

Óscar Osorio. *Allende el mar*. Tusquets Editores, 2023. 216 pp. ISBN 9786287567603. \$12.99.

The raw, honest, and private human condition of ten Colombian emigrants departing their homeland, as the result of a multiplicity of traumatic antecedents, in search of the assumed American dream takes center stage in Óscar Osorio's *Allende el mar*. A polyphony of distinctive minibiographies collides and provides a panoramic view of the Colombian journey to the United States of America that, if often met with varying levels of deception, hardships, and a patriotic nostalgia for *la patria*, can never be satisfied nor fully recovered with the fleeting passage of time. As expressed in "La luna y el lucero," "Manteníamos pendientes de las noticias de Colombia. No éramos capaces de sacárnosla del corazón y de la mente" (86). Although there are positive aspects to living in the United States of America, for the most part, distressing yet familial memories transition into uncomfortable present realities.

Osorio's writing style gracefully captures the natural flow of reflective thought and storytelling generated by the interviewees. As each individual shares their background and experiences, fueled by deep emotions, they weave back and forth through present and past tenses, attempting to sketch their most influential recollections. As the chapters conclude, readers are left to ponder an assortment of primarily unsettling shared topics that depict the reality of Colombian struggles both back home and in the United States of America. While much can be said about the singularity of each story, it is the similar experiences that highlight violence, abuse, machismo, poverty, loss, abandonment, isolation, loneliness, broken and complex relationships, and regret that tie these migrant journeys together.

References to Colombian origins recurrently emphasize a violent and savage atmosphere and innateness: "La ciudad padecía la violencia y el desorden social producidos por decenas de bandas de sicarios que actuaban principalmente al servicio del cartel de Medellín" (13). Rodín, in "Soy primo de Jesucristo," also makes the abundance of violence evident, "La violencia siempre ha estado ahí, al lado" (109). Sometimes the described Colombian violence accelerates to levels of gang and military style persecution, torture, bombing, and massacres (79, 90, 147). When it comes to the female protagonists, machismo and sexual abuse seem inevitable with each personal account. Men repeatedly pursue pubescent females, physically and sexually abuse their spouses and girlfriends, harass females, rape women and children, and seek adulterous lives.

Stereotypical Latino families of unity, love, and affability are mostly absent from these stories. Fathers are unreliable, deceiving, and have multiple wives and girlfriends: “A mí me gusta es tener novia o esposa. He tenido muchas. No me gusta sufrir ni gastar tiempo. Al pan, pan y al vino, vino. ... Tengo ocho hijos de siete mujeres, aunque tres de ellos no saben quién soy” (115). Although less frequent, the depicted children are at times abandoned by their mothers and raised by grandparents, other relatives, or even strangers, and even these relationships tend to fail the protagonists. Family separation through migration, irresponsible relatives, death, and financial turmoil recur throughout the divergent narratives.

Separation from the motherland and family juxtaposed to violent memories and a less-than-idyllic life in the United States of America eventually leads the majority of these migrants to loneliness, nostalgia, and depression. Franklin Humberto Coral Garrido expresses this sentiment best: “Nos asilamos para proteger la vida, pero nos aferramos a la ilusión de retorno. Por eso, el asilado es más nostálgico que el inmigrante de voluntad. Si esa nostalgia no se atenúa, podemos caer en depresión o en apatía” (30). Even though this is the overarching tone, that is not to say that there are no conveyed positives to leaving Colombia. The financial benefits and elevated commodities are underscored, and love for the United States of America is occasionally voiced (131). However, it seems as though the loss of culture, language, family, and a sense of home overwhelm.

At the end of *Allende el mar*, what the book ultimately reveals on the other side of the sea through these Colombian voices is an unfulfilled American dream. The losses seem to outweigh the benefits: “Yo me vine, él se quedó; yo sobreviví, él no. Así es Colombia” (86). Osorio does a remarkable job of obscuring his authorial presence and allowing the emigrants to illustrate the authenticity of their experiences. Anyone searching for well-documented migrant Colombian realities has certainly discovered the most appropriate text.

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