

Funeral for the Truth

By Ellise Ramos

“Growth is painful. Change is painful. But nothing is as painful as staying stuck somewhere you don’t belong.”

N.R. Narayana Murthy

I came from the Philippines at 14, and immediately recognized the abyss that separates my narrative from everyone else’s history.

My history is of salt water and dried fish. Sunny, humid days and afternoons spent with my back on the grass, toes curled, watching the clouds go by.

Yours is of winter, hugging cups of coffee, the initial sweet taste reinvigorating your body for the rest of the day. Coffee, the quencher of all thirsts, the muse of your mornings, the tradition that keeps a family close, one mug at a time.

I was 20 when I walked down the streets of Port Credit, forgetting the place I had in your world. A fuzzy, brown dog came bounding down the steps and pushed his head under my palm. I asked the

owner, “Can I pet him? Is he friendly?” And he said, “Maybe not with the Chinese.”

I was 23 when I noticed, sitting in a restaurant with my friend, an old man, his white son and his son’s Filipino wife staring at us.

I could see from the look of the Filipina’s eyes that something was about to happen -- something she was already desperately trying to apologize for.

The old man wheeled his chair over to my table, put both hands on my shoulder and asked: “You from the Philippines?” I nodded, my fork and spoon in mid-air. “Good. Come with me. I can give you everything. I can even send you back home. I have money.”

His son kept apologizing, but to my friend, not to me. His Filipino wife went down on her knees, put her forehead on mine, and said, “Pasensya ka na. Matanda na eh.”*

What is it about me that makes

people think I am for sale?

As each winter passes, and more snow gathers around me, winter jackets accumulating -- it’s so easy to forget that I used to belong to an island, whose history is marked by 300 years of subjugation --

that the colour of my skin is different from yours,

the language I speak is borrowed

--it is not my first and will never be my own.

Toronto is a multicultural city, and we can be so accepting and open. But denying the existence of the abyss we have to cross to reach each other, is a funeral for the truth.

We are all blinded by the lens that owns us, and bound to pasts we cannot destroy.

*Translates to: “Please have patience for he is old.”

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