

WISING UP ANTHOLOGIES

SHIFTING BALANCE SHEETS

Women's Stories of Naturalized Citizenship and Cultural Attachment
2011

VIEW FROM THE BED: VIEW FROM THE BEDSIDE
2010

DOUBLE LIVES, REINVENTION & THOSE WE LEAVE BEHIND
2009

LOVE AFTER 70
2008

FAMILIES: THE FRONTLINE OF PLURALISM
2008

ILLNESS & GRACE, TERROR & TRANSFORMATION
2007

COMPLEX ALLEGIANCES

*Constellations of Immigration, Citizenship
&
Belonging*



Charles D. Brockett, Heather Tosteson & Anna Steegmann
Editors

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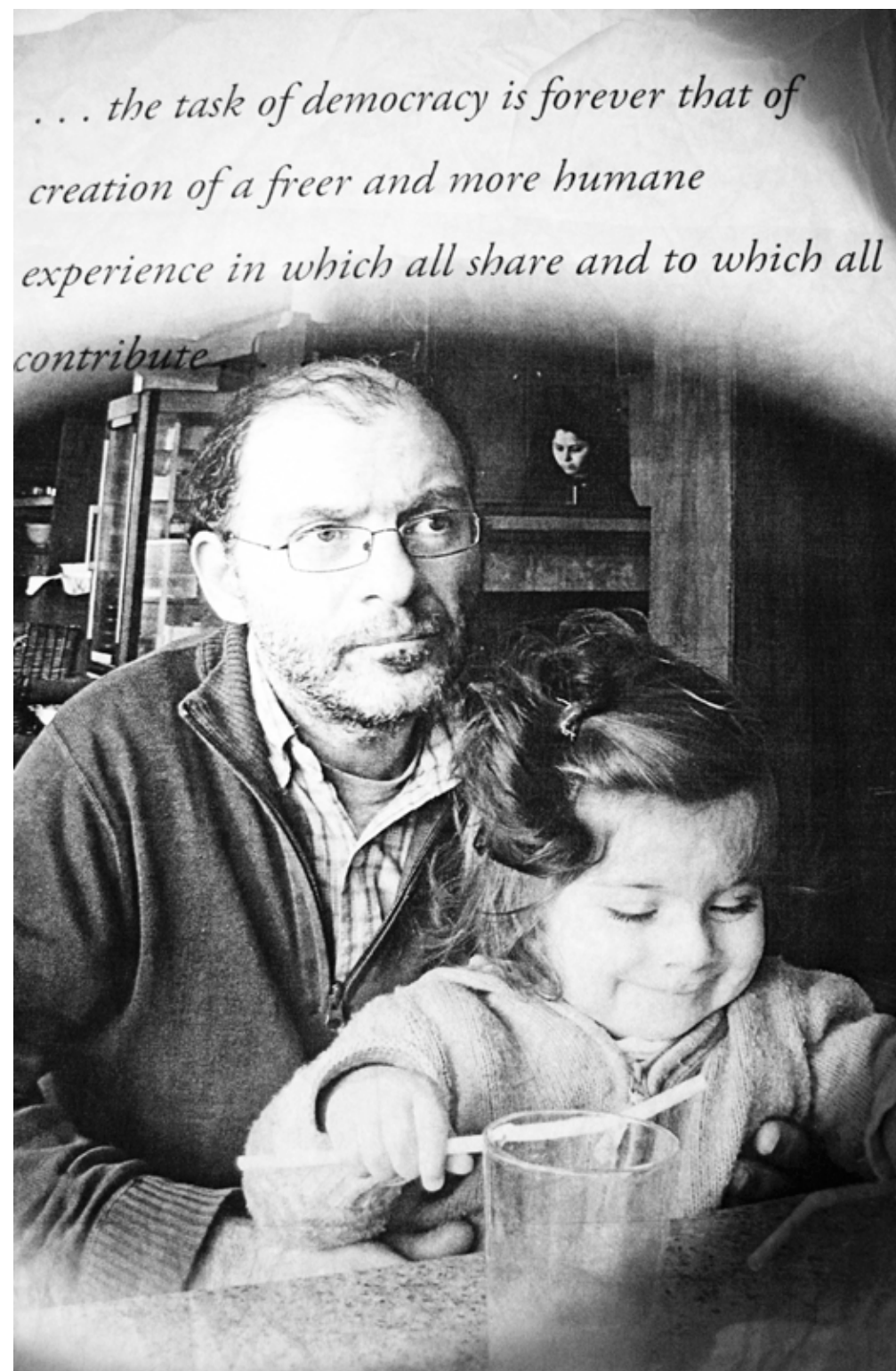
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INTRODUCTION

CONSTELLATIONS OF BELONGING *What You Will Find Here*

We invite you to get to know, as we have, a wonderful group of people, talented, thoughtful, open, who are introducing themselves to you in their own words. We invite you to give them access to your own imagination because we believe you will find it enriched by their presence, whether their experiences echo your own or challenge them. Don't be afraid to step into their shoes or to imagine inviting them to step into yours. We especially urge you to listen for constellations of belonging—that sense that we fit, that we are accepted—to listen to where these experiences of belonging were in the past for this person; to where they may be now; to how these constellations have been challenged, recreated, or discovered; to what happens when someone feels the experience of belonging is lost to them permanently. We invite you to think about how identity, allegiance, and a sense of community relate to these experiences of belonging. We invite you to imagine the emotions you might feel, the decisions you might make if you faced similar circumstances—and why. Our aim is for all of us to feel our way more deeply into some of the questions that affect the immigration debate in our country today by basing our thinking as much on what we have in common as on what may distinguish us.

We have organized the collection by some of the major questions that we had and assume other people have about immigration in general—ones that are even more salient when people have active ties to several countries through citizenship, cultural attachment and/or residency. The questions we ask about why immigration matters, why people come to the U.S., why they stay, why they go, why they commit, why they develop cultural allegiance, or how they decide where they belong apply to people at all different stages in their own journey, here and in other countries. The answers are as varied as the individuals.

In *Why Does It Matter?* we begin by providing both an historical

context for immigration debates in the U.S. today in Charles Brockett's "Allegiances Straightforward and Complex: The Social and Historical Context" and an experiential context in Heather Tosteson's "Listening for Belonging: I." We do so with the intention of relating these stories of complex allegiances to questions about the nature of national and local community today, questions that have direct relevance for many of us who live in increasingly diverse communities.

In *Why Do We Come?* we find people come to the U.S. to seek greater personal opportunity and also, like L.S. from the former Yugoslavia and Ara Sarkissian from Lebanon, because of powerful tides of history, the fragmentation of civil war, for example, sometimes several times over. Shan Yohan and Buddhi Masih both came to Atlanta from India as minority Christians, but each finds here a rather different constellation of belonging in the still segregated society of the South. Reasons for coming can differ significantly within a single family system. William Betancourt (part of the extended Losada family), although a birthright citizen by happenstance, experiences his own coming to the United States as an example of the classic immigration story, one he shares with millions currently, with all of us historically. Taye, who came to the U.S. through the diversity lottery, comes less for personal opportunity than for enlarged opportunity for his son.

Why Do We Stay? It isn't always self-evident why we stay in a new country. Except in the case of refugees and asylees, immigration always has a strong element of choice to it. But it also always has an undertow as well, as Marcelle Kasprovicz captures in her poem "Departure." We can feel, for extended periods of time, that we may have lost something precious that can't be replaced. We may have expectations or assumptions of welcome that are brutally shattered. In Emilio DeGrazia's memoir "Walking on Air in a Field of Green," he, like us, wonders at his father's persistence in the face of the callousness of his first employer, his dawning understanding of what could be involved in the American way. This question of what our first experiences here are like—and how they may come to define permanently where, how or even if we will ever feel we belong here—is one we suggest we all listen to closely because its various resolutions have many implications for us as a society. We find these questions still hotly burning in Natalia Treviño's meditation on what it means to be a legal Mexican immigrant. Jennifer Clark asks these questions from the perspective of a native-born citizen watching young people who have never been granted citizenship making the ultimate sacrifice



CHARLES BROCKETT

ALLEGIANCES STRAIGHTFORWARD & COMPLEX *Social and Historical Context*

Complex Allegiances explores the various forms that allegiance to country can take, particularly for immigrants, whether naturalized or not, and also for the native born. For many people there is no complexity here. Allegiance is a very straightforward notion—Fourth of July, love of country, patriotism, the American Flag, willingness to serve, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the Pledge of Allegiance itself.

War and Patriotism: This traditional understanding was vividly illustrated for me on Veteran's Day, November 11, 2011 when I attended the meeting of an American Legion Post in a Southern California community with my parents. My father served in the Navy during most of World War II. Many of those on the stage also protected their country during the same war. Many in the audience too had served their country and fellow citizens in the U.S. armed forces during a variety of conflicts.

In prior years my father had stood at the podium as the Post Commander. This year's leader gave an eloquent reading of the national American Legion statement for the occasion. "Regardless of which view of alternative history you take," he read, "we do know that without our veterans America would not be America." The statement quoted historian Stephen Ambrose, who once wrote, "America's wars have been like rungs on a ladder by which it rose to greatness. No other country has triumphed so long, so consistently or on such a vast scale through force of arms." (1)

Indeed, war often seems enmeshed with the concepts of nation, of patriotism, of citizenship for many of us. After all, "the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air" is a central image in our national anthem. The possibility of war is at the heart of the oath taken by new citizens. Not only are they told to "renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty" but they must also pledge "that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law."

World War II had a long-lasting impact for many people on notions of patriotism and service. It was the true Great War, the one where the line between good and evil was clear, where the threat to the nation itself was a constant scary presence. People responded unequivocally. Completing high school for my father seemed irrelevant with the survival of the United States seemingly on the line. He tried to enlist a few months after Pearl Harbor but was told to wait until he had graduated from high school if he wished to train for aviation. He signed up the day after graduation but was assigned instead to a cruiser where he was trained as a radio operator because he was one of the few in his group who could type. The newly commissioned *U.S.S. Cleveland* sailed off to join the invasion of North Africa in the fall of 1942, 89% of its sailors never having been to sea. Then it was on to the South Pacific for the rest of the war, participating in many of the defining battles for that front.

My experience was very different. I was not going to leave college to fight in Vietnam, a war many of us regarded as the opposite of WWII's Good Cause but instead one that we saw as immoral, illegitimate, and counter-productive. When the draft notice came, I still did not respond to duty's call, becoming instead a war resister. This troubled my father though he tried only once to convince me that it was my obligation to respond to the duty call for my generation. My maternal grandfather, a veteran of both WWI and WWII, a man who never shied from voicing his strong convictions, felt obliged to call me outside from a family gathering and explicitly disown me (although in later years we both ignored this).

Allegiance Gets Complex: "My country, right or wrong." "America—Love It or Leave It." The question of allegiance has long fascinated me. What precisely are we pledging? Are there limits? Where? Probably for no generation have these questions been less problematic than for the WWII generation. It is not just for subsequent generations that the meaning of allegiance gets more complex. We forget that for the WWI generation the connection between war and allegiance was not so straightforward either. The issue of U.S. involvement in a European war was very controversial at the time. The war's relationship to the security of the United States was unclear to many, especially to many families who had hoped that they had left Europe's long history of senseless destructive wars behind when they left the old country and immigrated to the U.S. Once reliable public opinion surveys developed, they found in the late 1930s strong majorities that believed it had been "a mistake for the United States to enter" the war.(2)

When patriotism and allegiance are less about war and the willingness to fight, allegiance is free to become more complex. When possibilities of serious conflict and possibly even war threaten between nations then dual citizenship seems to many an untenable division of loyalties. Which side are you going to support? Even if the conflict is not with the country of your second allegiance, can we in the United States count on you giving as much support as the rest of your fellow citizens or might you slide your primary allegiance toward your second country? As one critic declares, "The chief concern about dual citizenship is that it encourages or results in shallower attachments to the American national community than would be the case if there were not stiff competition for immigrant loyalties."(3)

Several of the authors in this anthology disagree, finding no diminution of their U.S. allegiance because of their citizenship in a second country (or in at least two cases, the possibility of a third citizenship). The world does continue to shrink. Through economic relationships, travel, television, and the Internet we are more closely tied together across national boundaries. More of us now spend more time outside of the country of our citizenship, perhaps for years. War is inconceivable now between the United States and Germany or Italy and our core national interests only continue to converge. What then is the danger of dual citizenship involving such countries? Would not proliferating dual/multiple citizenships further bind countries together with common interests and fates, reducing the possibilities of serious conflicts?

Some thinkers see these trends accelerating with national identities and allegiances fading away in relevance, not just for a few people but for many. Perhaps some day . . . but I do not see this as more than a possibility for a distant future. For the present and foreseeable time to come issues concerning national allegiance will remain salient. One significant reason for this is the continuing importance of immigration to many countries, particularly the United States, bringing us to the focus of this anthology: the relationships between national allegiance and immigration.

Why Do We Come?

Immigrants come with their own stories and for their individual reasons. Often they leave behind loved ones and locations, carrying ambivalence and even grief with them to their new home. Their futures are uncertain. Underneath their individual stories, there is the shared assumption that through immigration their life will be improved—or at least that of their children. That improvement for many people throughout our national history

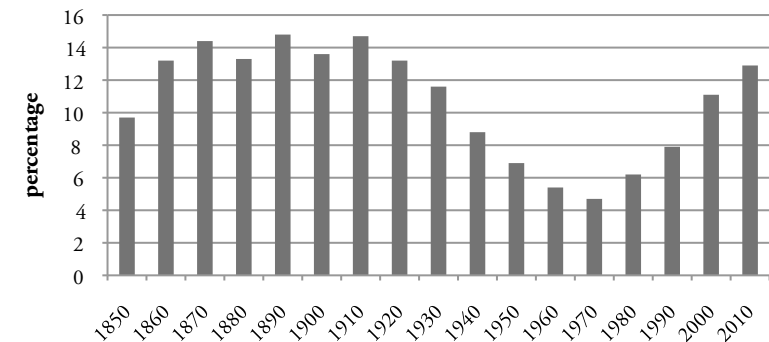
has been largely material. Greater economic opportunity is expected in the U.S. whether one is an unskilled laborer or a highly trained professional. Others have been persecuted in their countries of origin and come expecting greater freedom. Some have seen their homelands ripped apart by war, in some cases even disappearing as countries. They come seeking greater security and hopefully peace. Others come for the most personal of reasons—they wish to be reunited with a loved one, perhaps a spouse or a child. All of these motivations are represented in this anthology, in some cases many of them within one person's story.

Positive Attitudes: U.S. residents also view immigration as a positive force for the country itself, even with the complicating impact of illegal immigration on attitudes. When asked at three different points across the last decade, "In general, do you think immigrants who come to the United States today help the country and make it a better place to live or hurt the country and make it a worse place to live?," pluralities consistently selected "better" over "hurt" with an average spread of nine points.⁽⁴⁾

Immigration Policy: U.S. policy on immigration has varied substantially through its history and accordingly so too have immigration levels and the size of the foreign-born population. Only mildly regulated until the 1920s, immigration to the U.S. boomed in the late nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth. Major reforms in 1921 and especially 1924 greatly reduced this flow for the next four decades and institutionalized discrimination against non-Europeans. Landmark legislation in 1965 removed the country quota system established in the 1920s, instead creating separate ceilings for the two hemispheres; this division itself was removed in 1978. Priority under the law is given to family reunification, critical employee skills, and artistic excellence. Refugees were originally included as a priority category but were removed in 1980 and since treated separately.

Increasing Immigration Numbers: Although the precise number has varied, until 1990 the overall annual limit was less than 300,000 legal immigrants. In 1990 this ceiling was more than doubled. For the decade through 2010 the overall limit climbed again, averaging just over one million immigrants annually.⁽⁵⁾ These changes are reflected in the percentage of foreign-born residents in the overall population. From the high of just under 15% in both 1890 and 1910 the rate dropped steadily down to 4.7% in 1970, its lowest point since data was collected (see Figure 1). Under the impact of

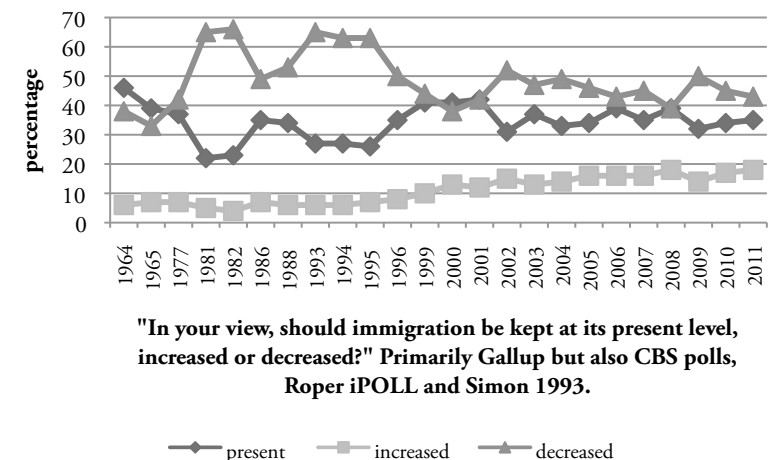
Figure 1. Immigrants as Percentage of the U.S. Population



Source: U.S. Census Bureau data at MPI Data Hub. The term "immigrants" refers to people residing (either legally or not) in the United States who were not US citizens at birth.

the 1965 law, immigration (legal and illegal) then began growing faster than the overall population with the increase of the last four decades just as steady as the decline of the prior period. By 2010 immigrants, both legal and otherwise, had climbed back up to 12.9% of the total U.S. population. One reason why immigration is so controversial is because this increase was substantially at odds with the public's preferences (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Preferred Levels of Immigration for U.S. Adults



Why Do We Stay?

For many immigrants their expectations have been met sufficiently in the U.S.—and perhaps their reasons for leaving their homeland are strong enough—that there is no question that they are here to stay. Gladly. And often most gratefully. These are the heralded positive immigration stories that give many of us a warm reminder of those positive symbols of our nationhood: American Dream, Land of Opportunity, Home of the Free and Brave. These stories are real and they are included throughout this anthology.

Economic Challenges: But for a number of immigrants the reality they live is harder and staying is more complex. For some, assumptions that their hard work will gain them their comfort and perhaps eventual prosperity are not met. Particularly daunting are the circumstances of unskilled workers who went into debt to make the journey and who have committed to sending part of their earnings back home to support family members. Given their low wages, they find that they "must wring this surplus out of their own deprivation, forgoing everything but an ascetic existence." (6)

Social Challenges: For others the complexity might be more social. The dislocations of immigration can be difficult enough under any circumstances but often are more so for minorities. After all, much of their experience will be framed by the reception they receive from those already here. The first great wave of immigration in the decades before the Civil War brought many Irish and German Catholics to what had been a Protestant country. Stories of the discrimination they faced are legion. At the end of the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth, immigrants were still overwhelmingly Catholic but now even more different culturally from the early settlers, coming primarily from Eastern and Southern European countries such as Poland and Italy. This new wave of immigrants once again "inspired a virulent reaction from the native-born community." (7) This was also the period of substantial Jewish immigration—30% of all Eastern European Jews had moved to the United States before the doors shut in the early 1920s. (8)

The great wave of immigration following the 1965 reform has brought even greater difference, with most immigrants coming from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Almost 30% of the foreign-born population in 2009 came from just one country: Mexico. Immigrants from the Philippines were next with 4.5% of the total, followed by India, China, El Salvador, Vietnam, Korea, and Cuba (at 2.6%). (9) Many immigrants have encountered welcome, interest, and assistance. Others, though, have had their experiences

made difficult by responses ranging from explicit hostility to indifference.

Mexican Exceptionalism: Immigration and allegiance for those of Mexican heritage can be particularly complex subjects for just about everyone, be they native-born Mexican-Americans, non-Mexican-Americans, or immigrants from Mexico. This is not just because of the preponderance of people of Mexican background among the immigrant population but also because of a lengthy shared border, and very much because of a complex shared history.

Because so many people of Mexican descent who live in the southwest U.S. have live family roots on the other side of the border some observers see a transnational culture developing that draws perhaps more from its Mexican heritage than the mainstream U.S. culture. This alarms some but delights others. (10) The elephant in the room for this controversy is the fact that the southwest came to be part of the U.S. primarily as a consequence of war. Very few people in the U.S. who I have talked with have known that the United States invaded the Mexican heartland in 1847, landing at Veracruz and marching on to take Mexico City. In contrast, any Mexican city of any size has an *Avenida Niños Heroes* and perhaps a monument in tribute to the six young cadets (one just thirteen years old) who, defending Chapultepec Castle, jumped to their deaths, taking their country's flag with them lest it be seized by the invaders.

The treaty ending the war formalized Mexico's loss of a little over half of its territory and the enlargement of the United States by California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, Utah, a large part of Colorado, and small parts of Oklahoma, Kansas and Wyoming. Adding to the complexity of this relationship, until recent decades there was only intermittent effort on the part of the United States to police this border, in large part because U.S. businesses (especially farmers) welcomed Mexicans who were willing to work for low wages under harsh conditions without protest. Even today, with policies of much tighter border control enjoying widespread public support, possibilities of immigration policy reform often are complicated by U.S. agriculture's dependence on Mexican workers.

Even with this complexity, Mexican-Americans are proud to be U.S. citizens. Surveys that compare levels of patriotism between different ethnic groups find Mexican-Americans generally do not differ from Anglo-Americans. However, when there are differences, it is the Mexican-American who is found by the surveys to be the more patriotic. (11)



HEATHER TOSTESON

LISTENING FOR BELONGING I

For to get rid of the habit of thinking of democracy as something institutional and external and to acquire the habit of treating it as a way of personal life is to realize that democracy is a moral ideal and so far as it becomes a fact is a moral fact. It is to realize that democracy is a reality only as it is indeed a commonplace of living. John Dewey

Citizenship is hard. It takes a commitment to listen, watch, read, and think in ways that allow the imagination to put one person in the shoes of another. James Leach

Narrative, I believe, is designed to contain uncanniness rather than to resolve it. It does not have to come out on the 'right side.' . . . the 'consolation of narrative' is not the comfort of a happy ending, but the comprehension of plight that, by being made understandable, becomes bearable. Jerome Bruner

Our nervous systems are constructed to be captured by the nervous systems of others, so that we can experience others as if from within their skin, as well as from within our own. A sort of direct feeling route into another person is potentially open and we resonate with and participate in their experience, and they in ours. Daniel Stern

This collection was inspired by several questions that grew in importance to us as we listened to the stories and meditations on the immigration experience included in our first citizenship anthology, *Shifting Balance Sheets: Women's Stories of Naturalized Citizenship & Cultural Attachment*. The word *We* is central to all of them. The phrase *Finding the We in Them, the Us in You*, is one we use to describe our approach to pluralism. *We* means to us both a pronoun and a posture of communal, consciously shared direct experience. We, in general, use *We* to refer to a group that we feel part of. Here are some of the questions that concern us:

Where do we, wherever we were born, whatever our citizenship status is, now place our 'We'?

What are we giving back to the place—and society—in which we now live?

What effect does being welcomed, or denigrated, in a new country have on where we place our 'We'?

What is the rate of change that is possible for a community, local or national, to sustain and still experience itself as a community, a group that feels ties of social reciprocity, of affection, respect, obligation, and unity of purpose and feels those not as a promise for the distant future, but as a reality now? Here.

These are all, finally, questions about belonging. The question of immigration, however complexly organized it is, remains for me a doorway into that even more powerful and pervasive question of belonging.

When I ask myself why I am so intensely interested in this question of belonging, what comes to mind is a morning on the beach in Chiapas, Mexico in the fall of 2004. We were spending several months in San Cristóbal and had decided to exchange the mountains for the sea for a weekend so had taken a bus down to a rather deserted beach town. We found a hotel some distance from town. The second morning there I decided to go for a walk alone on the beach, something I love to do. However, there are many stray dogs in Mexico and, especially in the morning, they can band in packs. One large pack was milling on the beach, so instead of walking away from town I decided to walk toward it thinking the dogs would be less likely to follow me. If they did it might be better to be near other people. The dogs eagerly trailed me. As long as they kept their distance, I decided, I was relatively secure. I did pick up my pace. However, just as I began to pass a few houses and restaurants, still closed at this fairly early hour, another pack of dogs appeared from the other direction. The two packs eyed each other warily, tails alert, a few growls rumbling, then they all turned toward me. Their interest was daunting. I decided it might be wise for me to step into the water.

The surf was stronger than I expected, sucking the sand loudly out from under my feet. I swiveled around to check where the dogs were. Suddenly a large wave washed up and slammed against my leg at knee height. Without warning, my leg gave and I found myself flat on my back in the waves. I tried to get up, but my leg collapsed again. Down the beach I could see an old man

and a younger woman. I yelled in Spanish for help. ¡Socorro! They did not respond, indeed turned away. I yelled again, louder. I varied my cry, ¡Ayúdame! I tried to get up again, fell again. I saw someone else coming along the beach and yelled louder. The dogs were all edging closer, fascinated. I had this moment of amazing clarity and realized that I was going to yell until someone helped me. All social inhibition disappeared. I was both desperate and eerily objective. Curious. How long would it take? Finally, many yells, falls, and several passers-by later, a young man paused beside me. His girlfriend walked determinedly on. I explained to him in Spanish that I needed help to get back to my hotel. I had hurt my leg.

"Just walk very slowly," he said.

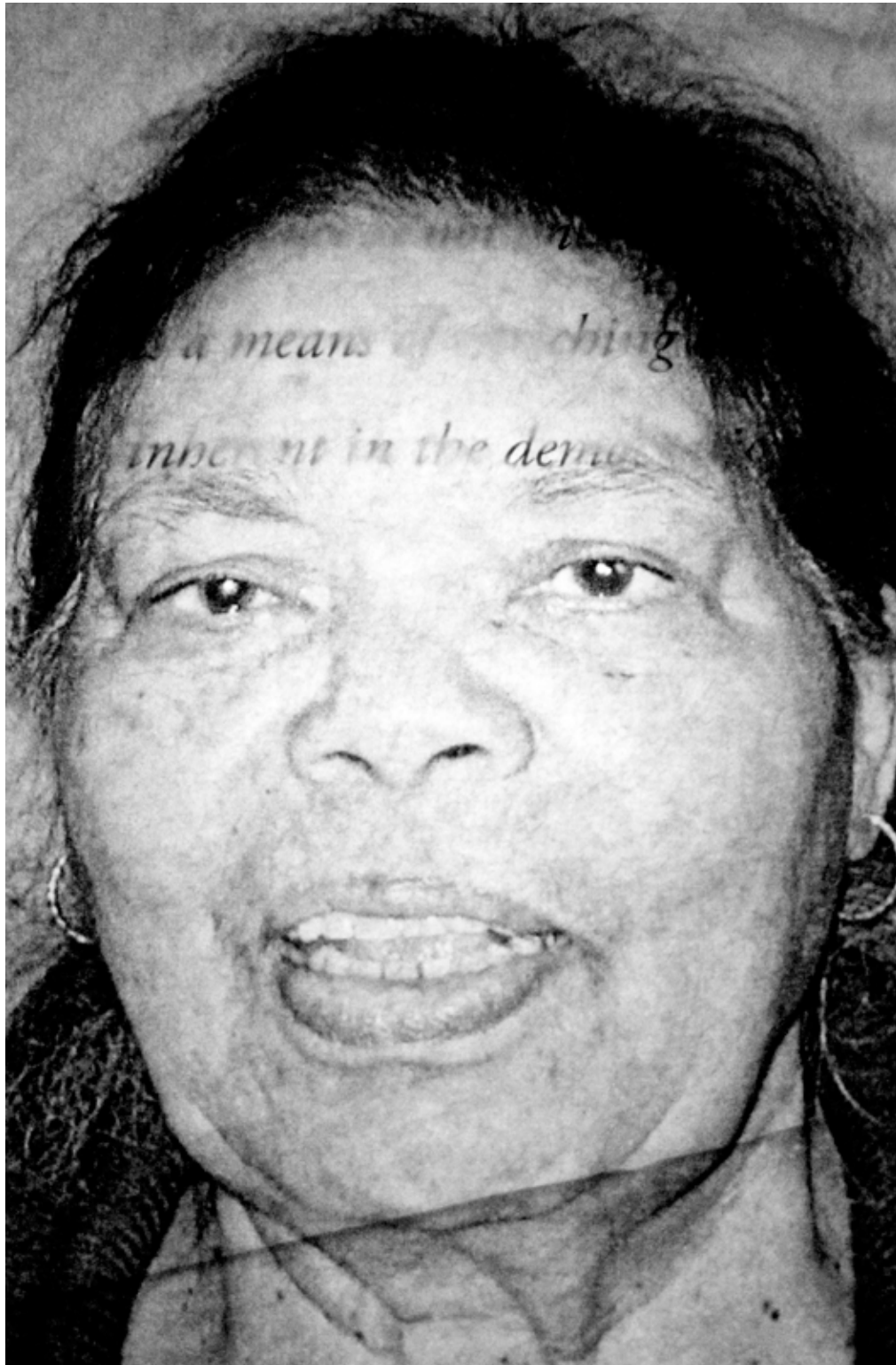
I explained that I couldn't, that my leg wouldn't hold. He looked interested now.

"I had something like that playing soccer. It is probably a muscle. Are you sure you can't walk on it?"

I crawled to standing, then tumbled back down again when I tried to walk. "If you can help me get to the street, I will take a taxi."

So, to his girlfriend's obvious disapproval, he gave me his arm and helped me hobble, my leg erratically collapsing on us, the block to the main road. But the three taxi drivers he hailed looked at me and shook their heads. They would not take me back to my hotel. I was too wet. Sandy. Unkempt.

"I think I will have to take you myself," the young man said at last. He told his girlfriend, who responded angrily, but went into their hotel and brought out a towel to save the front seat of their truck. She stood, arms crossed, scowling, as we drove off. As we drove, the young man asked me, "Do you like Chiapas?" "Oh yes," I said immediately. This was a well-practiced interchange that I had had numerous times in our months there. So, we had a surreally normal chat about the beauties of Mexico and Chiapas, the kindness of the Mexican people. I had this vocabulary down pat. "*Una gente muy amable, muy inteligente, muy trabajadora, muy simpática*," I said. As we approached my hotel, he suddenly lit up and said, "Oh, is that where you are staying?" And then he looked at me more closely. "You were at the restaurant last night having dinner with your husband. I saw you there." With this new context, some switch was flipped and, at that moment, I could see that I had suddenly, mysteriously, become fully human to him. So the smile and thanks I gave him when he left me precariously standing in the hotel courtyard were genuine from several different levels.



II WHY DO WE COME?

ARA SARKISSIAN

Interviewed by Heather Tosteson

WHERE IS THE 'WE'?

Fatherhood is wonderful. It makes you think about many things. It doesn't necessarily offer answers, but it puts out questions. I do wish I had had my daughter fifteen years ago because I can't live with the lack of sleep—and back then I felt I had the answers. But hopefully I am a bit wiser now.

What is America?

If you think about America as an ideal—it's a very unique nation-state that is not based on any ethnic allegiance, as opposed to most other places. In Germany, most people are German, and in Poland, Polish, etc. Perhaps in South America it might be a little different because people came from elsewhere, but in most other places there is a ruling ethos tied to the character of the nation-state. There is the mass culture idea of America with people obsessed with how white their teeth are, the extra large Diet Coke bottles and Disneyland. But when you think about what the heart of the country is, for me it's the South. It's true that the South has a past filled with things that are so obviously problematic, yet it seems to me the place where one can find the roots of the non-mass American culture—Appalachian music, banjo playing, cooking, hospitality, a sense of independence from *center*. Maybe it will take another generation or two for this culture to disappear into the *mass*. People often describe the U.S. as a place where people will give you a coffee, and then point to the time, whereas in most other places people would stay for hours and hours. But it feels like in the South, you could visit with someone for six hours, quite unlike in Boston.

I think, having been here for twenty years now, that this idea of America as a homeland is starting to take hold here. The notion of "I was here before you," prevalent in many other places, is starting to take hold here as well. Perhaps it just happens when a country gets to a certain age. People are developing the same sense of attachment and protectionism that you find

other places. I don't know if it is controllable. Is it just something that is natural? I can't figure out if it is something you can control. Perhaps it is just a result of thinking in a box. I think about this a lot. People assume they share a lot and a lot gets brushed under the rug for them to think this way. But every twenty or thirty years here there are riots. What is interesting is that people have very selective memories. Each time it is as if it never happened before. Everything is in the past and "the past" is always untouchably far away.

This is strange for me being Armenian, because we remember what happened 1300 years ago, where battles took place, who won and who lost, and how it affected the future. Why can't people here remember what happened in L.A. in the 1990s? Maybe there's something I can learn from them here. Maybe it is good to forget. And then I think, maybe there's something they can learn from me, maybe they should learn what they shouldn't forget. When you get your citizenship, no one tells you what is the right answer.

Growing Up in Lebanon

I just visited Lebanon last January for the first time in ten years. My last visit was twelve years before. It seems I go about every decade. For me, it felt like a normal place to live growing up. War was something we just grew up with. I was four years old when war began. This was a civil war, so in addition to invading armies, there were invading sub-armies invading neighborhoods. In a way it was bizarre, to be honest—like a very bad movie we just stopped watching.

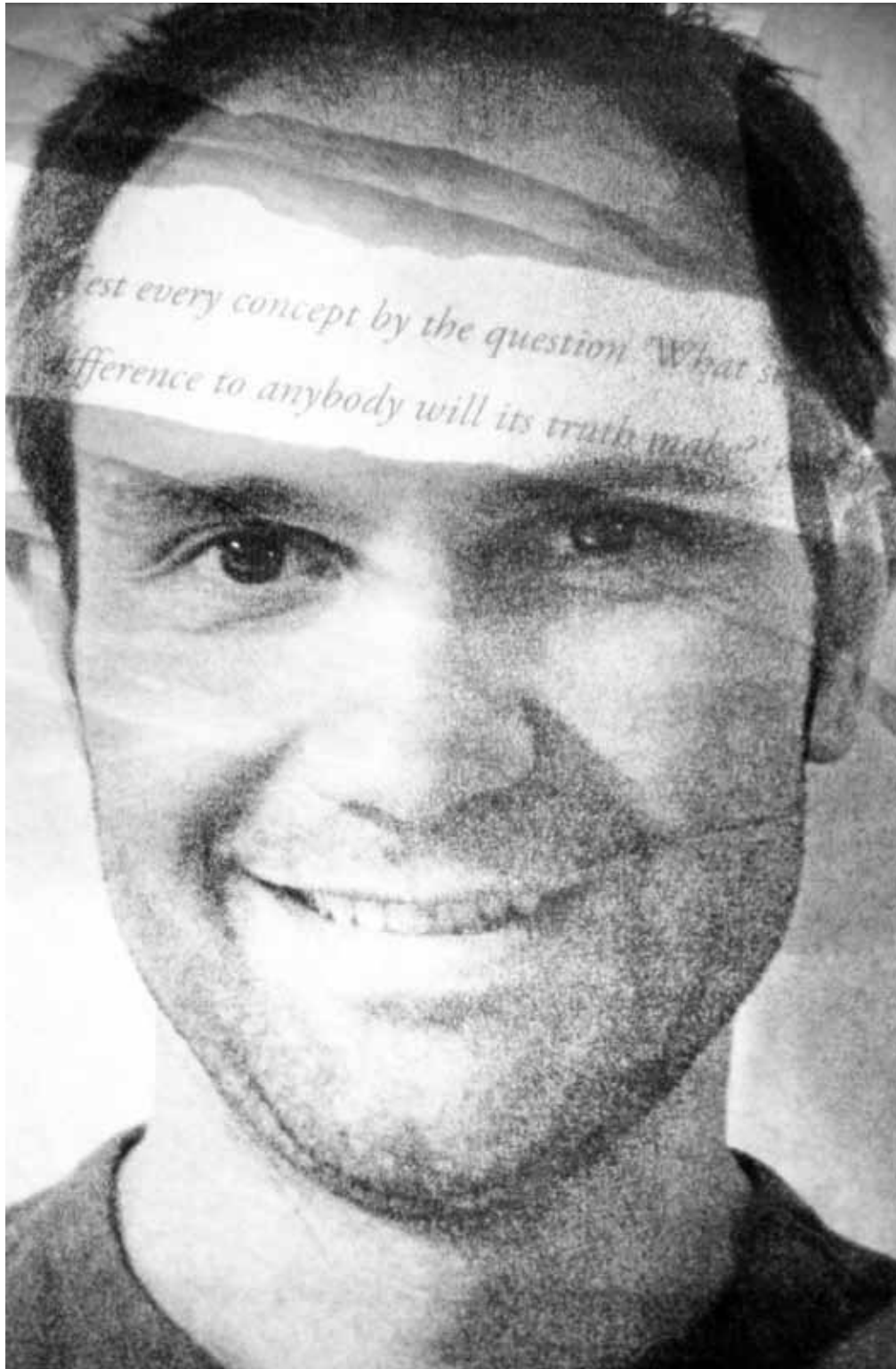
There were many of us Armenians in Lebanon then. There aren't now. Maybe there were about 150,000 Armenians out of about three million people living in Lebanon. Armenians congregated mostly in the capital. We had our own neighborhoods where maybe half the people spoke Armenian. It didn't feel like a transitory environment. The only choice other than making it a home was to emigrate again, which after a while becomes tiring. Even if you yourself did not emigrate originally, after the immigration of the previous generation, you felt as if you needed to stay a while.

The Lebanese system was set up to distribute rights along sectarian lines, and Armenians, like other groups, had representation based on their population. We knew we were not Arabs, the dominant population in Lebanon, yet we were Lebanese, which is a multi-layered concept.

We were citizens of a nation-state, there wasn't necessarily allegiance to a tribe. It wasn't that different, at least legally, from being a citizen of the



III WHY DO WE STAY?



PLAMEN RUSSEV

Interviewed by Heather Tosteson

I FEEL MY ROLE IS TO BE A NEVER-ENDING LABORATORY

Childhood in Bulgaria

I was born in Stara Zagora, which is in the middle of the country, halfway between Sofia and the Black Sea. It's near the Rose Valley and is one of the larger cities in Bulgaria, fifth in size. It has a pretty good cultural life and a rich history. The city has had eight names throughout history, including Old Bulgarian, Slavic, Thracian, Greek, Turkish, so it is very much aware of its history. There was a building with all eight names of the city in a mural painted on its side, and as a kid I loved looking at that as I was into geography and enjoyed saying the foreign sounding names. Stara Zagora was razed a few times, so it is a modern city now built on a grid and visually there are no clues to its history. But it's all there, right under the surface. For example, when they were expanding the old post office building, they discovered Roman frescoes and built an atrium around them.

I grew up during very closed-off times in Bulgaria. There was a thirst in people for knowledge outside what was allowed. There was a strong urge and drive to get more information, to get to the *truth*. All official information was censored. The same stories ran in all the newspapers and on the radio and TV. It didn't matter where you saw or heard them, they were all the same, endless redundancy.

It was endlessly frustrating. People felt they were being treated like idiots. In the 1970s and 1980s people were becoming very aware of how much the regime was suppressing any contact with the wider world, especially the West, and many intellectuals engaged in a form of *mental emigration*. In their minds, they started imagining living abroad, usually in the "free West." There is an old Bulgarian saying that "a book is a window to the world" because it shows us things we may never be able to see with our own eyes. Learning languages, I realized that every language is a *door* into the world. Intellectuals



IV

WHY DO WE GO?

YAR DONLAH GONWAY-GONO

Interviewed by Heather Tosteson

TO ME, EDUCATION IS SACRED

Yar Donlah Gonway-Gono is a naturalized American citizen from Liberia. She has a PhD in Women's Studies. Her dissertation examined acculturation in Liberian women living in Atlanta. In the last year, she has returned to Liberia at the request of its president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, to become president of a new community college in Nimba County, one of the areas most affected by the Liberian Civil War. She was first interviewed by phone as she was preparing to leave for Liberia to assume her new position and again, more fully, a few months later when she had returned to celebrate holidays with her family in Minnesota.

When I was talking with the women in my study, they said that coming to America was also an opportunity to see themselves in the culture in which they were raised. This was true of me as well.

Growing Up in Liberia

I grew up in a small town, Flumpa, in Nimba County, the second largest county in Liberia. The emphasis was on the farm, not on education. The first process of growing up was to work with your mother if you were a girl, learning to cook, or with your father if you were a boy. The community of women taught girls how to dress, eat, how to behave.

Later on, my father took us to Lamco, Yekepa, where we settled in Sawmill Camp, a small town of low-income families. He worked at Lamco Vocational Training Center as a security guard. It was a different life. People came from very different walks of life. They were very poor and some worked as housekeepers in rich people's homes. My mother was a housewife and subsistence farmer. Young girls who went to school got pregnant and left very early.

My father was part of the indigenous community, not the

Americo-Liberians. My mother birthed eight children, seven of whom lived. I was very close to my mother and helped take care of my younger brothers and sisters. My father kept me at home to help my mother. My younger brother (Peter) and sister (Yei) both went to school first.

One time, my siblings and I were sick with a cold. The custom was that the company provided some type of document for the worker's children to be treated at a nearby clinic. We went with my father to his place of work for the document. A colleague of my father's asked my father, referring to me in these words: "Is this smart looking little girl going to school?" My father's reply was: "This one will stay at home to help her mother." But the colleague's job was to enroll the workers' children for school and he enrolled me. So in 1968 at the age of eleven, I went to school for the first time. I was in a classroom with children five years old. The names of the children were written on the desks, but I couldn't read so I didn't know where to sit. I understood that if I could not read I would not be able to do anything, so I got my younger brother to teach me the alphabet and the numbers. Once I learned to read and write, school was everything to me. My mother thought my going to school was going to take her help from her. And the neighborhood girls became jealous and they would steal my uniform and books. But when I entered the door of the school, that was all that mattered to me. I did so well that at the end of the year they gave me the sixth grade exam and promoted me to seventh grade.

I developed a passion for learning and took it as opportunity. I was not meant to go to school in my culture and in my family, but I told myself I was going to go on and get as much education as I could.

In eleventh grade, I got pregnant. But I told my family I was going to have the baby and continue with school. I took my baby and found someone to help the baby and continued to go to school. For me, nothing was ever going to stop me from learning. There was something mysterious in it. I was not going to give it up. This help didn't come from my village. No one in my family could read and write, except my younger siblings who went to school before I did. There was something in my being that kept me going. Life was very challenging; I was encouraged to move forward regardless.

At first, because I was really good in science, I wanted to be a medical doctor. My father kept me at home because I was the most caring child. So, I was going to continue my love for caring by being a doctor. After graduating from high school, I wanted to go to college. I took several college entrance exams

JOSÉ VARIABLE

Interviewed by Charles Brockett

JOSÉ DREAMS OF BECOMING A U.S. CITIZEN

José Variable is one of six siblings. All of his brothers and sisters are U.S. citizens. Much to his dismay, José is not. Nineteen years old when I talked with him, José was in jeopardy of being deported from the country that has been his home for the last ten years.

"You know you could do a lot better," José tells me over the phone from Wisconsin, "but you can't when you are undocumented. It keeps you from doing so much of what you want to do. I get depressed. Lately I have been feeling really bad . . . alone. I am seeing a doctor."

"I grew up here," he emphasizes throughout the conversation, "it is not my fault that I lack papers." José was born in Toluca, Mexico, which is not too far outside of the capital city. "My mother had a small neighborhood grocery store. One day it was held up for 50,000 pesos, and they told her not to report it or they would kill her. That is when she decided that they would leave for the U.S." At the time, his parents had two children.

José was nine. "I learned English quickly and by the seventh grade I was doing well." Indeed, he speaks an almost-accentless English. His illegal/undocumented status was not an issue in high school. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1982 that public education through high school must be offered free to all children, regardless of their immigration status. But that does not apply at the college level. And the same philosophy certainly does not apply to employment. Since 1986 it has been against the law to knowingly employ workers who are in the country illegally.

"Friends in high school would tell me about job possibilities, good jobs, but I couldn't take advantage of them because of my lack of documents. I didn't want to tell my friends I was undocumented so I would make excuses." Talking with José, it is clear that making these excuses cost him psychologically. His friends wondered about the excuses too. Knowing this added to his distress.

Without documents, he could not apply for financial aid for college, so he took classes at the local community college. But since he could not work regularly he was hard-pressed to make his tuition. Neither could he get a driver's license. He tried his best to get by with odd jobs using skills he developed at repairing computers.

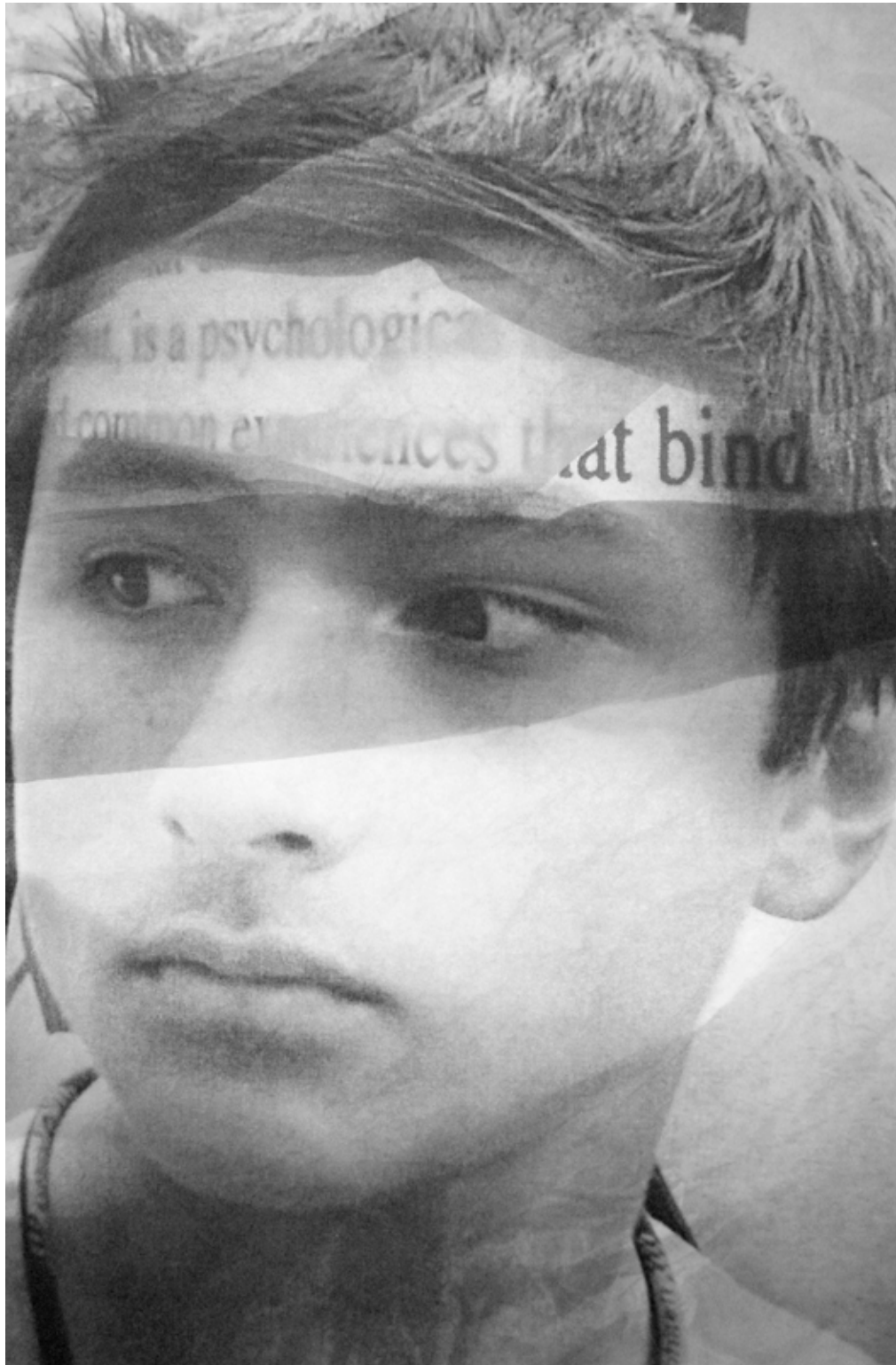
Adding to José's sense of the unfairness of his position is the situation of his family. The sister who migrated with him later married a U.S. citizen and is now a citizen herself. His parents had four more children once in the United States and so they are birthright citizens. That leaves only José among the siblings illegally in the country. Similarly, his parents are illegal aliens and when we talked his father was in the process of being deported. José presumes his father will return to Toluca. As far as he knows he has one uncle there, that's it. José does not know Mexico, never having returned since the family left. Now he has "the feeling of not being either from here or there. It is extremely hard to live like this."

José, of course, is not alone in this predicament. Each year some 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school in the U.S., many of them like José having grown up in the United States regarding it as their home. Research indicates that as they become aware of the lack of opportunities that they will face after high school, morale and motivation slump at least for some students, some even giving up and dropping out of high school.⁽¹⁾

In recent years a primary hope for undocumented students has been the possibility that the DREAM Act might pass Congress.⁽²⁾ This would provide undocumented youths who came to the U.S. before they were sixteen and have lived here at least five years a path to citizenship that would lead through either honorable military service or completion of two years of college. Estimates of the number of people who would be eligible run from two-thirds to three-quarters of a million.⁽³⁾

Across the country undocumented students have gone public with their status as a way of putting individual faces on what can otherwise be just one more abstract issue. Among them was José, who held his "coming out" in the summer of 2010. He did it "because it was necessary to let people know of my situation . . . about the things I can not do . . . like drive, get a job . . . live like a normal citizen."

It took about a month to plan the event. He was aware of the dangers of calling authorities' attention to himself but "I didn't care any more." Afterwards he had "no more fear" and when I talked with him more than a



V
WHY DO WE COMMIT?

ANNA STEEGMANN

THE NEW (TORN) AMERICAN

"The naturalization ceremony is a solemn and meaningful event," the letter said. I was to dress in proper attire to respect the dignity of the occasion, "no jeans, shorts or flip-flops." It was Friday, December 19, 2008. WQXR predicted heavy snowfall, hazardous driving conditions, a possible blizzard. Flip-flops were out of the question. I settled on my interview outfit, white turtleneck, navy pant suit, and moon boots.

The morning host on the radio announced "A Lincoln Portrait" by Aaron Copeland. As the music floated along, solemn and mysterious, the wailing contrabassoon transported me to my homeland, the poor blood-soaked continent of Europe. I thought about rape camps and ethnic cleansing during the Yugoslav wars, the millions killed during two world wars and the constant threat of nuclear war during the Cold War. Gruesome pictures of nameless horrors flashed through my mind. The brass section soared toward a dramatic climax and the pounding tam-tam sent tremors through my body. A male voice rose above the orchestra. *Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history.*

This music, these words are no coincidence, I thought. *As I would not be a slave, so I will not be a master,* the voice proclaimed. I thought about our European emperors and kings, our counts and rulers. Being born into the right class guaranteed wealth and success; being born into the wrong class guaranteed the life of an uneducated laborer. My grandparents, my mother and father had to leave school at the end of eighth grade to work in the fields. My mother-in-law came to the U.S. in 1950 with her young family. A refugee from the Soviet Union, she had ended up in Germany at the end of WWII, one of millions of displaced persons stranded like flotsam and jetsam all over the continent. In the Ukraine they had told her: "You were born in a basket; don't try to fit yourself into a suitcase." She loved the United States, the "greatest country on earth." In Irvington, New Jersey it did not matter that she was born in a basket; she could aspire to a suitcase or even a steamer trunk.

Words were twirling in my head: *Heimat, Mutterland, Vaterland. Heimat is untranslatable,* I thought. *It is not the same as homeland. Heimat is deeper, graver. Heimat carries the weight of a profound attachment; it holds centuries of German consciousness.* Wasn't I forever bound to my *Heimat* by my birth, my childhood, my experiences, my way of looking at the world? Could I truly become a citizen of another country? Was I betraying my *Heimat* by becoming an American citizen?

The A-train was crammed with early-morning commuters. Students were horsing around and banging into each other with their backpacks. An older woman with a Caribbean lilt warned us that the world was coming to an end. We were all going to perish unless we turned over our lives to the Lord. She was competing with a homeless veteran rattling a paper cup and asking for donations. I overheard snippets of Urdu, Creole, Spanish, and Russian. David Dinkens, New York's first African-American mayor, had called our city a "gorgeous mosaic." I felt proud to be a New Yorker, proud to belong to such a racially and ethnically diverse metropolis and country. I would never find this mix of people on any German bus or subway.

I pictured the faces of my students at The City College of New York. Razwan, Mohamed, Nor, Selah, Daler, Chukwudi, Adelina and Agnieszka expected a bright future in America and were willing to work hard to get there. Our classroom full of immigrants and children of immigrants was a miniature United Nations where white students and American-born students were the minority. *It is impossible to find such a college class in Germany,* I thought, *impossible to find such a class in all of Europe.*

During my last visit to Germany my nephew had invited me to visit his English class. The students in his *Gymnasium* (high school) were all German with the exception of one Turkish student (the proper German term is "a pupil with migration background"). His father owned a *Döner Bude*, a kebab stand. I wondered if his father had been denied better work opportunities. My nephew lives in Duisburg, a city of 500,000 inhabitants, where 16.5% of the population are foreigners and in some districts 25%. I have met plenty of Turkish taxi drivers with graduate degrees in Germany, but I have not found Turkish doctors, teachers or policemen. No doubt, this is the result of an educational system that separates the wheat from the chaff at the end of fourth grade.

I came to New York on a tourist visa in 1980. Smitten with the city, I cashed in my return ticket and stayed on as an illegal immigrant. The pre

NIKOLINA KULIDŽAN

MARGARITAS AND GUACAMOLE

By 8:15 a.m., Jelena is wondering what might have happened. We've been officemates for two years and it's not like me to be late to work without calling. By 8:30, she is worried. By 9:00, she is calling my cell phone at three-minute intervals. The phone is off. At 9:30, she dials my fiancé. Twelve hundred miles away, he is the last person to have seen me. Alarmed by her call, he tells her that he spoke to me around eleven the night before and that I was still driving from the airport. He hasn't heard from me since. By 10:00, Jelena is in tears.

That's when she starts a full-blown investigation. First, she calls every hospital on the Monterey Peninsula, and when she finds no record of my name, she dials the police and reports me as missing. She then summons our friend Sandro and together they go to meet a detective at the house where I am renting a basement apartment from a man whom Jelena has heard me refer to as mentally ill and in the habit of talking to himself in two distinct voices. When questioned by the detective, my landlord states that he believes he saw my car arrive late the night before and leave early this morning. The unopened suitcase they find in my room corroborates his account. The detective seems pleased, but Jelena is still suspicious. She eyes the landlord, plotting how to invite herself into his house. She imagines me tied to a chair, my mouth taped, my face red from struggle. She grows more and more upset.

Just about that time (it was getting close to noon) less than two miles away, I am walking out of a workshop on task-based instruction, trying to decide whether to go out for lunch or return to my office to check email. I decide in favor of a leisurely meal and am switching my phone on to see if any of my friends might want to join me, when I realize I have five messages. This would have been unusual at any time, but on a Monday morning it's alarming. I overcome my usual inclination to ignore voicemail, only to hear my fiancé's teary voice telling me to call him back and then some other stuff I don't quite understand. By the time I get to Sandro's message I am very

confused. But I gather that Jelena and he are at my house, along with a police officer, interrogating my landlord about my whereabouts.

I call Sandro right away. I am laughing my ass off as I explain to him that I was in a workshop and that I had told Jelena about it. When we meet for lunch fifteen minutes later, I fully intend to tease Jelena about her forgetfulness but her eyes are bloodshot and she looks exhausted so I save the teasing for later. She keeps touching me as if to assure herself that I really am alive. I feel bad to have caused my friend such grief, but a part of me feels very happy. It's a relief to know that someone would notice if you disappeared.

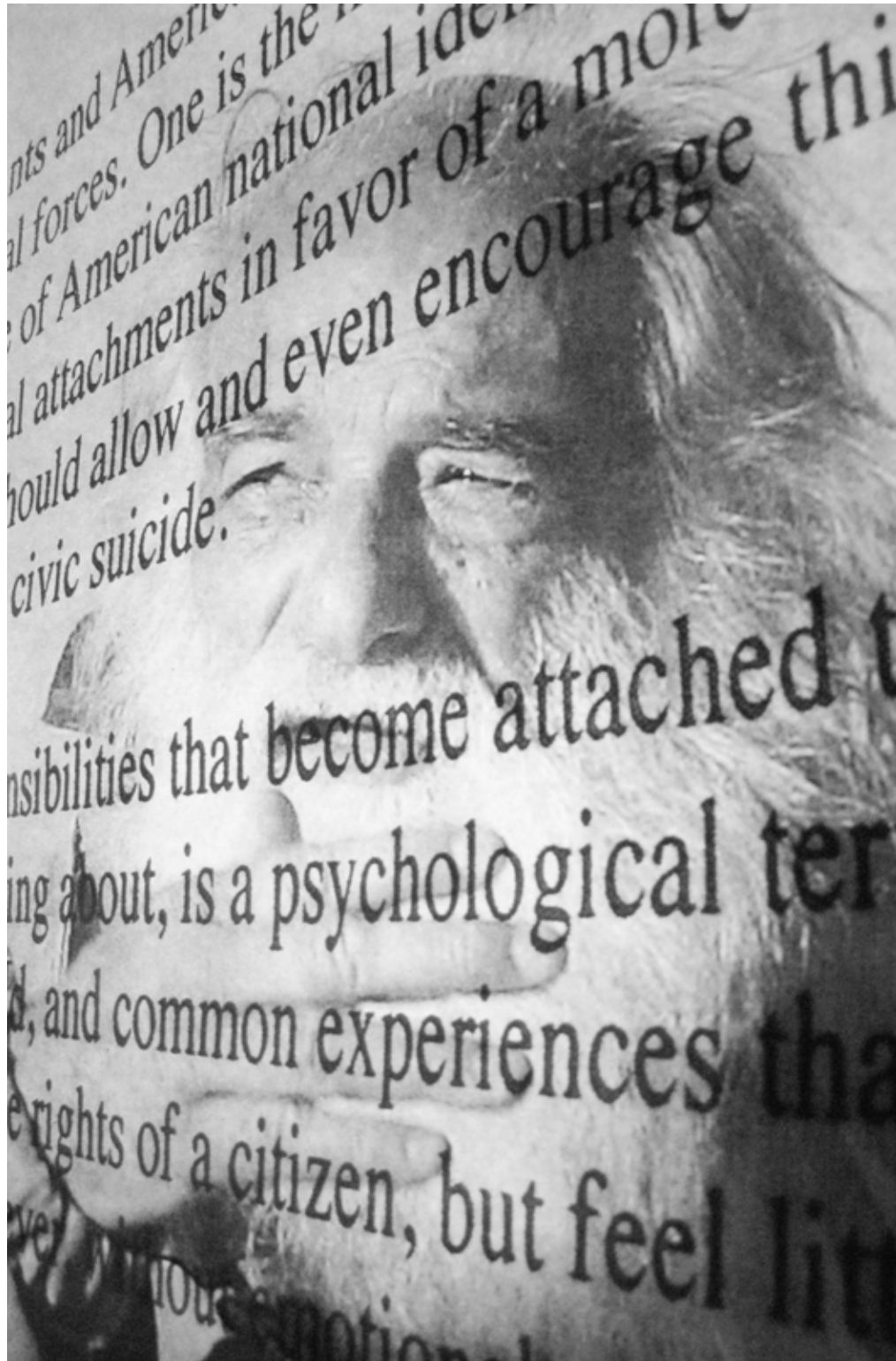
Now let me clarify something: I am a Bosnian Serb. Jelena is a Croat from Croatia. Sandro is a Bosnian Muslim (or to be more politically correct, a Bosniak). Or at least, those would be the shorthand labels we'd use to define ourselves. The reality, of course, is messier. One of my grandparents was a Croat and I am from Herzegovina not Bosnia. Jelena's mother is actually Macedonian, and Jelena attended college in my hometown. Sandro's parents were so determined to avoid ethnic categorizations that they gave their first-born son an Italian name, and I didn't really know what his ethnicity was until I asked him about it when I started writing this essay.

We were each born into a multicultural utopia, a place where relationships were forged based on character, sensibility, sense of humor, and shared interests rather than some misguided notion of ethnic identity. We each saw that utopia dissolve into chaos and madness, our lives suddenly shaped by animosities we never held, our paths veering off to unknown terrain. We each traveled great emotional and physical distances, to meet at an unlikely place, a picturesque coastal town in central California, where we unwittingly recreated the paradise we were born into, becoming not only each other's friends but a family.

So what had happened in between?

Mine was a charmed childhood. My parents were loving and present, my older brother the right balance of protective and tough, my hometown tucked into a valley, sun-filled and safe. I was a teacher's pet, yet my peers didn't seem to resent me for it. My family spent a month each summer at the Adriatic, the weeks melting away while I chased around with my cousins, dived off wharfs, picked wild blackberries, and napped in a hammock.

At the age of nine, there were still challenges to overcome and at the



VI

WHAT DOES *AMERICAN*
HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

JODI HOTTEL

"GOD BLESS AMERICA"

At seventy-eight,
bound to a wheelchair
by stroke and dementia,
my mother weeps
while she listens to the anthem
on the nightly news,
cherishing this country
of her birth, but no longer
able to repress
the shame of internment.
The only crime—
her Japanese face.

At sixteen,
wearing a smile
and saddle shoes,
she left behind
her best friend Mary
and her new pump organ
to live in the barren
Wyoming desert behind
barbed wire.

And now,
I have a hole
where her pain is planted,
watered by the tears salting
her lips as she mouths the words,
"my home, sweet home."

EVACUATION DAY

—June 5, 1942

At an empty station, beside
the train tracks' quiet gleam,
it's dusk, the in-between time
of a warm June evening.
With brakes screeching, a truck
skids to a stop at the platform,
spilling out young soldiers,
rifles slung over their backs,
drunkenly shoving each other,
shattering a windowpane in the station.

With a hiss, a black train creeps in.
Silent, the Japanese families approach,
dressed in their Sunday best.
Numbered and tagged,
they line up to board, heavy
with what they are allowed to carry.

Throughout the night, the train carries
its freight from their Yakima Valley homes
to an unknown future. Soldiers order
shades drawn, parade the aisles, point rifles,
as though their weary prisoners could escape.

Pulling into the stockyard,
the train's shriek signals arrival,
but still in darkness, the cargo
hears only the clang of the closing gates.

JULIJA SUPUT

THE RETURN HOME

"Are you going home for vacation?" a flight attendant asks, bending toward me, offering a glass of water. Puzzled, I look at her, shake my head.

"Work," I mumble. I take a plastic glass from the tray she balances on one hand with the dexterity of a circus juggler. As I move the book I was reading, Homer's *Iliad*, to make room for the glass, she glides away.

Her question floats in my head, though. "Can I pass for Korean?" I wonder, touching my face, my high cheek bones. I play with the idea that in Korea where I am heading for a couple of days of work, I could walk the streets and blend in, be considered a native. "Why not?" I wonder. Then I look at my colleague sleeping in the window seat. He is Korean, and we definitely do not look anything alike. However, the possibility of a new identity germinates in my mind. I soon forget Achilles and his wounded pride and my determination to finish reading the book during the flight. I turn the light above my head off and close my eyes.

But I don't think about a Korean identity. Instead, memories of my past swirl in my head, and I think about how I ended up on this plane, boarding it with an American passport. I think how, when somebody in California where I have been living for the last ten years, detecting my foreign accent, asks me where I am from, I say, "Croatia." In response to my interlocutor's baffled look, I explain that Croatia was a part of the former Yugoslavia. Few know about Croatia but many are familiar with the Yugoslav civil war. I quickly add that I was lucky; I and my family were not harmed in that war, at least not physically. But I did suffer loss, too. I lost my Yugoslav identity.

My childhood memories are a collage of happy images in which, year after year, I am a part of every school celebration of our Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and our President Marshall Tito. I am his pioneer, his follower, and I feel special while I recite poems dedicated to him and to our country, dressed in the pioneer's uniform: white blouse, blue skirt, red kerchief tied around the collar of my shirt, and a blue cap. My mother makes

sure that the cap does not slide off my head and secures it with hairpins. My performance is rewarded with loud applause. As I exit the stage, I glance at the audience and, in the back, I see my mother, her eyes shining with tears.

After the ceremony is over and the tribute to our grand nation has been paid, I play hide-and-seek in front of the school with my schoolmates, while my mother chats for a while with other mothers and listens to the praise for my performance. Everybody is proud and happy. I don't understand exactly why but later I will learn about the greatness of our President Tito who said no to the Soviet Union. Yes, we are a communist country because we care for our citizens, but we are a nonaligned nation, not a satellite nation of the Soviet Union as the rest of the East European countries are. We do not even geographically consider ourselves Eastern Europe. We are South Slavs as the name of our country clearly indicates.

I learn about the geographical and political structure of my country in school. It has six republics and two official alphabets, Latin and Cyrillic, and three official languages, Serbo-Croatian or Croat-Serbian, Slovenian, and Macedonian, and we are all Yugoslavs. I grow up in my neighborhood feeling happy and safe. I live with my mother and two brothers in a little apartment much like all the other children I know except that most of them have also a father, absent from my life. But since I don't know what it means to have a father, I don't miss him. I have everything else. I deem my mother the most beautiful and the best mother of all mothers I know. I am an excellent student and the teachers predict a bright future for me.

In the late 1960s, I am about thirteen when I travel for the first time to play in a tennis tournament in Subotica, a city in Serbia, close to the Hungarian border. My mother accompanies me. She wants me to meet some relatives from my father's side. They don't live in a small apartment as we do, but in a big house, furnished with antique furniture. Oil paintings decorate the walls and I think how real the lemons and apples on one painting seem to be. Other paintings are of some people and they are not interesting to me. Later I find out that the faces from the paintings are all my father's family.

My father's uncle and aunt are old, their hair silver, their movements elegant and stiff, and I feel intimidated. They complain about my father, the black sheep in the otherwise successful family. The aunt sighs as she complains about our President Tito who took away everything they had, and left them with so little. I look at her and at the carved massive furniture I have never seen before, and I don't understand what she means by "everything,"

DIANA ANHALT

GROWING ROOTS

Mexico City is magical, and I was eight years old. I had lived in New York from the day I was born, and I doubt anyone could have prepared me for a place so foreign with its palm trees and street corner musicians, its florid colors, and markets redolent of mangos and tortilla dough, its *burros* carting wood down the *Paseo de la Reforma*, the *charros* on horseback, lottery tickets, second-class buses, and car watchmen, the handshakes and cheek kisses, Spanish.

In any case, no one ever tried. My family fled the Bronx on November 15, 1950, the day I was supposed to be the apple blossom in our school pageant. I cried all the way to the airport and so did my four-year-old sister, though she didn't know why. "Why didn't you tell me? I had a singing part." My mother ignored me. My father plied me with chocolates. But once on the plane—I had never flown before—I stopped crying. The flight attendant pinned a Junior Stewardess pin to my chest and allowed me to follow her down the aisle handing out chewing gum. (Air travel was far more gracious in those days.) When a woman looked up from her knitting to ask, "Where are you going little girl?" I gave her the same answer my parents had given me. "I am going to California." "Well, dear, if you are going to California, you are on the wrong plane. This one is going to Mexico." I ran back to tell my parents, in case they didn't know.

Only years later would I question, and only years later would I realize that we had left the Bronx so precipitously because we had to. It was the height of the McCarthy era, and my father had run for public office on the American Labor Party (ALP) ticket. (By 1950, the ALP, a political pressure group, was accused of being a communist front and was under investigation by the FBI.) Mexico, I discovered, was one of only two countries that permitted the entry of U.S. citizens without passports—Canada was the other one—and the State Department routinely denied travel documents to the politically suspect.

When we first arrived, I was inconsolable. I missed my extended family, my friends, P.S. 106. "She'll be alright," I heard my mother tell my father. "Once you live long enough in any place, you grow roots." (Today I realize she was probably addressing her own apprehensions as well as mine.) But she was right. In the way of children, I adapted to the enormous changes taking place in my life within months.

No doubt adaptation had to have been far easier for me than it was for my parents. They were running scared. My mother instructed me: "If anyone asks what we're doing in Mexico, don't tell them." But even if I had wanted to, I couldn't, because no one had informed me. I was, they told me, to write "Zyke" in my notebooks rather than Zykovsky, our real surname. (They subsequently told me to change it back.) No doubt they feared the Mexican authorities, hand in hand with the American Embassy and the FBI, were keeping an eye on us along with the more than seventy families who had immigrated to Mexico in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s for political reasons. My parents were right to be cautious. We were under surveillance. However, they probably felt more secure knowing that in Mexico, unlike Canada, the rules could be bent and often were.

In spite of their fears, they sent me to the American School, closely allied with the U.S. government, where many of my classmates were the sons and daughters of embassy personnel or employees of large American companies. Half my school day was in English, the other half in Spanish. At the beginning, I understood little in this new language, but I remember learning a song about *la gloria de America*. Upon returning home, I told my parents how nice it was for Mexico to write a song praising the country of my birth. They explained to me that "America" included an entire continent, and the word was not synonymous with United States. (To this day, I grow impatient with using the two terms interchangeably and believe it says a great deal about the United States and its sense of self-importance.)

By the time I left Mexico for Michigan State University (MSU) in 1959, I had learned to kiss my friends hello and goodbye, to roll my tortillas around just about anything, and my Rs around words like *ferrocarril*. I knew the Spanish lyrics to the *corridos* and love songs, addressed my elders as *Señor* and *Señora*, had grown accustomed to three-course lunches, to *salsa* with every meal, to reading, writing and speaking Spanish, to having servants. I had become thoroughly adapted to Mexico.

True, much of what I had learned about Mexico disturbed me. I



VII WHERE DO WE BELONG?

BRIAN JUNGWITWATTANAPORN

ASIAN/AMERICAN

Uncomfortable silences follow questions on where I'm from, where I live, and which country or culture I feel a greater affinity for as I think through, yet again, how to reply. Sitting in exams during high school I would shade and erase the bubbles asking about ethnicity. I remember wishing for a simple classification, an identity I could mark. Before I began casually checking "other" on the various forms and documents life presents one with, I was in ethnographic fact an Asian-American. But I have credible claim on several other identifiers, some adopted, others imposed: Asian, American, the hyphenated grandeur of Asian-American, third culture kid, dual citizen, yellow, white, not really an American, the smudged AmerAsian.

People rarely realize that there are in fact two types of Asian-Americans. While you may think there are many more that fall under this umbrella as images of Chinese-, Indian-, Vietnamese-, Korean-, Pakistani- and so on Americans fill your head, from where I and the others like me sit, there are only two. There are Americans of Asian descent or of recent immigration who have parents of the same ethnicity, and then there are Asian-Americans of mixed parentage and dual nationality. While the former may use any of the charming hyphenated titles above, children of parents with differing nationalities end up with something that sounds like something less: the dreaded "half."

As half-American, half-something else we have different challenges. The first type of Asian-Americans have cultural markers for their identities. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* or Jhumpa Lahiri's books trace the conflict of being in one culture with roots in another and coming to terms with both. But within either culture, they have access and outlet to another, so they can be both, fully Asian and fully American. Being half this and half that, however, is the denial of something full. This is not to deny the assimilation challenges of American children with Asian parents, but at least they have their own books.

Growing up in Boca Raton, Florida, the world was a bubble. Learning later that it was an affluent area surprised me. As a child everything seemed normal, and I very much thought of myself as an American. I believed in our myths, knew our states and capitols, and cheered our teams in the Olympics. It never really occurred to me that I might be something else despite other children laughing and pointing, pulling the corner of their eyes, distorting them as they narrowed. As a child being an American in my community was playing baseball, speaking English, eating apple pie, and celebrating the Fourth of July. My family ate rice every day, an American mother's small concession to an Asian father. It never struck me as different. I thought everyone ate rice. The neighborhood agreed that the foreigners here were our Spanish-speaking Bolivian neighbors. Maybe it was Roberto's black hair and slightly darker skin, or just proximity, sharing our yards, but we got along with each other better than with the other kids. We never felt different though; we were always invited to the neighborhood's reindeer games. I never felt too out of place; like many children I didn't know things could be different.

I took my first trip to Thailand at the age of ten, and moved there when I was twelve. While our home in Florida was a rest stop for travelling Thais when I was a boy, going to Thailand was the first time I felt different. I felt both more American and less: I learned that my identity was flexible, a choice. Attending one of the few international schools in Bangkok, I was confronted with several emotions. I felt the boundaries that marked me as an American more surely. Living in Thailand, the land of my father's family, I also desired familiarity with it and with them. I wanted to learn about myself in a way I had lacked access to before.

Growing up away from the United States, my perspectives changed. Although I was still immersed in U.S. history, cheered U.S. sports teams, and returned for a short visit every year, I could feel a gap between myself and other American children. Reading the paper, watching news from the BBC, NHK, Deutsche Welle, and reading the local English dailies I saw my home, the United States, from the outside for the first time. It looked different. Having sold our house, we no longer had a base to return to in the U.S. We began to regard a trip to the U.S. as going home, no matter where we were headed. We no longer claimed a regional American identity, lumping the coasts together with the middle, telling strangers we were from "America" but unable to say where exactly. Living abroad facilitated this distancing while confirming a sense of place. I was an American from nowhere in particular.

THOMAS SPACCARELLI

INTERNATIONALISM

I grew up in Chicago in a working-class neighborhood of apartment buildings, bungalows and two-flats. We lived in a two-flat, a house that has two apartments, one on top of the other. My Italian grandparents lived on the first floor, and we lived on the second—upstairs, downstairs, if you will. Upstairs we were the typical American working-class family. My mother and father both worked. We had an abundance of food, good clothing, and a summer vacation every year that included a wide variety of sights: Miami Beach, Washington, D.C., the Badlands and Mt. Rushmore, etc. We were in many ways the American Dream family. My grandparents downstairs had minimal educations in Europe; both my parents had graduated from high school, and I was on my way to a college education and more. Upstairs we ate "American," watched the *Mickey Mouse Club* and *American Bandstand*, went to Friday-night activity night and sock hop at our high school, and tried every new fad that came along: Velveeta, Diet-rite Cola, and what have you. Downstairs, my grandparents spoke Italian and my grandmother fixed meals that were out of this world. We didn't really have a name for that kind of cooking back then, but when I think of it now, I know exactly what it was: gourmet!

My grandfather had come over to the U.S. when he was twelve years old. He moved around from job to job and state to state, but finally ended up in Chicago where he landed a permanent job distributing bread and pies to grocery stores. At first he used a wagon and a team of mules, and later progressed to a van. As seems appropriate, he was a life-long teamster—the real thing, you might say. My grandmother was born in Chicago, but her family moved back to Italy almost immediately after her birth. When her father died, my great-grandmother took her family to the south of France, so my grandmother grew up in Provence, speaking French in school. Although the family moved back to the U.S. when she was sixteen, grandmother Bambina (born on Christmas Day so appropriately named for the Christ

child) thought of herself as French. The basic situation of my childhood years then, was a typical American family upstairs, with my immigrant grandparents downstairs. I grew up hearing daily conversation in Italian and listening to my grandmother sing in French as she fussed and cooked in the kitchen.

It might be hard for some people to believe today, but back in the 1950's, America's public schools were top-notch. I attended the same school my father had attended, and indeed, I had the same first-grade teacher he had. When I got to fifth-grade the school began to offer Spanish classes, and I immediately found the subject I most enjoyed! Perhaps it was because I was always listening to other languages in my home, or perhaps it was the beauty of Miss Lucente, the young fifth-grade teacher I had a crush on. Either way, I took to Spanish immediately, and came to love every lesson, every dialogue, every verb form. Spanish classes continued throughout grammar school and then in high school also, where I dutifully came to have a crush on Miss Stotland, my favorite Spanish teacher ever. I became her assistant and even got to grade the quizzes of the other students. I also began my study of Latin since I thought that every educated person had to have some Latin. My family had no experience of college, so as the time approached to decide on where to go to school, I chose the local branch of the University of Illinois, largely a commuter college. I was chosen to participate in an honors program, and for that we had to choose either French or German. I chose German, and studied it on and off during the whole of my undergraduate years. I had so many courses in German that it was my minor field. Spanish, of course, was my major. Also during those undergraduate years, I was able to squeeze in one year of French, enough to start conversing with my grandmother in the language she most loved.

Back in the 1960's there were not very many American year-abroad programs, so I took a leave of absence from my college and registered for the Program in Hispanic Studies at the University of Granada in the south of Spain. This was the academic year of 1967-68. Franco was alive and well, and Spain was in the midst of the economic boom it had been hoping for since the end of its civil war in the 1930's. The year in Spain changed me forever. I immediately took to Spain's food and its customs, such as taking a break from one to four in the afternoon in order to have the main meal of the day and spend quality time with one's family. Despite the dictatorship, I liked the freedom I perceived in Spaniards, who were willing to talk about any topic, and usually had a very strong opinion about everything. It was in

HEATHER TOSTESON

LISTENING FOR BELONGING II

National identity within American democracy can be a blessing, a curse, or none of the above. Under some conditions, it can enhance participation, trust in government, and one's sense of obligation to the American community. I also find that there is a real yearning among the American people for a sense of unity amid our diversity—rather than a yearning for replacing diversity with uniformity. But national identity within American democracy can be a curse for society as a whole when our attachments are so strong that perceptions of deviation lead to threat and resentment. It can be a curse to members of minority groups who are attached to their American identity, but who also perceive that they suffer from discrimination. It is those people, I find, who are most likely to withdraw from politics and community.

Deborah J. Schildkraut

These survey results clearly indicate that the term "community" resonates with ordinary Americans when they are asked about the reasons for their political engagement. They do not tend to explain their activism in terms of self-interest, group interest, or selfless altruism; they are not acting on behalf of only themselves, their families, or other people. Instead, across a wide range of possible political acts, Americans choose to become engaged on behalf of their community. So, even if we do not yet know what the content of "community" is, —i.e., who belongs within the boundaries and how varied are the images of communities in people's imaginations—and how its political effects may vary, we do know community matters.

Cara Wong

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BELONGING

Discussions about immigration are, finally, about belonging. Psychologists and social psychologists have in the last fifteen years begun to discuss the need to belong as a drive as essential to us as drives for attachment and love—one that we are biologically primed for. It is not enough for us as

the most profoundly social of species to know that we are safe, loved. We also have a strong need to *feel* we fit in the human condition, that we are, at the most basic level, of the same stuff, the *right* stuff, as others. To feel we belong, we need, in general, deeper bonds not just more social contact. We need to feel that they will continue. Social interactions without these qualities can make us feel more alone.

Intersubjectivity

Daniel Stern, in his book *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*, discusses how we are biologically hard-wired for intersubjectivity, this capacity to feel in ourselves what others feel. Like love and attachment, this experience of shared mind is mutually created, it is not something that can take place individually. We are constantly readjusting and negotiating this world-in-common through shared present moments of mutual awareness, not just speaking and listening (non-verbally and also verbally) but also at the same time aware of the other person's participation in this moment, or as Stern would say, feeling that you feel that I feel.

This capacity for intersubjectivity, the mystery of my private self resonating with your private self, is the core of our social life. It is essential for our understanding of other's intentions, in fact that may be its most crucial purpose. Our use of it rises with any changes in social position, social ambiguity, our need for personal intimacy, our need to coordinate group action, and when our own identity is in question, for, as Stern says, "We need the eyes of others to form and hold ourselves together." We need it especially, I would suggest, when our social worlds are shifting more rapidly than we can control, as is the case for people facing changes in their communities because of large rapid changes in immigrant population, or when we are moving between various social worlds, which is the case with every immigrant and émigré whose story is included in this anthology.

Reciprocity

One of the intentions we pay most attention to as social beings is reciprocity. Jonathon Haidt writes, "Tit for tat appears to be built into human nature as a set of moral emotions that make us want to return favor for favor, insult for insult, tooth for tooth, and eye for eye." Social trust depends on our choosing the positive side of this response, encouraging and increasing the social reciprocity cycle. One way to do this is to acknowledge that the cycle