The Politics and Poetics of Belonging:

An auto-ethnographic exploration of personal identity and family

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in Anthropology

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Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.¹

¹ Lyric from Chilean folk artist Violeta Parra's song *Gracias a La Vida* first released on her 1966 album *Las Últimas Composiciones*. Loosely translated to "Thank you to the life that has given me so much."

Acknowledgments

This project is dedicated to and in memorandum of my great-aunt Eva who introduced me to Robert Frost's poetry and encouraged me to write.

When I told her I didn't know where to start, she told me "Start with what you know."

To my parents Jeff and Shary, thank you for bringing our family together and for supporting our decision to go to Chile.

To my sister Julia, thank you for always being there and for making me laugh.

To Inger and Siri, thank you for always making your selves and your stories available to me.

To Aunt Nanna, thank you for your late night emails of encouragement, your advice to drink earl grey tea, and for always taking photographs.

To my friends at Wesleyan and at home, thank you for your feedback, and your patience.

For helping me make sense of it all:

Anu, my sincerest thanks for taking a chance with this project and for helping tame a windy voice.

Manisha and Larry, thank you for your insight and helpful comments.

ANTH400, thanks for supporting beginnings that are now middles and ends.

"If a story is in you, it has got to come out."

William Faulkner

Introduction

As humans, we are not programmed to stay isolated, even in the most unfamiliar of settings. Something calls our attention. We continue in spite of the disorientation, put on a brave face, and interact, participate, learn. It's impossible, I've found, to leave / return after travel the same person. A process of exchange naturally follows introductions; the five months I spent in Chile in 2009 during a semester abroad are testament to that. Every day interactions and rituals deepened relationships that began with a hug, a kiss on one cheek.

Standing at the Customs window at the Santiago Airport I reflected on my time in Chile. A teammate of mine from the University of Chile soccer team waved goodbye and blew a kiss as I approached the window. I waved back and proceeded forward. I presented my United States passport to the young man behind the glass. He asked that I return my temporary student visa; things were back in bureaucratic order. *Pasa, no más.* Go ahead; that's all, he said, waving his hand. I could return as I came, as far as he was concerned.

A complimentary copy of the New York Times greeted me at my seat. I opened to the sports section and found an article about Tim Wakefield, the veteran pitcher of the Red Sox. If there was anything to signal I was going home, this was it. But even after updating myself on the goings on of the Major League Baseball season, I felt the familiar lump in my throat as I looked out my seat window. Another late night flight to Miami incited the same emotional response as the one three years earlier had. As our altitude increased, the city revealed itself as a tessellation of distancing shapes, slowly disappearing into nothing but solitary lights, an indistinct

urban constellation. The blinking red lights beneath the wing blurred as tears welled in my eyes. I was leaving again.

At the onset of this project my experiences of belonging and not belonging came across in clear distinction to me: a here and a there, but the borders are not so clear. After my first trip back to Chile in 2006, when my twin sister Julia and I met our biological family for the first time, I returned to Cambridge feeling unsettled. Something residual kept me up at night. I would get up and splash cold water on my face, but it didn't help. Trying to understand my relationship with Chile from afar wasn't working so I returned for a semester abroad in the fall of 2009, better prepared for the distinct cadence of every day life in another country. Again, I made another trip down Chile's coast to visit my biological family but this time returned to the sweltering summer heat in Cambridge feeling less panicked. More time in Chile and more time with my biological family helped to dispel my notions of singular belonging.

After driving back from Logan Airport home after my second trip to Chile, I stood in front of our house and felt the intangible weight of being away slowly dissipate. I stepped through the doorway and felt confident that I was home. A deep sigh escaped my lips at the top of the stairs. I automatically glanced around the room to see if anything had changed, made a quarter turn to see what, if anything, was on the dining room table. Maybe some mail? No. Everything seemed normal. My dad's music wafted into the living room from his study. Fresh cut flowers filled the vase in the hallway. This, for me, is home on a daily basis, existing almost by default. Only when its routine is broken, does its presence resonate.

My previous definitions of home, identity and belonging have shifted in their stability as I have explored the implications of my travels. However, there are convictions that have remained unchanged.

When I think of home I think of the place where my family has lived – houses on Franklin Street and Perry Street, the three-story white Victorian house that we moved to when I was seven. I think of other places that over time have become secondary homes like my Aunt Nanna's house on Long Island where Christmas dinner is held every year; my grandmother Siri's apartment in Soho. When I visit her, natural light floods through the windows waking me from sleep on the bed she has told me I am always welcome to stay in. A brief moment of disorientation occurs, but I remember almost immediately, reassured by the familiar sight of her painting supplies and color swatches, that this, too, is home. I think also of friends' houses, soccer fields, parks where we used to play kickball and have snowball fights - all confined within the borders of our neighborhood of Cambridgeport, right off of Mass. Ave. the main road that runs through the city of Cambridge. Belonging not only involves an immediate family but also neighbors, friends of local proximity, even those who live in other countries. Belonging in that sense transcends borders to incorporate new places that are experienced, imagined and remembered. Before 2006 I would have never thought about claiming Chile as home, as a place I belonged.

Now, however, I think of Chile, the country where I was born. I think of the faces around the red and white checked tablecloth in my biological grandmother's home in Nueva Imperial, the surreal experience of seeing a family resemblance in a face other than my sister's after nineteen years. In the small town in southern Chile

where they live, the brightly painted walls stand in adamant opposition to the almost perpetual grey skies of Nueva Imperial. I think of my biological mother Nancy and after my initial instinct to analyze every word of our few conversations I think of her kitchen, warmed by the wood stove in the corner, desperate to ground my experiences in a place. I remember her pushing my shoulders down and straightening my posture. She told me that I get my broad back from her. I remember her slightly kinked hair and swollen hands. And although we never talked of it, I imagine how difficult the decision to give my sister and me up for adoption must have been.

When people ask me about my trip it is hard to know what to say. Some people want to know about studying abroad, others inquire what it was like to meet my Chilean family. Talking about Chile as a country is easier than talking about family because my relationship with my Chilean family doesn't lend itself to simple recounting. I had hoped for a happy ending after my second trip in 2009, but our relationship remains complicated, understandably so. Over dinner one night, someone brought up the attacks of September 11th. Julia and I both reacted strongly and were surprised to hear that family members supported Osama bin Laden's tactics. The conversation spiraled out of control as people voiced anti-Semitic opinions. Julia got up and left me at the table; the imaginary world where we all agreed immediately collapsed, replaced by the unavoidable reality that we were in fact different.

In the last few years, my identity has shifted to accommodate the experiences of living abroad and meeting new family members. The process of understanding these experiences through writing has helped me integrate these new experiences, to expand my various places of belonging. And so the structure of this project reflects

the components of my identity that have changed. Framed by sites of belonging - the family, the nation, and, more broadly, the home - I challenge the naturalized ties of relatedness that posit singular belongings between people within families and people within nations. Instead of an identity that is 'rooted' in either biology or territory, I propose a rhizomatic identity (Malkki 1992), which like the plant from which it gets its name consists of networks of relations spanning across space, allowing for multiple belongings.

A rhizomatic identity entails a constant process of re-formation because the contexts in which it is situated are many. At once one can feel at home, belonging, and later feel estranged, removed. The constant dialectic between belonging and non-belonging as a member of a family or a nation, and what this means for identity formation, is the focus of this thesis. Through speaking with my extended American family whose identities belongings and non-belongings, the restless quality of identity surfaced over and over again. Stuart Hall writes, "perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation...", informed by "the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" (1990: 222-223). My choice to include the spoken words of my grandparents is at once an attempt to formalize certain oral histories as well as a rhetorical choice to place my voice in the lineage of histories to which I believe I belong.

Hall's words of wisdom resonate throughout the entire thesis. Writing, like identity formation, is and has been a process; this is not the whole story by any

means. I consciously decided to engage with my father's family, namely my grandparents; their stories merge with their children's, meld with mine. To delve into each person's narrative completely would consume too many pages and so they appear fragmented throughout this thesis as reminders that such reflection is impossible without the support of others. The present is impossible without them.

This is my attempt, albeit partial, at re-membering.

As much as I wish it were complete, the discussion of family, place, belonging and identity as defined in this thesis, is partial, an unavoidable product of the ethnographic method. James Clifford states it just right. "Even the best ethnographic texts are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control. Ethnographic truths are thus inherently *partial* – committed and incomplete" (1986: 7). I have chosen certain stories to tell and certain people to profile. Certain facts are laid out for both your benefit and mine, as it is difficult to keep track of the narrative when one doubles and redoubles back in time across generations and national borders. And so, a disclaimer: there will be tangents, read perhaps by some as a miscalculation by the author, but I assure you they are valuable.

"Doing ethnography is like trying to read ...a manuscript -- foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherent, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior" (1973, 10). Geertz articulates so poignantly the unwieldy, unpredictable nature of writing and of choosing what to write about. In an effort to capture as much as I can I decided to use a hybridized approach.

Blurring different genres of writing including memoir, family narrative as recorded through oral history, creative non-fiction and theoretical texts, the auto-ethnographic voice I have chosen to employ strives first to connect my personal experiences to familial histories, and then connect these personal expressions to global processes of coming together and moving together. More specifically, I address adoption, nation-making, place-making, and migration.

My personal experiences are constructed from memory and journal entries from my time abroad. The self, in this case the author, "is not only being articulated but also being examined, transformed and reaffirmed" (Wang and Brockmeier 2002: 45). Given this, I strive to keep alive the tension between inward and outward reflection, the particular with the general, the local with the global.

Native or Not?

Addressing my own positionality is itself a complicated issue. My personal investment in this project derives from the simple fact that I am writing about my family, which includes my adoptive family and my biological family in Chile. Autoethnographic projects focus on what is ostensibly familiar, one's self or one's family. Therefore this auto-ethnographic project begs the question: is this native anthropology of some form?

Delmos Jones believes what differentiates native anthropology from nonnative anthropology is a reconfiguration of the insider/outsider dichotomy (1970). In non-native anthropological studies, the outsider enters a field of study with no prior intimate knowledge. The insider is observed from a supposed objective stance and is then analyzed with the outsider's ideological categories and framework. Native anthropology confuses this process. The outsider is also the insider because he or she is native to the field of study and thus has an arguably easier time gaining access to local information. What happens to this dichotomy when the idea of 'native' itself is troubled?

One might assume that I am native to Chile because I was born there. Following Jones' logic I would have an "insider's" instinct and knowledge. My experiences abroad prove otherwise. My own ambivalence towards the term 'native' further complicate Jones' discussion. Though I was physically recognized as Chilean, the second I opened my mouth to speak I was recognized as a foreigner. Jones' definition of native assumes a territorialized experience in a 'native' place, yet I am fluent in the linguistic and cultural practices of Cambridge, Massachusetts. I feel 'native' having grown up there. I feel native to my American family, having grown up in the same houses, listening to their stories and traveling to visit family members who live far away. The emotional bonds I have created with people are solidly located in Cambridge. Even though the access that I had to my relatives' personal stories was indeed privileged, like Jones suggests is the case for native anthropologists, it was partial as well. As I address in Chapter 3, this is a condition neither the anthropologist nor family member can remedy. The all access treatment Jones describes native anthropologists as benefiting from does not exist.

Whether studying one's own community (Gwaltney 1976) or one's own family (Kikumura 1986), the native anthropologist's unique positionality (and assumed membership) requires reflexivity. One's self cannot be exempt from

analysis. Anthropologist Gina Ulysse writes in the introduction to *Downtown Ladies*, a study of Jamaican located in her native region of the Caribbean, "Reflexivity would be the maestro. It would connect everyone and everything that gathered within my perception at the crossroads of observation" (2007: 7). Ulysse's image of a crossroads resonated with me because as the writer, ethnographer, interviewer and observer not only my narrative, but also my family members' narratives, I find myself at an intersection of lives.

I have done my best to convey my observations as accurately as possible, down to minute details. Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughold's coined the term "ethnography of the particular", which concentrates on every day interactions. My use of family narratives echoes her focus on the particular by presenting larger discourses on familial and national belonging as visible in every day life as part of individual identities and practices.

The process of researching often times painful family histories required me to confront the emotionally charged bridge that Ruth Behar (2007) describes crossing when returning as part of the diaspora to Jewish Cuba, the site of her "abandoned childhood" (1997: 141). She advises writer who mix academic endeavors with matters of the heart to keep a "tender minded toughness" and to "write vulnerably" (1997: 6, 16), both of which I have kept in mind while writing this thesis. Lingering, however, is a fear that something important is missing, that my experiences as presented don't quite make sense, or that I have overlooked an idea, a vignette, or worse a person. To assuage such anxiety, I have kept Clifford's words in mind. This study of the self and of family, more specifically how one comes together, could

begin at any number of starting points. There are multiple beginnings, in-betweens and endings. This is but one representation supported by a specific theoretical framework that is outlined below, chapter by chapter.

Chapter Outlines

Relating the Family

The family as an institution is the first site of belonging I investigate. I have always felt strong that I belong to and with my immediate family, understood in its most simplistic terms - mother, father, and sibling: Shary, Jeff and Julia. However, my understanding of the family is different from mythologized popular representations. Superficially, the family is thought of as existing unilaterally in the world as modern and uncontested, as composed of a two parent (of opposite sexes) household with biological children, a car, or maybe two. What also goes largely uncontested is the idea that the family and home are private, removed from the market forces of the public realm where capitalism is perceived to most overtly manifest. The family as a unit of belonging and a locus of personal identity formation is engaged in this thesis through kinship studies that denaturalize some of these assumptions, namely that belonging to a family means belonging biologically. I draw upon studies that broaden the terms of family, as they exist contemporarily (Weston 1997, Carsten 2000a), in order to position myself in opposition to traditional anthropological discourses on kinship (Goody 1969, Schneider 1984).

In order to further oppose the argument that a natural and thus biological connection determines familial identity I draw a parallel between family making and

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Judith Butler's deconstruction of gender as an individual identity that is a natural and given essence (1999). Like Butler's notion of gender, I argue that families are constituted through repeated rituals and are thus performative. Instead of assuming an essentialized belonging on the basis of 'nature', I argue that family is created. People are "kinned" (Howell 2003) through every day rituals that create new forms of relatedness and thus expand the restrictive and exclusory terms of a biologically related family. My Danish grandmother Inger's memories are interspersed throughout as testaments to the important ritual of story telling as a way of re-membering² family.

In this chapter I also discuss my specific experience of transnational adoption, which as the means by which my family came together challenges the assumption of biological relatedness. The work of author Janet Carsten has been influential for its proposed new idioms of relatedness that prioritize social over biological relationship. Carsten also directly addresses transnational adoption, showing how it can be a process of fragmentation that uproots a child from a country and family of origin and relocates them elsewhere, a narrative that contributes to an incomplete biographical past that burdens many of the adopted children who inform her study (2000b).

My aim is to illustrate how through ties of love and through repeated acts of belonging like re-membering people, families are constructed across space (not limited to immediate locality) and time (multi-generational). Given this, the gaps Carsten perceives as informative to the adopted child's identity are filled with

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² I use the term "re-membering" to suggest that through the practice of remembering, one is also simultaneously *membering*, as in naming or numbering, the people who constitute a family.

histories of the adoptive family's members. Conversations with my grandmother Inger about the importance of story telling, my parents' story of traveling to Chile to adopt Julia and me, and my own reflections on traveling to Chile and meeting my biological family support the claim that family, as I have experienced it, provides a crucial function for its members as a site of belonging that is overlooked by dominant understandings that limit its constituents to biologically related people.

Imagining Chile and Other Places: Making Claims to Countries

If family is one key site for forming and negotiating identity and belonging, the nation is another. De-essentializing the naturalized link between place and identity is the objective of the second of three chapters, in which place equates to nation. I begin with the narrative of my grandmother Siri's experience of multiple relocations within Europe and her eventual immigration to the United States to illustrate how multiple relationships in and with nations inform identity. While interweaving her territorialized movement with my childhood practice of imagining nations, I cite discourses of nationalism, beginning with Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) to show the way political constructs try to inform identity through nationalism.

The trajectory of my thought sought to situate individual experiences within contemporary trends and processes that engaged the idea of imagining. Anderson's concept of imagining was the first to challenge my straightforward understandings of nation and belonging. I explore how the means by which people maintain ties to places have changed in the latest phase of globalization (Appadurai 1996); how these

ties link specific communities like the diaspora to places of origin (Tololyan 2007); as well as, how nationalism is fostered outside of the place of origin (Glick Schiller and Georges 2002). Influential to the writing of this chapter is Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson's work, which destabilizes the highly privileged notion of place as a component of identities, both individual and collective (1997). Instead of thinking about identity as rooted in territories, I, following Malkki (1992), imagine identity formation as rhizomatic relocation.

Experiences from Siri's narrative highlight the plurality of ties one person can have to multiple places, as her childhood consisted of near continuous relocations. In contrast to her territorialized movement in one country and then another, my experience of imagining other places as a child was deterritorialized and informed by my local setting. My imagining of Sweden, Denmark, Poland (the birthplaces of my grandparents) and Chile was shaped by people's presence or absence in my life. In my experience, language, cultural artifacts and novels substituted for having a family in Chile with whom to locate a claim of belonging.

Siri's experience of multiple belongings in multiple countries and my experience of an imagined, deterritorialized belonging attest to the fact that belonging to a place can precede (through imagination) and exceed (through relocation) a single set of national boundaries. The idea of an essential nation-based identity, singular at that, is troubled in this chapter. I use and associate with Anne-Marie Fortier's notion of movement-based identity instead.

Irreconcilables

In the concluding chapter of this thesis I explore the ways in which identities are subject to structuring of the state, namely through practiced rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion. Practices of decontextualization like displacement, occupation and genocide contest the notion of origins because the state plays an often violent role in the severing of these ties. I explore how identities shift and re-form when imagined and / or physical return to places of origins is impossible. I begin with my grandfather George's narrative to illustrate two points. First, to echo Timothy Burke's work on the limits of obtainable knowledge when constructing an individual's narrative (2009). And secondly, to show the ways in which individual and cultural identities reform in response to political upheaval.

Examples of decontextualization from recent history include the Jewish refugees created by Nazi state policies, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Rwandan genocide. They all, in respective ways, reiterate the variety of ways individual and collective identities respond to a denial of territory (or territorial belonging) by the state. Such experiences dispel the notion of home/land as a unilaterally safe place. Feminist scholars Chandra Mohanty and Biddy Martin challenge the romanticized ideal of home, casting it instead as a site of non-belonging and narratives of exclusion (2004). I engage their work to offer an experience different from my own.

Home as a site of *non*-belonging also informs identity. Authors and artists utilize different medium to present re-formed identities in response to experiences of displacement. Through the hybridized language of Spanglish, Gloria Anzaldua claims

the space between the US/Mexico border as her home in Borderlands/*La Frontera* (1999). Edward Said and Mona Hatoum identify with the experience of exile from Palestine and Lebanon respectively. Said's "homelessness" (1992) permeates all facets of his life and writing (Said 2000, Lentz 1994), while Hatoum's is most evident in her art (2000). All of these examples speak to the regenerative and re-forming processes identities go under when faced with violent and destabilizing experiences of involuntary decontextualization.

I close the thesis with an ethnographic moment that was the impetus for this project on identity, family and belonging. In this moment, I felt that everything that legally constituted me as a person, my belonging in certain places and to certain people and not others, was "capable of dissolution" (Doty 2002: 67); I was both "here and gone" (*ibid*), a sentiment that resonates with different intensities in the texts cited in the final chapter.

Methods and Their Implications

For a film class that I took in Chile last spring I wrote a paper about the theories of André Bazin, a French filmmaker. In Spanish he is quoted as saying, "no puede abrazar la realidad entera: siempre se le escapa por algún lado" (2004: 302), which translates literally to, "you cannot hug reality in its entirety; it always escapes from one side or another."

In spite of the partial nature of ethnographic film or writing, I believe it plays an important role in recovery. The ethnographic method of reading and writing disparate stories, capturing them and putting them on paper is what illuminates identity, gives voice. The dynamic of finding a voice and telling a story is a huge part

of re-forming an identity. Yet identities themselves tremor and rift the moment you give them closure, as they are in constant dialogue with their multiple contexts. I have found that recording their re-formations is best attempted in stages, first through dialogue and second put on paper.

I have recorded my family's oral histories and documented many stories as a means to ensure continuity, a survival of sorts. The process of writing and integrating the narratives of family members with mine has both complicated and clarified my experiences of belonging and not belonging to families and countries. Reading them in context and in conjunction with anthropological texts reveals the many coordinates of belonging, and through it, the ever-shifting interconnectedness of identity, people and place.

I find it necessary to acknowledge that the process of finding/finding out can be unsettling. Intellectualizing transnational, diasporic experiences led me to the nation as a site of belonging. Interrogating the experience of transnational adoption as a specific experience of transnational movement led me to the family as a site of belonging. Even within these rigidly defined entities, notions of relatedness have provided me with a framework to understand my experiences of belonging to one country over another, or to one family and not another. Differing contexts are at the heart of this thesis. Many of the narratives included are of involuntary decontextualization; this is the experience of displacement, of exile. Lives are thus lived fragmentarily in multiple contexts, which is why the metaphor of a horizontally growing as opposed to a singularly rooted plant applies.

In some sense I chose to re-contextualize myself by returning to Chile and embarking on this project. My understanding of my own multiple contexts - my adoption, my extended families and my connection to other countries – has, for the first, substantial time manifested itself in writing. It appears, with a certain wavering of confidence in the following pages.

"And one by one the nights between our separated cities are joined to the night that unites us."

Pablo Neruda³

Chapter 1 Relating the Family

³ I came across this quote tacked on a bulletin board in a café in Valparaiso, Chile. I scribbled it down on a piece of paper, and am unsure of the original source.

Photographic Memories

During a phone conversation with my grandmother Inger, we explore the idea of gatherings as a means by which our family came, and continues to come together. Thousands of photos document the trips that have been taken since my childhood. There have only been a few, as it is uncommon for Inger's extended Danish family to come here, likewise for us to travel there. Referencing particular photographs triggered stories of coming together.

I remind her of the photo of Julia and me in the seated trailer of a bike in the rose garden of our cousins' house in Denmark.



From l-r, Nils, Jeff, Shary, Nina, William and Julia. Christiania, Denmark 1991.

"Oh, yes! Yes, I've seen that photo," she remarks. I imagine her sitting on the reclining chair on her balcony, observing the migration of birds as they return after wintering down south, calm in her solitude. We haven't seen each other since

Christmas and hearing her voice somehow reassures me that next Christmas she'll be there too.

I remind her of my favorite photo of Valdemar, my cousin, and me, the one that always come up in conversation over holidays when we talk about our first trip to Denmark. He is bending over to buckle my shoes. The image of a tall, broad shouldered, blonde Dane hunching over to fasten the tiny clasp of my shoe is almost comical.

"And he did it so tenderly," Inger lightheartedly laughs, remembering the trip she also made with us to Copenhagen when Julia and I were five. We had bowl haircuts and boney knees. William and Valdemar were the epitome of cool, sporting sunglasses and Wayne's World t-shirts. We didn't quite understand the concept of Christiania, the autonomous commune in the heart of Copenhagen where they lived, but we reveled in being paraded around in the bike's trailer, animatedly pushed from house to house to meet neighbors and friends.

"How they adored you!" Inger exclaims. And it was reciprocated. Julia and I returned to school that fall with stories to tell of the amusement parks our cousins took us to, the games we played in the garden, and the colorful, curly straws we used to drink Danish soda.

In school that year we were asked to make a family tree, but our international family doesn't lend itself to simple root and branch metaphors. Trying to account for divorces and remarriages is difficult enough. Instead, Julia and I decided to make a map, tracing routes that mimicked our travels. We have family here; we'd say and point to Copenhagen, and *here*. Another finger would cover the capital star of

Stockholm, and *all over here*, a hand would wave in front of the United States. From one city to the next, we sketched the travels our grandparents had made years before. Grandpa George and Aunt Eva came from Warsaw and arrived in New York City. Grandma Siri is from Stockholm, landed in Baltimore. Inger, my dad's stepmother, is from Copenhagen, and she, too, also arrived in New York City. Corresponding red pen lines crossed the Atlantic, and another traveled northward, hugging the coast of first South America and then the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. That line was us.

Shorter trajectories traced my parents' travels. My dad was born and raised in the Bronx; my mom was born in Auburn, New York and raised in Gambier, Ohio. Their lines merged at the University of Pennsylvania's campus in Philadelphia, uniting as one before continuing to where all of the lines converge: a star next to an emboldened word, Boston. Our map ended there, conceding to the easy endings of state capitals, but for a more accurate account zoom in a little, to Cambridge, the city to Boston's north, to the corner of Franklin Street and Hancock Street. There is a Japanese maple in the front yard; the door and mailbox are red. This was the first house I ever lived in, the locus for my immediate family experience.

Recurring images assured me as a child, "Yes, this is home." I brushed my teeth in the morning standing next to my best friend and twin sister, giggling as toothpaste ran down our chins; we clambered downstairs to see Danish furniture in well-lit living rooms. Our soccer cleats, backpacks, and baseball caps littered the kitchen floor. Outside of the red front door was a garden with a stone bench that we liked to sit on.

These are the sounds and images of childhood that one tends to dismiss with a sigh. One writes about them in past tense. I was tempted to begin my discussion of family here, in this house with the wood stove and polished floors because it is perhaps the most obvious. Upon second thought, however, I realized that might confine my family to a certain place and certain people, when in fact the people who raised me are multiple. Parents loved unconditionally; aunts lulled us to sleep and read us poetry; grandparents applied sunscreen and taught us how to catch. In their repetition, these scene and acts of family making assured me, and continue to assure me, "Yes, this is family."

Any number of photos, conversations or memories could each, in different nuanced ways, present my family true to form and so some are included to broaden the terms of experience of family. In the process of narrativizing my own family (in all of its journeys, locations and offshoots) through re-membering, I challenge the common representation of familial composition predicated on biological relatedness. Stories like my parents' trip to Chile to adopt my sister and me clearly articulate family through the relatedness between multiple places. Other family stories feature people who may be isolated in time (past generations) or space (geographically stationary), but who are made transitory and present through practices of retelling, remembering.

Through a gathering of people, stories and practices, the discontinuities often associated with the process of adoption are filled, revealing the cohesive nature of my family as I have experienced it.

Coming Together

In May of 1988 Chile was five months away from voting 'no' to Augusto Pinochet's continued rule in the national plebiscite. Soldiers with machine guns still stood on the street corners. This is one of my first images of Chile described to me by my parents as they recounted their trip to Santiago to adopt my sister and me. I, a committed scribe of the stories that brought us together, sat listening, furiously typing in order to keep up.

It wasn't clear from the beginning that Chile was the country they would adopt from, nor that they would adopt internationally at all. My parents started with the idea of adopting domestically but found it difficult to overcome the bureaucratic impediments and the simple fact that they are of different religious traditions. At the time there were no adoption being made in Europe or in Russia, though they would become available later. My father had traveled to South America on business and felt, at the very least, it was a place he had been and there was a possibility that a child might resemble him and share his coloring. My parents' social worker pointed them in the direction of Chile, assuring them adoptions were being conducted smoothly despite the tense political situation. Her suggestion connected us, as a family, from that moment on to another country.

For my parents, Chile represented somewhere new and unfamiliar, with an unpublicized history in the United States. With time these connotations revealed themselves as temporary as Chile slowly, fragment by fragment, entered our collective imaginations.

"We'd only had a picture - a perfect little baby with a big smile, and another with a huge squall. We called you Comedy and Tragedy." The practices of *membering* a family preceded our first meeting. The actual adoption took five months to process.

On December 20th, the day after my sister and I were born, my parents received a phone call asking them if they wanted twins. Yes, our family would comprise four.

The flight down was long, they remember, filled with last minute cramming of basic Spanish phrases.

"When we got off the plane there was a taxi driver waiting for us with our name, BERG, written in Sharpie on a white sign. He dropped us off at our hotel. Dad tried to talk to him, but no words were spoken. My only comfort was that things were arranged. Someone was meeting us. Or so we thought," my mom remembers.

Harry, the adoption agency's Chilean connection was nowhere to be found. The clerks in the lobby had no knowledge of him. His phone number was not working. He would call; my parents would be out. My dad recalls the uncertainty. "I got the impression that we were living in a spy movie, that things would just happen without us knowing why, without us having any input or communication." For a few days, my parents played phone tag on foreign soil.

Finally, they received a phone message from Harry telling them to be in their room at 8 pm of that day. A ring of the doorbell announced the awaited. On the other side of the door was Cecilia Elena, another Chilean contact of the agency with whom my parents had never had any previous contact. Next to her was her nephew, carrying Julia and me. Neither spoke English.

"We couldn't communicate anything important through words, so we stood there, overwhelmed, just knowing how important it was. Us standing there, you being there. You were wearing white knitted outfits with hats. One of the hats had slipped down a delicate face. It was a time without words." My mom still has the diagram Fernando, Cecilia Elena's nephew, drew. The big baby gets fed a little more than the little one, it shows. The little one gets fed at 8. May 10th was our first night together, the day now celebrated as our adoption day. No one slept a wink. We would silently introduce ourselves to each other in the eerie, telling quiet of that Santiago night.

The next day and a half in Santiago was spent tending to formalities at the US Embassy. "Until we got on the airplane and the door closed in Santiago we were afraid that something would fall through," my mom remembers – a fear exacerbated by a cold we had picked up. "You came with colds," my dad told me. "And I was very worried about that. I was worried that the adoption wouldn't go through because they might think we weren't taking good care of you." Doubt is one of the most palpable feelings conveyed when listening to my parents describing their story. "It usually starts differently," my mom said during the same conversation, referring to the creation of a family, a tinge of melancholy detectable in her voice. "To go so far and trust that this was going to work. All we had were little fragments of a story and a picture."

Stories such as my parents' reflect the multisitedness of our family, a characteristic that did not cater to elementary school assignments that asked students to illustrate a linear progression from child to parent to grandparent to great-grandparent. If we didn't know our biological parents, how could we know where our

grandparents were from, what their names were? Unsure of our "roots", we traced routes instead (for clear distinction see Clifford 1994). We sat quietly in biology as other students flipped pennies to determine the likelihood their children would have brown eyes. We could only guess what color eyes our biological mother had. When asked by the teacher why I was waiting, I answered, "I know what color eyes my *mom* has, but I'm adopted."

Who my family consisted of was never a question. Adopted at five months I have been raised by and have lived with my parents since the day my Aunt Nanna picked us up from Logan Airport in May of 1988. We celebrate the day every year, as a reminder of how our family was created, how family *is* created, rather than taken as an already constituted entity for its biological definition.

The means by which our family came together deviated from conventional, biological constructions of family. As a result of our nontraditional beginning, I have come to understand family as an open-ended experience of making and remaking, as something constituted through rituals (like re-membering, storytelling, and holiday) rather than through blood ties. Practices of making family like story telling and remembering make people I never met or have never seen accessible, yet according to dominant cultural definitions our relationships do not adhere to the accepted idioms that privilege biological relatedness.

I have chosen to engage kinship and the family unit as a part of this thesis to illustrate how the family, more specifically my family as I have experienced it, provides a crucial function for its members as a complex and shifting site of belonging and identity formation that cannot be reduced to biologically related

people. Through relationships based in love and through repeated acts of belonging like re-membering people, families are constructed and reconstructed across space (not limited to immediate locality) and time (multi-generational).

More recent anthropological studies of kinship emphasize the relational quality of people. They suggest that it is through this lens that the contemporary family, in all its permutations, should be viewed (Howell, Carsten). Other authors deviate from restricting norms and present new families, such as those constituted by gays and lesbians, which are willfully chosen and constructed with relationships of love (Weston 1997). Others directly engage these new idioms of relatedness within the experience of transnational adoption (Carsten 2000). By elaborating on ideas from each, my personal conception of the family takes form theoretically, though it becomes apparent that theory must be improvised in order to make sense of the multiple narratives of movement and their implications for traditional representations of family.

As I suggested earlier, habitual acts of family making are also sites of inquiry.

I have included anecdotes from my childhood to show the ways in which the theories discussed in this chapter are visible in everyday acts.

Saturday Morning Swims

Every Saturday morning when we lived in our old house, my dad walked my sister and me up to the YMCA on Mass Ave for swim lessons. When my parents first enrolled us we were three years old and at that age, my dad accompanied us in the pool, protectively guiding our tiny bodies armed with orange floaties. There is a

photo of Julia and me sitting in our bathing suits, small enough to fit in the palms of his hands. Soon we navigated the depths of the pool on our own, progressing from beginner level Guppie to advanced level Shark in a matter of years. We walked the couple of blocks from our house to the Y by ourselves when we got older, but seldom skipped our weekly breakfast with our dad at the diner in between our house and the Y. We enthusiastically discussed our improvements over hot cocoa and scrambled eggs with ketchup and then walked home together as a trio.

I remember wanting to wear baseball caps because my dad did. Even today, I put mine on when he wears his, and he, Julia and I walk from our house to Fenway Park to catch a baseball game at least once a summer. The visual is identical to years before: one tall, lean figure accompanied by two, shorter figures, recognizably together by the B hat and linked arms, held hands.

Even without matching baseball caps, our appearance is similar. With dark hair and brown eyes, even as adopted children, Julia and I were recognized as his kids. My mom remembers the judge at the American embassy commenting that we looked like him and his being pleased. It meant a lot to be recognized as belonging. One morning before swim class, I remember Jean, the woman who worked at the front desk then and still does, offhandedly commenting as we walked in together, "Hey Nina, you have the same smile as your dad!" I remember feeling overjoyed. Without prior knowledge of our adoption, she recognized us as family.

Many families, both adoptive and interracial, are preoccupied over their families being obviously recognizable in the absence of physical resemblance. Often confused for a wide range of nationalities and ethnicities, it isn't too much of a stretch

to think I look like my tall, dark haired father. It is far trickier when my mom walks around with two dark haired, tan girls as a white, blonde, blue-eyed woman.

Regardless, within our own community where we have lived for twenty-two years, we are recognized as a family.

A couple summers ago I got in the habit of going to early morning yoga classes with my mom and continue to do so now during vacations. We walk up to Mass. Ave. together in exercise pants and New Balance sneakers, toting water bottles and house keys. Jean, who has seen us walk in and out of the Y since I was three, always says hello. If I'm running late, she'll mention, "Your mom already went in!" I doubt she has ever been explicitly told that Julia and I are adopted. Instead, over the last twenty years of walking through those doors in baseball caps or yoga pants our family has made itself known, recognizable.

My dad now goes on the weekends for lap swim and I tend to workout in the afternoon when he is still at work, yet I can usually count on someone at the front desk to remark on one member of the family's coming or going.

Time has naturalized our going to the Y as a ritual of family making. In my opinion, rituals such as this have been both formative and *per* formative in my family experience.

Theoretical Background

The discussion of 'real' and 'unreal' or 'natural' and 'unnatural' constructions of identities and of family surface in the debate over whether or not adoption is a viable way of constructing a family. Past and present studies portray adoptions as a

form of "quasi-kinship" (Goody, 1969), or as a family formed around a "tragic triangle" and thus beleaguered by a premise of loss (Sorosky, Baran, and Pannor 1978). Such language and representation derive from the idea that blood and a biogenetic basis determine family and social structures.

This idea has prevailed throughout modern Euro-American history. Whether it be the One-Drop Rule that perpetuated the stigmatization and prejudice against anyone with a trace of African heritage in the antebellum United States, or the *pureza de sangre* theories that existed in colonized Latin America and the Caribbean in which racial and social superiority were predicated on 'levels' of whiteness in a *mestizo* culture, to now, where in a less overt manner blood is understood to be the determinant for acceptable family formations.

These examples illustrate the ways in which natural or biological definitions have been institutionalized and continue to permeate every day life. Even so, recent work that challenges essentialized identities (of both individuals and families) rooted in biology is testament to the destabilization of these notions.

I draw on Judith Butler's deconstruction of gender as an identity that is natural and given essence (1999) to argue for a similar destabilization of a biologically rooted family. Like Butler's notion of gender, I believe family identities are constituted through repeated rituals, such as those detailed in this chapter, and are thus performative. In the preface to *Gender Trouble* she broadens the terms of experience of gender instead of conceding to popular understandings that certain "internal features of ourselves", in her case reproductive organs, in my case, blood or genes, solely determine and constitute identities (xv).

By seeing family as performative instead of naturally given, the categories that define this social institution are also blurred. "It becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal. And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that we take to be 'real,' what we invoke as naturalized knowledge...is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality" (Butler 1999: xxiii). It is changeable in that these familial identities are performed and iterative; we outwardly perform certain norms, corporeally and linguistically, but also subvert them, and both are instances of agency. The illusion of stable identities is also dispelled by technological changes that alter the ways of performing.

Author Elizabeth Bartholet (1999) explores the ways in which the "biological bias" and "biogenetic basis of American kinship" has been challenged by new reproductive technologies that change the ways families come together.

Fundamentally, she asserts that "biology is not destiny," echoing the conclusions drawn by other authors in cross-cultural contexts (Williams 1994, Carsten 2000).

Understanding kinship from a transnational perspective, furthermore, challenges the definition of a biologically constructed family that we are accustomed to in the United States. As non-western studies reveal, entirely different concepts of kinship are possible.

Janet Carsten, whose work focuses primarily on adoption, has studied the processes by which the Malay people of the island community of Langkawi, for instance, "make kinship." Carsten notes, "Over time, the accumulation of shared meals and cohabitation can establish 'natural' links between those who may have been originally unrelated" (2000, 687). Time and repeated acts, as evidenced by this

quote, naturalizes the links between previously unrelated people, just as time spent with childhood friends or loved ones compels the family to encompass affectional ties and grow beyond its proscribed nuclear definition.

Carsten premises the entire book *Cultures of Relatedness* on not taking the "context of kinship" for granted. She instead focuses the book on "the lived experiences of relatedness in local contexts" (1). My family is my local context, and similar to Carsten's studies, demonstrates that connections between people "can be described in genealogical terms, but they can also be described in other ways" (ibid).

Author Kath Weston urges readers to challenge dominant idioms. She asks us to "suppose for a moment that blood is not intrinsically thicker than water" (1997: 34) in her book *Families We Choose*. Where would that lead discussions of kinship? As Carsten aspires, it would allow for relationships to be described in other ways. It would render idioms like "blood is thicker than water" or "being of the same flesh and blood" (Schneider 1968) obsolete, thus destabilizing the notion that biology and procreation create family. My family, as well as those interviewed in Weston's study, demonstrate a shift away from the "dominant cultural ideologies of the family [which] focus on not only who 'naturally' belongs together, which tends to fall along lines of race, class, and gender, but how biogenetic linkages (or the lack of such) shape relations between people" (13). In the absence of the "mythological creature" that is the standardized American family, new cultural scripts for family creation are formed (56).

According to Weston, relationships based in love and choice, and not necessarily biological substance, should constitute families. These new forms of

families should be critical of the structures they are deviating from and avoid claiming themselves as The New Family, in the case of gay and lesbian kinship, but rather *a* new family. She writes, "the category 'families we choose' incorporates the meaningful *difference* that is the product of choice and biology as two relationally defined terms⁴," (40), and is thus also applicable to the discussion of adoption, as the understood means of procreation – biological - are replaced by parents' choice to create a family by nontraditional means. At the same time, however, the ability to *choose* family implies subscribing to the idea of a family, period. Even the idea that there is *a* singular, 'real', universal family is contested (see Collier, Rosaldo, Yanagisako 1982).

Collier et al (1982) ask how *a* family can still exist if families are forming that don't adhere to its dominant definition (set of oppositions between public/private, male/female, etc). Images of the family are many, but tend to follow cultural scripts that pigeonhole members, limiting them to specific roles, for example, woman as caretaker, man as breadwinner. Women's role as caretaker is legitimized by arguments that say they are naturally more apt at childrearing because they go through the birthing process. Men's role as breadwinner is constructed in opposition to the woman's as the parent whose time should not be spent childrearing, but rather participating in the outside markets and supporting the family financially. These roles, not natural or given, however, are themselves shaped by capitalism and by modern state practices (which institutionalize family norms in law). Weston shows

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⁴ While the idea of choice is applicable to other alternative forms of family construction, it is employed within the discussion of gay and lesbian families because "it reintroduced agency and a subjective sense of making culture into lesbian and gay social organization" (135) – a main point of contention throughout the book.

that when *choice* is involved in the decision to create a family, when you have women-run families, for example, these gendered cultural scripts fail to provide a functioning model.

It is evident that the ways families come together are plural, reflecting the macro political economic trends that have changed terms of relatedness. My cousin William, Inger's great-nephew, provides another interesting example of the role social ideologies have on relatedness. William, who was raised in Christiania, Denmark, tells me over Christmas, "Of course, you are my family," and refers to the same photos Inger and I do. Though our rituals of family making are similar, his experience growing up in an autonomous, socialist community whose identity is largely positioned in opposition to the state that enforces the historically accepted scripts mentioned above offers another dimension to experiences of belonging (to a family and a country). Carsten writes, "Particular versions of history sometimes demand different terms. The authors in this volume use the term 'relatedness' in opposition to, or alongside, 'kinship', in order to signal an openness to indigenous idioms of being related rather than a reliance on pre-given definitions or previous versions" (2000: 10).

Given the many routes to understanding family the literature of kinship offers, I found it helpful to use Carsten's term in understanding the relationships within my own "made-up" family. Employing the term 'relatedness' as opposed to 'kinship', "makes possible comparisons between Iñupiat and English and Nuer ways of being related without relying on an arbitrary distinction between biology and culture, and without presupposing what constitutes kinship," even its terminology (2000: 5). By

adapting the language used to speak about kinship, the idea of a family takes on a new appearance. What is thereby illuminated, instead of the polarizing effect of the biology/social, nature/nurture debate, is the inherent relational impulse of people. Adding the component of global ties and thus the means of communication between them demonstrates how relatedness and the make-up of families have changed in today's global world.

Re-membering Christmas, Part I

After Christmas dinner I listen as a love story unfolds. Most retire to bed, but I concentrate intently as my grandmother Inger remembers first meeting my grandfather. When family Christmases were held in Croton, NY, in my grandparents' old house with the stone fireplace, the polished Danish furniture and the high ceilings, my grandfather was there too, sitting beside her, but the passing of time has brought the number of people around the table to six: me, my sister, my mom, my dad, my aunt Nanna, and my grandmother Inger.

Even as a child I hung onto every word as stories lazily spilled out over the course of the meal as reminiscences and memories were stirred. I remember Inger describing her contributions to the underground resistance in Denmark during the early stages of the German occupation. I envisioned her, just as she described, unassumingly walking through the local park pushing a baby carriage filled with contraband newspapers made on a homemade printing press hidden beneath a blanket. 'Oh, what a nice looking baby!' a stranger would remark, and then take the paper. It played out in my head like a movie, she, of course, the heroine.

It isn't just over Christmas that stories are told, though Christmas is what first comes to mind for its annual prominence as a family ritual. In the bright light of my grandmother Siri's Soho apartment, I listened as she narrated her arduous travels on a freighter during the war with nothing but ketchup and Spam to eat. Stories like hers were fodder for an already busy imagination. What was it like to travel for so long? I'd ask. Were you scared? What about your family? Informal interviews conducted over Christmas dinners or for Hebrew School projects were elementary, yet they laid the groundwork for this extended project and made it clear, even for a middle school student, that the stories that brought us together, as a family, were many.

Each story has its own subtleties. Those of journeys and immigration have their own politics of return, or not. Not one story is the same or quite as I assumed, slightly changing with time as they are told and retold, expanding to adopt new characters, new places, and new perspectives.

Sometimes they are completely new, as was the story just this past Christmas of my grandparents' romance. I imagine the two of them at the guesthouse of Falling Water in Pennsylvania where they spent their honeymoon. Inger describes her excitement upon finding out with such liveliness. It was a wedding present from George's friend Edgar Kaufmann Jr., owner of the Frank Lloyd Wright estate. "For two Frank Lloyd Wright buffs, it was so unbelievable," she exclaims, reclining in bed. The story sounds familiar. I think I remember my grandpa describing losing his wedding band in the pool, or maybe it was Inger. I hesitate to interject as the story continues. "It was like, in a way, we already lived in the same world," she

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⁵ According to my dad, George lost his wedding ring in the pool. Edgar found it after he drained the pool at the end of the season and returned it.

remembers. The aspects of American culture she had imagined enjoying from

Denmark before her immigration, like the Museum of Modern Art, for one (a place
she would later take her children every weekend), George exposed her to. Together
they visited museums and admired art while both working for his design business
importing furniture. Sitting by Inger's side in bed, I wish he was there to chime in,
but it is just her voice, remembering the two of them.

The connection between death and memory is obvious, though I was hesitant to address it. Listening to any family member recall stories from the past was always enough for me. Other members of the family usually accompanied him or her, offering factual critiques, anecdotes of their own. Julia and I are known to protest when stories about us are misconstrued, eager to stave off embarrassment. Nanna tells stories about her younger brother Jan (pronounced Yan), who passed away before I could meet him, with such pathos I am hesitant to speak. Entranced, I listen, acutely aware that there is something missing, someone missing, a counterpart, someone to finish sentences, share glances. Yet even as such personal loss is conveyed, something is gained. In silence, I would have never known about the two of them skating on frozen ponds; the fierce protectiveness she felt for him that I feel in the love she extends to me. Articulated through stories, people distant to me with regards to both space and time become familiar. Piecing together stories creates a composite narrative; photos give those stories yet another dimension. Through every day practices of re-membering, family is constituted.

Part II: Skyping Denmark

The following day, Inger sat in awe as her sister, who lives in Copenhagen,
Denmark, appeared in full focus on my cousin's computer screen. It had been two
years since they last saw each other. Although they speak on the phone regularly, the
immediacy with which they were connected was something to behold. When Inger
first immigrated to the United States in the 1950s, communication with her family in
Denmark consisted of snail mail and expensive long distance phone calls. Weeks
between letters heightened the experience of dislocation as her connection back to her
country of origin relied on the successful delivery of a letter.

After she had children, she remembers recording their voices on audiocassettes and mailing the tapes overseas so that her parents, my Aunt Nanna's grandparents, could hear the voices and stories of the children they hadn't seen since the past year. Even though their relatives were far away, the process of sending photos and recording tapes of daily events maintained a connection that transcended their immediate locations.

"Being visual means a lot. It's tremendous." Inger explains after first using Skype. It was the visual as opposed to the audio component of the communications program that was most impressive to my grandmother. Programs such as Skype have evolved beyond the computer, as well. Free global, face-to-face communication is now possible at the click of a television remote (Stone 2010).

"Imagine it should happen in my lifetime. You feel so much closer. Every Sunday, we speak for half an hour. But then you can suddenly see each other and it's a bit different. Traveling has changed in all those years. When I left Denmark it took

forever to see people because it was a long, far away. [Now,] you can still feel very close to the people who are there, who are not next door to you. With all the communication, we can be exceedingly close. We could have just as well been living in Copenhagen the both of us. It was hard in the old days, but all that has changed. I don't think the distances mean that much anymore."

Rituals of relatedness, like the regularly scheduled conversations between Inger and her sister, have changed to become more instantaneous, visually clear. What they choose to share, however, has not changed.

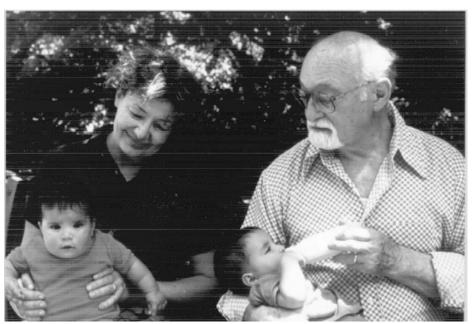
"Time," she tells me, "allows for memories. What we need more than anything is time to talk and remember things, remember people. There [in Denmark], family means a lot because she and I are the only ones who can remember certain things." I assure her it is the same here. I ask her about our adoption, a story I've never heard from her perspective, and even over the phone her soft voice captivates me.

"We were getting closer because we had something to share," she tells me, referring to her and my grandpa George's relationship with my parents just after my sister and I were adopted. The closeness she felt developing between her and my parents just as aptly applies to her and me through the things we share, most importantly through stories. Through children, she alludes, families get closer.

Through stories, I add, people get closer.

We first met, Inger and I, in the summer of 1988. A photo documents our early interactions.

"George and I were sitting with each one of you on our lap. You were tiny. It was so amazing; you were so tiny! I was a little overwhelmed that you were so small. I remember distinctly sitting with each one of you and a bottle."



Inger and George with Julia and me at nine months old. September 1988.

That was in Croton. Photos from years later show Julia and I dressed in Christmas red, a ribbon in our hair, held by a grandparent in front of the huge tree decorated beautifully, covered in candles. I sift through them from time to time and even unlabeled photos are recognizably staged in Croton – the distinct quality of light from the candles that dot the tree during Christmas the telltale sign. Since, though, Christmas has moved to my aunt's house on Long Island, same practices, same people.

The table is always set the same – black plates rest on a blue tablecloth covered in white stars. This is the only one tablecloth I've ever seen used for Christmas dinner. It is a family heirloom, passed down to my grandmother Inger from her parents in Denmark. I always thought it was ironic that the simple pattern

consisted of the six-pointed star I associate with Judaism. Although, after hearing these stories, it makes sense.

The incongruence within our holiday celebration is well represented by the people at the table. My dad is Jewish by way of both his father George and mother Siri. His stepmother, my grandmother, Inger is Christian as is my mother. My sister Julia, my aunt Nanna and I are all hybrids – raised aware of both religious traditions. We celebrate Christmas on the 24th instead of the 25th, a tradition also practiced across the Atlantic Ocean in Copenhagen where the rest of my grandmother's family lives. Presents are opened the day before the majority of children stay up for Santa, and the following day that most wait for with high anticipation is spent sleeping in, reading leisurely, and sharing stories. It is my favorite holiday, and not just for its particular cadence, but because it brings our family together, in one home, for at least a weekend.

"Both my parents came from very big families," Inger mentions. Aside from her grandpa, I don't know much about her extended family. "My mother had six sisters and brothers, my father had nine. Combined we were a big family with big Christmases." Our family is relatively small in comparison, but the importance of coming together remains.

"It has always been very important to get together and have each other, don't you think?" she asks me. "More than a religious ceremony Christmas was about celebrating each other and life. And light! In Denmark it was so dark when the men went to work and when they got home. Christmas signaled that the light was coming back, something to celebrate. It was also a celebration of that." All of a sudden the

hundreds of candles on the Christmas tree, a symbol of the lengthening days, make sense.

"It was more about family than religion." The tablecloth makes sense too.

"All of the whims of the family always came to our house, not just relatives, kids from the neighborhood, too." In a sentence, she touches upon the value social relatedness.

"My mother used to say that 'blood is thicker than water', but this part of my family I don't feel particularly kind to, didn't mean much to me. I acknowledge that now. There are certain kinds of family on different sides. Both were important to me each in their very different ways, but family, I think, can mean a lot of things. I think the really mixed up families are the best. We get different perspectives instead of being a homogenous white bread family." I laugh because my first instinct is to think how disgusted my grandpa would have been to serve white bread at Christmas. We used to make pacts that ensured I ate the doughy middle of bread that was most like white bread. Content with the middle, I happily passed over the crust despite being told it had all the nutrients.

"It's true," Inger continues. "Would I think so often of Chile, were it not for you and Julia? You add that perspective." Even though we are young, she suggests, we have our own stories that connect her, Nanna, and my parents to people she has never met or seen except in photographs. In the last couple years since Julia and I returned from our trip to Chile in 2007, our stories sometimes come out over Christmas dinners, in fragments, apprehensively. The way I felt nervous listening to Nanna speak about Jan, I imagine everyone else feeling as Julia and I shyly recount

meeting our biological family. It is a difficult terrain undoubtedly, as it re-engages the tension between biological and social relatedness, yet we tell them anyway. Julia nudges me from under the table, silently requesting that I do the talking.

I usually begin somewhere in the final week of our study abroad language immersion program in Santiago, which began in June 2007, right after my freshman year at Wesleyan. The back-story is usually cut out and I begin, instead, on the bus, sitting next to Julia, just as we are at the dinner table.

To Temuco

Julia's hand didn't once leave mine during the 8-hour bus ride south to Temuco. Content to be watched over, she fell asleep shortly after we both laughed too loudly at translated-into-Spanish American blockbusters. Driving through the city outskirts we passed soccer field after soccer field, distinguishable only by the goal frames placed roughly 100 yards apart, but then they too disappeared, and the country revealed itself as no more than trees and land with the occasional road-stop advertising *cazuela y pan a todas horas*,

When we arrived in Temuco the city was silent. The shadow of the taxi we hailed crept along the empty sidewalks in the dim light of the occasional lamppost. I wondered before going to sleep in the hostel we'd found if our decision to travel alone had been made in haste. Exhausted, we turned on the television to catch the end of a fuzzily broadcast soccer game and fell asleep to the static.

We had come to Temuco with limited resources. In Santiago, Fatima, our host mother in Santiago, had given us the address of an old friend who worked as a lawyer

in Temuco. As luck would have it, she was the ex-head of *la policia*, Chile's federal investigative branch. We decided to swing by her office after our trip to the markets. Fatima had warned us she might be out of town, so our venture to find her was a relative afterthought. When no one answered the door, I scrawled a note explaining our tentative plan to stay through the morning of the next day and left our cell phone number. Please call if you're in town; we're just down the street.

The next morning, the ring of our cell phone woke us up. Despite my morning stupor, I established that it was the lawyer, Nellie, and that she was free to meet anytime after 11. Waiting in her office, we didn't know what to expect. We heard a chair push back, and a few footsteps later Nellie turned the corner with a warm smile. Dressed in a cream-colored turtleneck sweater and black dress pants covered by a full-length red coat, she looked more like a TV personality or a model than a lawyer.

Formalities first. Julia presented the facts. We knew our birth mother's first name, Nancy, and maiden name, Leal, and suspected the surname of our father, Cervantes. We knew of an older brother, no first name, but who would share both the Leal and Cervantes surnames. We were in Temuco because our birthmother had provided this information during the adoption process, but had left no permanent address, only a city at the end of the world. We also had our birth certificates, which listed our RUT, a social security equivalent given to those born in Chile. We handed over what we had. Before she went to work, Nellie looked at us and told us she had done this before, but never like this. Never with girls this young, that had come so far. *Qué coraje*. What courage. I looked at Julia and tears were welling up in her eyes. We were sitting in the office of a stranger, in a city we'd never been to, hoping the few

facts that we had assembled would lead us to the family we'd been imagining for years.

Nellie's search yielded a collection of names with matching information. A quick drive to *el Registro Civil* and we had the birth certificates and addresses of these people. We got back in the car. Only after fifteen minutes did I realize what was happening. We were going.

We arrived in Nueva Imperial, a rural community outside of Temuco, after half an hour in the car. Nellie had driven to one of the addresses listed on one of the birth certificates, but was told that the family had moved. An interesting sequence of events led us to the doorstep of our grandmother. Nellie walked into a local calling center and after striking up a conversation with the store attendant was told the name Leal was in the calling center's directory. Coincidentally, Nellie had walked into the calling center that our older brother, Miguel, frequented in order to call his mother in Puerto Montt, a city five hours further south, when he was visiting his girlfriend and son who lived in Nueva Imperial. After hearing our story, the store attendant gave the phone number to Nellie.

Minutes later, per the directions of the store clerk, we were on our way to the remaining family who still lived in Nueva Imperial. Nellie's big Jeep climbed up unpaved streets, over a bridge, and stopped at the end of a road. All the while I was acutely aware of the confusion we were causing. I wondered what the store clerk must have thought when a glamorously dressed woman, driving a new edition Jeep parked in front of his store. I wondered how quickly news traveled in the outskirts of what appeared to be a tight knit, gossipy community.

An unassuming woman with piercing green eyes, dark hair, and tan skin wrinkled from the sun nodded her head in acknowledgement as Nellie parked the car outside the corresponding address. The woman stopped her work in the front yard and approached the car. Nellie leaned out the window.

"Señora," she began.

"Si?" she responded. Nellie proceeded to tell the woman that accompanying her were two girls from the United States looking for her daughter. Did you know, Nellie inquired, that your daughter gave her twin daughters up for adoption? No, the woman replied. *Pues*, the lawyer paused, *aquí estan*. Well, here they are.

Both Julia and I had been hidden by the front seats, listening as our story was unfolding before us. As soon as we climbed out of the car, the older woman, our grandmother, looked at us and began to cry. Julia began to cry. I began to cry. She mumbled something into my hair that I couldn't distinguish as we hugged. By the glory of God, or something like that. ¿Quieren conocer a su familia? She asked. Do you want to meet your family? There was no other answer. Yes, we said. Si.

The following day, words wouldn't come out of my mouth as I sat across from her at the table of my biological grandmother's house, muted by the magnitude of the moment and my ineptness with the language; feeling like my chance to ask questions was slipping away. Instead we spoke in generalities. Earlier that morning, Nancy had walked through the door in a red jacket. I had turned in time to see a blur; feel the impact of a body holding mine. Muffled words thanked God as wet tears fell from her eyes and ran down my neck. I was taller, but not by much.

"Tienes rabia?" Are you angry? she asked me. I wasn't sure what she was referring to.

"Me odias?" Do you hate me? she asked more insistently. I was trying to make sense of such a comment. Why would I hate her? Because she let us go, gave us up?

"No, no, no." I assured here. "Todo está bien. No hay nada que preocuparte." No, no, no. Everything is fine. No need to worry. I had somehow forgotten this was my mother. I hugged her tightly, in reaction to the strength of her own grip. I rubbed her back as she expressed her doubts, repeating, "No, no, no. Todo está bien." I felt guilty when she held my face in her hands as we looked at each other for the first time in our lives and her face was lined with tears. I had to smile; features I had only ever seen in Julia seemed commonplace. After nineteen years, I could say with certainty that I looked like my mother.

Moments later Julia and I were introduced to our brothers Miguel and Pablo, as well as our younger sister, Kelly. I remember taking a deep breath and looking at Julia. This is what she had always wanted. Speechless, she smiled and squeezed my hand. I smiled back, excited but ambivalent, silently considering the implications of these introductions.

We only had one day to spend in Nueva Imperial; our flight home has already been booked. We walked our cousins to school, drank maté with our aunts, and played soccer with the boys. That evening we all, some twenty-five aunts, uncles, and cousins included, piled into the town van to drive to the bus stop. We waited under the gazebo in the town square until the bus arrived. A line formed and it was clear to

me that it was time to say goodbye. Down the line I began. I came to my grandmother and she took my hand in hers and asked, ¿Cuando regresarás, mi niña? When will you be back? I responded, algún día, one day. Te prometo, I promise. She nodded her head and looked at me the same way she had when we first met, in awe, like I was a mirage. Nancy was last in line.

I reached her and she took my face in her hands just as she had the day before but there was not a tear in her eyes, and she said, *Mi hija, trabaja duro. Compórtate bien.* My daughter, work hard. Behave yourself. Children are a reflection of their family, I thought. I was lost in tears and irony. Of all the things to say... I stood there, captivated by the thought of some innate longing we both shared, waiting for her to reassure me that the shock our two lives had just endured was worth it, would be survivable. No. She didn't ask me to come back. She told me to keep living. *Trabaja duro. Cómpórtate bien.* And then, almost as suddenly as we had appeared, we were gone. Almost thirty-six hours of consecutive travel later and we were back in the sweltering heat of Boston's summer.

Some version of this story has been told and retold through the blog my sister made during our trip, or via email, or in person since Julia and I returned in 2007. With time, it has become easier to tell. The discomfort I felt soon after arriving back in Boston has lessened as I have made some peace with the reality of having met my biological family. It has become an every day experience. I wake up at home, and instead of having just a Chilean flag hanging on the wall, there is a photo below it of Julia, Nancy, Kelly, Aunt Ruth, and me.



From l-r: Julia, Kelly, Nancy, me, and Ruth in Ruth's house in Nueva Imperial. 2007.

To its right is a photo of Inger and George in Croton, sitting on the couch in front of the fireplace. Julia is visible in the background as is the Christmas tree. I used to feel that perhaps these photos shouldn't be next to each other, that the families were better kept separate. But then I remember Inger's words. "I think the really mixed up families are the best." Along with different perspectives, we frame different photos, tell different stories.

We decided to make Sunday afternoon conversations a ritual that day. The sky was overcast and gray in Middletown, CT, just as it was in Tarrytown, NY where she lives. Her voice is cheery on the other end of the line, spirited as we say our goodbyes.

"To be a person is to have a story to tell."

Isak Dinesen⁶

Chapter 2 *Imagining Chile and Other Places: Making Claims to Countries*

⁶ Under this pseudonym Karen Blixen penned *Out of Africa*. This quote, taken from a blog dedicated to her writing, highlights the relationship between personhood and storytelling.

"Home is living."

"You can have your roots in many places," my grandmother Siri tells me over lox and bagels. We are discussing the idea of home and she is quite clear that nothing is clear. She lives on the sixth floor of a Soho apartment in New York City. As a kid, I could never remember which building was hers. There were too many similar facades criss-crossed by fire escapes to choose from. Once inside however the white walls covered in paintings and the black leather couch reassured me we had come to the right place. She moved there in 1982 and says the building has always been the same, as has its interior.

Sitting at her dining room table, I notice the art has changed since I last came to visit. Pieces composed of industrial materials have replaced the painting I most associate with her: a sequence of overlapping circles filled with rich colors. She is a painter and adjunct professor of color theory at Parsons New School for Design in New York City. The two of us have always had a close relationship, which has strengthened over my four years at Wesleyan because of its proximity to the New York.

The premise of this visit was to record her experience of immigration. In the hours that we spoke, the positioning of me as interviewer and Siri as interviewee fluctuated and gave way to an open dialogue of a diverse array of themes. I debated how to begin, knowing that some degree of movement characterized her childhood. Her immigration was not the experience of fragmentation that I had imagined.

I assumed a single relocation from Sweden to the United States. I assumed homeland, if not home, to be singular as well, but her stories revealed multiple

comings and goings; multiple trips of leaving and entering one country or one home for another and the repetitive process of disorientation and familiarization that such movement entails. By the time Siri was nineteen and leaving for the United States she had already lived in five countries.

We begin at the biographical beginning. She was born in 1921 in Stockholm, Sweden to a German father and Polish mother. Only a few years of her life were actually spent there. Because of her father's business, her family was constantly on the move. Relocation one: Berlin. She applied and was accepted to a *litzeum* in Berlin and was eager to begin the 1st grade. Her plans were compromised when Hitler came to power and Jewish children were separated out from the rest of the student body and placed in separate schools. During their time in Berlin she became fluent in German. Until 1933, she says, "we lived in Berlin and returning home meant home to Sweden."

In 1933, her family moved back to Stockholm where Siri enrolled in the French School, which her mother and two aunts had attended. She remembers attending school there as "almost like homecoming" because of the previously existing relationships. Catholic nuns ran the school, so during the religious component of the education Siri sat out.

"All the students went one way to class, and I and another little Jewish girl sat waiting for the class to be over because they didn't have anything for us." Here she became fluent in French.

The next four years were spent in Czechoslovakia, the move again precipitated by her father's business. Siri spent two years in a gymnasium (high

school), before deciding to transfer out. Her mother enrolled her at the English speaking Victoria College, where she studied to become a court translator. After successfully passing the exam at Charles University, she became qualified for hire. She was now also fluent in English.

The following two years were spent in Brussels, where her prior knowledge of French came in handy. In Brussels, vacations back home to Sweden were more frequent. Her father's family was still in Stockholm, as they had left Germany as well when anti-Jewish sentiment increased. Her mother's sisters (my great aunts) were also there.

"There was always family," she remembers.

In 1939, they left Belgium and went back to Sweden. Siri decided she wanted to move to America. Her memories of the trip to the United States are vivid. Her mother took her to the municipality of Haparanda on the Swedish border where she boarded a bus by herself to Finland. She remembers, "all ice and snow and nothing. I never saw vegetation, nothing." From Petsamo, the most northern port in Europe, she left on the freighter the *Brita Torden*. She was one of eight passengers.

Our conversation began like this, Siri's series of relocations presented itself as the most obvious way to frame her narrative. Over the course of the conversation however the intimate details arose and the story took on a multi-dimensional level.

Bridge on the Brita Torden

"There were seven others," on the freighter. She doesn't recall a bed or a cabin. "I imagine it must have been a bench in the dining room," where she slept for the full four week sojourn across the Atlantic Ocean.

"What do eight people do for twenty-eight days?" she asks me. I shrug.

"I have no idea."

"They wanted me to play bridge and I had never played so they recruited me. I played bridge for twenty-eight days." We make a note to play some time that weekend and return to the story.

"Ok, alright," she repositions herself in her chair and returns to the memory she is recalling in minute detail.

"We pass Norway and the Germans stopped the boat and came on board. They went into the captain's office to check the papers of everybody. Now the captain's office was, picture this, where the bathroom is, where I paint (20 yards away from where we are sitting in the dining room). Your foolish grandma! She had to hear what they were saying and sat on the steps to listen. I was nineteen and stupid. If they had seen me, I wouldn't be here. There was nothing more. They checked the papers and that was the end of that!"

The freighter docked in Baltimore. She took a B&O bus line to New York to Columbus Circle and there, she exclaims, "was my aunt, my father's sister and her husband. Oh joy! There's family." She moved in with them and wrote home proclaiming she loved it in New York and would never return.

"But who would return?" she asks rhetorically, "so stupid, in such turbulent times." Instead, her parents immigrated as well, although the trajectory of their trip was more circuitous. On the Siberian Express, they went from Vladivostok, Russia, to Yokohama, Japan, to Seattle. Upon reunion, "all my freedom was gone." Siri's trans-Atlantic trip had provided limited respite from the watchful and restrictive eye of her parents.

We take a break from talking and go to find a deck of cards.

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I was surprised to learn how often Siri's family relocated during her childhood. She lived in five countries in the first nineteen years of her life becoming fluent in the popular languages of each one. Given the laundry list of countries to choose from, I posed the question of home.

"When you think of home, what do you think of?" I ask. She points to the table and considers the question aloud.

"But home can be many places, no?"

"Home is, I think, an unfathomable thing"

"It is not an apartment; it is not a house. You could move."

"I would not go home to Sweden. I do not call that home."

"I call home living."

"Home is here. Not in Sweden or in Europe. I never thought it was. We went one place, to another, to another. They were turbulent times. I'm one case out of many people. I had friends in school but I never stayed long enough the way you have four years with the same people."

Historically they were not normal nor were they conducive to stability. They were, exactly as Siri says, turbulent, reflected in her experiences of movement punctuated by temporary stability. Even so, she still believes she has roots "in many places", though she does not locate them explicitly in nations.

Theoretical Tracings

The nation has long been seen as a key site and privileged mode of belonging and this belonging is purportedly best expressed through nationalism. Recent headlines covering the opening of the XXI Winter Olympiad in Vancouver offer an example of the national fervor incited when countries converge on a global stage. As a kid, I remember during the weeks of competition rooting for people I had never seen compete before because they wore the flag I grew up pledging allegiance to in grade school. Athletes – through their performance and attitude – represent, to some, the productivity of the (North) American way of life. They are exemplars of the American ethic put into practice. It seems there is no event or narrative in which national undertones can be felt if not superficially injected. Just as it does in times of crisis, most significantly for our generation after the attacks of September 11th, the idea of one nation, "indivisible under God" is absolved of its previous misdemeanors and heralded as the place we are all thankful to call home.

Benedict Anderson's famous concept of the nation as an imagined community (1983) addresses the unifying effect belonging to a nation can have over a diverse constituency. The nation, Anderson asserts and I paraphrase, is inconceivable as a whole. It is impossible to know it in its entirety, and so the citizen imagines the rest of

what exists beyond his or her immediate locality as in some fundamental sense similar to what is known. It is an extrapolation of sorts, an envisioning beyond exposure that I, as a young child, also practiced when considering both the United States and Chile and my claim to either if not both of these countries.

Anderson defines the nation as an "imagined political community" (1983) - imagined because it exists beyond the local reality of the individual and political because it is sovereign. "No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind," he writes (1983: 7); borders inherently delineate national belonging. The nation is ideally conceived of in singular terms, though narratives of transnational migration like my grandmother's and my own challenge this idea. Siri's musings on the idea of home point us in one direction: "Home is living." Engaging the broader anthropological literature on transnationalism positions a claim like Siri's within a larger discussion about the different ways of expressing relatedness between people and places.

It would be logical to assume that membership as part of an imagined community, and thus a claim of nation as home, is contingent upon being legally recognized by the state, i.e. I belong because I am a citizen; yet personal reflection as well as extended research during this project revealed such an assumption as faulty and infinitely more enigmatic. The ways in which and by which people imagine a country have changed in the latest phase of globalization (Appadurai 1996). Which phase we are in and when it began is debated among economists. Some argue the most recent phase began at the end of the 1960s (Waters 2001), while others date it within the last decade, beginning around 2000 (Friedman 2007). Inarguably it has

been a phase characterized by changes in the speed and number of circulating goods, ideas and people across national borders.

Anderson's concept of imagining allows one to transcend one's localized understanding of the nation, but his requisite of singular belonging prohibits its applicability to people for whom movement is the precursor of identity (Jacobson 1995 in Fortier 2000). Arjun Appadurai's work contemporalizes much of Anderson's original theory by addressing how the recent advances in mass media and communication and mass global migrations of the last twenty years have changed traditional discourses about nationalism. Whereas Anderson claims that national belonging and the imagined community in the post-print era was the domain of the elite, who had privileged access to newspapers, for example, Appadurai asserts that imagining is an every day experience in the age of globalization, indiscriminate and experienced by all. The global circulation of culture in our present era has quickened and the sheer number of people who have experienced movement has increased significantly. In short, this phase of globalization, characterized by transnational flows of goods, ideas and people, provides a setting more conducive to imaginations of multiple belongings.⁷

Globalization is challenging the naturalized and singular tie between culture and place. In this discussion of national belonging it is "place" that I have chosen to focus on. In their co-edited collection, *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in*

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⁷ This is not to say that the circulation of these things flow evenly throughout the world. In chapter 1 of the *Anthropology of Globalization* authors Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo address the unequal distribution of such flows, which complicates Appadurai's theory. While imagining may be a practice that has entered the realm of the every day, it is not practiced similarly on a global level.

Critical Anthropology, authors Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson argue that the world is too often presented as a "collection of 'countries', as on most world maps, [seen] as inherently fragmented space, divided by the different colors into diverse national societies, each 'rooted' in its proper place" (1997: 34). Supposedly rooted as well are the people from these places, assuming that they stay and live their lives in their "native lands" (37), within their native culture which is presented as bounded by borders. How, then, to understand one's claim to a place if that assumed condition of rootedness does not apply?

The idea of rootedness often links people with countries of origin. We all have a homeland if we adhere to the simple definition of the word: the country in which we were born, but it is now rare to live one's entire life in one place. Siri told me,

"I don't say Sweden when I think of homeland or even home. It's my place of birth but emotionally I feel tied to this country in terms of what it has given me in contrast to what I had before. When I [immigrated], I came from having gone traveling to many places not only different countries but different languages, different school systems, different people. So in some way I was adjusted. This was nothing new, in a sense." Siri's immigration to the United States did not carry, for her, the connotations of a major break from a single set of "roots", rather it followed the pattern of relocation as experienced regularly, as part of her identity.

Recent anthropological work tries to make sense of the connections between identity (of multiple roots) and geographical displacements in order to understand "a world that has become strewn with migrants who inhabit imagined communities of

belonging that cut across and encompass multiple national terrains" (Inda and Rosaldo 2008: 23).

One idea that repositions the relationship between people and territory is long-distance nationalism. The ideology behind this concept is defined in *Georges Woke Up Laughing*, a book written by Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron that explores the way one man (Georges) maintained a relationship with his homeland Haiti after his immigration to the United States. Georges defined Haiti as his homeland even from the United States and even as a United States citizen. He thus falls into the category of people who "simultaneously live their lives in and are closely involved with more than one nation-state" (Basch, Blanc, and Glick Schiller 1995: 684) – a characteristic commonly shared in this phase of globalization.

Their concept of long distance nationalism "binds together immigrants, their descendents, and those who have remained in their homelands into a singular *transborder citizenry*", and, I would add, community (Glick Schiller and Georges 2001: 21). Membership in this group is not contingent upon legal citizenship, but entails different practices than belonging in say, Benedict Anderson's territorially imagined community of a singular nation. Long distance nationalism is not just imagined but also practically performed. In this case, Haitians also contribute to development projects that will improve Haiti or US-Haitian relations (24).

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⁸ The term *transmigrant* is another included in the trio of author's vocabulary. It's formal definition is as follows, "Transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relations to more than one nation-state" (Glick Schiller and Basch 1992, 1994).

Just as author Glick Schiller experienced, I have found that every day narratives of nationalism illustrate "the usefulness of an approach to nationalism that sees it as a discursive formation, a shared way of speaking that has multiple and contradictory meanings that change depending on the time, place, and speaker", and is thus not rigidly territorialized (30).

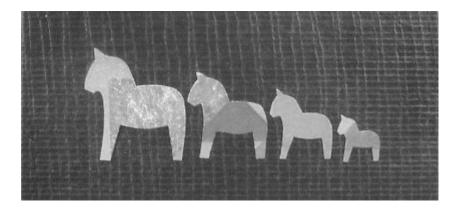
The diaspora provides a productive vantage point from which to examine the relationship between people, place, identity, and culture. While a singular definition of diaspora is hard to pinpoint because it has grown to encompass most groups of people for whom Fortier's notion of movement-based-identity resonates, a basic outline is useful to keep in mind.

The term itself has always had Jewish roots. During the first half of the twentieth century, it is fair to say the classic example of diaspora referred to the Jewish diaspora and the necessary displacement suffered prior to World War II and during the Holocaust. Though Siri says her immigration "had nothing to do with the political; it had nothing to do with Judaism at all," her efforts to maintain cultural continuity once in the United States was important. Interestingly though, it was the culture that she associated with Sweden and not Judaism that she describes as being part of her story as a mother. She describes the country itself and what it represents for her:

"Heritage."

"Scenery, everything surrounded by water."

"The Swedish horses that I paint."



"The national dances you saw when you went to Sweden, when Jeff went back with you and Julia."

"Little things like that, like food, that leaves a mark with you. That's why I asked you yesterday, do you like herring? That's typical." She has stayed very connected with the expatriate community of Swedes in New York since she immigrated, but even so she still sees her decision to leave Sweden as personal, removed from the other waves of immigrants from Europe to the United States. For people like Siri whose geographic movement was frequent and personally motivated, a contemporary assessment of the term diaspora is useful to consult.

"It may be best to think of diaspora not as the name of a fixed concept and social formation but as a process of collective identification and form of identity, marked by ever-changing differences that chart the shifting boundaries of certain communities hierarchically embedded as enclaves with porous boundaries within other, larger communities" (Tololyan 2007). Diasporic identity, in other words, brings to mind the symbiotic and changing relationship places have with people. One's belonging is largely informed by the degree to which the individual maintains a connection, investment, loyalty, etc. to one or both (or more) places and communities of people.

To account for such a variety of transnational ties and identities, Lisa Malkki proposes a rhizomatic identity that rearticulates the arboreal metaphors commonly used in the discussion of origins. One's identity cannot be "rooted" in one place – "To plot only 'places of birth'... is to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them" (Malkki 1997: 72). Such a reductionist account of belonging would tie to me Chile and the United States solely; the history of my mobile family and their multiple transnational ties would become obsolete, as would Siri's experiences in many different nations. Dick Hebdige reiterates the importance of considering the history that connects multiple places to a single person.

"Rather than tracing back the roots... to their source, I've tried to show how the roots themselves are in a state of constant flux and change. The roots don't stay in one place. They change shape. They change colour. And they grow. There is no such thing as a pure point of origin... but that doesn't mean there isn't history" (1987: 10). The imagery in Hebdige's statement echoes the dynamic and expansive nature of the rhizome, "a horizontal subterranean plant stem that is distinguished from a true root" (http://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/rhizome).

Siri's narrative illustrates precisely this rhizomatic identity and experience.

Living in Sweden, Germany, France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and the United States demonstrates the lateral rather than rooted nature of her travels. In each of these countries she remembers establishing communities of belonging, but nothing she considered stable. "When I came here," she said, "the most I had lived in one place was four years."

Reconstituting Circles: In Prague

She describes her group of friends in Prague during the middle part of our conversation.

"There was one friend, another friend, and two twins, identical girls. That was my group in Prague. One friend I didn't do much to stay in touch with," she admits. "The two twins went on to become professional dancers in Europe after I left. We were in contact a few times when they made it to New York."

"And the last one?" I pry.

"She died," she says, "in a concentration camp. And that was the end of my group."

She sips her instant coffee, contemplating, perhaps, the simplicity of such a fact. It comes across as nonchalance, but I'm sure it has taken years to be at peace with constant and, at times, violent reorganization of friends. From a young age, she lived a repeating cycle of reconstitution of circles after many dissolutions of center.

I was very aware of her voice and attempted to record it on the computer, an adjustment that ultimately failed. In these short anecdotes, just as telling were the silences between us, the creaks in the ceiling from movement overhead.

She breaks the silence, however, with another story of similar report.

"I had a friend in Prague. He was sixteen; I was fourteen. Heinz Winternitz. He had a regular lady friend, girlfriend, but I was fourteen and he was a fun friend and we used to do fun things together." She fondly remembers the leisure time they spent together going to see American movies in the local cinema.

"I think he said he saw it sixteen times, but I went to see it once. It was one of those very well known singers, American singer. He was such a fan of his that he would go see this movie over and over and over. And I went to see it with him once." I ask if she remembers the title, which she cannot.

"And then when I immigrated to America, I wrote to the Red Cross to see what happened to certain people I knew in that area. I had given his name and his family's name. He had died in a concentration camp and so had his whole family. That's what happened to those people, in those years. When you read about the stories, the people my age came out of concentration camps. How they survived." It is silent again because I feel like I am encroaching.

"Some, some," she repeats. "How some of them survived."

I know this is part of history, where Siri's biographical past merges with the historical past of the Jewish community that she and my grandpa George are a part of.

I am reminded of a book I read for Hebrew School. Black and white images of barely discernible corpses, of soiled shoes, of piles of gold fillings and pilfered jewelry followed me around like ghosts as I tried to make sense of how such an event could have happened. My heart felt like a marionette, pulled by the strings of a history I had never lived, only learned. I scared myself to sleep imagining how easily it could have been one of my grandparents. A naïve third grader, it never occurred to me that Siri or my grandpa George might not be able to explain the Holocaust to me or care to speak of it at all. And yet I felt a profound sadness for their loss, similar to the one I feel now sitting by my grandmother's side.

I know the loss is both hers and George's, but they are my grandparents.

Through this conversation I am realizing that their experiences merge with mine in a way that challenges any assertion about singular belonging.

I remember a friend asked me once why I reacted so strongly to the Holocaust. You wouldn't even be Jewish if you weren't adopted, he said. Chile *is* primarily Catholic. Had I grown up there, I would have been baptized, gone to Church and been culturally attached to a different religious history. I would have spoken of the Holocaust as a disgrace and embarrassment to the global community. I would have read about the survivors who sought refuge in Chile and maybe even likened it to the atrocities that Pinochet committed during his eight-year rule. Yet imagining an alternative life of *could haves* only intensified my feelings of attachment to the life I have lived, what *did* happen, what *is* happening: Siri and I at the table, each thinking about the implications of such a history.

I inherited my father's history; he inherited his parents' histories. These histories are not localized in place or necessarily culture, but in our family and more specifically in my own identity. I imagine Siri with her friends and feel sadness. I imagine Poland where George grew up and see grey, remember Elie Wiesel's book. "'Whose was that tear? Mine? His?'" (1982: 65).

Imagining Chile and Other Countries

My understanding of multiple countries influence on an identity also began in childhood, but my imagining of other countries did not stop or begin with Chile. In fact, it began with Sweden. Homeland to Siri and my great-aunts Pepa and Roma,

Sweden was perhaps the first international destination I considered myself a part of. My two great aunts lived in Stockholm and a family trip was planned when we were six to visit them. They had sent us, for as far back as I can remember, small porcelain figurines wrapped carefully in tissue paper. Julia and I would place them on our bureau, circling them off in groups of friends. They also sent postcards with images of their city, urging us to come visit. The trip for Julia and me revolved around visiting the origin of these packages and letters, to see, firsthand, who it was who signed their letters in beautiful cursive: "Much love, Pepa."

After meeting the senders of these packages, I left with distinct memories, feeling content. I remember eating apricots, sitting with my knees under my chin in the welcoming curvature of Pepa's Stockholm apartment bay window. I remember ceramic figurines housed in an old wooden frame. I remember the hallway and the door in the hospital where we visited Pepa but the memory is washed out, bleached with light. Sweden was my first interaction with another country.

After Sweden, came Denmark, the homeland of my grandmother Inger.

Growing up in what I have come to consider an international family, I began to believe that I knew these places through people. My grandmother would speak of Denmark and of Christiania and tell us that Julia and I were Danish too because we were her grandchildren. The claim that biogenetic ties create family never entered the conversation. Instead, we were included in the trajectories of our grandparents' lives, even the ones they had lived before they came to the United States. As they spoke to us of these far off places, we developed ideas about what it must be like to be there, to have lived there, just as we did about Chile.

Instead of people as informants or memories to call on, Chile entered my imagination through cultural artifacts, language and narration.

Reading Allende

The book is thin, only thirty-one pages. Its light blue binding is falling off, but the title, <u>A Family in Chile</u>, is still legible. Next to it leans <u>Chile...In Pictures</u> – part of the Visual Geography Series published in 1988, followed by a folded map, and a children's book called <u>Amigo</u>. They are all lined up on the top shelf of my sister Julia's bookshelf, next to the books on Fenway Park and game design, untouched since we last reminisced about early childhood readings. They were my earliest resources for visualizing Chile, conduits through which a different country became accessible to me at a young age.

As a child, Chile was a *desconocido*, a stranger. In lieu of people or formal relationships to the country, I dedicated myself to understanding, at the very least, some part of the Chilean culture. This process of familiarization began, thanks in part to texts like those listed above, as an elementary schooler. As I got older, however, different sources and ways of relating to Chile presented themselves, each affecting my understanding of the nation and my positioning in relation to it.

My mom bought me Isabel Allende's books, which I devoured one after another, always captivated by the strong female protagonists who navigated their way through a variety of conflicts. Yet it wasn't with her characters that I related, it was with Allende herself. I wanted to know more about her so when her memoirs *Paula*

and *My Invented Country* were published I read them even more attentively, trying to locate myself in her writing and construction of Chile as a country.

Allende told me through poetry I would understand the landscape of Chile:

"To see my country with the heart, one must read Pablo Neruda, the national poet who in his verses immortalized the imposing landscapes, the aromas and dawns, the tenacious rain and dignified poverty, the stoicism and the hospitality, of Chile. That is the land of my nostalgia, the one I invoke in my solitude, the one that appears as a backdrop in so many of my stories, the one that comes to me in my dreams" (2003: 10).

I complied and read *Twenty Love Songs and a Song of Despair, Book of Questions*, and *Elemental Odes*. Her reading suggestions led me to *What is Secret: Short Stories by Chilean Women*, and I continued building a personal canon of literature. Even so, I felt a dissonance. From my bedroom in Cambridge, even with the Chilean flag hanging on the wall, I felt ambivalent placing myself within her collective 'we.'

"Who are we, we Chileans?" she asks in My Invented Country.

"It's difficult for me to define us in writing, but from fifty yards I can pick out a compatriot with one glance. I find them everywhere. In a sacred temple in Nepal, in the Amazon jungle, at Mardi Gras in New Orleans, on the brilliant ice of Iceland, there you will find some Chilean with his unmistakable way of walking or her singing accent. Although because of the length of our narrow country we are separated by thousands of kilometers, we are tenaciously alike; we talk the same tongue and share similar customs" (*Ibid*, 33).

Would she recognize me as Chilean, I wondered? Better not to assume, I convinced myself, and continued reading from a distanced position. Similar to the conclusion drawn about Siri's childhood, I developed a "national consciousness" ("which is not nationalism") through literature set in and about Chile that made the country imaginable (Franz Fanon in Bhabha 1990: 4).

Texts presented me with one way of understanding a country, but narrated oral histories were the most formative experiences of long distance national belonging (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001).

Comemos y Conmemoramos

"La mayoria, la tiraban en el mar. Cadenada." (The majority, they threw in the ocean. Chained.) We had stumbled on this conversation and I was nervous. I had been living with Lucy and Humberto, my home stay parents, for almost four months. Their experiences during the military coup that accompanied Augusto Pinochet's regime occasionally lapsed out into conversation. A news headline from the previous night reported President Michele Bachelet's trip to Russia and to a Holocaust memorial. Talk of escaped Nazis and Jewish refugees in Chile and Argentina led to a simple sentence.

"Aquí también, había mucha muerte." (Here, also, there has been death), as if to insinuate that death itself had existed in some personified form, cowering over the city, the country, on its bridges, on the corners, and at every bus stop.

I can hear kids playing in the pool; the dog next door continues to yap, the peripheral noise fades and the present refocuses itself on the past. Humberto talks slowly and rewords sentences after I ask questions, trying to navigate the conjugations of the past. I worry I am intruding on a memory they would prefer to leave untouched. Lucy looks at me reassuringly. This is something I should hear.

They lived a block and a half away from Pinochet in their previous house in Santiago. Only eight blocks from President Salvador Allende's house. Humberto was

working at the Library of Congress, but was on vacation on September 11th, 1973, the day of the *golpe*. Somehow he ended up driving President Allende's daughter to the Mexican Embassy after the women were told to leave La Moneda, Chile's presidential palace. It would be bombed. Death was certain.

In between courses for lunch, Lucy explains to me that beginning the 12th curfew was instated. She made the kids stay under the bed. They used no light for a month. No, she rethinks, *más* (more). Humberto's brother worked for *La Escuela Militar* and was a Pinochet supporter, so they were given a heads up on what to do. Decades later the rift in the family is still palpable as they sit in silence, sipping tea and harboring resentment.

"Pero Nina, fue terrible. Terrible, terrible. Con los niños! Imaginate, Nina."

(But, Nina, it was terrible. Terrible, terrible. With the kids! Imagine, Nina.) I can't imagine. I know nothing comparable.

Humberto tells me that army officials lined up his coworkers at the Library of Congress the day of the *golpe*. With their hands on the wall, they were accused of being communists. There had to be people to testify *qué no*, or they were taken. Planes circled overhead. Lucy remembers a man running in the night, passing their window. I pictured shadows of silhouettes moving in the dark of night. Black on black. They were under house arrest.

Sitting at the dining room table, I'm crying for something that I didn't live through. Never saw, never felt, never heard. I'm reminded of how helpless I felt when listening to my grandfather talk about leaving Poland and the cruel assimilation process in New York.

"Tantos que nunca más vimos." (So many people that we never saw again,)
She remembers the disappeared.

I mumble to myself, "Como pueden pasar esas cosas?" (How is it possible that these things happen?)

She shakes her head and collects the plates from the table.

• • •

Through Lucy and Humberto's narration I learned about Chile's painful history just as I had while listening to Siri speak of the people she lost during the Holocaust. The affectional ties I had made during my time abroad led me to an appreciation and understanding of Chile's national history I would not have had access to from Cambridge. It was interesting to compare the two iterations of return. The first family I lived with in 2007 was largely apolitical. Their historical memory of the country was kept private. It was understood that they had lived through it, but it was not to be outwardly shared. I had felt ambivalent about asking, unsure if it was appropriate. I realized after living in Santiago for those four weeks that keeping mum about the dictatorship was most people's preference. Memorialized and acknowledged silently throughout the city, the practices that characterized Pinochet's dictatorship were still too recent in the country's past to be spoken about casually.

Studying abroad however and enrolling directly in the Department of Social Studies at the University of Chile was a different experience. Recognized as the most liberal university in the country, and Campus Juan Gomez Millas as the most politically active in the school, younger generations of Chilean's relationship to the

past manifested itself everywhere. The campus' buildings were covered in graffiti and stencils paying homage to Salvador Allende and his socialist policies. There were frequent days of commemoration for students who died protesting Pinochet's policies. The immediacy and all consumingness of being a student intensified my relationship to Chile, as one would expect. This, however, all happened after I had arrived.

Learning about the country of Chile prior to traveling provided one way of understanding; it was highly personalized. Actually living in the country with a Chilean family and attending a university provided a very different way of understanding, a new dimension to my relationship with Chile while also revealing the situadedness of my previous imaginings.

Even though I was well versed in the authors Chileans considered a part of their national literary history, when I opened my mouth to speak about my favorite authors, my peers knew my cultural fluency was learned and not native. My Spanish professor in high school was Mexican, and the accent he spoke with was discernable in mine. ¿De donde eres? people would ask. Where are you from? ¿Méjico? ¿Costa Rica? My accent eluded finite origins, but it was clear it was not Chilean. Soy estadounidense, I would concede. I'm American. The inquisitive looks would lessen and a knowing smile would appear on their faces, Ah, claro. Eres Americana. Of course, you're American. The translatability of cultural understanding was partial, if at all.

I realized after I returned from my five-month study abroad program this past summer that being related to a place or to a person does not necessarily signify belonging. Imagining Chile from abroad and being there in person were two different experiences of learning and of belonging. Being in Chile added a new dimension to the fragmented images and narratives I had accumulated over the first twenty years of my life. In conversation together, the two experiences revealed that what I had read in novels and seen in popular films was just one kind of truth. Some part of me had hoped, prior to leaving, that I would meet people similar to the characters in Allende's novels, that I would be recognized as Chilean by some distinct walk or intonation in speech like she describes all Chileans as having. I realized it was dangerous to hope like that, to romanticize, because when I was lumped with all the other Americans, maybe with a bit better accent, it was clear I didn't quite belong.

My personal identity includes my relationships to both the United States and Chile, though after returning to Chile I felt I belonged *in* (and not necessarily *to*) the United States. The other countries that I feel related to and compelled to learn about through texts, language and narration, contributed to a "national consciousness, which is not nationalism" (Fanon in Bhabha 1990). I believe it is important to be aware of the histories that tie people to places, especially those who matter most to me. In a reciprocal fashion, those people helped me do the same.

I tried to explain how I felt to Siri how I felt that I didn't quite belong in Chile. Quickly, she offered an explanation for the differences in our two experiences of understanding multiple nations.

"There's such a heavy connotation there. You're looking into your background. Why did you react negatively to the country? you wonder. Probably because there's a heavy burden there. It was all new for you." I mull this over and

can't help but feel guilty. Had I judged the country while I was there and after I had returned because my constructed idea did not correspond with what I actually experienced?

I tried to understand my reaction. I reminded myself that my experience of imagining Chile was deterritorialized. My earliest images of Chile were constructed from the maps, books and photos my parents had brought back from their trip to adopt Julia and me, along with their memories. As young children, and even still today, my parents were careful to buy the produce imported from Chile. My sister and I would playfully stick the labels "Hecho en Chile" (Made in Chile) on our arms, proudly parading around Trader Joe's as lesser-known imports. When friends who had family in Chile went back to visit, we asked them to bring us back a trinket and gradually built up a collection of dolls, stuffed llamas and children's books. This slow accumulation satisfied my interest. The advent of the internet, which I first remember using in 3rd grade, quickened the pace of this accumulation.

Instead of a handful of books portraying defined representations of the Chilean family or the Chilean countryside, a single search could yield hundreds of thousands of people who we physically resembled. The history of Chile presented itself from new perspectives, but they did not resonate with me as much as listening to Humberto and Lucy remember the first nights of the dictatorship. Just as Siri had commented, "it was all new" for me, whereas she had spent her childhood moving, relocating from place to place. Engrained in her identity is a process of movement, which has lessened since she moved to her apartment in 1982.

"This is my home," she says as she looks around, glancing at the artwork on the walls, the framed photos by the television.

"This is my home," she repeats as she puts her hand over mine. In this moment it seems superfluous to try to understand other sites of belonging when I so clearly belong with her.



Siri with Julia and me. 1988.

"It's interesting how lives can be totally different, no?" she asks. I nod, in complete agreement. "You grew up in a unique setting of Cambridge. A well-known community of intellectuals; a specialized people. It was atypical in itself. You had a childhood characterized by stability, an adolescence which I didn't have."

"Still, there is a mutual subject here," she notes moments after. I nod again, beginning to understand.

"Write what should not be forgotten." **Isabel Allende**

Chapter 3 *Irreconcilables*

⁹ It is important to remember that Allende's writing not only speaks to the realities of Chile that I could relate to from the United States, but also to and from a position of exile. Writing, for her and for me, is a process of remembering and documenting what displacement (and violence) tried to erase.

The Limits of Legibility

"He never wanted to go back," Inger remembers. "Roma and Eva [George's sisters] wanted to go; he was never interested. He never felt Polish because he never was treated properly. He became more American than anyone." This quote reveals feelings my grandpa George never personally conveyed to me. I know very little about his early childhood, and only a little more about his immigration to the United States from Warsaw, Poland in 1929. The process of writing the personal component of this thesis has revealed many discontinuities in many stories I wish I knew more completely, most notably my grandfather's who died in 2001. Understanding family history through story telling proves problematic when the original source is not available to tell his or her own story.

Historian Timothy Burke spoke eloquently about the limits of knowledge as a product of a colonial past during his lecture at Wesleyan University this past winter (November 12, 2009). He raised questions about the relationship between what is knowable and what is documented. How are the records we have access to now only limited totalities? What, he challenges, is missing? In his lecture *Mystery*, *History and Microhistory* he explores the limits of legibility of individual Africans' lives. The information available in archives is the main source of information for historians gathering data about past lives. Interviews with those still living offer fragmented memories of back then, and by cohering together these often-disparate portraits a persona is born, created. What agency, then, does the researched person have? Very little.

One's interaction with the archive, or with the state during his lifetime, largely determines how he is remembered posthumously, at least in Burke's studies. Mgodo, one of Burke's subjects, is remembered as a political figure – his more visible, public, role – and seldom spoken of or remembered as a wage laborer or an amateur boxer. Earlier trajectories of life, Burke contends, are not always visible because they do not necessitate any mediation by government. Certain questions about people's narratives are not answerable if the construction of the narrative relies on formal documentation.

In his ideological footsteps I follow, attempting to gain some sovereignty over my own history while keeping in mind the reality of partiality, granting space and time for the voices that inform this study to reverberate through the spaces that have remained empty for some time, being okay with an echo. Auto-ethnography, as opposed to his historiography, facilitates more easily such a feat, yet the structure of this thesis reflects my belief that the multiple narratives of movement within my own family helped construct my own. As I look to understand the fissures of my life, however, Burke's words of caution to any historian remain present. There are individuals who have "sole possession of moments", like a young mother giving her newborn children up for adoption or one's decision to remain mute concerning a painful past. This, he says, "is not tragic", just the reality of partiality.

Burke analyzes the ways the documentary approach of colonialism that chronicled a systematic imposition of English culture in Zimbabwe beginning in 1890 created a very specific and manipulated official memory. The dynamic between the historical context of an individual life and the possibility of a complete narrative can

be seen in similar present day examples that reiterate the contentious relationship between national histories and individual's identities.

Identity in Exile

Liisa Malkki has already been referenced in my writing for her proposed idea of a rhizomatic identity. She questions the idea of an identity bounded to a single country or home and thus subject to the state's actions. Similar to Timothy Burke's work, she underscores how scripted a nation's history can be. Malkki writes, "The nation is a construction of history of a particular kind; it is one that claims moral attachments to specific territories, motherlands or homelands, and posits time-honored links between people, polity, and territory" (1995:1). Burke explores how a colonial past obstructs *individual* identity with particular documentary practices, including destruction, while Malkki explores how present day examples of ethnic violence create winners and losers in national memory, which complicates the displaced ethnic groups' *collective* identity and attachment to place.

Her work focuses on the variety of ways in which individual refugees perform ideas of nationhood in contexts of displacement. Her study of Hutu refugees in Tanzania after the first genocide in Rwanda demonstrates how different spaces outside of the homeland (refugee camps and townships) are transformed into significant *places* through different practices of place and identity making.

Refugees who were placed in camps created a narrative that cast them as rightful natives to the African state of Burundi. Conversely, those who were living in Tanzanian townships adopted a narrative that aligned their displacement within the

larger trend of cosmopolitanism and assimilated into Tanzanian culture. These different responses illustrate how groups with identical geographical pasts do not process the fact of displacement unilaterally. "The Hutu refugees in the camp located their identities within their very displacement, extracting meaning and power from the interstitial social location they inhabited. Instead of losing their collective identity, this is where and how they made it. The refugee camp had become both the spatial and politico-symbolic site for imagining an amoral and political community" (1995: 16). Even though both the groups in the camps and in the townships shared the "fact of exile", "they lived their consequences very differently" (234).

The refugee camp group reterritorialized the second site of living in order to maintain the collective identity they shared in their homeland. Instead of adapting to the township, camp refugees privileged the experience of exile as part of the process towards an eventual return to Burundi. Their collective identity was thus still tied to their place of origin despite being in exile, an experience George Bisharat also addresses.

Bisharat's writing adds another perspective to this discussion of place and identity. Unlike Malkki's study of Hutu refugees from Burundi living in the refugee camp in Tanzania who constructed a narrative and collective identity that incorporated an eventual concrete return to their homeland, Bisharat focuses his study on the wave of Arab residents who left Palestine in 1948 after the establishment of the State of Israel who can no longer return to their original residences. Return is impossible because there is nothing to return to. In this case, practices of the state have not just threatened established ties to places, but eliminated them. In Bisharat's

example, the dynamic between power and place is complicated by Palestinians' experience of displacement *and* occupation.

360,000 to 380,000 Palestinians refugees currently live in the West Bank (Bisharat 2001: 206), having resettled there after being forced from their property after the creation of Israel. After being displaced from their homes based on political narratives of inclusion and exclusion, the collective Palestinian identity has undergone a transformation during the time spent in the West Bank. Bisharat writes,

"Palestinian refugee identity has had profoundly ironic meanings: on the one hand, as a signifier of statelessness, the ultimate negation of nationality; and on the other hand, as the embodiment of exile, that most defining, constitutive experience of 'Palestinian-ness' and the very means by which a Palestinian nationalism became distinctive" (205).

Borne from their uprootedness is a unifying identity distinctly Palestinian.

An interesting note to include is the Palestinian term *an-Nakba*, translated into English as "the Catastrophe" which refers to the forced exile experienced by many Palestinians. *an-Nakba* has, "passed into their national historical consciousness as one of unexpected, unnatural, and forced exile" (207). *an-Nakba* conveys the shock many Palestinians experienced. Exile was not something they planned for; many expected to return to the homes and land where they had lived (209). In the rush to be relocated, many did not bring forms of identification or permanent residency. When United Nations relief agencies relied upon these documents to establish who belonged where and thus who deserved what help, many were denied relief.

Those that did receive help did so ambivalently. Bisharat references a previously published interview (Cossali and Robinson, 1986:12) with a Palestinian refugee as saying, "Everyone was always waiting for things, handouts, forms, cast-off

clothes, applications, and so on. The whole sense of rootlessness created a sort of paralysis. The world saw our cause as a refugee one instead of a political one" (212). Herein lies a large portion of the problem. The perception of the government and international bodies as relieved of blame reflects the widespread belief in the stability of nation or place-based identities. With their claims to Palestine, and thus a 'home' or 'origin', negated by their displacement, refugees were seen by many local and neighboring communities as threats to the established order in their newly inhabited geographical space. Maltreatment was predicated on difference and perceived inferiority.

Belonging in neither Palestine, the West Bank nor the other countries which absorbed many displaced Palestinians like Lebanon and Syria, the embodiment of exile, which Bisharat speaks of at the beginning of his article, came to constitute a way of maintaining a tie to the biographical (of which geography is included) past. The physical connection to 'home' had been severed through displacement, but imaginative connections were fostered from one generation to the next through a mythologizing of Palestine as the homeland.

In 1967, however, approved access to the homes many Palestinians had left troubled the second generation's venerated image of the homeland. The mythologized Palestine, imagined and conceived from afar, did not coincide with Palestine pre *an-Nakba*. 385 of 475 of the original Palestinian villages were razed (219); people's land was often times reforested. Twenty years later, the generation that fled in 1948 returned "home" to nothing familiar. The children of these people, who had not lived nor seen the places of origin so essential to the social identity of their parents'

generation, but who had been raised imagining a place integral to their parents' identities, only had the oral record on which to belong. The liminal quality of not belonging they had experienced in the West Bank was heightened by the measures the Israeli government had gone to erase the physical remnants of the Palestinian people within Israel's newly constructed borders.

The second generation associated with the homeland through familial ties that linked them to the same place (territory) and their parents' memories of pre-1948 Palestine, whereas their parent's experience of homeland was territorialized and physically tangible. "Attachments formed on the latter [1967 reality] limited exposure simply could not match the intensity of those held by the original exiles and were inescapably different and more abstract (Parmenter 1994)" (220). The re-forming of nation-based identities are appropriately different across generations.

Even though the second generation will never know the Palestine of their parents, they live the repercussions of a history of displacement and occupation. Their shared pasts and desired future bind them together politically. Bisharat writes, "Historical narratives of a people's past are retrospective only in form but are future-directed in all their meaningful implications" (224). Just as Malkki detailed, the past is important because of its incorporation into or exclusion from present day identities. The experience of exile has been naturalized for some, as is the case with the township refugees of Malkki's study, and appropriated as an identity in line with cosmopolitanism. For others, like the Tanzanian camp refugees and for many Palestinians, an exilic identity is not stable or static; it is a, "continuing production, based on sets of oppositions between the self and an other – or, more accurate,

multiple others" (204). Whether those 'others' are refugees who have dealt with exile in different ways, or Israelis who occupy previously owned Palestinian houses, the self as an individual identity is in constant interplay with the social contexts it inhabits.

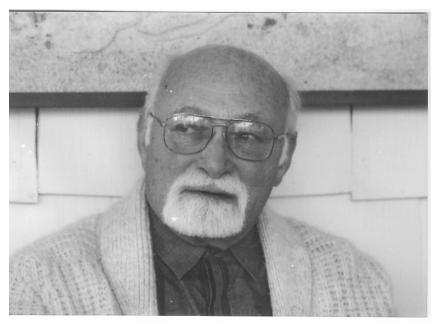
These examples detail the ways in which historical practices like colonial regimes, ethnic genocide and violence obstruct or force individual and group identities to re-form when places essential to their identities can no longer be physically occupied. Malkki and Bisharat depict exile itself as an experience of fragmentation, internalized and embodied by the individuals who live through it.

Those who never occupied the homeland itself rely on invocations of home as relayed to them by older generations through oral histories and political rhetoric. Homelands are made accessible through imaginative practices, which serve to reinscribe placebased identities despite physical displacement and various practices of erasure.

Colored Memories

As the grandchild of three family members, each with their experience of fragmentation (immigration), my interest in imagining their homes began at a young age. Visiting some but not all of the countries where they were born, as well as Chile changed my image of 'home' in each specific case, as discussed in the previous chapter. Yet as I mentioned at the start of this chapter, my grandpa George's experience was significantly different from Inger and Siri's. Contextually set during the early stages of Jewish persecution in Poland, his story is the most complicated. George's own personal catastrophe was not the war itself but his father's departure.

The discontinuities in my own memory of him are mirrored by the discontinuities in the story of his immigration. What is collectively remembered by other members of the family serve to fill the gaps. Piece by piece, a story, inaccessible now after his death, has cohered partially as follows, first through personal memory and second as a narrative of his immigration.



George sitting outside the pool house. Croton, New York.

Our relationship was quiet. We didn't speak much and I often wondered what he made of two high-energy girls running through his house. Julia and I sometimes slept in sleeping bags in front of the fire at his and Inger's Croton home when we visited for holidays. The floor creaked under his slippered footsteps as he left his bedroom in the morning, back hunched with a slight curve. He probably assumed I was asleep, but I remember watching him cross the room on his way to prepare breakfast for the rest of the family.

I remember this probably because it happened so often, on most mornings during the course of my childhood when I stayed at my grandparents' house. In addition to this memory, however, are less formal associations – colors, namely. I associate him with,

Yellow: the very particular bright shade of his perfectly scrambled eggs in a jet-black frying pan.

Dark navy blue: the color of a shirt he is wearing in the photo pinned to my bulletin board.

Orange: the color of the *only* cheese I would eat growing up. A foodie and a phenomenal chef, George sacrificed his exceptional ingredient standards for my youthful attraction to artificial coloring. I am often reminded of his whitening goatee and thin-framed glasses when I look at my father. Most clearly though, I remember him at the side of his wife, as a united front, always there to greet us when our car pulled into their graveled driveway. These of course are childhood memories, incomplete and romanticized. Even so, they contribute to a more filled out narrative, the one Timothy Burke asserts is always caught up in systems of power.

He was not one of the six million Jews to die in the Holocaust, but one of the many who left a Warsaw they never returned to, could never return to. He changed his name from Tannenbaum to Tanier upon immigration, a change symbolic of the irreversible rift between his life in Poland and his life in the United States. If I were to rely on Timothy Burke's primary method of research, the trajectory of my grandpa's life would not be obvious. It would be reduced to interactions with the State – a name change, a marriage, a mortgage – inanimate points on a Cartesian graph. What

follows hopes to add dimension, another axis through which the static plotting of points becomes instead a constellation of his life.

There is a pool about fifty yards behind their house in Croton-on-Hudson, New York. Each year there seems to be a gift waiting for us. This year there are two inflatable rafts to sit on as we patrol the waters. The body sized blow-up bear is for me and the alligator is for Julia. The summer sun reflects off the turquoise water and I remember the afternoon through a perpetual squint, darting back and forth along the edge of the pool trying to catch frogs. Grandpa George sits in a reclined beach chair under the roof of the pool house. Julia and I practice diving in front of him and a line of judges consisting of our parents and Aunt Nanna. If he doesn't announce his score soon enough we convince ourselves our belly flops weren't up to snuff. We'll try again! we declare, and jackknife back into the water. And so the afternoon passes, in and out of water, quietly watched over by his soft gaze.

This is the only clear memory I have of my grandpa before I was thirteen years old. The information I have on his life, I obtained through a brief phone interview for my graduation project from Hebrew School. I wrote a small book – ten typed pages – called *Through Their Eyes* dedicated to, "those who allowed to capture their stories and experience on paper." The list of those included is similar to the names included here: Siri Berg, Eva Hindus, Henia Schlossman and George Tanier. After our phone interview, I wrote a two-page story about George's immigration. At the onset of this project it constituted all of the information I knew about his narrative as told by him. Over Christmas dinner this past year, I gathered the courage to ask

Inger about his immigration. Echoing my assumption, she told me he didn't speak much about his life pre-1929. With no means to access the past, this is, unfortunately, everything I have.

Through His Eyes, Take Two

He said to me over the phone when I was thirteen, his trip represented "hope—that did and didn't happen." He remembered the day he left Warsaw as bright. It was July of 1929 when he left their big house with his mother and two sisters. He was eleven years old. They were not the first of their family to immigrate to the United States. His father had left five years earlier to gain citizenship and establish himself before calling his family to join him. According to my grandmother, his father had grown to be his hero and losing him at such a young age was terrible. In his father's absence he became the protector of the younger children in his neighborhood. As a Jew, he was treated badly by the Poles. Soldiers laughed at him; gave him ham to mock him, which he gladly took. His family was socialist, not kosher. One would assume, as I did, that the historical moment was what resonated so deeply for George, but really it was his father's departure.

Inger says, "He remembered running after the train after his father was leaving and running and running. There was this searing loss." When they reunited in New York, his father had lost everything. My grandmother explains, "A poor man can't help that, but a young child can't understand that." During our informal interview, George told me that Brooklyn was the ugliest place he had ever seen. Enduring a three week long trip across the Atlantic, plus the two week screening

period held by United States immigration in Poland, yielded disappointment, disorientation.

Navigating public school in New York without knowledge of the English language was difficult. Intensified by nativist sentiment, his labeling as an immigrant made his origins impossible to forget. The change in material wealth was also hard to ignore. George's family left a big house in Warsaw, furnished with all the comforts of home. Once in New York they moved in to a small, cramped apartment on Coney Island by the store his father owned. Their previous socioeconomic status dissolved; the discrimination they faced continued.

School children oblivious to the rampant anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe that precipitated his immigration made no effort to help George's transition to a new country. Instead they recognized someone out of place: a twelve year old in second grade who couldn't speak English. No effort was made to help him learn, so he was self-taught. He came home from school with bloody noses from fights he was outnumbered in, ganged up and teased because he was different. I vividly remember slinking down the wall, tears streaming down my face as he told me, "I felt helpless."

Rereading the notes from the original interview, I realize I never asked him if anything had made the transition to a new place easier. His early years in the United States were characterized by hard work. He remembers living through his problems and generally feeling satisfied with his life. Above all else, he was uncompromisingly committed to making things work for not just himself, but his entire family.

The American economy did nothing to make the transition easier. When his father lost his business in the Depression, George went from former customer to

former customer trying to generate business for the family. He worked multiple jobs depending on the season. From April to October he worked in a candy shop on Coney Island selling popcorn and peanut brittle. Yet even then he was asked to disappear because he was underpaid and underage when patrollers came around to local businesses.

He won a scholarship to Pratt where he won art awards, but felt he couldn't stay because of the anti-Semitic attitude of the professors. He went next to the New School for Social Research where he met Jose DeCreeft, a sculptor who he began to take classes with. During the three and a half years he went to the New School he worked as an assistant for Jose in his studio and eventually took over teaching his class. In 1940 he opened his own model shop and his work importing Scandinavian furniture ushered in a new age of design in the United States.

This is where my interview stops. Imagination and conjecture take over once again to fill the gaps. I question why I haven't asked about his and Inger's wedding, when Nanna was born. Those are stories for another time, though they will still be told from someone else's point of view.

My grandfather's experience of transnational movement is one of displacement, just like Malkki and Bisharat's examples. Neither he nor Inger directly referred to it as exile, but there are notable similarities. National rhetoric of exclusion convinced his father to leave and establish a home elsewhere. George's memories of Warsaw before he left are filled with references to the presence of soldiers, manifestations of the state. In the place he regarded as 'home', though not explicitly

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Poland, mounting hostility towards Jews threatened his security and labeled him as Other. Inger's words are telling and worth repeating, "He never felt Polish because he was never treated properly." Even as a child he disassociated with his homeland. Why claim Poland as part of his identity, if it didn't claim him as a member, when it went to such lengths to exclude? There was no need.

Working himself into the American economy and cultural landscape helped facilitate belonging in a new place. I've wondered if his story is one of assimilation. With regards to Warsaw, the historical moment of World War II and the Holocaust is often remembered as a period of erasure. The planned decimation of Warsaw in 1939 destroyed 84% of the city. There was no place to return to. George too must have realized it was impossible to return to his village or his house. The finality of destruction prevents me, the third generation, or my father, the second generation, from ever knowing firsthand a place his father lived in. But then again, for George, 'home' may have been a space devoid of meaning, filled only by his vehement opposition to what it represented.

Reconciling with both the history of the Jewish population, including the rest of his family who did not immigrate and were killed in Warsaw, and the dissolution of his father's livelihood was impossible. His painful personal history seldom revealed itself, even in the company of family. Unspoken stories lead to partial truths, limited knowledge. The irreconcilable nature of his lived narrative is embedded in my own pursuit of a family narrative in which to place myself.

Partial narratives are framed by national histories, rhetoric and regimes of inclusion and exclusion that dictate how people experience belonging to different

places. In the context of the Holocaust, that nation prioritized Aryan over Jew,

American over immigrant; such imbalances are internalized in identities. George was
not Polish. He could not be a Tannenbaum. He never explicitly said he was an

American. Most clearly, though, he was a Tanier – an identity he shared with nobody
but his family.

Re-formed Identities as Expressed in Selected Memoirs and Art

The collection of works consulted demonstrates the myriad of ways in which people's identities respond to the experience of permanent fragmentation. Examples like the Rwandan genocide, Palestinian occupation and the Holocaust collectively illustrate that throughout the world and more frequently in recent history, identities re-form when established ties to place are threatened or severed.

Some argue that the frequency and number of people who embody the fragmentation created by transnational movement necessitate an identity comprising such experiences alone. The "generalized condition of homelessness" that Edward Said articulates in his book *The Question of Palestine* (1979:61, 62) and his memoir *Out of Place* (2000) refers to the specific experience of exiles and refugees, yet his ideas resonate with many narratives of not-belonging and, indeed, identity formation. This quote also alludes to the idea that perhaps a fixed notion of home/land is not relevant if belonging is constantly threatened and thus shifts.

In their piece about the "problematics of home," feminist scholars Chandra Mohanty and Biddy Martin challenge the romanticized ideal of home by analyzing the autobiographical memoir, *Identity: Skin Blood Heart*, written by Minnie Bruce

Pratt. Her narrative illustrates the tension between "the power and appeal of 'home' as a concept and a desire" (2003: 85) and the reality that "home", thought of as a space of inclusion, carries a powerful history of exclusion. In her travels, Pratt brings with her to all of the sites of potential "homes" a body writ with its own histories and compromised of multiple identities- that of a white woman, of a privileged woman, of an educated woman, and of a lesbian woman. Which histories and identities are openly discussed or performed depend on the location.

Pratt finds it difficult to define home after numerous relocations to new communities because parts of her identity and history seem unspeakable. In a neighborhood that is primarily black, she is aware and uncomfortable in her whiteness. In a feminist group that does not support gay rights, she does not express her views that lesbian rights are essential to feminist discourses. Her trouble expressing a personal identity harkens back to Bisharat's definition of social identities, which are constantly created in opposition to something else, an Other.

Pratt's narrative "serves to indicate the fundamentally relational nature of identity and the negations on which the assumption of a singular, fixed, and essential self is based" (90-91). Ultimately, home as an ideal is also negated. Mohanty and Martin conclude that "not being home" or as I've suggested experiencing non-belonging derives from constructed histories of exclusion and inclusion that can be internalized in individual identities as well.

Differing from Pratt's search for a home where her multiple identities can be expressed is Gloria Anzaldua's concept of a transient home. She belongs on the fence that separates the southern border of the United States and Mexico, in the

borderlands, as she calls it. In the midst of a violent dialogue and history between two nations that struggle to define borders, include and or exclude people from narratives of nationalism, the place in-between is a regenerative site where a re-formed identity can be located. She writes, "To survive in the Borderlands/you must live *sin fronteras*/be a crossroads" (1999). By inhabiting the borderland itself, Anzaldua, a self-described "chicana dyke-feminist, tejana patlache poet, writer, and cultural theorist" (http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/anzaldua.php), claims a hybridized identity that refuses to conform to state-ratified forms of national and cultural belonging. Her writing on the geographical, metaphorical and psychological space that is the borderland conceives of the in-between as home and assumes the dangerous nature of claiming belonging to two countries that historically oppose each other.

The forum for exploring the interconnectedness of identity and place seems to play out best in writing and art. Anzladua comments, "By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it" (1999: 169). The complexities of a hybridized identity become understandable through writing. I found an interesting connection between Anzaldua's self-understanding through writing, an article about Edward Said's work and the Mohanty and Martin article. A new articulation of exile emerged in a critique of Said's memoir written by Gunter Lenz (2004).

Citing Susan Winnet's essay, *Writing in Place: Edward Said's Constructions* of Exile, Lenz argues the subject matter of Said's intent focus on exile is reinforced by personal familial experiences. For Said 'homelessness' begins at home, the setting of a complicated relationship with both his mother and father. In his personal memoir,

exile appears in the familial realm in the distance between relationships understood as essential to identity formation – mother from son, and father from son.

Similar to Said, my grandfather George experienced the permanent and painful fragmentation that happens on both the familial and "home" level. Losing his father destabilized his home life. Lack of stability at home was compounded by the lack of safety in Warsaw at the time of his immigration. Both Said and George's experiences reiterate Mohanty and Martin's depiction of home as penetrable, restrictive and dangerous. Trying to understand the implications of identities informed by permanent fragmentation of some kind has been the "intellectual project" of both Said and Anzaldua (Lenz 2004: 324). Anzaldua proposes the borderlands as a place of refuge. Said proposes no place, only "the condition of homelessness." The prominence of destabilized identities coupled with the understanding of home as a fictitious idea makes adopting a "homeless" identity or one that is constantly in flux a compelling alternative to stable and singular identity.

Such an identity is explored in the art and installations made by Mona Hatoum (2000). Photographed and accompanied by an essay by Edward Said, her work explores the danger of stability in both place and identity.

Necessary Travesty: The Entire World as a Foreign Place

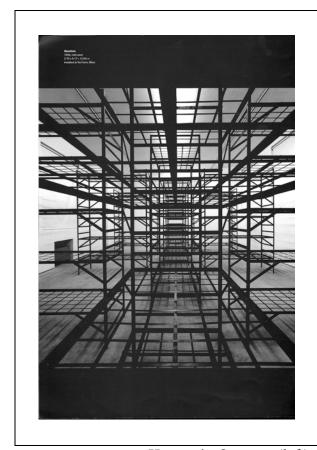
The first photo presents a series of graters leaning on a windowpane. A city skyline is dimly visible on the other side of the glass. Smog impairs the view, sharply contrasting the blurred background with the bold silhouettes of simple kitchen utensils. Potatoes and an assortment of knives lie on the table in the foreground, yet

they are secondary in importance, an afterthought to the graters themselves. This simple black and white photo opens Mona Hatoum's book, The Entire World as a Foreign Place. The familiar objects, in their unsuspecting abundance, mimic the repetition of the hi-rise apartments of the outside world. This is not surprising. It is commonplace to see familiar, intimate objects representative of home juxtaposed with the larger symbols of the outside world. It is the violent undertones signified by the knives that give the photo its edge and challenge the connotations of safety associated with domestic settings.

A Lebanese national, Hatoum moved to London in 1975 after war forced her to leave her native country. In her artwork, she presents dichotomies of inside and outside, familiar and foreign, and private and public reconfigured in the after effects of experiences of dislocation. In such a context, recognizable dichotomies clash. Hatoum's artwork suggests that the experience of movement renders the world, and every iteration of home, a foreign place, wreaking havoc on all levels of interaction, leaving not one corner of our lives untouched, not even the kitchen sink. Homes and homelands become nonexistent, represented in her work as places of deception, dangerous in their appeal.

The notion of home, or as Said writes, "a place where one might have felt in place, at ease or at rest, surrounded by the ordinary objects which together constitute the feeling, if not the actual state, or being at home" is challenged by the reactions Hatoum's installations elicit. In her installation *Quarters*, rigid constructions of metal panels and beams eerily liken military barracks. Their strong lines inherently contradict the curvature of cradling arms often associated with the comforts of the

familiar. This can't be home; we collectively cringe. In *Doormat*, a welcome mat appears normal, a symbol of suburban hospitality, but upon closer inspection reveals its malicious intents; it is composed of thousands of needles. Objects that appear familiar or obvious in their connotations divulge a personal pain not often represented.





Hatoum's Quarters (left) and Doormat (right).

In her art, Hatoum:

"articulates so fundamental a dislocation as to assault not only one's memory of what once was, but how logical and possible, how close and yet so distant from the original abode, this new elaboration of familiar space and objects really is. Familiarity and strangeness are locked together in the oddest way, adjacent and irreconcilable at the same time... They are unredeemed things whose distortions cannot be sent back for correction or reworking, since the old address is unreachably there and yet has been annulled" (15).

Return is not an option. Reinstating original meaning is impossible. A word as simple as 'welcome' loses its optimistic sentiment. Instead it becomes threatening.

Accurately, Hatoum suggests entering a new place means taking a risk, risking a life even.

Her work presents a disfigured version of home that is unapologetic and seeks not to re-right the representational divergence from our predisposed notions of home. Together, Hatoum's photos and Said's writing explore a world of displacement, of "identity as unable to identify with itself, but nevertheless grappling the notion (perhaps only the ghost) of identity to itself" (17). They articulate the desire to ground belonging in something physical, yet their work exposes that even the tangible in its most simplistic form – a bed frame, a mirror – is unavoidably tainted by the experience of displacement.

The familiar is changed ever so slightly so as to discreetly represent the transformation a singular object can undergo. In the opening paragraph of Said's essay, the slight relocation of a door handle triggers an immediate disorientation. The door handle is an understated choice, yet "from that beginning dislocation others necessarily follow" (7). The world as the reader knows it, on its most familiar level, is forced to then reconfigure, leaving the subject contemplating his or her place in the now imbalanced world of Hatoum and Said's creation.

The initial "dislocation" wreaks havoc on the previously understood definitions of home. In *Homebound*, an installation of a kitchen takes on a sterile, armored feel – metal appliances reflect jarring light while electrical wires are ominously strewn everywhere. Ignition seems probable. In *Marrow*, a rubberized bed

frame or crib lays wilted in a corner – the foundation of development left unsupported on a wooden floor. "All this," Said writes, "is designed to recall and disturb at the same time" (11).





Hatoum's *Homebound* (left) and *Marrow* (right).

The trauma often associated and experienced during the processes of relocation/dislocation informs and inspires the installations and writing of both artists. They both dare to say: [in exile] *everything* changes. In the larger context of my writing and the collection of experiences I have chosen to engage with, this assertion rings true. Both of my grandmothers articulated a sense of loss upon their return to Sweden and Denmark later in life. Old haunts didn't seem the same; vibrant experiences had become hollow memories.

"I felt like a tourist," my grandmother Siri told me in the dining room of her SoHo loft apartment. "There was nothing left to go back to." The effects of exile are generalized; places are "marked forever by changes in everyday materials and objects that permit no return", affecting even those who return regularly to homelands (16).

"¿Su nombre?"

The premise narratives and thus identities are partially understood because of particular practices of documentation surfaces again in Veena Das' ethnographic study on ID cards and residency papers (2004). In the midst of the Sri Lankan Civil War, documents that listed residence and name of the person attempting to pass through checkpoints connected individuals to different zones of the country associated with ethnic tribes and thus violence or insurgence against the Sri Lankan army. "Evidently textured subjectivities" were reduced to processable and punishable facts (Ulysse 2008: 7).

The need on the state's part for things to be organized, and thus legible and manipulable is explored by Jim Scott in his book *Seeing Like a State* (1998). Scott explores how "thoroughly society and the environment have been refashioned by state maps of legibility" (3). As we have seen, the inclination to trust in the continuity of stable identities legitimized and made visible through documentation by the state is dangerous.

I have chosen to close this chapter and body of writing with an ethnographic moment of non-belonging of my own. Previously confident in the uncontested nature

of my name, I have learned, from this experience and the texts engaged above, the error of my ways.

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Sitting across the desk from a heavyset woman with smudged eyeliner, I try to remain calm. She takes my fingerprints, asks if I'd like to be an organ donor. She tells me to smile as she takes my picture and replaces the image of four-month old me with nineteen- year-old me. With a click of the mouse, she instantly updates my file in the national Chilean database that had no record of my ever leaving the country. She then asks me to sign my name. Right here, she points, on the dotted line. I don't know what to do. I don't know what my name is here. Instinctively, I want to write Nina, but I know I cannot. The woman is impatient and asks again. Su nombre? I glance at the computer monitor quickly to see what my name is listed as officially in Chile: Elena Deyanira Cervantes Leal. I sign quickly, thank the attendant, and leave the building. I feel sick to my stomach. I feel like a fraud.

Outside the landscape is unfamiliar. I get into a car that is not the red Saturn station wagon my parents drive. I sit next to my sister who is beaming, thinks we are just like Jason Bourne. She can tell something is noticeably wrong on the drive back to the street where our Chilean family lives in the small town of Nueva Imperial.

"Beans," she asks, "what's the matter?"

"I want to go home," I say. I feel like crying.

"C'mon, kid." She says playfully. "Try out your new name."

"Jules," I snap, "I'm a Berg." I stare out the window wondering how this could have gone so wrong. Home in Cambridge feels infinitely further as Julia, my

only link back, and I seem to be drifting apart in the aftermath of what I had expected would be nothing more than a formality.

I remind myself that Julia has always wanted to return to Chile and find our biological family. She made that clear as a kid. A Chilean flag had hung in both of our rooms. We had both studied Spanish, but while I was reading history books, she was writing letters on Mother's Day to a woman she had never met. It hadn't surprised me, then, on the bus ride from Santiago to Temuco when she showed me the copies of her Chilean birth certification and adoption papers that she had stashed in her backpack in anticipation of the encounter we were both now processing. I knew at the beginning of our trip that this might be her chance to find answers, and although I had hesitated at first, I knew this was something she shouldn't do alone. Disoriented by what our trip to the Registro Civil revealed, I felt ill equipped to handle such an imposing idea. Two names. Two countries. Two families.

"Elena," I hear someone call as people are getting out of the car, but I don't respond. I'm staring at rusty coins long forgotten under the driver's seat, hoping if I stay in the car long enough the discomfort I am feeling can remain private.

"Elena," I hear again. I look up and catch Julia's eye. She is living her romantic notion of having two identities. From inside the car I can see her showing Aunt Ruth her Massachusetts state license, placing the two headshots in alignment. I imagine her commenting on how similar she looks in both photos, but I, still sitting in the car, can't seem to reconcile the incongruence of the two names. Julia is smiling and motions for me to come join her. I look away, certain she can read the emotions in my face. The last thing I want is to detract from her happiness.

I look at the card again. I pinch the two ends together to see if it will break.

Instead it springs open and I see my face positioned next to a string of names. Despite my wishes, they are still the same.

"Nina!" Julia shots. I recognize her voice instantly. She is motioning more adamantly now with an impatient and desperate look on her face. She doesn't want to be alone and neither do I. I leave the car and put the card in my backpack knowing full well I don't need a piece of plastic to remind me of the emotional confrontation brewing inside of me.

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As a child I felt like I was related to Chile. I did not feel like I belonged in or to Chile. Even in settings like a Latino Pride rally, amongst people I considered family, I was skeptical to claim any kind of belonging. I never yelled the loudest or was the most noticeable. Standing in solidarity sufficed. I felt comfortable supporting, but I always felt that my affiliations rested not with a nation or a race, though I related to them peripherally, but with the family I was raised a part of. The discontinuity of still existing in the legal system in Chile challenged the identity I felt most strongly about.

As Julia was likening her second name to the multiple identities of the fictional CIA agent Jason Bourne, my head was flooding with doubts. If a country could claim me as a citizen, couldn't a family claim me as a daughter? I responded in desperate opposition. No, no, no. I'm a Berg, I told Julia urgently. I felt like I didn't belong, that home was elsewhere. Since then, there have been moments where I feel comfortable with the discontinuity, sometimes not.

Said's closing remark in his accompaniment to Hatoum's art speaks to the symbiotic relationship between identities and the histories that inform and re-form them:

"The past cannot be entirely recuperated from so much power arrayed against it on the other side: it can only be restated in the form of an object without a conclusion, or a final place, transformed by choice and conscious effort into something simultaneously different, ordinary, and irreducibly other and the same, taking place together: an object that offers neither rest nor respite" (17).

As I have suggested through textual and personal examples, our histories are filled with irreconcilables that serve to remind us of the relational and rhizomatic nature of one's home, history and identity.

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. **Karl Marx**¹⁰

Epilogue

¹⁰ From the *Communist Manifest*o, originally published in 1848.

The Earthquake: Feb. 27, 2010

My lazy morning routine was forcefully interrupted by the front page of the New York Times website. An 8.8 level earthquake had struck Chile at 3:30 that morning. I quickly checked my email and saw nothing new. I sent out panicked messages to host families and biological ones, friends and professors, trying to get their assessment of the damage. Only weeks after the earthquake that devastated Portau-Prince in Haiti, another had hit, and this one was closer to home.

At the gym an hour later I watched as images streamed in from CNN's station in Santiago. The European-style architecture I had walked past months earlier in the city center lay crumbled in streets. There wasn't much news to report on. Instead, I watched the same images repeat over and over again: a man being helped from inside a building; smoke rising from a partially fallen apartment building; flooded streets and downed power lines. From the confines of 'far away', I didn't know how to react. Fellow exercisers conversed, "Too bad." "Right after Haiti, too."

Perhaps the distance that separates me and Chile is necessary – an idea I have considered time and again while writing this thesis. I imagine a world where the fields of Nueva Imperial are adjacent to the Esplanade in Boston. In the small town where our Chilean family lives, it is green as far as the eye can see. In makeshift soccer fields, children reenact the triumph and heartbreak of their national sports heroes, just as kids do here, running around imaginary bases in the shadows of the Citgo sign. Imagining the lush green countryside of Nueva Imperial in front of the strong, geometric patterns of Boston's cityscape doesn't make sense. There is a visual

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dissonance. It might be easier for me if these two places were closer, but it might complicate things too.

The people in the areas affected by the earthquake are without electrical power. The distance between us, heightened by catastrophe, instead, reminds us how fragile our sense of connectedness is. Technologies have become extensions of our own bodies; they feign stability. There is no phone service. No internet. On television there is a cycle of the same photos, on loop, becoming hypnotic in its repetition. I craved something new. "Show something I recognize", I silently plead, but all I see is a street in Talca where I know nobody. I wish Lucy and Humberto were closer, that I could transplant their kitchen somewhere near mine and we could converse like we had months earlier. Instead I am left warmheartedly and anxiously remembering the time we shared.

Appadurai (1996) theorizes that advancements in technology have improved the ways in which we communicate and quickened the speed with which images are transmitted. Yet they bear no import when there is no electricity and we are forced to wait. At times like this, the advances of globalization fail us; our webs of relatedness lay trapped beneath fallen wires.

Julia used to tell me, "absence makes the heart grow fonder," when I would leave for sleep away camp when I was younger. The month I spent away from home was filled with activities that I enjoyed. Too busy playing sports and swimming from sun up to sun down, I barely thought of the things I wasn't doing at home. Yet, there would be times where I would wish she were by my side and she was unreachable. I

carried on, troubled by a disquietude that wasn't overcome until I was back in the safety of our house and she was down the hall.

Our family in Chile has never been down the hall. They have been thousands of miles away living parallel lives of their own. Imagining them was about the best we could do. Until we met them, that is. Since then we have been riding an undulating wave of communication - one I often feel apprehensive about addressing. The power dynamics feel unequal. Nancy or her sister Ruth sometimes call from a casa de llamadas in Temuco, but I am in class, at the gym, or my phone is simply not readily available. I picture them on the other end, waiting for the ringing to end and my voice to sound: "Hi, this is Nina. I can't get to the phone right now." Because their cell phone plans do not include an international option, they uses the local Casa de Llamadas – a business in town that offers web access and phone services, both local and international, but those are all down now due to the earthquake.

"Disasters awaken people to the meaning of home at its deepest level because it forces them to confront what has been lost – not just in a material sense, but in terms of the idea of home as secure – as sacrosanct, as an inalienable right" (Chapman 2001: 136). Buildings fall in Santiago. Tsunamis sweep coastal cities from Chile's southern coast into the sea. Close to two million people are displaced. Homes are lost. Home is lost. I am not the only one who realizes this.

I checked my email again. My inbox was flooded with letters from friends and family in the United States. Is everything okay? they ask, aware of the magnitude of the disaster as reported globally but unsure of the degree to which it was felt locally. I don't know anything more than they do. Are *you* okay? they ask next, concerned

about the effect such an event could have on me. I'm not sure about that either. The simple act of looking to me for more information made me think twice. Was I okay? Should I be okay? Recognized as someone who might know more that the average person was a reaffirmation of my Chilean identity. People I hadn't spoken to since high school checked for the latest updates, in to see if I was okay. Most of the emails end with an offer of support, help, or love. What can we do? they ask. I'm not sure where to direct their offer. We can wait, I suggest, in solidarity, together.

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Waiting to hear back from our family in Chile after the earthquake was trying. It took nearly a week before we were able to establish everyone was okay. Our biological grandmother's house suffered serious damage, but they were all confident it was fixable. The rest of the country faces bigger problems, they told my sister and me. Some of Chile's main highways no longer function. Ruta 5, the country's major north to south highways, is severed in multiple points. The borders of Santiago moved eleven inches after the earthquake; Concepción moved, according to NASA scientists, ten feet to the west (CNN). The borders of cities have physically changed. Chile, territorially speaking, has been redefined, reformed. So too, then, must the identities informed by its borders.

In the weeks after the earthquake, the influx of images, sound clips and statistics was overwhelming. I wore a Chile World Cup shirt one day and was stopped multiple times to answer questions. I helped coordinate a fundraiser and a friend

approached me, "Thanks for doing this. Someone needed to step up." I felt ambivalent about taking credit.

Aftershocks have recently hit Eastern Turkey, Mexico and Southern California. The extensive displacement of earth worldwide resulted in millions who feel connected to the disaster. Identities with ties to these places have re-formed in response to the shifting of the ground; the notion of a stable identity falls short in a world where experiences of displacement resonate globally. "I return to the question of identity because the question of identity has returned to us" (Hall 1997: 42).

Ruptures threaten what we know. There have been earthquakes, *anNakbas* and *golpes de estado* throughout history. I wonder, how does identity endure? The individual's struggle is to find his or her voice, form a name, declare his or her own character, but even still the individual remains vulnerable.

American memoirist Mark Doty writes, "Here and gone, that's what it is to be human, I think – to be both someone and no one at once, to hold a particular identity in the world (our names, our places of origins, our family and affectional ties) and to feel that solid set of ties also capable of dissolution, slipping away, as we become moments of attention" (2002: 67). At the same time that ruptures or "moments of attention" threaten to compromise the integrity of the ties which bind us, they bring to light issues of identity, of relatedness. At the onset of this project, I established a place to stand, a place from which to speak that kept Chile and the United States appropriately apart. And then the ground shook. This project was in disorder. Papers were everywhere. I gathered things together: people, memories, text and presented them here, as best I could.

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