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## Exile and Refuge, and the new american

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## **Exile and Refuge, and the new american**

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*As an immigrant woman, an academic of diaspora studies, a white "other" in a sea of American whiteness, I navigate the layers of difference that are always contextual, never fixed, at times a deficit, at times an abundance, a surplus.*

*I believe in the practice of "counterpoint": When divergent, competing cultural elements come into contact with one another, the continuing processes of adaptation and creation shift existing power dynamics. People and cultures always mutually influence and transform each other through the encounters - and often "crashes" - of languages, customs and worldviews. Naturally, cultural productions come to reflect these processes. My life is a constant, shifting, exhausting and yet rewarding process of "counterpoint", an alchemy, a translation. These poems manifest this quality of translation, which is both my curse and my lens through which I observe and make sense of the world.*

For all the places I have lived in

Is a referent exile

The outline of a straight line from rough to clear  
unknown to progress

Is the fantasy that gives meaning to my now

For every place that has met me is one I have packed away from

In the cadence of my sadness

Is the pattern of exile and refuge

For every idiom grasped, every face read, every attempt at conquering my visitors status

Is the fierce stubborn wish not to partake

In the life of others

In the life like others.

In the cadence of my sadness is the resolute wish not to be- long

Not to be-loved

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To observe from the fringes  
To be able to choose  
To pack away from.  
But memory is disingenuous  
negative space spilling out of the straight outline  
makes another exile possible.  
My life a map of global terrorist attacks,  
Reminding you of what and who you left  
when you left.  
The cosmopolitan girl of the thousand adieus  
Patches loyalties to places and times of passage,  
In the cadence of my sadness  
is the secret of my life  
Like no other.

**The new american.**

She needs you to hold her and lift her up  
You, the new American, the new woman, the new breed of scholar  
Spaced out, branched out, disrespectful of ancestral rhythms, connecting the dots.  
Appreciating gerunds, mixing upscale with modal scales.  
Tattooing the other half of your life on your shame.  
You grew up within restrains, hoping that you will not be surprised by others.  
You have lived across places  
stuck within uprooted roots.  
She ran faster than you. She knew better.  
You lost her in the crowd; you looked out for her, then you gave up  
You lost the trust in the process of your becoming, and staked sticky notes as unfathomed  
borders –  
She lost you and began to wonder, with her needs chronic, her language white noise, her  
addiction to warm flesh and thick orange blood.

She brushed herself along the thick walls of the foreignness of this country,  
While you were busy justifying your moves, cutting little wounds, just enough to moan  
and linger

ambition and gravity made you heavy and lonely.

She looked out for you

You looked back, told yourself you will hold her one day. Not now.

Your embraces were taken, your breaths were busy rustling upon other bodies

She screamed at you.

*Too loud* you thought. *How uncivilized! what a poor imitation of an immigrant privilege  
you have turned into.*

She raised her hand, got rid of her dolls, you kissed him, and then another.

She warned you, cried out your name, licked your wounds across the glaze.

*Not now.*

*My soul is intact, I have not lost anything, just wasted little pockets of time.*

Baby. Darling. Sweets. Love. Precious.

How can you bear this middle ground, the mediocrity of your failed attempt at being  
whole—

while she is screaming for you?

She is as eager as you are, just more voracious and brave.

You think you can quiet her down, but there is no new American without a new you, and  
wholeness needs a huge jump

– if you leave her behind you won't make it to the other shore!

You land on the ground, unscathed; you land a great job, lucky.

You work your way into the new world, crawling into safety.

You find yourself. *And* love finds you, but before anything else, you find *her*. This time  
for good.

You both here to stay.