

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 Kasproicz 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

for this country. Tom Sternberg began life in Romania with Hungarian as his first language, survived World War II there, then emigrated to Israel when it became a state, then came to the U.S. alone when he was fifteen. We can see in his story how the lives and choices of many immigrants are driven by large historical forces and the vagaries of chance and luck. But why Sternberg stays also says much about him, his unique constellation of commitments. Plamen Russev, forty years later, describes the similarly large seismic shifts that brought him to Harvard, a nineteen-year-old student from Bulgaria, after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. He too discovers opportunities and freedoms here he did not know before, including the freedom of integrating more and more of his authentic self into his daily life.

Why Do We Go? We often assume that people who immigrate to the U.S. do so once and for all. This isn't always the case. Naturalized citizens often return to their country of origin. Their departure is not necessarily a rejection of their U.S. citizenship or cultural attachment. In the case of Yar Gonway-Gono, a woman born and raised in Liberia who learned to read at the age of eleven then went on to earn two master's degrees and a doctorate in the U.S. while raising five children, her decision to return to Liberia to help found a new community college speaks to her dedication to education, to the opportunities she experienced herself here in the U.S. and her desire to share them with young Liberians after decades of civil war.

Native-born citizens can also choose to leave the U.S. and spend the majority of their adult lives abroad, as is the case with both Alan Masters and Zoë Losada, both of whom have up until now chosen not to relinquish—or augment—their U.S. citizenship. Why does living in an expat community of Americans in a Costa Rican rainforest offer Masters and his family freedoms they can't find living in the U.S.? How does this intuitive and incremental decision shape the cultural allegiances of his sons? How does living in Venezuela shape Zoë Losada's understanding of her ties to the U.S., to her Baha'i faith?

Lauren Sergio (interviewed by her mother Alexandrina), who has sought and received Canadian citizenship, does not see this as a rejection of her U.S. citizenship, rather an amplification that permits her greater professional opportunity as a scientist and as a partner and parent in a same-sex marriage, a status which Canada as a nation recognizes. For Lydia, an American playwright living in Berlin, her decision to leave the U.S. and live in Berlin is reluctant, forced on her by the difficulty she and her same-sex partner experience because their relationship status is not acknowledged in

the U.S. She has not transferred her cultural allegiances and lives in personal fulfillment but in a painful cultural and social limbo in Berlin.

In this section, we find as well the stories of young people, brought here as children, who are deeply identified with the U.S. as a country and as a culture. However, they have either been deported, like Saad Nabeel, or face deportation, like José Variable, to countries to which they have had little exposure and for which they feel little attachment, ones in which they experience no feeling of belonging. They deeply desire to become U.S. citizens. On the other hand, although the costs of her illegal status are clear to Mirjana, an illegal immigrant from the former Yugoslavia who has lived in the U.S. for over twenty years, she has no desire for citizenship, rather would prefer to live as a permanent resident alien, loyal to the urbanity of her New York City environment rather than a national culture or government. Her alternative is to return to a country, Serbia, that did not exist when she came to the States. Mariana Figuera and her husband Andy Martin (part of the extended Losada family), citizens of Venezuela and Canada respectively, have found wonderful educational and professional opportunities that result in a desire to continue to work here, but not necessarily a desire to change citizenship. The U.S. is where they met and married, so if they must leave, their different citizenship statuses mean that they will need to rethink again the role of cultural allegiance and citizenship in their marriage.

Why Do We Commit? Commitment, we realize from the stories in this section, is both legal and emotional and it often takes far more time than we imagine. Anna Steegmann's essay, "The New (Torn) American" vividly describes the emotions she feels at becoming a U.S. citizen after twenty-eight years residence here and how being a dual citizen allows her to embrace the full range of her attachments. Murali Kamma, a native of India, describes his attempts to try and explain to other Indians both here and in India what made him decide to become a U.S. citizen at one of the least propitious times in its economic history. The reasons they decide to make the choice for U.S. citizenship differ as much as they do from each other. But their legal commitment makes other choices of attachment and belonging available to them, ones they didn't necessarily imagine or assume. Nikolina Kulidžan, another of our talented writers from the former Yugoslavia, explores the experience of having a pluralist environment suddenly fragment, the loss of attachment that goes with it, and the complexity of the attachment she develops over time to the U.S., one that, finally, allows for social optimism again.

To get a better understanding of commitment, the stories of people who do not want to commit to citizenship but who wish to remain as permanent resident aliens are of interest. Barbara Toews, a Russian Mennonite from Canada has lived in the U.S. as a permanent resident since the age of seven, never relinquishing her cultural allegiances to her Mennonite faith and culture and also to her Canadian citizenship. Her attachment to the U.S., often disregarded in her conscious thought, takes on more meaning as she realizes what it would mean if she returned to Canada and was no longer assured of ready access to the country in which she has lived for the vast proportion of her life. Elwood Dunn, who came to the U.S. as an asylee from Liberia, has lived and worked in the U.S. for over thirty years but has never chosen U.S. citizenship although his wife and all his four children are citizens through birth or naturalization. He explains the powerful commitment he has to his own country of origin, Liberia, as an attachment so deep that transferring it feels like soul death. If we were to live in another country, how long would it take us to transfer our loyalty? Would we ever choose to? Why?

What Does Being 'American' Have to Do with It? What does it mean to be "American," to *feel* "American"? The authors in this section explore different dimensions of this experience. Jodi Hottel's poems painfully describe the experiences of her mother and other Japanese-Americans interned in World War II and the influence of that experience on how not only they but also their children understand what that word means. Julija Suput, while on a trip to Korea, explores what it meant to her to be a Yugoslavian, to experience the dissolution of that cherished identity as an individual and as part of a country, and what it might mean for her, now, to understand herself as "American." Both Debra Gingerich, a native-born citizen, and her husband Zvonko Smlatić, also from the former Yugoslavia, when on a trip to France to see his family, begin to understand that becoming American is something that can sneak up on you, surprise you. Joe Kim is a native-born American, who defines himself as Korean in body but not, like his parents, first generation immigrants, as Korean in culture. His wife, Janet, Korean-born and a permanent U.S. resident, teases him that he is a banana, yellow on the outside and white on the inside. On the other hand, they both observe that he is far more sensitive about being Asian than she is. How they explore, and expand, their allegiances to their partner's country of birth is one of the more fascinating dimensions of their marriage. Diana Anhalt's parents fled to Mexico from the Bronx in the 1950s during the McCarthy period without in any

way renouncing U.S. citizenship or allegiance to the U.S. as a nation, rather to its policies. She explores the attachment she developed to the U.S. living in Mexico for over sixty years, and the attachments she discovers to Mexico, the country she always held at a little distance while living there, when she comes to live permanently in the States. In "A Feeling of Belonging" Heather Tosteson describes visiting a Somali strip mall in Stone Mountain, Georgia to explore some of the complex responses we can have as a native-born citizen when we engage with the reality of the waves of recent immigration, which in many places are so large they have substantially changed the nature of social cohesion in a community. Aurora Ferrer appeals to an understanding of American immigration broad enough to include all of our histories, all of our futures.

Where Do We Belong? In these memoirs and interviews, we have an interesting group of globalists by birth or by choice—and again we invite you to feel how those two conditions differently affect our feelings of belonging. Brian Jungwiwattanaporn talks about how, the son of a Thai father and American mother raised in both countries, he has always felt at a cultural disadvantage in both and how, over the years, he has learned to accept, with a struggle, his two inheritances as an amplification of identity, not a diminution. Paige Higbie describes the culture in which she does feel she belongs, that of the TCK (transcultural kid). We hear in her account, which is nostalgic, evocative, courageous and unsteady in its perspective (when do we use I, we, they, you?), the power and fragility of this fluctuating identification. Marcelle Kasproicz describes how she juggles French, Italian, and U.S. identifications, some more successfully than others. In a joint interview, members of the Losada family (which includes a Venezuelan husband, a wife who is a U.S. citizen, their two children, who are dual citizens, and their infant grandson) explore the variations in their individual understandings of belonging and national and cultural identity. This meditation even extends to the next generation as they contemplate the five citizenships currently or potentially available to their newest member.

Emily Beeson shares her fascinating journey around the world soon after college on a traveling fellowship to visit Mennonite expat communities of U.S. or Canadian origin in the Dominican Republic and Paraguay and how she begins to understand how her own Mennonite heritage has affected her understanding of citizenship and cultural attachment. Thomas Spaccarelli, who has received dual citizenship from Italy on the basis of his ancestry and

may apply for it in Spain on the basis of extended residency there, describes this accrual of citizenship as a natural development of his own experiential understanding of what it meant for him to grow up native-born and indisputably American in a multi-generational house with immigrant grandparents.

In the *Afterword* by Heather Tosteson, "Listening for Belonging: II" again we try to provide various holding contexts for these stories, ones that invite us to understand the questions we face now as a society that is *glocal*, where simple definitions of national identity may not apply, but local experiences of cohesive society need to. For our abiding question is very local and very personal. It is what Dewey would call making democracy a commonplace of living. How do we, with all this diversity, all this migration, all these constellations of belonging, create an experiential world in which we can create lasting bonds with our neighbors, bonds that acknowledge our differences and also, most importantly, acknowledge our mutual responsibility to create, through this acceptance, a new experience of belonging in the here and now. We emphasize this because there is a great cost not only to ourselves but also to those around us of living—often for years—in a place that we never acknowledge as bedrock real, especially in a democratic society whose major assumption is that we are all equally responsible for the structure and quality of the society in which we live. *Now*.

I WHY DOES IT MATTER?