

## DREAMING IN COLOUR – BERYL OHAS

'Thirsty' is a word that most of my peers described me as. They enjoyed their weekends discussing their supposed dream weddings and rich husbands, as they were indoctrinated to believe that was their purpose and goal in life. I spent my private time dreaming. Staring daily at the 6:30 pm plane, I was curious of the countries beyond, the kind of cultures they had. I wanted to experience it all, I wanted to quench my thirst. My blueprint to civilisation was experience, different angles of opinions from diverse cultural backgrounds; the foundation of hate, racism, homophobia, advance technology. I didn't trust third hand fabricated information from people who were barely connected to the situations and contexts. I craved affirmation to what the media portrayed. Books and documentaries weren't enough for me. I needed first-hand experience. Experience births wisdom which acts as a driving force to attain our goals.

The older I got, the more I realised that the world has created masks which promise so much perfection, burying imperfections. A country I call home has been run by self-centred leaders who promise roses but reward us with thorns forcing us to migrate to various foreign countries. As a Kenyan who grew up in the villages of the countryside I was protected, I was un-exposed to racism or tribalism. However, we'd hear about Europe and immediately our naïve little faces would glow with joy, envisioning success, a breakthrough to end the circle of poverty, a place to fulfil your dreams, attain our solace. Leaving our loved ones, friends, culture that shaped us into who we've become to relocate to a totally different continent to attain our goal is a bold and brave move. People on the move, we are trying to change our narrative, we want better lives and future that our birth country couldn't offer.

Being a migrant in Ireland has its shades of grey. On one hand I'm free from a country that deemed me a felon based on my sexual orientation. I can upgrade my college education to secure better jobs, I can share my ideas, and boost my advocacy skills. On the other hand I'm coming to terms with the fact that perfection of masks is enforced everywhere, we are all welcomed here but the systematic oppression doesn't really make it easy to achieve the dream. Depending on immigration status, some of us wait so long for all the permits and papers that by the time they get to work, their then age group might hinder them from getting the dream job. Migrants are not really fully accepted as part of the society only tagged during cultural months to market diversity of the country. It's very hypocritical that we are expected to be these picture-perfect figures with lots of achievements in a space that barely offer them spaces to begin with. Constantly being put to test whether we have got low or high IQ in a language so foreign to you without a second chance to prove yourself in a language you can best express yourself in.

While I carry the weight of people who look up to me, I am masking each obstacle from those naïve dreamers like I once was. Afraid to expose them to the reality of the unjust society rebuking us of our broken spirits while trying to escape from the clutches of the monstrous depression. Many migrant not strong enough, making news suicide headlines sometimes because of the reckless drinking spree that became their norm through the night's stillness. Their stories untold, their voices unheard, their dreams not achieved despite the cheap labour they had to provide. We may have new opportunities in our new home counties, but let's not mistake generosity of justice.

Back in Kenya I was volunteering in refugee camps, now I am a refugee living in limbo. I am told 'You are so lucky to have achieved so much within a short period of time' by people with twenty plus years of ongoing immigration status stories. Your story 'it's an inspiration to most because it's a sign that there's a bit of progress' I am told. They are right, I am lucky. Despite my immigration dilemmas; whether my application will be approved? How long it will take? What will be my options in case I'm to face deportation? I'm optimistic. If not for Ireland, I wouldn't have known the actual definition of freedom of speech. Where I come from women tend to be silenced, their value reduced by the number of children they bear. Adults are always right, young people never really have a say in anything. Things are completely opposite here. To be honest, I think that I've learnt to be more vocal than I've ever been. I've even started dreaming in English with an Irish accent. I've learnt the importance of sharing personal stories especially when volunteering in various organisations who aim to promote equality within the unjust system.

Stories helps to highlight areas of oppression that needs to be fixed. Without stories, we wouldn't have known about our history, culture, heroes. I want to push to make people see the un-fabricated experiences of migration process. Stories about all that hard work that doesn't come easy. Stories about how we can collectively make migration better for others or at least mentally prepare them that migration not always easy but depending on the mind-set things might work out swiftly or rough.

This country has made it possible for me to embrace diversity, find love and I don't just mean my partner but friends from diverse backgrounds too who have shared at least part of their cultures, religion, beliefs. That gave me opening for different perspectives as well as our shared bonds which doesn't make us any different from each other which is a good foundation to a better Ireland. I want my story to bring in colour. A colour that highlights both failure and success, a colour that eradicates trauma bonding, a colour that agrees to the fact that we are all broken in a way and the only difference is how we deal with these imperfectly perfect scars individually. A colour that not only celebrates achievement but also recognises trial and errors.