

A Place to Call One's Own

(Donde meter la cabeza)

Written by Peter Petkovsek and Martin Alejandro Segovia Rodríguez, based on the research done by Carlos Andrés Tobar Tovar. Co-Created by all performers.

First performed and recorded at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Cali, Colombia, as a collaboration between the university, the foundation Son de mi gente, and the research network Contested Territories.

Characters

DAUGHTER

MOTHER

CHORUS OF DANCERS / COMMUNITY / PANDILLEROS

MAN

NEIGHBOUR 1

NEIGHBOUR 2

YOUNG MAN

YOUNG JHON

JHON

THE MONSTER OF THE BLUE LAGOON

ACT 1 – A Place to Call Home

SCENE 1

DAUGHTER enters, singing and dancing.

DAUGHTER

Sol, solecito, caliéntame un poquito, por hoy por mañana, por toda la semana. Luna, lunera, cascabelera, cinco pollitos y una ternera... *[a Spanish children's song]*

DAUGHTER stops, surprised. She's looking around her.

DAUGHTER

Oh! And this place? Mommy, mommy, I feel so happy! Although it's not soooo pretty, it looks like a dry swamp... But I didn't like where we lived... We were displaced by violence... I would so much like to have a house, to live with my mother under a roof, and hopefully neighbors with a good heart. God, I ask you for that dream! But I don't know if it's possible...

MOTHER enters while DAUGHTER is talking and looks at her with love and pain.

MOTHER

Here you are, dear, I was looking for you. Come on, my love, come on, come on! They tell me that there is a piece of land not far away, by the wetlands, where those games were held. Well, you weren't born love. We and your dad saw them on television, and the whole place seemed so pretty to us. And there are people there like us... Maybe over there we can find a little piece of land that would be ours and that we can call home...

Music begins – song La Clave de Salsa (instrumental). CHORUS (the dancers) enters and takes positions on the stage: the dancers' bodies represent the wasteland, the environmental challenges, but also hope. The salsa rhythm continues.

DAUGHTER

Is it here, mom?
Are we there yet?
I'm tired...

MOTHER

My dear, we're almost there.

CHORUS does its first movements representing the terrain while MOTHER and DAUGHTER continue, seemingly oblivious.

DAUGHTER

Are we there yet, mom?
You already said we were almost there before.
I'm tired!
We've been traveling for so long.
We haven't even had time to eat.

MOTHER

I know, my dear.
We had to leave.
We had to go.
Escape from danger.

CHORUS continues the movements.

I want you to have a safer life.
I couldn't offer it to you where we were.
We have moved so much from there to here, from here to there.
To find a better place,
To find where a place to call home,
To find a place where we can build a decent life.
Maybe here?

DAUGHTER

It's strange here, mom...

MOTHER

Look, dear, it's not so bad. There are flowers, just like you like, and they smell nice. Listen!

DAUGHTER

What, mom?

MOTHER

The humming of bees, dear! Maybe this is it...

DAUGHTER

This is it, mom!

DAUGHTER runs around happily. CHORUS members jump up one by one, MOTHER and DAUGHTER notice them.

CHORUS

This is it / this is it / this is it etc.

MOTHER

There are people here.... But who are they?

CHORUS

The community!

DAUGHTER joins the CHORUS to get into position for dancing. Music starts. Song: Hecha Pa Lante. CHORUS and DAUGHTER dance. MOTHER is observing from the side. When the dance is over, MOTHER comes to hug DAUGHTER.

MOTHER

Yes, I think this is it, dear.

We found it!

This will be our place,

Where can you grow,

Surrounded by a community.

We belong to these people...

CHORUS moves out of the way, revealing the lot belonging to MOTHER and DAUGHTER. One DANCER brings a small chair onto the stage.

DANCER

Here everyone is welcome, but be careful with the Monster of the Blue Lagoon...

DAUGHTER

The monster?

DANCER

Yes, the lagoon is beautiful but dangerous... The monster eats people.

MOTHER

These are just stories, my dear. We're here!

DANCER

Just don't say you haven't been warned...

SCENE 2

DAUGHTER

Is this lot ours, mom? This is it?

MOTHER

Yes dear.

It's ours.

MOTHER sits on the chair and DAUGHTER kneels by her, placing her head in MOTHER's lap.

We bought it with the last savings we had.

We bought it from a man,

A man named...

CHORUS

Marroquín!

MOTHER

That's it.

DAUGHTER

But mom, there's nothing around here!

there is no house,

There is no light,

There is no road,

There is no water.

Mom, what are we going to do?

MOTHER

We'll have to build.

We'll build our house/

DAUGHER

But how, mom?

We don't have any money.

We spent the last of it buying this lot...

MOTHER

We'll do what we can.

We'll sell *empanadas*, *chontaduros*.

We'll sell whatever

To get money to build.

To have somewhere to call home.

And little by little, we are going to get what we need...
Now it seems bleak, black and white, but you'll see that...

Song: La vida es de Colores [Life is colourful]. CHORUS enters, DAUGHTER joins it and they and dance around the MOTHER. It's like a daydream of MOTHER, who joins in at some point. When the CHORUS leaves, MOTHER keeps on dancing without the music, eyes closed. DAUGHTER brings her back to reality.

DAUGHTER

But for now there are no colours, mom.
What are we going to build our house with, mom?
And how?

MOTHER

I don't know, dear.
There is nothing.
There is only *guadua* [a type of bamboo]

MOTHER and DAUGHTER find first two pieces of bamboo for their but don't know what to do with them.

DAUGHTER

It can't be done!

Music begins, the song El Pescador [afro-colombian pacific style]. CHORUS returns, bringing more bamboo sticks for the MOTHER and DAUGHTER.

CHORUS

It can!
It can be done with *guadua*!
You can make a mat out of it!
It can be done with neighbors!
It can be done together!

MOTHER and DAUGHTER create two different versions of a house with the bamboo sticks. But, the situation is still challenging...

DAUGHTER

There's no water!

One stick drops to the ground. A CHORUS dancer dances by, picking it up.

DANCER

We'll bring it!

MOTHER

There are no roads!

Another stick falls to the ground. Another DANCER picks it up.

DANCER

We'll use wheelbarrows!

DAUGHTER

There is no school!

A third stick falls down and is picked up by a third DANCER.

CHORUS

We'll educate each other!

MOTHER

There is no electricity!

Two sticks are left in the hands of MOTHER and DAUGHTER, in the shape of a cross. Two DANCERS come and take them.

DANCERS

After six o'clock,
We will play in the street,
Under the moon,
All together.

MOTHER and DAUGHTER

Under the moon

CHORUS, MOTHER and DAUGHTER

All together.

The music ends.

MOTHER

Now we have a place to call home.

DAUGHTER

Now it's done.
Now we have a community to call our own.

Sound of thunder. MOTHER and DAUGHTER are afraid while CHORUS comes on stage and creates a symbolic house holding up umbrellas.

MOTHER

It's raining hard!
We just finished building our house,
But it's still not that solid.

DAUGHTER

Let's hope that the roof will hold and that the rain doesn't wash us off to the Monster of the Blue Lagoon...

MOTHER

From the violence of men to the violence of nature

MOTHER and DAUGHTER carry the chair off stage. DAUGHTER returns to join the dancers.

CHORUS

Nature doesn't mean violence!
The rain cleanses,
It brings us sweet water,
And it reminds us of the water of the sea.
Water is our connection to memory,
To culture,
To who we are.

Music starts. The song: Los Charcos. [The Puddles] The CHORUS dances with umbrellas. MOTHER crosses the stage holding sticks above her head as though shielding herself from rain.

MOTHER

The rain is cleansing,
But we still need stronger houses...

CHORUS

We need to build our houses with stone,
So that we can stay here forever.

MOTHER

Did you hear that, my dear?
We will stay here forever,
With the community
And you can grow up in peace, dear one.

The whole community is together, united.

SCENE 3

A MAN enters the stage with the chair and climbs onto it.

MAN
No!

MOTHER
What?

CHORUS
What??

MAN
Who sold you these lots?

MOTHER
Mr. Marroquín.

MAN
He is a scammer.
He is not the owner of this land.
You are here illegally.
You have to leave.

CHORUS
I bought this land with my own money!
We worked hard for this!
We're not leaving!
This is impossible!
Let's negotiate!
Etc.

MAN
In the name of the owners and the government we are going to remove you from this land.

MOTHER
Never!

Everyone shouts. Music starts. Song: Pagan Pagan. CHORUS, DAUGHTER and MAN dance. MAN tries to get to the front and the others dance him away. The dance represents resistance of the community.

DAUGHTER
This place is ours!

ACT 2 – Parar el brinco [*Spanish saying, meaning intentionally stopping doing something risky*]

SCENE 1

CHORUS leaves. The DAUGHTER sits in the chair, the MOTHER and two NEIGHBOURS are looking out the window, peering through the curtain carefully.

DAUGHTER

Mom, it's been several years, and this place has changed...
Violence has entered the community, street gangs fight,
People get hurt all the time.
The lagoon is full of bodies and contaminated.
You can stand on the water...
The Monster is very human.
What is this place?

MOTHER

You are right my dear.
I didn't know borders could be drawn so quickly...
Invisible, but deadly.
You can't cross here, or you'll be shot.
This corner belongs to us,
That other one is theirs.
We have progressed, our houses are better,
Our streets are paved,
We've organized the community more,
But the children grew up and began to fight.
I can hear gunshots every day
On the corner of our block.

MOTHER, NEIGHBORS

What has our Aguablanca become?

The MOTHER is looking out the window and asks YOUNG MAN 1 the last question, then MOTHER, DAUGHTER, and the NEIGHBORS leave. YOUNG MAN 1 enters.

YOUNG MAN 1

What is Aguablanca? It may be ours, but how do we live? Poor infrastructure, poor people, lack of opportunities and more and more are coming every day. I do what I do to survive.

The music starts. Song: De Barrio en barrio. [hip hop] CHORUS enters one by one, dressed as a street gang, saluting YOUNG MAN. They form a semi-circle and perform some hip hop / street gang dance moves. Two NEIGHBOURS come to the front for their dialogue while the rest of the CHORUS stands in the back, the community of neighbors listening through windows and doors.

NEIGHBOUR 1

What happened to your cousin?

NEIGHBOUR 2

He fought with the boys from Los Lagos.

NEIGHBOUR 1

And what happened?

NEIGHBOUR 2

He killed one of them. Then they killed him. What's happening with your dad?

NEIGHBOUR 1

Still missing. He was using the last time anyone saw him.

NEIGHBOUR 2

My sister too... and my mom working all the time, we need her salary.

NEIGHBOUR 1

Did you have any luck with your job search?

NEIGHBOUR 2

No, nothing, they said they wouldn't give someone like me a job.

NEIGHBOUR 1

What does that mean?

CHORUS

What does that mean?

YOUNG JHON walks across the stage in new shoes. YOUNG MAN gets in the way and doesn't let him pass.

YOUNG MAN

Hey! I like your sneakers.

YOUNG JHON

Thank you.

YOUNG MAN

Give them to me.

YOUNG JHON

What?

YOUNG MAN
Give them to me.

YOUNG JHON
No, I saved up to buy them.

YOUNG MAN
Well, and now they are mine.

YOUNG JHON
No!

Music starts. Song: 110th Street and 5th Avenue. The two boys dance – it's the fight scene. Projections of hanging sneakers. At the end of the dance, YOUNG MAN 1 shoots YOUNG MAN 2 in the belly. The CHORUS makes the sound of the shot and throws the shoes in the air while YOUNG MAN 2, in slow motion, receives the shot in his stomach and falls.

YOUNG JHON
I saved up to buy them...

The Music Begins. Song: Welcome to the Party. CHORUS dances. During the dance, YOUNG MAN drags YOUNG JHON off stage and unties his shoes.

SCENE 2

JHON enters the stage – he's the same character as YOUNG JHON but as an adult. He's in a wheelchair. While JHON speaks his monologue, YOUNG JHON is dancing with his sneakers in his hand; he is the young version of JHON who is saying goodbye to his old life.

JHON

That's the way it is, people.

The CHORUS leaves the stage, JHON and YOUNG JHON remain.

The cycle of violence can continue forever.
They shot me because they wanted my sneakers.
I haven't been able to walk since then.
It has changed my life, but in general life goes on.
Nobody really cares.

JHON looks at YOUNG JHON who leaves the stage.

I have a lot of brothers, I could make them take revenge on me, fight with the people who hurt me, maybe kill them. But... What would that accomplish?
I don't want my brothers to have this life.
I don't want them to become victims too, because if they take revenge on me, they surely will. Someone will come for them, and it will continue and never stop.
So, I have a decision to make. Do I continue the cycle or try to break it?
Do I consider myself a victim and let bitterness and anger consume me, or do I consider myself as someone who can follow a different path, choose forgiveness, grow, learn, and fight for peace?
Violence is a monster, like the Monster of the Blue Lagoon.
But really it is empty inside, the monster only exists in our heads.
The lagoon should be a place of joy, of clean water and of people and animals living together, not of bodies and death.
Can we do that?
Can we find the sound of my people and free it?

Sound of a fire.

CHORUS

The lagoon is burning!!

YOUNG MAN

It's the monster! The Monster of the Blue Lagoon! It's him!

The MONSTER appears. Music Begins. Song: Ragga coreografia for men. The CHORUS dances.

SCENE 3

The MONSTER OF THE BLUE LAGOON stands in the middle of the stage, the CHORUS leaves to get plants, then returns one by one, setting the plants down by the MONSTER and creating a tableau of the neighborhood and its community.

CHORUS

Yes, the monster was there, a mixture of the fire that devastated the lagoon,
Of the government that tried so hard to get rid of its people
Of the pain and suffering
Of the murders and the broken families.

But it was our monster, the neighborhood monster,
Of the land that was once covered in water, then dry, then polluted and desecrated and fought over,
Of the people who stayed, those who continued to believe, those who fought for peace, for good-
hearted neighbors, for possible futures.
And through death sometimes comes life, which springs forth more strongly than before.

MOTHER, DAUGHTER, JHON and the rest of the CHORUS enter the stage.

DAUGHTER

This ending is not happy.

CHORUS

But it's not sad either.

CHORUS

It simply is.

MOTHER

It is the story of a community that came together and was forever linked to a piece of land.
With the water that was the heart of that land
The water that disappeared, first to create fields of millet, then to give way to cement and pavement,
until everything was drowned by violence and misery.

The MONSTER drops his black costume to reveal one of the dancers underneath.

MONSTER OF THE BLUE LAGOON

The Monster of the Blue Lagoon can be terrifying.
But it can also be a protector.
When this was realized, the recovery of the lagoon began.
El Charco Azul is now blue again, a place of life and pride.
The connection between people, water and time is alive and has the flavor of sauce.

Music starts. Song: Welcome to the Party by Har You. The MONSTER dances a solo, while the CHORUS creates a huddle behind him, swaying to the music.

JHON

And the community?

EVERYONE

Keeps dancing!

Music starts. Song: Salsa Caleña. Everyone dances the final song. When the dance ends:

JHON

One, two, three...

EVERYONE

Aguablanca District!

Everyone takes a bow.

END