

The winner was a well-known homeless personality from central London called Steven, who usually works for loose change by painting country flags with colored chalk in Piccadilly Circus. If you tell Steven which country you are from, he will paint your flag on the ground in impressive detail.

Steven entered the contest using a borrowed camera and submitted a very simple picture. It is not an artistic photo at all, but something simpler and more forceful, perhaps sadder: it is a denunciation. Steven's submission was an edict that was drawn up and posted on city walls by the Westminster District Police, one of the most colorful districts in the city visited by millions of tourists every day:

It is a crime to lie on the pavements of this pedestrian precinct or to set anything down with the intention of making a bed to lie on. Anyone doing so may be fined up to 500 pounds.

Steven's photo won the award and was widely reproduced by the media, triggering an intense debate that led the country to re-evaluate its budgets for vulnerable populations and social housing. The power of a single image.

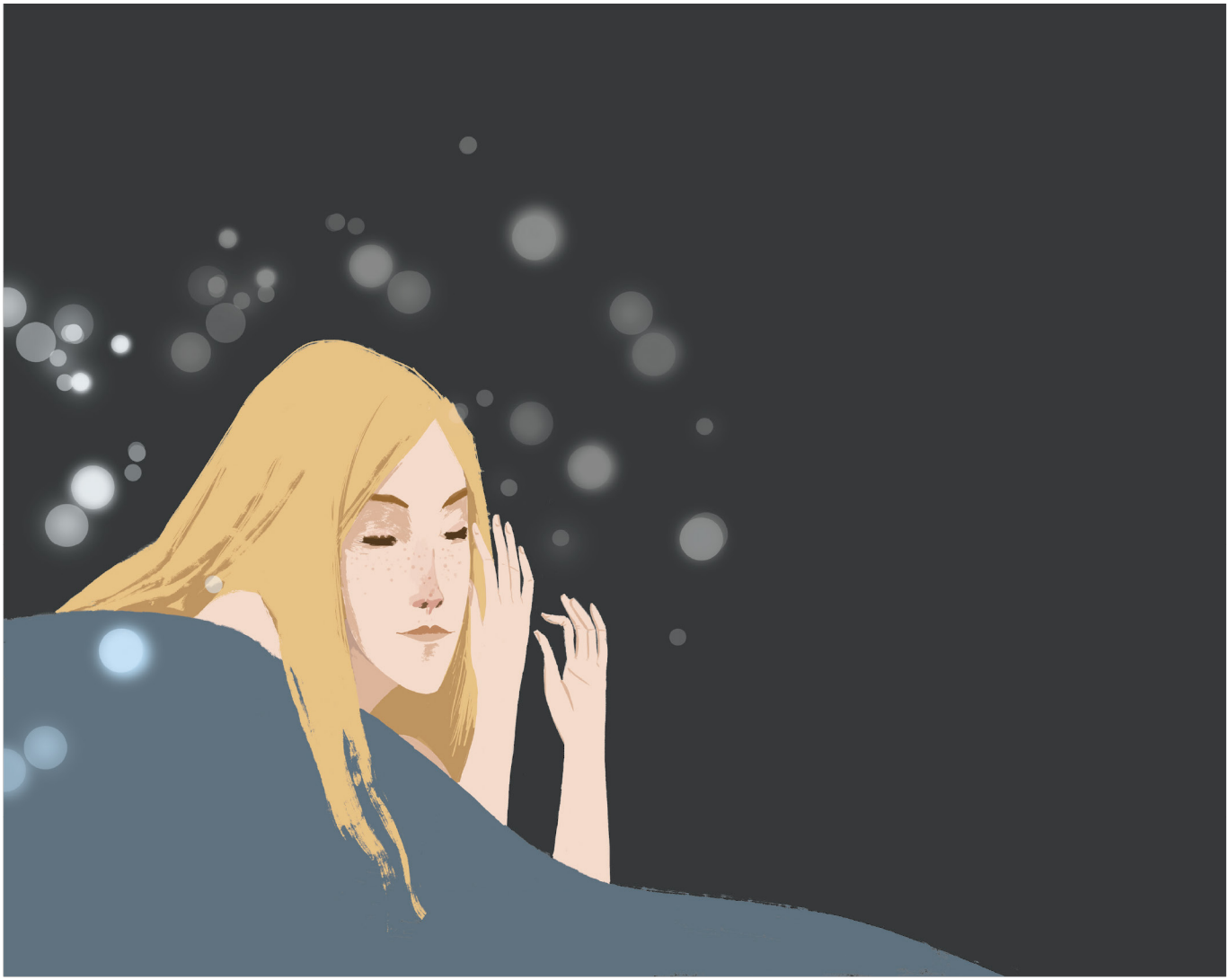
So, with organizations like Crisis and Civicus, we host workshops and forums where we've discovered that my story can be replicated in many other ways. Art, as I've already pointed out, has the power to change many lives, and it is changing them.

Right now, Rafeik, Jessica and Darren are waiting for me out there. Together we are going to give a talk on this subject as part of tonight's opening ceremony. The three of them still live on the streets, but they have been encouraged to share the same stories and reflections they gave me for my sound installation. It excites me to see how now, when they speak, they look at people differently: they look them in the eye, they tell them about their lives and fears, but they also share their aspirations and proposals. Like me, they now fight invisibility and oblivion and, in doing so, they take the microphone with the same confidence as they do the street.

In fact, the first homeless people's public protest took place outside the houses of parliament a few months ago. They came with banners to chant slogans in favor of their rights. Many other citizens joined the rally; they understood that we can't keep on acting as if nothing is happening.

People could come up with many reasons why others might suddenly find themselves homeless and unsheltered. They might see them as villains, morally inferior beings who ended up that way due to their own actions, or perhaps as victims, victims of a social catastrophe, or broken, purposeless puppets of a cruel system.

Many may assume that there is something wrong with people in this extreme situation: because they are addicts, they have some mental illness, they have lost the meaning of life and allowed themselves to be defeated, they are lazy, freeloaders, or antisocial vagrants. Others may prefer not to examine the individual reasons behind each case and choose to explain it as a failure of the society in which we live:



injustice, poverty, capitalism. "It's the system's fault," they say.

Truth be told, multiple layers of both realities are hidden behind each story. Personal dramas and social tragedies intertwine and give rise to what we see in many of the big cities of our time. Furthermore, no matter how open and empathetic we may be to this phenomenon, people who have not experienced it will never be able to imagine

what it means to the homeless to fight for their survival day after day.

One thing should be clear in any case: no one chose to go down that path. It is not a choice but the result of many factors. However, it isn't a life sentence either: where there's life, there's hope.

I was a teenager when I found myself on the street. Like many other cases, my life can tell stories of family break-ups, misery, abandonment, violence, loneliness. The stories in these cases are so similar that it is somewhat pointless to repeat them. Even in the context of these fractured lives, stories of friendship, solidarity, and struggle sometimes appear; only nobody knows about them, and they are filed away in the basement reserved for the invisible. Therefore, it is not by chance that photography—the image itself—is the tool I chose to make the truth visible.

I suddenly found myself on the street; I didn't choose it, but I did choose to get away from it. I wanted to live and tell my story, to share my experience and use it to create something different, original, unique, and dense. Tonight, I will sleep in a bed. While you are reading this, I may fall asleep, and you will too. And when you do, if you remember the people I told you about, I will be at peace.

I must hurry. Many people are waiting for me at the opening ceremony. I'd like to wrap up with a riddle:

The more you see of it, the more blind you become. The more visible it becomes to our eyes, the faster it disappears from our conscience.

Any ideas? I'll tell you: the homeless.

To Reflect and Discuss

The four stories presented here offer us a tremendous opportunity to reflect on the challenges facing any country that aspires to strengthen its democratic system. In all cases, the action of a single person changes the trend of events and the course of history, to a greater or lesser extent, thanks to citizen participation. These young women exercise leadership that converts their individual actions into a collective concern.

We offer educators and young people this tool so that, based on the analysis of what happened in other latitudes, we can look inside our own communities and illuminate possible decisions; very concrete actions to participate more actively in the democratic construction of Mexico.

The Vote Collector

Since the 1979 Revolution, elections have been held in Iran, despite all the political and religious difficulties that may exist. While there are no political parties as we know them, there are political associations that nominate candidates. Similar to Mexico, polling stations are set up in many towns and cities, and, in parallel, voter registration continues as an effort to facilitate the participation of residents in less accessible areas.

1. What articles of our Constitution* relate citizen rights to the right to vote and be voted for?

* Political Constitution of the United Mexican States.

2. What does article 34 of the Mexican Constitution say about who can vote and be voted for?
3. What is the National Law that regulates electoral processes in Mexico?
4. Why do you think Nasim was uncomfortable that a woman was the commissioned officer of the Election Committee and therefore had to follow her instructions?
5. Why do you think Asadeh was so intent on getting the citizens of her country to vote?
6. Iran's electoral system specifies how voting is to be conducted. What do you think is the purpose of this? This option is not provided for in Mexican law, but what efforts are being made in Mexico to enable all communities to participate in the electoral process?
7. What did Asadeh mean when she told Nasim "they have their own government"? Do you know if there are communities organized in a similar way in Mexico?
8. What is one of the voting rules that Asadeh points out when a man wanted several women who were with him to vote as a group? Do you know if this rule is in force for the electoral process in Mexico?
9. Election day in Mexico also contemplates that citizens should get involved in the administration of the voting process. Do you know how long this has been happening, how citizens get involved and where the procedure to be followed is specified?
10. What values did Nasim see in Asadeh to consider her an excellent candidate for election?

A Teacher in Kenya

This story focuses on Jane's decision to grant the population the right to inclusive education that was available in Kenya at the historical moment the events take place.

1. Jane's parents couldn't go to school. Thanks to her family's sacrifices, she completed her teacher training and, as the story tells us, the new generations in that country are already well on the way to being granted access to education. Do you think that previous generations in our country were afforded the same opportunities to be educated? As a society, what do we owe our parents, what do we owe our grandparents in relation to what

the country provides in terms of education?
2. Review article 3 of the Mexican Constitution and list the main elements concerning the right to an education in our country.
3. Why does the old man in this story so firmly claim his right to education?
4. Do you know if there are any illiterate adults in our country? Are there programs to address this lag? What do you think young people in Mexico could do about it?
5. The inspector and some residents of the town where the school is located did not support the idea of the old man going to school. Jane finds out their real reasons and asks them to be conciliatory. What does this mean?
6. Why do you think the school community of that village asked for the return of Jane as school principal? What values did you recognize in her as a teacher and as a person?
7. What do you think of David's performance as a professional and as a husband?
8. Do you know someone in your community who does not have access to education for any reason? If it is one of the guarantees of Human Rights enshrined in the Constitution, how could this be enforced?
9. What is the role the media played in spreading this story?
10. What do articles 1 and 6 of our Constitution say about freedom of expression, which is guaranteed by human rights? Investigate a case in your community or in the country in which the dissemination of news has improved a specific situation in terms of human rights.

Mother Water

Ancestral communities survive to this day in Latin America: ancestral cultures that were already here before the arrival of the Spanish. This is the case of the Quechuas in Peru, the culture to which Nélida belongs, who have a rich worldview from which they interact with their environment and with other cultures.

1. Just as the Quechuas form part of Peru's social structure, do you know how many ethnic groups we have in Mexico? Do you belong to one of them? Can you name an ethic group or groups that live in or close to your part of the country?
2. Review article 2 of our Constitution and say what its most important provisions are.
3. What would have happened if Nélida and her community had not put up resistance to the proposal to set up a mine in their

town?

4. Do you know of any cases in your community or in your country in which a people's worldview is in contradiction with proposals made in another area? How do you think this contradiction could be resolved, considering that the Constitution establishes that human rights are for everyone?
5. Mexico is a multicultural country. What cultural elements and contributions can you identify that enrich our daily lives and that come from ancestral communities?
6. Just as Nélida knows about the vision of her ancestors and their relationship with nature, find out about a legend or myth that, from the worldview of some indigenous culture, explains the relationship of human beings with their environment.
7. What natural resources can you identify in your community that need to be cared for more zealously? Read article 27 of our Constitution and talk with your friends about any cases of natural resource use and exploitation that you know of in the country and in your community.
8. Are you aware of any disputes in Mexico between environmental conservation stakeholders and development project investors? If development and natural resource conservation are both necessary, how could these kinds of disputes be settled?
9. For peaceful dispute settlement, what community role do you think young people should play?
10. The story tells us that Nélida has decided not to have any children of her own for now. What does article 4 of our Constitution say about the decision of Mexican citizens to have children?

Where Did I Sleep Last Night?

The so-called developed countries have reached a considerable standard of living that translates into well-being for most people. However, the characteristics of the system itself have caused an important number of citizens to be excluded from these benefits, a phenomenon that seems to be characteristic of poorer countries. This is the case of Bekki, the homeless young woman who became a visual artist as a form of social activism.

1. In our country, if people do not have a roof over their head at night, their Constitutional

Human Rights guarantees are lacking. Pursuant to section I of article 1 of the Constitution, what human rights are not being respected for these people?

2. Bekki was homeless and slept rough for several years. Besides the material inconveniences, what bothered her most about the people she interacted with on the street?
3. If the homeless have the same civil rights as everyone else, what should our attitude be towards these people?
4. In your community, are there people who have nowhere to spend the night and sleep rough in public spaces?
5. What does "make visible" mean? In our Mexican society, besides the homeless, who do you think lacks the visibility required to be considered in decision-making processes that would allow them to receive the benefits that every citizen deserves?
6. What is the power of art, according to the story? What is achieved through Bekki's photographs?
7. Do you know of an organization close to you that is dedicated to working with people in need through art?
8. Analyze Article 4 of the Constitution and summarize the nature of the right to culture and cultural rights.
9. How can we, as a society, get involved in correcting the lack of attention to people and groups that do not have what they need to live a dignified life?
10. Propose an artistic project in any discipline that gives visibility to people who have different special needs in your community.

REVOLTS, STORIES
YOUTH, DIVERSITY, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Bulmer MT Std, Open Sans and Bembo Std font families were used.

Rosaura Muñoz, better known as John Marceline, studied graphic design in León, Guanajuato. She soon realized that her true interests lay in sequential art, illustrated books, and fantastic stories; consequently, she left design behind to become an animator. After some time, and due to various circumstances, she moved to Mexico City in 2014, where she completed a certificate in illustration at the Academia de San Carlos. Since then, she has dedicated herself to illustrating books, ranging from supernatural tales to pre-Hispanic legends. Currently, she focuses primarily on creating comics and hopes to illustrate many more books in the years to come.

Revolts, Stories. Youth, Diversity, and Human Rights, the literary proposal for young people, brings together four stories based on actual events. From several places, these stories show the possibilities that young people have to actively participate in the defense of human rights and respect for diversity in different communities.

These are entertaining stories, magnificently illustrated, with characters and situations whose strength leads us to reflection, either through individual experience or as a result of group reading work. It also includes didactic aids that link these stories with events closer to the Mexican environment so that the reader can locate our constitutional references regarding Human Rights and what citizens can do for their full compliance.

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