

OUR GIRL, OUR TRAIN

By: LEONARDO GUZMÁN (El País – Apr. 15, 2016)

"The girl who watched the trains depart", the latest book by Ruperto Long, surpasses the boundaries of the historical novel. In collage form, it reconstructs Hitler's war and the tragedy of those persecuted by it until the events gave rise to the hunger for justice and became the source of Laws.

The common thread is a Jewish girl, Charlotte, who, in order to hide from the Nazis, was forced to live in a wardrobe in Lyon and undergo misery in Grenoble. The trains she watched depart were a macabre symbol of the concentration camps, until one day in 1945 her father decided that the family should return to their home town of Liège, by train precisely. With her soul in tatters, when she inquired about her loved ones to find out they had died, she even felt ashamed of being alive after the Holocaust.

When we become hypnotised by "earth-shaking revelations" - yesterday it was diplomatic chicaneries in WikiLeaks, today the financial hideouts of the Panama Papers - or when we are preoccupied by domestic issues - public security or the deficit of Ancap - we fall into the habit of not listening to each other and not synthesising reasons, and when, to make matters worse, our culture is immersed in a twilight without dawn in sight, it is imperative to restore public thinking to its bases and foundations. To do this, we need to recover the intimate relationship between freedom and the Law, weakened and impoverished by the greatest crisis in values we have ever known. The truths revealed by the chilling accounts of this book would doubtless contribute to this recovery of values.

The generic brutality of racism is terrifying; but the personal dimension of the crimes is even more moving: marked lives, many girls like Charlotte; lives cut short, many people like David Fremd*. Under the rule of Law nothing should be forgotten or silenced. Our rights are not limited to mere words or a frozen system, because they often decide our fate and that of others. Moreover, our Laws are a huge moral and intellectual conquest: the guarantees of the Constitution are the highest expression of civil

peace, which are upheld by the relentless intellectual battle that must prevail always above the passions, misery and darkness we all carry inside.

This is why Long's book succeeds in planting a much-needed seed in our minds. This is not the dense forest of legal norms - we have already passed more than 19,000 laws!- and nor is it the abstraction of truth set down in a language understood by a chosen few. It is the Law germinated by the empathy of I-am-you, the dream of the persecuted who suffer and the citizens who fight: whether against terrorism, or discrimination, or here with public security, that casts its shadow over us all.

And it has an additional value: the train girl turns out to be one of us. Life brought her to sow her legacy in the open climate of post-war Uruguay. Today she has become Charlotte S. de Grünberg, a woman who has overcome her misfortune, affirming her pedagogic vocation and supported the work of her son Jorge, a modern-day thinker and Rector of ORT Uruguay University.

She is a remarkable example of fortitude and maximum expression of resilience with the ability to lift her head high despite such fatal and inexorable events. She is testimony to the truths of the Old and the New Testament. She is proof that despite everything we can say yes to life, as Viktor Frankl wrote when he left Nazi captivity.

What is remarkable is not only that that such an example exists in the world, but that she walks our streets.

Her tone is not strident, but it shouts out that in the face of any adversity, those who treasure freedom have no right to lose heart or passively remain at home.

*David Fremd was murdered on March 8, 2016, by an Uruguayan converted to Islam in a small town in Uruguay