

PARALLEL LIVES

That baby was born in a refugee camp. He was the last descendant of ancestors who had always lived on the same land, land that had been expropriated from them by the interests of their former colonisers. Overnight they became a cursed people, persecuted and forgotten, despite the existence of a supranational organization that was founded for the purpose of maintaining peace and promoting equality in the world. An institution whose power was very limited because, since the end of the Second World War, it was controlled by the victors who always ended up imposing their criteria and conditions. Therefore, that child, like many others, grew up in an outcast family. People who only appeared in most of the media when they were the protagonists of shocking events provoked as a response to the continuous abuses, outrages and humiliations they suffered on a daily basis for decades.

This child attended one of the schools that agents of various non-governmental organizations had set up to ensure that the right to education was at least minimally respected. There he learned to read, write, arithmetic, geography, etc. There he met with other children from his environment: they played, performed plays, sang songs, etc. The purpose of these centres, in addition to guaranteeing the right to education, was, as far as possible, to protect the children from the permanent violence that surrounded them and to promote their emotional well-being. From the beginning he struck up a special friendship with a small girl with big eyes, always with a smile on her lips, whose movements were very graceful. It was the latter that particularly attracted his attention, he loved to watch her dance, it was as if a butterfly fluttered around him, leaving very pleasant trails that, even in dreams, he used to remember.

Little by little, that teenager internalized the situation of his family, his friends, his neighbours, of an entire people living under repression, under continuous injustice, under total arbitrariness, under endless humiliation. On the same day that his father and older brother were killed at one of the occupation's frequent checkpoints, he too threw stones, set fire to worn tires, knocked over containers and ran in front of the soldiers until he was exhausted, cowering and kneeling on the ground in a corner, tears running down his cheeks like a spring. Rage and despair had prevailed over fear and restraint.

When the dance-enthusiastic girl turned sixteen, she was forced to marry an older man who had prestige in the community. From the beginning she suffered humiliation and abuse within the marriage. When the marriage did not bear fruit, she was repudiated. This

was a great dishonor to her family and, as a result, that young woman was outraged and treated with disdain. People turned away from her as she passed, some avoided looking at her, some insulted her, someone even spat at her, but not him, he never acted like that. He often met her in faraway places, spoke to her in a sweet, singing voice, tried to make her smile, wanted to ease her pain, to make her happy for a while.

The invading army had been mercilessly bombing the buildings of the besieged city for days. One night the lights went out as the young man, so well known for his commitment to the cause, was trying to climb down from his cot to the ground. The infected fracture and the intense fever prevented him from moving. Outside, the sound of sirens pierced terrifyingly through the openings of the battered buildings. Mechanically, he turned his gaze towards the skylight, the glare of the detonations showing cut-out images of the girl's body performing "Swan Lake." This time no one would be smiling at him from the other side of the skylight, but he could never verify that.

The next day, a spectral dancer, taking off her ballet shoes, muttered with her head down: "What happened to him? He never made it to the basement."

"Stories without Mufflers" (2006 -)