

Tinderella

I came to Barcelona from the UK with the over-inflated and exotic view that I would be more politically stimulated here, that politics in my home country (this was pre-Brexit) was dull and business-like, that ordinary people there didn't discuss politics whereas across the shore in *Europe* they did. Yes, I know that technically we are European and that it's ridiculous to speak of the geographical continent, and at that time, Union that we are a part of, as something 'other'. But welcome to British exceptionalism, I've had to do a lot of deprogramming, and you can see where it's taken us..

I have come to write this column as I've realised that my experience of being a 'guiri' is not some paranoid dream. I have integrated fairly well, and am a fan of the local traditions and idiosyncrasies so feel relatively well placed to comment on the intersection between 'guiri' and local. Sure I'm not fluent in Catala but I can order a *tallat* as good as the rest of them. What's more I'm an exceptionally bland 'guiri', the archetypal resident guiri, an English teacher. The lowest common denominator, and as described in previous editions, I feel incredibly frustrated by the label, the one-dimensionality of it, the all-encompassing entrapment of my identity, and my subsequent feelings of erasure. I have had to reflect a lot on where my discomfort comes from and I have not always liked the answers as my own ignorance and unchecked imperialism has certainly played a key part. I have also come to believe that for women the light-hearted mocking and the implicit dehumanisation in 'guiri' could contain a sinister element and I want to discuss that here.

I will start by saying that problems in heterosexual dating culture are pretty universal and I don't think any culture or nationality either side of the European/American Atlantic divide really has the moral upper hand to point fingers at the other. Women are subjected to a whole host of problematic behaviours in dating culture from mansplaining to being ignored, to micro aggressions and pushed boundaries, to gaslighting and full blown sexual assault. The tools that are used to subjugate us within the realm of casual sex and dating, where sex positivity has been co-opted by straight leftist males to preach the inherent liberation of BDSM, will be tailored to each individual but still follow the general terms of the patriarchy. Do I believe that the specific style in which the patriarchal powers are exercised towards me here includes the label 'guiri'? Yes I do. Do I think that some men who may usually present themselves as allies to women but use a 'guiri', consciously or not, to release some of that misogyny they're entitled to. Yes I do. Maybe it's to take a break from being such a 'nice guy' and not having to feel too guilty about it. A 'guiri' can be a safe deposit box, a cathartic release to continue treating your 'own' with respect.

I remember one of the first dates I went on; we had matched on Tinder and after chatting for a bit we set up a meeting in Gracia. The conversation had flowed well online and I was really looking forward to the excitement of having new conversations with new people in a new location. Spoiler alert: this was a bad date and mostly for generic reasons but bear with me. The dude turned up and I spied *The Protestant Ethic by Max Weber* tucked into his pocket which I desperately hoped wouldn't be used as a prop on the date... but of course it was. The first time he gestured towards it I mentioned I too had read it. Then he proceeded to leaf knowingly through the pages he had covered so far, apparently still only within the first section of the book, a little beyond the introduction, and he proceeded to laboriously outline its hypothesis and main arguments for me. I interjected again that I love the book and had read it myself and studied it. No acknowledgement was offered so I gave up as the

conversation moved on. When it wheeled back again to Weber I was feeling pretty irritated that not one question had been directed my way in thirty minutes, so my ego decided to assert herself in all her dominance and cold glory. "Listen, I'm very glad this book has made such an impression on you; I have a masters in political and social theory so perhaps I could point you in the direction of similar material if you are interested." It was cheap, but necessary and satisfying. My spine had straightened and I was a good inch or two taller in my chair. However, no sooner had I stretched to my new height he narrowed his eyes, looked at me squarely and confidently and flatly pronounced, "I think there are a lot of problems with modern feminism". Oh do you now? Well I couldn't hide my eye roll and he picked up on it commenting that I must think he is a 'machista' and laughing as if that was preposterous. I didn't get the joke, we don't have a translation for machista in English and I wouldn't have found it that funny if I thought someone had apparently misrepresented me as sexist or worse. After finishing my drink I politely excused myself to leave. He jumped up and offered to walk me home and no matter how much I protested I couldn't shake him off. He was so direct and so confident I had no ammunition to respond - I just wanted to leave. We walked together and I kept trying to go by myself but nothing worked. He insisted on walking me to my house, and then he invited himself up to my apartment. I told him he wasn't welcome, didn't wait for an answer this time and entered my building. By the time I had reached my room I had received a series of angry WhatsApp messages saying that he knew all 'guiris' were racist and that's why we don't give Mediterranean men a chance. The evidence of a date so one-sided he hadn't even heard me say my father is Greek and so I count myself as half-Mediterranean. I was supposed to be some fun for him and I didn't comply, fucking guiri. I can't say whether I was treated worse because I'm an outsider than someone from here and I wouldn't want to say that either. But I do want to draw attention to the form that the response takes. Why was me being a 'guiri' relevant to his rejection and why must I be reminded of being a 'guiri' in this context? It was gaslighting before I had a word for it (2016 again). I was racist because I didn't want him in my house, and I was a 'guiri' as defined by my behaviour. I would go so far as to say the other hidden side of that is you better do better next time to fit in.

All my dating after this went quite badly, the dates were a little boring and very cold. Meeting at a corner and walking to find a terrace with metal chairs for a canya outside in February is not really it. I had a repeat of the doorstep chat with another guy who actually said 'Lily, it's 2019' as if to encourage me towards my true sexual liberation through satisfying his libido tonight. I liked a guy once, he supported la CUP and would talk to me about independence and fairness and democracy and tales of summers in Malgrat de Mar. I thought we were a good match but I was wrong, over time I noticed the questions kept coming during 'dates' that seemed as though my answer was always supposed to be the punchline. I was seen as stupid mass culture consumerist trash needing to be refined.

If you've read this column before you'll be used to me talking about how alien a concept being a 'guiri' was, and the drawn out experience of discovering you represent it, whether you want to or not. I want to re-emphasise it here in the context of meeting new people in a new city. Time and again the 'guiri' part of me was highlighted, American girls vs English ones, why I find it 'necessary' to wear a short skirt. We aren't seen as serious, in the same way as we aren't seen as permanent. We wear too much makeup, we have no culture, we're loud and trashy. To be honest the constant nit-picking made me feel big and ugly like a zoo animal or Frankenstein's monster. What's more I'm pretty sure our societies have moved past the constant policing of women's behaviour and bodies. I think some of the same people would never have considered saying that to their peers, and would be shocked to

hear of a friend experiencing the same. I have had some good times with other cultures here, some flirting, some love, some fun. When updating my Catalan mates that I was seeing someone new, another Argentinian they would say teasingly? Well yes... You haven't managed to catch a Catalan yet? Well no... Their questions betrayed their opinion "of course not silly guiri, you're fun but you're not quality enough".

You start to see it more and more. Unfortunately some aspects of private English teaching are similar to (toxic) dating. This idea that 'guiris' can be exciting but disposable plays out beyond dating contexts. I often can't think of a better illustration than when I was teaching at a student's house. I used to teach both him and his wife when one day she wasn't there. *Carles asked me to sit on the sofa with him so that we could do the lesson there instead of at the desk as normal. I wasn't very comfortable but I was still crippled by my don't-make-a-scene manner back then so I enquired after his wife *Lara. He replied that she was sleeping in the other room and he could be having sex with me in here and she wouldn't wake up. The eyes were full of relish at being able to say that in such a small space and have it hanging in the air for the remaining hour of class. I was a teacher with no authority in that environment, I was reminded that I was 'guiri' and that if he dared, could be used.

I see it in the streets. My friends' eyes pop out when I say that I've had "puta inglesa go home!" ringing in my ears more than once. I'm not sure the same people would shout that at a 6"2 lad from Wigan, North West England. On the other hand I don't know why people are surprised when we know the theory already; if it's so widely acceptable to mock and classify a section of people what happens to the more vulnerable members of that group? Anything dehumanising can be dangerous in certain contexts, the joke can run on too far. What if 'guiris' are never fully recognised as part of the shared community, is solidarity even extended to them? I'm sure it is if voiced, but what happens when 'guiris' aren't really able to be seen, what can happen then?

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Vaig venir a Barcelona des del Regne Unit amb una idea inflada i exotitzant que aquí estaria més estimulada políticament, que la política al meu país d'origen (això va ser abans del Brexit) era avorrida i empresarial, que allà la gent del carrer no parlava de política mentre que a l'altre costat de la costa, a Europa, ho feien. Sí, sé que tècnicament som europeus i que és ridícul parlar del continent geogràfic, i en aquest moment, més ho era parlar de la Unió de la qual formem part com un "altre". Però... benvingudes a l'excepcionalisme britànic! He hagut de desprogramar-me molt des de llavors; aquí podeu veure fins on he arribat...

He acabat escrivint aquesta columna perquè me n'he adonat de que la meua experiència de ser una "guiri" no és cap mena de somni paranoic. M'he integrat bastant bé, sóc fan de les tradicions i la idiosincràsia local, així que em sento relativament ben situada per comentar sobre la intersecció entre "guiri" i local.

D'acord, no parlo català amb fluïdesa, però puc demanar un tallat tan bo com ells.

A més, sóc una "guiri" excepcionalment anodina, l'arquetip de resident guiri, una professora d'anglès. El mínim comú denominador, i com he descrit en edicions anteriors, em sento increïblement frustrada per l'etiqueta, l'unidimensionalitat de la mateixa, l'arrabassament general de la meua identitat, i els meus subseqüents sentiments de ser esborrada. He hagut de reflexionar molt sobre d'on prové la meua incomoditat i no sempre m'han agradat les respostes, i aquí la meua ignorància i incontinència imperial de ben segur hi ha jugat un paper clau. També he arribat a creure que per les dones la mofa i deshumanització implícita del "guiri" conté un element sinistre i vull discutir-ho aquí.

Començaré dient que els problemes dins la cultura de cites heterosexual són bastant universals, i no crec que cap cultura o nacionalitat a ambdues bandes de l'Atlàntic estigui en una posició moral avantatjada per assenyalar amb el dit a l'altra. Les dones estan sotmeses a un munt de conductes problemàtiques dins la cultura de cites, del *mansplaining* a ser ignorades, de micro-agressions i passades de la ratlla, a *gaslighting* i assetjament sexual en tota regla. Les eines que s'utilitzen per subjugar-nos dins el regne del sexe casual i les cites, on la positivitat sexual ha estat adoptada pels homes heterosexuals d'esquerres per predicar sobre l'inherent alliberament del BDSM, tot i particulars a cada individu, encara mantenen les regles generals del patriarcat. Crec que la manera específica en la que aquests poders patriarcals són exercits sobre mi inclouen l'etiqueta "guiri"? Sí, ho crec. Crec que alguns dels homes que habitualment es presenten a sí mateixos com aliats de les dones usen el terme "guiri", conscientment o no, per alleujar una mica la misogínia a la que creuen tenir dret? Sí, ho crec. Potser és per prendre's un descans de tant ser un "bon tio" sense sentir massa remordiment. Un "guiri" pot ser un compartiment segur, un espai d'alliberament catàrtic per continuar tractant "als teus" amb respecte.

Recordo una de les primeres cites que vaig tenir; havíem fet *match* a Tinder i després de xerrar una mica vam quedar per trobar-nos a Gràcia. La conversa *online* havia fluid bé i frisava d'emoció per tenir noves converses, amb gent nova, en un lloc nou. Alerta, *spoiler*: va ser una mala cita i en gran part per motius obvis, però tingueu paciència. El noi va arribar i vaig entreveure L'Ètica Protestant de Max Weber ficat a la seva butxaca, jo esperava encaridament que no fos un accessori per treure tema durant la cita... però és clar que ho era. El primer cop que va fer un gest cap al llibre li vaig fer saber que jo també l'havia llegit. Aleshores ell va procedir a fullejar deliberadament les pàgines que havia llegit fins al moment, aparentment només la primera part del llibre, una mica més enllà de la introducció, i va arrancar a exposar-me detalladament la seva hipòtesis i principals arguments. Vaig

tornar a mencionar que m'encantava el llibre, que l'havia llegit i estudiat. Cap mena de reconeixement, així que vaig donar-me per vençuda mentre la conversa continuava. Quan el tema va girar de nou cap a Weber em vaig sentir irritada de qui ni una pregunta s'hagués dirigit cap mi en trenta minuts, així que el meu ego va decidir afirmar-se en tota la seva freda glòria i dominància. "Escolta, estic molt contenta de que aquest llibre t'hagi causat tal impressió; tinc màsters en teoria social i política, poder podria assenyalar-te en la direcció de material semblant al que t'interessa". Va ser barat, però necessari i gratificant. La meua espina dorsal es va redreçar i em sentia dos o tres centímetres més alta sobre la cadira. Tot i així, encara no m'havia fet a la meua nova altura que ell va aclucar els ulls, va fixar la mirada en mi i planament i amb confiança va articular, "Crec que hi han molts problemes en el feminisme modern". Oh, que tu en saps? Bé, no vaig poder amagar una mirada d'escepticisme, ell la va captar i va deixar caure que deuria pensar que era un 'machista', mentre reia com si allò fos absurd. No vaig pescar la broma, no tenim una traducció per masculista en anglès i no hauria trobat gràcies que algú em prengués presumptament per sexista o quelcom pitjor. Tan bon punt vaig acabar la meua beguda, vaig disculpar-me amablement per marxar. Ell es va aixecar d'un bot i es va oferir a acompanyar-me fins a casa, per molt que protestés no me'n podia desfer. Era tan directe i segur de sí mateix que em va deixar sense munició per respondre –jo només volia marxar. Vam caminar junts i jo continuava intentant marxar pel meu compte però res funcionava. Va insistir en acompanyar-me a casa i es va auto-convidar a pujar al meu pis. Li vaig dir que no era benvingut, aquest cop no vaig esperar una resposta i vaig entrar a l'edifici. A l'arribar a l'habitació ja havia rebut un sèrie de *whatsapps* empenyats dient que ja sabia que tots els 'guiris' eren racistes i que per això no els hi donaven una oportunitat als homes mediterranis. Prova de que la cita havia tingut només una cara és que ni havia escoltat que el meu pare és grec i que per tant compto com a mig mediterrània. Suposo que havia de ser alguna mena de diversió per ell i no vaig complir, coi de guiri. No puc dir que em van tractar pitjor per ser de fora que si hagués estat d'aquí, no voldria dir això tampoc. Però m'agradaria parar atenció a la forma que pren la resposta. Per què era rellevant en el seu rebuig el fet que jo fos 'guiri', i per què m'han de recordar que sóc 'guiri' en aquest context? Era *gaslighting* abans de que tingués un paraula per descriure-ho (de nou, 2016). Jo era racista perquè no el volia a casa meua, i una 'guiri' segons el meu comportament. Aniria tan lluny com per dir que el rerefons d'allò era, ja ho pots fer millor la pròxima vegada per encaixar.

Totes les meves cites després d'això van anar bastant malament, van ser avorrides i fredes. Trobar-se en una cantonada i caminar per trobar una terrassa amb cadires de metall i prendre una canya a l'exterior al febrer, no és el millor pla. En una iteració de la conversa de portal que vaig tenir amb un altre noi, em va dir concretament, 'Lily, és 2019', com per encoratjar-me al vertader alliberament sexual a través de la satisfacció de la seva libido aquella nit. Una vegada me'n va agradar un, era simpatitzant de la CUP i em parlava d'independència i justícia i democràcia i les seves vacances d'estiu a Malgrat de Mar. Creia que fèiem bona parella però estava equivocada, amb el temps em vaig adonar que les preguntes que em feia durant les cites eren només perquè jo hi afegís l'acudit final. Em veia com deixalla consumista de la cultura de masses que necessitava ser refinada.

Si has llegit aquesta columna abans, estaràs acostumat a que parli de lo estrany que és el concepte de ser 'guiri', i la desgastant experiència de descobrir que ho representes, vulguis o no. M'agradaria re-remarcar-ho aquí dins el context de conèixer gent nova en una nova ciutat. Una i altra vegada la part 'guiri' de mi ha estat posada en relleu, noies americanes vs noies angleses, per què trobo 'necessari' portar una falda curta. No som vistes de manera

seriosa de la mateixa manera que no som vistes com quelcom permanent. Portem massa maquillatge, no tenim cultura, som cridaneres i vulgars. Per ser honesta, aquest primmirat judici m'ha fet sentir gran i lletja com un animal de zoològic o el monstre de Frankenstein. És més, estic bastant segura que les nostres societats han superat aquest judici constant sobre el comportament i cos de les dones. Crec que algunes d'aquestes mateixes persones mai haurien considerat dir una cosa així al les seves col·legues, i els sobtaria escoltar-ne una que els expliqués haver viscut una experiència semblant. He passat bons moments aquí amb persones d'altres cultures, una mica de flirteig, una mica d'amor, una mica de diversió. Quan posava al dia als meus amics catalans i els explicava que estava veient-me amb algú nou, em deien amb to de mofa, un altre argentí? Bé, sí... Encara no has aconseguit atrapar un català? Bé, no... Les seves preguntes traïen la seva opinió 'i és clar que no ximple guiri, ets divertida però no ets prou bona'

Comences a veure-ho més i més. Malauradament algunes dinàmiques de fer classes particulars d'anglès són similars a les cites (tòxiques). La idea que les 'guiris' poden ser excitants i d'un sol ús va més enllà del context de les cites. Sovint no puc pensar en un millor exemple que quan estava ensenyant a casa un alumne. Acostumava a donar la classe conjuntament a ell i la seva esposa i un dia ella no hi era. El *Carles em va proposar de fer la classe al sofà enlloc de a la taula com era habitual. No estava molt còmode però aleshores encara em paralitzava el no-montis-una-escena, així que vaig preguntar per la seva esposa *Lara. Ell va contestar dient que ella estava dormint a l'habitació i que ell podia estar tenint sexe allà amb mi i ella no es despertaria. Els seus ulls eren plens de plaer al poder dir allò dins aquell espai tan petit i deixar-ho flotant en l'ambient durant el que restava de classe. Era una professora sense cap mena d'autoritat en aquell ambient, i se'm va recordar de que era una 'guiri' i que, si volia, podia ser utilitzada.

Ho veig al carrer. Els meus amics al·lucinen quan els hi explico que m'he sentit dir "puta inglesa, go home!" més d'una vegada. No estic segura de que aquelles mateixes persones li cridessin això a un xaval de 1'80 de Wigan, nord-oest d'Anglaterra. D'altra banda, no sé de què es sorprèn la gent quan ja sabem la teoria; si està generalment acceptat classificar i riure's d'una part de la població, què passa amb els membres més vulnerables d'aquest grup? Qualsevol comentari deshumanitzant pot ser perillós en cert context, la broma se'n pot anar de les mans. I si els "guiris" no són mai plenament reconeguts com a part d'una comunitat compartida, ni que sigui un mica de solidaritat envers ells? Estic segura que si pot ser dit pot ser fet, però, i què passa quan els "guiris" són invisibilitzats, què pot passar aleshores?