

## NATALIA FERREYRA-CARROLL

### *Story of Self*

Ever since I was child I was amazed by the reality that life is experienced completely differently all around the world. While that might seem obvious, it was not always obvious how directly relevant to me this truth would become or how the deeper ramifications of that concept would guide me through most of the important decisions I have taken.

Despite wanting to see the world, I never thought I was going to be a migrant.

My 7 year old self struggled to see why learning English would ever be useful. *'We don't speak English in Argentina, mama.'* I remember saying, unable to imagine a situation where having learnt English would be useful. It is not that I did not want to go places, but as a Latin woman growing up in a country with an accelerating devaluation rate, the prospect of gathering the means to travel internationally was hardly realistic.

I was lucky and I had loads of help. When I was a law student I got the chance to do an internship in Dublin. I had a strong premonition that this opportunity would change my life forever. I came for the first time, then a second and third, discovering a new culture and simultaneously discovering essential and previously unknown parts of myself. Three times I came and then came back to Argentina until I decided it was time to make a decision.

The coming and going finally materialised in deciding to move to Ireland for good. Almost four years ago I woke up on my last morning as a resident of the country where I grew up. My friends and sister had stayed the night and we had breakfast and hugs. My father came early to an empty apartment, and among tears and smiles he gave me a letter, instructing me to only read it only once I was *"ideally in the middle of the Atlantic between Buenos Aires and Dublin"* he said.

### *Story of Us*

The decision I made of coming back to Ireland grounded me as part of a thriving migrant and queer community that I am happy to belong to. I came once again to Ireland to reunite with the woman I love and to whom I am now married. I came to an island I already was fond of and the place where I wanted to be to be the person I am now.

The decision to leave one's home country, however, also has irrevocable consequences – and there is a lot to be said on the topic of the joys and struggles of migrating. The shared experience of migrants is rooted in living between the inescapable loss of places, people and familiarity, and the gain of new realisations, ways of understanding life and possibilities to create new destinies. These new destinies become a life richer than you could have previously imagined, but there is no detour around the grief.

Connection is the consolation and the purpose. As a queer migrant woman in Ireland, I have built powerful and live-giving connections, not just with other migrants or other queer people, but with a mix of local people from all paths of life. From shared and diverse queer and migrant experiences, I have seen the ways people in either (or both) groups develop tools to navigate a world that often feels very clearly not built for them.

Being part of a minority leads to feeling out of place and a very effective way to counteract this feeling has often been to create groups of people to share the burden. Queer and migrant people have created spaces filled with love, understanding and a thirst for change. I am honoured to be part of this and contribute to building community as part of Dublin Lesbian Line. These communities support its members at the same time they aim to improve society as a whole. They are meant for people to share and exchange ideas, to think about the future and ultimately to create a fairer world.

### *Story of Now*

There's a Swedish saying that shared joy is doubled and shared burden is halved. The true understanding of that saying only came to me while being part of a queer migrant community like the one I am now. When I get together with people in my queer migrant community, we share our hardships as much as we celebrate each other's joys, and this is the solidarity we need to affect some really needed change together. I think right there is where the balance between the joys and the struggles lies, in the strength and support received and given by others in similar circumstances. That is our main fortitude and the one we as a community strive to keep growing.

If I could take a plane anywhere in the world in the next hour with the aim of reuniting with everyone I love the most, I wouldn't be able to determine the destination. Those I love and care about the most are disseminated around the globe and acknowledging this fact upsets me as much as it nourishes me. A decision I made brought me to this place and I believe it was the right one for me. It is my hope that every immigrant in Ireland has a space where they feel safe and heard and where they get to share their experiences, hardships and joy.