

for the basics of life (shelter, food, education and work). Some of us were not even into these fights, but were married to leaders of the opposition, university students or union representatives: that was enough to signal us as subversives and troublemakers.

Our governments, mainly under the control of the military, look at any opposition as a threat to their privileges and their hold on political and economic power. Many of my friends have disappeared, were murdered and tortured together with their children; just a few of us were able to escape and are now living in exile.

The journey to exile starts with very heavy luggage filled with sadness, desperation and uncertainty about the future. Some of the lucky ones, like myself, leave with the family; some others, like one of my friends, will have to leave only a few days after their husband's funeral, or maybe their son's or daughter's assassination.

After leaving behind friends, family, a job, plans and dreams, one arrives in Canada — which in itself becomes a shelter, a place in which you feel safe (but you feel a foreigner), a place that in many ways welcomes you (but in many others is not prepared to deal with the things that will become your frustrations in the future). Canada is different: it is not your country; the cultural values are different, things are done in a way that is unfamiliar to you; and the people live differently. Most Canadians have never seen five year-old children picking cotton for \$1.00 a day or shining shoes in the streets for \$0.25 a day. Women have not been tortured, raped or left alone as a consequence of political violence. Men have not been taken away and never seen again. And grandmothers still look forward to seeing their grandchildren grow. That is not the reality in our countries. A mother with her children in university will be always wondering if her son or daughter will be coming back that night. A *campesino* mother can always feel lucky if her children grow up to be five years old. And a union leader prepares himself to perhaps not ever come home from work.

The first problem you encounter is the language, you have to go to school and learn it, but in many cases the need to send

money abroad for the number of members of your family, or just the need to work for self-assurance, will send you into the workforce. From then it is really hard to have the time or the energy to attend night school. A profession is very important but your five, six or ten years of post-secondary education are not recognized. You have to start it all over again and that is why there are so many talented men and women doctors, psychologists, lawyers, teachers, etc. working as unskilled labourers for low salaries.

In our culture, although things are changing, women stay at home and raise the children. Here most of the times our husbands do not earn enough to support the family and cover the expenses, and women end up in night cleaning jobs or factory lines — their dreams shattered, facing unfair treatment, discrimination, lack of opportunities and limited access to services. Many people will think ... well, so why don't you go back? It is not so easy. Your life is in jeopardy. So you stay and do the best you can in everything you do. You do not have to prove to anybody you are a superwoman, but you cannot let exile destroy your life. You are an example to all of those who follow you, and you have to show those who turned your life around that they might have left you without the support of your family and the material things you had, but that they didn't break your spirit, and your principles are now stronger than ever and the fight has not ended yet.

Perhaps some day we will go back to the places and faces we left. But it will never be the same: we have changed, those of us who coped will be stronger and more mature; those who couldn't cope will never understand the rationale of their years out of home that left their lives in shambles. It will never be the same, because many of our mothers and fathers died without ever seeing their grandchildren; because we were deprived of being at their bedside to kiss them good-bye, and that we will never forget or forgive.

But, if we go back, it will mean we have succeeded; we have won the fight, and we will rebuild a society with the same values and the same ideals as those who lost their lives in the process. Perhaps then it will all be worth it.

## CHAPTER 149 An Act Respecting Indians

Section 11. Subject to section 12,

a person is entitled to be registered, if that person (c) is a male who is a direct descendent in the male line of a male person described in paragraph (a) or (b);

Section 11. Subject to section 12,

a person is entitled to be registered, if that person (f) is the wife or widow of a person who is entitled to be registered registered by virtue of paragraph (a), (b), (c), (d) or (e);

Section 12 (1) (b)

The following persons are not allowed to be registered registered namely, (b) a woman who married married a person who is not an Indian, Indian unless that woman is subsequently the wife or widow of a person person described in section 11.

## CHAPTER 149 An Act Respecting Indians

### CHAPTER 149 (subsequently)

Father brothers uncles  
chiefs warriors politicians  
Where are the Women

"out there" you point  
"somewhere"

I reach out into the mist  
to women you refuse to see  
to strength you cannot give

and will not give to emotion  
you cannot feel to the other  
half of our beginnings

I have myself and my daughters  
and you my fathers have  
sons and sons and sons

and section 12 (1) (b)  
in the Act Respecting Indians

**Lenore Keeshig-Tobias**